

# REMEMBERING THE SHIPYARD STRIKE

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The 1980 strike at what was then the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk is often described as a milestone in recent European history, especially that of Central and Eastern Europe. The documentary film *Children of Solidarność* depicts the strike as the starting shot for the fall of communism throughout Eastern Europe. The same historiography is found in the permanent exhibition *Roads to Freedom*, next to the Solidarity headquarters in Gdańsk, near the shipyard and Solidarity Square, where the monument to the workers killed in the 1970 uprisings stands. In photographic displays, commemorative albums, tourist brochures, and other depictions of the events in 1980, texts recur again and again about how the strikers in Gdańsk and the activists of Solidarity proved that non-violence and civil disobedience were successful strategies in the struggle for a life of greater human dignity – for themselves and the generations to come.

The strikers knew the struggle for democracy would take time, but hoped that their children would someday be able to grow up in a free country. A song written during the strike became the movement's unofficial anthem. It was called "A Song for My Daughter".

I have no time for you;  
your mother hasn't seen you for so long.  
Wait a little longer, until you're grown,  
and I'll tell it all to you.

The story of these hopeful days,  
filled with talk and heated argument.  
Of all the long and sleepless nights,  
of our hearts beating like mad.

Of all the people who've come to feel,  
at last we've found our way home,  
Together we are fighting for our today,  
but most of all for your tomorrow.<sup>1</sup>

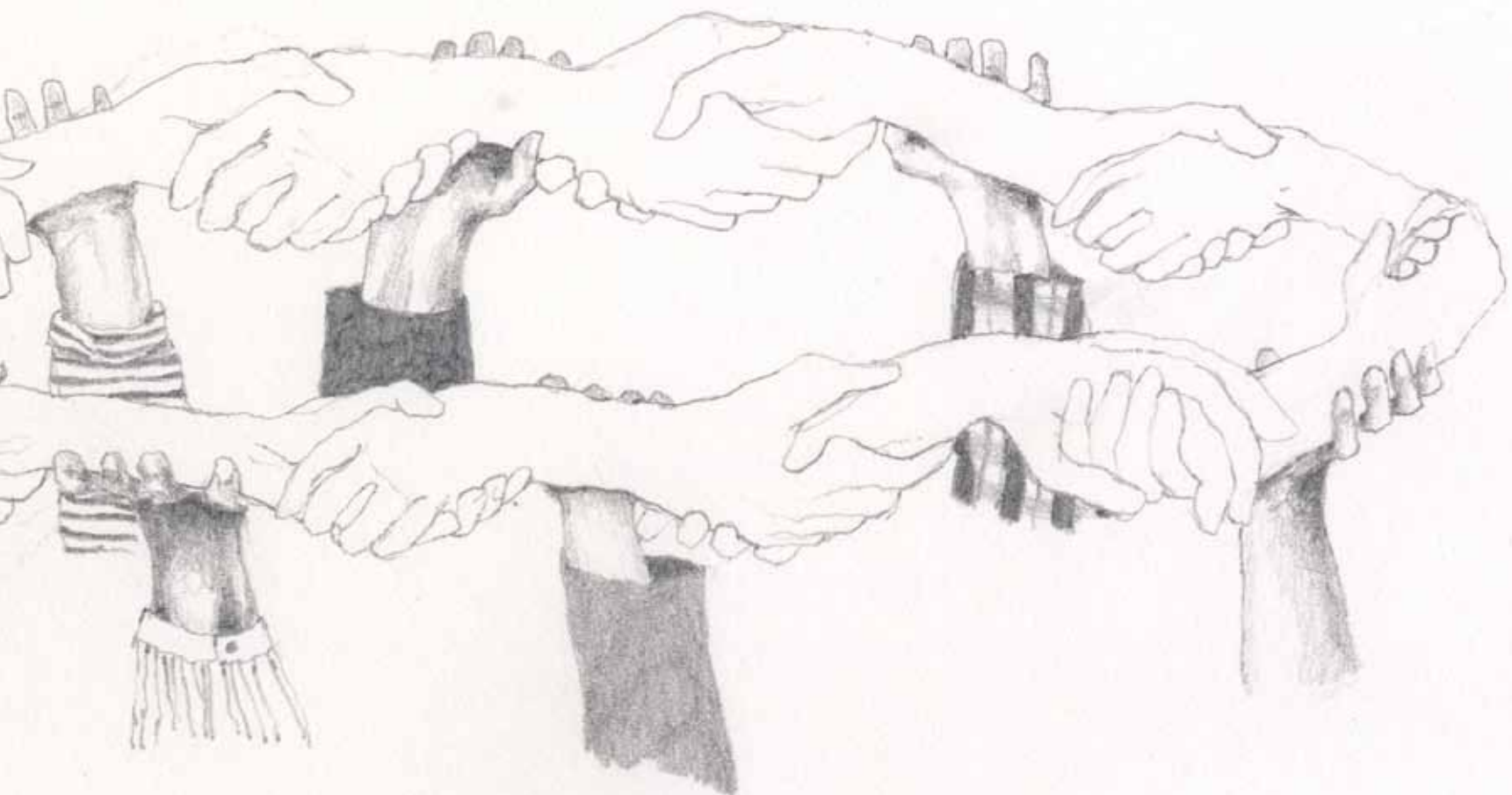
In this article, my aim is to study how the Gdańsk shipyard strike and the formation of Solidarity have been remembered and observed afterwards, especially in connection with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary in August 2010. In so doing, I want to explore how people create meaning in past events in relation to current interests, and how the depiction of a shared history is constantly recast and used.

