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THE ORIGINS OF ANTI-AUTHORITARIANISM

Nina Witoszek

The Origins of Anti-Authoritarianism

This book discusses the ongoing revolution of dignity in human history as the work of "humanist outliers": small groups and individuals dedicated to compassionate social emancipation. It argues that anti-authoritarian revolutions like 1989's "Autumn of the Nations" succeeded in large part due to cultural and political innovations springing from the work of such small groups.

The author explores the often ingenious ways in which these maladapted and liminal "outliers" forged a cooperative and dialogic mindset among previously resentful and divided communities. Their strategies warrant closer scrutiny in the context of the ongoing 21st century revolution of dignity and efforts to (re)unite an ever more troubled and divided world.

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Introduction

The revolution of dignity and its drivers

Living together with a monster

In the late autumn of 1988, the leading Polish war correspondent and poet Ryszard Kapuściński – author of acclaimed anatomies of power such as *The Emperor* (1978) and *The Shah of Shahs* (1982) – could be seen walking around Oxford in a state of angst and agitation. He had been invited to England by the then prime minister Margaret Thatcher, who wanted to know if her country was threatened by a potentially revolutionary situation. The United Kingdom was boiling after she had privatized state-owned companies, slashed the power of trade unions, and unveiled the controversial poll tax – and Kapuściński was there to tell her if she should be worried. As a political journalist, he had a legendary reputation of being an oracle on revolutions. He had barely unpacked his suitcase upon landing in Zanzibar when an insurrection broke out. He arrived in Honduras on the day when other foreign correspondents left, and bombs started falling on Tegucigalpa. During his first day visiting Tanganyika, a coup broke out.

But as soon as he set foot on British soil, Kapuściński realized he was in the wrong country. "Nothing was going to happen", he said dejectedly during one of our walks in the grassy "thinking places" around Wolfson College. In an endless conversation on where Europe and the world were heading, he predicted that there would be three powerful *cultural* forces that would energize 21st century responses to multiple economic and political crises: religious fundamentalism, nationalism and racism. All three would be irrational and divide the world into "infidels and fidels". Whether totalitarian or tribal, they would marshal the ideal of conformity and groupthink carried to the point where the interests of the individual would barely exist. But at the same time, Kapuściński insisted, there would be *one* revolution that would spasmodically defy the dehumanizing terror of the new tyrannical orders: the revolution of dignity.[1] This revolution would be less motivated by economic predicament and more by oppressed people's growing access to information and the possibility of comparing their daily humiliations with better and more dignified lives elsewhere. As soon as people reduced to the status of serfs realize that being human means being a free, autonomous agent, Kapuściński argued, a revolution of dignity was bound to erupt. As a participant observer of the anti-authoritarian movement started by the Polish *Solidarność* in 1980 – and

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suppressed by the communist regime in December 1981 – Kapuściński was adamant that the Polish revolution of dignity was not defunct. Not only was it an ongoing, often subterranean process; in November 1988 he insisted it was ripe to be relaunched, this time on a larger scale. Its main goal would not merely be gaining better living conditions within, and extracting more political concessions from, the Soviet empire. Rather, it would be an attempt to redefine what it means to be human.

Human striving for dignity – a predominantly cultural and ethical project often misunderstood by political analysts – has been inseparably tied to the ability for reason, empathy and desire for respect. The empathy shone through the words of Solon, who said that justice would not be achieved until those who are not hurt feel just as indignant as those who are. It electrified groups who gathered to listen to Christ of Nazareth, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. And it puzzled President Lincoln who said to Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, "So you're the little woman who started this big war!" In Kapuściński's view, the quest for the acknowledgement of human worth has been relentless under all latitudes. In the 21st century it was bound to increase in force, if only because the information age opened up the world and would keep provoking – and seducing – the wretched of the earth with the alluring images of people who enjoy security, freedom and recognition.

In contrast to armchair theorizers of social change, Kapuściński was a witness and chronicler of a multitude of social upheavals. Refreshingly free from the constraints of political correctness, and from progressive platitudes on the importance of a magical "third" or "fourth" revolutionary way or strategy, he was largely sceptical about creating a eudaimonic, perfect society on earth. In his view, the real aim of the looming European upheaval at the end of the 1980s was neither an improved socialism nor switching to capitalism. Rather, it was to continue and complete a re-humanizing project – a "second European Renaissance" – that had begun in Poland in the 1970s.[2] If the strategies and visions of the small group of savants and activists that gave birth to *Solidarność* were found inspiring by the outside world, Kapuściński argued – if they were intelligent and persuasive enough to withstand economic trepidations and avert the rise of nationalist xenophobia and religious bigotry – Eastern Europe would provide a model of a modern revolution of dignity for the rest of the world.

At the time, it seemed like a utopian project. Even a few months later, in April 1989, when the Poles became the first Soviet satellite to start their zig-zagging transition to democracy, the revolution of dignity seemed fragile in the extreme. True, in 1989, the imperial Soviet Union was wobbly and headed by the enlightened "tzar" Mikhail Gorbachev. But it still possessed a myriad of warheads. The prospect of the "oriental despotism" striking back seemed tangible even to Gorbachev's enthusiasts. And the anti-Semitic slogans that suddenly mushroomed in the fledgling Polish democracy, together with the triumphant clergy free to bellow virulent anti-communism from the pulpits, were chilly reminders of the stubborn presence of *barbarous intra muros*: the forces of reaction ready to tear to pieces all the noble clichés about solidarity, tolerance and democracy.

But *Solidarność* did radiate the revolution of dignity to other members of the Soviet bloc. In the autumn of 1989, the term *velvet revolution* was coined to describe the peacefully negotiated regime change in Czechoslovakia. Twenty years later, in the summer of 2009, the Islamic Republic of Iran staged a show-trial of political leaders and thinkers accused of fomenting an *enheleb-e makhmali* – i.e. a velvet revolution. And in 2011 in Cairo, the protesters at the Tahrir Square demanded that their rulers give them back their work and their dignity (Danahar 2015: 3). The non-violent movement that articulates the "power of the powerless", and brings the authoritarian regime to the negotiating table, has become as durable an aspect of the 21st-century modernity as its counterpart, the Popperian "retribalization of the world" (Popper 1945). While the battle between the closed and the open society continues – in 2011, *Time* named "The Protester" as its "Person of the Year" (*Time*, 14 December 2011).

***

There has been a wealth of studies on the resilience and sustainability of modern social movements, networks and upheavals (e.g. Huntington 1993; Sharp 2012; Della Porta 2014), though the human search for dignity as their propelling force has been somewhat occluded. But it was *Godność*, *Wolność* and *Solidarność* ("dignity", "freedom" and "solidarity") that were the rallying cries of the anti-communist *Solidarity* movement in 1980–81, in the 1989 revolution in Eastern Europe and in the 2014 "Revolution of Dignity" in Ukraine. Similarly, the leaders of the Hong Kong pro-democracy *Umbrella Revolution* in the same year defined reclaiming human dignity as one of their chief objectives.[3] The protesters in Egypt, Tunisia, Libya and Syria invoked the mantras of "dignity", "liberty", "freedom" and "bread" during the Arab Spring (e.g. Castells 2012: 67–68; Danahar 2015: 7, 9). The people who shouted these words – or posted them on the Internet – refused to be perishable goods, merchandise in the hands of dictators, corrupt politicians and bankers.

Most of these upheavals – initially edifying and intoxicating through the sheer power of their moral effervescence – have suffered from the same disheartening anti-climax. In the Middle East – and in countries like China – the cries for freedom and dignity came from what turned to be a Pandora's Box, which, according to some despondent observers, should have remained sealed. The dignity-starved Egyptians – who ended Hosni Mubarak's despotic reign through civil resistance and non-violent mass demonstration – have been resubmitted to the brutalities of a new military dictatorship. Libya, where scattered protests against Muammar al-Qaddafi in February 2011 led to an armed rebellion and the NATO-aided elimination of the dictator, lapsed into chaos and tribal strife. Syria, where Bashar al-Assad brutally cracked down on non-violent demonstrations, has plunged into a long and vicious war, full of unspeakable bestiality and countless casualties. Even Poland – the cradle of *Solidarność* – managed to slide into a "state of indignity". In 2015 the Poles elected an illiberal, nationalist-socialist government that assaulted democratic freedoms, starting with violations of the rule of law and culminating in ideological purges in schools and state media.

The resurgence of diverse forms of extremism has encouraged scepticism about the prospects for a civic revolution in the 21st century. One may ask: what is the point of resistance to dictatorial regimes if the price is so high? Why not wait until influential political players (say, a new Gorbachev), or a concert of great powers change the geopolitical map? Why not conform? Survive? Make the best of the worst of existing worlds? This is the *mimesis* model as outlined by Zbigniew Herbert in his poem, "The Monster of Mr. Cogito":

> … reasonable people say
> we can live together
> with the monster
>
> we only have to avoid
> sudden movement
> sudden speech
>
> if there is a threat
> assume the form of a rock or a leaf
>
> listen to wise Nature
> (Herbert 1985: 40–41)

Though there are understandable advantages to this survivalist modus, its advocacy raises questions. One could argue that understanding of the true meaning of the non-violent resistance to tyranny requires a historical lens: if pragmatic survivalism was the only "game in town" and stories and rites of dignity stopped being replicated, humanity would have never managed to generate modern, enabling welfare states. As I have argued elsewhere, the most successful examples of fair societies are as much products of mixed economies and well-functioning institutions (Witoszek and Midttun 2018) as *moral* outcomes of humanist visions of a better society.

There is evidence to the effect that, with all its hazards, non-violent and dignity-driven opposition to tyranny has been more successful in changing regimes than either acquiescence or violent insurrections. According to a study that has assembled a historical data set of over 300 campaigns spanning the 20th century – from Mahatma Gandhi's Indian independence movement against British colonialism (c. 1919), to the protests that removed Thai prime minister, Thaksin Shinawatra, from power in 2006[4] – no act of social, economic or political oppression has prevented non-violent campaigns from emerging or succeeding. "From strikes and protests to sit-ins and boycotts, non-violent civil resistance remains the best strategy for social and political change in the face of oppression", the authors argue. "Movements that opt for violence often unleash terrible destruction and bloodshed, in both the short and the long term, usually without realizing the goals they set out to achieve" (Chenowech and Stephan 2014).

The quoted study, and many other similar analyses, deal mainly with the "pragmatics of civil resistance", identifying the best tools and strategies for its long-term

effectiveness. In 2011 *The New York Times* went as far as to attribute the non-violent revolution of the Arab Spring to the strategies identified by the American scholar Gene Sharp (2012), whom, according to some acerbic commentators, most Arab rebellious youth had allegedly hardly heard of (Stolberg 2011; Nader 2013: 179). But Sharp's synoptic overview of some 198 different tactics employed by non-violent resistance movements made headlines and drew attention to the role of persuasion, non-cooperation and *non-violent* intervention – all of which have worked in various contexts with varying degrees of success.

While there is no doubt that the strategy-and-policy orientated studies contribute to a better understanding of the effectiveness of social resistance to authoritarianism, they tend to depict a generalized and "rationalized" mode of opposition, one that does not invoke a particular cultural ecology which is unique in each case. Such ecology is defined by the community's shared beliefs, values, religious allegiances, schooling, family stories, philosophy and the arts. The fact that the 10-million-strong Polish Solidarity movement succeeded in "keeping the revolution warm" (even when forced underground by martial law in December 1981), was *only partially* thanks to efficacious resistance strategies such as flexible tactics, mass participation, regime defections to the opposition, outside support for a resistance movement and a core group that operated as a shadow government ready to step into a leadership role as soon as communism crumbled.[5] As I will show, while these strategic and operational concerns mattered, there were other, culturally specific forces at work that had both preceded and contributed to the success of the revolutions of dignity in 1980–81 and the democratic transformation in Eastern and Central Europe in 1989.

There are countless cultural and political differences between the East European Autumn of the Nations and the later dignity upheavals such as the Arab Spring. The participants in the latter involved religious fundamentalists (of the kind identified by Kapuściński) opposed to the notion of human dignity. Although such opponents may not have dominated in the early stages of the insurgence, they were present in revolutionary crowds. Further, the Arab revolution was largely leaderless, while the East European movement flaunted charismatic and visionary spokesmen. The protests in Egypt and Tunisia were defined less by concrete ideological visions and more by their mobilizing tools; they were called "Twitter" and "Facebook" revolutions. By contrast, the democratic opposition in Eastern and Central Europe – rife with visions of a "return to Europe" – was forged through rites of friendship and solidarity and accompanied by the construction of independent educational and communicative channels. I contend that while these differences matter, the future and sustainability of the revolutions of dignity everywhere is ultimately dependent on the existence of *small, altruist groups* – the catalysts of change.

The "humanist outliers"

Existing, influential studies of the anti-authoritarian mobilization in Eastern Europe have drawn attention to the pivotal role of the labour movement, the

Catholic Church and the religious and political networks (e.g. Ascherson 1982; Touraine et al. 1983; Laba 1989; Ost 1990; Ost 2005; Falk 2003; Osa 2003). I argue that the true revolution of dignity happens as it were *behind* social movements and organized networks. Though the democratic paradigm shift ultimately needs the critical mass of protesters and a strategy of action, it is first contemplated and designed in the work of individuals and small prosocial groups. Their vision is often sung by single voices: intellectual savants, religious leaders, writers and courageous ordinary people who do not necessarily organize, but testify to the presence of conscience, compassion and humour in the midst of indignities. Their ranks are endless: the German anti-Nazi theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer; the Polish iconoclast writer in exile, Witold Gombrowicz; the former Soviet scientist, Andrei Sacharov; the Chinese human rights lawyer Gao Zhisheng and the writer and activist Liu Xiaobo; the Egyptian stand-up comic Bassem Youssef who challenged the authoritarian regime by "laughing through the Arab Spring"; the citizen journalist Abdelaziz Alhamza from Raqqa – the Syrian headquarters of Islamic State (IS) – who, after fleeing in 2014, founded a monitoring group called "Raqqa is Being Slaughtered Silently".

More often than not, these individuals, and the groups gathered around them, enjoy a dual reputation of heroes and pests. On the one hand, they are the source of an energizing, almost dizzying, delight that springs from watching 'their' protagonists make the impossible possible. But they are also perceived as moral blackmailers, provoking a guilty conscience in the mass of the "gratefully oppressed". By building islands of individual empathy, autonomy and quirkiness within or outside oppressive structures, they are a constant reminder of how things could or should be. Modern authoritarian regimes define them as "traitors" and "members of an anti-state conspiracy", "enemies of the people", "social parasites". But in spite of – or maybe because of – their outsiderhood, these social outlaws are the true catalysts of change. They think and talk about the human capacity for unshackled and virtuous existence and name it even in "infrahuman" situations where there are no longer words for it. They are the bearers of *polis* in demeaning conditions, as poignantly defined in Zbigniew Herbert's poem "Mr. Cogito on Upright Attitudes":

> In Utica
> the citizens
> don't want to defend themselves
>
> in town an epidemic broke out
> of the instinct of self-preservation
>
> the temple of freedom
> has been changed into a flea market
>
> … the citizens
> don't want to defend themselves
> they are attending accelerated courses
> on falling to the knees.
>
> (Herbert 1993)

One of the aims in this study is to illuminate the often overlooked ways in which the work of those groups and individuals who maintain "upright attitudes" is an indispensable condition for a revolution of dignity to take place. I call my protagonists the *humanist outliers*: people who do not fit because they first help their neighbour and then study their soul. Or people who have a mythogenic talent for forging stories which give power to the powerless. Or, alternatively, people who are like ancient Celtic bards, or more precisely, *filid*: the species of *homo ludens* with the ability to satirize their authoritarian opponents to death. What are their motives, blueprints and sources of inspiration? How do they evolve and mature as the revolution matures? What stories do they read and what new narratives do they concoct to imagine and bring about a social transformation? What constraints do they impose on their own ideas and actions while redesigning a "dignity script" for their contemporaries? What role does human friendship play in their success? And, last but not least, how is the passage to dignity influenced by women? What are the strengths and weaknesses of female altruism in the life of revolutions?

Aware of the ongoing philosophical and religious controversy around the concept of humanism (Düwell et al. 2014), I define it, broadly, as a worldview which emphasizes the indelible value of humans, cherishes altruism and cooperation, and demands respect for the Other: a mindset which we find not just in the Western Renaissance and Enlightenment but in the cultural archives of many world traditions. According to the latest evolutionary biology, altruism – as much as its selfish twin – has always been latent in human nature and, as such, functioned as a permanent constitutive factor in the cultural evolution of human species (Wilson 2016; Griffin 2012). And although humanism exists in many (religious and secular) versions – each of them modified by a particular cultural context – both its biological moorings and ongoing, global cross-pollination turn it into a transcultural project.

One qualification is in order. Fertile humanism celebrates human dignity without idolizing human powers. It steers away both from the perception of humans as a maladapted species and the delirium of the super-rational and the superhuman. As Andrei Pleşu has put it, "It is neither the humanism of a diminished man, nor that of an idealized man monumentally projected against the empty sky" (Pleşu 2004: 9). It is the grass root humanism of the tiny groups of followers gathered around Christ of Nazareth who preached the message of universal compassion. But it is also the elitist humanism of secret Masonic lodges, that, in the intriguing reading of Irene Jacob (Jacob 2007), created intellectual and democratic ferment in 17th-century Europe. And it is the humanism of the Norwegian peasant Hans Nielsen Hauge and his group of "Friends" whose religiosity and business ethos made an incalculable impact on the emergence of the future welfare society (Witoszek and Midttun 2018).

The anti-authoritarian role of the humanist outliers differs from society to society because the forms and degrees of authoritarian oppression differ. But their status and their strategies of resistance show a number of common characteristics. Firstly, they do not necessarily define themselves as "revolutionary" or "political";

their work is more often the effect of moral instinct rather than the outcome of political calculation. Their importance is not measured by the number of followers, electors or congregations; rather, their actions constitute what Jan Skórzyński in a different context called “the fifth column of social consciousness” (Skórzyński 2012: 20). Whatever their self-perceptions, they feed and sustain the community’s vision of itself as a “virtuous community” in a world of often harrowing existential constraints. The ways they manage to keep their *humanum* undamaged despite the inhumanity around them, remains a riddle that has fascinated psychologists, evolutionary scientists and generations of writers from Cervantes to Albert Camus and Zbigniew Herbert. To mention but one example among many: the Chinese dissident Liu Quinn, who served 11 years in No. 2 Prison in Shaanxi Province, was forced to sit on a stool 8 inches high, from 8.00 a.m. to 12.00 p.m. and then again from 1.30 p.m. to 7.00 p.m., for four years. If he moved, he was beaten. He tried to kill himself by playing mental games, he conjured visions of food, counted minutes, and speculated about astronomy and black holes (Hillman 1994: 49).

The psychologist, James Hillman, has argued that what keeps individuals like Liu going is a voice of conscience, a higher “shadow self” that listens – and talks to – a chorus of voices from the past and present. “Imagine them as an interior platoon, a secret society, a tribal unit, an initiation group, a company of martyrs, an inner city of ancestors and descendants”, Hillman writes (Hillman 1994: 50) This interior platoon is the source of the humanist outliers’ extraordinary strength: they are part of an atemporal alliance of – and dialogue between – the living and the dead: mentors, pedagogues, heroes, jesters and iconoclasts who had preceded them and prefigured their fate.

Hillman’s analysis is persuasive in that it unwraps the narrative and relational (dialogic) mechanisms of human strength in the face of adversity. But it does not address the question of the bravest species’ breakability, especially in the conditions where evil is the only game in town. Here Anna Pawełczyńska, the former prisoner of Auschwitz, is an interesting guide. Pawełczyńska has linked the art of survival to what she called a “minimum humanism” observed in the most beastly place on earth (Pawełczyńska 2004: 21). Such minimum humanism – whether of Christian, Jewish or Muslim provenance – had to be adjusted to the extremity of the situation. In the case of Auschwitz, “‘Beautiful 19th century slogans had to be reframed and reduced to: ‘inflict least suffering’ …From socialism only brotherhood made sense”, Pawełczyńska further writes:

> The most compelling Christian catchword, “Love your neighbor as you love yourself” was rephrased as “Don’t wrong your fellow brother and save him/her if you can’. Finally, the socialist ideal of equality lost its meaning; what became important was the principle that those “strongest and highest in the group hierarchy had to restrain from harming their companions and defend them if possible”.
>
> (Pawełczyńska 2004: 177–187).

What emerged was a “secondary moral simplicity”, where only those who balanced selfishness and compassion – and were tolerant of human frailty – could hope to

oppose utter dehumanization. Interestingly, among the Auschwitz inmates, Pawełczyńska singles out one inconspicuous group that was extraordinarily resistant in the face of endless atrocity: the German-Jewish readers of Holy Gospel – "some several dozen people whose valiance earned them respect even of the SS command" (Pawełczyńska 2004: 111).

The mechanisms behind humanist outliers' moral intransigence have been illuminated in the work of another Holocaust survivor, Victor Frankl. Frankl insisted that being truly human involves directing all efforts to something or someone other than oneself. The more one forgets and transcends oneself – by devoting life to a meaningful, prosocial cause or to persons in need – the more complete human self-realization is. Frankl goes even further than Pawełczyńska; his anthropology redefines the true meaning of human life as voluntary acts of self-transcendence (Frankl 1946; 2006). The problem is that such acts are both rare and spectacular in those savage regimes, where the dominant, widely accepted goal of life is survival and compliance with imposed rules. It is little wonder, therefore, that "self-transcending" groups and individuals tend to be in the conspicuous minority. Or, conversely, the idea of heroic self-transcendence that Frankl so eloquently depicts, needs some qualification.

As I will show in the chapters that follow, Frankl's narrative, while making partial sense of the people's motives in resisting authoritarian pressure, does not capture the often messy and tragic complexity of their choices. Adam Michnik, one of the leading humanist outliers in Eastern Europe, talks about the "stained purity" of 20th-century dissidents. (Michnik 2011). "No one can live under a dictatorship without being somehow compromised", he argues. Even "Mickiewicz, the greatest national anti-tsarist bard in the nineteenth century … signed an oath of loyalty to avoid prison". He "duped the despot by crawling like a snake". Michnik talks about the "wounded generation" of anti-authoritarian fighters, one that carries an eternal burden of guilt (Michnik 2011: 160).

The other distinctive feature of the humanist outliers – one which is the focus of this book – is their role as *cultural innovators*. As moral and practical visionaries, they cross the chasm between the old and the new, promoting a novel stance, habit or mindset and "massaging it" into the social fabric. This is often an agonizingly long process, sometimes taking generations before their vision is embraced by an early majority. The thrust of such innovation is less a Schumpeterian "creative destruction" and more what Daniel Bell called a cultural *ricorso* (Bell 1991: 32), forging the new through the selective return to the old. As I will show, while they critically inspect a community's shared history and its founding narratives, the humanist outliers tend to first weed out *polarizing* stories and reframe the insular and the particular into a more *inclusive* moral vision. To mention but one example on which I shall elaborate later, the two Polish writers and members of the Workers' Defence Committee, Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik, re-cast the workers' protest against low wages and increased food prices into a story that spoke, not just about economic injustice, but read the communist state's treatment of the workers as an offence against their dignity. The insertion of dignity into what would otherwise be an economic demand was as simple as it was groundbreaking: it transformed an

introverted, class-related project into a humanist one. It is this enlarged, dignity-driven vision that was embraced by an early majority led by Lech Wałęsa during the Polish *Solidarność* revolution in 1980. Similarly, by focusing on the shared "humanist commons" of the agnostic or atheist Left and Christian ethics, Kuroń and Michnik showed how traditional adversaries could imagine themselves as potential partners in a dialogue about the future of Poland.

Looking at humanism through an interdisciplinary lens

My attempt to re-read modern revolutions of dignity as part of a universal moral project highlights the importance of cultural actors and programmes in the advancement of humanity towards a "good society". Without underestimating the role of institutions in codifying the principles of this rite of passage, I wish to better understand the role of *humanist values* as the engine of this progression. To take but one example, in 1977 there were just 242 signatories of the Charter 77 in former communist Czechoslovakia, and their total number never transcended 2,000. But this small group had an incalculable impact on the future of the country. Thanks to Charter 77, a mighty oppositional structure emerged, one which represented the humanist "solidarity of the oppressed", to use Jan Patočka's metaphor, and developed a strategy to challenge the regime when the time was ripe. The question is thus not just functionalist – how did this happen – but phenomenological: what did the main protagonists feel, learn and unlearn? And how did they use existing moral traditions to break the contract of mutual indifference which dominates in authoritarian regimes?

While not dismissing the importance of political and economic scrutiny, this book is about the search for *cultural origins* of the anti-authoritarian resistance. There have been a number of studies, largely in the social sciences, that have partially covered this terrain. Jan Kubik, in an anthropological exploration of *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power* (1994), highlighted the central role of cultural discourses in the construction of political power in an authoritarian state. Barbara Falk has eloquently demonstrated the dilemmas of dissident intellectuals as "philosopher kings" in the 1989 revolution (Falk 2003). Jeffrey Goldfarb has discussed the role of Eastern European intellectuals' mixture of civility and subversion in the non-violent character of *Solidarność* and the Autumn of the Nations (Goldfarb 1998). And Maryjana Osa (2003) used contemporary social movement research and network analysis to show how an interplay of religious and oppositional networks led to widespread protest mobilization in an authoritarian state.

While gleaning much from this research, I wish to propose a semiotic-historical journey which takes us back to the work of diverse small groups (and individuals) who were the *animateurs* of the revolution of dignity which started in 1968 and peaked during the 1989 Velvet Revolution. In particular, I want to draw attention to the unique, Eastern European humanism and its salient, though complex, role in the anti-authoritarian struggle. That is to say, while agreeing that the "success" of the 1989 revolution was dependent on political opportunity and the organization of networks (Osa 2003: 11), I also contend that, as a humanist revolution, 1989 was

both a success and a failure. It was a success because, for a short period, it reminded its participants of what it is to be human and challenged them to grow into their better selves. But it was also a failure because humanism – an endless rehearsal of the Promethean and Christian gesture – is ultimately about defeat and rebirth and defeat and rebirth *da capo al fine*. If this is so, it is only because an unselfish and creative orientation that welcomes people's diversity and social inclusion is not the dominant feature of societies in times of uncertainty and crisis. It tends to be the domain of small groups. It is then that the moral task-force – one that exists in every national community – becomes critical to restoring, creating or sustaining what has been variously called a "virtuous circle", a "decent society" or a "fair society" (Shklar 1992; Margalit 1998; Corning 2011).

The attempt to look at the revolution of dignity as the work of small groups has been prompted by research in a number of disciplines, ranging from semiotics, sociology, innovation theory, to the latest insights from evolutionary theory. Yuri Lotman's historical semiotics has drawn attention to small groups as transformative actors in a cultural *semiosphere*, which both stores up a community's memory and contains programmes prefiguring its future (Lotman 1990; 2001: 123–143). According to Lotman, more often than not, the world-changing narratives and ideas are the work of creative outsiders challenging the dominant cultural centre and operating at the borderline between what is approved and what is perceived as "foreign" or "deviant". Such groups of liminars are both *us* and *them*: real or imaginary "Jews", "Masons", "parasites" who are part of us and yet do not belong and do not fit. My contention is that humanity's cultural and moral advance owes much to these groups' patient, groundbreaking work at the cultural margins. As social and ethnic suspects – the anomalous, the bizarre, the heretical – they are equipped with creative distance to their habitat, and hence more likely to reimagine and defy the cultural centre. In this volume, I shall inspect the ways in which their civilizational critique and compelling visions of a more dignified life gradually colonized the oppressed community's perceptions of the world, its self-images, and, in the long run, reimagined its shared identity.

There is a body of sociological literature on the role of small groups as propellers of social change (e.g. Olson 1971; Putnam 2000). In his classic *Logic of Collective Action* (1971), Mancur Olson argues that small-scale groups are more easily organized than large ones, better at tackling the free-rider problem, and do not overshadow individual members; on the contrary, they recognize each other's individual identity. Admittedly, this is not always the case. Small social groups have the ability to act efficaciously, but they can also be pockets of intolerance and prejudice, imposing stifling surveillance and control of individual members. But, as my examples will show, if united by friendship, talent and the ideal of improving the welfare of others, they can be exuberantly creative. When the time is ripe and conditions less oppressive, their audacity becomes the disempowered community's audacity. Their ability to cooperate is projected on the community's ability to work together. This is how prosociality begins to blossom in a community where *man is a wolf to man;* it starts from groups that radiate their unselfish codex to others. The humanist outliers unite what has been divided, make bridges and

forge alliances. And, as they gradually expand their communication channels, they boost social confidence and a sense of empowerment in a divided and atomized mass of human meteorites.

The next inspiration comes from evolutionary science – a discipline that has for a long time been insulated from humanist-existential pursuits by a putative apartheid between the "two cultures" (cf. C.P. Snow). But the latest, third wave of evolutionary thought – with its focus on the role of prosociality and cooperation in historical paradigm shifts (Wilson 2015; Corning 2011; Hodgeson and Knudsen 2010) – cannot be ignored by the cultural historian. There is now a body of evidence showing how cooperative, altruist and freedom-seeking drives inherent in human nature counteract the power of "selfish genes" and become an indispensable condition of human emancipation and the construction of fair societies. As David Sloan Wilson and Dag Hessen argue, "The conflict between lower-level selfishness and higher-level welfare pervades the biological world. Cancer cells selfishly spread at the expense of other cells within the body, without contributing to the common good, ultimately resulting in the death of the whole organism". However, once in a great while, a group of unselfish individuals manage to suppress egoism within their ranks. "Then something extraordinary happens. The group becomes a higher-level organism of highly cooperative cells" (Wilson and Hessen 2014). If humanity has evolved, Wilson and Hessen argue, it has done so via suppressing self-serving behaviours that are mostly destructive for their communities, and forging successful groups able to outcompete more selfish groups. Teamwork is "the signature adaptation of our species" (Wilson and Hessen 2014).[6]

Paradoxically, both the rise and the fall of authoritarianism are the net effect of teamwork. Dictatorships emulate beehives and anthills, where humans are *coerced* to cooperate, their individuality and creativity being erased by a tyrannous "queen bee". In the case of humans, a transformative challenge to oppressive regimes – and the evolutionary change towards more sustainable societies – starts from an act of *willed* cooperation, where opposing parties learn to transcend their prejudice and to respect one another as future partners. The power of anti-authoritarian cooperators poses a threat to every dictator.

The cooperative lens provides a corrective to conventional perceptions of anti-authoritarian individuals and small groups as either 'romantic-heroic' or insignificant in the arena of the big political theatre, where mass-movements and geopolitical forces seem to play a much more decisive role. I argue that if the humanist animateurs succeed, it is thanks less to their revolutionary bravado (though that plays a role too), and more due to their wisdom, pragmatism and ability to compromise when necessary. But most of all, it is down to their *mythogenic and learning* talent. It is relatively easy to rouse a protest that vents social anger and frustration. In contrast, it takes a great deal of ingenuity, patience and sagacity to forge and sustain peaceful resistance to oppressive regimes over long stretches of time. For such resistance to become effective and durable, one needs galvanizing visions that will unify a divided community. But even the most compelling visions are not enough. To be effective, the new roadmaps have to be nested in the process of learning: the ability to draw lessons from history and weed out stories and strategies that "felt

right", but did not work. Freedom-making is not just the process of liberation. It is also the process of unlearning old, and learning new, habits. It does not come from the heads ready to burn or roll; it comes from the heads that think.

The view that evolution provides the root premise for the theory of emancipation challenges both mainstream, relativist anthropology and the institutionalist explanations of the origins and conditions of a fair society. Following Amartya Sen, Christian Welzel illuminates the seeming expansion of freedom, democracy and trends towards human empowerment in a functionalist way, through invoking what he calls the "utility ladder of freedoms" (Welzel 2013: 393). In this reading, evolution – which favours "utility-realizing capacities" – has "programmed" humans to seek emancipation. Supporting his claims with upbeat empirical research generated by the UNDP, the World Value Survey and Freedom House Reports, Welzel argues that "[t]he growth of emancipative values contributes not merely to expansion of freedoms onto formerly excluded groups; it elevates a society's productivity and an overall sense of well-being. Nothing that lives – including societies and their culture – escapes selection for better reality coping qualities" (Welzel 2013: 393) In short, the evolutionary theory of emancipation is universal: In every culture one finds ideas about the worlds where humans enjoy freedoms from existential constraints. More, institutions that guarantee universal respect and freedoms are the outcome, not the cause, of this process – in contradiction to the prominent "institutions first" view marshalled by Acemoglu and Robinson (2012). There is also evidence to the effect that emancipative narrative, once they get replicated and entrenched in the cultural realm, stimulate strong intrinsic motivations, nurture greater trust, encourage social empowerment, strengthen commitment to democratic norms, and enhance the work for the public good (Witoszek and Sørensen 2018).

Admittedly, the 21st-century landscape of "freedom rising" seems to be more complex than Welzel's uplifting indexes and statistics would suggest. True, on the one hand, as he points out, "Tyranny, although it continues to exist, is no longer safe; in fact, it is receding at an accelerating pace" (Welzel 2013: 24–25).[7] But what about the evidence to the effect that tyranny is staging a comeback? According to figures published by Freedom House, there was a growing number of countries showing a decline in freedom between 2006 and 2016. In this period, 43 countries made gains, 105 countries saw a net decline, and only 61 experienced a net improvement.[8]

The process of "freedom rising" needs a more fine-grained analysis. Human history – from ancient Rome to modern Iran or Turkey – is rife with cases of civilizations that advance and then regress. Thomas Jefferson's often quoted dictum: "I believe that every individual mind feels pleasure in doing good to another", is matched by numerous exceptions to this rule. For all the studies demonstrating the victory of the "better angels of our nature" (Pinker 2012; 2018), there is also evidence to the effect that, for many people in many parts of the world, violence and killing is their ultimate life project.

I shall discuss Welzel's universalist claims in subsequent chapters, but before then I wish to allude to one more inspiration in my study of humanist outliers as agents

of change. I refer to Elinor Ostrom's body of work on small communities that manage to overcome the tragedy of the commons through a mixture of incentives and social controls. Ostrom has singled out eight design principles, which have structured such resilient communities' modus operandi (Ostrom 1990: 90):

1 Clearly defined boundaries.
2 Congruence between appropriation and provision rules and local condition.
3 Collective choice arrangements.
4 Monitoring of members' behaviour.
5 Graduated sanctions.
6 Conflict resolution mechanisms.
7 Minimal recognition of rights to organize.
8 Nested enterprises from the lowest level up to the entire interconnected system.

In their joint attempt to generalize core design principles for the efficacy of groups, Wilson, Ostrom and Cox go as far as to insist that observing these principles is the universal condition of human groups' just redistribution of common pool of resources. (Wilson, Ostrom and Cox 2013). What I wish to do here is examine small groups as adroit managers of the *pool of cultural resources*: a society's founding traditions, its constitutive narratives, symbols, habits and routines. In Ostrom's case, the adherence to core design principles has helped communities overcome the tragedy of the commons. In the case of humanist outliers an innovative use of cultural resources may help them to overcome the tragedy of human indignity. But one pivotal principle has to be added to the Ostromian list – that of cultural innovation. It is crucial. It is the "alchemical brew" of the old and the new. Not starting from zero creates feasible roadmaps of shifting from an oppressed to a free society. The prosocial and cooperative ethos embodied by the humanist outliers has to interact with existing values and traditions.

Admittedly, the manifold inspiration in this book involves taking some theoretical risks. The synergic interaction between disciplines representing adversarial scholarly cultures is alien to mainstream academic culture. But, as I will try to show, my attempt to re-read the emancipatory struggles of disempowered communities through an interdisciplinary lens offers some dividends. Firstly, it illuminates the role of small, prosocial groups and individuals both in the ecology of revolutions and in the dynamics of cultural advancement towards a more humane social order. Secondly, the double grounding – in cultural semiotics and in evolutionary science – allows both for capturing the particular and the universal. As I have argued, the architecture of each instance of social resistance to oppression is different and unique, dependent on specific cultural and political traditions. But ultimately, the success of the revolution of dignity rests on cooperation, altruism and striving for freedom – facets which are present in every society. If they were not, the worldwide diffusion of emancipative ideas would be well-nigh impossible. Human history does show that, in the long run, disempowered societies, where individual dignity is non-existent or restricted to some social groups, tend to become unproductive and unstable. By

contrast, empowered societies mobilize citizens' intellectual creativity, which in turn nurtures *dignitas*, and with it, creative productivity and self-realization.

De hominis dignitate: the case of Poland

I have chosen Poland as the testing ground of my study for several reasons. Firstly, Poland has a long tradition of efficacious and prosocial groups that have both created a parallel society within existing oppressive structures and replicated the project of rebuilding the national community by non-violent means. In the 18th and 19th centuries, after the country had been partitioned by Russia, Prussia and Austria, the humanist outliers kept the idea of *republica emendada* afloat through peaceful and pragmatic means – often against the majoritarian propensity for national martyrology and self-destructive insurrections. The dynamic, prosocial individuals and groups were central to cradling the humanist flame when Poland became a theatre of brown and red totalitarianism in the twentieth century. They were, then, crucial in fostering a parallel society – complete with its own education, health system and legal institutions – under the Nazi occupation. After the Second World War, drawing on their earlier oppositional and humanist traditions, they unmasked the evil of Bolshevism and built a microcosm of democracy within the walls of an authoritarian state. As Maciej Bartkowski argues:

> The conspiratorial experience of organizing and running secret education became ingrained in the collective memory of the national resistance. It was recalled during traumatic events such as the German occupation of 1939–45 and during communist rule, particularly the 1970s and 1980s when widespread illegal education, including the re-establishment of the flying university, ensured the truthful reading of national history, culture and tradition.[9]

But Poland is an interesting case of prosociality for yet another reason: it is a country which has had a populous, subversive intelligentsia – an educated social group which has traditionally embodied civic responsibility and a strong moral mission: to protect and pass the humanist ethos on to the next generation (more on this in Chapter 6). The pithiest definition of this group has been proposed by Adam Michnik: "Intelligentsia's role is that of the Capitol geese: to warn the Romans about the arrival of the barbarians. The intelligentsia's duty is to quack".

The intelligentsia's quacking has signalled the role of culture – literature, philosophical reflection, the arts, religion and pedagogy – in forging both the anti-authoritarian opposition and sustaining the conception of the country as an *imagined European community*. It is thanks to the domestic humanist outliers that Poland, under Soviet occupation, became a place where all world literature – from Aeschylus to Becket and Ionesco – was read as one great anthology of allusions to the People's Republic (Bikont and Szczęsna 2006). The broad humanist vision – although predominantly focused on the struggle for national freedom – was inseparable from fostering a European identity in a country which was forcefully sovietized after the

Second World War. The ingenious banner, tilted *Solidarność* was – like a charging flotilla – intelligible to the outside world, and stood not just for a rebellious national community but for unity with the rest of Europe.

My tracing the revolution of dignity to the words, values and routines of micro-communities is both a pretext for rethinking the role of the chief actors in peaceful resistance to despotic rule, and for discussing the fate of dignity in the new millennium. How does the old humanist outliers' toolkit to fight authoritarianism compare to 21st-century "Facebook revolutions"? How do friendship, charismatic leadership, and flying universities fare in comparison with the powerful role of digital flows that foster what Manuel Castells called "networks of hope and outrage"? (Castells 2012: 10). The question of whether the Internet has made the liberation of oppressed societies more likely has been the subject of intense debate among scholars, media executives, writers, Internet activists and government officeholders (e.g. Morozov 2012; Wajcman 2016; Howard 2016; Applebaum 2015). Castells has drawn attention to the paramount importance of bloggers, social networks and cyberactivism in imagining and constructing social revolts (Castells 2012: 27). His contention is that Internet and mobile phone networks do not merely speed up the diffusion of narratives of grievance and mobilize thousands of protesters in the matter of seconds; they are "organizational forms, cultural expressions, and specific platforms for political autonomy".[10] Are social networks, wikis and tweets more potent than the rites of personal friendship and face-to-face politics? And how right is Anne Applebaum's claim that weak democracies become even weaker due to "the curse of Facebook?" (Applebaum 2015).

The argument in this volume goes against the dominant Zeitgeist in 21st-century Eastern Europe which romances a reactionary, populist version of itself. In this respect, this book is a reminder that the unique feat of anti-authoritarian mobilization was possible in what was a much more testing and precarious situation than the one obtaining in 21st-century Poland, Hungary or Slovakia. In the pages that follow, I will show how the emergence of the revolution of dignity was ignited and sustained thanks to the patient work of small groups and individuals who lived and acted in the pre-Internet era – most of them without phones, cars or access to fax machines. Their "antediluvian" technology had to be compensated for by the power of courage, camaraderie, a talent for critical self-reflection, and the ability to forge partnerships through a creative "think-say-do" strategy. This innovation has been largely occluded from the study of social upheavals, even though there is a general sense that the shift of entrenched stories based on the *us-them* polarization to ones that flaunt unity is pivotal to the success of social transformations.[11]

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All over the world, groups and individuals that aspire to peacefully overthrow oppressive regimes face a double Herculean task: both to challenge the mythology of the alien tyrannical centre, and, at the same time, to reinvent the often ossified and divisive narratives that the oppressed themselves hold sacred and are unwilling to tweak or refashion. Each disempowered and homeless community desperately

clings to its tribal, nationalist and religious myths; they are its shelter, *axis mundi*, a source of consolation. They restore the elementary homeostasis and stabilize the glaring chaos that cannot be ordered without an injection of mythical energy. This means, in effect, that both the authoritarian and anti-authoritarian myths, like all myths, don't just unite people but divide them as well, creating walls between them. They do not speak the language of argumentation, reason or criteria; they override all three.

To create a new, empowering and uniting story in a truly oppressed and divided community is thus a complex, often underestimated, challenge, going beyond catchy political soundbites. New narratives of identity will work only if they feed on the familiar and the known. As expressions of a novel moral and narrative order, they will be bereft of social appeal if they do not chime with existing traditions and resonate with the predicament of the people. Further, their meaning will be trivial and their potency cosmetic if not reinforced by accompanying rituals and routines. In what follows, I will thus focus on the pivotal, but often occluded, power of the *humanist toolkit* in the revolution of dignity: humanism that surfaces in once inspiring, once obstructive, national mythologies, fills the space of friendship, illuminates the vision of religious apostates, and shines through the often self-defeating altruism of women: the true "dignifiers" of the revolution of dignity.

Hannah Arendt's work coruscates both in the title and throughout the pages of this study, though my objective is to provide a counterpoint to her autopsy of the totalitarian community of evil (Arendt 1951; 1966). Arendt highlighted the importance of imperialism, racism and anti-Semitism, and the displacement of peoples in the post-First World War crises, as some of the factors which contributed to human susceptibility to totalitarian terror. She also argued that no systematic analysis of the complex causes of human baseness or human greatness can provide us with a conclusive, universal explanation for the ongoing moral regression – or advancement – of the human species. While partly sharing her pessimism, this book argues that the humanist work is necessary, if only to restore a human dimension to people who are reduced to numbers. If we do not succeed, it could mean that Hitler and Stalin shaped not only our world, but also our humanity.

My semiotic analysis will be based on a broad variety of sources, ranging from the current wealth of monographs on the history of Eastern European opposition, through early essays and analyses in samizdat publications, to conversations with prominent humanist outliers such as Leszek Kołakowski, Czesław Miłosz, Jacek Kuroń, Ryszard Kapuściński, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Karol Modzelewski, Agnieszka Romaszewska, Konstanty Gebert and Adam Michnik. I will show how, in the Polish case, the humanist outliers challenged not one, but two types of authoritarianism: the first passive-aggressive, submitting to the power of history and the Communist Party, and the other, Catholic-nationalist, wallowing in powerlessness on earth, worshipping the heroic past and yielding to the higher power of God, the tribe or the infallible leader. Both authoritarianisms – in their past and present forms – share the conviction that life is determined by forces outside the individual Self, its interests, and its wishes.

The sense of powerlessness, and the loss of the self, whether in communist fantasies, right-wing religiosity or modern jihadism, is on the rise in the second decade of the 21st century. Studying the ways in which it has been – and can be – overcome makes sense, if only to see that cultural evolution is about a gradual opening of human hearts and minds. For, to paraphrase Frank Zappa, the human mind is like a parachute; it is outright dangerous when it does not open.

Notes

1 Personal communication, Oxford, spring 1989.
2 I shall come back to this point in Chapter 1.
3 The Chinese students protested against the Government's decision to select the Hong Kong party executives through an election committee composed of pro-Beijing elites. Joshua Wong, the leader of the democratic protesters insisted that by "by vetoing this electoral reform proposal, we are able to keep our dignity". http://time.com/4047648/hong-kong-umbrella-revolution-occupy-anniversary/ Accessed 17 May 2017.
4 There is also evidence to the effect that while non-violent campaigns succeeded in achieving their goals almost half the time, some of them failed because they were unable to produce mass support, or because they used the wrong tactics. In Syria, for example, non-violent activists tended to rely solely on demonstrations and occupations – the riskiest methods of civil resistance according to the authors – while strikes, boycotts and other forms of mass non-cooperation were weak, localized and lacked support. See E. Chenowech and M. Stephan, "Drop your Weapons", *Foreign Affairs*, July–August 2014. http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/141540/erica-chenoweth-and-maria-j-stephan/drop-your-weapons. Accessed 15 July 2016.
5 Most importantly, in Poland the transition to democracy in 1989 started from a national dialogue and a comprehensive reconciliation of all adversary parties. When the country recovered its independence in 1990, it did so with a new set of electoral rules and practices, many of them shepherded by Solidarity through a series of negotiations, which allowed for a much more unified turn towards democracy. But even here, democratization has been a bumpy journey and a zig-zagging project rather than a linear progression.
6 https://evolution-institute.org/focus-article/blueprint-for-the-global-village/. Accessed 18 January 2018.
7 However improbable it sounds in the age of jihadism, tribal wars and global warming, as late as December 2015, the *Atlantic Monthly* ran a headline: "2015: the best year in history for the average human being". There is seeming evidence to the effect that war and terrorism worldwide, although claiming more victims than before, are less menacing than stomach cancer, which, as the *Atlantic Monthly* has put it, "takes more people than manslaughter, war and terrorism combined. Other horsemen of the apocalypse, famine and pestilence, also decreased. Wiping out extreme poverty, reducing the death of children under 5, and making schooling accessible are other positive indicators". See *Atlantic Monthly* 18 December. http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2015/12/good-news-in-2015/421200/).
8 https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2016.
9 http://maciejbartkowski.com/2013/12/10/in-defense-of-civil-resistance-as-people-practice-it-not-as-others-imagine-it/ Accessed 18 January 2018.
10 Castells talks about a "rhizomatic revolution" (from rhizomes, the underground, horizontal stems of a plant, often sending shoots from its nodes (Castells 2012: 113–143).
11 This argument is propounded by, among others, Ibrahim Fraihat in *Unifinished Revolutions: Yemen, Libya and Tunisia after the Arab Spring* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), 1–18.

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1 The second renaissance in 20th-century Europe

The community of conscience

According to evolutionary science, for social solidarity and teamwork to exist at any given rung of the social ladder, there must be mechanisms that hold the "wolves of selfishness" and tyranny at bay (Wilson and Hessen 2014). These mechanisms are not just law-abiding democratic institutions, but also shared stories and beliefs that define a group's identity and boundaries.

There are many signs in 21st-century Europe that the institutions and stories that have been selected by many national communities have failed to keep the wolves of selfishness at bay. This book is being written in the aftermath of the carnival of the Polish *Solidarność* (1980–81), an extraordinary anti-authoritarian revolution which began the process of European renewal. And yet, a mere three decades later, the notion of "renewal" has an ambivalent ring to it: the democratic gains of the 1980–1989 upheaval seem to have been short-lived. The euphoria of 1989 has long evaporated. The miracle of the *Autumn of the Nations* – a potential toolkit to forge a new European identity – has become relegated to spurious folklore, only occasionally invoked at national anniversaries. There is a surreal discrepancy between historical research which generates ever more sophisticated insights into what made 1989 a unique event in European history – and the darkening of the public sphere both in Eastern Europe and on the continent as a whole. Glorious deeds and stories of the recent past have been forgotten – or unmasked as the work of selfish agents and nefarious forces. Could it be that one of the reasons behind the crisis of European identity has to do with a failure to capitalize on the mobilizing potential of 20th-century Europe's most compelling saga of anti-authoritarian mobilization and "family reunion"?

Once so bold and buoyant, the stories about the altruist daredevils challenging the authoritarian powers have been eclipsed by narratives of resentment and wrong. More, the very nation that once radiated the energy and bliss of Europeanness reborn, has turned into its own antithesis. Nothing can be more embarrassing than the post-Solidarity Party of Law and Justice (PiS) which, after coming to power in November 2015, began to replicate the old authoritarian protocol by violating the independent judiciary and purging public media. And nothing can be more ironic than the story of forward-looking, European Poland – once an emblem of class

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solidarity and *caritas* – morphing into a chronicle of a hurt, selfish and inhospitable community. As Adam Michnik put it: "We destroyed the great Polish myth at our own request. Poland of revanchism won over Poland of solidarity and compassion" (Michnik 2008).[1]

There are multiple reasons for this regression. One of them is the mixed blessing of democracy and neoliberal capitalism which has exacerbated inequality and made life painful and humiliating for the underdogs and the left-behind. Neither democracy nor the market – for all their virtues – function as guardians of human dignity: dignity understood as more than mere participation in economic growth and popular elections. They do not offer any safeguards against exclusion, lack of respect and violations of human integrity, whether inflicted by the state or economic piranhas. Thus, despite their initial successes, young and wobbly democracies face losing the battle with sacred symbols and certainties represented by absolute powers such as God, the Church or a populist government. The economic and political elites have been fixated on the gross national product, not on gross national happiness. They seem to have forgotten about the pivotal importance of human dignity in the making of the post-authoritarian national identity. They left it, as unoccupied territory, to the Church, family and the religious and populist healers of the national soul. In these conditions, the invisible legacy of cultural ligatures – a hotchpotch of earlier authoritarian, nationalist and religious traditions – has grown in importance and blossomed, often not in spite – but *because* – of economic achievements.

