



European  
University  
Institute

DEPARTMENT  
OF HISTORY  
AND  
CIVILIZATION

## Practices of Togetherness

Jacek Kuroń, Affective Community and Political  
Opposition in Late Socialist Poland (1964-1982)

Nguyen Vu Thuc Linh

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of History and Civilization  
of the European University Institute

Florence, 27 September 2019



European University Institute  
**Department of History and Civilization**

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September 19, 2019



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## List of Abbreviations

AiKK	Archiwum Instytutu Literackiego, Kultura Paryska, Maisons-Laffitte (Archive of the Literary Institute Kultura Paryska)
AIPN	Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw (Archive of the Institute of National Remembrance)
AOK	Archiwum Ośrodka KARTA, Warsaw (Archive of the Karta Foundation)
BUW RPS	Gabinet Rękopisów Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw (The University of Warsaw Library Department of Manuscripts)
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
JDC	American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee
KH	Komitet Helsiński (Helsinki Committee)
KIK	Klub Inteligencji Katolickiej (Club of Catholic Intelligentsia)
KOR	Komitet Obrony Robotników (Workers' Defense Committee)
KW MO	Komenda Wojewódzka Milicji Obywatelskiej (Provincial Headquarters of the Citizens' Militia)
MKS	Międzyzakładowy Komitet Strajkowy (Inter-Factory Strike Committee)
MKZ	Międzyzakładowy Komitet Założycielski (Inter-Factory Founding Committee)
NOW or NOWA	Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza (Independent Publishing House NOWA)
NSZZ Solidarność	Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Solidarność (Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarność)
NSZZ RI Solidarność	Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Rolników Indywidualnych 'Solidarność' (Independent Self-Governing Union of Individual Farmers 'Solidarity')
NZS	Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów (Independent Students' Union)
OKO	Ogólnopolski Komitet Oporu (National Committee of Resistance)
ORMO	Ochotnicza Rezerwa Milicji Obywatelskiej (Voluntary Reserve Militia)

PiS	Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice Party)
PKP	Polskie Koleje Państwowe (Polish State Railways)
POP	Podstawowa organizacja partyjna (Basic Party Cell or Unit)
PZPR	Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza (Polish United Workers' Party)
RKW	Regionalna Komisja Wykonawcza NSZZ 'Solidarność' (Regional Executive Committee)
ROPCiO	Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela (Movement for Defense of Human and Civil Rights)
SB	Służba Bezpieczeństwa Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych (Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs), commonly known as Esbecja
SKS	Studencki Komitet Solidarności (Student Committee of Solidarity)
TKK	Tymczasowa Komisja Koordynacyjna NSZZ 'Solidarność' (Temporary Coordination Committee)
TKN	Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych (Society for Scientific Courses)
TSKŻ	Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce (Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland)
UB	Urząd Bezpieczeństwa (Department of Security)
USSR	Union of Socialist Soviet Republics
WRON	Wojskowa Rada Ocalenia Narodowego (Military Council of National Salvation)
WZZW	Wolne Związki Zawodowe Wybrzeża (Free Trade Unions of the Coast)
ZAK	Zakłady Azotowe Kędzierzyn (Nitrogen Plant in Kędzierzyn)
ZHP	Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego (Polish Scouting and Guiding Association)
ZMP	Związek Młodzieży Polskiej (Union of Polish Youth)
ZMS	Związek Młodzieży Socjalistycznej (Union of Socialist Youth)
ZOMO	Zmotoryzowane Odwoły Milicji Obywatelskiej (Motorized Reserves of the Citizens' Militia)

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Figure 1: Jan Zieja, Józef Rybicki, Jacek Kuroń. Photograph: Marcin Jabłoński, Ośrodek KARTA



Figure 2: Grażyna or Gaja Kuroń, Halina Mikołajska, unidentified person, Jacek Kuroń, Konrad Bieliński. Photograph: Janusz Przewłocki/Andrzej Friszke Archive, FOTONOVA