The empirical material consists of printed and published

materials – including brochures, web pages, writings, and commemorative albums – as well as field observations and visits to various exhibitions in Gdańsk in connection with the anniversary celebrations. The material also includes printed matter and observations from earlier visits to the permanent exhibition *Roads to Freedom* in 2001 and 2005.<sup>2</sup> Since the central themes in the material are generation, history, and the future, I focus on the passing on from one generation to another of the cultural legacy constituted by the strike and the Solidarity struggle. Beyond this, I will discuss the *moral legacy* of the activists of the 1980s and the *exhortation to solidarity* with the rest of the world in which this legacy is materialized in the 2000s.

The theoretical premises of the study are deconstructivist and power-critical, based on the school of discourse theory developed by the political philosophers Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. A fundamental idea in this theory is that life is informed by a constant struggle for interpretive precedence about which understanding of the world should be considered the "right" one, and that these interpretations are always temporary fixations of meanings that might have been





utterly different.<sup>3</sup> In this article, this overarching framework will be combined with tools of theory-in-use, primarily derived from ritual theory.

## PREDECESSORS AND HEIRS

Among the books for sale in the lobby to the *Roads to Freedom* exhibition is *Freedom: A Do-It-Yourself Manual* by Czesław Bielecki, a former Solidarity activist and adviser to Lech Wałęsa during his presidency in the 1990s.<sup>4</sup> The book was intended to inspire and guide young people who want to start their own social movements and is available in several translations: I catch a glimpse of at least Polish, Spanish, and English behind the counter.<sup>5</sup> There is a cover blurb, signed by Lech Wałęsa, which reads as follows:

**I was fortunate to lead a unique revolution. In 1980–1989 we won our struggle for freedom bloodlessly. It was as recently as 1956 in Budapest and 1970 in the Polish cities on the Baltic Coast that blood had flowed. We began to disassemble communism with**

**our victorious strike in August 1980.**

**“Solidarity” was created. By joining together millions of people in Poland, we showed other nations how they could escape their totalitarian captivity. We kept up our resistance, and the world supported us with solidarity. The Roundtable of 1989, at which the opposition reached a historic compromise with the government, became the beginning of the end of communism and its rules of lies.**

**I recommend Czesław Bielecki’s book to all those who want to win their own non-violent fights for freedom. Its title conveys its meaning: If you do something for freedom yourself, others will help you.**

The book was published by the European Solidarity Center, an organization founded in 2007 after a ceremonious signing of a Letter of Intent on August 31, 2005, the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Gdańsk Agreement, the social accords between management and the strike committee at the shipyard. Like its predecessor, the Solidarity Center Foundation, which was formed

in 1999 under the chairmanship of Lech Wałęsa and is still in operation, the mission of the European Solidarity Center is to spread knowledge about Solidarity and the modern history of Poland by means of exhibitions, educational projects, anniversary celebrations, conferences, and publications.<sup>6</sup>

The poetic appeal – and the moral challenge – of Wałęsa’s text recurs on the European Solidarity Center website, where the former director, Roman Catholic priest Father Maciej Zięba, describes the organization as follows:

**Solidarity means a commitment and a challenge. It is a commitment for the authors and participants of the events of August 1980 in Gdańsk and in Poland; and it is a challenge for the future generations and for those for whom freedom, dignity, and justice remain a dream. Sustaining memory about the moral message of the “Solidarity” movement and the creative delivery of its legacy to our posterity, indicating how current and universal it is – these are the main tasks of the European Solidarity Center.**

The Center strives to achieve the first goal – the

retrospective one – with a modern and interactive museum describing how the events initiated by the strike at the Gdańsk Shipyard started a domino effect – liquidating the communist system in the entire Central and Eastern Europe, also affecting other regions of the world. It will be supported by the multimedia archive and library, securing the legacy of “Solidarity”, which nowadays is scattered and sometimes neglected. Through expositions – including mobile exhibitions traveling throughout the world – the European Solidarity Center wants to enhance the memory of history, which seems to be weakening in Europe and which is necessary for building a European identity.

The other – prospective – goal is to transfer the legacy of “Solidarity” to the future, delivering it to the next generations of young people, not only Poles. Showing solidarity, caring for the common good, building a deeper community of ideas while respecting diversity as values that are not anachronistic, which are a creative challenge, worthy of energy and skills. This is why education is very important for the Center. Even now the European Solidarity Center is working on it: organizing workshops for young people from all over Europe and seminars for young Poles, arranging a series of lectures and discussions, and preparing a training offer for teachers and local leaders.

As a cultural institution, the European Solidarity Center creates cultural events and stimulates artistic activities related to subjects concerning very broadly defined solidarity. It organizes concerts and festivals as well. In November 2007 the Center inaugurated a film review entitled “All About Freedom”, which presents various film forms speaking about freedom in the modern world. It has also organized a screenplay contest. The European Solidarity Center is a scientific research institution as well, analyzing the issues of freedom especially the achievements of “Solidarity’s” peaceful fight for justice, democracy, and human rights to share these achievements with those who are still deprived of these values. Moreover, the Center is a forum for public debate not only about history, but also about current objectives. And these objectives include civil society, integrated Europe, and peace.

