

East and West as the Basic Concepts of Solidarity 1980-1989

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A number of both Polish and foreign commentators conceive *Solidarity* as an alternative to both the ideology and the practice of the communist system. Books by historians, political scientists and journalists, for example by Alain Touraine (1982), Timothy Garton Ash (1983), Jerzy Holzer (1984), Lopiński, Moskit and Wilk (1989) or Georges Mink (1989) emphasize the conflict between Solidarity and the government. The authors see it as a struggle for freedom, democracy and liberalism against dictatorship.

Analyses by Roman Laba (1991) and by Lawrence Goodwyn (1991) distinguish simultaneous confrontations on two different levels: one between the working class and the Leninist state, the other within Solidarity itself: the working class and the intellectual ideologues.

Sergiusz Kowalski (1990) offers an interesting discussion of the distinction between tradition and the past in Solidarity ideology, as well as of the trade-union's "reconstruction" of the Polish tradition as an anti-communist one.

Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (1992) points out the confrontation between different ideas which arose as Solidarity appropriated "Polish" religion, history and tradition. The official system was thus left unrooted in the Polish past.

Many scholars, then, considered Solidarity to be a political and ideological alternative to the communist system, and saw the situation as the "new world" fighting *l'ancien regime*.

But did the ideas of Solidarity and their application in fact constitute a real alternative to the official structures? It seems that more of the actual facts indicate that Solidarity should be described as *complementary* to

and not as an alternative to the official Poland of the time.

The complementarity manifested itself in a binary view of both Polish and global political realities. The Polish political arena was divided into the area of the government and that of Solidarity. The world was similarly seen as *East* and *West*, which was a revival of the older Polish ideas, particularly those connected with the 19th century insurrections.

The concepts of *East* and *West* were understood both by Solidarity and the Party as ideological and political, rather than geographical categories. The pro-communist African countries, for instance, were part of the East, while New Zealand or Australia belonged to the West. The system of concepts used by Solidarity and the communist party tended towards political and ideological mirror images. Solidarity, for instance, reproached the authorities for their taste for secrecy, censorship and secret police. The slogans of "visibility", "openness" and "sincerity" in the Solidarity propaganda referred to the interests of the underprivileged, of social groups that had been pushed outside the political scene. It is an interesting fact that the emphasis on openness did not change even during the martial law period, when many Solidarity members became conspirators.

Solidarity offered openness, which meant a different attitude to the individual as well as to the world of his or her ideas. At the same time, the individual representing the new truth within the walls of the trade-union dominated shipyard in Gdansk gained an opportunity for social advancement of a new kind. He (or she) ceased to be a blacksmith, a carpenter or, to use the most famous example, an electrician connected with the old system by means of the employment contract. Now he (or she) could attempt to become a leader of an organisation with millions of members, or its ideologue, printer, distributor or guard...

This was an opening of opportunities for social advancement that surpassed the opportunities offered by the regime. At the same time we witness another opening: that of the world of ideas. Solidarity periodicals began publishing Western theories, until then unavailable in the communist countries. The trade-union endeavoured in those publications to define its attitude to the three ideological challenges i.e. communism, the Polish tradition and the "West" (the last included the American and European ideological universe). The three challenges resulted in three themes, which can respectively be termed *Russian*, home-bred or *Polish*, and *European*.

In this way, Solidarity extended the ideal type of Marxist ideological discourse, which was based primarily on the East-West distinction. According to that model, Poland was a loyal part of the Eastern block

with no separate position of its own. The trade-union created a new concept of the Pole as a Translator of Eastern and Western ideas without destroying the binary model. His historical identity and national character became suddenly elaborated. This development was contrary to Marxist discourse, which preferred globalism on the ideological level rather than nationalism.

The process began at the end of the seventies, when Poles increasingly lost faith in the stability of the existing order of the East. The economy showed decreasing production, while its Western competitors exhibited relatively dynamic growth and energy.