Thus a dark, inverse version of the revolution of dignity has taken place: one where the dignity of the excluded is no longer restored and cemented by creativity and altruism but disfigured by selfishness, fear and hate. In the 21st century, the PiS project of "raising Poland from its knees" by defying the united forces of international capital, feminists, atheists, ecologists and cyclists, sounds as preposterous as it is distressing. And yet it seems to be successful. *Solidarność* has become a debased currency. The ever more inventive interpretations of the 1989 Roundtable Agreement – the founding event of Polish democracy – reframe it as an act of treason or collusion with national and ideological enemies (e.g. Bielik-Robson 2016). The founding fathers of free Poland are no longer even "controversial" – i.e. idolized or denigrated. They are about to be eviscerated.

That said, Poland is a country where everything is possible, even change for the better. This is what this book is about. It is an attempt to look again at the period 1976–1989 as an example of change which seemed not just impossible, but was perceived by many as a kamikaze project. And yet, as I will show, there is abundant evidence to the effect that these years were an inspiring, effervescent period, not just in modern Polish, but in European history – a time when the "wolves of selfishness" were held at bay and human altruism and wisdom flourished, if only for a stretch of time.

Alfred North Whitehead singled out two instances of such triumph of human sagacity and foresight in the history of Western civilization: the first was Rome under Caesar Augustus and the second was the generation of America's founding fathers (Ellis 2008: 10). I suggest the list is incomplete without the 1976–1989

revolution of dignity, orchestrated by small groups of humanist outliers. It was then that an extraordinary gathering of political and literary talent – thinkers, poets and activists from all social strata – set out to restore human autonomy in an authoritarian state. Much of their work has been hardly recorded on cameras, reported by mainstream newspapers, or anatomized by political scientists. Rather, it constituted the revolution *behind* the revolution: an invisible, ongoing transformation which slowly erodes *all* authoritarian regimes and which, seemingly, has no direct political or economic telos. It advances and retreats and advances again. It does not belong to the progress of democracy but to the moral progress of humanity. It is a revolution which augments, and constantly refines, the idea of a "community of conscience".

The concept of conscience – that inner voice that helps us to distinguish right from wrong and calls us to choose public good and suppress selfishness – is not as unsexy as it sounds. In one of the most poignant discussions of such a community of conscience – Shakespeare's *King Lear* – we encounter the Jester, a Renaissance protagonist who replaces the ancient Greek Chorus. The Fool's two main characteristics are wisdom and empathy. Empathy, like love, is a vestige of his original, preconscious oneness with creation. It permits the Fool to recognize the like in the unlike, to identify with King Lear's confusion, Edmund's villainy and Cordelia's selflessness. According to Leszek Kołakowski, the philosophy of the Jester is based on "goodness without universal indulgence, courage without fanaticism, intelligence without discouragement, and hope without blindness" (Kołakowski, 1971: 58). The Fool's head thinks with the diabolical reason of the scoundrels and the Machiavels, yet his actions run directly counter to his self-interest: in his dealings with the moral bandits he follows the ancient virtues of honour, compassion and loyalty. This makes the Jester into a *sober* dreamer who knows that there is no way back to a prelapsarian state – or forward to a radiant future which starts at point zero. He desires no new beginnings *ex nihilo*, and no wars to end all wars. It is as if he were a post-apocalyptic human who has stored up the desolate wisdom from all past defeats. His vision of social transformation is a passage to a "city of light" that is forged through the sheer power of will, wit and moral imagination.

The jesterly community of conscience is the opposite of the ghastly community described by Hannah Arendt in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951): a community which built Auschwitz and Gulags and created a world which "transformed human beings into uncomplaining animals" (Arendt 1951; 1973: 439). The origins and morphology of the community of conscience – one that opposes inhumane regimes and totalitarian barbarities – are as intriguing as the enigma of the community of evil which engineered the Holocaust, Kolyma or the North Korean Hoeryong. For, as the poet Wislawa Szymborska reminds us, it is not so much conscience, but hate and evil that are seemingly a more robust force in uniting the wretched and the downtrodden:

> Does doubt ever really rouse the rabble?
> Only hatred has just what it takes

[…]

Let's face it:
It knows how to make beauty.
The splendid fire-glow in midnight skies.
Magnificent bursting bombs in rosy dawns.

Above all, it never tires
of its leitmotif – the impeccable executioner
towering over its soiled victim.
(Szymborska 1995:181–182)

While agreeing that hatred is a powerful glue, there is evidence to the effect that, at some historical periods, acts of altruism have equal potency. Though, as I suggested in the previous chapter, such acts are most likely to occur at the small group level, they are occasionally scaled up and penetrate into national and supranational movements.

There are now countless studies of a fascinating mobilization against violence and hatred in Eastern and Central Europe which had preceded the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989. There is a gripping library of books about August 1980 and the birth of the Polish Solidarity movement): a massive, peaceful protest of 10 million people challenging the communist regime and the Soviet tanks. But the Eastern European revolution of dignity did not start in 1989, or even in 1980. I argue that its origins can be traced back to 1976, to the ideas in the heads of several brave and eccentric individuals who liked strong cigarettes, vodka and intelligent women. These ideas were not new; they had figured in the post-WW2 émigré publications and in masterpieces of philosophy and poetry banned by the communist inquisitors. But in 1976, they stopped being mere explorations and speculations. They became *embodied ideas*. Their trigger was the Shakespearian jester's impulse: something had to be done to demonstrate empathy and solidarity with the victims of the workers' state repressions. In this particular case, the topic of deliberations concerned the arrests of workers from Ursus and Radom who had protested in June 1976 against the rising price of meat. As the Russian poet Joseph Brodski put it in his imaginary socialist Book of Genesis: "In the beginning there was a can of meat". In the striking workers' case it *was*, literally, a can of meat. But in the heads of a small group of intelligentsia gathered in a Warsaw apartment on 23 September 1976, it was a stirring of conscience, a spur of goodness. This was an unusual impulse, because usually the intellectuals give the people what the intellectuals want. But not this time.

The group decided to publicly announce that they were taking the imprisoned workers and their destitute families under their protection. They called themselves the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR) – a clever rhetorical ploy, invoking the romantic-proletarian tradition that the Communist Party in Poland preached but did not practice. They issued an "Appeal to Society" calling for financial, medical and legal help for the oppressed workers. They went on tedious trips to Radom and Ursus, where they sat through the workers' trials as Samaritan witnesses of communist

ignominy and mock-justice. They knocked on people's doors, gave out money, and collected names and addresses of victims of state repression. More importantly, they did it openly, publishing their own names and telephone numbers in a regular information bulletin which they circulated through their network.

This is not to say that KOR was group of righteous do-gooders who agreed on a virtuous strategy of action. On the contrary, many of them had inflated egos, a penchant for argument and squabble and a talent for insubordination. They split and improvised and they went along. But whatever their differences, they followed their selfless vision to the end. Already they were forging a new *meme*: a story about a community that no longer drew on motifs of national victimhood and pity, but rather on actions of Shakespearian moral tricksters intent on outsmarting the oppressive state. KOR members were not depressingly manic-depressive; rather, they were manic-impressive – a style and air which was found irresistible, especially by the ladies. When they were not in prison, they partied, romanced, argued and schemed. They obsessed endlessly about dignity and solidarity, but, as has been observed, often amid "four letter words flying in the air".[2] They worked on "how to make a plus out of a minus", to use the expression of the world's most famous political electrician, Lech Wałęsa. Tirelessly, they built alliances with students, Catholics, workers and peasants. Soon, they created their own press bureau, with a link to the BBC, Voice of America and Radio Free Europe, which started broadcasting every single case of communist tyranny. Their modus operandi was courtship and seduction rather than supplication: they enticed leading international poets and thinkers to embrace their cause; they sent endless appeals to influential political leaders in the West; they persuaded, ironized and cajoled.

And thus, in the course of four years, the core group of humanist outliers – counting 34 members and several thousand supporters – changed the fate of the authoritarian state. During that time the Workers' Defence Committee managed to snatch the information monopoly from the state, build an extensive network of publishers, activate a web of independent "flying universities", and publish *Robotnik* (The Worker) – a broadsheet distributed in Polish shipyards and factories. *Robotnik* repeated ad infinitum – in all possible combinations and permutations – one idea that was to become the name of their revolution: the idea of "solidarity". Solidarity was not a theoretical concept: it was a tangible practice. For the first time in the communist history, no arrested or persecuted Pole – whether a worker, peasant or intellectual – was allowed to feel that he or she was abandoned or forgotten. All cases of harassment were double-checked and documented and swiftly broadcast at home and abroad.

The result was that suddenly, in the spring of 1980, a parallel society, complete with an independent education system, communication networks and the support of international celebrities, was in place. Gradually, students, workers and peasants abandoned their adaptive "zombiehood" and joined the unusual group of anti-authoritarian animateurs. It was as if the humanist outliers' acts of solidarity created an "epidemic of goodness" yielding countless civil initiatives, committees and projects. In the period 1977–1980, the author of this book saw a mass of previously "gratefully oppressed" or intimidated people slowly turn into an enchanted community of citizens.

What KOR and its allies and collaborators changed was not just the cultural-political landscape in the country where words were as damaged as people; they transformed national self-perceptions from a mere *resistance identity* to a *project identity*, to use Manuel Castells' pertinent concepts (Castells 1977: 8). "Resistance identity" is based on shared knowledge about the rotten inefficiency of the despotic and corrupt regime, accompanied by a general disbelief that the system would ever disintegrate. "Project identity", however, is no longer founded on cynicism towards, and hatred of, the oppressive system, but on forging of a transformative partnership between different, and often conflicting, classes, communities and ideological circles. The new "creative commons" challenged the idea of living and thinking *against* the communists. Rather, it flaunted the idea of creating a new reality *without* them – while right beside them. Only in this way could a motley community of freedom and dignity be sculpted.

Concealed in my emphasis on the revolution of dignity as a journey of the "community of conscience" is the contention that the *Solidarność* movement, which exploded in August 1980, was not the *sole* result of an economic crisis, the fruit of the Pope's encouragement, an exclusive product of nationalist sentiment, or a spontaneous explosion of independent trade unions. While all these forces certainly played a pivotal role in venting the social discontent and infusing people with courage, the very architecture of resistance as a sustained, peaceful and Other-oriented social movement, was largely thanks to the work of a small community of humanist animateurs like KOR. It is this community that did the preparatory work to challenge the ubiquitous *homo homini lupus est* principle – one which is pervasive in all authoritarian states. It resurrected altruism from the realm of limbo and made it not just imaginable but compelling. In this it did more than challenge the moral squalor of an authoritarian country; it defied the ghettoized, "pickled" Poland, debased by the communist apparatchiks, infantilized by the Catholic Church, and chastised by international revolutionaries who believed (after Engels) that the "Poles have never done anything in history except engage in brave, blatant foolery".[3]

But first of all, the anti-authoritarian community of conscience that matured between 1976 and 1980, detonated the ideal of life in an authoritarian state as a struggle for existence of human termites with no will of their own. Jan Jozef Lipski, one of the founders of KOR, defined his co-workers as "a group of people – of very different worldview and opinions – who set out to defend the beaten and jailed workers, oppose totalism, create a movement building a sovereign and democratic Poland, and show, by their own example, that such resistance was possible" (Lipski 1982: 42).

This summing-up sounds misleadingly simple and life-enhancing. But it hides a Herculean effort which involved broken limbs and lives, small successes and colossal disillusionments – a mixture of ashes and diamonds.

Intellectuals on trial

In his classical study, *The Intellectuals and the Powers* (1972), Edward Shils explored modern intellectuals' ambiguous role in furnishing the doctrine of revolutionary movements. The beginning of the 21st century has witnessed a surge of revaluations

of the civilizational role of intellectuals in the life of communities. There has been a crop of Cassandric studies – from Richard Posner's *Public Intellectuals: A Study of Decline* (2001), André Glucksman's *Dostoevsky à Manhattan* (2002), Mark Lilla's *The Reckless Mind* (2004) and Richard Wollins' *The Seduction of Unreason* (2004) to mention but a few – showing the ever more inventive ways in which educated men and women romanced totalitarian ideas and despots. From Voltaire, who prostrated himself in front of despotic Tsarina Catharina of Russia, to Chomsky – who applauded Pol Pot – many lives and loves of leading Western thinkers and writers point to what mark Lilla called an intellectual *tyrannophilia*: a bewildering weakness for virile, autocratic leaders (Lilla 2002). The Rwandan genocide was masterminded by men educated at French universities. Peru's Shining Path – one of the most vicious guerrilla movements in the world – was headed and founded by professors and mainly staffed by students (Chege 1996/97). These are but a few examples of intellectuals' complicity in a project of turning the world into an inferno.

Indeed, the reputation of the chattering classes has been so tarnished, that there has been a virtual avalanche of comments and studies which have either contested or demolished the role of Eastern European intelligentsia in the peaceful transition to democracy (e.g. Goodwyn 1991; Laba 1991; Ost 2004).[4] Some of them will be discussed in more detail in Chapters 5 and 6. But it is enough to watch the cultural creatives' enthusiastic self-abuse in Andrzej Wajda's *Lech Wałęsa: Man of Hope* (2014) – a film which trivializes and satirizes the role of the educated advisers of *Solidarność* – to see the self-debasement at work. In one scene Wałęsa ironizes: "Intellectuals? They talk and talk for five hours in an obscure language and arrive at the same conclusion I reach after five seconds" (Wajda 2013).

While Wałęsa's jibe is not entirely unfounded, the blossoming home industry of intellectual self-denigration has been puzzling. For it is in "second-class" Europe that the intelligentsia's altruism, sagacity and foresight peaked in an unprecedented way in the decades preceding 1989. Admittedly, their role in masterminding and narrating the 1989 revolution has not been entirely disregarded: it has been alluded to by leading scholars and thinkers (e.g. Ash, 1989; 1991; Tismăneanu 2001; Falk 2003; Goldfarb 1998; Dahrendorf 1997; Friszke 2011). But there has been little research on the humanist outliers' role as *cultural innovators*: their ways of transcending sectarianism, forging an efficacious class cooperation on the ground, building the structures of self-government, and supervising the democratic reconciliation of opposing parties in 1989. Without the dialogic imagination of the community of conscience, its cooperative skills and communicative élan, the workers' strikes of 1980 would have hardly have possessed any staying power or shown their legendary prudence or restraint. Certainly no institution – even the Pope – would have been able to sustain and broadcast an upheaval of 10 million people for 16 months, and for 8 long years after martial law had been declared – and *Solidarność* quenched – in December 1981.

As I will show, it is largely thanks to the humanist outliers' novel, insurrectional ethos and its energizing *memes* – diffused via the ever growing independent publication channels – that the image of *Solidarność* as a peaceful revolution of dignity was firmly planted in the public consciousness and kept aglow in the time of adversity.

In the chapters that follow, I contend that the legacy of the community of conscience – the work of countless writers, philosophers, political activists and, especially, the opus of KOR – has been one of the most overlooked *moral-intellectual achievements* in the history of European modernity. Certainly, the humanist outliers were no saints. They had throbbing egos, lusted for fame and indulged in frivolous addictions – vices which do not rub out their virtues or their merit. On the contrary, there is a potential Hollywood film about their lives, loves and lusts, entitled *The Magnificent Thirty*. It centres on a group of determined derring-doers arriving in defeated towns whose inhabitants are afraid of their own shadows. It sketches the resourceful ways in which the defenders of workers' rights mobilize human solidarity and peaceful protest against the communist gangsters. It shows stunning acts of bravery, wit and intelligence in the struggle against the bullies. Finally, it puts a European corrective on the Hollywood happy ending: in return for their services, the Magnificent Thirty – and many of their followers – are rewarded with a bizarre mixture of public adulation and scorn – and shelved into the attic of history.

Their story is as predictable as it is tragic-ironic: on the surface, a sad epos of revolutionary pride, prejudice and revolutionary patricide. More, the humanist outliers themselves prefigured their own undoing. KOR's bard, Zbigniew Herbert sang prophetically: "repeat old incantations of humanity / fables and legends / because this is how you'll attain the good you'll not attain / … and they will reward you with what they have at hand / with a whip of laughter with murder on a garbage heap" (Herbert 1974).

Like most revolutions, the Polish anti-antiauthoritarian insurgence was split and repossessed by the "true Patriots": the Church, the old local heroes, the new false heroes, and the united front of the begrudgers. Multiple factions of various hues – one pink-cosmopolitan, one khaki-nationalist, one post-communist radish-red, and still another holy blue and virginal – emerged. Yet, I wish to contend that for all the demystifications and denigrations, the flashes of goodness and intelligence which permeated the revolution of dignity in 1980–81, and then again in 1989, have not just evaporated; they remain imprinted, if only as a moral compunction, on the national memory. The old virtues of the humanist outliers – however anachronistic they seem to the digital-pragmatic generations – make another feat of overcoming the authoritarian scourge an *imaginable project*. As Ann Norton has argued, virtuous acts, although defeated, do not vanish, they present alternatives that can be taken up again in an altered form. They are "possibilities preserved because both the memory of the victory and the identity of the victor depend on that which was overcome" (Norton 2004: 49).

Perhaps it is time to revisit the wisdom and strategies of a small group of people who envisioned and designed the first European revolution that came close to Hannah Arendt's dream of "public happiness"?

Oppositional humanism

Though 1989 was a political and moral breakthrough in the history of late modernity, its importance has been largely dismissed from political theory, in striking

contrast to the studies of the French and American Revolutions (e.g. Isaac, 1995: 637–655). Research on social movements often refers to the Autumn of the Nations as lacking "any distinct dissident political theory" or a vision of some groundbreaking "third way" that would impress radical intellectuals in the West. Habermas commented on "a peculiar characteristic of the 1989 revolution, namely its total dearth of ideas that are either innovative or oriented towards the future" (cited by Kumar 1991: 116). This is rather disconcerting. If one adds to it that even more generous historians, such as Francois Furet, argue that the revolutions of 1989 were imbued with "the famous principles of 1789" and "renewed their universality" (Furet 1990: 5), then the situation is depressing. Furet's is a classical, ethnocentric misreading of the revolution which, like no other upheaval, *invalidated* rather than emulated the revolutionary tradition associated with French Jacobinism.

In fact, there was *one novel aspect* of the dissidents' oeuvre and actions that political scientists have largely overlooked: their civilizational project. The latter was not just about the proverbial "rites of resistance". It was a titanic humanist mission undertaken by a small group of citizens living in a political system specializing in de-civilizing initiatives and projects As Stefan Kisielewski – one of the Polish "jesters" – put it in a pithy comment, "communism was like King Midas, only in reverse. Whatever Midas touched turned into gold. Whatever communism touched, turned into shit" (Kisielewski 1979: 15). In short, what has been missing from many "structural" political analyses of the time is its moral victory over the radical, cultural and civilizational regression that Soviet Russia wreaked on its vassals. Sovietism created a system which specialized in cutting the citizens off from their historical roots, "transforming heroes into traitors … accusing anti-fascist fighters of fascism, and renouncing good taste. Its heroic-grotesque symbol was Warszawa: erected from ruins by people's collective, voluntary effort, and flagging a monumental architecture in the Constitution Square 'built for the Huns'" (Trznadel 1985; 1997: 306).

For Eastern European writers and thinkers – such as Miłosz, Kołakowski, Kundera, Havel and Konrád – Soviet authoritarianism was as much a product of a derailed modernity as it was the continuation of an earlier Oriental despotism which was perceived as a decivilizing and revolting force. Its imagined, "proletarian taste" expressed itself in crude and grand Stachanovite forms in the arts, in abundant chloroform in print in the national press, and in the "lodi-lodi-usia" of folkloric music blasted from the radio. In a poignant poem, "The Power of Taste", Zbigniew Herbert captures an overlooked, moral-aesthetic impulse behind the gesture of resistance against authoritarian ugliness:

> It did not require great character at all
> we had a shred of necessary courage
> Fundamentally it was a matter of taste
> Yes taste
> that commands us to get out make a wry face draw out a sneer
> even if for this the precious capital of the body the head
> must fall
>
> (Herbert 1985:69).

The omnipresent, state-sponsored kitsch – that "translation of the stupidity of received ideas into the language of beauty and feeling", as Kundera put it (Kundera 1988) – was supported by fraudulent, mendacious ethics. Unlike fascism, communism coupled vicious behaviour with a seductive rhetoric of virtue. Fascism, sometimes out of cynicism, sometimes out of barbaric imbecility, showed a certain consistency in navigating between words and action. If it wanted war, it made an apologia of war. If it was anti-Semitic, it theorized and glorified anti-Semitism. Communism was always ready for war, but constantly spoke of peace. It was anti-Semitic, but constantly spoke of humanism. As Leszek Kołakowski argued:

> Sovietization is successful even when nobody believes in it any more. The doctrine does not demand faith or fanatics. Sovietism presupposes a situation where everybody becomes convinced that nothing is, and nothing can be, "true". Nothing is for real, all words have lost their proper meanings. Thus one should not be surprised that a cockroach is called a lark and a parsnip is called a poem … Sovietization reaps its harvest when everybody takes for granted that public speech has nothing to do with "real" life … It is when real life is exhausted in mundane routines and general misery, and when the ritual phrase, deprived of meaning, paralyzes thought, that Sovietization is successful.
>
> (Kołakowski 1982: 302)

These words – strikingly relevant again in the "age of post-truth" and fake news – capture the core menace in the authoritarian system. If successful, the ongoing *pierekovka dush* (the "remaking of souls") – not just through coercion but through the perversion of words – would have transformed Poles under Sovietism into a people with broken spines, captive minds and devastated consciences. It is often said that if it did not happen it was partially due to the dogged moral resistance and oppositional stance of the Catholic Church. But, as has been pointed out by Carl Tighe, the Church's role was less heroic than some researchers want to believe (Tighe 1999: 179–210). In Chapter 6, I suggest that what deserves more attention is the "alchemy" of secular humanism and alternative forms of Catholic Christianity in the decade preceding 1989.

There are several intellectual responses to a life overflowing with lies, ugliness and debasement. One can practise Miłosz's *ketman*, the ecological adaptation to a brutal, sham-reality by means of bluff, pretence and newspeak, and by separating official lies from unofficial truth. (Miłosz 1954; 1981: 54–82) One can withdraw into the "politics of small things": venting frustrations at the family table, voicing the truth in the safe circle of friends or staging allusive theatrical happenings and cabarets. This is a therapeutic, "valium-like" way of sustaining the remnants of lost dignity or integrity. Forging a language and a sustainable programme of action which restores human worth and offers hope, on the other hand, requires a more coherent vision and concrete action on the ground. What I am arguing here is that the primary source

of this vision and its operationalization was a moral awakening in Poland in the late 1960s and 1970s – a period which brings to mind a virtual "second Renaissance" at the heart of European modernity.

The original Renaissance (c. 1400–1600), commonly associated with a splendid *rinascimento* in the arts and sciences – Leonardian paintings, Copernican ideas and Shakespearian aphorisms – took place in a world of cruel religious wars, persecution, and the rule of dogma (Buckhardt 1867; 1990; Kinsman 1974). This imaginary renaissance came to us thanks to a tiny *republica litterarum* which consisted of people like Erasmus, Montaigne, Machiavelli and Pico – thinkers and artists who read the ancients, knew and corresponded with one another, and argued about beauty, truth, God and human dignity. Many of them danced on the fringes of heresy, calling for the return of the sun to the centre of science and of metaphysics as taught in Plato's academy.

By suggesting that a similar "Renaissance" and *republica litterarum* emerged 400 years later in Eastern and Central Europe, I do not wish to imply any mechanical repetitions. Rather, I allude to a cultural *ricorso* in the sense defined by Daniel Bell (Bell 1990: 333): a creative return to the basic themes of the original Renaissance such as the discovery of the individual and celebration of human potential; intense interest in antiquity, and revolt against the dogma of powerful doctrines. Just as the Renaissance artists and thinkers did, modern Central European intellectuals were breaking free from "second Middle Ages" imposed on them by the authoritarian functionaries. And just as in the period of Italian and French *humanisti*, the humanist outliers' project went beyond the liberation of the self; it was about the discovery of the new ways of knowing, new conceptions of time, space, politics, religion and historical consciousness.

More parallels abound. The censorship imposed on the works of Kołakowski, Miłosz, Havel, Kis, Konrád and Kundera, had its equivalent in the 16th- and 17th-century bans on the writings of Machiavelli, Boccaccio, Erasmus, Bruno, Campanella, Galileo and Charron. And, just like their humanist forerunners, the modern Eastern European thinkers were avid readers of the classics who often described their predicament by allusions to the fall of Rome and the triumph of the barbarians.[5] The ideas and stories which they repeated in the "catacombs", anatomized the manifold forms of despotic rule and drafted the ways of preserving and nourishing *humanum* in a world of dogma and oppression.

By highlighting these Renaissance affinities, I wish to contest two stock misconceptions in research on revolutions. Firstly, a tendency to study them exclusively as political or economic phenomena, and thus to perpetuate conceptual confusion, a deficiency which is especially prominent in the discourse about the Chinese "cultural revolution". For if we look closer, this revolution was *anti-cultural* in the extreme: it destroyed history, memory, roots, national monuments, it pulverized a sense of community, and eradicated critical inquiry: the pillars on which every culture rests. Secondly, I wish to nuance the often simplistic perceptions of Polish *Solidarność* as founded on the tradition of ostensibly "suicidal" Romanticism. The very idea of Solidarity as a "self-limiting revolution" invoked the ethos of Montaigne rather

than Robespierre – firstly participation in the act of freedom-making without resorting to the tyranny of sword and overzealous convictions, and secondly, the codex of restraint and pragmatic idealism. In one of the more sober readings of *Solidarność*'s humanist underpinnings, Adam Michnik polemicized with the "romantic fever school" from his prison cell:

> Since 1976 the Poles have not been demonstrating any madness. They have been manifesting their will of freedom combined with an extraordinary political instinct and correct reading of the signs of time. It is enough to note that none of the societies under communism have generated such a broad, manifold and efficacious model of resistance as the Polish ostensible "necrophiliac romantics".
>
> (Michnik 1983: 15)

Indeed, there seems to be something refreshingly anti-romantic about the period leading to Solidarity – something that has less to do with national chimeras and revolutionary spasms, and more with patient learning from past mistakes and the cultivation of judicious restraint. The process leading from KOR to *Solidarność*, and then on to 1989, involved a great degree of *prudentia* and *sapientia* – a conscious attempt to combine reason with flamboyance, passion with realism, and heroic will with peaceful mobilization. It was a "starry time", as Jacek Kuroń described it (Kuroń 1991) – but without too many stars in the rebels' eyes.

What is certainly noteworthy is the link between the anti-authoritarian reflection and the return to the thinkers and heroes of antiquity. Hannah Arendt's first homeland, we recall, was Greece, and her mentors were Socrates and Aristotle. In that sense, the Polish humanist outliers of 1976 were Arendtian to its core. Not only did they philosophize by invoking the classics, they combined a *vita contemplativa* with a *vita activa* as parts of the same moral quest for reclaiming nature and humanity in a de-naturalized and de-humanized world. They used the stories about the ancient Greeks and Romans as a meta-language to speak about the debased reality of Soviet authoritarianism. But they also invoked the classics to remind itself of its allegiance to European humanist culture. The greatest Polish poet, Czesław Miłosz, declared:

> My Poland is the Mediterranean Poland, anchored in a classical intellectual tradition and defending a wise order … Renaissance Poland has not died. It still exists, it lasts in the souls of many Poles … It is not true that I belong to the 19th century. I come from the 17th century. And I told myself that I belong there.
>
> (Fiut 1988: 149)

Adam Michnik's influential *History of Honour* (1976; 1985), a book written in a communist prison, invoked an anachronistic concept which advocated the ethic of public duty and selfless service to the community. Michnik's "honourable man" – true to his friends and defying cruelty with kindness – was an imaginary

protagonist inspired by Montaigne. The fixation on honour had a double function: it gave Michnik something positive to think about during the long dark days behind the bars, and it allowed him to better imagine his return to the world in which this honour would be reclaimed.

Leszek Kołakowski looked up to Erasmus, the Renaissance thinker whose faith reconciled Christianity with the mockery of scholastic logomachy and trust in human possibilities (Fiut 1988: 149). The poet Zbigniew Herbert built his cosmology from rereading and rethinking the heroes of ancient Greece and Rome. In the poem "Why the Classics", he implicitly demands that art serves a higher purpose than the self-centred introspection of the poet's hurt ego:

> … if art for its subject
> will have a broken jar
> a small broken soul
> with a great self-pity
> what will remain after us
> will it be lovers' weeping
> in a small dirty hotel
> when wall-paper dawns
> (Herbert 1985: 138)

There are several reasons why a creative, Renaissance-like ferment, and so many bold and audacious visions, emerged in the period preceding *Solidarność*. To refer again to the original Renaissance thinkers and historians: Machiavelli noted that letters flourish in a society after arms; "first come the captains, then the philosophers" (cited in Burke 1986: 33). And Vasari argued: "It is Nature's custom, when she creates a man who really excels in some profession, often not to create him by himself, but to produce another at the same time and in the neighbouring place to compete with him" (cited by Burke 1986: 16). There is also a convincing argument about the roots of a cultural effervescence offered by Milan Kundera:

> The identity of a people and of a civilization is reflected and concentrated in what has been created by the mind – in what is known a "culture". If this identity is threatened with extinction, cultural life grows correspondingly more intense, more important until culture itself becomes the living value around which all people rally.
>
> (Kundera 1984: 97)

But there is one more, pedestrian reason for the cultural awakening in pre-1989 Eastern Europe, one that has less to do with the brilliance of humanist outliers and more with the time of "little stabilization" in the 1960s and 1970s. Broadly speaking, there were two regimes of knowledge and entertainment that were served to the subdued populations at that time: the first included communist indoctrination and the umpa-umpa folklore rasping at national anniversaries and on the national radio and TV. The second regime boasted a state-controlled menu

of "high culture" comprising ideologically safe masterpieces of classical literature, and politically correct international works which flaunted a critique of the capitalist system. The product of this Bildung was a highly educated, ethically and aesthetically aware young generation brought up on the classics, and the ideas of Diderot, Dostoevsky, Ionesco, Neruda and Marquez. It was this Socrates- and Marx-inspired generation that became a high-octane, anti-authoritarian task force. For them, as Hanna Świda Ziemba has argued, participation in culture was a "way of being in the world" (Świda-Ziemba 2011: 141).

Irrespective of the reasons behind the cultural *rinascimento*, the "second Renaissance" intensified under conditions of the brainless and soulless modernity spawned by Marxist-Leninist doctrines. It is as if the triumph of instrumental reason needed a moral corrective that had to be fetched, less from the Age of Reason, and more from the time of Shakespeare and Erasmus. Interestingly, this dialogue with antiquity was far from mere facile idealizations. Mr. Cogito, a virtuous Everyman created by Zbigniew Herbert and adopted by the Workers' Defence Committee as their guide, thinks with the "uncertain clarity" of Marcus Aurelius and limps through many verses on two legs: one belongs to Don Quixote, the other to Sancho Panza (Herbert 1993), Speaking of the latter: Eastern European literature of the time is also resplendent with Shveik-like lovers of the classics, like the one from Bogumil Hrabal's story about a man who became a half-hearted informant in exchange for an exit visa to Hellas. He just wanted to see Greece, he said. "After all, we are all humanists" (Hrabal: 1990).

The Irish poet, Seamus Heaney – spellbound by the depth and sagacity of Herbert's and Miłosz' poetry – coined the term "oppositional humanism" to refer to the tradition which imbued their work. He considered their poetry as "far more than 'dissident'"; in his eyes their writing "gives no consolation to papmongers or propagandists of whatever stripe. Its whole intent is to devastate those arrangements which are offered as truth by power's window-dressers everywhere" (Heaney 2002: 174). This was the quintessence of the poetry which – as in the original Renaissance – explored the dual hubris inherent in human nature: the first was Macbeth's lust for power. The other, studied by Montagne's friend, Étienne de La Boétie, was the drive to what he called "voluntary servitude" (La Boétie 1549; 2002).

The subtle anatomies of tyranny – filling the poetry of Wislawa Szymborska, Tadeusz Różewicz, Ewa Lipska, Adam Zagajewski, and so pervasive in thought of Leszek Kołakowski, Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik – give us pause. For here lay the rub: the vision of oppositional humanism stood in stark contrast to the fads and fashions predominant in the West. There, the intellectual life in the period between the 1960s and the 1990s was marked by an *anti-humanist turn*: unmaskings of "grand narratives", "truth" and "human nature". In 20th-century Eastern Europe, on the other hand – as if in a different galaxy altogether – the humanist vision was the true energizer of the anti-authoritarian struggle. The conceptual inventory of Western postmodernity designed to deconstruct authoritarianism was thus of no help to anti-authoritarian animateurs. Leszek Kołakowski problematized the trendy idea of the 'social

construction of reality' as threatening to pulverize individual and collective responsibility:

> The belief that the human person is entirely society-made, even if molded from a raw material (which is physical and not human) has a number of alarming consequences … If "I" am not "I", if the word "I" is a pronoun to which no reality corresponds, at least no morally constituted reality, if "I" am totally definable in "objective" terms of social relationships, then indeed there is no reason why "I", rather than the abstract "society" should be responsible for anything.
>
> (Kołakowski 1990: 152)

For Kołakowski, relativism – the foundationless foundation of postmodernity – undermined the human quest for the truth and speaking it to power. Postmodernity's fluid categories and blurred boundaries ultimately led to a cultureless world:

> With the abolition of the dividing lines between executioner and victim, between man and woman, crime and heroism, law and arbitrary violence, victory and defeat, knowledge and ignorance, the sense of culture evaporates *tout court*
>
> (Kołakowski 1990: 47)

The question is not just were the humanist outliers deluding themselves in their dogged exhumation of ancient and compromised concepts such as truth, beauty or goodness; the question is whether the humanist ideal was too remote – too "aristocratic" – to appeal to simple mortals. Weren't courage, virtue, *phronesis* – the ancient virtues also extolled by Hannah Arendt – too much of a moral challenge to people whose lives were consumed by queuing for food and basic necessities, fighting all-powerful bureaucracy – or simply surviving?

The Hungarian dissident writer Gyorgi Konrád hit the nerve of the problem when he spoke of the Eastern European opposition as "a venture, a cultural alliance, [and] a literary chivalry" (Konrád 1986: 113). Such declarations may invite a charge of peddling a conservative, elitist nostalgia. However, if we care to study the lives of *Solidarność*'s founding fathers, we see that their cultivation of excellence was the opposite of "reactionary". It was a struggle to keep standards of beauty and unselfish action, a defence against the totalitarian bulldozer wiping out human autonomy and individuality. It was about an exhausting, relentless opposition to a system which said:

> Non cogito, ergo sum.
> Don't think.
> If you have to think, don't speak
> If you have to speak, don't write.
> If you have to write, don't sign.
> If you have to sign, don't be surprised.

The charge of ostensible "elitism" directed at the community of conscience collapses when we further consider that most dissidents spent large chunks of their lives in prison or performed punitive, degrading jobs in industrial workplaces. Their "normalcy" was less about armchair meditation and more about fraternizing with the working classes in ways which were not always elevating or inspiring. To reproach the oppositional intelligentsia for indulging in "elitist intellectual salons" is not just disingenuous; it fails to grasp the true and tragic nature of the revolution of dignity everywhere.

This being said, in every society the existence of brave altruists-cum-moral innovators is a mixed blessing. Their identity – defined by acts of intellectual brilliance and existential bravery – *is not of this world* (Benda 1946; 2002: 50–49) It was, is and will always be, a provocation to a more passive and pragmatic majority. As I shall argue in Chapter 6, the moral and intellectual chasm between the original "aristocratic rebels" and their not-so-brave successors, became a source of, once subtle, later explicit, mutual resentment. It was not the classical resentment of the losers against the winners. It has been part and parcel of the "terrible beauty" of the humanist project.

The European 'Tao'

The Iron Curtain which divided Europe in the second half of the 20th century did not merely demarcate two opposing geo-political blocs; it divided two intellectual camps with different intellectual and moral metabolisms. To continue our Shakespearian metaphors, on the one side of the divide there was a Western "Empire of Prospero" with its cold regime of knowledge and cult of deconstructive rationality. And on the other, there was an Eastern "Empire of Caliban" with its moral and physical ugliness, its chimera of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and with its extraordinary group of outliers intent on reclaiming humanism in the midst of Calibanism Soviet style. Understandably, their intense pro-Europeanness was bound to be perceived as an irritant by Western postcolonial critics. To the latter, the official, socialist Empire of Caliban seemed heroic and romantic in its assaults on the consumerist prosperity of capitalist Prosperos. The very tropes of the "Iron Curtain" or the "Wall" used to describe the boundary separating the sphere Soviet authoritarianism from the rest of Europe suggested less imperial impositions and more a mere partition, a demarcation of the region whose inhabitants, in most cases, preserved their own language, were offered free education, full employment and a life blissfully free from the deadly culture of consumerism. In once fashionable studies of the "empire writing back" (Ashroft et al. 1989), the inhabitants of Poland or Estonia qualified less as victims of colonization than Canadians or Australians. In the radical imaginary, the Empire of Caliban was, after all, heading for a higher stage of human happiness on earth, and the price was worth paying.

Few outside observers captured the sense, or rather nonsense, of waiting for the arrival of Paradise on Earth in communist countries. The nonsense is perhaps

best articulated by an anecdote which circulated in Edward Gierek's epoch. When a speaker from Moscow was finishing a party conference in Warsaw, he concluded with the sentence: "The spectre of communism is looming on the horizon". The workers understood everything with the exception of the word "horizon". So they looked it up in the Great Soviet Encyclopedia which defined it as follows: "A line defining the earth from the sky which gets further away, the closer we approach it".

Equally puzzling to progressive, anti-capitalist critics was the humanist outliers' obsession with Europe. And yet, the dream of the *return to Europe* was once a *raison d'être* of the anti-authoritarian resistance. The humanist outliers defined themselves less as "thinkers to the Left" and more as "thinkers to the West". The Hungarians and the Czechs especially attempted an imaginary escape from the Soviet Empire through a conceptual demarcation. To them, the idea of "Central Europe" was a term which stood for the "kingdom of the spirit" (Garton Ash 1986) that distinguished them from the prisoners in the Soviet "ideological barracks. They were amputated Europeans whose life support was to dream about their true cultural home. Their "Occidentalism" pointed to a fragile civilization, demanding constant defence. This does not mean that they overlooked Western modernity's genocidal portfolio. After all, they themselves were the prime victims of brown and red totalitarianism – ideologies with a European pedigree. But it was enough to compare the indignities and deprivations of the Soviet Neverland with the well-fed and liberated discontent in the West, in order to appreciate the significance of the ideas which forged and nourished the birth of welfare states and the pluralist and tolerant Europe after the Second World War.

To sum up: there were two opposite kinds of civilizational critique which split Europe in the 20th century. While the radical inquisitors of Western civilization were challenging modernity by recommending the disposal of Enlightenment axioms and grand narratives, oppositional humanists were responding to the excesses of derailed modernity by returning to the Renaissance worldview. While the progressive intelligentsia in the West was sophist, indulging in the intellectual frissons of relativism and deconstruction, the humanist animateurs were Socratic, obsessing about truth and dignity. It was a surreal experience to navigate between one discourse, which dismantled grand narratives, and the other, which flaunted the concepts of truth, reason, liberty and transcendence without the benefit of quotation marks and without the sense of irony befitting such exhausted notions.

Nothing illustrates better the pivotal difference between two European traditions, one shaking all foundations – the other searching for firm ground – than Kołakowski's ethnocentric apologia for European culture:

> We affirm our belonging to European culture by our ability to view ourselves at a distance, critically, through the eyes of the others, by the fact that we value tolerance in public life and scepticism in our intellectual work, and recognize the need to confront, in both scientific and legal spheres, as many opinions as possible; in short by leaving the field of inquiry open. And while

> we concede all this, we also maintain, tacitly or explicitly, that a culture capable of expressing these ideas in a vigorous way, defending them, and introducing them, however imperfectly, into its life, is a superior culture.
>
> (Kołakowski 1990: 52)

In the 1970s and 1980s this way of putting things was not just the epitome of ethnocentric arrogance; it was the apex of political heresy. But it made perfect sense to the small groups of humanist outliers. The Czech humanists received the French analysis of the modern West as a "grand prison" with a mixture of amusement and bewilderment. "What is prison to you, is freedom to us", the signatories of Charta 77 said to the arch-deconstructionist, Jacques Derrida, during his 1981 visit to Prague. The Czechs argued that French deconstructivists were, in fact, undermining their project of emancipation. One could not demand freedom and autonomy with a symmetric demand of deconstruction of the very same concepts. To fight for the individual, autonomy and truth required a modicum of belief that these ideas are preferable to lies and slavery.

As Derrida himself admitted, he got a bit of a sobering shock in Prague.[6] More, some 20 years later on 31 May 2003, he and Jürgen Habermas would publish an epistolary manifesto on "Europe the Philosophers Dream of".[7] Interestingly, their text would come rather close to the earlier humanist outliers' conception of what Europe is about. The manifesto – which was a response to the American invasion of Iraq – was signed by intellectual luminaries such as Umberto Eco, Fernando Savater and Richard Rorty, and reprinted in major European newspapers. It identified five attributes of European identity: the neutrality of authority, embodied in the separation of Church and state; trust in politics rather than the capitalist market; an ethos of solidarity in the fight for social justice; high esteem for international law and the rights of the individual; and support for the organizational and leading role of the state. "We all have in front of us the picture of peaceful Europe, ready for cooperation, open for other cultures and prepared for a dialogue", Derrida and Habermas declared. European identity was now perceived as cemented by Kantian eternal peace, secularism and cosmopolitan order based on international law. It radiated a Europe which embraced, rather than repudiated, its humanist legacy.

Sadly, even in 2004, when Poland finally "returned to Europe", neither the domestic intelligentsia nor their Western counterparts had enough imagination to capitalise on the magnitude of past achievements. They were not able to see that the feats of solidarity and peaceful anti-authoritarian revolution may have provided a more compelling foundation for the new European identity than the dichotomizing anti-American humanism preached by Western philosophers.

The totalitarian temptation *da capo*

In the second decade of the 21st century, most references to a "totalitarian order" have been seldom made for other than figurative purposes. Even in the time of ISIS, the old leftist stigma put on totalitarianism as a concept has hardly been lifted. Totalitarianism has been unmasked as an ideological rationale for

American post-war imperial ambitions (Spiro and Barber 1979), as liberalism's need for an illiberal double (Halberstam 2000); or as a tool deflecting criticism of liberal democracies (Žižek 2001). As John Stanley observed: "So deep had the antagonism to the concept become that the article on totalitarianism in the *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* concluded with the wish that totalitarianism would disappear from the political science lexicon" (Stanley 1987). Further, as has been amply demonstrated by Polish historians themselves, the term is more confusing than clarifying when applied to successive variants and phases of "real-existing" communism. In strictly doctrinal terms, Poland in 1976 was not totalitarian; it was Soviet-occupied police state with a totalitarian legacy (Walicki 1996).[8]

That said, no historical account of the period 1976–1989 can do without invocations of an "anti-totalitarian struggle". The concept was ubiquitous in the writings of the Polish and Czech dissidents; it shone in the samizdat publications; it coruscated in the lectures of the Flying University; it blossomed in popular speeches during *Solidarność*. While most Western Sovietologists of the time redefined Brezniev's Soviet Union as a modernizing, bureaucratic, corporatist system, the dissidents stubbornly invoked the totalitarian trope. This did not necessarily mean that they were unaware of the misnomer. As Adam Michnik argued, both strong concepts and moral absolutism were necessary to challenge the world of dictatorship. "True", he said, "we demonized communism, but to defy the Bolsheviks demanded a Manichean stance. To risk one's own life and the security of one's family meant that the time's decisions and concepts were not the result of an academic debate but concrete moral choices often paid for with years in prison, a wrecked career, or broken life".[9]

The situation in which the actual users of a concept challenge its theorists creates an interesting analytical-existential conundrum. Tadeusz Borowski, the former prisoner of Auswchitz and the author of *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, summed up a similar predicament in a caustic way: "We were dirty and we died for real. They were aesthetic and discussed matters *na niby*" (for the fun of it) (Borowski 1946).[10] Borowski's remark points to a special sense in which the use of the concept of totalitarianism was justified "in the trenches". Although Poland was not totalitarian under Edward Gierek's rule, its history was. Thirty years after first Nazi and then Stalinist occupation, pivotal elements of the totalitarian legacy – including the spectre of *Homo sovieticus* – were lingering in institutions, in the dominant mindset, and, most prominently, in official newspeak. Culturally and economically, the grip of the Soviet Empire on people's actions was as tenacious in the post-communist era as the grip of the colonial legacy in Africa. And, as the first two decades of the 21st century show, the revenants of the authoritarian past make an unexpected entrance even, as in Poland's case, at a time of relative economic prosperity.

The resurgence of illiberal and authoritarian temptation in the 21st century makes Hannah Arendt's thought topical again. In the 1950s she insisted that "Totalitarian solutions may well survive the fall of totalitarian regimes in the form of strong temptations which will come up whenever it seems impossible to

alleviate political, social, or economic misery in a manner worthy of man" (Arendt 1973: 459). Her argument stands. True, neither Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism are likely to re-emerge in the era of social media in their previous, radical forms. But there are reasons to believe that the interment of "totalitarianism" is perhaps premature. Global crisis has reinforced numerous movements which proclaim ideas of a radically intrusive state – or a radically intrusive cyberspace – run by the people who do not merely control their citizens from the outside, but also attempt to reach into the most intimate details of their lives. This refers not just to a brutal Sharia state or Google's gentle tyranny; paradoxically, it also encompasses some enlightened projects that are designed to save the planet.

According to Arendt, totalitarianism has been an inseparable aspect of modernity and is not going to vanish. Doing away with Nazi camps and Bolshevik gulags has not made the danger of corpse-factories go away. On the contrary, with migrating populations and homelessness everywhere on the increase, masses of people are continuously rendered superfluous and dispensable. To completely disable the concept is thus to disarm its various mutations, and thus to re-invite the radical evil which tricked the world into accepting the evisceration of individuality as something as normal as the squashing of a gnat.

Today we know more than Voltaire knew about absolutism, more than Sartre knew about communism, and much more than Heidegger knew about Nazism. And yet, at the beginning of the 21st century, "civilization" and "humanism" are contested terms. Radical elites distrust them because they have been alleged tools of Western dominance (e.g. Ehrenfeld 2006; Merleau-Ponty 1948; 1990). Masses resent them because they are elitist. People in crisis reject them *tout court* because in conditions of uncertainty, "civilized behaviour" and humanism are too demanding; narratives of ethnicity and stories of grievance hold a much stronger unifying power than the voice of a "Mr. Cogito". This brings us to the fundamental problem in all projects endorsed by a Gandhi, a Havel or a Mandela: the general public's aversion to the humanist agenda.

In the above, I have tried to reassess the historical role of humanist outliers – small groups that take risks and prefigure an idealized future of the local people as a "community of conscience". As a matter of fact, their role goes beyond the community; more often than not, they represent the moral frontier of humanity as a whole, initiating and completing its emancipatory project. Without such a universalist vision, Habermas' Europe would have never emerged from the rubble and Eastern Europeans might still be waiting for their enchanted c*onstitutio libertatis.*

David Sloan Wilson has argued every that once in a great while, a group of individuals in a species "manages to decisively suppress selfishness within their ranks" and reach a higher level of complexity through igniting a cooperative and altruist action (Wilson 2015). Elinor Ostrom has demonstrated the ways in which such cooperative communities manage to overcome social and environmental adversity by following the core design principles of good governance (Ostrom 1990).

In the argument above, I have touched upon the transformation of a selfish, oppressed community into a Wilsonian-Ostromian cooperative, altruist community. Its instigators were a group of individuals who forged a second renaissance in

the heart of Europe. But, unlike the biological species which progresses, ultimately creating a successful super-organism, the architects of the 1989 revolution revealed a frailty inherent in humanist ideas. They are desirable but resisted, often unacknowledged, and hardly ever rewarded. The 20th century expired among declarations of humanism alongside wars and crises that unleashed suppressed repositories of violence and revealed a fatal weakness at the heart of the West's intellectual life. Today we return to "dignity", the central concept of the Renaissance, often not realizing the painful wisdom and frightening cost of humanism in action – the humanism which is not about being a winner, or even a survivor, but about the burden of being a carrier of *humanum* in humanity.

The Eastern and Central European experience is thus a testimony both to the value of altruism and cooperation – and to the *inhumanity of the humanist ethos.* While democratization may follow as a result of institutional, economic and technological fixes, it remains a volatile construction, often challenged by strong and virulent cultural patrimonies. It is thanks to the largely unrewarding, and often unacknowledged, work of the community of the humanist outliers that the revolution of dignity persists.