## Introduction

Jack Kurón, one of the key members of the political opposition in late socialist Poland, is standing in the door frame of a private apartment in Warsaw in 1978, wearing casual clothes. His focused attention and hand gesture suggest he is in conversation with someone outside the photograph. In the foreground are Józef Rybicki<sup>1</sup> and the priest Jan Zieja<sup>2</sup> (both sitting). The photograph was taken in the apartment of Professor Edward Lipiński.<sup>3</sup> The second photograph depicts members of the opposition on a hunger strike in the Church of the Holy Cross (Kościół Świętego Krzyża) in Warsaw that occurred between October 3-10, 1979 and that was an act of solidarity with political prisoners in Czechoslovakia. Clockwise from the bottom left, we see Grażyna or Gaja Kuroń, Halina Mikołajska, an unidentified person, Konrad Bieliński and Jacek Kuroń. The protesters are calm: they are all lying on the floor, some of them reading a newspaper, others taking a nap or in the middle of a conversation. Like old family photographs, the two scenes – the meeting in Lipiński's apartment and the hunger strike – evoke a sense of familiarity and of a banality of the quotidian that stands in stark contrast to the harsh political reality and the radical repertoire of contestation, including hunger strikes, the opposition resorted to.

At first sight, these photographs appear to show informal and innocuous meetings of political activists in late socialist Poland, and thus prove irrelevant to the analysis of the history of dissidence. It is, however, precisely the informal character of the meetings that makes both scenes emblematic of dissident life and that should inform our understanding of the nature of everyday political opposition in which even dramatic repertoires of contestation such as the hunger strike were embedded in and sustained by a web of informal social relations. As I will detail in this dissertation, the political opposition drew upon a variety of traditions and resources, such as socialist scouting and pedagogy, it involved everyday practices of informal caring and labor of love, such as collective singing and communal cooking, and it was based on a web of

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<sup>1</sup> Józef Rybicki (1901-1986) studied classics in Vilna and was a member of the Homeland Army during World War II and of the anti-Soviet resistance in the immediate post-war years. He was a member of KOR in the 1970s.

<sup>2</sup> Jan Zieja (1897-1991) worked with the Polish Council to Aid Jews 'Żegota' during World War II and was one of the co-founders of KOR.

<sup>3</sup> The economist Edward Lipiński (1888-1986) was a former member of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) who gradually turned critical of the party. He was also one of the co-founders of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR).

informal bonds both in terms of its emergence and reproduction. All of these aspects deserve careful investigation. The focus of this thesis will be on the life and legacy of Jacek Kuroń (1934-2004), one of the most prominent and influential Polish dissidents and co-founder of the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR), as well as on the complex ways in which he both shaped and was shaped by his milieu. Focusing on Kuroń might seem paradoxical given that the aim of the thesis is to highlight the collective nature of dissident culture, but it is precisely Kuroń's own self-understanding as well as his practice that will serve to highlight the essentially social and often invisibilized enabling conditions of activism in contrast to dominant narratives of activism that glorify individual struggle.

It is hard to classify Kuroń since his life was marked by a great variety of prolific activities in the political opposition that gained him an almost canonized status among political activists. Jacek Kuroń was born in Lviv in 1934 to Henryk Kuroń and Wanda Kuroń (née Rudeńska) who met there in 1933. Wanda Rudeńska was from a Polish-Ukrainian family and a young and educated white-collar worker in an insurance company when she met Henryk.<sup>4</sup> Henryk Kuroń was a worker who grew up in a working class family in Sosnowiec, an industrial town in today's Silesian Voivodship. As strong supporters of the Polish Socialist Party (PPS), the Kurońs cultivated the myths and values of the working class struggle in Sosnowiec during the dramatic events of 1905, when the Revolution spread from Russia to Polish lands. Already as a little boy Jacek Kuroń was imbued with the spirit of romantic political mobilization against social injustice. His grandfather Franciszek Kuroń's knack for storytelling and in particular the stories about the brave activism Franciszek's brother Julek's proved to be a great source of inspiration for his grandchildren Jacek and Andrzej (known as Felek).<sup>5</sup> The family's redemptive narratives of seemingly powerless individuals acting in concert against all odds in a common struggle against worker exploitation and the partition of Poland turned out to be not only convincing and romantic but also highly effective in Jacek Kuroń's life. Because of Henryk and Wanda's clandestine involvement in the Home Army – which involved helping Jews in hiding – the family left Lviv in March 1944 and