At the same time, the "universalist objectivism" of Marxist or Hegelian philosophy lost its appeal. It was outdone by the "subjectivist" ideas of Heidegger and Kierkegaard for instance, who paid much more attention to individual existence than to systems. The change found its political expression in the Polish dissidents' involvement in the Helsinki resolutions concerning the domain of human rights. Until 1980, the model dissident action was the protest of the individual demanding that human rights be respected.

Subsequently, the dissidents moved away from the human rights of the individual towards the rights of Polish individuals — i.e. persons defined by Polish tradition, mentality and national institutions. The individual became a collective person: a member of Solidarity.

Solidarity publications devoted much attention to Russia, as well as to the West. Russia was popularly equated with communism, or the *East*, while the West, often labelled *Europe*, was understood to be the enemy of communism. In accordance with combative tactics, the West was treated as a logically, culturally and politically homogenous and cohesive entity. The terrorist groups of the Western extreme left were in this way of thinking accused of being "Moscow's agencies".

Solidarity's underground press, for example, unscrupulously lumped together Western ideas and ideologies as dissimilar as liberalism and conservatism, social-democratic ideology and human rights, pacifism and environmentalism, i.e. ideas that in their Western context were regarded as polemical, or downright inimical to each other. For, whereas social democracy descends from socialism, liberalism and conservatism are anti-socialist. Whereas only state institutions can guarantee human rights, liberalism consistently demands limiting the authority of state. Whereas the human rights movement states that "all people are born free and equal", liberalism juxtaposes freedom and equality. Environmentalism, on the other hand, limits the activities of liberal economics.

The fact is, Solidarity ideology wanted to choose the West before the East, without making the choice between the different "Wests". This unwillingness perhaps turned the West into an ideological slogan, rather than a possible way of living and thinking to be considered in public debate.

I would now like to give another example of the lumping together of different democratic ideologies. It is from a book called *A Little Democrat (Maty demokrata)* by a liberal underground politician and publisher, who wrote it under the pseudonym of Maciej Poleski. His work was meant to be a kind of "teach yourself" book for Polish democrats. On page 10, the author says that "the only measure of (democratic) freedom is the freedom of the individual", and on page 23, that "money serves democracy...". In the book these statements are not seen as conflicting even though they express one of the basic contradictions of Europe's social and political reality.¹

In order to give the struggle against communism an inner logic, perhaps, the Solidarity press published no articles on the social consequences of liberal politics, such as growing unemployment or increasing racism in Western Europe, the mafia-like nature of some institutions, etc.

It was not seen that Western democracy was in a state of crisis and that its various ideological formulas, such as liberalism and human rights, could not be reconciled, either in theory or in every-day life.

Solidarity, then, had no room for impartial judgement of Western ideas and, at the same time, was critical of the Eastern ones. The Solidarity thinking was thus in a negative way dependent on the system of communist theories.

It seems that Solidarity's communicative function was to strengthen the "Western part" of the Polish binary consciousness by translating and publishing Western thoughts. The trade-union did not create new ideas in order to build up an alternative to both the East and the West. Its messages were constructed on the same binary principles as the communist ones. But in order to endow its voice with national significance, the organisation had to establish itself in a new communicative position: the position of translator between Eastern and Western ideologies. The old translator, as a Marxist, had to be nationally transparent, i.e. underplay his own ethnic features. The new Solidarity translator is very visible: he is Polish and continues the cultural, intellectual and political history of his ethnic realm, the history interrupted by the foreign, communist take-

¹ Or, as Isaiah Berlin says: "Democracy can sometimes be oppressive to minorities and individuals.(..) Democracy is not *ipso facto* pluralistic. (..) Some states governed by individual despots have been more liberal than some extreme démocraties." (Jahanbegloo 1993, pp. 143-144).

over after the Second World War.

Let us now compare the translators' efforts during the period of the state of martial law, according to existing bibliographical sources (Lam 1991; Czachowska and Dorosz 1991; Kamińska 1988, Chojnacki and Jastrzębski 1992).

I shall do it by way of a review of translations from foreign languages, published by official publishing houses as well as by Solidarity underground presses.