Notes

1 http://vod.tvp.pl/audycje/publicystyka/tomasz-lis-na-zywo/wideo/polska-oczami-adama-michnika-03112008/182301 Accessed 18 August 2018.
2 Personal communication with Adam Michnik, October 2004.
3 This view is not just a construction of "imperial" outsiders. It has been shared by many leading Polish thinkers and writers. See Adam Zamoyski, *Holy Madness: Romantics, Patriots and Revolutionaries, 1776–1881* (New York: Viking). See also Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Briefwechsel*. ed. D. Rjazanov (1929), Part iii. vol. 1, pp. 206–207. The letter is included in English in K. Marx and F. Engels, *Correspondence, 1846–1895* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1934).
4 For a selection of Polish deconstructions see especially the issue of *Krytyka Polityczna* No. 1, Summer 2002.
5 For a more detailed analysis of the Renaissance motif in Polish thought and writing see Andrzej Stanisław Kowalczyk, *Kryzys świadomości europejskiej w eseistyce polskiej lat 1945–1977*: *Vincenz – Stempowski –Miłosz* (Warszawa: PWN, 1990).
6 Private conversation with Vaclav Havel, November 2004. Derrida, who was participating in a conference organized by Charter 77, got another shock during his departure from Prague. He was stopped by security at the airport, accused of possessing drugs, strip-searched and left naked in a cell for twenty four hours. When he protested his innocence, the accusation was reinforced by the charge of unauthorized philosophizing, which was not allowed in communist Czechoslovakia.
7 The manifesto originally appeared in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* on 31 May 2003. See Jacques Derrida und Jürgen Habermas, "Unsere Erneuerung. Nach dem Krieg: Die Wiedergeburt Europas [After the War: The Renaissance of Europe]", 33/34.
8 According to Walicki, in the 1970s – as a result of its embourgissement – the Communist Party transformed itself into a de-ideologized mass organization, where the majority openly despised Marxism and did not like to be called "communists". See Andrzej Walicki, *Marksizm i skok do królestwa wolności. Dzieje komunistycznej utopii* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1996). Hannah Arendt herself admitted that after the death of Stalin, the system could no longer be called totalitarian (*The Origins*, xviii).

9 Michnik insists that he stopped using the term in 1980s. Personal communication, October 2004.
10 Tadeusz Borowski, "U nas w Auschwitzu" (1946) http://chomikuj.pl/honda1987/Ebook/Borowski+-+U+nas+w+Auschwitzu,436119298.pdf Accessed 15 February 2018.

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2 Re-enchanting modernity

Comparative perspectives on the legacy of 1968

Modernity on trial: perspectives of East and West

The anti-authoritarian upheavals that espouse dignity at their semiotic and moral centre do not happen in a vacuum. They are unique and context-dependent, but they also feed off – and cross-pollinate – one another in their strivings for a good society. One of the signs of human advancement is that people gradually embrace a vision of an enlarged self: extending it to women, children, ethnic minorities, nature, the earth. The humanist agenda has been very much a story about the blessings and hazards of such an expanding self: the challenge to focus on the Other without distorting or destroying the Self.

There is little doubt that one of the most spectacular crossings of the Rubicon that separates the self from the Other took place in the late 1960s. It happened, as if through osmosis, in all corners of the world. And though its rationale and aims differed from place to place, it was everywhere a moral journey, inspired by the young generation's discovery of the authoritarian nerve running through the heart of modernity – one that was deforming humans, and ravaging their cultures and their natural environment. The year 1968 was thus as much a reaction to the imperial-masculine-rational fundaments of the modern era as it was an attempt to re-enchant it. The students' protests against hierarchy, dogma, patriarchy and political doublespeak were joined with the struggle for the rights and freedoms of the Self and the rights and freedoms of the Other. It would not, then, be too much to say that both the 1989 revolution in Eastern Europe – and the 21st-century *Lebenswelt* as we know it – have built on the legacy of the 1968ers. If only for this reason, 1968, as a nest for the post-Second World War revolutions of dignity, merits closer scrutiny.

There has been a flurry of studies that have reappraised the spirit and implications of 1968 but – Paul Berman's reflections in 1996's *The Tale of Two Utopias* aside – few attempts to compare the anti-authoritarian rebellions of 1968 in the West with those in Eastern Europe. The aim of this chapter is to revisit these two upheavals as two scripts of civilizational critique. My questions are: to what extent did the countercultural upheavals talk to and inspire one another? What were their main scriptures and how did they reconfigure Western and Soviet-style modernity? And what can the 1968 rebellion teach us

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about the most efficacious means to create intellectual and spiritual antibodies against the totalitarian temptations?

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In *The Silent Revolution* (1977), Ronald Inglehart argued that the frenzied activism of the 1960s transformed political life throughout the Western world by shifting the dominant materialism to the quality of life, and drawing attention to the role of civil society in democracy-building. Zygmunt Bauman saw the international upheaval of 1968 as the young generation's reaction against the division of the world into actors and spectators, and as a project of the renewal of participatory democracy (Bauman 1968: 6–21). Similarly Hannah Arendt, although critical of the 68ers' politicization of the university, welcomed broad student mobilization in the public sphere:

> As I see it, for the first time in a very long while, a spontaneous political movement arose which not only did not simply carry on propaganda but acted, *and moreover acted almost exclusively from moral motives.* Thereby an experience new for our time entered into the game of politics … This generation discovered what the eighteenth century had called "public happiness", which means that when man takes part in public life he opens up for himself a dimension of human experience that otherwise remains closed to him and that in some way constitutes a part of complete "happiness".
>
> (Arendt in NYRB 1971)

The more recent reappraisals of 1968 in the West and South (e.g. Gurminder et al. 2009; Horn 2007) – with their fashionable focus on emancipatory struggle of subaltern groups (aboriginal people, blacks, sexual minorities) – have demonstrated how we are all beneficiaries of gender equality, human rights and the struggle for peace and environmentalism: the main projects of the 1968 rebels. Certainly, when summing up the legacy of 1968 we cannot overlook the value of the civil rights movement's opposition to the policies of legal racial segregation which inspired international solidarity with excluded communities. Neither can we disregard those aspects of 1968 which fostered the idea of a more inclusive society by elevating the status of outcasts, drop-outs, provocateurs, nonconformists and subversive iconoclasts who exploded modernity's rational squareness. The Gargantuan *vogliamo tutto* ("we want everything") mentality amplified the conception of life as more than just a quest for standard careers, standard jobs and standard families: it aspired to reclaim the side-tracked, spiritual dimension of an increasingly soulless world.

But there have also been more dystopian readings of the role of 1968 in human history. Michael Seidman argues that the crisis of the 1960s was imaginary and change illusive. Ultimately, "the May-June events demonstrated the power of the centralized state and the attractions of a consumer society that had effectively smothered revolution while promoting hedonism" (Seidman 2004: 282). Paul Berman has scrutinized the self-destructive puritanism and dogmatism of the Western radical Left (1996). And Tony Judt, in an acerbic assault on the overblown individualism of the 1968ers, reasoned that

the student upheaval ultimately undermined its own objectives and led to the decline of a sense of shared purpose:

> Doing "your own thing", "letting it hang out", "making love not war" – these are not inherently unappealing goals, but they are of their essence private objectives, not public goods. Unsurprisingly, they led to the widespread assertion that the "personal is political". Curiously, the new Left remained exquisitely sensitive to the collective attributes of humans in distant lands, where they could be gathered up in to autonomous social categories like "peasant", "post-colonial", "subaltern' and the like. But at home, the individual reigned supreme.
>
> (Judt 2010: 87–88)

Clearly, these contrasting interpretations of the legacy of 1968 point to a rich palette of often contradictory trends, strains and objectives all of which fed into the student movement. The latter's complex and paradoxical sense has been captured by Immanuel Wallerstein, who declared: "There have only been two world revolutions. One took place in 1848. The second took place in 1968. Both were historical failures. Both transformed the world" (Arrighi, Hopkins and Wallerstein 1989; 2012: 97).

If we re-read 1968 as the work of small groups of outliers who attempted to create an anti-authoritarian modernity in the East and West, Wallerstein's diagnosis should give us pause. For there is indeed a sense in which both rebellions failed and succeeded at the same time. Can we illuminate their "victorious defeat" in more detail?

Let us start by panning over the affinities and correlations between the 1960s' protests of East and West. Both the rebellions in Paris and Warsaw were orchestrated by the revolt of the impassioned *puer* against the passionless, ossified *senex*. In both cases the young protesters' energy and *élan* could be seen as a resurgence of Hannah Arendt's "public happiness". Both shared the same battle cry: "Be realistic, demand the impossible". The legendary leader of the Parisian rebels, the red-haired and red-minded Daniel Cohn-Bendit, insisted that the rebellions in Eastern and Western Europe had the same goals: "the struggle against … state repression, authoritarianism and hierarchy". He argued that "All three elements exist in the West and in the East, and my opposition to both systems is complete … Our struggle has to be international. In Warsaw there's the same development as here …" (Cohn-Bendit 1968).

On the surface the two rebellions sang in one concert. Their conductors were young men and women of the Left. Seemingly, "everyone was fighting for the same thing: "basic democratic rights". The famous "Open Letter to the Party" penned in Warsaw by Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski (1966) – a damning Marxist critique of the shoddy and lawless reality of the workers' state – was disseminated in Paris.[1] When Cohn-Bendit was asked in court what his name was, he replied famously: "Kuroń Modzelewski" (Michnik 2008: 4–5). To this list of

family resemblances we may add the propensity for a countercultural lifestyle: from sporting flamboyant apparels and extravagant artistic tastes, to a penchant for free sexual mores.

And yet, as I shall contend, these parallels were skin-deep. If the Eastern and Western versions of the Leftist *Sturm und Drang* really had anything in common, it was their misidentification of the nature of the authoritarian threat. The French, German and American rebels used the incongruous label of "authoritarian states" in reference to what, at the time, were the most productive and prosocial Western democracies on earth. The Eastern European outliers on the other hand, started their insurgency in the mistaken view that the worldview inspired by Marx and Lenin could be reformed and humanized. It could not: so much became clear after brutal repressions following the Polish students' protest in March 1968 and the Soviet invasion of Prague in August that year.

That said, what the rebels from the East and the West shared was their lack of a strategy that would shake the dominant, rational and institutional tyrannies of late modernity. One such possible strategy would have been forging a cooperative coalition of the willing, including not just radical students and selected "subaltern groups" but trade unions, industrial workers and peasants. The problem was that, all too often, these latter groups refused to see modernity through the same, apocalyptic glasses as the hot-headed rebels.

The "Viet Kong of thought"

For all the cosmetic similarities, 1968 in the West and in East/Central Europe stemmed from different historical experiences and featured different *telos* and political agendas. Adam Michnik, one of the leaders of March 1968 in Poland, reminisces: "When I was observing [the] Parisian May, I was thinking all the time: how close it is, and how far! On the one hand, I felt the same passion, the same anger, the same need to question the sense of the world in which I lived. On the other, I saw the portraits of Mao, Trotsky, Castro, Lenin …" carried by the French protesters (Michnik 1995: 98–99). To Michnik they were genocidal tyrants; to Cohn-Bendit and his friends, they were the holy icons of *their* revolution.

There were further disparities. Ideologically, the good society as envisioned by the Western radical Left was based on an old millennial ambition to conceive of a perfect social system and impose it upon society by a combination of propaganda and model experiments, the latter called "network communes" in the terminology of leader of the German rebels, Rudi Dutschke. This was an either-or project. Students in Berlin and Paris proclaimed their "total rejection" of all bourgeois mantras, rules and institutions. They refused concessions (Horn 2007). They declared their wish to transform the world *ex nihilo*, using their own methods, and according to their own revolutionary standards. By contrast, the Eastern European Left aspired to no more than the expansion of personal freedoms *within* the existing *Realsocialisum*s, and turning what was called the workers' state – into the *true* workers' state. At this stage the rebels in Prague and Warsaw still believed that such project was feasible; one needed a

Lutheran-like reformation to decontaminate the polluted doctrine and return to original church of Marx and Lenin.

One of the ways to unpack the difference between the 1968 Left in the East and West is to look closer at two kinds of civilizational critique which featured in the most influential revolutionary gospels of the time. At the core of one such gospel – the writings of the mentor of the 1968ers, Herbert Marcuse – was the detonation of the Western "one-dimensional man" and the disposal of liberal "repressive tolerance" (Marcuse 1965; 1969). On the surface, Marcuse's argument – when re-read today – sounds inspiring, elevating, even refreshing: it exposes Western hypocrisy, American imperialism and mendacious tolerance extended to the machinery of discrimination and injustice. The so-called "virtues" of liberal society – freedom of speech, welfare, democracy and shared affluence – are unmasked as deceptive alibis for oppressive state power. But there is one hitch. If we take the trouble to closely examine Marcuse's reasoning – using the "Marcusian" lens itself – we soon discover that the dichotomizing, Manichean mindset which he claims to oppose, shines through everything he writes and says. Thus, the revamping of the old repressive world order involves the elimination of liberal, "repressive" tolerance in exchange for a "liberating tolerance". The latter means, literally, the "intolerance against movements from the Right, and toleration of the movements from the Left" (Marcuse 1969: 109).

True, Marcuse admits that "The factual barriers which *totalitarian democracy* erects against the efficacy of qualitative dissent are weak and pleasant enough compared with the practices of a dictatorship"(Marcuse 1969: 99, my emphasis). But the pleasures of Western "totalitarian democracy" should not distract us from creating a genuinely free society, even if it involves using partially undemocratic means. To this effect, Marcuse distinguishes between a "reactionary" violence and the "revolutionary", progressive violence against the established system; a violence which should break the historical continuum of injustice, cruelty and silence (Marcuse 1968; 1970:107).

Marcuse's enthusiasm for the concept of "totalitarianism" to describe the horrors of Western liberal society was matched by his exertions to understand and excuse Bolshevik inhumanities. In his reading, the Soviet kind of totalitarianism was justified because it was "not expansive or aggressive and [was] dictated by scarcity and poverty" (Marcuse 1970: 94). Western authoritarianism on the other hand – much more covert and insidious – was motivated by profit, greed, imperial ambitions and the capitalist aim to turn citizens into consumer zombies.

From the perspective of the 21st century – the perspective of the seeming death and resurrection of neoliberalism in the aftermath of the financial 2008 crash – some of Marcuse's points on "disaster capitalism" have hardly aged. What has fared badly has been his critique of post-Second World War liberal democracy. The latter was a pioneering attempt to create a sustainable peace and ensure citizens' well-being in the world recovering from of its own savageries. But Marcuse did not see the novelty of the new, liberal, post-Second World War order. Instead, he pontificated on the parallels between authoritarian structures in Auschwitz and those in modern free democracies.

This preposterous convergence may have given his anti-capitalist and anti-American crusade and extra rhetorical "jizz". But Marcuse's civilizational critique of the West is unsettling for several reasons. His willed historical amnesia is accompanied by an attempt to construing the bestialities of Nazi and Soviet concentration camps as close to "the image, and in a sense the quintessence, of the infernal society in the US, into which we are plunged every day" (Cranston 1969: 39). This is an example of academic voodoo science. A new, better world that Marcuse envisaged – a libidinous utopia of the liberated, true selves (Marcuse 1968; 1979: 94) – had less to do with a genuine attempt to imagine a more inclusive and fair society, and more with peddling a simplistic, one-sided view of modernity and a mobilization of hatred for Western liberal values and freedoms. Marcuse's Marxism, which was to help humanity to unite through friendship and solidarity, focused instead on a wild chase for ideological enemies, mirroring a similar chase among the Cold War propagandists of the Right.

There are thus two features of the Marcusian legacy which have a bearing on the late modernity of the 21st century. The first has to do with vitriolic assaults on liberal democracy which used to be – and remain – a *leitmotif* in retribalizing Europe. In the 1960s, such assaults replicated earlier arguments advanced by Nietzsche, Sorel and Bakunin – thinkers whose hatred of Western modernity had inspired totalitarianism both on the Right and Left. In the 21st century they are heard again, preying on similar historical amnesia which encourages new mutations of authoritarian rule. The second feature of Marcuse-as-our-contemporary has been the abolition of meaningful distinctions between democracy and despotism, altruism and egoism, cooperation and coercion – a blurring of distinctions which has dignified an ahistorical and anti-humanist turn in Western intellectual life. Some may see this turn as an "emancipative anti-humanism", necessary to destabilize the hegemony of elites that Jonathan Haidt labelled as WEIRDs: Western-educated, industrialized, rich, and democratic (Haidt 2013: 113.) While it is doubtful whether it has destabilized any structures at all (apart from its own), its impact on the revolution of dignity has been anaemic, if not downright spurious.

Some of Marcuse's ideas were mirrored in another influential anatomy of the horrors of Western civilization which featured in the influential work of Noam Chomsky. Again, Chomsky's civilizational critique, often creative and legitimate, is marred by a periodic descent into a conceptual and moral chaos. In his influential *American Power and the New Mandarins* (1969), Chomsky anatomized the moral-intellectual complicity of American citizens in the extermination of Red Indians, black slaves, and in bloody interventions in Korea and Vietnam. But his condemnation of Western genocide was as forceful as it was selective: Chomsky approved of Mao's "war of liberation" which involved genocide on a scale which was incomparable with that in Vietnam – or indeed any other imaginable scale (Chomsky 1969: 299). Very much as was the case with Marcuse, Chomsky never took the trouble to study the true nature of the totalitarian oppression. The Khmer Rouge's violent takeover of Cambodia in 1975, and reports of atrocities committed to create a communist paradise on earth, did little to modify his

applause for Pol Pot. In effect, Chomsky offered a rationalization of violence, which showed parallels with the US argument for the American terror in Korea and Vietnam: there might have been some casualties, but they were understandable and necessary under conditions of regime change and social revolution (Chomsky 1975:30).

The review of the intellectual inspiration for Western 68ers remains incomplete without a second glance at the writings of the most quoted architect of the *soixante-huitards*' mythology, Michel Foucault. The philosophy informing *The Order of Things* (1966; 1970) – a book that was greeted in France as heralding "the greatest revolution since existentialism" – rested on the idea that man was to disappear "just like a 'crease' being ironed out of a wrinkled shirt" (Chapsal 1966: 19–122). Foucault's book, which immediately appeared on the bestseller list, taught its ecstatic readers that, after the Nietzschean "death of God", it was time for the "death of man": dissolving identities, continuities and disposing of the truth. In Foucault's vision of history, there was no room for humanism and there was no moral progress; only a series of patterns which were "neither more true nor more false than those that preceded [them]"(Veyne 1979: 235). As in his earlier *Madness and Civilization* (1960), Foucault was obsessed with the concepts of power, violence, oppression, transgression and surveillance to the point of relating the word "subject" to "subjection" (Miller 1993: 148–160). Being so overburdened with serfdom and subjugation, the idea of the Western "subject" needed to be demolished, very much like the concepts of responsibility, sensitivity, justice and law – those mere tokens of bourgeois ideology that allegedly lacked public support and legitimacy.

Foucault's project was not just a conceptual unmasking of the sham of Western civilization; it welcomed a "total contestation of Western culture", destruction of the oldest laws and pacts" and openly endorsed "violence from below" in Marxist and Maoist-inspired extremism (Miller 1993: 172). The appeal of Foucault among the 68ers was enhanced by the fact that he was a "man of action". In 1969, when he became head of department at St. Vincennes, he gave himself to rebellious rapture by joining a group of 500 students who seized the administration building and amphitheatre to show solidarity with colleagues who had occupied the Sorbonne earlier that day. When the police arrived, he followed the protesters to the roof in order to "resist", though there is no evidence that the French representatives of power took the trouble to discipline or punish his transgression.

The radical scriptures of the Western 68-ers, briefly reviewed above, accrete to a civilizational critique based on the conviction that Western liberal democracy was an oppressive system resting on a comprehensive social manipulation exerted by a mix of an authoritarian state, the media, boards of directors, and the academy. And herein lies the greatest paradox of the Western Left's protest against tyranny: Its seeming anti-authoritarianism was, in fact, often based on the promotion of authoritarian, even violent, means to forge a better world. The more radical the utopia, the most abysmal its dystopian, violent, shadow self. The intellectual Jacobins proclaimed in the Parisian Arc: "We are whore-sons, sons of the great

harlot which is the so called consumer society … We are the Viet Cong of thought. The philosophy of tomorrow will be terrorist, [and it will be allied] to all active policy of terrorism" (Aron 1968: 23).

A qualification is in order. What I am arguing here is not that there was a direct causal relationship between the penchant for illiberal transformation among the intellectual animateurs of the 1968 revolution and the words and actions of the American Black Panthers, the Italian Red Brigades, the German Baader-Meinhoff gang or the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentbund*. Nor am I suggesting that there were no enlightened individuals and groups on the Western Left – such as C. Wright Mills to mention but one example – who were genuinely concerned about building the East–West dialogue to better understand and defy modernity's authoritarian potential (Horn 2007). But it is difficult not to see the connection between the icon of the 1968 uproar, the promethean Daniel Cohn-Bendit – standing on the barricades and telling the enchanted crowd that everything was evil and had to be destroyed – and the apocalyptic scenarios flaunted by Foucault and Marcuse. Similarly, the Baader-Meinhoff terrorists, who openly spoke of fighting the repressive "fascist capitalist state" that specialized in late-capitalist alienation did not invent their revolution from ground zero; they were using revolutionary memes and mindbites which were cited, disseminated and believed in by many *bien pensant* world improvers.

The relation between progressive thinking and life as we know it has always been crooked. But in the 1960s it was perhaps more crooked than ever before. Suffice to cite one revealing anti-climax: when angry students insisted on organizing a sit-in at Theodor Adorno's institute, the professors called the police. Unlike Foucault, Adorno was in no hurry to join the students' antics. The rebels were subsequently escorted out shouting *Scheisskritische Theoretiker*! (shitty-critical theorists) (Steinmayer 1969: 30–31). They found it hard to believe that *their* Theodor Adorno – a scholar who lectured them on the death of bourgeois culture – was defending *des bürgerlichen Rechstaates*. When pressed on the point that without his theories the German student protest might perhaps not have arisen, Adorno declared: "In my writings I have never set up any kind of model for practical action. I am a man of theory, and feel theoretical thought to be extremely close to the purposes of the artist". When it was pointed out to him that his stance came close to that of the German intellectual mandarins who had washed their hands when Hitler threatened Germany, Adorno retorted: "I am not in the least afraid of the term *Elfenbeinturm*" (Steinmayer 1969: 31).[2]

This episode is telling. By distancing himself from the students' actions, the Frankfurter sociologist – the pillar of the progressive social sciences in the post-war period – clearly signalled that his ideas were not designed to be "contaminated" by the messy life of society. The question of whether his writing belonged to the sphere of art or scholarly sociology is tricky: after all, the Frankfurters' prose was too labyrinthine and convoluted to qualify as *belles lettres*. However we take it, Adorno's apologia for the intellectual "ivory tower" is a direct proof that the powerful escapist strain in German intellectual history did not die out after the Holocaust; it was considered a defensible stance as late as the end of the 1960s.

Does the intellectual radicalism of the 1968ers deserve a second scrutiny? I dare say it does, if only because the progressive intellectuals' washing their hands of the consequences of their academic phantasms marred the trajectory of the academic Left in the decades that followed. What has had the most enduring impact on Western academy was their penchant for linguistic machismo and vulgar Darwinism. It is as if the radical revolution which refused to happen in France, Germany or America, *migrated to discourse* and planted itself there, complete with its own set of tropes and hyperboles, resplendent with references to fascism, totalitarianism, power, hegemony, domination, abrogation and repression. It was a semiotics of brutality which went beyond mere aesthetitzation of violence: witness the case of Roland Barthes, who, after being appointed a chair of semiology at the Collège de France, declared that language was "quite simply fascist" (Sontag 1982: 122). Or attend to Badiou, who called Chairman Mao an "aesthetic genius" and argued that "Extreme violence is … the correlate of extreme enthusiasm, because it is in effect a question of the transvaluation of all values" (Lilla 2016: 93).

The problem is that declarations such as this – a staple cost of postmodernity – have eroded humanist traditions in the West, North, East and South. Hidden in the relentless unmaskings of human institutions, language and politics as instruments of power, domination and egoism, is a simplistic version of misconceived Darwinism: one which reduces *all* human transactions to selfish motives, a will to power and a struggle of interest. Importing such reductive anthropology to the postmodern discourse of emancipation has not just been a contradiction in terms; it has undermined the very quest for freedom and dignity that the 1968 Jacobins embarked upon.

1968 in Eastern Europe: the legacy of the *Komandosi*

Hanna Świda-Ziemba (2011) drew attention to three distinct groups within the young generation that came of age in 1960s Poland: the dominant, "doublethink" utilitarians who expected justly deserved social and career advancement in what was variously believed – or disbelieved – to be an achieved communist utopia on earth. The second, more aesthetically sensitive formation – known as the "mockers" – derided wooden propaganda and doctrinal educational slogans, and assimilated some of the ludic-anarchic spirit typifying Western counterculture (Świda-Ziemba 2010). But there was also a third, restless group of seekers on the path who sported a utopian-dystopian mind and soul. One half was altruist, feeding off the original socialist ideal of a compassionate community of solidarity. The other half – surrounded by the utopia as it came out in the wash – was hungry and angry at the abysmally low respect for the workers' dignity in the workers' state, at the ubiquitous squalor, moral ugliness and ubiquitous surveillance which marred citizens' daily lives. Having come from the well-to-do families with strong communist roots, this generation had been told since their childhood that they would participate in one of the most daring social experiments on earth: building a world where the weak would be protected by the strong, lies would evaporate and justice would prevail. Many of these divided souls had been former members of the *Walterowcy* scouts: a communist youth organization led by a charismatic young pedagogue, Jacek Kuroń.

Were he born in a more affluent society, Kuroń might have turned into a Marcuse or a Chomsky. But in the conditions of the "Soviet barracks" he started from the renovation of the barracks. As an idealistic teacher, activist and a gifted writer, he set out to make communism deliver what it promised. His politics has been the subject of numerous studies and lively controversy (e.g. Friszke 2001; Skórzyński 2017). Rather than rehearsing it, I wish to draw attention to the original, Kuronesque *communist paideia* inspired by the ideas of Anton Makarenko and his 1925 "Pedagogical Poem". The underling idea was "to educate a man who would be able to combine his own interest with social affairs, who will look beyond cooking his own dinner and engage in forging the future of his nation" (Kuroń 1989: 64,72).

Like Makarenko, Kuroń trained his scouts in self-government, altruism and solidarity. He sang of the importance of empathy, social engagement and courage. For his young disciples, he was was an incarnation of limitless courage and communist *noblesse*. As his disciple Adam Michnik put it:

> Jacek Kuroń told us that a communist is a guy who fights for justice, freedom, social equality and socialism. And for these convictions he goes to prison for years, and after his release he starts over again … When he sees evil, he should tell the truth about it. And so, we told the truth about it.
>
> (Cited by Gawin 2013: 149)

Thus, when Michnik founded a heretical club of the "Seekers of Contradictions" at the age of 15, he did so in the Kuronesque belief that "the mission of communists was to reveal contradictions and, through the exposure of such contradictions, make the world into a better place" (Gawin 2013: 150).

During the late 1950s and 1960s, Kuroń's disciples grew into a tight group of thinkers and activists who stood out as an anomaly in a crowd of regular rock-and-roll teenagers. The music they listened to had less to do with Elvis Presley's libidinous spasms and more with the soul-pinching, bitter wisdom of the ballads by Russian bards Vladimir Vysotski and Bulat Okudzhava. They oozed social concern – but also irreverence for power or hierarchy. They derided pomp and spectacle. They were not interested in football but in Plato, Hobbes, Aristotle, politics and the economy. They often crashed communist meetings and party seminars, and shocked the audiences with straightforward and often kami-kaze questions. People panicked when they heard assaults on the one-party state or, worse, references to the Soviet Union's "imperialist politics" which undermined the interests of the international proletariat (Dąbrowski et al. 2008).

In the communist circles, they were known as *Komandosi* – the name allegedly inspired by their raids on party meetings, disturbing the sessions of the Communist Student Union, and breaking all taboos (Friszke: 2010: 457). The name stuck, if only because of the association with the operations of the Israeli special service during the 1967 war with Egypt: an allusion to the Jewish origins of many of Kuroń's former pupils. As Michnik put it, "We were 70% Marxist, 80% Jewish, and 40% sons and daughters of the red bourgeoisie – often on a war footing with our parents" (Cited by Zabłocki 2008: 454).

Their structure and modus vivendi brings to mind Victor Turner's *communitas*: a rudimentarily structured community of social outcasts inspired by friendship and pleasure in being in the same zone of work, love and politics (Turner in Moot and Meyerhoff 1977: 36). The liminal, suspended, status of such community – its existence in a time and place of withdrawal from "normal" modes of social action – gave it an advantage when it came to scrutinizing the central values of the culture of which it was a part. More, as Turner has aptly observed, the *communitas*' "creative effervescence" can sometimes lead to a birth of visions which contain "the germ of future social developments, of social change, in a way that the central tendencies of a social system can never quite succeed in making" (Turner 1979: 41). This, in fact, is how the Komandosi's *communitas* evolved: from being the intellectual shock-troops of the student rebellion that started in March 1968, to becoming the architects of the anti-authoritarian revolution in 1980.[3]

In the spring of 1968, they were fighting against the controlling, authoritarian strains in *Realsocialismus*. But unlike the gauchists' massive assault on the supposed authoritarianism of Western democracy, the *Komandosi*'s civilizational critique was oriented against the ailments of modernity with a Bolshevik face. After the Stalinist purges in the 1940s and 1950s, they saw the rule of the proletariat as a grotesque antithesis to the *belle époque* of workers' paradise that was waiting just around the corner – and then the next corner, and the next – *da capo al fine*. At first they criticized the system from Marxist positions which informed Kuroń and Modzelewski's legendary "Open Letter to the Party" (1964). After both signatories of the "Open Letter" had been rewarded by the Party with long prison sentences for their ideological "revisionism", they sobered up. But even in the face – or maybe because – of state brutalities and repressions, their belief in a more humane socialism remained intact.[4] After all, fighting for just causes was part of the Polish intelligentsia's romantic credentials, personal sacrifice was *de rigeur*, and the struggle had to go on. Thus the *Komandosi* remained faithful to the communist cause even after their intellectual mentor, Leszek Kołakowski – Poland's leading Marxist scholar at the University of Warsaw, always ahead of everybody else – had concluded that Stalinist terror was not just an "error"; it was an inseparable part of a totalitarian political, economic and cultural system which derived from Marxism (Kołakowski 1956 in Gawin 2013: 64).[5]

Again, while talking about the early architects of the anti-authoritarian struggle in the East, it is difficult not to mention a tiny group of "clairvoyant outliers" who had seen through the sham of the communist utopia earlier than Kołakowski, and earlier than the Komandosi and their mentors. One of them was the Polish writer Leopold Tyrmand, a colourful lover of jazz and bon vivant who – without reading Hannah Arendt – openly spoke of the crimes of communism and fascism as being symmetrical. In 1969 he wrote:

> I'm also under the charm of Leszek Kołakowski figure skating – but I don't believe him. I sympathise with Modzelewski and Kuroń but I wouldn't like to live in their socialism. And the toothless causticity of Marcuse, the thoughtless hypertension of Franz Fanon, and the expectorant rhetoric and arrogant

> idealism of the Cohn-Bendits and the American New Left, all these I find quite off-putting.
>
> (Cited by Gawin 2013: 137)

If I mention Tyrmand it is because, as I have argued in Chapter 1, in charting the origins of anti-authoritarianism we should not discount the importance of individuals who moved on the outer margins of the cultural centre. Anti-authoritarian writers like Tyrmand or Witold Gombrowicz – not to mention the giant of oppositional humanism Zbigniew Herbert – were seminal to the revolution of dignity by their very presence in the unofficial public sphere. They were the guardians of transcendent wisdom whose morsels reached parts of the Polish intelligentsia through the émigré journals such as Paris *Kultura*.

One of the most distinctive features of the Eastern European student protest and the subsequent journey to anti-authoritarian socialism was a unique historical *ricorso*: a return to national memory and culture. Most Western rebels dreamed of shedding the shackles of bourgeois conventions, breaking connection with modernity's genocidal past, starting from ground zero. The Eastern Europeans, *per contra*, as victims of the decoupling of the present from history, witnessed how starting from scratch translated into living in a cultureless world. They saw national history was disfigured by the scythes and hammers of Marxist-Leninist writers and historians. Their writings stood in stark contrast to the wooden newspeak and propaganda which paralyzed independent thought and critical reflection. Their project of rehumanizing socialism was thus not just about reclaiming lost freedoms; it was about arresting cultural regression and recovering national history and memory.

The revolution started in the theatre. In February 1968, hundreds of students and Varsovians stormed through the doors and windows of the National Theatre to see for the last time the performance of *The Forefathers' Eve*, a play written in the 1830s by the greatest Polish Romantic Adam Mickiewicz. The play had been banned by the Communist Party when it became evident that its original 19th-century content was read as neither purely poetic nor politically harmless: both the director and the audience interpreted Mickiewcz's attack on the Russian Tsar as the critique of the communist "Tsar" sitting in the Kremlin. One sequence, in particular, galvanized the audience: "Oh man, if you but knew, how great your power!? / … O men! Each of you could, locked up alone / By faith destroy and establish many a throne" (Mickiewicz 1834; 2016: 34–36).

Hearing these lines was like hearing the Rolling Stones: the spectators experienced a collective political orgasm. The play told them about three powers: the power of words, the power of imagination – and the power of the powerless. The result was that after seeing *The Forefathers Eve*, the students poured out into the streets of Warsaw and protested against Moscow's dictatorship. This is how the Polish Spring of 1968 exploded. It began with poetry which, ostensibly, "makes nothing happen".

The demonstrators demanded freedom, but – unlike in the West – it was not the freedom to destroy, but to reclaim national culture, to exhume the

cultural legacy which was part of the confiscated national memory. Restoring linkages with the past seemed like an antiquarian exercise, but in the Polish context, it gestured towards Hannah Arendt's argument about the treasure of revolution which hides in past history. It was the uses and re-imaginings of the past that guaranteed the "deadly impact of new thoughts" (Arendt 1968: 201).

The Warsaw upheavals – inflaming students in other Polish cities – provoked massive communist repressions and an unprecedented mobilization of the propaganda machine. The official press poured scorn on the student revolt in a language which mixed patriotic indignation with the old fascist vocabulary. The *Komandosi* were portrayed as a "nest of reptiles", "Zionist lackeys", "drooling dwarfs of reaction" and "leeches and parasites" that were contaminating the national soul (Dąbrowski et al. 2008). The state media presented the rebellion as a subversive plot of "Jewish revisionists on the payroll of the CIA". The Polish struggle for a re-humanized socialism ended in long prison sentences meted to the 1968 leaders and a vociferous, state-sponsored, anti-Semitic campaign. The Poles of Jewish extraction – whose majority held middle-high and lower managerial positions in administration and economy, and were highly conspicuous in academic an cultural professions – were an ideal target as "Zionists", "Cosmopolitans" and "Revisionists" (Schatz 1989; 1992; Eisler 1991). After the Six-Day, Arab–Israeli war (1967) – where the Kremlin supported Egypt – the Jews became a sacrificial scapegoat to blame for all mistakes and distortions (*błędy i wypaczenia*) of decaying socialism. The media campaign highlighting their alleged conspiracy against the "healthy tissue of the nation" ended in a company of harassment which led some victims to suicide, and many others to flee. In the ensuing Jewish exodus, Polish power-holders committed one of the most spectacular cultural hara kiris in modern Polish history: they lost numerous Polish-Jewish intellectuals who, after 1968, came to enrich "the healthy national tissue" in England, Sweden and the US.[6]

But there was yet another difference between the intellectual and ideological dossier of 1968 in the West and in the East. It had to do with ideas and visions propagated in the canonic writings of the time. As I have argued, the Western revolutionary curriculum included the "Red Necks" – Marx, Mao, Marx, Lenin, Marcuse and Foucault. The rebels in the East read Marx, naturally, but their main inspiration came from the anatomists of authoritarian evil: Joseph Conrad, Albert Camus, Hannah Arendt, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Jan Patocka, Czeslaw Miłosz. Indeed, there is ample evidence that one of the most powerful influences on the 68ers in Poland was Leszek Kołakowski's trailblazing essay, "The Priest and the Jester" (1959; 1968).[7]

Kołakowski proposed an innovative framing of an "incurable" antagonism between a philosophy that perpetuates the absolute, and a philosophy that interrogates and detonates accepted doxa.

> This is the antagonism of the priest and the jester … The priest is the guardian of the absolute; he sustains the cult of the final and the obvious as

> acknowledged by and contained in tradition. The jester is he who moves in good society without belonging to it, and treats it with impertinence: he who doubts all that appears self-evident … Both violate the mind, the priest by strangling it with catechism; the jester by harassing it with mockery.
>
> (Kołakowski 1959; 1968: 33)

Many have read Kołakowski's text not just as a philosophical metaphor but as an ethically charged programme for action, even a project of self-realization. Implicit in his idea of the "jester rebel" was not so much the messianic-heroic protagonist that the Poles knew from previous bloody uprisings, but an ironic sage equipped with a transcendental wisdom that would allow him to understand all that is in conflict. The jester believes in the necessity of rebellion but knows the limits of the revolutionary stance. He prefers the Socratic to the theocratic, the dialogic to the mutinous. He "derides common sense and reads sense into the absurd". In short, he is a *homo ludens*, immune to revolutionary or religious dogma.

What I am arguing is that one of the lessons of 1968 was the realization that the way forward for the *Komandosi* generation was less an anti-communist protest and more a "jester's strategy"; undermining power relations via non-revolutionary means such as a mixture of civility and subversion.[8] As Kołakowski wrote:

> To adopt this attitude is to adopt a view of the world which holds out a hopeful but difficult prospect: that of a gradual and laborious process of working out, in our interactions, how to reconcile those elements of human thought and behavior which are hardest to reconcile: *how to achieve goodness without universal indulgence*, *courage without fanaticism*, *intelligence without disenchantment and hope without blindness*. All other fruits of philosophical thinking are of little worth. (Kołakowski 1968: 58, my italics)

Needless to say, the jester's philosophy involved relinquishing of the idea of revolution. As one of the members of the *Komandosi*, Barbara Toruńczyk put it:

> We had a reflexive attitude to the revolution, war and destruction – this is what made us different from the revolt in the West. I remember the discussions in Michnik's club pondering whether communism was to be blamed for the gulags. And the majority decided that since the communists built the gulags, sentenced innocent people and broke their lives, then all those who identify with the ideals of communism, face the moral burden of the gulags … It was very hard to accept the idea that we had to renounce revolution … But we saw ourselves as a link between generations. Our school readings were Camus and Conrad … And like Conrad's heroes, we also knew that we had to face irresolvable dilemmas.
>
> (Toruńczyk 2008)

There were other, equally influential, anti-revolutionary memes which circulated in 1960s Eastern Europe. Jan Patočka, the great mentor of both Czech and Polish

1968 rebels, promoted the Socratic theme of "care for the soul" in lieu of revolutionary action (Patocka cited by Michnik 1993: 82–83). Care for the soul, in Patočka's view, meant the quest for truth – but truth that is not something given once and for all but rather a lifelong inquiry, a slow Shakespearian journey towards the place where "ripenesss is all".

Here we touch upon one more distinctive feature of the 1968 rebellion in Eastern Europe: its resorting to culture as a tool of anti-authoritarian struggle. The often used concept of "anti-political politics" (Ost 1990) to describe this process is slightly misleading. The rebels were not anti-political. Rather, they realized that – in the face of the Soviet despotism and the tanks that went with it – the only way to practice politics was via culture: interrogating authoritarianism and resisting it through poetry, essay, theatre, intellectual discussion or religious studies. Such a programme of action may sound naïve or escapist. It was hardly so. On the contrary, the March rebels decided that a feasible revolution *within* the existing authoritarian structures – achievable then and there – would not foreshadow political apocalypse but a moral transformation. In his "Theses on Hope and Hopelessness", written in the aftermath of 1968, Leszek Kołakowski advanced a series of postulates that redirected the struggle against totalitarianism from head-on political resistance to exploiting the internal contradictions and weaknesses of Sovietism (Kołakowski 1971; 1988). The most important of these postulates spoke about the necessity of living a "life in dignity". Such a life was to be an everyday struggle against the most toxic effects of all authoritarian systems: the loss of autonomous selfhood.

Anatomies of totalitarian temptation

Decoding communism was not *comme il fault* in the utopia-starved generation of 68ers in the West. But one thing is certain: the most prescient and insightful critics of authoritarianism had a communist past. There were fascinating deserters among Western 1968 revolutionaries – intellectuals who switched sides when they became aware of a stubborn monstrousness of communism in practice. Andre Glucksmann is one example: originally a radical intellectual who promoted a slightly dandified apology of violence and extremism and helped to organize a Parisian group with the derisory name, "The Base Committee for the Abolition of Wage Labour and the Destruction of the University" (the French counterpart of Abbie Hoffman's "Plans for the Destruction of the Universities and Revolution for the Hell of It"). Then – apparently after reading Solzhenitsyn – Gluckmann saw the light and recognized Western-style Maoism as a branch of the intellectual cult of death. Ditto Arthur Koestler, who, initially seduced by radical ideas, had given up his secure job as a Berlin journalist, and, during a meeting with the Communist Party official, asked to work as a tractor driver in the Soviet Union (Grossman 1949; 2001:19). But Koestler's later, close encounter with communist fever made him one of the most insightful inquisitors of the radical Left.

In their anatomies of the totalitarian temptation, both Glucksmann and Koestler pointed to two reasons for Marxism-Leninism's success in the East and West. The first was that it offered a glorious vision of a better future and the only and

last hope for oppressed humanity. The second was Marx and Engels's ability to simultaneously quench the intellectual quest for certainty, harmony and moral-aesthetic delight. As a result of Marxist reading, "The new light seems to pour in all directions across the scull" wrote Koestler. "The whole universe falls into pattern like the stray pieces of a jigsaw puzzle assembled by magic. There is now an answer to every question, doubts and conflicts are a matter of the tortured past. Nothing henceforth can disturb the convert's inner peace and serenity – except the occasional fear of losing faith again" (Grossman 1949: 20–23).

In Poland the early anatomies of the totalitarian temptation go back to the pioneering – and now almost forgotten – opus by Gustaw Herling Grudziński: *The World Apart* (1951). Though Herling Grudziński's work was in many ways a trail-blazing study, it is Czeslaw Miłosz's American publication of *Captive Mind* (1954; 1981) which became the iconic, if controversial, autopsy of the authoritarian evil and its allure. The originality of Miłosz's book stemmed from the way he used a polyphony of voices – Alpha the moralist, Beta the disappointed lover, Gamma the slave of history, Delta the socially engaged troubadour – to describe multiple motives for succumbing to the totalitarian spell. The Alphas and Betas fell prey to the communist dreamland because they were against inequality and injustice and believed that Marxism-Leninism would remove it; or because they feared thinking for themselves and arriving at dangerous conclusions; or because they liked the idea of the active comradeship and a sense of purpose in a struggle for a better world; or because they believed that communism offered an antidote to the fatal attractions of Polish romanticism, nationalism and xenophobia. The communist novice, subjecting his soul and mind to the sacrosanct doctrine, experienced the same liberating relief which Catholicism brings to sinners wearied and worried by the privilege of too much freedom. For many believers, Marxism was compelling because it exploded liberal fallacies; it taught the bitter truth that progress is not automatic, that social injustice and racial discrimination are not cured merely by the passage of time but have to be fought for.

Miłosz argued that whatever the motivation, Stalinism operated with a dialectic which "anaesthetized human minds in a manner resembling wasps impregnating caterpillars with their larvae".[9]

Interestingly, *The Captive Mind* was met with perplexity and resistance both in Western radical circles and among some Polish anti-totalitarian writers such as Gustaw Herling Grudziński and Zbigniew Herbert. In their reading, anybody who succumbed to the allure of the dialectic materialism – defined by Miłosz as the "Hegelian sting" – suffered either from mental turpitude or a twisted fascination with raw thuggishness and brutal force. Miłosz explained too much away – and thus pardoned himself and the other "captive minds". Zbigniew Herbert, a giant of Polish oppositional poetry, raged: "I understand that somebody who falls in love goes insane. But how can you fall in love with a police state which throws good people into prison?" (cited by Trznadel 1997: 206–207). According to Grudziński and Herbert, those who embraced communism did so out of base motives – fear, cowardice, greed, conformism – or else out of sheer stupidity.

The battle of the books about the true nature of totalitarian temptation remains unresolved to this day. Milan Kundera confessed that, in 1948, after communists had taken power in Czechoslovakia, he had also "danced in a ring" until he was expelled from the Party and had to leave its "warm circle" (Kundera and Roth 1980). It was then that he became aware of the magical, compelling qualities of authoritarianism. In the afterword to *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, he concluded:

> The whole period of Stalinist terror was a period of collective lyrical delirium … People like to say: Revolution is beautiful, it is only the terror arising from it which is evil. But this is not true. The evil is already present in the beautiful, hell is already contained in the dream of paradise and if we wish to understand the essence of hell we must examine the essence of the paradise from which it originated. It is extremely easy to condemn gulags, but to reject the totalitarian poesy which leads to the gulag by way of paradise is as difficult as ever.
>
> (Kundera 1982)[10]

The most intriguing verdict on the indiscrete charm of authoritarianism is to be found in the writings of Leszek Kołakowski, a philosopher who started out as an orthodox communist, and lived through the fog of communist rapture, only to finally turn against his former self. For Kołakowski, as a young Marxist, the role of philosophy was to fight against dogma and superstition. But the more he progressed in his studies, the more he was struck by the fact that his *bêtes noirs* – dogma and superstition – were part of the fabric of Marxism-Leninism itself: they constituted its immovable doctrinaire positions and axiomatic truths. Worse, in the case of Marxism-Leninism, dogma posed as scientific truth. Kołakowski's *Main Currents of Marxism*, published in 1974, seven years after the Polish March in 1974, was a complete demolition of his own religion. By that time he had dissected all the predecessors and sources of the Marxist dialectic – from the classical philosophy of Plotinus to the "pathetic thought" of Brezhnev, Kim Il-sung and Elena Ceauşescu – nothing was left but rubble. Characteristically, he highlighted not the political but *spiritual* attraction of Marxism. The latter was the "greatest fantasy" of the 20th century, not because it offered a political strategy to achieve a better life, but because it appealed to human nature and its "ineradicable spiritual cravings" (cited by Kimball 2005: 38).

After utopia

Umberto Eco, when asked what remained of 1968, replied curtly: "Nothing. Apart from changes in lifestyle" (Eco 2008: 5). It is easy to disagree. In Paris of the 1960s, if you were a woman, you could not open a bank account without the agreement of your husband. The rebellion did contribute – if only in part – to reinvigorating democracy with the ideas of a more caring state

oriented towards social justice. But the increasingly ossified, autocratic Marxism which swelled in the ranks of the radical Left, seems to corroborate what Leszek Kołakowski was arguing all along: that *despotic* communism was not a mere degeneration of Marxism, but a logical and well-founded interpretation of its main premises. In Kołakowski's view, arguments to the effect that dictatorship was "not what Marx meant", were undermined by successive implementations of the Marxist utopia either in life or in theory – all of them sharing the same, desolate finale.[11]

To sum up: intellectually and morally, 1968 in the West gave birth to an oxymoronic, postmodern civilization: one, which combined emancipatory ideas with the pulverization of grand narratives, truth and human nature. And, as the actual "revolution" became more and more textual – more divorced from actual practice – so did the intellectual acrobatics inspired by Lenin's or Marx's insights. One of the best incarnations of this process has been the work of the agent-provocateur of the Left, Slavoj Žižek. Žižek's playful attempts to prove that Marx and Lenin are "cool" and that revolutionary violence is justified, have been found inspiring in academic circles: to many acolytes they have offered the same delight that Koestler spoke about when he wrote about "the new light [that] seems to pour in all directions across the skull". But the evermore sophist unmasking of bourgeois or capitalist crimes and deceptions have been as inspiring as they have been inconsequential. In the 21st century, they embody academic extremism as *camp*. Camp, Susan Sontag wrote, "incarnates a victory of style over content, aesthetics over morality, and of irony over tragedy" (Sontag 1964).

If the original programme *minimissium* of the Western Left was to forge strategies to prevent the triumph of the authoritarian world, then their mission has hardly been completed in the 21st century. True, the progressive intellectuals are still concerned with the predicament of the oppressed, but largely rhetorically, and comfortably so; after all, the poststructuralist critique of human agency and subjectivity encourages a flight from intellectual responsibility that comes close to Adorno's retreat into his intellectual ivory tower. In a scathing critique of the anti-humanist turn initiated by "textual revolutionaries" inspired by the ideas of 1968, Camilla Paglia singled out the erosion of ideologies, the rapture of the connection between generations, and the reduction of history to an endless list of depressing acts of injustice. "Poststructuralism is a corpse", she concluded her assault on Michael Foucault. "Let it stink in the Parisian trash pit where it belongs" (Paglia 2016).

This is a hyperbole worthy of the Jacobin's provocative rhetoric. But it evokes a deep sense of frustration at the disfigurement of a vision which began as project to counteract authoritarian despotism and ended in its promulgation.