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<sup>4</sup> Anna Bikont and Helena Łuczywo, *Jacek* (Warsaw: Agora, 2018), 33-34.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

eventually relocated to a flat in Żoliborz in Warsaw at the beginning of 1946.<sup>6</sup> Jacek Kuroń went on to live in the very same apartment until his death in 2004.

Although there are many sides to Jacek Kuroń's personality, for decades his identity as a pedagogue loomed large in both his self-understanding and in how he was perceived by others. When asked in an interview in 1986, by J. W. Marewicz, to characterize himself, the 52-year-old Kuroń described himself in the following terms:

I'm a pedagogue. During my whole life what I wanted to do most was to educate and to bring up people. I'm interested in shaping people in a social movement. I'm convinced that the improvement of the social order – by making it more human – depends as much on human attitudes as on social structures. A social movement that can change the surrounding world – by improving social structures – creates people who will be able to live a fuller and better life in the emerging new order.<sup>7</sup>

Kuroń was a co-founder and passionate leader of the co-educational scout troops *Walterowcy*, which were active in Warsaw from the mid 1950s until the early 1960s. The *Walterowcy* were famous for their experimental pedagogy, vanguard socialist summer camps, and strong collective identity. Kuroń saw the *Walterowcy* as a way to create the enabling and empowering conditions for the development of capable, self-confident and socially sensitive future members of a socialist and democratic society. The pedagogical practice that took place in the *Walterowcy* aimed to bring a utopian future closer to the present and shaped a commitment that continued to inform Kuroń's political practice under radically changing circumstances.

Kuroń's pedagogical zeal imbibed his political activism in ways that were shaped by the personal contacts and organizational skills acquired during his time as a scout leader. In the interview just quoted, Kuroń went on to describe how his own pupils from the *Walterowcy* led him to join the political opposition.<sup>8</sup> Although the *Walterowcy* officially ceased to exist in 1961, the pedagogical patterns and practices that were developed across the *Walterowcy* summer

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 80, 89.

<sup>7</sup> AO III/12.K.5, 'Taki upór,' 1.

<sup>8</sup> AO III/12.K.5, 'Taki upór,' 2.

camps, outings and meetings, survived, albeit in a changed form. Kuroń's former pupils came to shape central aspects of the political milieu that began to form around him a bit later and that was built on the adapted practices and spirit of the *Walterowcy*, with its emphasis on acting together and creating close bonds within the group.

Being and acting together, offering shelter and binding loyalties also provided a counterpart to the everyday hardships linked to political activism. The imbrication of a sense of empowerment and vulnerability with limited access to basic needs such as food was an experience common to the lives of members of the political opposition who were often devoid of stable earnings and reliable family bonds. As Zbigniew Bujak (b. 1954), one of the most prominent dissidents in Warsaw, describes it in a matter-of-fact way rather than boasting the heroism of political activism: 'there were moments when one lost one's job and when one had nothing to eat and had to find a way to invite oneself to friends for dinner.' Under these circumstances, Bujak adds, it was of great importance to have passionate and committed friends such as Jacek Kuroń.<sup>9</sup> Another political activist, Ewa Kulik (b. 1957), shares a similar experience: When she lost touch with her mother after deciding to fully commit herself to the political opposition the lacuna was filled by Kulik's close relationship with Jacek Kuroń's wife, Elżbieta Grażyna Borucka-Kuroń, better known as Gaja.<sup>10</sup> Close ties of intimacy between members of the milieu at times supplanted the missing family relationships, further underlining the need to conceptualize the social and often informal enabling conditions of activism in ways that are more expansive than dominant narratives allow for.