The European Solidarity Center goes beyond politics and it is not associated with any party. It promotes deeper values, shared by Poles despite their differing political opinions. The intention of the creators of the European Solidarity Center is to make it a center for cooperation and integration. Even now, many organizations and institutions from Poland and abroad approach the Center with various proposals for joint projects. Private persons approach us as well. Every contact is priceless. This is more than just studying the past or presenting it in an attractive way. This is a way to create meta-political connections between people for whom August 1980 is not a closed story. This idea brings a network of interpersonal solidarity to the map of the independent Republic of Poland, of the solidarity which still is the most universal Polish product of the best quality in the world.<sup>7</sup>

This text and the previously quoted cover blurb by Wałęsa summarize, in an almost painfully clear way, the entire com-

plex of meaning activated in conjunction with the anniversary celebration in 2010 and the recollection of the events of August 1980. This embraces both the dedication of those who were actively involved in Solidarity and in the strike in particular, and the challenge faced by today’s (and tomorrow’s) youth in shouldering the moral legacy and passing it on, both inside and outside Poland. The story that the shipyard strike in Gdańsk in 1980 was the first domino to tip in what would be the fall of Eastern European communism<sup>8</sup> – and that another important push was given by the roundtable discussions in Warsaw after Solidarity’s electoral successes in 1989 – is, of course, also there, as is the oft-recurring national self-image of Poland as brave martyr and moral savior.<sup>9</sup> The importance of building a common European identity based on historical memories is also emphasized, along with the importance of solidarity with – and the duty to aid and inspire – people all over the world for whom freedom, human rights, democracy, and justice are not the unquestioned conditions of life today. The multiplicity of activities described among the center’s operations also reflects the multifaceted celebrations that took place in 2010. These included everything from cultural events and educational initiatives to scholarly congresses and public debates: events for children, youth, adults, and senior citizens – including people for whom “August 1980 is not a closed story”.<sup>10</sup>

The passing down of historical knowledge to coming generations is a central aspect of the activities of both the European Solidarity Center and the Solidarity Center Foundation. The websites of both organizations present several educational and exchange projects directed at children and youth in Poland and other countries. In 2010, before and during the 30th anniversary of Solidarity and the shipyard strike, for example, the “My Little Solidarity” and “Gdańsk Station” projects were carried out at the European Solidarity Center. Projects at the Solidarity Center Foundation included “A Test of Solidarity” and “zaPLeCZe (Backstage)”. “My Little Solidarity” was an essay project directed at younger Polish school-children (in Poland and abroad):

We are looking for written works in which young people describe their perceptions of the historical Solidarity (what they know about it, what they value in it) as well as their perceptions of solidarity today (how they define and understand it).<sup>11</sup>

“Gdańsk Station” was an exchange project between teenagers and young adults from Western and Eastern Europe (but also attracted participants from countries including Brazil and Japan, according to the website), which was realized in conjunction with the Youth Forum 2010 conference in Poland. Project participants listened to talks about modern European history, visited museums, and participated in workshops where they discussed the current state of the world. The young people were also able to visit significant places in the struggle for freedom, and sites that “symbolize the Polish people’s struggle for freedom”, and, finally, to attend Youth Forum, where “Nobel Peace Prize Winner, Lech Wałęsa” was a special guest.<sup>12</sup> “A Test of Solidarity” was a solidarity and humanitarian aid campaign based on collecting postcards from people all over the world. It was in commemoration of Solidarity, and sought to aid an educational project in Afghanistan:

“By organizing ‘A Test of solidarity’ action we want to demonstrate that in spite of distances between various countries, despite all the linguistic, cultural, and religious barriers, political affiliations or inter-

ests, we can share common intent, and the word ‘solidarity,’ associated for 30 years with Poland, the Gdańsk Shipyard and Lech Wałęsa, apart from a common historic success, has also a universal value”, emphasizes Danuta Kobzdej, Chairwoman of the Solidarity Center Foundation. “‘A Test of solidarity’ action is aimed not only to enhance knowledge about the civic movement, but first of all to promote the value of solidarity in its social dimension.”<sup>13</sup>

“zaPLeCZe (Backstage)” was a theater project involving teenagers and young adults from Poland and the Czech Republic, where one of the particular concepts explored was “solidarity”, both as a value and in connection with “the history of the civil movement that began in Poland in 1980”.<sup>14</sup> What these projects – and their descriptions – share is the moral link and the passing down of the idea of solidarity between generations, where the strikers in Gdańsk in 1980 and the founders of the Solidarity movement are established as moral predecessors and today’s youth – and coming generations – are written into the story as moral heirs in the struggle for freedom and human dignity.

The Eastern European expert and modern historian Timothy Garton Ash has also, in an eyewitness account of the strike, emphasized how dignity was the strongest, most palpable feeling communicated during the weeks of the strike.<sup>15</sup> Solidarity, morality, and dignity became important discursive elements in the story created around the strike, the Solidarity activists, and the significance of both to the continued geopolitical, economic, and cultural development of Europe.