For the generation of *Komandosi*, 1968 was a deep existential and philosophical shock, a turning point in their (mis)conceptions of the authoritarian nature of the political system they lived in. The brutality of the police beatings, the virulence of the anti-semitic campaign, and the shock at discovering the inviolable, petrified "stoniness" of *Realsocialismus* – all these traumas were accompanied by an acute

sense of existential isolation. One of the participants of 1968, Józef Dajczegwand, summed up the experience of many March protesters:

> I came out of prison and actually I had nowhere to go … I felt I was completely alone. People who were victims of the March events felt constantly threatened, had problems with their studies. Some seemed to go mad … I saw they [many former friends and acquaintances] feared to meet me.
>
> (Burska 2013: 125)[12]

But for all the despair in the aftermath of the state violence and venom, 1968 in Eastern Europe marked a seminal paradigm shift. The umbilical link connecting the Left with the Communist Party and its authoritarian artery was cut. The new, bitter wisdom was captured by a joke: "Who is a communist? It is somebody who has *read* all the works by Marx and Lenin. And who is an anti-communist? It is somebody who has read all the works by Marx and Lenin *and understood them*".

At their trials in 1968, none of the *Komandosi* described themselves as communist any longer. In the texts written by Kuroń, Michnik and Kołakowski after 1968, traditional dichotomies such as progress-reaction, and Left–Right were replaced by a new dichotomy: democracy–totalitarianism. The next ten years will seem moribund, but only on the surface. Underneath political and economic stasis (interrupted only by a short Western loan-driven boom in 1970–72) there will be a tireless and ever more vehement search for the ways to salvage human soul – the vestiges of altruism and cooperation – under communism. Gradually, Kuroń and his disciples will shed their social outsiderhood. They will start searching for partners: liberal Catholics, workers, craftsmen, peasants. They will evolve into a group of humanist outliers who will author one of the most astounding – and still misunderstood – social transformations in human history. In 1980 they will co-create *Solidarity*, and a decade later, they will engineer a non-violent transition to democracy in Eastern Europe.

Their 1980 revolution will be based on the balance between compromise and intransigence – a jester's wisdom – which is perhaps the most demanding part of the script of modern revolutions of dignity. In this sense, the lessons of 1968 in the East and West are worth revisiting in the context of the resurgence of polarizing, illiberal movements in the 21st century. These movements – both on the Right and on the Left – thrive not just because of the economic crisis or the appeal of populist demagogues. They blossom also because the anti-humanist turn promoted by intellectual heirs of Western radical 68ers – had emboldened authoritarian forces and allowed them to prevail relatively unopposed.

On the heart-warming side, one cannot resist being struck by *déjà vu* at the sight of a 16-year-old Joshua Wong – a Chinese student, activist, and a founder of the Scholasticism (later renamed as *Demostito*) movement that defends democracy and dignity in Hong Kong. Wong is a living alter ego of Adam Michnik, who, at the age of 15, founded the "Club of the Seekers of Contradictions" in early 1960s' Warsaw, and was subsequently declared an "enemy of the communist

state". Both teenage outliers have been the agents of the revolution which, in a short run, is a story of failure. But, as the 1968 rebellion in Eastern Europe clearly shows, it is also a process of learning to fail better next time.

Notes

1 Jacek Kuroń and Modzelewski, "An Open Letter to the Party" (Warsaw Available in English at http://www.unz.org/Pub/NewPolitics-1966q2-00005 (accessed 17 March 2013). Paris knew about Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski thanks to a young student activist Barbara Toruńczyk, who was in the West in 1966–67 while Modzelwski and Kuroń sat in prison. She reminisces: "I was very much moved by the fact that these two young academics whom I didn't know in person were behind bars for their beliefs so I thought the world needed to be shaken so that they should be set free". Toruńczyk sewed Michnik's and Kuroń's photos into her coat and approached – with success – Radio Free Europe, Amnesty International and the Trotskist circles for help. Personal communication with Adam Michnik, October 2004.

2 Let us be fair and add that Habermas took a much more resolute stance. With his usual acuity, he unmasked the "false colours" of the 1968 rebellion in Germany. "Not one of the generally accepted symptoms of a revolutionary situation was present", he argued. "The conditions were not found intolerable, there was no international anti-capitalist movement and there was no support of the trade union movement without which the rebels were deprived of one important weapon – the political strike". Habermas later labelled Rudi Dutschke's strategy for action as a specimen of potential "Left Fascism", and the tactics of the pseudo-revolution as "exercises in infantilism". See Jürgen Habermss, "A Critical Words at the Court of Our Self-Appointed Revolutionaries", *Encounter*, September (1969), 63.

3 The group included Adam Michnik, Jan Lityński, Jan Grossman, Jakub Karpiński, Jacek Kuroń, Karol Modzelewski, Teresa Bogucka, Barbara Toruńczyk. Irena Lasota, Irena Grudzińska, Eugeniusz and Aleksander Smolar, Waldemar Kuczyński, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Mirosław Sawicki, Ewa Morawska, Andrzej and Wojciech Celiński and Henryk Szlajfer.

4 Kuroń and Blumsztajn presented a paper on "The Illusions of Revisionism" at a conference organized at Warsaw University in 1966. Personal communication with Seweryn Blumsztajn.

5 According to Kołakowski, overcoming Stalinism demanded a transformation of the system, not just repairing mistakes. In March 1968, he argued: "We realized belatedly, that everything that in the Stalinist system was about injustice, terror, destruction of culture – that all these things cannot be considered as the components of a socialist evolution which, by a dialectical negation, will turn into their opposite. Injustice is nothing but injustice, terror is just terror, destruction of culture is not a premise for the development of culture but just destruction of culture, oppression is not a premise for freedom, it is just oppression". Leszek Kołakowski, "Perspektywy i zadania: od Października 1956", p. 280. See the communist Ministry of the Interior's comment on Kołakowski's speech in *Marzec 1968 w dokumentacji MSW*, Dąbrowski et al. 2008: 687.

6 Some 20,000 Poles of Jewish origin – among others intellectual stars such as Zygmunt Bauman, Włodzimierz Brus and Jan Kott – chose to leave rather than endure relentless witch-hunts.

7 In my interviews with some of *Komandosi* conducted in the period 2004–2006, all informants mentioned *The Priest and Jester* as their main inspiration. Michnik declared: "I bore this text within myself". Personal communication, May 2005.

8 Kołakowski's essay was widely read and disseminated. For comments see Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski, *Między panem a plebanem* (Kraków: Znak, 1995: 126).

9 Personal communication, Kraków November 2004.
10 See Milan Kundera, "Afterword: A Talk of the Author with Philip Roth" in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting: A Novel* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982). I cite from http://www.kundera.de/english/Info-Point/Interview_Roth/interview_roth.html (Accessed 18 March 2016).
11 Personal communication, Oxford, November 1988.
12 Similarly Adam Michnik confessed: "My colleagues and contemporaries were making careers, published books, worked at the academy. And I, at the age of twenty eight – didn't work anywhere, I didn't have any life or stability". Personal communication, Warsaw, October 2004.

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3 Friendship and revolution

The Eros and ethos of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR)

The Players

In late October 1976, a young Varsovian poet, Anka Kowalska, read the *Appeal to Society* issued by a small group of intellectuals who called themselves the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR). It asked all people of goodwill to provide financial, medical and legal help for the workers who had been thrown into communist dungeons after a series of strikes in June 1976. Kowalska was at a critical juncture in her life where a sense of the ongoing humiliation and lunacy of life under Sovietism made her choose inner emigration. She was repelled by the system she was living in, but had neither any idea of what could be done nor the energy to dream about a better world. KOR's *Appeal* came like an electric shock; it liberated layers of fury that had piled up for years. It made her think: if one was to lose or waste one's life in any meaningful way, then joining KOR would be the way to do it. True, there was an absurd dimension to this project, because the action of collecting money for the striking workers in the workers' state seemed as promising as growing bananas in Spitzbergen. And yet, as Kowalska phrased it, KOR's Appeal woke her up from her homelessness. It touched a hidden "Promethean self" that she knew was her only chance to recover a sense of purpose (Kowalska 1983: 31–33).

When Kowalska went to the workers' trials as a KOR representative, she received another shock: it was one thing was to hear about the strikes and read the official lies in the newspapers, but entirely another to see blood and puss coming out of the ears of the men dragged out of their jail cells and thrown on the bench of the accused. But she could see that the presence of the outside observers at their trials made a difference. She realized that Committee for Workers' Defence was not just about helping the proletarian *Untermensch*; it was about making every person who was arrested or beaten – or newly released from a communist prison – feel less powerless. It was about the countless pages of KOR's illegal pale print that people scrambled for, hungrily deciphered, copied and passed on to other readers. But first of all, it was about forging a new parallel society – a republic of friendship – that was at once risky and enchanting.

Admittedly, in 1976, a project of mobilizing an army of do-gooders in an authoritarian state was as surreal as it was time consuming: telephones were under surveillance, private cars were scarce, electronic media were not yet available, and

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ink for illegal publications had to be smuggled from abroad or manufactured from spirits, shoe polish and eggs. And yet, in spite of the Stone Age technology, all the hazards, police arrests and bullying, the authors of *The Appeal* who resuscitated Anka Kowalska from her frozen lethargy, managed accomplish their mission. In the course of the following months, they succeeded in obtaining the workers release from prison, and during the next three years masterminded one of the most impressive anti-authoritarian mobilizations in the Eastern bloc.

How did they do it? What motivations and stories nourished their actions? And how do the old, painstaking ways of revolution-making compare to the revolutions of dignity summoned by the Facebook and Twitter generation?

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Ironically, the analysis which follows would have been impossible without the dedicated work of the secret agents of the Security Police in communist Poland. In the library of the Institute of National Memory – which stores countless files bursting with the sins and transgressions of the citizens of the former People's Republic – there is a folder with a Hollywood cryptonym: "The Players".[1] The folder contains original reports of police investigations and transcripts of bugged meetings of a group of friends who are variously referred to as KOR, Judeo-Masons, political degenerates, provocateurs, national traitors and social parasites. Some of the scurrilous nicknames coined by the security agents were justified. Four members of the Players were Freemasons (IPN 1979: 39–40), a significant number had a "criminal" past (i.e. they had been jailed in communist prisons for spreading anti-state and anti-communist propaganda), and about one-third were of Jewish origin. Though hitherto there has been no comprehensive study on the role of social "outsiderhood" in world revolutions, it may well be that it was the Players' status as political outcasts, and their in-betweenness as ethnic and social outliers, that forged the profound bonds between the group's members. It is also possible that their social and political liminality equipped them with the sparkling rebelliousness and creative impudence that is so characteristic of the hyphenated species: the Anglo-Irish, the Anglo-Indians, the Latin-Americans.

There are two legends about KOR. One is about a group of altruistic Don Quixotes who laid the fundaments of the biggest anti-authoritarian revolution in Eastern Europe, started by the *Solidarity* movement in 1980. The second story mutters darkly about "national traitors" who posed as saviours of the crucified nation only to eventually profit from the revolution.[2] In this second reading, not only did the KOR's work have little or no effect on *Solidarity*; driven by a lust for power and a sense of omnipotence, the Players allegedly challenged the Catholic patriotism of *Solidarity*'s rank and file and bungled the process of decommunization. A summary discussion published by the Institute of National Memory in 2003 stated dryly:

> So far nobody has spoken positively about the people of the pre-*Solidarity* opposition. They did not do so themselves because of modesty … after all it would be out of place to say about themselves: "We were wonderful and

> brave; we did great service to the cause of freedom, independence and democracy". The communist propaganda wrote lies about them … When there was a system change in Poland, deep cleavages emerged in *Solidarity* before anybody said "thank you". … And now we, historians, using extremely tendentious materials procured by the security police and the apparatus of repression, are supposed to write the truth and only the truth about them? What truth would it be?
>
> (Dyskusja 2004: 64)

The truth is about heroes with many faces, now illuminated by a series of studies (e.g. Zuzowski 1994; Friszke 2008; Skórzyński 2012; Gawin 2013). They have given justice to the people who both created the new type of anti-authoritarian resistance in Europe and contributed to the subjected population's exit from communism. In this chapter, I wish to draw attention to KOR as one of the most original cases of humanist outliers in Europe – one which deserves at least as much attention as the French Encyclopedists. I also wish to explore some questions which have been less central to existing analyses; questions which have to do with the study of morphology and efficacy of the "community of conscience". I shall unravel the mainsprings of KOR's success, not just as a nucleus of democratic opposition but as *mythogenic thinkers* and cultural innovators. What were the new "revolutionary memes" designed and propagated by the Players and why did they have such a groundbreaking impact on the society at large? And what can we learn from their *embedded*, face-to-face revolution in the age of disembedded Facebook protests?

The predicament of the group is intriguing for three reasons. Firstly, it touches upon the often crooked relationship between human selfishness and altruism – a relationship that can be captured only in hypotheses and suppositions. Secondly, it makes a fascinating case study of the role of intellectuals in social upheavals, displaying, in a brutal way, the unphotogenic side of the interplay between the humanist outliers and citizens of authoritarian states. Most importantly, it points to the pivotal role of offline bonds such as love and friendship – as well as the potency of the Ostromian core design principles – in forging the effectiveness of social resistance.

The "psychiatric opposition"

The official date of the fateful meeting which stamped the establishment of the Committee of Workers' Defence is 23 September 1976. But the genesis of KOR involved encounters and projects which had taken place a bit earlier. There is evidence to the effect that a prefiguration of what was to become a classical Players' action was spotted in June of that year by a certain Colonel Maj from the III Commando of the Warsaw Militia. On 17 July 1976, Maj sent a cryptogram to the Ministry of Interior Affairs reporting that during the trial of the workers accused of unlawful strikes a month earlier, a group of young people had been milling outside the courtroom. Not only were they "nonchalant and provocative;

they organized a collection of money for the workers, and handed flowers to the families of the accused" (Bogucka 2006)[3]

This demonstrative show of solidarity with the workers was rather novel. Although the Polish intelligentsia had long training in selfless acts of patriotism and social engagement, direct and generous acts of empathy with the working class were a rare occurrence after the Soviet imposition of the dictatorship of the proletariat in the aftermath of the Second Word War.[4] It may well be that massive state repressions following a series of workers' strikes in Ursus, Radom, Plock and Łódź in the spring of 1976, sped up the ripening of two ideas which had been gestating in the heads of the intelligentsia for a while. The first one had to do with the humanist outliers' learning curve and a growing realization that the only way to strengthen the anti-authoritarian front in Poland was by reaching out to the workers. The second idea was deeper, more existential – and, as Anka Kowalska's example shows – perhaps more important, because it related to what Roger Griffin called *nomos*, or sense-making crisis (Griffin 1993: 15). The news about thousands of arrested workers and countless families who faced complete destitution, stirred the intelligentsia's suppressed, prosocial self. "If your conscience was clean in the face of these brutalities" said Jacek Kuroń, "it could only mean that it had never been used".[5]

There were several ingenious dimensions to the Players' plan of action and their evolving vision. The very name – the Workers' Defence Committee – was a clever rhetorical ploy, invoking a concern for the proletariat that the communists should, in principle, have supported. So was the *Appeal to Society*, which was not a secret, anonymous document, but a letter openly signed by 14 eminent public figures.[6] The *Appeal* demanded the immediate release of the imprisoned workers and called for money, medicine and barristers with guts enough to defend the proletariat. Finally, the *Appeal* was not just about words. Apart from mobilizing public support for the prisoners and their families, the Players published an Information Bulletin about every single case of state repression. They travelled to Radom and Ursus to the workers' trials to demonstrate their solidarity and offer moral support. They knocked on doors, talked to the affected families, offered money and help, brought coal for the winter. These were not always uplifting experiences. First, they involved personal risks: police arrests, beatings, and various forms of harassment and retribution. Second, they led to close encounters with the unimaginable poverty and squalor of the workers' families: something that must have been an ultimately sobering experience for academic desperados and sensitive souls, such as Anka Kowalska. Third, they were often an eye-opener as to the real level of consciousness of the proletariat. Not only were the Radom workers unaware of the authoritarian state they lived in; they hardly connected repression to the workings of the system. They only knew that "the police beat" (Friszke 2011: 292). On many occasions the workers' families refused to take the money that had been raised, fearing police harassment; at other times they unleashed their pent-up frustration on their rescuers.

"A mouse challenging a lion", was Anka Kowalska's verdict. Jacek Kuroń admitted as much:

> In the beginning everybody, us included, thought that this was madness, a collective suicide … We were told that if ten thousand were in jail and we founded a 14-member-strong KOR, the effect would be that there would just be ten thousand and fourteen people in jail.
>
> (Kowalska: 1981: 40)[7]

Keeping a group of rebels afloat through building social solidarity and documenting communist savagery was one thing. But breaking with the principle of conspiracy, and doing it all openly with the names and telephone numbers of the Players published in the group's Bulletin, seemed like a kamikaze act. In reality, it was a calculated risk. KOR was taking advantage of the newly signed Helsinki Accords, especially Chapter 7 on respect for human rights and fundamental human freedoms. Like any document signed by the communists, the Helsinki Agreement meant exactly what the Kremlin said it meant. But its very existence limited the scope of the government's imaginative responses to the stirrings of the opposition. The Communist Party "policy of restraint" was, "To use a number of measures – political, criminal and operational – which would complicate KOR's situation and make the lives of its members as difficult as possible" (Friszke and Zaremba 2008: 54–59).

In practice, this meant criminalizing small oppositional groups like KOR via a continuous, negative media campaign, constant surveillance, threats, interrogations, regular house searches, arrests, and prison sentences for "anti-state activities".

The Players became eternal fugitives, forever pursued, arrested, released and re-arrested. Many lost their jobs and careers, some experienced social isolation, and even toyed with suicidal thoughts.[8] Jacek Kuroń's ability to make a living depended on his wife, Gaja, who worked as a psychologist, and on his "politically correct" friends, who would allow him to publish his crime fiction and essays under a pseudonym. If there was a method to the Players' madness, it worked mainly thanks to the power of friendship. True, the predicament of its members was punctuated by countless rituals of hate: threats, beatings and jail terms. But it was also resplendent with common adventure, euphoric sprees after a success, long, inspired chats and heated debates, and a compelling project of changing the world together. The Players had a knack for mixing martyrdom with carnival. Their story proves that intellectuals are like cream: they are at their best when whipped.

The question is: why did they stretch themselves in this way? Christian theology points to *caritas*, understood by Thomas Aquinas both as "the friendship of man for God" and "the love of our neighbor".[9] Admittedly, most Players were short on biblical virtues, such as a fundamental belief in God Almighty or the ideal of chastity. Michnik, a sworn agnostic, claimed that his ethics were based on "the Ten Commandments and the Gospels – except for the commandment about adultery!" (Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski 1994:

64). But if we scrutinize KOR's words and actions, their selfless acts, and the idea of responding to hatred with empathy, we cannot overlook their affinity with teachings of the Christian Gospel.

A more detailed discussion of the role of religion in the work and thought of the community of conscience follows in Chapter 7. Here it is worth noting that the Player's version of Christianity was not based on the sappy love so despised by Nietzsche. It was partly coloured by their strong socialist convictions, and partly inspired by their readings and discussions. While in prison, both Kuroń and Michnik voraciously read Bishop Dietrich Bonhoeffer's letters written from his Nazi death cell. Kuroń argued: "Again and again, Bonhoeffer's letters from prison demand that we live like people who do without God … One can live as a Christian *etsi Deus non daretur*" (Michnik et al. 1994: 32). Jan Józef Lipski wrote about a conscious recourse to Christianity as the religion which opposed hate: "We were convinced that if KOR's answer to arrests, provocation and slander was hatred, then KOR would have to lose because hatred is self-destructive. In no other matter has the influence of Christian ethics been as conspicuous as in this" (Lipski 1983: 67).

But *caritas* was not the only motivation. For Adam Michnik, the KOR project was strongly connected to the act of self-making: "I didn't search for an affiliation. First of all I wanted to see my own face, to find out who I was" (Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski 1994: 235). For many, membership in KOR was about self-respect and pride – pride in the continuation of a noble family tradition, building a link with a grandfather who had taken part in past insurrections against the Russian tsar, or a mother who had fought in the Warsaw Uprising against the Nazis in 1944 (Eisler 2001: 27). For men, especially, joining KOR was about the combined ideas of vanity, charity and risk – a play at being Zorro and Robin Hood. For Jacek Kuroń, the anti-authoritarian opposition was meaningful because it was a community-making act: "I had a grand idea of love and friendship, both of them harnessed in a brotherhood, in a struggle for a cause" (Kuroń 1989: 23). Most Players spoke openly of their need for friendship with extraordinary people: "I joined in because … I always aspired to a friendship with people like Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik, Sewek Blumsztajn, Janek Lityński. And it is their friendship I cared for, not just for being there" (Jankowska 2000: 35).

Many of these reflections point to an often occluded, attractive protagonist in resisting authoritarianism: a revolutionary *homo ludens*. As one of the Players put it, "Yes, moral protest, living in truth, all that was important, but you have to remember that we were also having tremendous fun, a sense of meaning and joy tied to what we were doing" (Szulecki 2012: iii).

In *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973), Erich Fromm identifies five conditions for feeling at home in the world: a stable worldview; the rootedness (a sense of reference and devotion); unity or a sense of oneness with at least part of the world; effectiveness or having a sense of impact; excitation and fun, or relief from boredom and routine (Fromm 1973: 230–242). As a small altruist group, the Players satisfied all five needs of their members, and in this way impinged directly on their willingness to take risks and survive defeats. In their

case the yearning – or Eros – to "beget in the beautiful" in Platonic terms, led to the project of "the right ordering of cities and households" (Plato 1993: 32).

For Hannah Arendt, the latter was politics in the highest sense. Her writing is full of dreaming about the Eros of revolution. KOR embodied her dream. Right from the start, its work – and its friendship – was imbued with a Platonic-erotic sense. Rarely in intellectual history does the desire for the "right ordering of cities and households" serve not merely a rhetorical purpose, but translates itself into a concrete programme of beneficial "civilized and civilizing" actions. In the case of KOR, it involved creating a wide network of collaborators, allies and publications which, in the beginning, had two immediate effects. First, in July 1977, it led to amnesty for the imprisoned workers; and second, it lifted the unimaginable solitude and fragility of the individual in the communist state. The KOR "friends" broke the barrier isolating the Poles from the outside world: the literate majority discovered that – through KOR's publications and regular broadcasts on Radio Free Europe and Voice of America – Poland was no longer a grey *terra incognita* of communist misery, but a locus of "anti-totalitarian struggle". And even if people shook their heads, they heard KOR's voice every day on Radio Free Europe: recording communist brutalities, bringing a message of hope, but, most important of all, making people aware of a new, monitoring eye that saw things from the inside and watched the government's every action.

Still a teenager at the time, I was hardly aware that the dire lists of communist blackmail, injustice or abduction belted out by the half-jammed Radio Free Europe were the result of KOR's acts of bravado and scrupulous book-keeping. I only knew that there was a group of people who had embarked on a social solidarity crusade and made us – fresh students and young academics – feel sceptical, guilty and mesmerized at the same time. KOR's very existence was a slap in our faces: why were we just passive observers? Their magic sprang from doing the impossible: challenging the claim that in a despotic city friendship and solidarity could not thrive because all social relations are based, not upon positive ideals such as justice or virtue, but on negative sentiments, like the power of fear. We witnessed how the reclaimed connection with the fellow brother – and with the outside world – gradually became a powerful weapon against fear. As Seweryn Blumsztajn put it, "The experience of friendship, of an extraordinary tightness of the environment gave you an absolute sense of security. You knew that, when they lock you up, everybody will stand on their head to let Jacek [Kuroń] know and that Radio Free Europe will mention it immediately".[10] Everybody in opposition – and beyond – knew Kuroń's home phone number by heart: 39 39 64. This was the number one called to report every case of arrest or act of repression.

But the Eros of the Players was as inspiring as it was costly. They started their project at a time when individual courage and challenging taboos were not particularly admired qualities; rather, they were treated as a lack of adaptive skills. KOR's tireless petitions, signature hunting and bold brinkmanship were unpopular in most intellectual circles; they exerted a moral blackmail on all people whose conscience was clean in Jacek Kuroń's sense, i.e. unused. Many felt trapped by the subtext in the KOR's message: instead of the usual litany of accusations and

jeremiads targeting *them* (i.e. the communist regime), there was a subtle "shame on you" directed at passive bystanders. This does not mean that the Players were staging a "dictatorship of virtue". On the contrary, the police records of surveilled conversations reveal that they often doubted their right to put people's lives at risk and discussed the necessity of understanding those who collaborated with the system. One reason behind such a tolerant stance was that, ultimately, the daredevils knew they were dependent on less audacious, opportunist survivors: a state official who would make a kind gesture in prison, an editor who would allow them to earn a living, an academic who would pass on the unvarnished statistics of communist atrocities (Friszke 2011: 13–14). To many ordinary Poles, however, KOR was "psychiatric opposition" – a group that was either mad, or must have ulterior motives behind their apparent altruism. Nobody in their right mind would risk so much to invite so many horrors in return.

The republic of friendship

From the beginning, KOR was a community which crossed generational, ideological and even ethnic boundaries, which was both a strength and weakness. There were the "older majesties" (*starsi państwo*), including such eminent public figures as the lawyer Aniela Steinsberger, known for her bold defence of the 1968 rebels, and the leading professor of economics, Edward Lipiński .[11] There was Jacek Kuroń – the charismatic "godfather" of KOR, an outstanding pedagogue, ideologue and a sui generis eccentric. There was Jerzy Andrzejewski, one of Poland's best writers, who was *fanaberyjny* (read: "with homosexual leanings"), as well as Halina Mikołajska, a famous actress and a "great lady". There was a Catholic priest, Fr. Zieja, who was "[living] proof of the existence of God". Finally, there were the former 68 rebels, who came to dominate both KOR's actions and outside perceptions of its work.

In the spring of 1977, the Players were a buoyant, heterogeneous, team, bringing together socialists, agnostics and Catholics, Jews and Poles in a community acting out a bizarre family romance. They partied, smoked, drank and argued as passionately as they risked their lives and careers. The most (in)famous duo – Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik – were the Achilles and Patroclus of the group.

There were two Jacek Kurońs. One was a hobo who never took off his jeans, addressed every woman as *córeczko* ("little daughter"), a thug who shouted and coughed, smoked 100 cigarettes a day, and who "learned English while doing push-ups, devouring breakfast and receiving phone calls" (Kowalska 1981). The other Kuroń was a Christ-like figure who used to proclaim himself a Jew, a Gypsy, a Tibetan, a Ukrainian and HIV-positive in a dogged crusade against all signs of social exclusion and hatred. One was a psychological terrorist who infuriated the Players by chronically interrupting everybody and knowing better. The other a reflexive democrat who said "Don't burn party committees, establish your own". One was an anarchist in eternal blue jeans. The other was law-abiding to the point of absurdity. When one of the KOR collaborators found a malfunctioning telephone booth from which KOR could ring all over the world for free, Jacek

strongly opposed taking advantage. "If you are to go to jail, it is better to do it for a Cause rather than for a petty theft", he reasoned.[12] But the most electrifying side of Kuroń was his charisma as a communicator. I remember his "flying university" lecture in a private flat in Wrocław. Already after 20 minutes, all the students in the room wanted to be like Kuroń: not just a legendary "Corleone" of the Eastern European opposition, but the embodiment of intellectual Eros. We all wanted to have a hundred kilometres of ideas per hour, emanate Jacek's confidence, shine with Jacek's wit, and befuddle the enemy with empathy and good-naturedness.

Kuroń had a twin soul, Gaja, his extraordinary wife, friend and adviser, who kept KOR going while he was in prison. Their love and friendship – one of the most romantic stories in the history of Eastern European opposition – deserves a separate book. Certainly Gaja was a secret "Holy Grail" of KOR and one of its feminine sages. All outside observers who saw her understood that, while Jacek was the *spiritus movens* of the KOR opposition, she was the centre that held.

Adam Michnik was a more complex case. As a precocious 15-year-old, he founded the "Seekers of Contradiction Club" at Warsaw University to debate pivotal questions of contemporary history and politics. He remained a seeker of contradictions – and a living contradiction *in persona* – all his life. One Michnik was an exalted dreamer and romantic patriot who, from his prison cells in Kurkowa or Mokotów, dazzled thousands of young readers with a political-poetic analysis which had an eerie, clairvoyant quality, always ahead of the time, always penned in a recognizable, ludic-ironic-exalted style. The other was a carpet knight, sparkling with wit and ready repartee; a seducer of women and men. But also an outstanding essayist with a phenomenal memory – a man who paralyzed his interlocutors and opponents with quotes from Mickiewicz, Homer, Dante, Voltaire and Lenin. Still another was Poland's most unbearable snob, attracted to – and attracting – talent and fame from home and abroad. Still the other one was a superb dialectician, seasoned not just in deciphering and unveiling deception, but in navigating himself adroitly between contradicting views, seasoned not just in deciphering and unveiling deception, but in navigating himself adroitly between contradicting views. His greatest paradox – that of a charismatic orator with a stammer – was as confounding as his double addiction to a mixture of moral high-mindedness and Machiavellian scheming.

The friendship between Kuroń and Michnik – the two intellectual virtuosos of KOR – was built less on a harmony of souls than on endless arguments about ideas, books and strategies of action. There is a story which captures in a nutshell the gist of their personalities. When in April of 1984 there was a chance of amnesty for *Solidarność* prisoners, Kuroń was escorted from prison by a group of jubilant friends, but Michnik refused to leave his cell. He could not accept the conditions of release set by the authorities: freedom in exchange for giving up oppositional activity for three years. "If they put you up on a General Anders' white horse, and the entire country is watching you", he stammered, "you can't shit in your pants on the white horse. Especially if you are Jewish" (Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski 1994: 67). But Kuroń was not amused. "You can't think solely about YOUR honor and YOUR dignity", he retorted. "You have to think

about us all".[13] In the last instance, Kuroń's generous communitarianism was tempered by Michnik's principled megalomania – and vice versa. Socially, both men were a tonic, which, combined with their strong charisma and diabolic intelligence, created a magnetic aura that mesmerized and united their followers and provoked the highest level of toxicity in their opponents.

Apart from the aggregate power of "Kuroniomichnik", the success of KOR was made possible thanks to the resourcefulness and dedication of their close collaborators and allies. The scattered comments and reminiscences accrue to a picture. The action takes place in Kuroń's flat where people camp, work, argue, sleep and eat for 24 hours a day. Walking through the yard in the evening, one hears the incessant *taktaktak* of typewriters. The phone never stops ringing. There is a constant stream of students, journalists, possible collaborators, security police issuing threats, and people offering money. Many of the callers are madmen and loonies: a woman who claims her sex life has been ruined by the security police and Scotland Yard, and demands that KOR provide her with a flat; a man who claims he has been poisoned by the Special Units and needs an immediate medical check-up; a gentleman who introduces himself as a representative of the clandestine underground government of Lithuania, Latvia, Ukraine and Poland. As Kuroń put it, they were the "distorted mirror of the disease we were all suffering from".

KOR's "republic of friendship" was a bohemian community sharing things, money and food (and, occasionally, women). It was a warm circle which provided a sense of security and an awareness that "you can risk everything because there will always be people who love you, who will help you and who will be with you to the end" (Michnik 2004: 98). When all the 14 founding members of KOR were arrested, they were immediately replaced by a team of wise women: Gaja Kuroń, Aniela Steinbergowa, Anka Kowalska, Helena Łuczywo, Anna Szczęsna, Teresa Bogucka. "We could relax in prison", wrote Kuroń, "because the movement not only didn't stagnate but got a new lease of life" (Kuroń 1991: 45).

But was it enough to ensure the group's meteoric success in forging an independent cooperative polis within an authoritarian state? In the Introduction, I referred to Elinor Ostrom's study of the efficacy of small groups as being dependent on design principles, such as clearly defined identity, monitoring of the members' actions, quick and fast conflict resolution, inclusive decision-making and graduated sanctions for breaching the group codex (Ostrom 1990: 90). Here I wish to suggest that, if the small group of Players was extraordinarily efficacious, it is because it embodied, to a great extent, such an Ostromian community: one with strong identity, well-defined boundaries and a clear codex of action. Its communal *modus vivendi* was regulated by a set of democratic, if flexible, principles. There were no more or less important members, though some were irritated by international Kuroń de facto role as the Players' press spokesman.. New members were tested and double-checked for their loyalty, but the principle was that trust was more effective than suspicion, even if that meant the occasional infiltration by an informant. And, rather than monitoring the actions of its members, KOR scrupulously monitored – double- and triple-checking – all information that was broadcast

to the outside world. The force of strong, often intractable personalities was the reason why, when an important decision was to be made, the members preferred to not vote in order to not confront the unsavoury division into a minority and majority; they just kept arguing and hammering the point until everybody agreed. Conflicts were frequent but they were resolved fast and expediently, either by a deliberation or a split. Though Kuroń describes it as a "school of democracy", this was less a democratic than Socratic way of tackling problems – one which created havoc and schisms, but also, paradoxically, forced the Players to develop and refine their "dialogic imagination".

Inventing a parallel society

After KOR attained its objective – the release of the last Radom and Ursus prisoners in July of 1977 – its project was reassessed and the group renamed itself as the "The Social Self-Defence Committee" (KSS-KOR). Its aim was broadened, and now encompassed creating institutional conditions for the protection of civic rights and freedoms, including the structures of social self-organization which would challenge the monolithic communist state. The idea of building a micro-community of dignity *within* the exiting authoritarian state – elaborated by Michnik in his trailblazing essay, "The New Evolutionism" (1976), and refined by Kuroń in his "Thoughts on the Program of Action" (1977) – was not necessarily shared by all the Players. Antoni Macierewicz – one of the original architects of the idea of KOR – was from the start on a collision course with the other members. His way forward was to reanimate a sacrificial-nationalist meme of Polish opposition to authoritarian oppression – one which would be less contaminated by the Leftist bias so prominent in the ranks of the former *Komandosi*. For him, the main objectives of the anti-totalitarian struggle were the funeral of communism and reclaiming independence; democracy was to come later.

Thus, while Kuroń and the former *Komandosi* advocated forging an *inclusive community* based on inter-class and inter-faith dialogue and reconciliation, the radical wing (Macierewicz, Moczulski and Kaczorowski) resorted to schismogenetic techniques to intensify the "us–them" dichotomy.[14] Clearly, for many members of the opposition (not to mention society at large), KOR was not patriotic enough; one kept pointing to their socialist past and their "Jewish pedigree". Nor were they amused by the Kuroń and Michnik's frivolous attitude towards the pieties of "our beloved crucified nation" and their scathing remarks about Polish megalomania and xenophobia. The priest in Macierewicz hated the jester in Michnik. The puritan nationalist in Moczulski derided the worldly Gargantua in Kuroń. When Jan Józef Lipski published his infamous essay, "Two Motherlands, Two Patriotisms", he juxtaposed a critical, inclusive patriotism with a closed-minded, pious and parochial nationalism – something that infuriated KOR's opponents even more. In the end, the moral and ideological differences within the opposition became so pronounced that Macierewicz left KOR and founded the "Civic Movement for the Defence of Rights of Man and Citizen" (ROPCiO) – a rite of transition which made the anti-

authoritarian struggle in Poland into a dualist project, pregnant with future schisms and antagonisms.

What is most intriguing about this split is not so much the classical syndrome of moderates versus radicals in social revolutions, but rather the problematic status of wisdom in social upheavals. Wisdom – which is about the work of the mind orchestrated by virtue – invests in foresight and in accepting limits to human actions. It is about an awareness of the interconnectedness of things and the ability to distinguish between what is important and what is petty (Hall 2010). In preparing their new programme of action, the KSS-KOR embarked on a thorny project whose hallmark was just such difficult wisdom: a unique combination of historical and moral imagination, social empathy and Socratic quest. It was this wisdom that called for a more hospitable national identity than the one promoted by radical romantic rebels and by KOR's more "tribal" patriots like Macierewicz. To refine this wisdom, the Players reactivated the tradition of the 19th century "Flying University".[15] They demanded historical literacy, a critical stance and prudent action rather than mindless sacrifice. At countless meetings, debates and sessions of the Flying University, Kuroń stubbornly repeated: "Do you want to fight tyranny? Then read! Read as much as you can. Talk, write, look for people like you. Get books from abroad [and] lend them to others. And buy the communist's criminal code, study it and try not to break it".[16]

In re-designing the contours of the narrative of an anti-authoritarian struggle, Michnik and Kuroń engaged in history lessons: anatomizing all sublime failures and illustrious disasters which characterized past Polish insurrections: against the Russians, the Prussians, the Austrians and the Nazis. Their scrupulous anatomy of national follies was a prophylactic against yet another folly. Their assault on nationalist illusions and consoling stories was an antidote against further illusions. They promised no utopias, apart from creating an "open society". They insisted that the way forward was to overcome the anti-communist fixation and to invest in a strategy of *transcending* one's enemy. This transcendence – captured so well by Kurt Vonnegut's motto, "We are what we pretend to be, so we'd better pretend well" – meant, in effect, living *as if* communist Poland was a free country.

For most Poles, this seemed like a Sisyphean project. It was insane. It was too demanding. It was only for alpha males with no families and no attachments. And yet, in spite of its hazards, the number of KOR followers grew over time, because it became clear that the Players restored *nomos* and *dignitas* amidst the chaotic lawlessness of the communist police state. At the risk of simplifying a complex moral vision, I would roughly distinguish eight pillars of KOR's success: 1) The programme of social solidarity and self-organization designed by Kuroń in his "Thoughts on the Program of Action" (1977); 2) The reorientation of the oppositional struggle from the one directed *against* the authority to one focused on creating an independent public sphere as elaborated in Michnik's programme of the "New Evolutionism" (1976); 3) The Aristotelian-Arendtian conception of politics as a public struggle for values and interests undertaken through peaceful means; 4) The creative reworking of the values of original Christianity as the ethical platform of action, as codified by

Kuroń in the influential essay "Christians without God" (1975); 5) The dialogic strategy of inter-class and inter-faith dialogue outlined by Michnik in *The Church and the Left* (1979); 6) The code of honour, exhumed by Michnik in his prison book *Z dziejow honoru w Polsce* ("From the History of Honour in Poland" 1976); 7) The imperative of speaking truth to power; 8) The demand of continuous self-education.

These value premises were not some "pap for the dispossessed", to use Seamus Heaney's metaphor. They constellated into a programme of action which was consistently implemented over the four years of KOR's existence. The Players' publishing houses and journals – such as *NOWA, Aneks* and *Krytyka* – created an independent educational network which promoted an uncensored version of Polish, Soviet and European history and circulated translations and discussions at the cutting edge of contemporary Western thought. *Robotnik* ("The Worker") – an independent broadsheet circulated in factories and shipyards – was a hotline to the proletariat. The "Flying University" and its sister institution, *Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych* (The Society of Scholarly Courses), represented intellectual shock-troops that circulated the best analytical achievements of independent thought in East and West. The alliance with the Student Committee of Solidarity ensured a constant influx of young activists. The BBC, Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America played the role of the opposition's "boomerang telegraph", where all suppressed news about the true situation in Poland returned back to the Poles via foreign radio broadcasts. The support of international writers, such as Günther Grass, Heinrich Böll or Saul Bellow, gave KOR the status of a *cause celèbre.*

Strikingly, the Players' anti-authoritarian memes were a mixture of the old and the new: Christian compassion and the tradition of Polish democratic Romanticism were melded with the humanist legacy of Camus, Nicola Chiaromonte, Bonhoeffer and Hannah Arendt, and the anatomies of the totalitarian temptation penned by Leszek Kołakowski. What would emerge out of this inspiration would be a philosophy which can be called "idealist pragmatism": a life stance that would invoke realism and, at the same time, demand imaginative transcendence of the here and now. In short, the Players forged – and propagated – a meme of a *cultural revolution* based on an imaginary humanist polis. Such revolution could not be reduced to a secular-left ideology or to a sectarian, romantic mindset. Both Michnik and Kuroń were obsessed by the imperative of *not* becoming "the possessed from the Dostoevsky's novel", not following "the road which transforms a movement of the democratic opposition into a religious sect or a gang of bandits – the fate of the triumphant Jacobins, Bolsheviks or the bearded partisans of Fidel Castro" (Michnik 2004: 57).

But there was a hitch in this higher wisdom. Revolutions are neither "wise" nor humanist. They are stormy, unpredictable, elemental and mostly irrational. As I have argued, a conspicuous Christian ingredient and the redefinition of friendship as a tool of oppositional practice gave the Players' *Weltanschauung* a slightly archaic, pre-modern touch. The ethics of compassion and the invocation of the ancient code of honour gestured towards the Renaissance rather than the modern worldview. So did the discourse of human dignity, which lay

the foundations of the *Solidarity* movement. The interest in the concrete human being rather than, say, class or universal humanity, echoed 16th-century humanism more than the values of the Enlightenment. The dislike of patriotic exhibitionism and a reluctance to invoke the sacred nationalist mantra was a departure from romantic obsessions; rather, it gestured towards a reactivation of Erasmian cosmopolitanism. These features were the core of KOR's difficult wisdom.

There were thus several elements which bring KOR close to the Renaissance *republica litterarum* mentioned in Chapter 2 – that group of scientists, thinkers and aficionados of antique literature who struggled against fanaticism through the invocation of the wisdom of antiquity. Needless to say that such project seemed rather elitist – a point I shall return to. But just as the friendship of – and argument between – Erasmus and Luther, Pico and Ficino, Leonardo and Machiavelli, contributed to a momentous change in European sensibility, so did the intellectual legacy of the Players create the basis for a historical breakthrough. After the meeting of KOR with the Czech dissidents which took place in the autumn of 1977, Kuroń wrote:

> Over there, there are hordes of the secret and open police and their agents. Here we are, sitting at the table on which there is rum, salami, cheese and bread, all of them pulled out of Havel's bottomless bag. The fir trees are humming above us as we discuss how to overthrow the common enemy. It is as if at this moment the common dream of deliverance from servitude through friendship began to come true.
>
> (Kuroń 1991: 83)

The anticlimax

The dream of deliverance came true, though in crooked ways. Michnik' pithy diagnosis – *Solidarity* was "KOR's child, albeit an illegitimate one" (Michnik 1998: 61) – is revealing. It is no accident that the founding event of *Solidarity* was the legendary August 1980 strike in the Gdansk shipyard – a place where KOR had a very strong programmatic basis and an active team of collaborators including Bogdan Borusewicz, Andrzej Gwiazda, Anna Walentynowicz and Lech Wałęsa. Though it would be too much to say that the shipyard workers read samizdat, they certainly read KOR's *Robotnik*, where the Workers' Charter was published on the eve of the strike. The July 1980 *Information Bulletin* included Kuroń's instructions on "How to strike" and an article, "Sharp Turn", where he insisted that the strikes were not to be about concrete economic demands but the first step towards organizing independent trade unions.[17] The existing communist reports – based on secret surveillance – state that the strikes "were led *by Korowcy* with Wałęsa who was connected with Kuroń's group" (*Tajne dokumenty* 1992: 23–24). Though this is perhaps an overstatement, there is no doubt that both the energy and the final agenda of the strike were very much due to the impact of KOR's ideas disseminated through *Robotnik*. Zbigniew Bujak, one of the founders of *Solidarity* in Ursus, recollects:

> When I went to check what's happening in the factory I saw that there was [a] strike. But at the same time there was an atmosphere of uncertainty and fear … Aha, I say, let's look at *Robotnik*. So I ran to get *Robotnik*, the issue which we had on the premises … and I said this: Listen, there are names, telephone numbers in here, so if anybody's going to harass you, these people are there to defend you! And the workers say: that's it, that's it – and grab *Robotnik*! That's why our shift refused to budge. As I learned later, the workers were tremendously strengthened by this. By the knowledge that if anything goes wrong, there's somebody to defend us.
>
> (Bujak 1981: 36)

And yet, the KOR-*Solidarność* connection was as dismaying to the "nationalist camp" in the opposition as it was to the communists. It is here that the old splits and factions between the two programmes of anti-totalitarian struggle manifested themselves most intensely: one humanist and inclusive, the other, more particularist, focused on the recovery of national sovereignty and tradition. When the communists arrested most of the Players in the last week of August 1981 in an attempt to stall the strikes, there was marked reluctance among many *Solidarność* leaders to swiftly demand their release. At the meeting of the General Striking Committee on 30 August, Wałęsa saved the face of the strikers by insisting that "if we allowed them to continue rotting in jail it would be an ignominy haunting us for the rest of our lives"(Friszke 2011: 573).

The question, thus, is why was KOR either sidelined or treated as a liability by *Solidarity* leaders just when it seemed to have just reached a hard-won victory? Why were the Players not fêted and extolled, and why wasn't their suffering acknowledged and rewarded?

In 1981 – during the second, more intricate stage of *Solidarność* – attacks on KOR were coming from all fronts: the Communist Party, Solidarity's leaders and advisers, even from the best and brightest of the intelligentsia. Leading Polish intellectuals, who had previously never bothered to rise above the safety of their armchairs, took to unmasking the "heroic amateurs" of resistance. Michnik writes:

> I remember a meeting in the KIK (The Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia), at which Bronek Geremek, Andrzej Wielowieyski, and Jadzia Staniszkis talked about the strikes in the shipyards. They spoke about KOR with such ironic superiority that I couldn't bear it and left slamming the door … For those who had just been released from prison their jibes were painful and humiliating.
>
> (Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski 1994: 299)

There were many political and psychological reasons for this character assassination of the chieftains of the Polish revolution of dignity. There is no doubt that, in the conditions of uncertainty and impending Soviet invasion, the communist's propaganda image of KOR as a powerful communication network manipulating the gullible masses and leading them to the abyss was found half-convincing by

many. As in every revolution, the atmosphere of mistrust and suspicion was further intensified by ubiquitous agents. "The situation during *Solidarity* was such", Kuroń writes, "that if the true news was spread that the government laid a golden egg, people would say: firstly, not golden; secondly not an egg; and thirdly, it didn't lay it but stole it" (Kuroń 1984: 201). Ironically, the former defenders of Polish workers were very much mythologized in similar terms: firstly, not the defenders, but Jews and Freemasons; secondly, not the advocates of workers' interests, but *their own* interests; and thirdly, on whose payroll were they?

Tadeusz Mazowiecki, widely respected as *Solidarity*'s main adviser (and from 1989 the first democratically elected prime minster), believed the Players should not enter *Solidarity*'s structures, not merely because they were the communists' *bête noir*, but because they "had an overdeveloped instinct of group interest" (Jankowska 2000: 151). He touched the nerve of the problem. To many outside observers, KOR was first of all a tight and powerful group of friends who "did the impossible" – a liability rather than an achievement in the crooked context of the revolution under siege. The Jewish credentials of some of the KOR members were an irritant to the camp of the "true Poles". The Players' erudition and strong personalities were readily misunderstood as signs of haughtiness, and an "attitude of disdain towards the silent majority" (Zuzowski, 1996: 173).

Mazowiecki had a point, though the charges of KOR's alleged elitism or superiority complex seem profoundly unfair. One tends to forget that big chunks of the Players' lives were spent behind bars, in rather unedifying conditions, or in the factories which functioned as punishment stations for people who had specialized in "disturbing the peace". The Players used as many hours on penitential drudgery like scrubbing prison toilets or doing laundry as they did on thinking and writing. The sojourns in arrests, prisons and internment camps were the stages of encounters with common criminals that did not necessarily encourage faith in human goodness and forgiveness. Kuroń wrote to Gaja:

> [After all this time] I experience prison to the umpteenth power. Not by sympathizing with the "professionals of crime" but by trying to feel myself into their way of seeing the world, their lives and pasts. In these lives there had been no room for friendship, love, or human feelings. And suddenly, in this sump, I discover a human being – his dreams and longings – and the landscape becomes even darker.
>
> (*Karta* 1969)

The Players tried to make the best of their solitude and long periods of being – literally and metaphorically – deleted from life. They strived to look at the bright side of things. According to Michnik, working in the bulb factory put him in touch with the most beautiful working girls in town. Long prison sentences allowed him to read the *Collected Works of Marx and Lenin* and become a winner of the all-Poland competition on the history of Leninism – a source of deep embarrassment to the party secretaries.[18] As with Mandela,

prison was an effective schooling in how to face degradation and debasement – and how to *not* turn one's traumas into a dark story of bitterness and hatred.

To recapitulate: There are manifold reasons behind the revolutionary patricide executed on KOR. One of the most obvious ones is tribal begrudgery, an antipathy to a group which hijacked the monopoly on charity from the Catholic Church, the monopoly on compassionate socialism from the socialists, and the monopoly on patriotism and courage from the "true Poles".

There is, however, one more explanation which seems particularly suggestive. With their cultivation of dialogue the Players challenged the "natural order of things" in the authoritarian state. Trying to avoid the pitfalls of dogma and fundamentalism, they made a go at a difficult balancing act: They wanted to practice *both* politics *and* friendship. They were *both* patriots *and* cosmopolitans. They were *both* compassionate Christians *and* secular socialists. As "liberal-conservative-socialists",[19] they fought *both* for socialism *and* capitalism with a human face. In short, already then and there, they were precursory citizens in a utopia of "dialogic", "deliberative" or "agonistic" democracy – of the kind theorized by Western thinkers such as Anthony Giddens, Chantal Mouffe and John Dryzek. And here, precisely, lies the problem. The professorial theories, when enacted in real life situations, hit the wall of human nature, where egoism and folly tend to beat selflessness and foresight, especially in situations of existential threat or impending doom.

Revolutions today: the "false prophecies of interconnection"?

The Eros and ethos of revolutionary leaders in the anti-authoritarian upheavals in 1980 and 1989 make us pause and think again about 21st-century Twitter revolutions. How do the traditional tools of the revolution of dignity – close friendship groups, underground publications, poetry readings, sermons, strikes and history lessons at the flying universities – how does this ancient revolutionary toolkit compare with 21st-century Facebook protests?