This shift of perspectives involves posing a series of questions that have not always been at the center of the history of political mobilization and opposition: What are the intellectual, cultural and social roots and the enabling conditions of the political mobilization of Kuroń and his milieu? What kinds of material and immaterial resources were mobilized in the everyday lives of activists to facilitate the emergence and the sustainability of this political milieu? What was the role of friendship ties and a sense of care in maintaining the political commitment of the activists in the changing political landscape of late socialist Poland?

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<sup>9</sup> Zbigniew Bujak, interview, Warsaw, October 9, 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Ewa Kulik, interview, Warsaw, December 16, 2016.

In order to answer these questions, I will highlight the communal and, at times, affective dimensions of dissident activism. I shall describe Kuroń's impact on the university students living in Warsaw who gradually became activists and part of his closest political circle. These students created a milieu that sustained Kuroń and their own activism through the 1960s, 1970s and up until the end of martial law in the early 1980s. My hypothesis is that viewing political mobilization in late socialist Warsaw through the lens of mutual commitment and Kuroń's emotional habitus allows us to understand the significance of bonds of friendship for the purpose of political mobilization. Rather than the rational critique of state abuses or individual dramatic acts of protest, then, it is the interplay between political commitments, habitus and practices that managed to constitute powerful 'practices of togetherness' that shaped the political opposition. In this way, I hope to bring into light an aspect of oppositional practice in Poland that is essential for understanding both its longevity and its specific unfolding in different phases of the history of the Polish People's Republic.

### *Workers vs. Intellectuals? Beyond Dichotomies in the Debate on Solidarność*

In recent years there has been a proliferation of research and books on Solidarność in Polish, which still provides the prism through which the history of the opposition in late socialist Poland is predominantly understood. They range from political biographies of the movement's leaders<sup>11</sup> via book-length interviews with its activists<sup>12</sup> and autobiographies<sup>13</sup> to historical investigations of various hitherto under-researched aspects of the movement.<sup>14</sup> Simultaneously, something like a canon of Polish historiography has been established with more recent monumental works by Andrzej Friszke, Anna Machcewicz, and Jan Skórzyński establishing their place among older

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<sup>11</sup> See, e.g., Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk, *SB a Lech Wałęsa. Przyczynek do biografii* (Gdańsk: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008), Barbara Szczepuła, *Alina Pienkowska. Miłość w cieniu polityki* (Warsaw: WAB, 2013), and Anna Bikont and Helena Łuczywo, *Jacek* (Warsaw: Agora, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> See, e.g., Ludwika Wujec, *Wujec. Związki przyjacielskie* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2014) and Krzysztof Strycharski and Henryka Krzywonos-Strycharska, *Moja żona tramwajarka* (Warsaw: Agora, 2019).

<sup>13</sup> Danuta Wałęsa, *Marzenia i tajemnice* (Kraków: Literackie, 2011) and Karol Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii. Wyznania poobijanego jeźdźca* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> Łukasz Kamiński, Wojciech Sawicki, Grzegorz Waligóra, eds., *Solidarność Walcząca w dokumentach*, vol. 1: *W oczach SB* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2007).

classics by Jan Józef Lipski, Jerzy Holzer and Jadwiga Staniszkis.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, Solidarność as a collective historical experience and a point of reference for Polish civic identity after 1989 has slowly entered Polish visual culture, especially contemporary art and cinema.<sup>16</sup>

Despite its recent revival as a research topic in Poland, Solidarność as an object of study seems either to have been exhausted for or forgotten by international scholars.<sup>17</sup> This decline in historical interest in the Polish opposition has manifested itself in the relatively small number of recent publications on the movement in English – a development that stands in sharp contrast to the 1990s when the then booming historiography on Solidarność was animated by the discussion on the origins of the movement.