Through life history interviews with highly educated Poles, the ethnologist Katarzyna Wolanik Boström has shown how personal and family histories are intertwined with important events and phenomena in Polish history. By telling the stories of their lives, they also tell the story of Poland, evoke Polish society as they understood it – and their own place in it, as they would like to be understood. Solidarity, morality, and dignity also have an important place in these stories: no one wants to appear to be part of an oppressive system; everyone wants to understand themselves as a morally comprehensible person.<sup>16</sup> Now, in retrospect, when we know which social system and ideology “won” and which lost – at least from the historical perspective we are capable of surveying today – it becomes important to take a stance on this “truth” (however provisional and potentially open to question it may be). The moral threads become central to the fabric of the projects for children and youth. They are offered a particular, discursively created and politically airtight understanding of historical phenomena – and a great responsibility is laid upon the young generation to be good stewards of their legacy.

## MORALITY AND RITUAL

In connection with the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the strike in 2010, a number of happenings, exhibitions, and manifestations also took place that further underlined this moral legacy (such as marathon and roller skating races, musical, theatrical, film, and art events, conferences, book presentations, and other events in honor of Solidarity and the anniversary of the strike, with varying connections in content). These can – like the anniversary celebrations overall – be analyzed as *secular rituals* or *public events*.

The anthropologists Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff coined the term “secular ritual” in the 1970s, meaning a sense of collective ceremonial forms with no religious or magical purposes – ceremonies that mirror, reorganize, and create social arrangements and modes of thought.<sup>17</sup> The an-

thropologist Don Handelman instead uses the term “public events” for public ritual contexts that can either be pompous, clearly defined, and solemn with an unambiguous message – “events-that-present” – or playful, messy, rebellious, carnivalesque, and spontaneous – “events that re-present”.<sup>18</sup> Quite often, the more carnivalesque elements of parades and other events are the province of teenagers and “young adults”.

One of the more playful events during the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations in Gdańsk – which drew a great many young people – was “A Day in the Life of the Conspiracy”, a happening held at the “Klub Rock Café” at the Museum of Polish Rock in Gdańsk on August 30, 2010. Videos from the student movement with connections to Solidarity were shown, a troubadour sang protest songs typical of the times, and participants could print their own flyers with the text “THE CROW CAN NOT DEFEAT THE EAGLE”,<sup>19</sup> or a copy of the very first bulletin issued by the shipyard strikers in 1980. Outside the club, passersby could paint slogans and political street art from the communist era using stencils and spray paint on a plywood panel. Afterwards, visitors could allow themselves to be arrested by young men in militia gear. One of the costumed militiamen (who approached with a feigned threatening mien when I photographed one of the arrests) told me that he had come to Gdańsk from Warsaw for the sole purpose of taking part in the happening: “I think this is the best way to tell young people about the history”, he said, and pointed at his militia shield and baton. In this case, play was used to pass down the historiography of what happened in Poland in the 1980s and before then to the young generation of today.

The previously mentioned do-it-yourself manual from the European Solidarity Center also ends with an exhortation aligned with this idea of handing over the history:

**It is for them [the new generation] that this book was written. It was written by parents who had been successful at defeating communism, and now they don't want the next thugs who come along, those who resemble Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, Pol Pot, Castro, Mao Zedong, Lin Biao, Haile Mariam, or Bin Laden, to turn our common house into a madhouse. And then blow us all up.**<sup>20</sup>

The moral legacy to modern youth is emphasized again and again and the authorities are those who personally suffered and fought for a free, more humane society.<sup>21</sup> The many exhibitions and stage productions are effective tools – entertainment and education wrapped up in one – for getting the message across and making it stick in the minds of young people. Other ways of popularizing and passing on the message of the strike and what happened afterwards to a younger generation

included the comic strip published in the Solidarity magazine at the XXX Congress in 2010<sup>22</sup> and the comic book published for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2005.<sup>23</sup> In a book about the importance of museums as political arenas, political scientist Timothy W. Luke emphasizes the power that the exhibition medium has over the public, specifically through this intertwining of education and amusement:

**One of the most effective techniques for governing these populations today is entertainment; and [...] some of the most powerful public performances to interest and amuse people are museum exhibitions.**<sup>24</sup>

“History” is a construction, a negotiation, and a struggle about meanings, and the canonized, hegemonic version is always an exercise of power vis-à-vis other ways of depicting the same historical events.<sup>25</sup> Through all of these exhibitions, writings, etc., endeavors are made to create a consensus by which other interpretations of Poland in the 1980s are suppressed and made unwelcome. From the perspective of discourse theory, this hegemonic version is called *objectivity*, a truth composed of discourses laid down and articulated so many times until it seems unquestioned and natural.

## FREEDOM AND EMOTION

In addition to the emphasis on the moral legacy, freedom is a strong theme in most depictions and commemorations of the strike. Visitors given the brochure for the *Roads to Freedom* exhibition in 2010 read the following:

**The “Roads to Freedom” exhibition tells of people who tried to make the dream of independence come true for hundreds of thousands of Poles living in the Polish People’s Republic. Those who sacrificed everything for the idea of freedom were many. The exhibition is dedicated to them.**