The 21st-century social media – a potent tool and trigger of social upheavals – makes the old "stone-age" techniques seem both heroic and futile. The new Havels of the Internet epoch, such as the founder of WikiLeaks, Julian Assange, reach millions of people in one nanosecond. There is a "monitory democracy" at work, where social media – from Twitter to Facebook to Instagram – make it possible to survey the actions of the rulers and divulge their secret crimes and misdemeanours to the world's public (Trägårdh and Witoszek 2013). It has even been claimed that "If we had an Assange in the 70s, the Berlin Wall would have collapsed much earlier. The totalitarian regimes would not have had any chance in a confrontation with the WikiLeaks" (Condon 2013).

The question whether Internet makes the anti-authoritarian struggle more efficacious, has been a subject of intense debate among scholars, media executives, writers, Internet activists, and government office-holders (e.g. Castells 2016; Della Porta 2013; Della Porta et al. 2016; Morozov 2012; Applebaum 2015; Ferguson 2017). In *Networks of Outrage and Hope* (2012) Castells has drawn attention to the paramount importance of social networks, YouTube and cyberactivism in re-

imagining and constructing social revolt for our time. According to Castells, Internet and mobile phone networks are not merely channelling shared grievance; they are "organizational forms, cultural expressions, and specific platforms for political autonomy" (Castells 2016: 27, 103). The extraordinary mobilizing potential of social media was evident in the initial, euphoric stages of the Arab Spring, especially in the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, and in Muslim countries with sizeable online and urban populations, such as Morocco and Bahrain. There the Internet allowed a leaderless movement to mobilize, coordinate and expand. It was also an instrument of a broad internationalization of the revolution; it is enough to study its web-based prosocial foundations such as the instant messenger app *Wickr*, or leaf through the diaries inspired by the Arab Spring (e.g. Shibab-Eldin and Alhassen 2012). Maytha Alhassen, a Muslim Californian, travelled in the Middle East and North Africa, hopping from revolution to revolution in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria, where she worked with digital producers and the hosts of *Al Jazeera*. Alhassen's diary is a testimony to social media communities' amazing capacity to forge a hybrid, multilingual world, a compulsive need to communicate beyond cultural divides and beyond one's immediate kinship group, while retaining and a sense of unique personal and cultural identity. The revolutionary social media communities are literally "leaking" into each other's culture. They are the protean selves of late modernity, inspiring both new forms of resistance and pioneering models of transcultural humanism.

However, as has also been remarked, while the horizontal, open-ended and leaderless structure of the revolutionary flows makes them (in some cases) less vulnerable to repression, it also creates a space of confusion and chaos, one which one can easily end up in a general social dispersal or digital stampede. The Internet magnifies existing (revolutionary) sentiment in both a positive and negative direction: anger feeds on itself to produce greater anger; polarities of opinion become intensified; individual voters can easily turn into a bullying mob; virtual enmities may erupt into acts of physical violence. Ann Applebaum goes as far as to talk about the "Facebook curse" in weak democracies. Any project to forge peace or rebuild a shattered society, she argues – whether in Libya or East Timor – requires both a broad national debate and a unified vision which becomes impossible in conditions where the Facebook media launch multiple, often contradicting versions of truth (Applebaum 2015).

This critique points towards virtues of the antiquated, *embedded revolution*, anchored as it is in small groups of people, strong social bonds, the common road of trials and shared historical experience. The like-minded clusters of friends illustrate what Mark Granovetter called the "strength of weak ties" (Granovetter, 1973). Such groups are efficacious not only because they rely on their unbreakable emotional allegiances and loyalties; the basis of their actions is a dialogue with the past and history – a source of ongoing self-correction and renewal. The virtual revolutions, on the other hand, tend to be ahistorical; they fall prey to what has been called the "Silicon Valley effect": a conviction that revolutionary strategies are dependent on the power of new technology rather than lived and processed past experience.

Perhaps the future of the anti-authoritarian movement depends more on concrete people, and less on the net? So much is evident in the reflections of Iyad El-Baghdadi, the co-author of the *Arab Spring Manifesto*. At the 2016 Oslo Freedom Forum, El-Baghdadi emphasized that if the Arab Spring is to succeed, it is in urgent need of a new generation of organized and courageous intellectuals and thinkers who are not merely "netizens" but moral actors taking binding collective decisions. This generation, he insists, must be as well organized as the wealthy dictators they are up against (El-Baghdadi 2016).

To sum up: when seen against the foil of the anti-authoritarian revolution as staged by the Players, modern upheavals face at least four problems. The first has to do with the belief in the virtues of technology rather than the hard work of building and sustaining human relationships in harsh circumstances. The second springs from overestimating the power of logistics and right strategies as opposed to the power of persons and stories. With all respect for Gene Sharp's legendary "manuals of resistance", (Sharp 1993; 2012), there are reasons to believe that a successful non-violent uprising which he so persuasively advocates, is not just about correct tactics but about doing the impossible through compelling personal examples and captivating stories. As in Shakespeare, character is action. The former 1968 rebels in Eastern Europe conceived the revolution of dignity on the basis of deep personal ties and the magic of stories which were not conjured "for the occasion", but sprang from a sustained and intimate group experience, and challenged stock cultural responses to the dehumanizing aspects of authoritarian oppression. The Assange generation, for all its volubility, does not cultivate profound bonds. "Likes" may be profuse, but contacts are loose, stories are many and often confusing, and humans are fickle.

Thirdly, the KOR experience points to the importance of a factor that Gene Sharp does not discuss in his manuals of revolution: the importance of learning, education and historical literacy. Central to the success of the revolution is the work of a small group whose project is cemented by friendship, study and ongoing reflection, people who keep the non-violent revolution on track during manifold crises and provocations. True, the Eastern European community of conscience lacked the digital tools that spread ideas in an instant. They published their samizdat literature in 250–500 copies that were laboriously retyped by subsequent readers and passed on to friends and family who retyped them again. This was a long and murderous process. But unlike most Google and Facebook protesters, the revolutionaries were not groups that tweet but groups that meet. Without their close bonds and friendship – an intimate way of moral soldiering – the very notion of the "power of the powerless" would have been unimaginable.

Cynics might say that, ultimately, the embeddedness of the revolution of dignity is not a guarantee of its success: in the second half of the 21st century both the embedded and the Facebook revolutions seem to have shared the same fate. Most places – from Egypt and Turkey to Poland and Hungary – have witnessed a resurgence of the illiberal *ancien regime* and the triumph of the alleged "party of stabilty" over the "party of dignity".

There is but one problem with this rather depressive reading. As mentioned above, the revolution of dignity is an unfinished project, one which ultimately depends *not* on technological progress or political and economic breakthroughs, but on fostering and sustaining altruistic, empathetic and cooperative aspects of human nature. Ultimately, it is thanks to these faculties that the revolution of dignity persists, and humanity has a chance to improve its lot.

Notes

1 See for example "Meldunek Operacyjny", IPN 0204/1404, 1979, vol. 8, 39–40.
2 The contours of this negative, and surprisingly influential, myth are reconstructed by Artur Domosławski, "KOR: Hieny, zdrajcy i terroryści", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 22 September 2001. http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,444838.html Accessed 20 February 2018.
3 This was the first action of what later become a stock activity of KOR. Apart from the *Komandosi*, the group of workers' supporters included well-known writers (such as Jacek Bocheński and Andrzej Kijowski), the people connected to the Łódź group "Movement", Henryk Wujec (the Club of the Catholic Intelligentsia), Ewa Bugajska-Adamowicz (a physicist) and Małgorzata Łukasiewicz (a translator).
4 There were certainly exceptions, such as Stanisław Hejmowski's brave defence of the arrested workers after the 1956 Poznań rebellion. See "Mowa obrończa adwokata Stanisława Hejmowskiego wygłoszona 16 października 1956 roku w 'procesie dziesięciu'" in Jarosław Maciejewski and Zofia Trojanowiczowa (eds), *Poznański Czerwiec 1956* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo poznańskie, 1981), 322–32. Ditto Aniela Steinsberger's defence of the student protesters arrested by the police after March 1968.
5 Personal communication, Warszawa, November 2002.
6 The *Appeal* was signed by fourteen people: Jerzy Andrzejewski, Stanislaw Barańczak, Ludwik Cohn, Jacek Kuroń, Edward Lipiński, Jan Józef Lipski, Antoni Macierewicz, Piotr Naimski, Antoni Pajdak, Aniela Steinsberg, Andrzje Szczypiorski, father. Jan Zieja and Wojciech Ziembiński.
7 Bronsław Wildstein, former KOR member, reminisces: "There was fear, but not of landing in a tragedy but in some grotesque play. We dreaded that our calls and appeals would be met with laughter, and that our challenge to the state would come out as a pathetic swagger or naïve folly". Bronisław Wildstein, "Z osobistej perspektywy", *Kontakt* (1983), 51.
8 Halina Mikołajska, the leading Polish actress and member of KOR attempted to commit suicide as a result of security police harassment. Personal communication with Adam Michnik, October 2004.
9 According to Thomas Aquinas, what is meant by unselfish love is the "constant, effective desire to do good to another". See Walter Farrell, O.P., *A Companion to the Summa*, vol. 3 (New York, 1940), 61.
10 Personal communication, Warszawa, June 2004.
11 Four of the founding members were connected with *Czarna Jedynka* – the patriotic scouts who produced heroes of the resistance during the Second World War. Five had been former members of *Walterowcy*, a legendary team of socialist scouts run by Kuroń in the 1950s and 1960s. The *Walterowcy* camps had been Kuroń's attempt to build a children's socialist utopia, where the "law of the smallest" meant that the weakest had more rights than the stronger.
12 Personal communication with Seweryn Blumsztajn, Warszawa, June 2007.
13 Personal communication with Jacek Kuroń, Warszawa, November 2002. The eleven KOR members were eventually released as a result of amnesty in July 1984.

14 By contrast, KOR used a conciliatory conceptual strategy. Zbigniew Romaszewski reminisces: "We didn't say that the People's Republic was a 'Russian colony'. Using less radical concepts and less extreme ways to appeal to patriotism allowed us to win over the souls of those who sold their soul to the devil". Skwieciński and Romaszewscy (2014) *Romaszewscy: autobiografia*. Warszawa: Trzecia strona, p. 202.
15 The institution of the Flying University – with its strong branch of Ladies' University – referred to an underground schooling that was offered in Russian-occupied Warsaw between 1885 and 1905. For the in-depth exploration of its founders and strategies see Bohdan Cywiński, *Rodowody Niepokornych* (Indomitable Pedigrees) (1976; Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2010).
16 I paraphrase from memory. Flying University, Wrocław 1981.
17 The workers' postulates as designed by Kuroń, went beyond the salary raise and demanded the improvement of work conditions and freeing political prisoners. See Jacek Kuroń, "Ostry zakręt", *Biuletyn Informacyjny*, vol. 5, July 1980. Reprinted in Jacek Kuroń, *Polityka i odpowiedzialność* (London: Aneks, 1984), 151–156.
18 Personal communication with Adam Michnik, Oslo, June 2004.
19 This rather oxymoronic ideological stance has been influenced by Leszek Kołakowski's essay "How to be a Liberal-Conservative Socialist?" See Kołakowski, *Modernity on Endless Trial* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 225–228.

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4 Three weddings and a funeral? The "dialogic revolutions" of 1980 and 1989

The undead past

The Eastern and Central European dissidents were ambivalent about Hannah Arendt. Adam Michnik both idolized and chastised her:

> If the twentieth century was a labyrinth ruled by an invisible cruel monster, then her writings were a luminous thread which showed an exit, and allowed to confront the Minotaur and to return to the human world. She was the Ariadna of the twentieth century. Arendt's thoughts – circulated in the underground press – were a dynamite that detonated the construction of the totalitarian order. We argued about her in smoke-filled apartments, underground publishers and at student meetings. We debated the nature of totalitarianism, the condition of intellectuals' meddling with politics, what it means to be a Jew after [the] Holocaust, what were the dynamics of the transformation of the communist system, and, finally, what was the nature of freedom, parliamentary democracy and [the] market economy.
>
> (Michnik 2002: 15–17)

But, according to Michnik, one thing was unsettling about Arendt: namely, "how little she knew and understood Eastern Europe" (Michnik 2002: 15).

Arendt was impatient with Eastern European "tribal nationalism", which partly stemmed from her conviction of the deeply rooted, dark, obscurantism of the region (Arendt 1974: 227–234). Perhaps this was one of the reasons why, until the end of her life, she remained sceptical about Eastern Europe's ability to dismantle Soviet authoritarianism. True, inscribed into her vision of the human condition was the idea of a new beginning that sprang from an innate human capacity to strive for freedom. But this capacity, if we do not count the Hungarian revolt against communism in 1956, did not quite stretch to the populations thrown into bondage in the Soviet empire. Arendt's favourite examples of the *constitutio libertatis* were the American Revolution, the Paris Commune of 1871, and the French Resistance to Hitler in the Second World War (*sic!*) (Arendt: 21–52). Interestingly, she was preoccupied with revolution, not as a site of nemesis and retribution, but as the birthplace of emancipatory councils and a

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locus of dialogue, including dialogue with social memory and history. (While reflecting on revolution and human condition, she herself led an incessant dialogue with the architects of Greek and Roman antiquity). Her concept of the ideal revolution gestured thus towards its Latin root, *revolvere*: not creative destruction but a rolling back, turning full circle. A truly liberating revolutionary process would be driven by persuasion, contestation and compromise: the art of Sophrosyne (Arendt 1978: 201). The sovietized societies were the antithesis of this dialogic strategy: narcissistically wallowing in their wounds, ridden with bigotry and prone to nationalist and anti-Semitic excesses.

It is, thus, almost paradoxical that the most "Arendtian" of all revolutions – the one that took place in the 1980s – was staged by the democratically retarded Eastern Europeans. Not only did they think dutifully, they acted beautifully as well. In August 1980, 10 million Poles rose against authoritarian Soviet rule. What had hitherto been an amorphous community of disempowered thralls, morphed into *Solidarność* – a united movement of equal citizens. The 16 months of *Solidarity* were a revolution which, in its initial phase at least, came very close to the Arendtian project of a "re-enchantment of politics": a massive participation in freedom-making. True, this re-enchantment was complicated by rivalries, conflicts and splits. And yet, despite the assorted tensions, the *Solidarność* revolution was not yet another fleeting mobilization of citizens whose lungs and heads were oxygenated by the quest for freedom and justice; its success has to be measured by the ways in which hitherto confrontational transactions with communist adversaries were replaced by conversation, cooperation and compromise.

But Arendt was not entirely wrong about the immaturity of Eastern European democracy. From the perspective of the 21st century, her views on the sectarian disposition permeating Eastern European cultures have proved prescient, at least in part. They were been prescient because the ghosts of authoritarian pasts – of Russian, Fascist and Soviet provenance – did not depart after the end of communism; on the contrary, the beginning of the 21st century ushered in the era of authoritarian avatars. What Arendt overlooked, however, was the ongoing work of the groups that had been forging – and institutionally codifying – a vision of an open, pluralist society. What she also disregarded was that the flight from freedom and the entrenchment in inhospitable, increasingly illiberal communities has not been an Eastern European specialty. As she herself argued, the authoritarian temptation is a permanent condition of modernity. Challenged by 21st-century refugee crisis, even seasoned pro-social democracies such as Nordic welfare states have witnessed their ideal of universal rights clashing with the renewed quest for *ethnos*, while their cosmopolitan aspirations are increasingly thwarted by tribal selfishness and a competitive ethos (Pedersen 2013).

There is, thus, an "undead past" whose revenants resurface in times of crisis and uncertainty. In Ostromian terms, they appear as defenders of a clearly defined identity (allegedly in peril) and as guardians of the community's boundaries. At the mythical level, they play a complex cultural-political role, at once the memorizers of the tribal patrimony and national sovereignty, and simultaneously the radical avant-garde of populist democracy.

As I shall argue in this chapter, this undead past is particularly potent in revolutionary times, as it weighs both on the novel and regressive character of the insurgence. On the one hand, the revolution is sculpted by cultural innovators who mould what I call the community's "visionary cycle": stories which support groundbreaking strategies and visions of the future. On the other, it is simultaneously pulled down by the forces of gravity: the custodians of past legacies and memories.

My aim, then, will be to examine both the prefigured future and the undead past by unearthing the often occluded, cultural engines behind Solidarność: its empowering narratives, rites, and paroles. And rather than rehearsing the history and trajectory of the movement, so competently described by Polish and international historians such as (e.g. Holzner 1984; Friszke 2008; 2011; Davies 2001). I wish to draw attention to the peculiarity of Solidarity by reinterpreting it in terms of an agon of two mythologies: one, dialogic, pointing to novel scenarios of negotiation with the oppressor, and the other, self-absorbed and dogmatic, repeating the national sacrificial-schismatic codes. The painful question is: why has the second, monologic discourse triumphed and given power to the powerless?

To highlight the originality of the Polish upheaval in 1980 and 1989, let me begin by setting it against the foil of other groundbreaking revolutions. As has been observed, as a cultural, strongly Christian and predominantly humanist revolution, Solidarity hardly yielded any casualties. It was an extraordinarily bloodless – though far from anaemic – upheaval. By comparison, the American Revolution counted 17,000–25,000 victims. Executions and guillotines of the French Revolution killed some 40,000 people.[1] The number of deaths following Russian Revolution-related terror, famine and disease, varies between 4,017,000 (Rummel 1994) and 10 million (Figes 1998). In the case of Solidarność, instead of guns, its signatures were the red and white brassards – copied from the Home Army during the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 – worn by Solidarity members on their arms.

Another interesting point of comparison is the revolutionaries' perceptions of human history and identity. The French sanctified the mythical present, the instant creation of the new community, the sacred moment of the new consensus (Hunt 1984: 27). The Poles per contra, inaugurated the virtuous circle by diving into history and celebrating deeds, words and examples from a pantheon of mentors ranging from Greek sages, romantic seers, to banned anti-communist writers such as Czesław Miłosz and Zbigniew Herbert. Most importantly from the evolutionary point of view, the French and Russian revolutions aimed a reconstituting human nature by starting from ground zero and creating a *Homo futurus* (the ideal French Citizen and the Russian New Soviet Man). *Solidarność* thinkers saw Bolshevism as a *violator of human nature* and its basic needs. They oriented their revolution towards reclaiming human nature's indelible desire for property, freedom, dignity and justice.

Solidarność was not free from sporadic expressions of xenophobia and antisemitism, especially virulent in relation to KOR. But they were relatively toned down by comparison with the fanatical revolutionary writings and declarations of revolutionary France (Hunt 2004: 27). The language of the first *Solidarność* was on the

whole conciliatory, Christian and pluralist. Revolutionary literature mixed resistance with appeasement. Even today, the contents of some of *Solidarność*' pivotal documents strikes us not merely as balanced and prudent in the context of their time, but ageless and pertinent to the concerns of the 21st century. Suffice it to quote the declaration of "the Association of the Scholarly Courses" [Towarzystwo kursów naukowych], which became one of the independent educational platforms of *Solidarność:*

> There is in our historical tradition an enduring – though rarely victorious – idea of the open society, free from fear of diversity and oppressive tyranny of mediocrity and conformism. The idea of a society connected by respect of people of various faiths and open to our neighbours, other cultures, universal values of great religions and civilizations. Our past and present rests on humanism free from chauvinism and national introversion, on a society believing in itself and taking responsibility for its fate.[2]

Such declarations point to a dialogic, argumentative Pole. He or she attends *Solidarność* lectures at flying universities, reads independent publications, participates in myriad debates and historical inquiries, and delights in a swirl of poetry, prayer, satire, music, political posters and ad hoc performance. It is as if, at the nadir of the anti-authoritarian revolution, the unique alliance of poets, priests and the working masses forgot about their past wounds, bracketed their anger and hatred, and engaged in co-creating a pluralist, dialogic counterculture proclaiming the collective transcendence of the despotic here and now.

Morally, the first *Solidarność* was thus a spectacle of Christian caritas and altruism: a striking contrast with polarizing revolutions in America or France. The image of Lech Wałęsa, wearing a defiant picture of the Holy Virgin in his lapel, and signing the Gdańsk agreement with a giant ball-point pen adorned with an image of the Pope strikes us today as kitschy, if not slightly bigoted. But to his audience, these were the most anti-authoritarian – if not provocatively entertaining – insignia he could employ.

The question is: what were the dividends and hazards of dialogue as the condition of the success of socio-political upheavals? Does the fetishization of the dialogic modus generate only benign, positive solutions to socio-political crises, or does it, in fact, exacerbate tribalism and even create new tensions?

Culture as an incubator of revolutions: the nuptial roots of Solidarity

To paraphrase Matthew 4.4, no revolution lives on bread alone. As has been pointed out, by among others Yuri Lotman (1999), Lynn Hunt (1984) and Baker and Edelstein (2015), the course of social transformation depends on explicit or implicit semiotic engines: morally charged myths, images, props and tropes which dress up, legitimate and influence the revolutionary course. My contention is that there is a hitherto unexplored "storied residence" at the heart of the Polish *Solidarność*. If Poland in 1980 and 1989 was largely the site of a

peaceful, negotiated revolution, then it is not merely thanks to the workers' muscle and determination, or the ineptitude of the communist apparatus; it is, in part at least, thanks to the power of narratives, images and practices which had been well entrenched in Polish imaginary long before the emergence of independent trade unions.

In previous chapters, I have argued that *Solidarność* had been preceded by a moral and cultural innovation whose authors were groups of humanist outliers. The paradigm shift they launched was based on reinventing the national struggle for independence from being a political-insurrectional, to a *moral-educational project* of forging a cooperative society, reconciling antagonistic views and classes, boosting independent education and championing the practice of social altruism. Here I shall draw attention to a culturally specific, "dialogic" myth which had predicted *Solidarność*: a story which has been told and retold by generations of anti-authoritarian writers and thinkers since the loss of independence at the end of the 18th century.

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In the doleful, mythical annals of the Polish struggle for independence between 1771 (the first partition) and 1980, the rites of resistance to the imperial powers – whether it was Russia, Prussia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire or later, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union – all championed the ideal of brave, often reckless, acts of civil disobedience and armed insurrections. The struggle for freedom was the goal and self-sacrifice was the key.

Even a peremptory look at the multitude of visionary ideas of a possible exit from foreign bondage shows a mournful *basso continuo* – the repeated story of failed revolts against external oppressors. For a long time, Poland, a non-existent country with archaic feudal structures, had specialized in national disasters. They were partly engendered by internal divisions and predatory neighbours, and partly mobilized by the glorification of a romantic auto-da-fe in the struggle for freedom. The idea of resistance to foreign oppressors through an alliance of hostile classes made strategic sense, but for some 200 years seemed unfeasible due to internal schisms and external policies of divide and rule. But, like many elites' obsessive ideas, the project moved to literature, where it gestated, matured and morphed into a symbolic language to speak about an unfulfilled freedom-bringing revolution.

But how to tell a divided nation – and its querulous elites – to initiate a national dialogue? The 19th-century writers chose an intriguingly compelling trope: they replicated an allegoric story about a marriage between the gentry and the people. The motif of a charismatic Polish leader of noble origin marrying a poor, or lower-class, girl to inspire national reconciliation featured in the masterpieces of the great Romantics: Adam Mickiewicz's *Pan Tadeusz*, (1834)[3] and Zygmunt Krasiński's *The Undivine Comedy* (1833). The ideal of forming a "holy bond" that would transcend narrow class interests in the service of the national cause was captured in Krasiński's catchphrase: "Polish people with the Polish gentry" (*z Szlachtą polską - polski Lud*). Its various

renditions can be found in the thought of the prime movers of post-Romantic culture (Potocki, Świętochowski, Daszyński, Brzozowski), in the programme of the populists connected with the Krakovian *Głos*, and the visions of the Socialist Party and the Democratic Party (Witoszek 1988: 97–99). But it was not until the beginning of the 20th century that the wedding as a figurative representation of Polish national aspirations became codified and sanctified as an iconic rite of resistance.

In 1901, Stanislaw Wyspiański, a literary genius dying of venereal disease, wrote an extraordinary play, *Wedding*, based on a real-life event outside Kraków: the wedding between a nobleman and a peasant girl. At the turn of the century such weddings became something of a cultural fad in the Austro-Hungarian part of Poland. They pointed as much to the fascination with new democratic and egalitarian ideals, as to the project of national renewal. What was interesting about Wyspiański's pseudo-nuptials was that they were not a feel-good Hollywoodesque pageant, consoling the wretched of the earth. Rather, they were used to critically inspect the possibility of an inter-class alliance as a condition for an insurrection against oppressive powers.[4] They attacked national holy cows, flagellated the elites, spared no one and nothing. They established a ritual code through which to speak of – and challenge – Poland's dearest dreams and traditions. Thus, the wedding metaphor, and the accompanying relentless social scrutiny, added something original to the national mythology. Unlike the tremendously potent, but ultimately frustrating, founding myth of 19th-century Poland – one steeped in images of a crucified nation and the whole assortment of necrophiliac heroics – the story of the national marriage went beyond a powerless catharsis. It conveyed a dual message of self-critique and of hope. It unmasked the Polish insurrectional tradition as the "dance of a strawman". But it also gestured towards a vision of a society where social tensions were transcended and national interests won over individual selfishness.

It would not be too much to say that, through most of the 20th century, Polish oppositional writers were forging a unique *Theatrum Nuptialis* which spoke of the desired – and mostly disillusioned – dialogue between the opposing classes. The revolutionary wedding was exploited by Poland's leading writers – from Witold Gombrowicz (*Ivona Princes of Burgundy*, 1935; *The Marriage*, 1948), Sławomir Mrożek (*Zabawa*, 1962 and *Tango*, 1964), Jerzy Andrzejewski (*Miazga* [The Pulp], 1977), Ernest Bryll (*Rzecz listopadowa* [The November Thing], 1968), to Jan Marek Rymkiewicz (*The Ulhans*, 1975). Semiotically speaking, most of these works, written at the heyday of censorship and ideological inquisition, invoke the dream of a coup, or a rebellion, about which they speak in a poetic, allusive way. They obsess about the wedding-to-be as the beginning of a new world and the end of the old, oppressive order. Wedding rites torment and tease the national soul. They allude to all previous failed insurrections. They sneer at the indolence and selfishness of the political and intellectual elites. Most interestingly, they show how the "progressive" bridegrooms become the new authoritarians. In Gombrowicz's *The Marriage*, the bridegroom, Henry, stages a *coup d'état* against his father by installing himself as King:

> If I were to become master, I could grant myself a marriage – and a decent and respectable one too. Then I would be the one who makes laws. I would be the one who decides what is holy, what is virtuous, what is a sacrament.
>
> (Gombrowicz 1969: 96)

Sławomir Mrożek's acclaimed comedy, *Tango* – drawing on Wyspiański and Gombrowicz – portrays another rebellious son who plots a nuptial rebellion. Arthur cannot abide his parents' sloppiness and opportunism: "I come home and what do I find? Laxity, chaos, shady characters, ambiguous relationships". He dreams of returning to ancient order and tradition via a "revolutionary wedding" to his cousin Ala:

> Marry me. That's the first step. No more promiscuity, no more dolce vita … A genuine old-fashioned wedding with an organ playing and bridesmaids marching down the aisle … I'll turn them into a bridal procession, and at long last my father will be forced to button his fly.
>
> (Mrożek 1981: 52)

There are two intriguing semiotic features of these literary nuptials. First, as I have indicated, they often show the ambivalent nature of revolutions, where the anti-authoritarian actors become themselves contaminated by a despotic, monologic mindset. And second, they show protagonists who do not aspire to open the door to a New Time, but rather return to some kind of ancient regime, to earlier cultural-political structures that had been overthrown. Their basic appeal is to a better yesterday. Gombrowicz's tavern turns into a palace with a royal family, while Mrożek characters are transformed into old-fashioned gentry employing a lackey. In short, lurking behind the nuptial texts is an outlook, which – however subversive vis-à-vis the ideological establishment – is based on the idea of "backward progression".

What I am arguing here is that the idea of social solidarity, which blossomed in the political upheaval of the 1980s, did not emerge *ex nihilo*. It had deep and interesting cultural roots: a cache of images and stories which nested in masterpieces of Polish literature and replicated the nuptial myth of revolution as the outcome of class dialogue.

There was thus a mythical current underlying the successive anti-communist uprisings of 1968 and 1970: one which can be interpreted as a story of an "abandoned bride" or "abandoned bridegroom". In 1968 the workers left the striking intelligentsia at the altar, in December 1970, during the workers' protests in Gdańsk, the intelligentsia never even got as far as the Church. In this sense the beginning of KOR marked a genuine breakthrough in the "romance" of the classes.

But there is an interesting prescient dimension to all literary nuptials. Inscribed their dramaturgy is an incomplete, botched revolution. The bridegrooms are consistently portrayed as too drunk, too Hamletic-pathetic, or too caught up in their own navel-gazing to lead the insurgency. The wedding itself – if it finally takes place – is not exactly an incarnation of harmony and happiness. In Jerzy

Broszkiewicz's novella, *The Wedding in the Quarter* (1965), one of the protagonists declares:

> One would think that there is nothing here but the wedding – joy, one family, tenderness, love. But underneath, I tell you, it looks scary. The aunt is squinting at the mother, the Major at Wincenty, Wincenty at the Major, the Curate at the Secretary, Madam-Editor at the bridegroom, the father at the bride. Give them a minute and a few more jars and there'll be trouble. The national agreement will topple under the stroke of the battle axe of the epoch.
> (Broszkiewicz 1965: 14)

Declarations like this expose the shallowness of national chimeras of a cohesive community and its ability to overthrow the bullies. But one could also argue that, for all its critical edge, the nuptial story had an evolutionary, world-making role: by endlessly invoking the ideal of social solidarity, it kept the dream of a dialogic revolution alive.

In previous chapters I followed the progress of the idea of class solidarity and a pluralist society in the writings and activities of the Workers' Defence Committee (KOR). Here I am suggesting that the foundational story of *Solidarność* as a dialogic revolution in fact preceded KOR's ideas and practice: it had been hammered into the national (un)consciousness by the humanist outliers – socially engaged writers and thinkers – from the 19th century onwards. The magic of Solidarity was thus more than the sublimity of a political movement of national unity: it touched upon the national "erogenous zone" and represented the climax of a long-repeated story which verged on a self-fulfilling prophecy. In 1980 the wedding made a quantum leap from literature to life – and the word became flesh.It is not accidental that Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Iron* (1981), an iconic film about the birth of *Solidarność*, culminates in the marriage of a rebellious intellectual (Agnieszka) to a rebellious worker (Birkut), witnessed and sanctioned by the united people's leader, Lech Wałesa. For Wajda, the inter-class marriage ceremony was the most natural way to represent *Solidarność*' triumph. The symbolic union of the opposing classes in his film overcomes all previous "bungled weddings" that the poets had sung about and the humanist animateurs dreamt of.

The cultural underbelly of the dialogic revolution

The theatre of the revolution was ambulatory – it migrated from literature to the shipyards and steelworks, to private flats, and churches – and back to fiction. It featured thousands of workers beginning their daily strike by kneeling, praying and singing the patriotic *Rota* (The oath), the ancient defiant anthem of the Poles sung under the Prussian partition (1772–1918). It flaunted a virile political cabaret which mocked the political and economic indolence of the communist government that made the Polish situation "hopeless but not serious". Again, the prayers and the satire were free from the motifs of unforgiving rage, revenge or vendetta. The workers at the Gdańsk shipyards prayed not just

for free Poland but for the current government as well (sic!). They were entrusting it to the Black Madonna, the rightful Queen of Poland and an underestimated saviour of souls of the dehumanized and corrupt apparatchiks. Even universities and schools restrained from provoking or threatening the communist power holders. Instead, they circulated handbills declaring, after the Romantic poets: "We'll never submit to be allies of kings / We'll never bend necks to power and might / For only from Christ do we take our commands / We are the servants of the Virgin" (Davies 1984: 385)

This general religious elation was found inspiring even by staunch atheists who began visiting churches and kneeling down with the crowd. According to a popular anecdote, when asked why they knelt if they did not believe in God, they would reply "Well, we are also against the government".

In short, one of the most compelling features of the so-called first stage of *Solidarność* was that the Poles seemed to follow the ideal nuptial script as imagined by KOR: for a while, they transcended their selfish, partisan interests, religious differences and class snobberies. Conflicts and tensions were there, but, initially, they were cherished: the one, commanding voice of the party was replaced by a liberating polyphony of ideas, disagreements, arguments and alternative perspectives. The "dialogical undercurrent" permeating Solidarity's ethos often confused its interpreters: the trade unions saw the latter as a culmination of the century-old struggle for workers' rights and socialism; the liberal fans of Margaret Thatcher and President Reagan as an anti-communist revolution; the liberals were struck by its hospitality to pluralism, the apostles of workers' councils noted the construction of a Poland of self-governments; the Christians emphasized a gigantic religious uprising presided over by the Pope; patriots delighted in the forest of national symbols and icons. All these elements found their home in *Solidarność* and, for the first few months at least, spoke to one another in an unprecedented dialogical *Theatrum Nuptialis*.

The initial, "dialogic" Solidarity erased social barriers, hierarchies and differences. Professors and plumbers, journalists and mechanics sat beside one another and talked about matters which had hitherto been relegated to illegal literature, satire or private conversation. Many felt genuinely moved by the joys of teamwork and class rapport. Ryszard Kapuściński, alluded to earlier as the writer who specialized in the sober unmasking of revolutions, confessed: "I couldn't resist being permanently moved, I kept crying, which made me embarrassed, so I tried to hide, to escape from the mushy pathos, only to notice that everybody had to let the heart go before reason. The dialogue between the Poles was genuine and utterly moving".[5] Characteristically, Kapuściński insisted that "those who reduced the workers' strikes in Gdańsk to a struggle for wages and better life did not understand the sense of this revolution". The main motif of the upheaval was "human dignity, an aspiration to forge new relationships between people in every place and at all levels, to create the basis for human respect according to the principle that there are no subordinates, only partners" (Kapuściński 2007). The unforgettable vignettes of the workers queuing to buy the poems by Zbigniew Herbert or Czesław Miłosz were one of those rare, fleeting openings of public space in which the high meets the low, and none are disillusioned.

The steel-mill workers from Częstochowa printed the poets' words in their bulletin; "We were permitted to shriek in the tongue of dwarfs and demons/ But pure and generous words were forbidden" (Miłosz 2001: 259). Spellbound workers listened to actors reciting national poems and singing patriotic ballads in front of the monument commemorating their confrères killed by the communist regime during the Gdańsk strikes in 1970.[6]

It is easy to dismiss these lyrical acts of class rapport as a sign of fleeting idealist euphoria, often manifest in exhilarating displays of people's power everywhere. As Boris Pasternak ironized, during the February Revolution in Russia, "even roads, trees and stars, took part in festive rallies" (cited in Venclova 2016). But, in the Polish case, the dialogic mode was extraordinarily pervasive; it even penetrated into Catholic religiosity, at least for a while. In a programmatic sermon at the Wawel Cathedral on 19 October 1980, the charismatic Chaplain of *Solidarność*, Fr. Józef Tischner, codified the ethics of Solidarity which embraced both Catholics and the "apostates" alike. Solidarity was about creating space for the expression of the true self, allowing people to throw off masks, come out of hiding, to show their real face. In this revolution: "[T]he believers remain the believers, the sceptics remain the sceptics and the atheists remain the atheists", argued Tischner. "Nobody plays alien roles" (Tischner 1981: 7). All opposing forces were part of a "confederation against evil", a movement that challenged "the dogmas of Marxism pervading schoolbooks, newspapers, radio and TV, university and countless conferences". These dogmas told the people that the "world was divided into two hostile camps, that there was a mortal struggle between the social classes, that the base determined superstructure, and that there was a proletarian internationalism" (Tischner: 11). Now it was all changed: hostile classes, camps and parties sang *Rota* in ecstatic unison.

The first *Solidarność* was enchanting because it broke both with the nationalist and the communist, Manichean mindset and transcended ideological and religious boundaries. It radiated friendship. It was a festival of people's better selves. True, the cross-bearing welders and electricians collided with the popular leftist representations of the working class. But they were exotic and ensouled, appealing to the suppressed, spiritual side of the Western Left. And although a virtual orgy of poetry readings at striking factories did not make as many headlines as the riots or the demonstrations, it was central to the general public sense of *spiritual* unity, and the mood of elevation and exultation. It was an act of individual ennoblement, soaring in the realm of tramped upon dignity. It was the toiling masses ascending with the intelligentsia to a Platonic realm of beauty and truth.

Needless to say this nuptial, poetic-religious bliss had its limits. First and foremost, it could not last. The daily pedestrian struggle for toilet paper kills sanctum in most human hearts, skulls and stomachs. The sublime mood was already waning by the second phase of *Solidarność*, and it did so for several reasons. Firstly, as Karol Modzelewski noted, "in each region there was a Solidarność Joan d'Arc who would disagree with with local communist apparatchiks, leading to conflicts and tensions" (Modzelewski 2013: 271). Secondly, the splits and squabbles were exacerbated by the uncertainty of tomorrow, and a tangible possibility of "military rape" by Soviet

tanks.[7] Last but not least, an army of Solidarity's heroic laggards – riding on the backs of those who took risks and paved the way – proceeded to take ownership of the revolution and reshape its mythology from heart-warming to heartless.

This being said, there were genuinely charismatic mentors who, standing outside organized opposition, attempted to maintain *Solidarność*' dialogic script. One of them was the renowned historian and dissident Karol Modzelewski, who persuaded the leadership of Gdańsk strikes to abandon their idea of forging a multitude of interest-and testosterone-driven strike committees, and instead choose the option of a transcendent, all-national self-governing trade union called *Solidarność* (Modzelewski 2013: 256). Such a union, he argued, apart from cementing the popular protest, would have much more leverage with the authoritarian rulers. But people like Modzelewski were becoming a minority. More and more the clash of mythologies – one nuptial and dialogic and the other, sacrificial and schismatic – became a detonator within Solidarity's chest.

What, then, of the people who had dreamed, imagined and scripted the dialogic revolution? Firstly, they were surprised, even shocked that their ideas and words materialized in August 1980. Ironically, Michnik and Kuroń were arrested by the police just at the moment when they were boarding the train to Gdańsk to convince the striking workers that establishing independent trade unions was suicide at this early stage. As Michnik put it, "Thus, thanks to the fact that we didn't come to Gdańsk, Solidarność was born – our child, albeit an illegitimate one" (Michnik 1998: 61). It was as illegitimate as it was mainly cultural, we might add. *Solidarność*, as imagined by the humanist outliers, was a non-political project based on conciliation, personal virtue and peaceful methods of solving disagreements. It was not political in the sense that it was not a struggle for power based on sidelining or eliminating the enemy – something KOR couldn't stop emphasizing. Michnik's famous remark ran: "I believe that overthrowing the dictatorship of the party by revolution is both unrealistic and dangerous because those who use force to storm present-day Bastilles are likely to build bigger and worse Bastilles" (Michnik 1998: 106). However, if we understand politics in a special, Arendtian sense, as a form of participation in the public realm based on dialogue – between the intelligentsia and the workers, the opposition and its adversaries, the past and the present – then the first *Solidarność* as conceived by the humanist outliers embodied this idea. And here lay another rub.

The people who had conjured Solidarity before it materialized in massive strikes at the shipyards, in factories and at collective farms, were not politicians. They were emblematic Arendtian *hommes de lettres*, men and women who combined wisdom and courage with a complete lack of political savvy. Their altruist actions were nourished by friendship, that elixir of civility in a community of equals. Like Arendt, they were interested in ideas rather than armies, culture rather than economics, nations rather than political systems, and individual men and women rather than amorphous collectives. They shared with her the Platonic perception of intellectual activity as an erotic quest, as mating and communing with ideas. Like her, they searched for an antidote to the totalitarian catastrophe in the classical tradition. Like her, they believed in dialogic politics as the foundation of

freedom. Like her, they were exiles in their own countries, chronic outsiders literally and metaphorically – Erasmian citizens in an imaginary cosmopolis, working against the dominant group-think. Like her, they were engaged in a vivisection of evil and the search for ways to cope with human inertia in an authoritarian state. And like her, they had wise eyes and bad teeth.

The distinctively cultural underbelly of the *Solidarność* revolution was both its strength and weakness. It was its strength because a group of cultural creatives managed to unite the nation around a resonant image of a moral community that aspired to incarnate the best traditions: pluralism, social solidarity and a novel, *dialogic* way to fight authoritarianism. But the emphasis on public engagement and dialogue as the answer to the oppositionist dilemma, "reform or revolution", did not presuppose any political or institutional arrangements. It was more a civilizational objective concerned with restoring individual agency and dignity.[8]

There were other liabilities of the cultural revolution as envisioned by the humanist outliers. The values of their programme – such as freedom, tolerance, dialogue, trust and citizenship – were phantom concepts that had not yet lodged in social experience. True, the poets had sung about freedom in all octaves. But like many post-colonial countries, for most newly born democratic citizens in Poland, freedom was something that was *not* radiating from the inside. It came from the *outside* – the Communist Party, God, the Holy Virgin. Democracy was an abstraction, if only because its basis, social trust – especially trust in the state – was non-existent (Kornai et al. 2004). The Poles had lived in a police state longer than they had lived in democracy. The very concept of "socialism" – needed to create a social-democratic alternative to authoritarian rule – had been entirely compromised by the travesty of socialism in the years preceding and following the establishment of *Solidarność*. As Norman Davies observed, it was socialism with neither a human nor inhuman face; it was a socialism with no face at all (Davies 1986: 316). The *Theatrum Nuptialis* concluded with the declaration of Martial Law on the feral day of 13 December 1981. It was not merely perceived as an atrocious act of national betrayal. It brought relief to countless souls suffering from fear of freedom, post-revolutionary justice – or from their faltering courage.

There was but one bright spot in the tragic finale of the anti-authoritarian revolution suppressed by the communist generals on a cold December night in 1981. The peaceful character of *Solidarność* imparted some of its spirit to the military dictatorship of 1982–1983. The latter was rather "half-hearted" by comparison with acts of gratuitous violence unleashed in other authoritarian countries such as Afghanistan or El Salvador. There were no systematic purges, and, with few exceptions, no bestial physical cruelty to speak of. Similarly, oppositional terrorism and sabotage were never made into a patriotic imperative, even with the opposition's abundant access to industrial dynamite and technical expertise. One is tempted to ascribe this non-violent stance to the teachings of the Church, but it may well be that the general humanist, dignity-ridden programme of Solidarity was also a contributing factor to a relatively peaceful and feeble character of the authoritarian repressions after the defeat of *Solidarność* in December 1981.

The clash of mythologies

Every positive social transformation in the formerly authoritarian state has its doppelgänger: even if victorious, it is haunted by the spectre of indigenous tyranny or mimicking the former alien rule. Poland is no exception. As I have argued, already in the second half of 1981, the original revolution of dignity, based on cooperation and compassion, became eclipsed by its dark companion. In *Takie czasy*, Michnik talks about many of his KOR colleagues feeling hurt and robbed of their pivotal role in the creation of *Solidarność*:

> *Korowcy* … waited for some words of recognition of their efforts. This was very human. But the leaders of the August strikes … and their advisors did not always feel like admitting their affinity with a group which was the object of attacks from official [communist] propaganda.
>
> (Michnik 1985: 24)

Three months before the Martial Law, on 28 September 1981, at the *Solidarność* Congress, there had been a resolution put forward by the Radom region to officially thank KOR for their "contribution to the anti-totalitarian struggle". But during the night, a counter-resolution appeared – one that deleted KOR's name and emphasized the role of the Pope and the Catholic Church. KOR's founding father, Jan Józef Lipski, who suffered a heart attack as a result of his shock, summed up his immediate reaction as follows: "During all [the] years of my struggle I never broke down. But this is beyond my endurance. I can't bear the atmosphere of hatred and cunning, I can't bear [the] hypocrisy … of those whom I considered, if not friends, at least my comrades in the common struggle". The *faux pas* was amended, but the nuptial bliss was clearly over, and mutual resentment clouded Solidarność' original ecumenical spirit.

The cultural script of *Solidarność* trajectory conforms, to some extent, to Crane Brinton's view of revolution as beginning with the dominance of moderates, reaching a social honeymoon and ending with being taken over by the "radicals" (Brinton 1965). But in his reading Brinton is rather unkind to the moderates, whose failure, he argues, is not so much a tragedy as their own fault, since they either lack the courage of their convictions or they fight for hegemony (Brinton 1965: 9). This sounds simplistic. The lower, selfish level of revolutionary architecture winning over the higher, altruistic one, can be explained by a number of psychological, social and political factors. The legacy of the authoritarian self does not evaporate with the weakening of authoritarian rule; the old varnish of tyranny lives on in the hearts and minds of the newly liberated citizens. Central to the immature, anti-authoritarian Self is the fear of individual freedom and responsibility, anxieties which make it susceptible to strong, radical demagogues rather than people of measure. Even more significant is the resurgence of the mythology of national *Gemeinschaft*, which promises to recover order and security by drawing boundaries between those who belong and those who do not. In the case of Poland, the national community followed a carnival logic: at the apex of festive

Solidarity all sides were equal. After the carnival, the revolutionary community returned to its former pieties: nationalism, Catholic dogma and hostility towards the Other.

But there were two other cultural tensions at work which complicated the Polish dialogic utopia. The first had to do with what Julien Benda called "The betrayal of the clerks" (1927). Benda argues that the clerks – a class of critical, free-thinking intellectuals – have been both challenged and weakened by modernity's nationalist aspirations. Submitted to a constant pressure to stay attuned to the needs of *demos* and *patria*, and accused of orchestrating social maladies – real and imaginary – many clerks succumb to being "assimilated", that is to say, to betraying their cosmopolitan altruism (Benda 2002: 50) Benda describes their predicament in terms of a virtual Catch 22: they are losers when they describe themselves as the defenders of universal individual rights, and double losers when they define themselves as defenders of a particular class or nationalist interests. If they have material claims, they deserve the contempt of ordinary people for being manipulative; if they are too cosmopolitan, they are automatically excluded from the warm circle of the national community. "The clerk is strong only if he announces that his kingdom is not of this world", Benda ironically concludes (Benda 2002: 59).

The humanist outliers who imagined *Solidarność* were "not of this world". They dreamt of a free Poland with a European identity that did not yet exist. By contrast, most of *Solidarność*' rank and file aspired to reclaim a distinctly Polish, national identity, nourished by the cult of the Holy Madonna and a long list of wrongs and grievances that had been pushed into the catacombs during the communist time. In the agon of these two reborn Polands – one parochially triumphant and the other cosmopolitan and European – the cosmopolitans, however patriotic, had little chance of winning the struggle for the national soul. A remark of Zbigniew Romaszewski, the former KOR member, is revealing: "the intelligentsia around Michnik and Kuroń, was launching Europeanism too early and too brutally, before rebuilding Poland". This, Romaszewski adds, could be explained by the fact that, as mostly Jews and former Marxists, "[T]hey had internationalism in their blood" (Skwieciński and Romaszewscy 2014: 400).

The second tension disrupting a dialogue both *within* and *between* the oppositional groups had to do with the very nature – and limitations – of social solidarity. In his study of human collaborative efforts, *Together: The Rituals, Pleasures and Politics of Cooperation* (2012), Richard Sennett questions the ambiguous attractions of solidarity. For Sennett, very much as for Hannah Arendt, the concept of solidarity too often appears in an 'us-against-them' form which figures in exclusionary – fundamentalist or ethnocentric – social movements (Sennett: 287). Even social solidarity, which has been the Left's traditional response to the evils of capitalism, all too often sustains and reinforces a Manichean outlook. Sennett juxtaposes this exclusionary type of solidarity with a more inclusive, but demanding *cooperation*, which, to be effective, is more about transcending a particularist mindset. This is one reason why cooperation has "rarely figured as a strategy for resistance" (Sennet 2012: 287).

Sennett's analytical distinction between solidarity and cooperation gives us pause. For if we return to my analysis of the small groups' success in crafting a sustained anti-authoritarian front between 1976 and 1981, we see that much of this success was due to their talent for social cooperation: the ability to unite the nation not so much *against* the common enemy and more around a constructive project of building an inclusive, parallel society. Paradoxically, the very name of the movement they helped to create signalled a polarizing, "friend–foe" approach. As it matured and diversified, the originally pluralist *Solidarność* became less hospitable to outsiders and "infidels". In the autumn of 1981, the national nuptials cracked: factionalism blossomed, disruptive, self-serving behaviour became common, and the motif of "repressive unity" became more pronounced.

The *derailment* of the *Solidarność* revolution, to use Patrice Higonnet's concept (Higonnet 1998: 21) was, I would argue, deepened by a profound and unresolved conflict between the schismatic mythology of the community of authoritarian victims, and the cooperative ideal of the community of citizens. The layers of the collective memory that resurfaced in 1981 included Catholic identity, the memory of national martyrs, the myth of national sacrifice, and the heroic deeds of patriotic ancestors. These motifs were mixed with vague memories of Poland's past imperial greatness, a code of military honour, and a sense of preserving Christian values against the barbarities of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany.