At that time, the debate revolved around the question of the main political agent driving the movement: was it workers or intellectuals? This discussion resulted in a reconsideration of the role of both intellectuals and workers, in terms of their respective impacts on the subsequent success or failure of Solidarność. In their contribution to the debate, Roman Laba and Lawrence Goodwyn objected to the then predominant position that dissident intellectuals from the Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) organized and led the movement.<sup>18</sup> Laba's claim, spelled out in his seminal book *The Roots of Solidarity*, that 'the roots of Solidarity were in the Baltic working

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<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., Andrzej Friszke, *Rewolucja Solidarności* (Kraków: Znak, 2014), Anna Machcewicz, *Bunt. Strajki w Trójmieście 1980* (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2015), Jan Skórzyński, *Zadra. Biografia Lecha Wałęsy* (Gdańsk: ECS & słowo/obraz terytoria, 2009); and for the older generation Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR. Komitet Obrony Robotników – Komitet samoobrony społecznej* (London: Aneks, 1983), Jerzy Holzer, *Solidarność, 1980-1981: Geneza i historia* (Warsaw: Agencja Omnipress, 1990), Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984).

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Andrzej Wajda's recent film *Wałęsa. Człowiek z nadziei* (Walesa. Man of Hope), Poland 2013; Waldemar Krzystek's film *80 milionów* (80 Million), Poland 2011; the Netflix series *1983* (Poland 2018); and Sanja Iveković's art work *Niewidzialne kobiety Solidarności* from 2009 (which is in the collection of the Muzeum Sztuki Nowoczesnej in Warsaw).

<sup>17</sup> Scholars interested in the political opposition after 1956, who come to study it as cultural and linguistic outsiders to Poland, will most likely start their research from the classic literature on the topic, which is available in English. See, e.g., Alain Touraine, *Solidarity: The Analysis of a Social Movement: Poland 1980-1981* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1983] 2002), David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of the Anti-Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1994), Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), as well as the works discussed in the following paragraphs.

<sup>18</sup> A prominent example of this position is provided by Lipski, *KOR*, see also Robert Zuzowski, *Political Dissent and Opposition in Poland: The Workers' Defence Committee 'KOR'* (Westport, CT and London: Praeger, 1992), 253-262.

class, and the intellectuals made a necessary but not causal or creative contribution,<sup>19</sup> is part of his broader critique of what he calls ‘the elite thesis.’ Laba suggests that this narrative not only reproduces an elite-centered account of the movement, but also contributes to an elite-oriented writing of history in general. Along similar lines, arguing for an understanding of Solidarność as primarily a workers’ movement, Lawrence Goodwyn’s book *Breaking the Barrier* focuses on the choices made and the risks taken by Polish workers in forming this large-scale movement that challenged Polish politics.<sup>20</sup> By narrowing down the creation of Solidarność to the self-formation of workers as political subjects, both Laba and Goodwyn question the widely accepted belief that – in a nutshell – ‘KOR made Solidarity.’ Providing an alternative perspective on the origins and conditions of the emergence of Solidarność, Laba’s and Goodwyn’s work can also be seen as an intervention in a broader debate. They position themselves against a type of scholarship that prefers to focus on historical events through the lens of ideas and the intellectual interventions they inform rather than analyzing the concrete material conditions that allow for collective action to emerge. An analysis of these conditions would need to include longer-term practices, dynamics, circumstances, and efforts that can make an event happen. As the case of Kuroń’s milieu highlights, his political ideas and reflections on a just social order were never abstract but immanently anchored in his everyday practices.

Against this background, Jack M. Bloom’s *Seeing through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution* is one of the few recently published books on Solidarność that makes a substantial contribution to this debate. Combining the voices of a significant number of workers, Bloom’s book echoes the paradigmatic discussion from the 1990s, and provides a discursive space for workers to articulate their role and agency in Solidarność. The title of the book could thus be read metaphorically but also very literally as the book tells the story of political opposition enacted by workers as it was seen and as it is remembered by workers themselves. Already in the introduction Bloom claims that ‘there is little doubt that workers themselves were the creators of Solidarity.’<sup>21</sup> His position is even more explicitly formulated when he describes the complex – seemingly causal –

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<sup>19</sup> Roman Laba, *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 178.