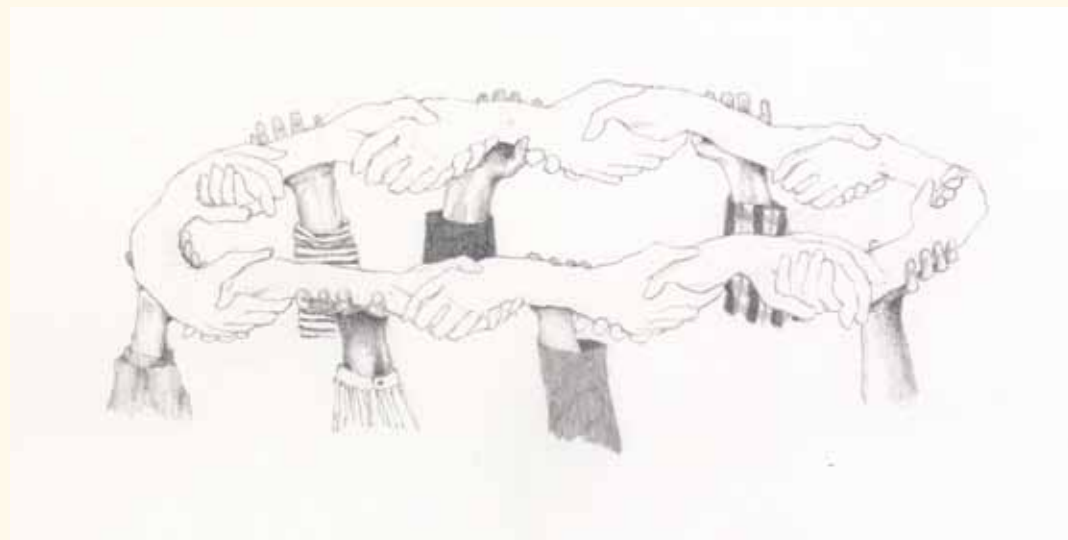
The strike was commemorated at Solidarity Square on August 31, 2010, the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the strike agreement, in an emotional and solemn Catholic mass – an obvious example of an event-that-presents in which secular and non-secular rituals were mixed. The participants were made up mainly of senior citizens and union people, probably with personal experience of the Polish people’s struggle for freedom, memories of the events in Gdańsk in 1980, and perhaps personal connections to the iconic figures of the strike:

**August 31, 2010, 12.00: Mass at Solidarity Place. “Everybody” from the church is there. Men, men, men ... The Black Madonna from Częstochowa. Women in the choir and the orchestra. A young woman reads (aggressively) in English from the Book of Joshua. The men and women in the audience (most of them seniors) understand nothing ... they look around, impatient. The Smolensk Tragedy is remembered. After a while, Anna Walentynowicz, “legendary mother of Solidarity” is mentioned. (The big screen displays zoom in on the portrait of her and Lech Kaczyński, frames draped with mourning bands.) This unrelenting motherhood ... Flags and banners, a flame burns in the monument to the workers shot in 1970, souvenirs are sold (mostly flags of various sizes), the Doki Pub outside the shipyard gate is doing brisk business, newspapers and flyers are being passed out.**<sup>26</sup>

It is interesting to note how various events, persons, and symbols are linked in a situation like this.<sup>27</sup> The historiography of the 1980 strike often emphasizes the importance of the Polish cardinal Karol Wojtyła’s election as pope in 1978, and that he, as John Paul II, chose his homeland for his first official pilgrimage in 1979. According to this version of history, he infused hope and courage into his countrymen with his homilies and addresses in Poland – and the very next year the revolt was a fact.<sup>28</sup> The church was also a palpable presence during the strike – in the form of priests who celebrated mass inside the shipyard grounds – for the strikers and for the crowds outside. During the communist era, the church and religion in Poland stood for opposition to the state and for freedom, in contrast to communist ideology and the control machine of the regime. So, there is nothing odd about the close ties between the Polish Catholic church and the Polish-born pope and the events at the shipyard in August 1980 and developments over the next decade.<sup>29</sup> These bonds were strengthened by the death of John Paul II in April 2005, in the midst of Poland’s preparations for the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Five years later, in April 2010, another event with strong symbolic overtones occurred: the tragic plane crash in Smolensk, in which several former Solidarity activists died, including President Kaczyński and Anna Walentynowicz. It is thus no surprise that this event, along with memorials of the lethal shootings in the 1970 protests, were given a prominent place among the more solemn elements of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations.

Motherhood is also an important symbol, both for Poland as a nation and for the Polish Catholic church (in the person of the Madonna). The family ideology of the communist era, centuries of Polish nationalism, and conservative currents in 21<sup>st</sup> century Poland: the mother symbol can be related to all of these.<sup>30</sup> That Anna Walentynowicz is tied to Solidarity as a mother figure is thus to be expected. From a feminist perspective, however, this is problematic, as it implies a risk that Walentynowicz will not be fully recognized as a political activist and revolutionary as her male comrades have been, but rather portrayed and remembered based on the archetypal position of woman as mother – albeit on a symbolic level – which makes an understanding of her in a significant political context essentially impossible. We are quite simply incapable – within the framework of the discourses that currently dominate our society – of linking the “mother” with positions of “dissident”, “revolutionary”, and “union and political activist”.