The revolutionary semiosphere – a museum of past and present images, myths, dreams and frustrations – is too complex to ever be completely deciphered. But its main "exhibits" constitute the moral loci of lost *national/tribal* dignity that humanism – with its focus on the free, autonomous individual – is unable to provide. There was then, not one, but at least two revolutions of dignity informing the 1980–81 upheaval, and again with the democratic transformation in 1989. As argued earlier, the humanist outliers were the boundary species, intent on building a dialogic, *transcendent identity*, one that would be embedded in national history, but would point towards the inclusive, pluralist commons yet to be created. However, as the history of 21st-century Europe shows, such a humanism – or rather such a transcultural humanism – is a project that remains to be completed, not just in Poland, but in the world at large. The project of forging such humanism is less perhaps less dependent on ever new political and sociological insights, and more on the mobilization of mythogneic elites and cultural creatives. As I have argued, what is fascinating about Solidarity's narrative is how much it copied the revolutionary scenario prefigured in Polish *literary weddings*: starting with nuptial festivities and ending in bitter acrimony, squabbles and divorce. It has been argued that morphing of *Solidarność* into an intolerant, sectarian movement was inevitable: "[T]his divorce had to happen, the more so that [the parties] married one another not out of love but out of necessity" (cited by Bertram 2015). Even the metamorphosis of the nuptial protagonists from freedom fighters to authoritarians – foreshadowed in the plays by Gombrowicz and Mrożek – points once again to a "higher wisdom" hidden in the literary tradition that is often surprisingly more accurate than the whole library of socio-economic prognoses.

The defeat of Solidarity?

At the end of the 20th century, "dialogue" became one of the most fetishized concepts in the world. Politicians, NGOs, UNESCO and academic managers of diversity started repeating it as a mantra and the model of *Idealpolitik* (Ash 2004). Unlike the "clash of civilizations" (Huntington 1996) – a trope which codifies the gut feelings and ethnic prejudices of an ordinary taxi driver – dialogue has been promoted as a visionary recipe for a future "New Deal" in the enlightened global ecumene. Those who devote their lives to fighting global inequality reason that there will be no security or stability in the world until a more just democratic order is established, naturally through dialogic means. Sociologists have thrown themselves into a conceptual frenzy. Anthony Giddens has proposed a "dialogic democracy": a concept which designates the reconstruction of social solidarity and a furthering of cultural cosmopolitanism (Giddens 1994: 122–113.) Zygmunt Bauman has theorized about a "dialogic sociology" which challenges the mechanistic view of social forces (Bauman 1992: 85–86) Feminists have launched a gender discourse based on Bakhtinian polyphony and a "state of decentering" in which a "number of voices, "social, national, semantic" and gendered will speak simultaneously" (Holme and Wussow: 1993: vii).

The question remains: is the dialogic ideal hazard-free?

On the surface of things, the Round Table Agreement – signed by the Solidarity leadership with the members of the Communist Party in the spring of 1989 – was the crowning achievement of the humanist outliers' dialogic mindset and strategy. The ethos of compromise – a bulwark against authoritarian temptation – seemed to have won. But there was a hitch. The basis of the opposition's dialogue with the former authoritarian rulers was the Christian principle of "charity before justice". While settling accounts with the communist generals and apparatchiks, Michnik – now a powerful editor of the greatest national daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* – made a spectacle of forgiving his former bullies. When advancing his programme – "Amnesty – yes, amnesia – no!" – he quoted Arendt:

> Without being forgiven, released from the consequences of what we have done, our capacity to act would … be confined to one single deed from which we could never recover; we would remain the victims of its consequences forever.[9]

To Michnik, the Round Table at which the opposition talked to the communists was Poland's greatest achievement: it "signified a willingness to transform what had been a policeman's monologue into a political dialogue" (Michnik 1998: 17). Persecuting his former oppressors, he insisted, "would mean that these people will never grow up … that, being the victims of my fanaticism, they'll be locked in the ghetto of the damned in which there's no point to become better" (Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski 1994: 117).

But whatever brilliant justification he conjured, his new nuptials – this time with the former communist apparatchiks – were perceived by many as treasonous and attesting to the funeral of the ideals of *Solidarność*. After years of life in the communist

shackles, the national community expected a moral purge, a rite of symbolic passage from the Age of Darkness to the Age of Light. But in Adam Michnik's democracy, the Poles were not allowed to beat one another with their red and white flags. "Democracy" – he insisted in one of his programmatic essays – "is grey" (Michnik 2005:251–263). As an admirer of the post-Franco Spanish model, he was at great pains to prove that the democratic transformation could be brought about without too radical a rupture with the past, including the authoritarian past. This seamless transition was part of the humanist outliers' dialogic ethos from the beginning, and there is little doubt that it contributed to the self-limiting, bloodless character of the Polish revolution. However, from the perspective of the retrospective history of the victims of transition, sitting with the communists at the Round Table in 1989 – and then making them into partners in the post-communist Poland – was an act of moral transgression.

Myth is a non-material thing. It cannot be crushed with tanks, shot or locked up in prison. These actions do not harm the myth; on the contrary, they often make it more potent. One can destroy a myth only by creating a situation which activates a powerful counter-myth, one which talks about the feeling of disenchantment and deception and looks for a scapegoat. The apostles of the myth of Solidarity promised a *more dignified life* for all members of the national community. Such a promise the newly elected democratic rulers were not able to deliver. To add insult to injury, they colluded both with the former communists and with the proponents of tough, neoliberal policy which threw many people overboard. For some, the trauma of the "great transformation" was like hopping from a jumping board down into a pool without water (Modzelewski 2016: 387). For many, this was the ultimate funeral of Solidarity both as a movement and as a myth. Moreover, it was one of the most protracted funerals in the history of Poland, one which seems to have lasted since 1989 until the very moment this book is written. The year 1989 marked a mythological bifurcation: the story of the struggle for a tolerant, European Poland parted ways with the story of heroic Poland that suffered in vain, once again cheated and wronged by its internal and external enemies.

The mythical space, left unoccupied, even discounted by the modernizers as an atavistic irritant, was appropriated by the Church and the nationalist fractions. At the beginning of the 21st century, the sacrificial-schismatic mythology – preached from church pulpits, broadcast tirelessly by the xenophobic *Radio Maria*, and by democratically elected populist leaders promising a more Polish Poland – eclipsed the story of the nuptial march to the altar of ecumenical happiness.

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Each revolution is betrayed and defeated but some are more defeated than others. In the second decade of the 21st century, Poland witnessed a frantic re-assessment not just of the oppositional legacy but of Solidarity's achievement *in toto*. From being regarded as one of the most impressive anti-authoritarian revolutions of modern times, *Solidarność* has become increasingly associated with a dreadful miscalculation on the part of irresponsible intellectual elites who pushed Poland into

the embrace of predatory capitalism. Strikingly, such perceptions have featured in many sophisticated scholarly analyses. A crop of gloomy diagnoses – refined and corroborated by studies such as Zdzisław Krasnodębski's, *Democracy at the Periphery* (2003) and David Ost's *The Defeat of Solidarność* (2005), have accused members of the former opposition of "class sublimation and a struggle for hegemony", or ostracized them for alienating the working class by exaggerating ostensible Polish xenophobia and nationalism. The result is that, in the second decade of the 21st century, it is not uncommon to encounter references to Solidarity as the "greatest success of the [former] Polish communist party" (Jan Sowa), or interpretations of the independent trade unions in August 1980 as "the work of the secret police" (Andrzej Gwiazda).[10] Such comments signal a deep and understandable disenchantment. But they also reveal the national propensity for masochism, self-hatred, even academic obscurantism. As Jan Józef Lipski, the founder of KOR remarked: "Just be careful not to create anything immortal. Think how many people will have to sacrifice their lives to destroy it".

What is interesting is that there are many passages in the humanist outliers' writings which reveal a tragic knowledge of ultimate defeat inscribed in the vision of forging a humanist, European Poland. According to Michnik, such a vision would involve carrying within yourself an acceptance

> that you'll be an object of slander, that the bad tongues will accuse you of contempt for your nation and betrayal of national values. In other words, if you want to be faithful to the truth and sceptical towards the herd, you'll have to inscribe your fate into a vision which includes a sentence for outraging your fellow brothers. Like Socrates.
>
> (Michnik 1995: 289)

As I have argued, the founding fathers of democratic Poland attempted a daring experiment: they tried to put the brakes on nationalist aspirations and forge a meme of a dialogic, "self-limiting revolution".[11] The advocacy and maintenance of this revolution was clearly a Titanic, if not impossible, task. On the positive side, there is good reason to believe that it is partly thanks to the dialogic ethos that the Polish transition to democracy took place without bloodshed or witch hunts, without an explosion of hatred towards the communists, Russians or Germans, or indeed without the revival of ancient nationalist claims vis-à-vis Lithuania or Ukraine. Secondly, the new democracy is not just a function of respect for the law and institutions; at a cultural level it is the result of a strong humanist legacy which, for all its liabilities, has become entrenched, and equipped with a "survival toolkit" that keeps defying the forces of populist fundamentalism to this very day.

On the other hand, however, the Polish revolution, as envisioned by the humanist outliers shows the limits of dialogue: its inability to address past wrongs and balance charity with justice. Poland did not have "truth commissions" in the aftermath of 1989. According to many former dissidents, such commissions would have inflamed real and imaginary wounds in a country where practically everybody was forced into being an open or secret participant in communist ignominy. The

scale of communist crimes and misdemeanours was not comparable with the savagery of South African apartheid (Antohi and Tismăneanu 2000: 94). But to many former victims of communist ignominy, having to watch the perpetrators of lies and oppression reinvent themselves as new political celebrities – now self-confident and progressive, and dressed in Armani suits – fuelled resentment towards – and assaults on – the advocates of the politics of social reconciliation.

In the 21st century the myth of *Solidarność* remains a seismic zone. Ideally, it should have been a positive, uniting story in an increasingly unsolidary and illiberal Europe. That it has not become such story is unfortunate. For, in many respects, *Solidarność* remains one of the most extraordinary mobilizations of the anti-authoritarian spirit in European history: a blueprint for the Autumn of the Nations whose fundament was a Christian-Kantian Europe. Even Slavoj Žižek, an expert in unmasking political crimes and contradictions, restrains his antics when speaking of the Polish upheaval: "It would be interesting to read anew the initial programme of Solidarity", he writes, and adds:

> I think that the fight for this legacy is a principal matter, otherwise – if the dream of a collective solidarity disappears – we will be living in a frightening society where market rivalry will coexist with a new kind of tribalism. We – the post-communist societies … have a mission to invent a new form of social life which would be capable of avoiding old traps. Perhaps we are even able to save humanity?
>
> (Žižek 2005)

Whether Central European condottieri under the valiant command of General Žižek will save humanity or not, the dialogic ethos and the humanist legacy will hopefully keep the revolution of dignity afloat in Eastern Europe. After all, as Arendt herself said: "The good things in history are usually of very short duration, but afterward have a decisive influence on what happens over long periods of time" (Arendt 1972: 204).

Notes

1 https://www.civilwar.org/learn/articles/american-revolution-faqs; see also https://www.google.no/search?hl=en&q=how+many+people+died+in+french+revolution&meta=&gws_rd=ssl. Accessed 3 August 2018.

2 The programmatic text of the TKN "Why Tradition?" [Dlaczego tradycja?] was published on 10 October 1978. http://liberte.pl/deklaracja-zalozycielska-towarzystwa-kursow-naukowych-z-22-stycznia-1978/. Accessed 3 August 2018

3 The concluding lines in *Pan Taduesz* run: *Kochajmy się* ["Let's love one another"]. See *Pan Tadeusz, czyli ostatni zajazd na Litwie. Historia szlachecka z roku 1811 i 1812 we dwunastu księgach wierszem*. For the English translation see *Sir Thaddeus, or the Last Lithuanian Foray: A Nobleman's Tale from the Years of 1811 and 1812 in Twelve Books of Verse*, trans. George Rapall Noyes (Berkeley: University of California, 1917).

4 Czesław Miłosz summed up the phantasmagoric plot of *Wedding* as consisting in "the growing expectation of some tremendous, extraordinary enemy which remains unnamed (An uprising? A miraculous recovery of the country's independence?) The

phantom of an eighteenth century wandering lyre-player and minstrel Werynhora (a purely legendary figure) gives a peasant lad a golden horn at the sound of which the 'spirit will be fortified; Fate will be accomplished'. …All those present are ordered to prepare themselves and strain their ears toward the road from Kraków. Yet the lad returns empty-handed; he has forgotten his mission and has lost the golden horn. The big event never comes; instead, the play closes with a dreamlike dance of Strawman that symbolizes the inertia of Polish society". See Czesław Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, 2nd ed. (London: Macmillan, 1978), 356.

5 Personal communication, Warszawa, 1992.

6 The monument featured another quotation from Miłosz: "You who have wronged a simple man/Bursting into laughter at the crime/Do not feel safe. The poet remembers/You can slay one, but another is born/The words are written down, the deed, the date". Czesław Miłosz, "You who Wronged", *New and Collected Poems 1931–2001* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 103.

7 On the night of 4 to 5 December 1981, there was a meeting of the leaders of the Warsaw Pact. The plan was to start the Soyuz 80 military manoeuvres involving the arrival in Poland of 14 divisions of the Soviet Army and 2 East German divisions. They were supposed to surround all big cities and industrial centres. The plan was known to CIA via the secret CIA agent Ryszard Kukliński. However, as a result of a telephone exchange between Brezhnev and Carter on 3 December, the Russians accepted the idea that the Poles would solve their problem internally.

8 At the *Solidarność* Congress in September 1981, the moral argument came up several times, perhaps most succinctly in the programmatic resolution, "Who We Are and What We Want". The text ran: "We are brought together in the protest against injustice, abuses of power, and the Party monopolization of the right to define and express the aspirations of the whole nation". See http://www.bolshevik.org/Pamphlets/Solidarność/Solidarność_appendix.html Accessed 18 February 1918.

9 According to Arendt, forgiving is the act of promise; it enables us to come to terms with the past and liberates us to some extent from the burden of irreversibility; promising allows us to face the future and to set some bounds to its unpredictability. See Hannah Arendt, *Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 237. See Adam Michnik, "Jakiego prezydenta Polska potrzebuje", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16–17 September 1995, 6.

10 For a summary and discussion of the surreal interpretations of the era of *Solidarność* both by the former heroes (Andrzej Gwiazda) and the young generation (Jan Sowa) see Jan Skórzyński, "Solidarność. Tak było". [Solidarność. That's how it was.] *Gazeta Wyborcza* 6 June 2015. Online version: http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,124059,18055424,_Solidarność___Tak_bylo.html Accessed 14 January 2018.

11 The term was codified in an academic work by Jadwiga Staniszkis in *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

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5 The power of the hinterland

The tragedy of anti-authoritarian clerks

In 1990, Jacek Kuroń, the newly made Minister of Labour and Social Policy, experienced one of the most disturbing episodes in his life as a national hero. As Poland moved to what was cynically called "paleo-capitalism", Kuroń became obsessed with the idea of building a "market with a human face" and helping the poor and desperate. He returned to his old project of creating a self-help society, and guaranteed state subsidies to people who would make and donate soup for the victims of transformation. Soon, *Kuroniówkas* (or "Kuroń's soups"), became the talk of the country. But one fateful day, when he was inspecting the feeding stations, he was confronted by a furious woman: "Get lost! You are only humiliating us with your silly soups!"

Kuroń went speechless. "She shot me in the heart", he said.

> Her reaction captured so well a sense of debasement which accompanied the politics I was proposing! But how to prevent the poor from being reduced to humiliated clients of the state? Shouldn't we first fight inequality and then maximally widen the participation of society in political processes?[1]

Humiliation was the key word. Post-authoritarian Poland was resplendent with freedoms, but also new kinds of desolation yielded by freedoms: unemployment, brutal competition, inequality. Fighting inequality needed investment, and Poland in 1993 was a thoroughly destitute post-Soviet state. The soup episode symbolized the gap between the noble aspirations of the former democratic opposition and their inability to deliver instant economic improvements and social services. It illustrated the post-revolutionary indignities suffered by the victims of authoritarianism everywhere – people who lost their former security and rights, even if the latter had been acquired at the price of bondage. The angry soup-eater yelling at Kuroń was, in fact, yelling at all the dreamers of democratic dreams. After the revolution won, humanist outliers were no longer seen as a bunch of colourful bravados; increasingly, they became identified as a new version of the old communist *Oni* ("They").

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The broad social participation in politics that Kuroń dreamed about was hardly feasible for one simple reason: it required a modicum of trust in the state. This indispensable "hormone" of democracy was completely missing in a country where the government had been traditionally associated with lies, lawlessness and oppression. As János Kornai has convincingly argued, in post-Soviet conditions, the legacy of the anti-state *us vs them* mentality was a strong social cement. That is to say, in the 1990s, most Poles inhabited a world where "cheating the state did not count as dishonest conduct but as a sensible response – even an act of courage – with regard to what has been perceived [as an] oppressive, corrupt force" (Kornai 2004). Those founding fathers of the revolution who became part of the new state apparatus were natural victims of a general mistrust and suspicion of political elites, especially in the situation where they could neither promise nor deliver a miracle. The situation resembled the scenario of Henrik Ibsen's *Brand*: an idealistic, charismatic preacher who sacrifices his personal life to build a "church without limits" and relieve people of mental thraldom, is hunted down by his congregation when he fails to deliver more than purely spiritual goods.

The growing public resentment of the humanist fathers of democratic Poland was as conspicuous as the elevation of its evangelizing demagogues. One of them was Father Jankowski, once a tribune of the people during *Solidarność*, and now a man who declared that "If Christ was alive he would also drive a Mercedes" (Narbutt 2004). Only 12 years earlier he had given the legendary mass to the striking Gdansk workers. There were even rumours that he had refused to eat breakfast because "the gun shots would heal much quicker on an empty stomach" (Narbutt 2004: A9). In 1993, Father Jankowski was one of the ten richest Poles – he drove expensive cars and wore golden chasubles and crocodile shoes. Though a generous protector of the poor and the needy, he was also a vocal anti-Semite. There was an aura of a modern imam about him: charity and bigotry went hand in hand. "I say aloud what the nation secretly thinks", he insisted. And he was proud to be nominated by *Solidarność* – i.e. by himself – as a Nobel Peace Prize candidate "for his nonviolent struggle against communism and predatory capitalism" (Narbutt 2004).

The situation was emblematic. In post-Solidarity Poland, Father Jankowski held sway over adoring crowds, while Kuroń failed to feed and appease the ever more resentful electorate. Perhaps the former "Players" did not play their new democratic game well enough. Perhaps they should have fought more vigorously for smarter and gentler economic strategies for bringing Poland into Europe. Perhaps, as has been argued, they did not sufficiently appreciate the importance and mobilizing the power of national symbols and religious tradition.[2] Perhaps the situation was a Catch 22: in order to prosper, Poland needed trust and welfare which did not exist, but in order to forge trust and welfare, Poland needed a modicum of prosperity which did not exist either. Or perhaps the former humanist outliers were confronted with Renan's paradox: "The Motherland is an earthly affair. Whoever wants to be an angel will always be a bad patriot" (cited in Benda 2002: 50).

Crane Brinton in his classical *Anatomy of Revolution* speaks of the endemic tendency of revolutions to turn in a populist direction (Brinton 1965: 148–198). There seems to be a "Gresham's law" of cultural evolution at work here, where the oversimplified displaces the sophisticated, and the exclusive and the selfish eclipses the inclusive and altruist. Interestingly, the degree of corrosion seems proportional to the initial promise: the more the revolutionary radicals aspire to transcend all problems once and for all, the greater the subsequent derailment.

Post-revolutionary "regression" – understood not just as economic relapse, but as a civic and moral decline – is an intriguing topic. Edward Shils, who considered the imbuing of revolutionary movements with their guiding doctrines as one of intellectuals' most important accomplishments (Shils 1972: 9), did not problematize the translation of high-minded ideas and lofty visions to, and by, the masses. And Crane Brinton, who provided an insightful analysis of the elbowing out of the moderates from revolutions, did not discuss the complex relationship between the progenitors of democratic projects and the ever vocal and resentful "Hinterland". I wish to illuminate this relationship by looking closer at the dynamics of the mutual disappointment of the "bridegroom and the bride" in the years following the Polish nuptial revolution. I also hope to problematize some of the popular clichés about the sources and nature of the populist backlash in response to both the 1989 transformation, and to the multiple European crises of the 21st century.

Let us, then, re-construct the odyssey of the disillusionment. As I argued in the previous chapter, the revolutionary patricide was already underway in the second phase of *Solidarność* (dating back to 1981), when various commentators – and competing *Solidarność* leaders – developed a penchant for calling KOR a "Warsaw salon", or "pink hyenas", forgetting that they were talking about the people who used to carry a toothbrush, towel and spare pair of underwear in anticipation of their potential arrest. After 1989, such declarations, initially subdued, became ever more resonant. The "Warsaw salon" discourse grew in power in the years that followed. In June 1996, on the twentieth anniversary of the communist repression of the 1976 strike in Ursus (the factory whose arrested workers had been once helped by the altruist Players), the ugliness of the derailed revolution was on display for all to see. At a grand celebration involving the Polish Primate and representatives of all political parties – all bathing in banners and flowers – the leader of the Ursus branch of *Solidarność*, Zygmunt Wrzodak declared:

> The pink political hyenas from KOR, free-riding on the workers, the Church and the Motherland, had only one aim: to grab power, using the workers as their tool. Kuroń, Michnik and comrades, in their zoological hatred of Polishness, cynically played out our misfortune, blood and innocence. Their help was a Pharisee's attempt to buy themselves into our Polish, Catholic, working class environment. They did all this in order to strike an agreement – behind our backs – with their ideological kinsmen, the communists.
>
> (Domosławski 2001:17)

Thus spoke the Hinterland.

Whipping the Hinterland

The German concept of *Hinterland* – referring to "the land behind", backcountry or countryside – was allegedly first used in 1888 by George Chisholm in his *Handbook of Commercial Geography* (Chisholm: 1908). But the phenomenon of Hinterland alludes not just to the "land behind", but also the "mind behind". Such a mind is born of fear and uncertainty, which are assuaged by turning to religious dogmas and exhuming national traditions which offer shelter against a hostile world. In a certain sense, Hinterland is an intriguing evolutionary relic; a re-growth of narratives and sentiments that Enlightenment philosophers thought would be severed by modern ideas. Popper deplored it and talked about a "retribalization which "threatens the force of reason, criticism and personal responsibility in situations of crisis" (Popper 1950: 195). But Hinterland is not simply a regression: it points towards the potency of human sentiments and an emotional response to change which cannot be banished by social engineering or education alone. As such, it must be understood as an enduring reaction to modernity's hubris. Democracy is cold; bureaucracy is impersonal and humiliating; the modernizers tend to ignore deep human attachments and allegiances. Feeling surrounded by dangerous, incomprehensible forces and menaced by an uncertain future, the Hinterland begins to take solace in a world where emotional security is guaranteed and the outsiders have no entrance. This world – often invoked by religious leaders – restores *nomos*, the sacred power of the tribe.

The Polish Hinterland – anchored in strong nationalist-Catholic traditions – has been traditionally a source of – interchangeably – exasperation, despair and bad conscience among the Polish intelligentsia.[3] The best and the brightest veered between defiance, fascination and virtual masochism when describing the "mind behind". The poet Aleksander Wat, in his conversations with Czesław Miłosz, claimed that at the core of the Polish nation lay not rebellion but "mass Catholicism, this parochial, obscurantist, and often squalid force which got purged and more profound in the catacombs. It made the national soul impermeable to the magic of ideology" (Wat 1988: 48).

Witold Gombrowicz was simultaneously spellbound and repelled by the natural robustness, feeble-mindedness and brutality of the rabble. He thundered from Argentina:

> We have been terrified to discover that we are surrounded by an ocean of dark minds who kidnap our truths in order to deform then, diminish them, turn them into tools of their passions; and we discovered that the quantity of these people is more decisive than the quality of our truths … Poland is a grim dream of a madman! This darkness, stuffiness, uncertainty and boredom … I'm so amused by this new Polsha, because, between us, we are stamped by the Sas epoch. The nation is dark, Endek, boorish, rebellious, haughty and half-cooked … and the Kremlin's communism has been grafted upon it.
>
> (Gombrowicz 1973: 34, 42)

Czesław Miłosz especially offers a whole diapason of conflicting – often blasphemous – perceptions of the Poles *en masse*:

> Rapacious Poland scares me … How to behave if you are gripped by it and yet [have] to remain reasonable, sober, peaceful, and honest?
>
> (Miłosz 1991: 268)

> Something happened with me, mainly due to the brutal realization that I don't care for the past society, that I am indifferent to its messianic and patriotic incarnation.
>
> (Miłosz 1990: 259)

> If I am to be frank … I have a common language only with a demonic Pole, one that went through Marxism, atheism, and perhaps some other deviations, for example the nationalist or sexual ones, in his family.
>
> (Miłosz 1990: 63: 38)

> If I was given a means, I would explode this country, so that mothers would stop mourning those killed on the barricades … Because there is a species of pity which nobody can bear.
>
> (Miłosz 1990: 273)

What is intriguing about these perceptions is how "Occidentalist" they are; as if they were written by a prejudiced Voltaire or an Engels. Miłosz went as far as to admit that he was "allergic to Polishness", though he understood that "each civilization had its kitsch and schmaltz" (Miłosz 1990: 63).

The quoted assaults do not necessarily imply a lack of patriotism. More often than not, they testify to being "hurt" by Poland, in the same way Joyce was hurt by Ireland and Ibsen by Norway. Secondly, the brutal self-scrutiny, together with often quoted references to Polish xenophobia and anti-Semitism, certainly need nuancing. There have been, in fact, two, equally prominent strains in Polish culture: one exclusive, advancing nationalist-Catholic bigotry, and the other inclusive, highlighting tolerance and pluralism. The latter tradition goes back to the Renaissance and the so-called Warsaw Confederation of 1573, which yielded a pioneering codification of religious tolerance in Europe.[4] The next step in the progression to a precursory European humanist ethos was the Constitution of 3 May 1791. The Constitution introduced elements of political equality between townspeople and nobility, placed the peasants under the protection of the government, and, most importantly, offered freedom of religion to all citizens regardless of their ethnic or spiritual creed.[5] It would have certainly been interesting to speculate what kind of society might have emerged if the moral advance of the community of conscience had not been halted by the 1772–75 dismemberment of Poland and, later, by Soviet occupation between 1945 and 1989: A proto social democracy? A harbinger of a fair society prefiguring the later "Scandinavian model"? Or a bizarre mixture of a laboratory of the future and a folk-museum?

One thing is certain. The perverse logic of the communist regime – glorification of *lud pracujący* (working people) and their simultaneous oppression – complicated not just the humanist outliers' ambivalence about the labouring classes but effectively nourished the intelligentsia's gentle self-contempt. Henryk Elzenberg, one of the most eminent Polish writers and philosophers of the post-war period confessed: "It is terrifying to say it, but – in a certain over-refined sense – I feel less a slave with the invader [the Soviets] than with my own people" (Walicki 2000: 376).

Underlying such declarations is not just a frustration with the communist defilement of humanist aspirations. Well into the 1960s, part of the Polish intelligentsia (especially those living in exile), however horrified they were by the prospect of a communist future, argued that a non-communist Poland would be even worse. The September 1968 issue of the influential émigré journal *Kultura*, includes an essay criticizing Kuroń and Modzelewski's infamous "Letter to the Party" demanding free and democratic elections. Such elections, the anonymous author argues, would lead to an overwhelming victory of the forces of darkness and reaction. "The socialist system would be then replaced not by parliamentary democracy but a right-wing dictatorship and a fascistoid totalism".[6]

The rise of *Solidarność* temporarily suspended this brutal self-scrutiny, though the angst linked to the potential rise of the "atavistic mob" remained. In 1989 many former dissidents (especially those of Jewish extraction) were afraid of Polish integrism, which, in their eyes, would block what they considered the next phase of the transition to democracy and geo-political security: entering NATO and joining the EU. The spectre of the triumph of the theocratic, anti-Semitic and anti-European Hinterland haunted Michnik more than the idea of a Soviet backlash. He held that the "democratic postulate of civic freedoms which is transformed into a particularist slogan of the rights of Catholic community, leads – very much like the moral absolutism of the intellectual elites – to an "Iran syndrome" (Michnik 2005: 33).

To preempt the charge of sweeping generalizations I must reiterate that the *Solidarność* intelligentsia – very much like the Hinterland itself – was a highly diverse group. Some members of the intellectual opposition, like Leszek Moczulski, Antoni Macierewicz and Andrzej Czuma, claimed that they were more in tune with *lud* (people) than the Players. They tried in vain to "nationalize" KOR and make it more aware of sacrosanct traditions. Similarly, a number *Solidarity* leaders – of both intellectual and working-class provenance – were less former anti-communist heroes and more a motley collection of misfits, failures and adventurers for whom *Solidarność* offered a meaningful life project.

The Players were a species *sui generis*. On the one hand, they both preached and practised social altruism, and had helped the persecuted workers more than any other oppositional group. But, unlike the more nationally minded intelligentsia, they resisted a romantic belief in the wisdom and supreme moral value of the crowd. At one of Kuroń's lectures at the Flying University in the spring of 1981, we were shocked to hear a prediction that KOR was bound to temporarily lose the revolution to the "populist free-riders" – though in the long term the Players' ideas would prevail.[7]

The accurate reconstruction of the relationship between the humanist outliers and the Hinterland is a tricky heuristic challenge. To get out of the Polish orbit let

me cite Paulo Freire who, in theorizing his famous *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, insisted that the

> man or woman who proclaims devotion to the cause of liberation yet is unable to enter into *communion* with the people, whom he or she continues to regard as totally ignorant, is grievously self-deceived. The convert who approaches the people but feels alarm at each step they take, each doubt they express and each suggestion they offer, and attempts to impose his 'status', remains nostalgic toward his origins.
>
> (Freire 1998: 59).

According to those who think along Freire's lines, by condemning the intolerant nationalism of the Hinterland, the intellectuals risk distancing themselves from the people, fuelling social resentment, and thus creating – even exacerbating – populism and racism.[8] While conceding that Freire has a point, I find this diagnosis problematic for three reasons. Firstly, it posits the role of the intellectual elites as the "doctors of the national soul" rather than votaries of inconvenient truths. Secondly, class solidarity in the fight against the common enemy is not the same as being cosy with the people during the process of painful modernization. While the latter must involve a social dialogue, courting the people cannot become an end in itself and blunt the edge of necessary legal and institutional reform. As Michnik pointed out:

> If you finally arrive in the Poland of your dreams, you have to defend her and protect her against demagogy, stupidity, irresponsibility, and anarchy … [n]ot let yourself be pushed into extremist positions. You have to use peaceful means in building relations between people and neighbors. You have to keep the course to the West. I subordinated everything to this aim.
>
> (Michnik 2005: 33)

Last but not least, the concept of the class communion couched by Freire gestures towards a lyrical socialist belief that one can cure a fanatic. Such a belief implies that if Michnik and his *Gazeta Wyborcza* had not scolded those who wanted to rid Poland of "Jewish contamination", there would be no populism in Poland.

There is actually something both distressing and energizing about the humanist outliers' efforts to resist the temptation of being "popular" and court the ordinary man in the street. What is distressing is their despair with the amnesiac ingratitude of people whom they had once defended and risked lives for, and their ultimate fate, which often resembled that of missionaries devoured by lions. What is energizing is their staunch defence of the beauty of humanism – a realm defined by Benda as "not of this world" (see previous chapter).

Homo sacer vs *Homo humanistus*

The study of the voices of the oppressed calls for a nuanced approach that avoids the pitfalls and clichés both of postcolonial studies and Marxist *good people vs bad elites*

theorizing. Further, being the domain of psycho-history, the exploration of the dynamic relationship between the humanist outliers and the Hinterland remains forever an inconclusive, partial account. Similarly, the transition from the closed to the open society – in the eyes of Popper "one of the deepest revolutions through which mankind has passed" (Popper: 1950: 175) – is often less a revolution and more a punctuated *evolution*. It abounds in advances and regressions and hence is often difficult to make sense of without a telescopic approach, navigating between past, present and future.

On the surface of things, the Hinterland's ruling ideology is populism: the celebration of the people, of the unpolitical, the heartland, which thrives on perceptions of politics as corrupt, elites as treacherous and strangers as a mortal threat. I write "on the surface of things", because, as I will show below, we need to take into account the latest research that reveals that the concept of populism may be a misnomer. The Hinterland has a complex makeup. On the one hand, it yearns for a muscular leader who will restore the dignity and self-esteem of the collective. But it can also be leaderless, erupting spontaneously in a frontal attack on the tyranny of cosmopolis. It embodies common sense and groundedness, but it can also be irrational and unpredictable. It is pregnant with ancient hatreds, wounds and allegiances which may both disturb the ruling order, but also stabilize the sense of rootedness and identity.

The awakening of the Hinterland is an amalgam of multiple, political, economic and cultural forces. Most social scientists talk about the accelerated and brutal socio-economic transformation which leads to the existential destabilization of thousands of people and the emergence of the Agamben's *homo sacer* (Agamben 1995): a superfluous and "redundant" man and woman, a lame consumer, a new Untermensch without hope and perspective. The economic trauma that comes with increased unemployment, social inequality or, most recently, "Euro-tyranny", leads to the loss of faith in mainstream moral frameworks and a frantic search for restoring the sense of security and community. Some of the humanist outliers, like Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, were deeply aware of the shattering anti-climax following the carnival of *Solidarność*. As Karol Modzelewski put it: "I didn't sit for years in prison for capitalism" (Modzelewski 2016: 394).

Yet another reason behind the inflamed Hinterland is the very nature of democracy. As has been observed by Wiktor Osiatyński, in the legal and constitutional culture of democracy, "there are no safeguards that protect human symbols and human dignity – dignity understood as something more than a contribution to economic growth or participation in elections. There are no safeguards against exclusion, not just by the state but by dominant market and social forces. True, penal and civic codes defend people's good name and private property. But without the will of the rulers and a strong culture of individual rights, binding legal principles are often useless" (Osiatyński 2017).

Social psychologists talk about the "crisis of agency" whose sources are feelings of frustration and inadequacy. Unlike the loyalty to the nation, which involves confidence and trust and which favours altruism, men and women who feel they are no longer in control of their life exhibit narcissistic features and "look to nationalism that makes them as good as everyone else – better even" (Bilewicz 2017).

But this is perhaps only half of the story. Consider the press photo of an Egyptian woman in hijab who, with tears of desperation in her eyes, chained herself to a fence, ready to die for the ousted President Morsi. This manifestation of the Hinterland signals less a narcissistic pageant and more a readiness for self-immolation for the exalted leader. If we look at the woman with modern eyes, we cannot fail to notice that, through her support for a religious fanatic leader, she chooses to deny her daughter and granddaughter the right to self-realization as full human beings. Her devotion to the old ways and her hatred of the new ways is the triumph of unfreedom. When seen in this perspective, Hinterland is *not* the expression of the narcissistic self; it is more, to use James Joyce's metaphor, a triumph of the "gratefully oppressed".

The Hinterland becomes inflamed as a result of what Roger Griffin called "a nomic crisis": the loss of home, meaning, belonging, self-respect (Griffin 2012). And, since it involves an anti-corruption rectitude mixed with rage at the establishment, it is a potent moral force in the life of every homeless community. The sense of homelessness is exacerbated by the threat of strangers who are perceived as potentially "contaminating" national culture, religion and mores. Construing outsiders – whether from inside or outside the nation – as not so much enemies but *wrongdoers*, the Hinterland has the ability to ignite inhumanity. According to Adam Michnik, it is about the "wounds that grow with a coat of meanness" (Michnik 2003: 9).

But there is yet another source of the awakening of the Hinterland, one that has to do with the psychological makeup of post-authoritarian people. Sovietism in Poland was both about internal and external conquest, meaning that those who come after would have to learn "the difficult art of forgiving crimes". Post-revolutionary Poland was not resplendent with the virtues of *Solidarność*; it was a society which had been methodically infantilized by communist regimes, often ruled by imbeciles, and trained in a passive-aggressive stance vis-à-vis the outside world, rather than in a pro-active or positive enterprise. Far from creating a new socialist man, free of egotism and greed, communism had actually bred atomized, amoral cynics good at doublethink and "working the system". The post-authoritarian Poles – those "baboos of Eastern Europe" – have many similarities with the postcolonial Indians or Algerians scrutinized by Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi.

That said, outside "inventions" of countries with a strong Hinterland are bound to intensify the latter's toxicity. The dominant external stereotypes of Poland highlighting *Polnische Wirtschaft*, Polish Parliament, the country of slaving plumbers or strawberry pickers, or – to go further back in history – "Europe's rheumatism" (Aristide Briand), "Europe's headache" (Roosevelt) or the "White Orient" (Larry Wolff 1994), signal a continuity of the dominant experience of humiliation of a once great nation. The responses to these largely negative external perceptions range from an assimilated, learned incapacity (thus reinforcing the "truth" of negative stereotypes), to rage and defiance, including the break-up of international diplomatic protocol. But they also lead to increased self-hatred, masochism and divisiveness. As Adam Michnik put it, "Defining the Solidarity revolution and its protagonists through the Secret Service archives is for some a

heroic deed and for others a grenade thrown into a septic tank: some will get killed some will be hurt, but surely everyone will stink like hell" (Michnik 2011: 35). In the self-hating community, the practice of fomenting, inciting, slandering, riling, mud-slinging becomes the norm. The 21st-century literary masterpieces exemplifying this trend, such as Kuczok's *Gnój* (Muck 2013), portray people who "have their roots and their branches" but are hollow inside and hide themselves in that hollowness. Muck concludes with a telling appeal "May the fucking lightning strike and burn it all over".

The heightened virility of the Hinterland in the 21st century has been undoubtedly assisted by the advent of the Internet. Interestingly, in the age of Facebook, the nomic crisis is not the result of being groomed or indoctrinated by higher powers. Rather, it is elevated by virtual echo-chambers which fuel disenchantment with the political process, a sense of being voiceless, and a cultural despair that neither mainstream political parties nor social institutions seem able to comprehend. The Facebook effect is dual: on the one hand it generates electorates that are more critical of – and less deferential towards – traditional elites, although not necessarily better informed. On the other, voters became more convinced that elected officials or forces outside their control – the EU, globalization, US policy, a "Jewish conspiracy" – are responsible for unpopular and degrading policies.

All these various framings of the power of the Hinterland, feature one leitmotif: the alleged wickedness of the intellectual and political elites. The toiling masses are "sick with their own innocence", as Czesław Miłosz put it, while the intelligentsia's sins are multiple: from being unable to imagine a pro-social political "third way" and collusion with former authoritarian oppressors in the transition to democracy, to the penchant for awfulizing about national obscurantism and bigotries. This being said, there are differences between the popular anti-intellectualism of the Polish Hinterland and the American Trumpland's contempt for the elites. For in the Polish case, public anger has been also directed at the people who – unlike the passive majority – actually fought and suffered for the democratic order. In contrast to the American elites – who have identified themselves with sweetness and light and demonized the Cyclopean "Other" largely from their armchairs – the former Eastern European oppositional intelligenstia have themselves been victims of social exclusion, stigma and brutalities. As Adam Michnik put it: "You experience frustration with your own virtue that is rejected by the democratic verdict of the majority" (Michnik 2003: 145). Here the masses' former anti-authoritarianism becomes a peculiar species of Bolshevism with an anti-communist face, while discontent with the deprivations of transition to democracy is sublimated into hatred of the groups that played a vital role in the creation of a free Poland. The Hinterland is a community that does not understand the courage of heroes – it needs to rationalize this courage, banalize it, throw it out of the reach of memory. The ongoing humiliation of the national democratic fighters – starting with the smear campaign against Lech Wałęsa and finishing with the denigration of people like Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik – is perhaps the most the tragic and painful part of the democratic rite of passage.

Matters are not helped by the fact that the founding fathers of the Polish democracy were, on the whole, against political purges – or the *lustracja* – designed to identify and punish former communist collaborators and confidents. Introduced by the first PIS government in 2005, *lustracja* was opposed by most founding fathers of Solidarność on account of the fact that "nobody was saintly in unsaintly times", and because it was likely to lead to a permanent witch hunt which would further deplete levels of trust in Polish society. Michnik's refusal to "marinate the Poles in past injustices" and his *Gazeta*'s slogan: *amnestia tak, amnesia nie* ("yes to amnesty, no to amnesia"), was an alternative to the South African Truth Commissions. He defended distinctions: Jaruzelski was no Hitler. Decommunization was not the same as denazification. In conversation with Habermas he clarified his position:

> You have to remember, but you have to be able to transcend the frontier of your own suffering, you must not insist on remaining in the world of your own suffering. That is impossible. I had great problems with my newspaper. It is a paper that is produced by the entire anti-Communist opposition. What I said was: let's have no more vengeance. There will be no vengeance in the *Gazeta* … Spain is a positive model for Poland. The Spaniards say: In our country there was no *dictadura*, only a *dictablanda*, a mild dictatorship.
>
> (Michnik 1994)

The former dissidents looked to the Philippines, South Africa and Chile, where yesterday's enemies sat in parliament, and where people from the old regime were given a chance to become the followers of democracy, independence and the market economy rather than fierce enemies. They also studied Western European countries, many of which were reconstructed on the foundation of forgetting: Spain, Italy, Austria – and in particular Adenauer's West Germany – that helped Nazis to become democrats.

There was, however, a price for the policy of reconciliation: a growing public perception of historical injustice, dirty fragments of the past constantly resurfacing in the present, the burgeoning cynicism of the electorate, and attacks on the opposition's "drinking Bruderschaft with Cain".[9] The agenda of dialogue across social and political divides and catching up with Europe and capitalism, eclipsed the existential, cultural and religious needs of the community, which were often fended off as atavistic or premodern. The economic and political elites forgot that, although history does not repeat itself, master narratives and images do. The unoccupied cultural space has been quickly taken over by stories preached by nationalist demagogues and the Catholic Church.

One such master narrative springs from the national-socialist mythology about an ethnically pure, heroic- Catholic Poland – unsullied by the Jews and foreign capital – marshaled in the past by pre-WWI political movement *Endecja* ("National Democracy"). In post-war history the stories and rites of *Endecj*a were buried and disinterred and buried again. They were unearthed in 1968 in a national-communist guise and empowered massive, anti-Jewish purges. After a seeming burial of

Endecja in the 1970s, parts and particles of the national socialism were reanimated during the festival of Solidarity, and lived an especially virulent life in the illegal press such as the conservative newspaper *Rzeczywistość*, and in the activities of the Grunwald Patriotic Union. In the 21st century the nationalist, xenophobic and authoritarian topos has been successfully exhumed once again as the founding myth of Jarosław Kaczyński and his PIS party who were elected to power in 2015. Their tiumph shows that the 50 years of communist rule conserved and reinforced – rather than quenched – authoritarian, national-socialist and anti-European folklore. It is true that the Catholic Church under communism had been mildly pro-European and anti-authoritarian, yeilding such enlightened cardinals as Wyszyński, Wojtyła and Kominek and open-minded priests like Józef Życiński and Józef Tischner. But as soon as the communist threat evaporated, the stage was occupied by the ever so expansive nationalist-anti-Semitic clerics such as Father Rydzyk and Father Jankowski, their sermons, their press, their Radio Maryja and their TV station *Trwam* ["I keep going on"].

Lech Wałęsa: a trickster of the hinterland

In the acclaimed international bestseller, *Being There* (1970), the US-based Polish émigré writer, Jan Kosiński, tells an allegorical story about Mr Chance: a semi-literate gardener who, through a series of happy coincidences, becomes a candidate for American president. *Being There* was one of those prescient stories which prefigured the surreal rise of Donald Trump to become the most powerful man on earth. But for those who are familiar with Polish literature, Kosiński's novel bears striking similarities with *The Career of Nikodemus Dyzma* published by Tadeusz Dołęga-Mostowicz in 1932. The action of Mostowicz's novel takes place at the end of the 1920s in Pilsudski's Poland, and its protagonist – a small-town dweller who arrives in the capital in search of work – finds an abandoned invitation to a Warsaw party reception. Being the proud owner of a tuxedo and hoping for a free meal, he goes to the party and impresses the gathering with his intriguing comments and aphorisms. The rest of the novel is the story of his meteoric rise to fame and affluence: Dyzma gets a job as superintendent at the country estate of one of the guests, takes control of his master's affairs, starts climbing the social and political ladder, and is offered a series of prestigious appointments.

In the domain of "Wałęsology" – including both biased and balanced anatomies of Lech Wałęsa – comparisons of the national hero with Nikodem Dyzma have been been made by many commentators. To mention but one pithy, description:

> This is a simpleton-dodger from near Lipno. A Nikodem Dyzma. He hasn't learned to read or write … But after he's got the Nobel [Prize], he goes to various conferences, remembers stray phrases and sentences – and then repeats them without any clue as to what they mean. Tomorrow he will say that we should create a union of Poland, Ukraine and Belorussia. Or of Poland and Egypt. He is FOR and even AGAINST.
>
> (Korwin-Mikke 2013)

The national obsession with Lech Wałęsa is a fascination with a human being whose life has swung between the realms of the real and the supernatural. His vertiginous career – from a dirt-poor, laid-off electrician in the Gdansk shipyards to national hero, Nobel Prize winner and president of democratic Poland – has no precedence in Polish, if not European, history. His political shrewdness (at least in the early days) – combined with wit, charisma and a hotline to the workers – dazzled and seduced both Poland and the world. His legendary ignorance – an infinite source of apt aphorisms and silly malapropisms – has puzzled and vexed many intellectual snobs.

As an ordinary, uneducated man born into rural poverty, Wałęsa had one talent: he was a peasant Cicero with a ready repartee. He used language blissfully free from abstractions and resplendent with earthly nouns and verbs. What spellbound his public were his legendary aphorisms and *Zwischenrufs* – "Break the thermometer and you won't have fever" – allied with a talent for turning a monologue into a dialogue. His visceral awareness of the mood of his public made Wałęsa change his mind about what he wanted to say in a split second. Blurting "I am for – and even against" was, according to Jerzy Bralczyk (1990), not a linguistic blunder, but the instant self-correction of a speaker who resonated with his listeners and changed the sense of a sentence before he finished it.

A list of Wałęsa's blunders cum aphorisms is long, and includes: "It's good that what's happened is bad". "There are negative plusses and positive minuses of this situation". "I acted on it resolutely and turned 360 degrees". "If there were fish in the lake, fishing wouldn't make sense". "I'll reply evasively in a straightforward way". "I have two professorships, [a] hundred doctorates and more medals than Brezhnev. I got freedom for Poland".[10]

And yet, in 1980, in the first days of *Solidarność*, all Poles were stunned by a seemingly humble, moustachioed man who suddenly appeared at the Gdansk shipyards and took over the revolution as a charismatic tribune of the striking workers. He was almost invented for the occasion: charming and funny, a mixture of a lion and a fox, determined and yet cautions, purging the Orwellian newspeak of its woolliness and woodiness and calling a spade a spade. He was the incarnation of folk wisdom. Very much as KOR, he represented a new type of national freedom fighter – one that invoked pragmatic idealism rather than a messianic-romantic stance and sang of hope rather than martyrdom. Jacek Kuroń wrote:

> I cannot hide that Lech has made a huge impression on all of us. An extraordinary raconteur and braggart in a poor, worn-out suit … father of a multitude of children, continuously sacked from work, living in a hovel. And yet … instead of pathos, Wałęsa gave us wit and serenity … I believe he must have been very lonely at the time, if only, because he couldn't befriend anybody in his situation. He was much above his environment.
>
> (Kuroń 2011: 463–464)

Wałęsa's most conspicuous metaphors were "play", "battle" and "war". "For me parliamentary democracy is a peaceful war of all against all … the war that I want

to win", he declared in an interview for *Gazeta Wyborcza* (Bralczyk 1990: 65)). His other favourite concept was "acceleration": "If you cycle slowly on a bicycle you can easily collapse, so I want us to accelerate, to press harder on the pedals" (Bralczyk 1990: 90). As his presidential career progressed, the modest and dialogic "I", became usurped by the royal "Lech Wałęsa": "Lech Wałęsa criticises in order to help, not to mess up". And soon what was a collective victory became the work of one champion: "Alone and singlehandedly I played this game and I arranged the prime minister for you. You entered the parliament on my back" (Bralczyk 1990: 70, 76).

Wałęsa-the-*Solidarność*-hero is a specimen of what anthropologists call a "trickster": a comic survivor. All cultures have their (fictitious or real) tricksters: innovative and resolute protagonists with a talent for keeping afloat, outwitting the mighty and helping the underprivileged. The English have their Robin Hood, the Norwegians have their Askeladden, the Swedes cherish Pippi Langström, the Native Americans celebrate their Coyote. The Poles had their Wałęsa. What very few of his observers noted, however, was that they had to deal with a special kind of trickster: one that was a genius of the Hinterland. When in opposition, Wałęsa was the *creative* "mind behind": resourceful and seductive, but – as his position became entrenched – increasingly cocky and dichotomizing, flaunting a triumphalist and dogmatic "I know best" sentiment. When he took over as president, he set out to control Poland by dictatorial decrees and actions. From the perspective of the 21st century, he became a Polish version of President Trump, a pompous buffoon, bragging of his ignorance and infallibility. In the famous 1990 *New York Review of Books* article on why he would not vote for Lech Wałęsa, Adam Michnik argued:

> Wałęsa is unpredictable. Wałęsa is irresponsible. He is incompetent. And he is also incapable of reform. Wałęsa's unpredictability was an asset in the struggle against totalitarian communism. But it spells disaster in the democratic structures of a modern state. Wałęsa cannot learn from his own errors because he is deeply convinced that he commits none. Finally, Wałęsa's opinions on the economy and foreign policy are paralyzing and horrific in their absurdity.
>
> (Michnik 1990)

Admittedly, as the *genius* of the Hinterland, President Wałęsa represented a soft, palatable version of the earthly virtues and vices of the "mind behind". He was not a rabid Catholic nationalist, though he insisted that he incarnated the nation (minus intellectual bores and pains-in-the-neck). He was not a fundamentalist Catholic, though he demonstratively wore an image of Holy Virgin on his lapel and listened avidly to Radio Maryja. He was not an anti-Semite, though he occasionally differentiated between "Jews, gays and the white people". Some observers claim that power went to his head. I gently disagree. His metamorphosis was not a case of heroic hubris; it represented more the gradual unfolding of the dark core of the Hinterland: wounded, paranoid, insulted, disdainful and authoritarian.