<sup>20</sup> See Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

<sup>21</sup> Jack M. Bloom, *Seeing Through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 6.

relationship between the group of Warsaw intellectual activists from KOR and the formation of Solidarność: 'While workers did not necessarily accept what the intellectuals suggested, they were perfectly willing to listen. That is why, when the 1980 strikes began, intellectuals were often invited to be advisers. But as others have noted, they did not set policy.'<sup>22</sup> According to Bloom, then, the common explanation of the formation and development of Solidarność not only privileges intellectuals but is also too limited to grasp the dynamics of everyday political struggle in Poland.

Regardless of which position one takes in this debate, it is hard to engage with the existing scholarship available in English and Polish on dissidence in late socialist Poland and not see political dissent primarily or exclusively in terms of street confrontations with the forces of order, strikes in factories and intellectuals engaged in discussion in the underground press, i.e. through the lens of what members of the political opposition call 'the carnival of Solidarity'.<sup>23</sup> Simultaneously, a related strand of thinking about dissidence has clustered around the centrality of the concept of civil society and its explanatory power.<sup>24</sup> In addition, what almost all these publications have in common is the underlying assumption, treated as self-evident, that everyday life in late socialist Poland was defined by the somewhat static and overarching dichotomy of state oppression and citizen resistance. Historical and cultural narratives of this kind have a popular appeal and have become a standard – and by now familiar – framework for thinking,

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>23</sup> On the significance of ideas in dissident circles see: Robert Brier, 'Broadening the Cultural History of the Cold War: The Emergence of the Polish Workers' Defense Committee and the Rise of Human Rights,' *Journal of Cold War Studies* 15, 4 (2013), 104-127; Robert Brier, 'Adam Michnik's Understanding of Totalitarianism and the West European Left: A Historical and Transnational Approach to Dissident Political Thought,' *East European Politics and Societies* 25, 2 (2011), 197-218; Gregor Feindt, *Auf der Suche nach politischer Gemeinschaft: Oppositionelles Denken zur Nation im ostmitteleuropäischen Samizdat 1976-1992* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015); Michał Siermiński, *Dekada przełomu Polska lewica opozycyjna 1968-1980. Od demokracji robotniczej do narodowego paternalizmu* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa, 2016); Dariusz Gawin, *Wielki zwrot. Ewolucja lewicy i odrodzenie idei społeczeństwa obywatelskiego 1956-1976* (Kraków: Znak, 2013); Tomasz Sylwiusz Ceran, *Świat idei Jacka Kuronia* (Warsaw: PWN, 2010). The notion of the 'carnival' is prominently used by many of my interviewees (e.g. Ewa Kulik and Ewa Milewicz) during interviews and is taken up, with reference to 1989, by Padraic Kenney, *A Carnival of Revolution: Central Europe 1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>24</sup> Michael Bernhard, 'Civil Society and the Democratic Transition in East Central Europe,' *Political Science Quarterly* 108, 2 (1993), 307-326; Jacques Rupnik, 'Dissent in Poland, 1968-1978: The End of Revisionism and the Birth of Civil Society,' in *Opposition in Eastern Europe*, ed. Rudolf L. Tökés (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1979), 65-68; Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 31-36, 58-69.



talking and writing about the political opposition; they shape our image of the political opposition and the logic as well as the risks of political involvement in late socialist Poland.

While well-known images of iconic moments of public protest still dominate the public imagination and frame the private sphere as inscrutable, the growing literature on dissidence<sup>25</sup> increasingly challenges standard narratives of late socialist political activism and the conventional public-private divide, pushing towards an expansion of the focus beyond the well-researched politics of Solidarność. Rather than dismissing the existing frameworks of interpretation, my goal in this dissertation is to provide a complementary interpretation that will allow for insights into micro-histories at the intersection of the practices of everyday life and political mobilization that can have momentous effects.