Several memorial concerts were also held during the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, at which the words *freedom and*



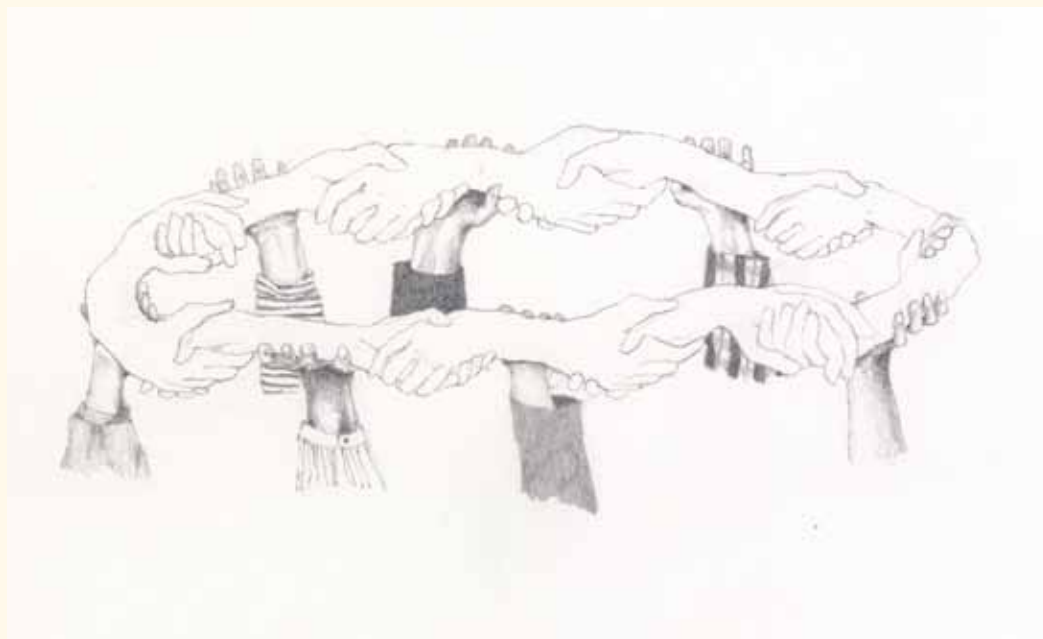
*solidarity* were repeated again and again. I saw two of them on TV at home with friends in Gdańsk. Despite differences in format and setting, the events were remarkably similar. The same kinds of pictures of the strike and the state of war, everyday life in communist Poland, dominos falling as the Eastern Bloc collapses, suffering and struggling people in other parts of the world. There was also the emphasis on freedom and solidarity in the choice of songs and other expressions; children as symbols of hope and the future; Polish flags, the red-and-white Solidarity logo, the constant presence of religion; and Lech Wałęsa with his fists raised – as a distilling emblem of this entire cultural legacy.<sup>31</sup>

It is interesting how elements from so many different contexts can be brought together in this public ritual (with both presentational and representational, secular and non-secular aspects) – John Lennon’s *Working Class Hero*, Leonard Cohen’s *Hallelujah*, and Bob Marley’s *Get Up, Stand Up* – and combined into something that becomes graspable here and now. The “here and now” constructed by joining these disparate components is the celebration of a Catholic labor and democracy movement with a distinct right-wing profile (even if some of the intellectuals who supported the strike and participated in the founding of Solidarity had Marxist backgrounds). It is obvious that the mash-up works as long as the various elements contribute to switching on the same emotional register.<sup>32</sup> In connection with the generational theme, it is also interesting to note how a broad program is offered in order to draw the younger generation to the celebrations. Macy Gray, for example, was a huge hit in Poland in the summer of 2001, which I remember from my fieldwork for a previous study, when her songs were played “everywhere” – and Rufus Wainwright’s version of *Hallelujah* is mainly known from the animated film *Shrek*. Both of these are examples of pop culture references that appeal to young audiences.

## THE YOUNG GENERATION

But what do Solidarity, the shipyard strike, and the Gdańsk Agreement of August 31, 1980 actually mean to young people today? Is the intensive campaign to ensure the survival of the memory mounted by groups like the European Solidarity Center a sign that the younger generations in Poland do not care enough about the history of their country? The Swedish historian Ulf Zander has thought about whether the reason for the lukewarm interest in Solidarity among youth in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is that the strikes of the 1980s and the Solidarity movement were the *final* link in a long, tradition of rebellion in Poland, rather than the *starting shot* for something new.<sup>33</sup> He argues that young people are rejecting this and that they are weary of the constant harping on old injustices.<sup>34</sup> In my own thesis, *If We Are to Become Like Europe*, on the creation of identity among young, urban, well-educated women in Poland, the same tendencies emerge when interview respondents distance themselves from what they consider out of touch in the Poland that is to be integrated into the European Community and become part of the EU. These old and tired (and *Polish* – which is presented as old-fashioned in and of itself) notions are represented in their minds by the older generation, as well as the poorly educated and the rural population.<sup>35</sup>

Older people often remember the oppression of the communist era and the Cold War – and some of them even World War II<sup>36</sup> – while those born since the late 1970s essentially lack this experience, even if they have assimilated part of the “collective memory” through the stories of others. Among older people, reminders of the strike and the formation of Solidarity in August 1980 trigger enough memories and deep-



felt emotion to fill the anniversary celebration with meaning, while the younger generations need more far-reaching connections – references to the war-torn places of today and oppression in countries like Afghanistan, Tibet, and Sudan – in order to switch on a similar emotional register and engagement.

## CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

This article has described some aspects of the 2010 anniversary celebration of the strike at the former Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk in August 1980 and the formation of the Polish labor union and freedom movement Solidarity. The focus was on how these historic events are observed and remembered today – through various types of secular rituals and public events – and which elements are presented as important to hold onto and pass on to future generations. I have paid particular attention to concepts like freedom and solidarity, history and future, and the moral legacy from yesterday’s activists to today’s young generation and generations to come.

The depictions of the events in the 1980s and the production of history going on around them – continuously and in connection with the anniversary celebrations in 2010 – are, however, not entirely unproblematic. Historiography is always political, always commingled with power, just as presentations of historic phenomena in words, pictures, exhibitions, and stage productions of various kinds are always the result of specific interests and selection processes. Which groups and figures in modern Poland are out to score political points by constructing the past in this particular way? Timothy W. Luke writes:

**The politics of symbols are quite powerful, because they invoke ideals, recast realities, and manufacture meanings. Museum exhibits may not change public policies, but they can change other larger values and practices that will transform policy.<sup>37</sup>**

Which values and practices are being changed by presenting history, the present, and the future in this particular way? For whom is it important, for instance, that the Polish struggle is ascribed universal meanings, as emphasized in both the projects for children and youth and the anniversary concerts? Why is it so important that the young generation accepts the

baton and carries it forward? How are consensus, hegemonic discourses, and “objective truth” about the shipyard strike created, and how are other events linked with this in a logical and graspable chain of phenomena? For example: the election of a Polish pope, and the pope’s visit to Poland in the late 1970s → the strike in Gdańsk in 1980 → the founding and activism of Solidarity in the 1980s → partially free elections in 1989 → the fall of Eastern European communism in 1989–1990 → eastward enlargement of the EU in the 2000s. How are political phenomena shaped and influenced by such discursive linkages, today and in the future? What other voices and alternative versions are silenced and ignored in such a historiography? Further research – especially in the field of history and related disciplines – on the fall of Eastern European communism and its most iconic events, of which the shipyard strike in Gdańsk is one, is needed.

Many parallels to what happened in Poland and other countries in the former Eastern Bloc in the 1980s and 1990s were also drawn in connection with the Arab Spring in 2011. The comparisons describe courageous and desperate people rising up against the oppressive regimes in their countries in joint action – their actions guided by the hope of a better future. Many twists and turns are yet to come before anyone will be able to say with any certainty what the outcome of the revolts in North Africa and on the Arabian Peninsula will be – and what the historiography and memorial rituals surrounding these events will look like. Will they in any way resemble those surrounding the fall of Eastern European communism? Which events will be brought to the fore as special and symbolic? And, in such case, which galling voices will resist these descriptions? ❌

Note: All essays are scholarly articles and have been peer-reviewed by specialists under the supervision of Baltic Worlds’ editorial advisory board.