For example, in 1983 the official editorial policy resulted in translations from the following European literatures: Austrian, Belgian, Bulgarian, Czech and Slovak, English, French, German, including books from both East and West Germany, Greek, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Lusatian, Portuguese, Rumanian, Scandinavian, Swiss and the literatures of the Netherlands, the USSR and the Yugoslav nations.

As we can see, almost all languages of Europe are represented, perhaps with the exception of Albania and Finland.

The literature of the Americas is represented by the USA and Canada, as well as the Latin American countries. Among non-Euro-American translations we can find books by Arab, Chinese, Indian, Iraqi, Japanese, Jewish and Israeli, and Turkish writers. From Africa there were only translations of Nigerian books. Australia and Greenland are missing.

This superficial review of officially approved translations is given in order to illustrate a tendency rather than to prove a point. My review includes the humanities only, but I guess the situation in the exact and natural sciences was the same. As we can see, the Polish "official consciousness" approved by the communist censors was quite West-centric.

From Russian literature there were translations of four books of poetry, including "Selected Poems" of Marina Cvetaeva, a poet not very favourably inclined towards communism, 32 novels and collections of short stories, 3 books of reportage, 2 plays, 8 diaries and memoirs, 2 volumes of literary criticism and 13 children's and teenagers' books; 64 publications in all.

From American literature in the same year there were translations of 20 novels and collections of short stories, 1 reportage, 5 diaries and memoirs, 3 collections of letters, 3 collections of essays, including "Life without Principle" by Henry David Thoreau, 6 books for children and teenagers, none of them written in the 20th century, and 1 book of poetry, a parallel-text edition of poems by e.e. cummings, translated and annotated by Stanislaw Barańczak. (Barańczak was at the time a declared enemy of the system, and political emigrant working as a professor at an American university; he also wrote for the underground and emigrant press.) In all here were 39 publications from America.

Among the English books translated into Polish in 1983 were 2 books of poetry, 20 novels, 1 book of journalism, 14 plays, mostly by Shakespeare, 1 memoir, 2 biographies, 2 books of essays, and 8 books for children and teenagers, all without exception from before 1950; 50 publications in all.

In the case of English and American prose, the censors' policy was: the older the book the better. The rule was especially strictly applied to children's books. One wonders whether it was out of fear of contagion that the young people were prevented from getting acquainted with their English and American contemporaries and the circumstances under which they were growing up.

A reverse rule was applied to the literature of the Eastern Ally: the newer the book, the more in line with current cultural and ideological policy the better. That is why there are relatively few translations of Russian writers from before 1917, with the exception of the "great classics". The principles of official cultural policy were subordinated to ideological ones. This required a picture of Soviet culture as free from *contradictions*,² and a picture of capitalist countries as lacking cultural dynamics. Novels were more severely censored than poetry as they were believed to have a stronger influence on the reader's mind.

However, one cannot say that the Polish reader was completely isolated from Western literature and its ideas. On the other hand, one must say that his access to the literature was selective and became more restricted the closer it came to the present.

Let us now see what rules governed the "Solidarity consciousness". A list of translations by underground Solidarity in the period 1977-89, comprising publications in book form, included European literatures from Austria, Czechoslovakia, England, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, Russia, Switzerland, the Ukraine and White Russia. North America was represented by books from the USA, Asia by 1 political booklet concerning the *Khmer Rouge*, most probably translated from a Western European language. South America, Australia, Greenland and Africa were not represented at all.

We can say that the principle of selection is distinctly political: the published books had in one way or another to reflect an anti-communist tendency that made them suited to the conspiracy's purposes. This is, perhaps, the reason why the only ancient Greek book is a fragment of

² Suspension of "Spotkanie z ikonami" by the Soviet writer Vladimir Solouchin can serve as an example of this policy. In his book Solouchin criticized suppression of religion in the USSR. Even though the book was published in Moscow by *Советская Россия* in 1972 with the permission of the Soviet censorship, its Polish translation was suspended in 1975. The permission to publish it in Poland was, according to Polish censors, a "serious mistake" (Czarna Księga Cenzury 1977, p. 204).