Interestingly, Wałęsa's refreshing *anti*-authoritarianism returned only when his country turned in an authoritarian direction in 2015. He was then 69, his former status as a hero in tatters.

The neo-authoritarian soul of hinterland?

Throughout the 20th and the 21st centuries two post-authoritarian communities have confronted each other in Poland. One has been pluralist, civic and multi-ethnic, going back to Jagiellonian, Renaissance Poland; the other, *Endecja* Poland, has questioned the Round Table agreement, decadent Europe – even the very legend of *Solidarność*. One has looked to the future, the other raked over past injustice; for one, life is a fountain of opportunities, for the other it is a zero sum game; one is for sharing, the other for excluding; one insists on working together, the other is for ganging up; one exudes optimism, the other festers with resentment and wallows in talk about "Poland rising from its knees", or Poland as a Catholic antemurale in Europe. It is this "hurt Poland" which gives the government the mandate to remove the independence of the courts, change the Constitution, and sack insubordinate journalists.

The effects of a "historical echo" have been discussed by Anna Wolff-Powęska (Wolff-Powęska 2017) who has argued that, although liberalism has never established itself as a triumphant formation in Poland, the proponents of national socialism have nonetheless accused its phantom of pulverizing national culture and identity and promoting Western hedonism (Wolff-Powęska 2017: 73). According to Wolff Powęska – these assaults bring to mind Weimar Germany, swayed by the same "anarchy of the heart", opposing the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment, glorifying the community, elevating sacrifice and heroism and contempt for intellectuals, and raging furiously at imagined, liberal Europe with its secularization, feminism and human rights. What the conservative Poles and the Weimar Germans share is their messianism and political *imaginarium*, seeking remedy and the healing of the national fabric in the restoration of ethically (and morally) pure community, national pride and a sense of worth.

To sum up: the replication of the Hinterland in Poland has had many causes, some of them related to the post-*Solidarność* economic instability and deepening inequality. Or so the story goes. But there is yet another account – one which detonates accepted social science theories of populism propounded by thinkers such as Chantal Mouffe, Ernesto Laclau and Donatella della Porta (Mouffe 2013; 2018; Laclau 2012; Della Porta 2015).

In a report about Polish politics from the perspective of a small city that overwhelmingly voted for the national-socialist PIS in 2015, a team of researchers discovered that the reasons for the inhabitants' support for an illiberal party were neither political nor economic – they were *cultural* (Gdula et al. 2017). More precisely, they have to do with the recrudescence of *Endecja* mythology among the relatively affluent groups.. The conclusions of the Report explode the popular theories of populism which highlight the pivotal role of inequality and so-called "victims of neo-liberal transformation".

The city under scrutiny has shown high economic growth and gained materially and aesthetically from Poland's accession to the European Union. The votes of so-called "losers" were insignificant. Most of the respondents represented the lower and middle classes that had been generally prosperous and content with their lives under the previous government. What was decisive in the city's overwhelming support for PIS was te party's success in creating an emotional "social drama" which portrayed the elites as either remote from the life of ordinary mortals or corrupt and immoral. The small city's support for the reform of the Constitution was stemmed from the general scepticism towards hosting refugees.

The report's conclusion was that the

> dissonance between personal experience and political views … shows that we have moved away from populism as the type of relation between the politicians and their electorate. In populism, the mechanism of gaining support has been based on voicing concerns for which there is no room in the public sphere. Today we have to contend with a new situation: the private experience of well-being is marginalized by political identification.

The political project of the winning party was described by the authors of the Report as "neo-authoritarianism". "Neo", because it evokes a democratic imaginary where the voice of the people as a sovereign gives an unlimited mandate to the rulers who are, in turn, guided by justice as the emanation of the will of the people. There are thus three pillars of the Polish version of neo-authoritarianism: 1) settling accounts with "arrogant elites"2) declaration of allegiance to the national community and 3) an assertion of domination over minorities and strangers (Gdula 2017).

Interestingly Gdula's findings corroborate a similar trend in Germany, where the supporters for the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) – largely educated, middle-class men – reveal that it is not economy but culture and ethno-cultural identity that motivate the right-wing voters (T.G. Ash 2017). Does it mean that the revolution of dignity inevitably has a shadow, anti-humanist *alter ego?* The findings of the Polish research team are not necessarily representative or descriptive of all parts of Europe. Similarly, the very existence of the Hinterland does not always imply a choice of the neo-authoritarian option; in certain cases it may be an expression of a response to a fluid and homeless modernity or the search for self-government in smaller, allegedly homogeneous units. But one thing is clear. Far from wanting to be world citizens, or even Europeans, people prefer Wallonia to Belgium, and Catalonia to Spain. They feel that Italy is too big and diffuse for them, and dream about Padania. Small is beautiful, especially if it is linked to a deep conviction that the national community would be better off without strangers and free-riders.

Conclusion: the era of hinterland?

In the 21st century, the spectre of Hinterland is haunting not just Poland but many parts of Europe and the US. Although its threat can be averted, it has to be

taken seriously. There are reasons to believe that its rise has been facilitated by one factor that I have yet to mention: the erosion of the humanist agenda inspired by intellectual apologists of radical relativism and diversity. Postmodern academia, fascinated with the global civil society and the age of the posthuman, has tended to disregard the importance of altruism, cooperation and prosociality in making terrestrial communities work. Intellectuals have lauded complex, occupationally mobile, technically advanced societies, forgetting the cultural fissures within societies, their frozen, aggravated and offensive grievances, and their resistance to change. And yet it is ordinary citizens in search of meaning who have co-created the crises of our times: those who cannot bear democracy and inequality, unemployment, inequality, a multi-cultural world, and the Kantian idea of "a universal history with cosmopolitan intent".

The protagonists of the Hinterland – often referred to as "reactionaries" – have, according to Mark Lilla, largely been misunderstood (Lilla 2016). Reactionaries are not necessarily conservative – they are as radical as revolutionaries, but revolutionaries who consider themselves the guardians and prophets of the "good society" that once existed and that, they insist, is still possible. They are the avant-garde of a growing army of citizens who oppose decades of undemocratic liberal policies. They come from two flanks. One is the party of the victims of inequality whose rage is going to continue, if only because, as Bauman has observed, "adding freedom of action to the fundamental inequality of social condition will result in inequality yet deeper than before" (Bauman 1995: 82). In short, what liberal society offers with one hand, it tends to take back with the other. The second flank is the often affluent community of middle-class citizens who – apart from being morally provoked by the cosmopolitanism, corruption and complacency of economic, political and intellectual elites – are willing to trade their freedoms for greater personal and collective security.

On the surface, the second decade of the 21st century – with its symbolic galleon figures and events such as Trump, Kaczyński and Orban and Brexiteers – marks the return of the Hinterland. Only one-tenth of the inhabitants of 47 post-communist countries live in democratic countries, 15 per cent toil under autocracy and the rest under dictatorship (Farkas 2017). Has the transition to liberal democracy proven too much of a challenge?

There is no way to avoid the rise of the Dopplegänger of the revolution of dignity. But its growth can be kept in check by the politicians who heed the call to repoliticize the crucial issues of the 21st century, such as immigration, neoliberal economics and European integration – to bring them back into the electoral realm and offer coherent and consistent alternatives to the often short-sighted and simplistic offerings of populist leaders and their parties.

In the West and East the public debate presided over by the liberals has higlighted the virtuous narcissism of the Left, whose ideas – unsupported by any concrete actions – are only for the already converted. It is from the right-wing wilderness that the unadorned truth about how things are springs and seduces the masses. There is thus the need to dust off and reclaim the dialogic imagination of the anti-authoritarian outliers and enter into a conversation with the

"wild men". Otherwise what has started as the revolution of dignity will end as the building of ruins. As Karl Popper put it, "The more we try to return to the heroic age of tribalism, the more directly do we arrive at the Inquisition, at the secret Police and at the romanticized gangsterism … We can return to the beasts. But if we wish to remain human, then there is only one way, the way into the open society" (Popper 1950: 156).

Popper's dictum sounds logical and straightforward, but its tragic implications have been better captured by the poets. Zbigniew Herbert's "The Envoy of Mr Cogito" spells them out:

> be courageous when the mind deceives you be courageous
> in the final account only this is important
>
> and let your helpless Anger be like the sea
> whenever you hear the voice of the insulted and beaten
>
> let your sister Scorn not leave you
> for the informers executioners cowards—they will win
> they will go to your funeral and with relief will throw a lump of earth
> the woodborer will write your smoothed-over biography
>
> (Herbert 1993)

Herbert's poem testifies to the fact that, ultimately, the truth about the power of the Hinterland – and the tragedy of its challengers – has been discovered not by political scientists but by poets. Those who do not listen to the voices of national literature will struggle to understand the post-authoritarian societies they study.

Notes

1. Personal communication, Warsaw, November 2002.
2. Some Polish scholars emphasized that the problems of the post-communist transition were exacerbated by the intellectual elites abandoning the language of nationalism, which had proved such a powerful motivating force in the fight against communism. See Marek Cichocki, "Doświadczenie pierwszej Solidarności: między absolutyzmem a polityczną samowiedzą Polaków" in Dariusz Gawin, *Lekcja sierpnia: Dziedzictwo Solidarności po dwudziestu latach* (Warszawa: IFIS, PAN 2002), 200. See also Zdzisław Krasnodębski, "Sens i bezsens klęski", *Europa*, vol. 20 (2004).
3. For the in-depth studies of the mercurial concept of inteligenstia in Eastern Europe see, for example, Björling 1995; Jedlicki 2008.
4. The Confederation extended religious tolerance to nobility and free persons within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. While it did not prevent all conflict based on religion, it did make the Polish Commonwealth a much safer and more tolerant place than most of contemporaneous Europe, especially during the subsequent Thirty Years War. See: Bob Scribne, *Tolerance and Intolerance in the European Reformation* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), p.264; Norman Davies, *God's Playground. A History of Poland*: Vol. 1: *The Origins to 1795*; Vol. 2: *1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press); Mirosław Korolko and Janusz Tazbir, *Konfederacja warszawska 1573 roku. Wielka karta polskiej tolerancji* (Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy PAX 1980).

5 The Constitution was annulled by Grodno Sejm in November 1793, and the struggle to retain it was stalled in 1795 by the abolishment of the sovereignty of the Polish state and its partition by Russia, Prussia and Austro-Hungarian Empire. See Mark Brzeziński, *The Struggle for Constitutionalism in Poland* (London: Macmillan Palgrave, 2000).

6 This convinced some *Kultura* intellectuals (like Edward Mieroszewski) that, for the sake of a more humane future, it was better to tolerate Soviet communism than to let democracy lose. See Dariusz Gawin, *Wielki Zwrot: Ewolucja i odrodzenie idei społeczeństwa obywatelskiego* (Kraków: Znak, 2013), 130–131.

7 In a fascinating interview conducted at the height of the upheaval in 1981, Jacek Kuroń, in a moment of despair, expressed scepticism about people's ability to really become free, creative beings, and doubted whether political democracy would make them into democrats. See Kuroń, *Polityka i odpowiedzialność*. London: Aneks. 1984. The interview was originally marked "not to be printed" (sic!).

8 A number of Polish scholars advanced just this idea, emphasizing that the former anti-authoritarian thinkers' worldview was incompatible with the "Poland of peripheries". See especially Zdzisław Krasnodębski, *Demokracja peryferii* (Gdańsk: Słowo/obraz/terytoria, 2005); Marek Cichocki "Doświadczenie pierwszej 'Solidarności': między moralnym absolutyzmem a polityczną samowiedzą Polaków" in Dariusz Gawin, *Lekcja sierpnia: Dziedzictwo "Solidarości po dwudziestu latach* (Warszawa: IFIS, PAN, 2002); Dariusz Gawin, "Inteligenckie obrachunki w epoce tranformacji", *Krytyka polityczna*, 1(2002), 94–111. Agata Bielik-Robson, "Obrona kołtuna" in *Krytyka Polityczna*, 1 (2002), 85–100.

9 The greatest oppositional poet – and the former bard of KOR – Zbigniew Herbert, saw a reconciliation with the communists as a "domestic disgrace". See Jacek Trznadel, "Wypluć z siebie wszystko: Rozmowa ze Zbigniewem Herbertem" in *Hańba domowa* (Warszawa: AWM, 1997), 206–207.

10 http://pl.wikiquote.org/wiki/Lech_Wa%C5%82%C4%99sa.

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6 The power of *Sanctum*

Solidarność and Shakespeare: evil in the dialogue of temptation

In one of Shakespeare's masterpieces, *Richard III*, we meet Richard, Duke of Gloucester, an evil hunchback who dreams of becoming king and goes about it by killing his rivals king Henry VI and his son Edward. But Gloucester's ignominy does not stop here. He both desires – and is morally provoked by – Edward's widow, Lady Anne, who is an incarnation of beauty and goodness. To kill her is less of a challenge than to corrupt her soul and make her his accomplice. Gloucester, now King Richard III, does so using dialogue as his tool. As an expert sophist, he first turns upside down the dialectics of blame: he draws attention away from his status as the accused by becoming the accuser. He persuades Lady Anne that it is her beauty that led him to kill her husband. The murder is not his fault, but *hers*. Ergo, his crime is really not a crime but a misfortune. More importantly, Gloucester reveals to Anne the painful truth about himself: as a monstrous hunchback he is a deeply unhappy, suffering man. His life is a curse, a permanent inferno. He wants reciprocity – love, compassion, sacrifice. He longs to be understood and rescued. Touched by his pleas – and by his heart-breaking "frankness" – Anne becomes taken by the idea of saving Richard III. In her superior goodness she even agrees to become his wife. When their marriage is consummated, there is no more dialogue: Gloucester drops Lady Anne in utter contempt.

What is unsettling about Shakespeare's play is that here dialogue is not a space of agreement or reconciliation; it is a place where evil is born. Goodness becomes marred and contaminated in the course of what looks like an elevating moral transaction but what, in the end, turns into a Mephistophelian contract. By her desire to do good Anne is transformed from the epitome of virtue into a hideous traitor: a woman who betrayed the memory of her husband with his murderer. More, after becoming the accomplice of evil in the harrowing act of betrayal – she is betrayed herself. Her goodness is destroyed, her sacrifice rendered utterly meaningless. The play ends with Gloucester's demonic triumph: showing that the best and the most virtuous are as evil as him.

The above interpretation of *Richard III* is not mine. It is the – now almost forgotten – rereading of Shakespeare by the leading Polish Catholic philosopher – and *Solidarity*'s chaplain – Fr. Józef Tischner (Tischner 1982: 3–40). There are two

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extraordinary dimensions to his essay. Firstly, it offers a novel approach to the study of totalitarian temptation. The concept of "totalitarianism" never appears in the essay, which it was published in 1982, when lessened – but still active – censorship constrained free expression. But the main message is unambiguous: Gloucester's temptation of Lady Anne is a metaphor for the nature of Soviet totalitarianism and the convoluted ways it sponged on – and destroyed – human altruism.

The success of Marxism-Leninism derived, in many respects, from the same evil dialectics: its false appeal to human best instincts and a fake "dialogue" with its victims, which culminated in their cruel disposal. The aim of this exercise was to pervert human generosity and goodness. The communist dialogue inspired – or coerced – people to scramble to sell their souls: hate their spouse, denounce their father, betray their friend, spy on their neighbours. It created a world whose sediments were not easily excised when Sovietism ended. Its legacy would haunt the future: it would be manifest in the instinctive recourse to cynicism and manipulative lies, in tormented self-hate, and, most of all, in massive distrust of the ideas of compassion, altruism and generosity.

Tischner was innovative not just in the way he problematized dialogue as an ambivalent panacea for modern ills. He worked on reframing the worn-out notion of the sacred. He drew on Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* (1917) and Karl Barth's *The Epistle to the Romans*, the texts which interpreted the sacred as an ambiguous force which can lead people to *Rausch, Verzückung und Ekstase* ("intoxication, rapture and ecstasy"), or, equally, to profoundly traumatic experiences (Otto 1917; 1959: 1926–27; Barth 1033: 28). In Tischner's view, the modernist uses and interpretations of the sacred departed so much from traditional Christian conceptions of the divine that the resulting confusion called for distinctions. Tischner proposed to juxtapose *Sacrum*, anchored in pagan theophany, with *Sanctum*, based on compassion, and springing from Christianity. *Sacrum* is both *tremendum et fascinosum*, a force that demands sacrifice and can be both good and evil. The demon, too, is sacred, insists Tischner. But, unlike the Christian *Sanctum*, which signifies goodness and generosity, *Sacrum* is jealous and vengeful. It fulfils itself, not in the metaphysical, but in the physical, brutal and sensuous. It is manifested in instinctive force, violence and natural overflow. Its medium is an active, dynamic, agonistic universe which bursts with energy and subsists on tension, even when at rest. Tyrannical, possessive, and yet sustaining, *Sacrum* is thus the site of "religion" whose liturgies are part of all authoritarianisms.

This novel framing is ingenious. On the one hand, it allows us to talk about – and better understand – the religious dimension of non-religious creeds such as Nazism and communism, which placed great value on human participation in their sacred order. On the other hand, Tischner's *Sanctum* – referring to a religiosity based on Samaritanism – enables us to differentiate between the demonic and exclusive nature of many pagan or atheist cults, and the revolutionary character of Christianity as a religion which – in its original, "catacomb" version – launched a community of empathy and compassion.

The focus of this chapter is on the exuberant, *Sanctum*-inspired rediscovery of religion in the Polish intellectual renaissance between 1976 and 1989. The

importance of the "Christian turn" in this renaissance has been hitherto occluded both from the studies of *Solidarność* and from the discussions of the role of Catholic religion in communist Poland. The prevailing trend has been to fixate on the alleged role of the Catholic Church in both sustaining Polish identity during the time of authoritarian oppression and in inspiring the Solidarity movement.

I argue that studying the relationship between Catholicism and *Solidarność* remains incomplete without attending to sophisticated forms of religiosity and religious reflection which emerged in the 1970s. This was the period when Leszek Kołakowski published the influential essay "The Revenge of the Sacred" (1971); when Michnik wrote his trail-blazing *The Church and the Left* (1977); and when Bohdan Cywiński's *Indomitable Pedigrees* (1977) – a new, historical approach to the varieties of secular and Catholic humanism – was the talk of the intelligentsia. It was also the time when Czesław Miłosz composed the Introduction to the *Collected Writings of Simone Weil* (1981) and when Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik studied and wrote about Bishop Dietrich Bonhoeffer – the German anti-Nazi theologian and dissident. This religious *ricorso* is intriguing, especially in the light of the fact that many of its drivers defined themselves as agnostics and non-believers. Thus, while not diminishing the role of the Polish Pope John Paul II in the massive mobilization against Soviet authoritarianism, I shall argue that the religious resurgence among the intellectual and theological elites had a genuine impact both on the ways in which the community of conscience thought and functioned, and on the making of the first *Solidarność*.

The ambivalent anti-authoritarianism of the Polish Church

There is now a body of work explaining the role of the Catholic Church in overthrowing communist rule (e.g. Osa 2003; Ramet and Borowik 2017; Tighe 1999; Paczkowski 1995). Maryjane Osa has drawn attention to the adroit ways in which the pastoral mobilization in the period 1957–1980 – in advance of the millennial anniversary of the Baptism of Poland (966) – united various networks of the anti-authoritarian opposition. The veneration of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa – with the ongoing Great Novena and rituals blending legend, folklore, history and peasant mysticism – brought solace, massaged national feeling and offered hope to the disempowered masses. This being said, Osa's insightful reconstruction of the ways in which religious framing – and the Polish Pope – boosted the anti-authoritarian spirit in Poland, leaves out of account the Church's more opportunistic, adaptive stance in the communist times. Carl Tighe, by contrast, busts the myth of the ostensibly oppositional role of Polish Catholicism.[1] He argues that "The post-war Church was never the hunted, furtive underground creature of Western imagining" (Tighe: 1999: 182). As a matter of fact, after 1977, the episcopate could finally relax, as it was virtually courted by the communists. The government issued a record number of permissions for building new chapels, allowed for the establishment of the Catholic University in Lublin – and even broadcast selected religious ceremonies on national TV.

While not discounting the duality of Polish Catholicism, I wish to draw attention to its more innovative, countercultural versions – those that enriched both the

Polish and European humanist tradition. What is especially interesting is that we find a turn to religion, not just in the work of self-proclaimed religious writers as Czesław Miłosz, but also in the thought of leading agnostics, from Leszek Kołakowski to Adam Michnik.[2] The lively "romance" with Christianity in the 1970s had multiple sources. On the one hand, the economic, political and moral misery of communism led to a hunger for alternative narratives which would de-contaminate the lie-ridden landscape. The detonation of the dream of "socialism with a human face" in 1968 made the intelligentsia flee from the naked brutality of the authoritarian system to the realm of the spirit. In addition, the years after the Second Vatican Council (1962) witnessed the emergence of innovative, sophisticated Catholic clergy; Józef Tischner, Józef Maria Bocheński and Karol Wojtyła being prime examples. There was a marked awakening in liberal Catholic circles (the nationalists called them derisively the "Catholeft"), who gathered round such journals as *Tygodnik Powszechny, Znak* and *Więź* and advocated open, tolerant and ecumenical Catholicism.

Was the Polish religious revival a result of a disappointment with communist dogma? Not entirely. If thinkers such as Leszek Kołakowski, Adam Michnik and Jacek Kuroń embraced Christianity, it is not because they were suddenly converted. Rather, it is because they saw the Gospel's anti-totalitarian potential. Their lively interest in Christian ideas had much to do with their insight into the demonic *Sacrum* at the heart of the communist gospel. The exposure of the true colours of the Bolshevik oppression after the invasion of Czechoslovakia and the violent suppression of the 1968 rebellion yielded a realization of human defencelessness in the face of the demonic and dialogic *Sacrum* imbuing Marxism-Leninism.

Much of the same humanist quest has fostered modern spiritual effervescence in other authoritarian countries: Bahá'ísm in Iran, Falun Gong in China or Sufism in Egypt, to quote but a few examples. If these religious movements are persecuted in authoritarian states, it is mainly because the authorities find religion incompatible with the state Sacrum. They know that insisting on human autonomy and freedom to pursue a spiritual quest, the religiously inspired humanism is part and parcel of the modern revolution of dignity.

What, then, was role and use of *alternative Christianity* in the anti-totalitarian resistance as preached and practised by Poland's humanist outliers such as Leszek Kołakowski, Jacek Kuroń, Adam Michnik and Józef Tischner? To what extent did their perceptions sustain or challenge the traditional values of Polish Catholicism? And how did the "Christian Renaissance" in Poland in the period 1976–90 relate to contemporary Western ideas about the supposedly delusional nature of the concordat between faith and reason (e.g. Dawkins 1976; Harris 2004; Dennet 2010)?

The "religion" of Marxism-Leninism

The trajectory of Poland's revolution of dignity illustrates in a nutshell the Janus face of religion, both as an agent suppressing selfishness and inspiring cooperation,

and as the handmaiden of groupishness, tribalism and nationalism – even an accessory to atrocity.

Many members of the "community of compassion" started their political life as enthusiastic advocates of Marx and Lenin's bible. The bible is not just a metaphor. To see the transfer of religious rhetoric to the ideological vocabulary of the Stalinist era, it is enough to quote "The Thankful Litany to the Party" sent by an anonymous zealot to the Communist Party Secretariat in 1954:

> Beloved Party, we bow at your feet
> Though your road is thorny, you refuse defeat
> In your way of the cross, full of blood and tears
> You're a torch of light that conquers all fear
> You're invincible forever, our Party dear (my translation).[3]

When Józef Stalin met 50 Soviet intellectuals on 25 October 1932 and explained to them what socialist realism meant in literature and the arts, he said: "You create the goods which we need. And we need *human souls* more than we need machines, airplanes and tanks" (Kula 2003: 145–146).

The thankful litany to the party is but one example of Stalin's *Homo sovieticus* worshipping the totalitarian Sacrum as an ersatz of a new religion. There is now a rich literature showing parallels between ideological and religious systems and the ways in which the former have borrowed from the latter. Leading Western and Eastern European intellectuals, such as Eric Voegelin, Raymond Aron and Nicolas Berdyaev had written about "secular religions" already before the Second World War (Voegelin 1938; 1999; Aron 1951; 2001; Berdiaev 1937; 1965). Berdiaev characterized communism as an integral doctrine aspiring to play the role of a comprehensive religion in the life of man (1965: 170). In his legendary study, *The Captive Mind* (1954), Czesław Miłosz depicted communism as a "new faith" from the East which conquered European countries after the Second World War. Those who were especially susceptible to its allure were "good pagans" – people who were hostile to the doctrines on the right. For them, the party became the Church, while communist rallies and festivities – celebrated in front of the portraits of the leaders of the revolution – imitated Christian liturgy. Miłosz compared the red-clad conference rooms in communist schools and meeting places in factories and offices to medieval chapels, and the thought-paralyzing communist dogma to the doctrines of the Catholic Church. The only difference was that, unlike Christianity, communism destroyed the conception of a person both as a social being and as a God's child, dissolving them in the collective realm (Miłosz 1954; 1982).

Later studies further refined these analogies. Emilio Gentile and Roger Griffin explored the link between fascism, totalitarianism and religion as a durable aspect of modernity (e.g. Gentile 2006; Roger Griffin 2005). Marcin Kula, in *Religiopodobny Komunizm* ("Crypto-Religious Communism"), argued that there was striking similarity between Marxist historiography – portraying a social succession from slavery, feudalism, capitalism and socialism finally on to the communist Paradise on Earth – and the Catholic view of human progress – from earthly toil,

through purgatory and on to heaven. Purgatory was the class struggle. Lenin and Stalin were perceived as the followers of Moses leading the proletariat (and all of humanity) to the Promised Land. Exclusion from the party was akin to the excommunication of a heretic who lost faith. A communist was not allowed to worship other gods than the party. According to Andrzej Walicki and Richard Pipes, communism was a chiliastic religion drawing on aggressive action which aimed at a radical transformation of society and human nature, thus completing God's creation according to the principle of *homo homini deus est* (Walicki 1991: 470–471; Pipes 1991: 110). This would have been a glorious project if it did not collapse into a reality where *homo homini lupus est*.

These borrowings and parallels, however, were not just a matter of formal liturgy and rhetoric. For many young socialists after the Second World War, what made communism compelling was its aspiration to moral excellence, paralleling Christian ideas of equality, dignity and care for the poor and the weak. Józef Tischner confessed: "We need to pose a risky question to find out to what extent the success of communism in Poland had a Christian inspiration … It is not an exaggeration to say that the idea of social justice – a smokescreen for the Soviets – resonated in Christian souls" (Michnik, Tischner and Żakowski 1995: 273).

Admittedly, the intriguing religious-ideological parallels are as illuminating as they are confusing. In an effort to stymie conceptual malaise and ahistorical interpretations, Jerzy Wojciech Borejsza has insisted that fascism, Nazism and communism differed in their perceptions of religion (Borejsza 2000: 7–50). While fascism was based on a compromise with Catholicism, and German National Socialism tolerated the Protestant creed, Marxism-Leninism aspired to *replace* all religions. What the three totalitarianisms shared, however, was the project of building a new state religion, supporting not a democracy but what can be better described – taking on board Tischner's demonic *Sacrum* – as a *demono*cracy.

The philosopher and the devil: the intellectual metamorphosis of Leszek Kołakowski

In 1988, I was one of the seven or eight students attending Professor Leszek Kołakowski's seminar on "Reformation" at All Souls College in Oxford. There was no particular interest in religion among British students in the last decades of the 20th century. Those who came were less motivated to learn about Luther and more curious about Kołakowski's un-Oxford way of thinking, undisturbed by academic fashions, and his openly proclaimed interest in the devil. After all, the devil was a relic of humanity's shameful past and lay beyond the horizon of what was acceptable among sane citizens of the United Kingdom.

While talking about the correspondence between Luther and Erasmus, Kołakowski admitted his partiality for Erasmus: a philosopher who opposed an institutional, "trading" Church, and advocated a return to Christ's evangelical ideals. Kołakowski was enchanted by Erasmian humanism for three reasons. Firstly, it was a humanism which, while accepting that fundamental Christian values are beyond the human sphere, assumed that human nature is, of its own accord, able to reach

moral and intellectual heights. Secondly, unlike the idol-free Lutherans, the Erasmian Catholics cherished treasures and divinities of the pre-Christian world and the achievements of the great masters of antiquity. Theirs was a poor, non-dogmatic, tolerant religiosity, mocking scholastic logomachia and unmasking the depravities of the institutional church and priesthood.[4] Lastly, Kołakowski valued Erasmus's reluctance to support ineradicable, revolutionary change. During the discussion about the legacy of Protestantism and Catholicism, we argued about the fanatic and obscurantist Catholic creed which had for four centuries impoverished and disfigured social life in countries like Poland, Ireland and in Latin America. Was liberal Catholicism the answer?

Kołakowski was, as ever, ironic and confounding. He argued that, for him, liberal Catholics were a problem. They blessed all forms of life and wallowed in an all-too-generous concept of faith that lacks the idea of evil. The nerve of Kolakowski's humanism, very much like that of Hannah Arendt's, was the conviction of the durable presence of evil which vibrates in, and permeates, all human life. It does not spring from the absence of virtue or goodness, nor is it reducible to malfunctioning institutions, nor indeed is it a "phantom made of fog and jelly". Evil is something we cannot exterminate like rats in a cellar. It is always ahead of humans, while goodness is always delayed. It derives from lack of human empathy and the inability to conduct an inner dialogue. Its existence is not contingent, but a stubborn and unredeemable part of human condition. As such, the devil – one of the faces of evil – can only be bridled by an altruistic paideia but never truly eradicated. All the bans, exorcisms and enlightened jibes will prove impotent in the encounter with the human potential for *maleficium.* [5]

This was the general thrust of Kołakowski's reflections on the idea of liberal Catholicism, as they came out at the Oxford seminar. They were later refined in books like *Can the Devil be Redeemed?* (1982; 1990) *Horror Metaphysicus* (1993) and *Religion* (2001). What was shocking to us there and then was that only 20 years earlier Kołakowski would have been the first to sneer at the rhetoric of devils and angels. In the early 1960s, he was one of Poland's most fervent Marxist philosophers, making assaults on the Catholic Church's "philanthropic banalities, conservative message, twisted half-statements, contradictions and the vacuum of contents, as well as utter emptiness, zero programme, nothing" (Kołakowski 1972; 1989). In his work from early 1970s we can still read that "Christianity created the first model of totalitarian states in Europe" (Kołakowski 1989: 25). But already at that point, he was studying religion, and – as a possessed reader – memorizing long passages from the writings of Jerome, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. On the surface, the direct fruits of his labours took the form of classical Marxist unmaskings: he exposed the Catholic Church as a force supporting economic and political exploitation, and the idea of God as a prosthetic device to hold the oppressed in check. Christian thought "objectively aided imperialism"; as for the Almighty, he was an "intellectually mediocre author of a supposed autobiography known as the Holy Bible". (Kołakowski 1972: 28). But, as Kołakowski's understanding of Marxism and knowledge of Christianity deepened, he became increasingly haunted by the

realization that Marxism-Leninism was not a scientific antidote to religious superstition; it had the same deep, mythological structure.

Many of Kołakowski's colleagues – as well as outside observers – were puzzled by his metamorphosis from commissar to Christian advocate. They saw his fascination with religion as a sudden quantum leap which was either inexplicable or had to be treated as a re-channelling of his earlier, ideological zealotry into a new, religious form (Thompson 1974; Berman 2005). I see a different development here. Kołakowski's endorsement of the Christian ethos was less the effect of a spiritual hunger and more the result of a relentless, Titanic study of Marx and Christ teachings as two parallel mythologies. In this comparative project – yielding the magisterial *Main Currents of Marxism* (1981; 2008) – Christianity emerged as a morally superior narrative. Communism, Kołakowski argued, promised a paradise on earth and never delivered. On the contrary, not only did it reproduce the problems of the capitalist system – exploitation, imperialism, pollution, misery, economic waste, national hatred and national oppression – but it added "a series of disasters of its own: inefficiency, lack of economic incentives and, above all, the unrestricted role of the omnipotent bureaucracy, and a concentration of power never known before in human history".[6] Communism quoted the inviolable "laws of history" and scientific evidence for progress towards a glorious future which never arrived. Christianity, on the other hand, had no scientific ambitions and never promised a wonderland on earth. Its central message was to restrain human appetites for terrestrial utopias by pointing to the inevitable limitations of being human.

There is no space here to review in detail Kołakowski's studies on religion or scrutinize his complex relationship with the Catholic Church. Rather, I wish to draw attention to the possible reasons why Christianity became Kołakowski's cultural tool-kit against totalitarianism. The first is existential: Christian ideas are humanity's way of accepting life as an inevitable defeat; the acknowledgement of its weakness and incompleteness. Kołakowski saw no contradiction between the Renaissance elevation of human dignity and the recognition of men's and women's basic fragility. He insisted that "The humanism outlined in Pico della Mirandola's famous *Discourse on Human Dignity*, a humanism defined by the idea of human incompleteness, his inevitable state of hesitation, and the insecurity caused by his freedom of decision, is perfectly compatible with Christian teaching" (Kołakowski 1990: 28). The emphasis on human limitations inherent in Christianity was a safeguard against the "men-like gods" syndrome which typified totalitarian projects. The two 19th-century ideas which empowered red and brown totalitarianisms – Marxism and Nietzscheanism, respectively – were both Promethean and anti-Christian in their roots. "Nietzsche knew that Christianity is the awareness of our weakness, and he was right. Marx knew it too, and from the young Hegelians he took over and transformed the philosophy of man's self-creation and futuristic orientation" (Kołakowski 1990: 91). The Nietzschean, Marxist and Sartrean theorising – which insist that man can free himself of tradition and all pre-existing sense, and that all sense can be

decreed by an arbitrary whim – do not lead to divine self-creation, but, more often than not, invite totalitarian solutions.

The anti-totalitarian potential of Christianity springs from its original core message: the renunciation of hatred. "If we reduce Christianity to this minimum – we notice that, strictly speaking, there is no such thing as a Christian political program or a Christian system of government", insisted Kołakowski. The interpretations of Christianity as the imperative to bear poverty and suffering or as a holy "jihad" to spread the Gospel are remnants of medieval culture in which Christianity was treated as a universal source of norms and standards. In its original form, Christianity had no political aspirations. Christ condemned the greedy not because he proclaimed a better social order but because they were greedy. "The philosopher's stone, the elixir of immortality – these are superstitions of alchemists; nor is there a recipe for a society without evil, without sin or conflict; such ideas are the aberrations of a mind convinced of its omnipotence, they are the fruits of pride" (Kołakowski 1990: 30–31).

The next reason for Kołakowski's support for the Christian *Sanctum* as a safeguard against the totalitarian pandemonium was structural: secularization, which has erased the tension between the sacred and the profane from human consciousness, leads to a loss of distinctions which constitute the vital foundation of all human cultures. The secularized world is one where "[I]ncreasingly, there seems to be no longer any clear-cut division between war and peace, sovereignty and servitude, invasion and liberation, executioner and victim, stupidity and wisdom, art and fraudulence". Kołakowski was for upholding the opposition of *sacred vs. profane.*

> With the disappearance of the sacred, which imposed limits to the perfection that could be attained by the profane, arises one of the most dangerous illusions of our civilization – the illusion that there are no limits to the changes that human life can undergo, that society is 'in principle' an endlessly flexible thing, and that to deny this flexibility and this perfectibility is to deny man's total autonomy and thus to deny man himself.
>
> (Kołakowski 1990: 72)

In Kołakowski's view, two post-Second World War movements that attempted to erase thed tension between *sacrum* and *profanum* – progressivism and integrism – although seemingly opposite, have revealed equal genocidal potential. In the name of mounting a defence against atheist communism, the integrists have been ready to support brutal military dictatorships. The progressivists, on the other hand, have all too often accepted an alliance with communist tyrants against the right-wing despots.

The final ground for Kołakowski's advocacy of Christianity can be called civilizational: for all the institutional abuses of religion, Christian ideas have remained the foundation of moral progress in European culture. He argues:

> If we were to trace the origins of resistance to barbarity, both foreign and indigenous, if what we have in mind is a search for the "ultimate source" of

> Europe, we shall get stuck: all the Greek, Roman, Judaic, Persian and other influences which mingled to produce this civilization, not to speak of the material, demographical and climactic conditions, are obviously confusing. But if what we have in mind is a grasp of what constitutes the core of this spiritual region, and if we describe this core – the spirit of uncertainty, incompleteness, and unestablished identity – we shall come to see more clearly how and why [it] is that Europe [is] Christian by birth.
>
> (Kołakowski 1990: 28)

In this reading, Christianity has provided a normative foundation for Western liberalism. The rhetoric of human rights amounts to a pared-down version of liberalism in much the same way as liberalism can be seen as a purged, secularized version of Christianity.

In the 1980s, at the time of his lectures on the Reformation, Kołakowski called himself an "inconsistent atheist". Later, he playfully described himself as a "conservative-liberal-socialist". When asked whether he believed in God, he used to reply that only God knew. At his funeral in July 2009, Marek Edelman, a leader of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising, upon hearing the blessings being spoken over Kołakowski's coffin, whispered audibly, "Why are you making a Catholic out of him? That man was a decent atheist!"[7]

***

How relevant are Kołakowski's reflections to the challenges of the 21st century? Jan Tokarski, in an insightful study of Kołakowski's ideas (Tokarski 2016), points to the "foreignness" and anachronism of the Polish philosopher, elbowed out by sparkling and despotic Žižek, the unintelligible and strangulating Derrida, or the critical-cynical Sloterdijk. There are other virile visions that challenge Kołakowski's work; it is enough to think of Raymond Kurzweil, whose optimistic future of *homo sapiens mechanicus* signals the abolishment of the boundary between the biological and non-biological and the arrival of a new intelligence that will override the existing scientific laws and create a new, immortal terrestrial species. Today Kołakowski's philosophy, with its fixation on the presence of evil and the importance of limitations, strikes us indeed moralistic and antiquarian. And yet, born out of the 20th-century's greatest cataclysms, it speaks of the authoritarian nemesis coruscating in all, past and future, "men-like-gods" visions. If it has aged, it has done so like a good, oak-preserved wine.

The inventors of a modern Samaritanism

"Why did God create Adam Michnik?" joked Fr. Tischner. His answer paraphrased the Polish *górale* ("highlanders") aphorism: Michnik was created to make the stupid men more stupid and the wise men wiser.[8] But this wisdom took some ripening. Both Michnik and Kuroń's stance on religion mirrored Kołakowski's quest. As a young socialist, Michnik repeated after Voltaire, Marx and Fauerbach that religion was a psychological-prosthetic device, an expression of spiritual

weakness, and an escape from responsibility (Michnik 2012). Kuroń on the other hand, was inspired by Karl Kautsky's *Origins of Christianity*, which concluded that Christ won not by creating a revolutionary organization but by supporting the strongest pillars of oppression and exploitation. Rather than reducing Caesar's power, they increased it – along with slavery, poverty and oligarchic wealth. At the same time, however, Kuroń "read in Kautsky that Christ and his apostles were communists and communism was the main message of the New Testament" (Makarenko 1935; 1949). The link was there. The other link was *The Pedagogical Poem* by Anton Makarenko (1925), the educational handbook of the red scouts, which, although it viewed religiosity as a mental disease, claimed that superstition should be eliminated in a peaceful way, through gentle persuasion and good example.[9]

But neither Michnik nor Kuroń were in a hurry to study Christianity. In April 1960, when the workers from Nowa Huta demanded that the authorities agree to the erection of a cross and the building of a church, he used Marxist materialist arguments against it. Michnik recollects:

> Jacek was an apologist of the Holy Virgin of Meat. As a Marxist he was convinced that wherever there is no meat, a battle for a cross commences in Poland. He argued that most human actions were about bread and meat, because he could not imagine that they could be about the cross itself. This was also my horizon.
>
> (Michnik et al. 1995: 87)

A paradigm shift started in 1968, after the shock at the brutality of the communist squashing of the student rebellion and the exorbitant prison sentences meted out to the leaders of *Komandosi*. To their surprise, Cardinal Wyszyński issued an outright condemnation of state repression in the aftermath of the uprising. "When we were battered by the police", Michnik recollects, "we fled to the Church, and the priests hid us. My generation cannot forget this gesture. It was then that I and Jacek Kuroń starting talking to the bishops – and we had truly exciting arguments".[10]

The dialogue led to readings, and countless discussions that yielded a renewed scrutiny of the belief system which Michnik and Kuroń opposed. "As late as 1965 we were the heretics of communism", declared Karol Modzelewski. "We wanted to destroy [the communist] Church but we still believed in its God" (cited in Ceran 2010:181). 1968 was the crossing of the Rubicon. Michnik and Kuroń discovered Bishop Bonhoeffer's "religionless Christianity", and were enchanted by the analogies between Bonhoeffer – who wrote in prison awaiting execution by the Nazis – and their own predicament. They were taken by Bonhoeffer's project of "being with the other" without institution, ritual, dogma or theory (Michnik 1992: 39). They reread Mounier's personalist manifesto and the writings of the Polish philosopher Jan Strzelecki. The latter explored the connection between Christianity and the Left and saw it especially in their common emphasis on compassion:

> If "Christian compassion" is … an unrelenting crusade against indifference and hatred (Mounier), then everything that was the loving embodiment of that compassion, such as the Christian injunction to love thy neighbor, seemed to us during those years to be one of the heroic dimensions of humanity, one of the values which endowed even this anti-human period with an uncommon splendor. I'm speaking of an ethics that puts brotherhood in God – that is, absolute values – above the brotherhood of the tribe or the gun.
>
> (Strzelecki 1971: 63)

Slowly, the KOR thinkers began to see Christianity as identical with their project – "being for the other", "doing good", and building an alliance against the authoritarian rulers. "God does or does not exist, yet we must live in accordance with His commandments", Kuroń and Gaja decided. This resolution entered into Kuroń's political, social and private credo. When he went on hunger strike in St. Christopher's Church, he sat there for ten days, read the Gospel and meditated: "I – the godless creature – know and deeply believe that Christ triumphs, though he only fights with love and only through his own sacrifice" (Kuroń 1980).

Kuroń's friends joked that "It is not important if Jacek believed in God; it is important that God believed in Jacek".[11] The codification of his secular Christianity is the essay "Christians without God" (Kuroń 1984). There he cites Bonhoeffer who disagreed that Christianity directs our thoughts to the afterlife. To Bonhoeffer, Christian life is not an escape from earthly tasks and troubles, but a following of Christ's work springing from compassion (Bonhoeffer 2010). This Kuroń found attractive, even though he was painfully aware of the central dilemma of "Christians without God": "To reject one's values is apostasy. To enrich oneself by the values of the Other is conversion" (Kuroń 1984: 29).

Michnik also softened his stance on the "opium of the people" as a result of a cognitive gestation. "We were bewildered by how often people believe and practice their religion without any coercion", he admitted in one of our conversations. "It is while reading Boenhoffer that I realized that one of the Enlightenment's illusions was the conviction that religion was in decline. In fact, religion is a human need".[12]

When Michnik sat down to work on his ground-breaking *The Church and the Left* (1977) he was writing it from the perspective of a man who had a "guilty conscience about keeping his mouth shut when the Polish Church was pushed into the catacombs [by the communists] and the Catholics were discriminated against".[13] The book was written during his five months in the Catholic cloister of the Franciscan sisters in Laski: one of the most open and intellectually generous religious institutions of the 1970s. In their library, Michnik studied episcopal letters, Cardinal Wyszyński's speeches and leading Western Christian thinkers. He registered the Catholic Church's frequent references to human dignity and defence of national identity during the Stalinist period. He scrupulously noted that the Church's official position on anti-Semitism – disturbingly cautious in the communist period – was challenged by the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*, which condemned the communist anti-Semitic purges in 1968. He praised Cardinal Wyszyński for supporting the

student rebellion. He drew attention to the religiously informed call for civil disobedience: "You must remember the principle from the Acts of the Apostles; that whenever the power-holders give unethical orders, transcending human possibilities, one must serve God more than man" (Michnik 1977; 1992: 98). He quoted Johannes Baptist Metz, who saw the emancipatory functions of the Church in three different tasks: the defence of the individual, criticism of totalitarianism, and love as a principle of revolution (Michnik 1992: 118, 192, 265).

In many respects, Michnik's *The Church and the Left* prefigures ideas that later figured in Tischner's writings and in the Polish Pope's encyclicals inspired by *Solidarność*. It is a book which, in 1977, launched a constructive vision whose underlying ideology was not the politics of the Left or the nationalist-Catholic insurrectionism, but the politics of cooperation between opposing creeds: the very fundament of what later became the movement of *Solidarity*. Michnik called for the "opening" both of the Church and the Left via an exhumation of those traditions that held anti-totalitarian potential and were thus able to act in concert and initiate a paradigm shift. Such a shift – a reclaiming of the ideas of freedom, individual autonomy, the emancipation of labour and just distribution of income – had to be based on a strategy of non-violence (Michnik 1977: 202–203.)

The Church and the Left became an important stepping stone in forging the ethos of a small group of KOR outliers: an attempt to combine socialist ideas with Christianity through a creative dialogue. In Jan Józef Lipski's essay on the subject (Lipski, 1983: 33), KOR's value platform is defined in terms of its emphasis on Samaritan altruism, evolution rather than revolution, cultivation of trust, and the renunciation of hatred. "If KOR's [response] to beatings, arrests, provocations, [and] slander were hatred", Lipski argued, "then KOR would fail because hatred is self-destructive. In no other matter has the influence of Christian ethics been so pivotal as in this one" (Lipski 1983: 37). There is no doubt that Christian inspiration in the ethos of the Players also included the readiness to forgive – something that influenced KOR's attitude to the communists after 1989. Forgiving human mistakes – even wrongs inflicted on others – was one of the central values of the community of conscience. Michnik declared: "The genuine influence of Christian ethics on our circle was based on the memory of the joy of recovering a sheep that went astray …" and on Christ's warning: "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone" (Michnik 1992: 38).

The alternative Catholicism of Father Tischner

In 1981 all Poles were enthralled by the brave and brilliant Lech Wałęsa – an unemployed electrician who demonstratively wore an image of the Holy Virgin below his bushy moustache. But there was yet another *Solidarność* hero – one who was less known internationally, but with whom all "mothers of Poland" were secretly in love. It was the priest whose anatomy of evil opened this chapter. His name was Józef Tischner. Tischner was wise, witty, gallant and handsome – and adroitly hid his extraordinary erudition in light, aphoristic, raconteur-style

comments which were quoted all over the country. Inspired by the folk wisdom of the Polish highlanders, he made a breakthrough with his legendary homily on the "Ethics of *Solidarność*", delivered on 19 October 1980 at the Wawel Cathedral in Kraków (1980; 1992). The sermon was the epitome of an ecumenical, sagacious Catholicism. It was almost "Mozartian" in its luminous, conciliatory rhetoric and effortless navigation between the teachings of the Pope and the heroic ethos of the more secular founding fathers of Solidarność. It was clear that Tischner had unique insight into the plural nature of traditions which informed *Solidarity*: nationalist, Catholic, socialist, intellectual and proletarian. His definition of Solidarność's ethics was inspired by St. Paul's message:

> What does it mean to be in solidarity? It means to carry the burden of another person … Solidarity has still another facet; solidarity does not need to be imposed from the outside by force … And one more thing – solidarity, the one that is borne from the pages and spirit of the [G]ospel, does not need an enemy or opponent to strengthen itself and grow. It turns towards all and not against anyone.
>
> (Tischner 1980; 1992: 7)

Although solidarity opens people to the sacred, Tischner argued, the experience of *Solidarność* was not religious, but ethical: "The deepest solidarity is the solidarity of consciences. It is first of all solidarity with those who were wounded by other people and who suffer the suffering which is possible to avoid and which is useless" (1990: 2–3). Very much as Michnik and Kuroń, Tischner emphasized the non-adversarial character of the moral upheaval, and thus pointed to its cooperative rather than "tribal" nature: "Solidarność is not designed *against* anybody; it speaks *to* everybody. It is not a movement of protest against political and economic oppression, but a moral protest against the system, that, by wasting the fruits of human labor, has broken human dignity" (Tischner 1992: 91).

Tischner's other famous homily at the Wawel Cathedral, dating back to 1982, echoed John Paul II's encyclical *Laborem Exercens* (1981) in its focus on the connection between human dignity, solidarity and work. Karol Wojtyła's encyclical had been a response to the degradation of man as the subject of work both in collectivist and in neo-liberal systems. It called for "new movements of solidarity *of* the workers and *with* the workers" – solidarity which was especially needed in a world where exploitation of the working masses was intense, and the gap between the rich and poor was growing ever wider in both systems. According to Tischner, "[H]uman work is a language through which one speaks with the other, the language which develops or destroys him. The exploitation of human work takes place whenever an economic system becomes founded on a lie" (Tischner 1990: 45).