## references

- 1 From the 2005 documentary film *Children of Solidarność*, directed by Rafał Lewandowski, which was broadcast on the Swedish Television program *Mera historia* [More history], Swedish Television *Kunskapskanalen*, 2006-10-29. The song lyrics were written by Krzysztof Kasprzyk and the music by Maciej Pietrzyk.
- 2 The exhibition was then housed in premises inside the shipyard grounds, Sala BHP, which was the headquarters of the 1980 strike and where the strike agreement was signed. Sala BHP is now used for more temporary exhibitions, while *Roads to Freedom* has been given new permanent premises a few hundred meters away, near the Solidarity headquarters.
- 3 Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*, London 1985.
- 4 Since then, Bielecki has been a Member of Parliament for the conservative and Catholic – some would say right-wing populist – party PiS, “Law and Justice”. PiS was formed in 2001 by the twin brothers Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński, both with roots in Solidarity, who were in government in 2005–2007. Lech was the president of Poland until April 10, 2010, when he and a large number of political VIPs (including Anna Walentynowicz of Gdańsk strike fame) died in a plane crash – known as the “Smolensk Tragedy” – on the way to a ceremony in commemoration of the Katyń massacre of 1940, when some 4,500 Polish officers were shot to death by the Soviet military.
- 5 See also Gene Sharp, *From Dictatorship to Democracy: A Conceptual Framework for Liberation*, Boston, MA, 1993; 2010 – a pamphlet written by the American political scientist and activist Gene Sharp. This similar manual has been used, for example, in Serbia to overthrow Milošević and in Ukraine during the Orange Revolution in 2004. It is also said to have been a source of inspiration for the resistance movements in North Africa and on the Arabian Peninsula during the Arab Spring of 2011 (CBC News, 2011-02-24, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/story/2011/02/23/f-carol-off-gene-sharp-middle-east.html>; retrieved 2011-08-12). Bielecki’s book seems to have similar ambitions, but has not, as far as I know, had any significant impact.
- 6 Solidarity Center Foundation, <http://www.fcs.org.pl/fundacja>; retrieved 2010-10-26.
- 7 European Solidarity Center, [http://www.ecs.gda.pl/About\\_us](http://www.ecs.gda.pl/About_us); retrieved 2010-10-26.
- 8 A historiography confirmed by the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, where one of the events staged for the celebration was a line of dominos set up along the former line of the wall, and where Lech Wałęsa, very symbolically, was given the honor of tipping the first of the dominos. (*Dagens Nyheter* web edition, 2009-11-09: <http://www.dn.se/nyheter/varlden/berlinmurens-fall-firades--under-envist-regnande>; retrieved 2011-12-05.)
- 9 This national self-image has been analyzed by scholars including Barbara Törnquist-Plewa (*The Wheel of Polish Fortune: Myths in Polish Collective Consciousness During the First Years of Solidarity*, Lund 1992) and Norman Davies (*Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland’s Present*, Oxford 2001).
- 10 One example of such people might be the people of Belarus, which is still under Lukashenko’s dictatorial oppression.
- 11 <http://ecs.gda.pl/newss/news/1818/archive/7>; retrieved 2011-12-05.
- 12 <http://ecs.gda.pl/newss/news/2172/archive/4>; retrieved 2011-12-05.
- 13 Press release, [http://test.fcs.org.pl/files/FCS\\_press%20info\\_EN\\_06.2010](http://test.fcs.org.pl/files/FCS_press%20info_EN_06.2010); retrieved 2010-10-26.
- 14 [http://www.fcs.org.pl/dzialalnosc/inne/project/\\_projekt\\_zaplecze/\\_o\\_projekcie](http://www.fcs.org.pl/dzialalnosc/inne/project/_projekt_zaplecze/_o_projekcie); retrieved 2010-10-26.
- 15 Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity 1980–82*, London 1983, p. 50.
- 16 Katarzyna Wolanik Boström, *Berättade liv, berättat Polen: En etnologisk studie av hur högutbildade polacker gestaltar identitet och samhälle* [Narrated lives, narrated Poland: An ethnological study of how well-educated Polish professionals present identity and society], Umeå 2005.
- 17 Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (eds.), *Secular Ritual*, Assen/Amsterdam 1977, pp. 4–5.
- 18 Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events*, Cambridge 1998; 1990, pp. 41–58. See also Barbro Blehr, *En norsk besvärjelse: 17 maj-firande vid 1900-talets slut* [A Norwegian invocation: Independence Day celebrations in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century], Nora 2000, p. 19.
- 19 In Polish, WRON-a ORŁA NIE POKONA. This is a play on the name of the military organization WRON, which governed during the state of emergency in 1981–1983. With the suffixed “a”, *wron* becomes the word *wrona*, crow, which is set against the old Polish national symbol of the crowned eagle.
- 20 Bielecki, op. cit., p. 41.
- 21 Other things can be read into the quotation above – such as a reference to the so-called war on terrorism, in which Poland has been one of the allies of the United States and the former Bush administration.
- 22 “Historia Solidarności piórkem Jacka Frankowskiego” [The history of Solidarność from the pen of Jack Frankowski], in *Tygodnik Solidarność* [Solidarity weekly] 2010-08-31.
- 23 Maciej Jasiński, *Solidarność 25 lat: Nadzieja zwykłych ludzi* [25 years of Solidarity: The hope of ordinary people], Poznań 2005.
- 24 Timothy W. Luke, *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, Minneapolis 2002, pp. 220–221.
- 25 Luke, op. cit., pp. 219–220.
- 26 From the field diary.
- 27 See Randall Collins’s discussion of “interaction ritual chains” through which situations and symbols are emotionally linked and given meaning, e.g., in Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, Princeton & Oxford 2004, p. xii.
- 28 See e.g. Ash, op. cit., pp. 28–30.
- 29 Wałęsa himself is also known for always wearing an image of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa on his jacket or overcoat lapel.
- 30 See, e.g. the arguments in Karin S. Lindelöf, *Om vi nu ska bli som Europa: Könsskapande och normalitet bland unga kvinnor i transitionens Polen* [If we are to become like Europe: gender construction and normality among young women in transitional Poland], Gothenburg 2006, and Wolanik Boström, op. cit.
- 31 See Collins, op. cit., pp. 81–87.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 108.
- 33 Compare this with that which has been said and written about the miners’ strike in Kiruna, in northern Sweden, and how this strike ended an epoch of consensus solutions during the postwar era and entailed the beginning of something else (see Robert Nilsson’s thesis proposal, *Den stora gruvstrejken i Malmfälten: Görandet av en historisk händelse* [The great miners’ strike in the Swedish ore fields: The making of a historical event], Department of History, Stockholm University, 2010-09-28, p. 5).
- 34 Ulf Zander in *Mera historia* [More history], op. cit.
- 35 Lindelöf, op. cit.
- 36 In addition, the anniversary of the German invasion of Poland, and thus the starting shot of World War II, coincides with the anniversary of the strike: at dawn on September 1, 1939, the German battleship Schleswig-Holstein opened fire on Westerplatte in Gdańsk. For this reason, a solemn memorial service is held every year with the laying of wreaths and military presence at the monument on the site. In 2009, the memory of seventy years of oppression was also linked with the same anniversary in Poland: 1939–1989, precisely the years from the outbreak of World War II with the invasion of Poland until the end of the Cold War with the partially free elections in Poland, which brought a landslide victory for Solidarity and were followed by the Velvet Revolution and the fall of communist regimes across Central and Eastern Europe. Poland was written into history as the center of these events – and the shipyard strike in August 1980 is understood by many as that which drove and made possible these developments in the former Eastern Bloc (see, e.g. the official anniversary website 1939–1989: *It all began in Poland*, [http://www.3989.pl/en/d15\\_home.html](http://www.3989.pl/en/d15_home.html); retrieved 2011-12-01).
- 37 Luke, op. cit., p. xiv.