Aristotle's famous work, "Politics". It was published officially in 1953 and again by underground Solidarity in 1985 under the title *Thoughts on Tyranny* (*Myśli o tyranii*). In order to protect the author from the confrontation with general Jaruzelski's police the conspirator publisher added an inscription: "The selection was made without the author's knowledge or consent" (Czachowska and Dorosz 1991, p. 81).

It seems that the underground publishers did not attempt to replace the official ones, but rather to rectify the official distortions by supplementing them with ideas at that time not admissible to the censors. There is no evidence of the expectation of an abrupt revolutionary take-over. On the contrary, the Solidarity publishers acted on the assumption that the existing order was so stable that it was only possible to supplement and soften it.

According to bibliographical sources (Czachowska and Dorosz 1991) in the years 1977-1989 unofficial publishing released 21 translations of American books, two thirds of the number published by its official counterpart in the single year 1983. Among the unofficial books were 7 by Nabokov and 2 by Kosiński. Their political implications were not contained in the texts, but rather in their context: both were written by political emigrants.

156 Russian books were translated in the period 1977-1989. The number includes 8 books by Josef Brodskij and 2 about him, 10 by Vladimir Bukovskij, 6 by Erofeev, 7 editions of Salamov's Kolyma stories and 33 books by Solzenicyn.

A remarkable feature of the selection is the preoccupation with the fate of the individual Russian, often a prisoner in the Gulag: how he manages deprived of freedom, what he thinks and what he may say. This preoccupation can best be interpreted as a concern for the human rights of the individual Russian, as well as for his economic situation. A similar attitude was assumed towards the Polish communist regime. Underground periodicals like *Prawo i Bezprawie* (Law and Lawlessness) or *Rewers*, published by Ruch Wolności i Pokoju (Movement for Peace and Freedom), registered instances of violation of human rights by the state, such as dismissal from work for political reasons, repression for refusal to do military service, police brutality, etc. (*Prawo i Bezprawie*, 1988, 17 ff; *Rewers*, undated, 6 ff).

At the same time the underground press informed about the principles of the Helsinki Convention and the nature and existence of Amnesty International, including its London address. It is clear then, that the underground press assumed that the connection between the lack of human rights and the communist system was an obvious one. On the other hand, Solidarity publications pointed to the Western countries as the authors

and defenders of human rights. Whether these rights were actually respected in the West remained totally outside the scope of the attention of the Solidarity writers. The result was a specific political and ideological dualism: the West is for human rights, the East (Russia and other communist countries) is against them. It was generally unknown for instance, that the USSR was a co-author of so-called economic and social human rights, claiming everybody's right to work.

Here, then, we are dealing with a characteristic feature of the Solidarity ideas: the assumption that the phenomena of the West do not exist in the East and vice versa. Violations of human rights are seen as a distinctive feature of totalitarian dictatorships, especially of the Soviet variety, and they are not seen to exist in the Western democratic countries. I shall call this feature of Solidarity thinking a "perceptual complementarity". It presupposes an obliteration of inner contradictions within the sets of ideas named "The West" and "The East". Thus a homogenous ideological "product" was obtained, one that could be utilized in the political struggle.

This conception was, in fact, a revival of a Polish romantic *cliché*. The highest Polish romantic authority, Adam Mickiewicz (1798-1855), portrayed Russia as a huge, snow-covered, frozen land, without any cultural and philosophical ideas. In *Forefathers' Eve*, one of his great poems, he "prophesies the doom of the czarist empire, that kingdom of evil incarnate. The great flood with its unleashing of elemental forces brings to completion, thus, the symbol of winter present throughout poem" (Miłosz 1983, p. 224).

The repetition of the romantic ideology in the Poland of the 1980s is worth noticing today.

The communist perception of the world derived its energy from ideology, too. However, it was less selective— not in its declarations, but in its more pragmatic editorial policy.

There is a paradox in Solidarity's rejection of "the East" and its emphasis on belonging to "the West" and its culture. The categorical partition of Europe into East and the West was in reality anti-Western, as it denied the fact that much of the Western intellectual consciousness derived from the creative influence of great Russians like Puskin, Dosto-evskij, Tolstoj, Sestov or Bachtin. Two important books by Bachtin, by the way, appeared in the officially published literature during the state of martial law (Bachtin 1982 and Bachtin 1983).