The focus on human work rather than prayer, on social solidarity rather than individual striving for grace, and on the violation of human dignity in communist and capitalist systems alike, was a daring addition to the standard Catholic agenda both in the pronouncements of the Pope and in Tischner's books and sermons. But Tischner

went further than John Paul II: his sermons struck – and united – everybody by their discrete, rather sparse references to the Catholic Church, and their emphasis on the movement in which people could finally remove their ideological masks and be themselves. "In *Solidarność* we are what we really are: The believers remain believers, the unbelievers stay unbelieving". Though Tischner saw the difference between Christianity and socialism, "it is not so that one is good and the other evil: both search for human happiness" (Tischner 1992: 21).

Tischner's intellectual legacy ranges from the studies of the inadequacy of Thomism to critiques of anti-liberalism and anti-democracy in the Roman Catholic Church, and on to *Historia filozofii po góralsku* ("The Highlander's History of Philosophy"), written in the Polish Highlander's dialect (1997). Though there is no room here to explore the nuances of his theological thought, even a peremptory look at his opus shows one of the most innovative, though perhaps least known, Christian thinkers of the last century. As co-founder (with Hans-Georg Gadamer) of the Viennese *Institut für die Wissenschaften vom Menschen* in 1981, Tischner was in continuous dialogue with Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur and other leading international thinkers. He sought to bridge the gap between the East and West by disseminating in Poland the most exciting contributions to theological thought. Both the ease with which Tischner moved between various intellectual (and non-intellectual) environments and his status as John Paul II's close sparring partner, put him at the heart of the Solidarity movement.

What is most important from our anti-authoritarian perspective is the shadow of Auschwitz and Kolyma which hangs over Tischner's theological visions. He held that the evil of the totalitarian epoch was so great that it surpassed all intellectual categories and human potential to comprehend it (Tischner 1996: 66). Yet, in a speech given to German theology students in 1993, he contended that "it is not true that at Auschwitz and Kolyma humanity lost. The truth is that humanity won. How was this possible?" (Tischner 1982: 3). Again and again, just like the Viennese psychiatrist Victor Frankl, Tischner returns to the heroism of small groups of camp prisoners in his systematic philosophical work, *Spór o istnienie o człowieka* ("The debate concerning the existence of the human being", 1998). It is an attempt to offer a heroic anthropology based on a philosophy of hope. Its fundament is the memory of concrete people who walked through the concentration barracks in Nazi and Soviet camps comforting others, giving away their last piece of bread. They were few in number, but they offered sufficient proof that there was one thing that could not be taken away even from the most degraded humans: the ability to choose *not* to submit to those powers that threatened one's inner freedom.[14]

Tischner's philosophy of hope challenges the Catholic command to "bear one's cross" or "to suffer with dignity". The act of being human is to constantly testify to the fact that good can conquer evil and that evil is not free, if only because it is dependent on hatred of the good. Tischner's strong prosociality demands that one resist the temptation to indulge in the triumphalism of pain. The Polish inclination to wallow in national traumas – a long *Gehenna* of partitions, constant foreign invasions, the almost total destruction by the

Nazis, and half a century of Soviet bondage – all this was deplorable. But "there is, after all, much pain in the world. There are famines, poverty, diseases and wars. Why should we focus on *one* pain, on the pain of this particular people and not others who are defeated?" In Tischner's view, the impulse to dwell on past wrongs persists in Poland because the "national pain is perceived as a messianic pain, from which the emancipation of the world will allegedly emerge" (Tischner 2010; 2013: 78). But will it?

Human emancipation does not spring from narcissistic pain, reasoned Tischner. Rather, it is the result of abandoning of the "my-suffering-is-worse-than-yours" attitude, and the human ability to transcend dramatic predicaments in acts of altruism and compassion.

At the time of *Solidarność*, and in the1990s, Tischner became a living symbol of an open, prosocial, humanist Christianity. Unperturbed by the labels of "Jew", "liberal" and "Mason" thrown at him by the obscurantist flank of the Catholic Church, he continued to spread the Erasmian wisdom among the masses. His televized ruminations on the Catechism of the Catholic Church were avidly watched by millions. Believers and non-believers alike sought him out until his death in 2000. This was the year when the light in the Polish Catholic Church went dim.

To summarize: much has been written about the role of the Polish Pope in boosting the anti-authoritarian resistance in Poland through his 1979, 1983 and 1987 visits, his legendary "Do not have fear" appeal in front of an ecstatic mass, and his successive encyclicals. Certainly the homilies during the papal visit in 1979 were masterpieces of subtle social empowerment: though not openly incendiary and reiterating reconciliation and non-violence, they spoke of the "rights of each nation" and radiated Christian humanism. At the same time, however, it is also true that courageous, enlightened priests on the ground – such Józef Tischner or his friend, Father Popiełuszko – played a fundamental role in making the non-violent revolution sustainable on a daily basis and in animating the community of compassion. Many of the Pope's insights in the post-1989 encyclical *Centesimus Annus* (1991) bear the stamp of his exchanges with sages like Tischner and Kołakowski.

What unites the three thinkers is their critique of the anthropological vanity built into communist vision and their polemic with ideas of social constructivism. Apart from the fact that these ideas – as embodied by communist practice – were an invitation to manipulate human identity, memory and history, they had a serious repercussions for the concept of human responsibility. Tischner and Kołakowski insisted that, by reducing humans to a series of social relationships, communism erased the concept of the person as an autonomous and accountable subject able to make free moral decisions. The mistaken conception of personhood led to both a distortion of law and an erroneous understanding of the role of private property. Tischner agreed with Wojtyła when he argued that a person who is deprived of things he can call "his own" and who is not appreciated for his or her own initiative becomes an involuntary slave who depends on the social machine and on those who

control it (Tischner 1981). Such dependence reduces a person's dignity and blocks the creation of an authentic human community. Like Kołakowski, both theologians kept detonating the dream of building an anthropocentric paradise where all evil would be eradicated. They insisted that the root of modern totalitarianism was to be found in the denial of the transcendent dignity of the human person who is the subject of rights that cannot be violated either by another individual, group, class, nation or state.

From Sanctum to pan*demonium*?

In the pages above, I have attempted to explore an extraordinary turn towards the Christian *Sanctum* in the 1970s which contributed to forging anti-authoritarian thought and practice in Poland. I have argued that the process of building resistance against the authoritarian state was accompanied by a genuine, intellectual effort by the humanist outliers to study and "befriend" the Christian worldview. Their project of fighting the evil inherent in the totalitarian mindset was preceded by hard intellectual work and a moral quest initiated by the 1968 generation: a quest which prepared the ground for future partnership between the Church and the opposition.

Ironically, only two decades after 1989, the tradition drawing on Tischner's *Sanctum* was eclipsed by the Catholic Church's political struggle for the "rule of souls" whose main protagonists have lapsed into being good Catholic Manicheans. The likes of Father Jankowski and Father Rydzyk built their mini-empires, with Radio Marija and TV *Trwam* blurting obscurantist parochialism, anti-Semitic propaganda and acid, anti-European nationalism.[15] In the second decade of the 21st century, the broadcasts of Radio Maryja send a clear message:

> The European Union is [the] new form of human enslavement, a locus of an atheist action which is directed against the Church. The Poles are a Catholic nation. A healthy, Catholic nation can be the origin of the change in the world. But this is dangerous for the Globalists. That is why they want to stifle our nation, and use the occasion to take possession of our land. The European Union wants to create the lungs of Europe in the East, a place for bear-hunting. And so the [Western] lords, when they feel like getting a deer, will have fun, while the Poles will be lackeys who perform menial jobs that nobody wants to touch. (Romanowski 2005)

Such grotesque, brainless and sectarian views show a quantum leap backwards – from the enlightened, altruist church of Solidarność to the narrow-minded, authoritarian church of the 21st century. The oppositional, "Julianic" Church has been replaced by the "Constantinian Church":[16] an institution which is no longer generous and independent but greedy and hegemonic, working in cahoots with the illiberal government.

Does it mean that the tolerant, spiritual tradition which animated the emergence of the first Solidarność is ultimately incompatible with the human *libido dominandi* and thus irrelevant to the contemporary revolution of dignity?

To resort again to evolutionary theory and the punctuated trajectory of human advancement: the religious effervescence of the humanist outliers, once brought to life and releasing the best in humans, is not perishable. It constitutes a legacy that has its own energy. Once created – complete with mobilizing narratives, paroles and empowering actions – it both evokes and prefigures an alternative, prosocial country and culture which once existed and can be reborn.

Notes

1 "Cultural Pathology: Roots of Polish Literary Opposition to Communism", *Journal of European Studies*, 29 (1999), 179–210.
2 According to Michnik, a strong presence of religious quest was the most distinctive feature of the Central European culture of that period. See Michnik, "I Loathe Totalitarianism: Remembering Bolesław Miciński" in *Cross Currents*, vol. 8 (1989), 9–28.
3 The original Polish version of the "Litany", found by the historian Paweł Machcewicz, runs: "Hołd Ci składamy, Partio Ukochana/choć droga Twoja kolcami usłana./ Wysiłku potem i krwią jest zroszona/Tyś nieugięta i niezwyciężona./ Przykładu światłem płoniesz na kształt znicza/ Podziwu godna Partio Robotnicza". See Paweł Machcewicz, "Litania do partii" in *Mówią Wieki* (1993), vol. 9, 13.
4 Author's seminar notes, Oxford 1989.
5 Author's seminar notes, Oxford 1989.
6 Author's seminar notes, Oxford 1988.
7 Cited from memory, Leszek Kołakowski's funeral 29 July 2009 in Warsaw.
8 The anecdote was well-known in intelligentsia circles, but it is not possible to date or verify its accuracy.
9 Personal communication, Warszawa, November 2002.
10 Personal communication, Warszawa, spring 2004.
11 Cited by Adam Michnik, personal communication, April 2014.
12 Personal communication, Warsaw, May 2004.
13 Personal communication, Warsaw, May 2004.
14 Tischner often spoke about Fr. Maximilian Kolbe, a Polish prisoner at Auschwitz, who saved the life of a young man facing execution by offering his life instead. Another of Tischner's exemplaries was his friend Fr. Jerzy Popiełuszko, who was brutally slain and dumped into the Vistula River on 19 October 1984 by the Security Police for his activities in *Solidarity*.
15 In 1998, over 40 per cent of respondents replied that they listened to Radio Maryja. See Witold Zdaniewicz, *Religijno*ść *Polaków 1991–1998* (Warszawa: Pax, 2001). See also Timothy A. Byrnes, "The Polish Church: Catholic Hierarchy and Polish Politics" in Charles Christopher Manuel, Lawrence Reardon, Charles Wilcox (eds), *The Nation State and the Catholic Church: Comparative Perspectives*. Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2007. http://books.google.no/books?id=-8gqfwcbTaAC&pg=PA113&lpg=PA113&dq=how+many+poles+listened+to+Radio+marija&source=bl&ots=D5cgmA6NAo&sig=vT7Vkhb0KmF8PE_uTkCyCnXnais&hl=en&sa=X&ei=KmixU7TvC6Kh4gTXtIDACA&ved=0CEcQ6AEwBg#v=onepage&q=radio&f=false Accessed 16 May 20017.
16 The typology has been proposed by Cywiński in his *Rodowody Niepokornych* (Indomitable Pedigrees). A Constantinian church – named after Roman Emperor Constantine (reigned 306–337) – is a church in possession, enjoying its autonomy and participating

in power. A Julianic church was named for the anti-Christian Roman Emperor Julian (reigned 361–363), who challenged the mainstream church by trying restore the old Olympian religion. See Cywiński, B. (1971) *Rodowody niepokornych* (Indomitable Pedigrees). Kraków: Znak.

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7 The power of women

Revolution of dignity and the "underground women"

In a documentary film about *Solidarność According to Women*, by Marta Dzido and Piotr Śliwowski (2014), a young female director wanders around the spectral remains of the Gdańsk shipyards, in an attempt to challenge the collective amnesia and recover the faces and voices of women who were part of Solidarity. In one of the last scenes, she interviews Janina Paradowska, an influential political journalist and one of the former leaders of *Solidarność*. When asked why, in her earlier work on the movement, Paradowska had interviewed exclusively *male* leaders, the journalist replies that there were no women in the movement who had any vision or a strategy. But then, on reflection, she corrects herself: she could have talked to Alina Pieńkowska. Or Anna Walentynowicz. Or Joanna Gwiazda. "They were strong and determined – perhaps even more determined than men". The conversation takes an intriguing turn when the young film director presses:

> MD: Surely the women did a ton of work! They published *Tygodnik Mazowsze* …
>
> JP: Yes, without women there wouldn't have been any underground at all! They did their job but were *not* chosen as Solidarność representatives.
>
> MD: But why?
>
> JP: Exactly. Because this is how it was.
>
> MD: Because they didn't they want it themselves?
>
> JP: No, they weren't invited. Generally, their role was to do their job … and men had the power.
>
> MD: And nobody was surprised back then?
>
> JP: No. Actually things changed dramatically since then. We owe a lot to feminists![1]

Paradowska laughs heartily, first bemused by this discovery. But her face gets serious. She speaks slowly, more to herself than to the interviewer. "Yes, it's like we agreed to be some kind of a service staff, support staff, logistics staff … It doesn't make sense. You are right. It doesn't make sense …"

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Paradowska's suspended "eureka" moment is telling. The camera records how one of the sharpest brains in the post-authoritarian country realizes that she was not so sharp after all. Not only did she overlook one of the key actors in the anti-authoritarian revolution; she herself was one of them, accepting her role as secondary to men. It did not make sense indeed. Or did it?

The film about *Solidarność According to Women* shows how the role of small groups of humanist outliers in the revolution of dignity was impossible without one pivotal, and yet occluded, taskforce. In the Polish case, this taskforce consisted of brave, disciplined and highly creative individuals without whom the revolution might have faltered. They did not write philosophical treatises or flaming letters from prison. They did not negotiate with the authorities. For a long time they were obscured from public view. But it is due to their work that the publication channels were firmly established and functioned smoothly both at the time when garrulous male stars were bathing in the international spotlight, and in those periods they sat behind bars. Between 1976 and 1990 it was the *female subaltern revolutionaries* who made Solidarność happen. They ran the communication network, but they made no fuss about performing less elevating, mule's chores: making coffee and food for men, finding safe places for dissidents on the run, collecting money, scheduling operations and working as couriers. As Anna Herbich has shown, some of them lost their jobs, got arrested, had their children confiscated, or were left without any means of subsistence (Herbich 2016). Why did they never step out and demand recognition for their work and talent? And what have been the consequences of their discrete anti-authoritarianism? Has it yielded more or less dignity to women in the years to come?

The 21st century has spawned several studies on the resourcefulness, bravado and extraordinary humility of the women who co-created *Solidarność*. Both Ewa Kondratowicz's volume, *Szminka na sztandarze* ("Lipstick on a Flag" 2001) and Shana Penn's more systematic analysis, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism* (2006) have revealed women as "the unsung heroines" of the Polish revolution of dignity. The studies lay down the facts: KOR's *Information Bulletin* was run by women – Anna Dodziuk, Joanna Szczęsna, Zofia Romaszewska and Anka Kowalska. The *spiritus movens* of the worker's spreadsheet, *Robotnik*, was Helena Łuczywo, who also created the Solidarność Press Agency. The most influential, opinion-making weekly published between 1981 and 1989, *Tygodnik Mazowsze* (Mazowsze Weekly), was the feat of six women who described themselves as the "Ladies Operational Group".[2] Interestingly, *Tygodnik* provided not only the platform for the dissident writings of Solidarność heroes such as Zbigniew Bujak, Władysław Frasyniuk, Maciej Poleski and Jacek Kuroń; it made an invaluable contribution to popularizing economic thought and visions of democratic institutions in future Poland. In addition, women were in charge of *Wszechnicas* (workers' universities) and led courses at the Gdańsk shipyards. In the words of one, "We told [the workers] about the trade unions in the West and taught them how to live in a free country" (Labuda in Kondratowicz 2001: 159) But the women didn't talk only to workers. Often more eloquent in foreign languages than the male stars, they gave interviews to the foreign press on behalf of Kuroń, Bujak or Wałęsa.

There are three extraordinary women in particular – Anna Walentynowicz, Alina Pieńkowska and Ewa Ossowska – who were like three wheels of fortune in the epic transformation that started in 1980. Anna Walentynowicz – a widely respected welder and trade unionist – was the very reason for the strikes at Gdańsk shipyards. After she had been fired for her advocacy of independent trade unions, the Gdańsk workers struck to demand her reinstatement. And it was as a result of Walentynowicz's, Pieńkowska's and Ossowska's moral impulse that, at the fateful moment on the third day of the strike, the idea of a broad solidarity was hammered into Lech Wałęsa's and workers' heads. It was the day when the authorities finally agreed to meet the Gdańsk workers' demands, and the men, satisfied, were going home. But the three women were thinking ahead of their colleagues. They saw that outside the shipyards gate there were hundreds of anxious workers from striking factories all over Poland. They had come to Gdańsk to show their solidarity with Lech Wałęsa. Now that the Gdańsk strike was called off, they faced an uncertain future back home. Initially, Wałęsa was not aware of the "slot of time" that fate had bestowed on him, nor did he see the need for reciprocal solidarity with outside strikers. But Pieńkowska, Ossowka and Walentynowicz did. Resolutely, they closed the gates of the shipyards and stopped the Gdańsk workers from leaving. Then they succeeded in persuading Wałęsa to continue the strike until the *national* demands for the ground-breaking registration of independent trade unions everywhere were met (Kubasiewicz Houée in Kondratowicz 2001: 196.)

This pregnant episode featuring key women protagonists has been erased from the official narrative of *Solidarność*. Marta Dzido's film shows how the legend of Solidarity – or whatever has been left of it – has been reduced to the following story: Lech Wałęsa jumps over the shipyard's fence. A crowd of workers lifts him on their shoulders and he, like some rock star, raises his hand in a V-sign. And then everybody shouts Solidarność! Solidarność! Wałęsa is the hero. The revolutionary semiotics is male. What adds insult to injury is that the 2009 exhibition, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the movement, featured no female protagonists. Can we talk about the ingrained and ever so nasty male chauvinism behind this sin of omission?

Intriguingly, the case studies and interviews cited by Polish and international studies provide ample evidence to the effect that most women who were part of the anti-authoritarian opposition did not think that they were underestimated or treated unfairly. On the contrary, they emphasized the value of male friendship and men's cordiality, especially in the first phase of *Solidarność*. Some insisted that their public invisibility was their own choice. They did not care for fame. Neither did they feel discriminated against. They felt happy to be witnesses to and participants in an epic moment in their country's history (Dodziuk in Kondratowicz 2001: 33–34). "We were small, petty girls, we smoked lots of cigarettes, it was a fantastic time. We sat at night tapping away on the typewriters. We felt empowerment and a sense if community … It was dangerous, but every moment was full of friendship" (Dzido 2014). Many speak of "feeling honored to be part of a splendid company – the best intellectual company in Europe, if not in the world". (Dodziuk in Kondratowicz 2001: 33) Some, like Anna Dudziak, ascribe their humility to plain realism:

> I have a cynical consciousness that in order to climb to the pantheon you need to be either a Stalin or a Dalai Lama. As for me, if I really choose to care for something, I'm at my best in a small circle of people around me … Besides, even if I vomited out my entrails, history would have hardly paid attention to me.
>
> (Dudziak in Kondratowicz 2001: 33–34)

Other interviewed women stress that their invisibility was strategic: it was the guarantee of the continuity of work on forging a parallel society and the survival of the conspiracy after martial law had been imposed in December of 1981. The secret police did not suspect women to be the masterminds of the opposition, and so when men were arrested the oppositional work could continue uninterrupted.

These comments leave many questions unanswered. Is it – as has been occasionally claimed – that "by not telling their own story [women] sentenced themselves to non-existence?" (Kowalska and Romaszewska in Kondratowicz 2001: 48, 73). For all its inclusive spirit, was *Solidarność* a largely *macho* enterprise, where the female dissidents would never admit to being suppressed by the alpha males because this would, in effect, mean an admission of self-deception, a flawed existence and of living in denial? And how has the *Solidarność* revolution affected women's status in post-authoritarian Poland?

The feminist studies shed only partial light on Polish women's insouciance about fame and recognition. Shana Penn dwells on Poland's patriarchal culture, Catholic ideas of womanhood, men's narcissism, and the negative connotations tied to the Western concept of feminism (Penn 2005). Anne Reading (1992) is at pains to demonstrate how "[S]exism saturates Polish culture historically, linguistically, socially and in literature, under state socialism, and in Solidarity". Just as Poland was once partitioned, so women are allegedly partitioned and annexed by the workplace, by children, by men (Reading 1992: 5).

Without entirely discounting these findings, let me propose a more nuanced, historical-evolutionary approach which casts light on issues occluded from feminist research. Can we get a more accurate picture of the seeming idiocy of female life under, and after, communism?

The smithery of humanism

In his *Indomitable Pedigrees* (1971) – a classic of oppositional humanism in Poland – Bohdan Cywiński talks about the emergence of a unique humanist *Bildung* in 19th-century Poland, one whose bearers were mostly women. At the "flying universities" and "Ladies' Universities" established in Warsaw in the 1880s by Jadwiga Davidowa and Helena Radlińska, young girls living under the Russian governorate were offered 11 weekly hours of secret education in logic, theories of cognition, psychology, ethics, history of philosophy, law, political economy, aesthetics, sociology and chemistry. These courses were not some light-weight extracurricular add-ons. The teachers were recruited from the most enlightened elites – people with great brains and spirits who considered underground education to be

part of their patriotic duty. Many female pupils exchanged ancient prayer books for economic and political narratives in the course of this alternative education – stories which led them less to the altar and more to the catacombs of social resistance. Their civic mission became their second habit: a counterpoint to Jane Austin's languishing domestic species. Maria Skłodowska – internationally known as Maria Curie – was a graduate of these courses, and her intellectual level upon arrival in France in 1891 was found sufficient to get her enrolled at the Department of Chemistry at La Sorbonne.

It would not be too much to say that before the dawn of communism Poland had flaunted a well-educated female intelligentsia that functioned not just as the unofficial inventor of the nation as an imagined community, but as the bearer of the "Europeanness" of Poland as well. As educators – both in the school system and at home – women formed a clandestine republic of story tellers: stories which were banned in the then Russian or Prussian schools. The occupying powers' educational agenda was to "de-Polonize" the nation and suppress teaching of national history and language. Men resisted and died publicly in a series of spectacular and failed uprisings against the oppressors in 1794, 1830–31, 1846, 1848 and 1863–65. But the protest against the Prussian, Russian and Austrian partitioners assumed also a more discursive and privatized form: it took place at home, in churches and in small theatres. These were places where women functioned as mentors and masterminds of cultural dissent. By functioning both as guardians and disseminators of the alternative version of Polish history and the ideas of social care and cooperation, they forged a unique epistemic regime of "underground knowledge". The legendary Catholic trope of the Black Madonna as a "Queen of Poland", was transmuted into the mythology of *Matka Polka* ("Mother Pole"), with her exemplary patriotism, selflessness and responsibility for the future of the nation. But Mother Pole was hardly a passive, suffering Niobe. Her readings and teachings were about Poland as a European country, as opposed to the "Orientalized" Poland – the West's Other – whose culture and identity were on the brink of extinction.

When seen through this lens, the traditional role of educated women in Poland between the 19th century and 1989 went beyond being victims of the male patriarchy of the Catholic Church, as Penn's and Readings' deconstructions suggest. Many women interiorized their role as *clandestine agents of public-mindedness* in a country which was both de-Polonized and demoralized by a succession of alien authoritarian powers. My own mother, a teacher in former communist Poland, was one such agent. The obligatory menu of our Sunday dinners included not just the banned names and contents of the national past and present. There were also difficult – often resisted – lessons in the art of compassion extended to the Russians and the Ukrainians, whose fate – in our mother's eyes – was surely worse that our predicament in the "merriest barracks in the Soviet concentration camp". We were even taught to imagine "decent Germans": something that official communist education would hardly allow for.

This civic *Bildung* – transmitted by countless mothers like mine[3] – ensured the continuous existence of a community of compassion and the unbroken membership in an imaginary "European home". Far from perceiving their status as pixels

in the revolution, they considered their role as that of civilizing agents, guides and advisers. It would not have occurred to them to expect recognition or kudos for their work. My own mother insisted that "one is not paid or rewarded for being a patriot". She argued that her duty was to "keep the Shakespearian jester alive in Poland at the time when she and her people were living in the heart of darkness".

Do we, then, have here a case of "virtue unrewarded", or what Machiavelli called "a pathology of altruism"? The pioneer of prosociality-focused evolutionary biology, David Soan Wilson, argues it is impossible to disprove psychological egoism or altruism because we have no way to read minds and no access to the subconscious motivations of others. However, he believes that what matters most are not the thoughts or feelings motivating people, but the actions that benefit others and increase the resilience and survival of a group (Wilson 2016). In the Polish case, the educated women who took part in the anti-authoritarian movement "inherited" the culturally reproduced trait of selfless action for the benefit of the group. Their code was "living for the other", being fulfilled and self-realized through taking on the role of a giver. And it is largely thanks to women's selflessness that the struggle against authoritarian oppression went on and culminated in the rise of the anti-authoriatrian *Solidarność*. To deny it, or distract from their feat by focusing on gender discrimination, would be misguided.

The fact that the women did not seek recognition for their work is due to many factors. But one is strongly tied to both the conciliatory and imaginative aspect of altruism. As friends, sisters, mothers and wives of the anti-authoritarian frontliners, the women knew the intimate details of the fates of the men who took risks: the everyday humiliations of prison life, the beatings, interrogations, living in a time warp, being broken both physically and mentally, losing hope. As one of them put it:

> Communist Poland was not Latin America. Even when we were identified as "anti-state elements" during the martial law in 1982, we were hardly ever physically abused. So if we didn't scream for attention after the collapse of communism it is largely because we had imagination. For us, to accuse national heroes of naricissim or chauvinism was out of place. We speak about men whose life was mostly about beatings, arrests, and scrubbing the prison toilets – to accuse them of excessive self-importance would be both awkward and selfish.
>
> (Surażska 2005)[4]

This imaginative humility was combined with a cooperative work ethos. In the formulation of some observers, Polish women who worked in the opposition cultivated compromise-seeking rather than a confrontational modus operandi (Borusewicz in Kondratowicz 2001: 58). The readers of the underground weekly, *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, published between 1982 and 1989, were struck by the journal's tolerance and almost Buddhistic openness and impartiality. As one of the editors put it: "We were fighting for a less militarized human being, one that would

counteract a totalitarian creature always dressed-up in a uniform" (Tarasiewicz in Kondratowicz 2001: 117).

Perhaps the dialogic character of the 1980 and 1989 revolutions was as much due to the influence of a Kuroń or a Gandhi as the work of the "feminine mode of resistance": one that pursued strategies inspired less by Nancy Fraser and more by Florence Nightingale and Madame de Pompadour. Whatever the answer, at the heart of KOR and the first *Solidarność*, was the wisdom of a *smart, caring creative*; a wisdom that yielded what Goldfarb called a mixture of "civility and subversion" (Goldfarb 1989). The result of women's work was not only a communicative revolution, but also the exemplary management of a social upheaval which produced almost no victims.

To sum up: as mostly altruistic mentors rather than fighters, Polish women activists were imaginative co-workers and co-creators of *Solidarność*. But they were ill-prepared to embrace feminist partisanship. While the socialist legacy of top-down gender equality and broad access to education made them potentially equal partners of men, their *thymos* – the Aristotelian term for the human drive for recognition – has remained largely work in progress well into the second decade of the 21st century.

The anti-feminist femininity

If the prosocial orientation of the female anti-authoritarian activists can be understood by citing their particular cultural-historical experience, their general and stubborn anti-feminist stance – ranging from mild scepticism to downright aversion – is a puzzle to Western observers. Again, the anti-feminist bias can be partly traced back to the dominance of the patriarchal and Catholic worldview and a seemingly low level of gender consciousness. Feminism's largely leftist orientation has not helped either: in a society which was a victim of real existing socialism, feminists have been stigmatized as the relics of the "atheist, totalitarian regime". Still another story tells us about the eternally postponed cause – the common task of survival and moving forward was stronger than the articulation of the conflict between the sexes (Ksieniewicz 2014). The struggle for women's rights was treated as secondary to the struggle for independence, then to the agenda of catching up with Europe, then joining the EU, then NATO – until women woke up in an overwhelmingly anti-abortion and "anti-gender" Parliament in the 21st century.

The ravages of women's (self)marginalization have been telling: among the 21 signatories of the Round Table Agreement in 1989 there was only one woman: Grażyna Staniszewska. The post-1989 crisis was water to the mill, or – to use a more apt metaphor – myrrh in the incense, burnt by the alliance between the Holy and Apostolic Churches and the party of the motley camp of the "True Poles". In 21st-century Poland – a country with one of the strictest anti-abortion laws in Europe – it is easier to win a parliamentary debate on drastic cuts in public spending than to pass pro-abortion legislation. Young women, especially, have been disadvantaged by the largely male-centred monologue which has dominated politics, the economy and social life. In March 1992, Anna Popowicz was fired

from her position as head of the first cabinet office on women, youth and family for questioning discriminatory policies arising from the alliance of *Solidarity* and the Church (e.g. Pakszys and Mazurczak 1994: 147).

Rather than framing the women's seemingly lost revolution in terms of Freudian or Lacanian neuroses, I wish to draw attention to three, often underestimated, but significant reasons for the lack of enthusiasm for feminism – not just in Poland, but in many authoritarian or post-authoritarian countries such as Iran or Tunisia. The first reason is pedestrian but nevertheless pertinent: the working middle-class women in these countries have had no time for feminism. We are talking about the "infrastructural time" that one needs to make things work in an unpredictable world. In such contexts, sexuality has been a secondary issue compared to the time needed to combine a job with looking after a family, providing food and ensuring stability – in short, creating cosmos out of chaos. "Feminists were burning their bras while we couldn't buy them", was the often heard sarcasm that captured the gap between the East and West in the early 1990s. Caught in the treadmill of tasks at their workplace and the jungle of family duties, women have had little or no energy left to theorize about *Das Unbehagen in der Frauliche Kultur*.

The second reason for the lack of feminist resurgence in the post-authoritarian context is what can be called the law of cultural *ricorso*: a cultural backlash which follows too rapid a transformation. As a matter of fact, women's predicament is a good illustration of how culture can override political and economic goals. An accelerated project of modernization invites the "old habits of the heart" to strike back, often with renewed force. Such habits and values are a community's moorings; they provide certainties and a moral compass in a liquid, alienating modernity. More often than not, they lead to the victory of conservative, value-charged narratives that catch secular opposition by surprise. Nothing illustrates this backlash as poignantly as the cry of one Tunisian feminist after the fall of the dictator Ben Ali: "Now we have the freedom to wear the veil!" (Khalil, 2014: 190).

In the Polish case, the culture of the pre-authoritarian *ancien regime* – going back to the 1930s – was marked by strong nationalist sentiment fused with the Catholic ethos. Both embraced a predominantly patriarchal culture, where superficial chivalry and veneration of women mixed with their tacit or open subjugation. It is easy to underestimate the energy of this entrenched cultural *habitus* – especially if it has been suppressed by a rather thin veneer of socialist secularism. The transition to democracy has thus been marked by an ongoing clash of two communities: one reclaiming the old allegiances, the other embracing new freedoms and institutions. In the resulting "mini-clash of civilizations", post-communist feminism finds itself in a Catch 22 predicament: in the public consciousness – including most women themselves – it is either associated with past, hated communist impositions, or with the alien, Western culture of anti-Catholic promiscuity and demolition of family values.

But there is one more reason for the stigma imposed on feminism in post-authoritarian countries, one which has to do with *Western feminism's failure* to understand or help the anti-authoritarian resistance. To cite from autopsy: in 1981, after finishing my studies, I was recruited as a translator by one of the small,

underground journals that were mushrooming at the time of *Solidarność*. Since we were ambitious and snobbish – and anxious about being "different" from other dissident presses – we decided translate one of the classic feminist texts into Polish. That is how a fragment of Kristeva's seminal study on women in China (in English) landed on my desk (Kristeva 1977). On the surface, Kristeva's essay looked exciting, but soon I realized that it was both an intellectual and existential challenge. I struggled with the conceptual apparatus – heavily influenced by Freud and Lacan – and with the dense and convoluted argument which was infested with invocations of "an Oriental other" and references to "a specifically cross-cultural, rather than cross-gendered, identification to challenge the Freudian and Lacanian paradigms of Western female subjectivity". I barely understood what Kristeva meant by this and how it was to help us – or indeed the Chinese women – to press on with, if not improve, our anti-authoritarian resistance. But I ploughed away, full of angst over my failing intellectual faculties. When I delivered the final, battered translation, the reaction of the editorial committee was one of bewildered amusement. The conclusion was that either I had to be replaced by a better translator, or Bulgarian-French feminism was about a decadent sect of spaced-out females that indulged in mumbo jumbo. Whether or not the true reason for the abandonment of the feminist agenda by our journal was my mental feebleness or Kristeva's inscrutability, I decided that it was mildly ridiculous to risk years in prison for the translation of pretentious, jargon-driven writing which suffocated our imagination rather than offering empowerment and inspiration.

Later though, after having combed through the feminist literature, I discovered less scholastic ideas in the work of Germaine Greer, Kate Millet and Camille Paglia. But I still could not shake off the impression that they were not speaking to, or partnering with us: young and moderately intelligent Eastern European women who took risks while trying to speak truth to power. It is as if, for all their conceptual refinement and theoretical sophistication, Western feminists were living in a different, clean galactic space, while we, lesser beings, were sunk in the dirt of the post-communist quagmire.

While I appreciated that Western feminist literature was involved in the project of addressing historic gender injustice, its academic version went beyond the pressing concerns of our place and time. In the 1980s Western feminism had little room for any sisterhood with the citizens of the authoritarian countries *not* singing in the anti-American or anti-Western chorus, or not being able to decipher the Lacanian, asphyxiating chant. "They are too much ahead of us", said the editor, and gave up publishing Kristeva. But maybe they were behind us?

"Keep your rosaries off our ovaries" or how to reclaim the revolution

It is only in the 21st century that Polish feminism started making inroads in the Polish transformation. In 2014, one of Poland's leading feminists, Agnieszka Graff, summed up the relationship between feminism and the master narrative of the Polish 1989 revolution. "One could say", she wrote "that Polish feminism of the '90s read the famous essay by Shana Penn … and took it so much to heart that it forged a coherent story about the [underground] women in Poland". The

story was based on the conviction that "Polish female heroes did a tremendous work; the work that has been forgotten in the official version of history … The revolution of 1989 betrayed women, allowing the Catholic Church to play a decisive role in key issues concerning women" (Graff 2014).

According to Graff, Polish women have been reified and infantilized by three powerful forces: conservative politicians, the Catholic hierarchy and the neoliberal tabloid culture, where the ideal has been being feminine, affluent and successful. Of all three actors, the Catholic clergy and its mouthpiece - the conservative press - made the most vociferous and most effective, assaults on genederism as the alleged fruit of totalitarian ideology. Father Dariusz Oko, and influential professor at the John Paul II University in Kraków declared i that "The so called genderism [is the] spiritual child of Marxism … The programme of the promotion of this ideology in Poland has been accepted without public consultation and bears the stamp of totalitarianism".[5]

This is how women's causes have become appropriated by thick-headed men in ties or in dresses.

According to Graff, "There is a sense that the women's movement, rejecting the current shape of collective memory, is a natural heir to the democratic opposition, more precisely – KOR's wing" (Graff 2014). Her statement confirms that the status of Polish feminists in 2014 (when she penned these lines) vaguely resembled the predicament of small groups of humanist outcasts in their own society. As late as 2018 this situation obtains. The question is: how to forge a cooperative front between the feminists, women at large, independent media, civil society and opposition parties? Making the feminist into the national programme requires repeating the feat of KOR: forging a vision that will not just be tweeted by made feasible by new, young and charismatic protagonists.

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The Polish case of "retarded feminism" is not unique. Countless women from post-authoritarian and previously patriarchal cultures struggle with some of the dilemmas described above. Not only are they marginalized; they have been deprived of the language to communicate what they think and feel. They are the victims of what a Norwegian psychologist, Berit Ås, calls "five master suppresson technques" that allow men to stabilize women's powerlessness: "making invisible, ridiculing, witholding information, 'damned if you do and damned if you don't'; heaping blame and putting to shame" (Ås 1945).

There are a variety of initiatives counteracting the inertia of the male-defined world which reduces women's bellies to being a property of the tribe. One ongoing project is the Women's Congress (established in Warsaw in 2009) which, while reclaiming the memory of women's anti-authoritarian resistance, attempts to restore a sense of the social solidarity which has crumbled in neo-authoritarian Poland. One of the liberating aspects of the Congress is its open, humanist nature which guards against its derailment into a parochial conferencing: the 7th Women's Congress in Warsaw gathered 8,000 men and women who debated not just strategies of animating women's solidarity but also ecological challenges, and

the organization of assistance for Syrian war refugees. As one of its participants put it, "we are here not just to recover the memory of the past but to start building the memory of the future".

Wisława Szymborska's post-gender humanism

The revolution of dignity takes ever new forms. To mention but one example – unlike other civic upheavals in human history, the movement in 21st-century Iran is largely driven by women protagonists who have become the international face of dissent and human rights: Parvin Ardalan, Shadi Sadr, Shirin Ebadi, Mansoureh Shojaee, Nasrib Sotoudeh, Shiva Nazar Ahari. These women seem to have replaced the old male Eastern European dissidents – the Havels, the Michniks, the Sakharovs – and added a novel dimension and energy to pressing emancipative projects.

While there is a definite masculine bias in the stories about the revolutionary past and present, there are also archipelagos of higher feminine wisdom that go beyond the blueprint of Western partisan feminism. Such wisdom is joined with a precursory attitude and viewpoint that *goes beyond gender*. There are, I suggest, new e humanist outliers o that challenges the authoritarian rule in the 21st century.Though feminine, they transcend the categories and formulas that talk about the fight for the recognition of female space and value in politics and society. The self-perception of these pioneers is less determined by the juxtaposition of woman against man; it is, first and foremost, the perception of themselves as human beings who do not yield to the division of sex and gender. Brotherhood or sisterhood are archaic categories; what matters is the liberation and emancipation of all mankind based on compassion. The point of departure is an enlarged, *deep humanism* which is both trans-national and post-gender. It either speaks from the future – or it assumes that the world of men cannot be taken very seriously (sic!). This does not mean that it underestimates men; the women I talk about are fully aware of the heroic deeds of men that should be admired and honoured. But they have evolved an almost Buddhist detachment in their way of seeing and reacting to male achievements and failures. For these women, the fight against gender stereotypes is not as important as, say, lessening the pain of the human predicament, or acts of everyday heroism such as looking after a relative with dementia.

The stance I am trying to describe is perhaps best captured by the poetry of Wisława Szymborska, a Nobel prize winner in literature, who, curiously enough, has largely escaped the attention of feminist scholars.[6] As Bożena Karwowska has remarked in her insightful essay, Szymborska's poetry defies those critics who believe that in poetry, the female voice is dominated by the male imagination and symbolic order (Karwowska 2013). Szymborska does not stand for anything that the Polish literary tradition associates with male or female poetry, does not fit into the existing order of the patriarchal world, and her poetic persona has nothing in common with a *femme fatale* or a platonic mistress, or with a victim of male predatory drives, or, indeed, with the patriotic *Matka Polka*. Neither does she fight the existing tradition of gender discourse; she seems not to notice its existence.

She passes over it. As has been observed, “Sometimes Szymborska’s poetry seems to come from a future time where the struggle for the woman’s place [in the world], in other words, the place for the human being, both male and female, is no longer necessary” (Baranowska 1996: 17).

Many of Szymborska’s poems allude to an evolutionary process that has yielded a miracle: a *homo sapiens*:

> I didn’t get a choice either
> but I can’t complain
> I could have been someone
> much less separate.
> Someone from an anthill, shoal, or buzzing swarm
> (“Among the multitudes” 1998: 267)

Just as she inspects herself as an evolutionary accident, Szymborska looks at the other sex with an ironic, studious eye:

> This adult male. This person on earth.
> Ten billion nerve cells. Ten pints of blood
> pumped by ten ounces of heart.
> This object took three billion years to emerge.
> (“A Film from the Sixties” 1998: 94)

In describing the male she mixes irony with “good-natured pity”.

> with that ring in his nose, with that toga, that sweater
> He’s no end of fun, for all you say.
> Poor little beggar.
> A human, if we ever saw one.
> (“No End of Fun” 1998: 107)

In short, at the heart of Szymborska’s world there is a Shakespearian “poor, bare, furked animal” – a man and woman who are both heroic and grotesque in their struggle for dignity and recognition. Szymborska’s is the voice of a woman who feels – as an individual but also culturally – equal to man, and consequently, does not need to fight for anything or yield to anyone. Her poetry resounds with the voice of a human being who knows that even if history belongs to heroes, “after every war / someone has to tidy up” (Szymborska, “The End and the Beginning”).

Perhaps it is in post-gender poetry like Szymborska’s that the next stage of the revolution of dignity – and the anti-authoritarian struggle – is prefigured?

Notes

1 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tAmcnAw4Cu0.
2 The group consisted of Helena Łuczywo, Anna Dodziuk, Joanna Szczęsna, Irena Lasota, Anna Bikont and Elżbieta Rogulska.

3 Personal communication with Agnieszka Romaszewska, Warszawa, October 2004.
4 Personal communication, Warszawa January 2005.
5 See "Zatrute źródła genderyzmu" (The Poisoned Roots of Genderism), *Nasz Dziennik* 24 January 2014, see https://wp.naszdziennik.pl/2014-01-24/0,zatrute-zrodla-genderyzmu.html#.UuKGdccQexU.blogger. See also "Gender Destroys Poland, Gender Destroys Family", Dziennik Zachodni (22 October 2013). See http://www.dziennik-zachodni.pl/artykul/1023109,co-to-jest-gender-gender-niszczy-polske-gender-niszczy-rodzine-gender-stop-ideologia-gender,id,t.html. See also "Gender as a neo-Marxism-Leninism", *Fronda*, 1 January 2014. http://www.fronda.pl/a/genderyzm-jak-neo-marksizm-leninizm,33465.html.
6 In a book on feminist literary perspectives published in 2000, the name of Szymborska figures only in a footnote. See G. Borkowska and L. Sikorska (eds) (2000), *Krytyka feministyczna. Siostra teorii i historii literatury,* Warszawa.

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Epilogue

In *False Dawn* (1998; 2009), the "noirvoyant" philosopher of our time, John Gray, argues that humanity has entered a tragic era – a "hallucinatory New World Order" – typified by international anarchy, the rule of fiat money and a cascade of economic, military and environmental crises. "We may stand on the brink of a tragic epoch" Gray writes, "which will be marked by a deepening international anarchy" (205).

There are many thinkers who, although less apocalyptic, point to a critical juncture in Western civilization. At a 2018 conference in Oslo (13 February) Francis Fukuyama spoke about the erosion of the liberal world order installed in the West after the Second World War (Fukuyama 2018). In his view, the growing number of illiberal governments that have abandoned the rule of law and democratic accountability points towards a relinquishing of the idea of a Europe unified through shared patrimony and common institutions. Other critical observers have signalled the "decline of the idea of the West in the West", and the end of "embedded liberalism" (Ruggie 1982), based on a commitment to free trade allied with the agenda of cultural cohesion and full employment. What seems to dominate the political landscape in 21st-century Eastern Europe is a diversity of what can be called "lilliputinisms": the rule of semi-Putinesque leaders who forge their own cultural forms of capitalism based on the return to Heimat, roots and (revised) history, and stress their scepticism about the ideal of cosmopolitan Europe.

The revolution of dignity I have attempted to describe in this book runs counter to these pessimistic scenarios. I have drawn attention to one of post-war Europe's greatest modern achievements: the role of humanism – rooted in the best European traditions – in the anti-authoritarian struggle. This project – going back to the late 1970s – was based on a unique alloy of potent words and efficacious strategies that drew on the tragic wisdom of Europe's experience of brown and red totalitarianisms. It invoked the power of ideas captured in an epigram of one of the original Polish poets of the 19th century:

> Colossal armies, valiant generals
> Police – secret, open, and of sexes two
> Against whom have they joined together?
> Against a few ideas … nothing new.
>
> (Norwid 1851)[1]

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But words and ideas on their own are not enough. They are world-changing only if fused with human bravery, imagination and prudence. The theme of this study has been the unique, East European "Second Renaissance" in the second half of the 20th century, where the wisdom and altruism of small and courageous groups of humanist outliers challenged the last authoritarian stronghold in Europe. I have argued that the victory over Sovietism in 1989 was a summary effect of many factors and agents, but ultimately, it was possible thanks to a humanist agenda that shone through the social mobilization of the time. A virtuous cycle kicked in, starting a process which was defined by Mahatma Gandhi's concept of *satyagraha*.

According to Gandhi, the trajectory of resistance is about purification: purging oneself of prejudice and anger and exercising the faculty of forgiveness (though not amnesia). It is also about transparency: signalling to the oppressive authorities the intention to resist, yet being open to negotiation. It rests on the idea of "bearing witness": being able to withstand and outlive assaults and punishments in a non-retaliatory way (Gandhi 1906; 2001). In addition, I contend, it depends on innovation – breaking entrenched group-think and habits and the resultant fear through the power of friendship and creative cooperation.

In 1970's Poland, the modern national self-image was long tied to the idea of "you are what your parents and grandparents suffered". This changed in the late 1980s, when more energizing memes of the "power of the powerless" emerged and the idea of forging a parallel *cosmopolis* took shape in numerous educational and communicative initiatives. The most original part of the *Solidarność* upheaval was a model of dialogic, peaceful resistance which, I affirm, sprang less from the workers' sense of being wronged and trade unions' truculent traditions, and more from the humanist outliers' cultural innovation and visionary flair. The "opening of the Polish mind" – both in religious and ideological terms – happened thanks to the power of ideas, the potency of friendship, alternative forms of religiosity and the humanism permeating samizdat poetry and essays. I have argued that – while the ultimate outcome of *Solidarność* anti-authoritarian mobilization was a massive moral and political uprising – literature, myth and family ethos played an invaluable and often underestimated role in this process. The humanist outliers diagnosed the ailments of the past and present, and prefigured the society that was to be. Intriguingly, these prefigurations turned out to be all too accurate: they imagined a new-old world in which anti-authoritarians become the new authoritarians.

This being said, the anatomies of authoritarianism which emerged from the "time of contempt" in Eastern Europe remain as relevant for the ongoing revolution of dignity as they were for the people who created the Workers' Defence Committee. One such central, world-changing text is Leszek Kołakowski's "Theses on Hope and Hopelessness", published in the aftermath of the quashed 1968 rebellion (Kołakowski 1971; 1982: 285–308). Kołakowski's essay polemicized with those who – shocked by the brutality of the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring – claimed that the Soviet system was unreformable; one could only adapt to it or overthrow it by violent revolution. In Kołakowski's view, this perception was erroneous and defeatist for several reasons. Firstly, the end of Stalinist

terror and atrocities proved that the system was not completely fixed forever. Secondly, Sovietism's rigidity depended partly on the degree to which people living under it were *convinced of its rigidity*. Thirdly, the thesis of unreformability was based on the Jacobin logic of everything or nothing – a classic error made by individuals steeped in Marxism-Leninism. It is a position that does not tolerate the "rotten" middle ground or gradual, piecemeal solutions. Fourthly, and most importantly, bureaucratic, despotic socialism was entangled in internal contradictions which needed to be exploited by the opposition. These contradictions included a paralyzing fear of the Kremlin's authoritarian power *within* the ranks of the Communist party itself – a fear which fractured rather than cemented the party. They sprang from the clash of the need for change with the dogmatic inertia built into the authoritarian ideology which hung round the necks of the rulers like the legendary albatross. They were also exacerbated by an acceleration of technological and industrial progress which was opening the world and minds, and making oppression ever more transparent and vulnerable.

While exploiting these contradictions was central to forming an opposition, the kernel of the anti-authoritarian revolution took place every day, in every single act of friendship and altruism and in the ongoing work of groups that fostered humour, beauty and critical inquiry.[2] This was the sense and rhythm of the humanist outliers' visionary cycle. Once put in motion, it became imprinted on the national community's consciousness, even if the results were not immediate or evident to those who chose the tactic of passive mimicry.

***

The authoritarian backlash which threatens the West in the 21st century is a summa summarum of many economic, political and cultural crises. Does humanism matter in meeting their combined force?

In this book I have argued that it does for at least three reasons. One is evolutionary: humanism increases the well-being of a society and its resilience in times of disruption and humiliation (Witoszek in Witoszek and Midttun 2018). The second reason is political and economic: when the humanist agenda penetrates political and economic models, it creates a relatively civilized capitalism, high-trust politics and relatively incorrupt institutions. And thirdly, and most importantly, a robust and well entrenched humanist vision is a buffer against the ever-present totalitarian temptation.

Notes

1 Polish original: Ogromne wojska, bitne generały/Policje – tajne, widnei dwu-plciowe/ Przeciwko komu tak się pojednały?/Przeciwko kilku myślom … so nie nowe. Cyprian Kamil Norwid, "Siła ich")1851), fraszka. See http://literat.ug.edu.pl/cnwybor/index.htm#spis Accessed 17 May 2016.

2 One of the most ludic expressions of the new modus of resistance was the "comic opposition" movement called *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa* [The Orange Alternative], which staged mock-street festivals that derided authoritarian holy cows. See P. Kenny (2002) *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

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