Solidarity's wholesale condemnation of communism — a Western theory *par excellence* — as a purely Soviet ideology is another related paradox.

A characteristic feature of the Solidarity mind was to see "the East" primarily in terms of the lives of individuals colliding with the system. "The West", on the other hand, was perceived as a fertile ground of ideas and theories: conservative, liberal, social democratic, human rights, etc.

This perception was a continuation of an earlier attitude of some Polish dissident intellectuals. Professor Jerzy Jedlicki, for instance, wrote in his introduction to the translation of Isaiah Berlin's *Two Concepts of Liberty* that in the period 1976-1980 the dissidents "were not interested in a critique of Marxism any more; we had already been through that. We were much more interested in the philosophical and ethnical premises of democratic, liberal and conservative ideas." (Jedlicki 1991).

Solidarity publications show a striking lack of translations or original books describing the hardships of Western man: as a worker, an office employee, a farmer — or an unemployed person. There is nothing about racism and discrimination against the handicapped, about corruption in politics and business — in other words, nothing about the topics the Polish official press liked to describe. Thus, the Solidarity mind became a mirror image of communist propaganda.

The Solidarity consciousness and the communist one complemented rather than excluded one another. They had their political and ideological Eurocentrism in common. Their world views were symmetrical; the party, or rather its ideologues and censors, saw Russia as the obligatory source of ideas and inspiration, and as a rule omitted consideration of the daily life of the Soviet individuals. Solidarity, on the other hand, saw official Russia as intellectually futile soil, on which prisoners of the Gulag eked out a miserable existence.

According to the Party, the West was unable to inspire the Polish intelligentsia; the ideas of the dissidents were as rule called "pseudo-ideas" or "ideas instrumental in relation to the West" (Bielak and Zieliński 1987, 59 ff.)

On the other hand, the official publications eagerly depicted the unemployment and racism of the Western countries, concealing at the same time the crimes against human beings committed by the Soviet system. For Solidarity, the West stood for an "ideal state of being", which did not require analysis of specific institutions or of the vicissitudes of individual lives.

Solidarity's intellectual movement was subjugated to the requirements of a political struggle for democracy in Poland. Thus, it could hardly be as open and pluralistic as the Western democracies. Face to face with its communist rival, Solidarity defined its own positions in relation to the

official ones. For instance, the idea of human rights was connected to the political situation of the 1980's and treated instrumentally, as a weapon against communism. With the regime's fall, the idea of human rights was nearly forgotten on the Polish political scene.

Thus, I do not think that Solidarity was a revolutionary alternative, either to the idea or the actual reality of communism. Perhaps this hypothesis, better than others, can explain the non-violent character of the Polish change, with its Round Table talks and Mazowiecki's "thick line" tactics, gentle to the communists.

The binary conception of the West and the East has made it difficult for Poles to understand that it is insufficient to declare themselves in favour of the West and against the East. It was—and still is—equally important to choose between different "Wests": the liberal "West" or the "West" of human rights? Western conservatism — or environment-alism? Western religious ideas — or post-modernism?

On the other hand, these mystified, dualist theories about the West and the East have made it difficult for Poles to abandon their binary view of the world, as one divided into the authorities and Solidarity, into tyranny and freedom, or into ethical values of good and bad. It has thus impeded a transition to more complicated systems, which, perhaps, can better reflect reality.

This binary structure is also typical of the nationalist mind, dividing the world into two domains labelled: "mine" and "the others". It is not surprising, then, that so many former East European communists and dissidents, including some of the Solidarity people, became nationalists so easily and so soon after the fall of communism. In this connection I should like to conclude by referring to one of Jurij Lotman's last works *Культура и взрыв*. Lotman observes the vulnerability of binary systems and their makers. He says that "in binary systems all existence is within the range of an explosion" (Lotman 1992, p. 258).

The present condition of Solidarity supports the argument that Lotman's analysis does not apply exclusively to Russia.

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