In order to reconceptualize the notion of political opposition, I will adapt one of the central points that emerged from the contributions of Laba, Goodwyn, and Bloom – namely that the complex genealogy of Solidarność can only be understood if we take everyday practices, material social conditions, and the perspective of the participants as our starting point. In so doing, I hope to reinsert this point into the study of a group these scholars thought was not as relevant to the formation of Solidarność, namely the political and intellectual milieu around Kuroń. There is no doubt that intellectual exchanges and interventions played a crucial role both in the self-understanding and political practice of the activist milieu, which is at the center of this thesis – and Kuroń's own writings will serve as important reference points throughout. However, these intellectual practices were always embedded in and shaped by the everyday life of the milieu and what could be called its 'moral economy,' its 'popular ethic,' which encompassed norms and obligations that must be part of any attempt to understand why its members challenged the status quo.<sup>26</sup> In order to understand how Kuroń and his milieu were able to sustain their political activism through changing political contexts, it is necessary to spell out the ways in which political

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<sup>25</sup> To give just a few examples, see: Siobhan Doucette, *Books Are Weapons: The Polish Opposition Press and the Overthrow of Communism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018); Jan Olaszek, *Rewolucja Powielaczy: Niezależny ruch wydawniczy w Polsce 1976-1989* (Warsaw: Trzecia Strona, 2015); Jonathan Bolton, *Worlds of Dissent: Charter 77, Plastic People of the Universe, and Czech Culture under Communism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012); Anka Grupińska and Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Buntownicy. Polskie lata 70. i 80.* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2011).

<sup>26</sup> See E. P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century,' *Past & Present* 50 (1971), 76-136, esp. 79.

mobilization was rooted in everyday practices, how activists related to their friends and what role their distinct ‘structures of feeling’ or ‘emotional habitus’<sup>27</sup> played that pushed them towards concrete actions. As Kuroń himself remarked, ‘one could say that each social milieu that discusses public affairs is a part of a [politically] oppositional movement.’<sup>28</sup>

The field of *Alltagsgeschichte* offers a good methodological starting point to understand how the dynamic daily praxis of historical agents helped them transform their immediate surroundings. According to Alf Lüdtke, ‘historical change and continuity are understood as the outcome of action by concrete groups and individuals. Human social practice is shifted into the foreground of historical inquiry.’<sup>29</sup> In line with Lüdtke’s proposal, the microhistory of how political mobilization emerged and sustained itself in adverse political conditions involves as much focus on concrete groups of activists as on potentially transformative practices and their social and affective underpinnings. Looking at various modes of social interaction involving forms of collective care and identity formation – such as singing, cooking, and gathering in informal ‘semi-private’ spaces that shape the sense of belonging to a community – alongside more established forms of concrete political action – such as hunger striking, street protests, and the writing of open letters – allows us to see how aspects of the daily practices of political activists that might otherwise appear as mere personal anecdote or historical trivia are intrinsically bound up with political protest and the broader political culture of dissent. As a side-effect, this change in perspective also allows us to question the stereotype of these activists as disconnected elite intellectuals who primarily traded in abstract ideas.

By reconstructing everyday practices of care, we come across individual activists embedded within webs of interrelations, concrete practices and encounters. Going beyond rigid dichotomies between the public and the private, and considering in-between spaces such as apartments, offers a view into sites of informal work and interaction. Apartments were loci where

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<sup>27</sup> Raymond Williams, ‘Structures of Feeling,’ in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 128-135; on the term ‘emotional habitus,’ see below.

<sup>28</sup> Anon. [Jacek Kuroń], ‘Polityczna opozycja w Polsce,’ *Kultura* 2, 326 (1974), 16.

<sup>29</sup> Alf Lüdtke, ‘Introduction,’ in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experience and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 6. For an example of *Alltagsgeschichte* of life in the Soviet Union, see Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Everyday Stalinism. Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times. Soviet Russia in the 1930s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); Sheila Fitzpatrick, *Stalin's Peasants: Resistance and Survival in the Russian Village After Collectivization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

political activists met each other on a daily basis, providing support, shelter, and comfort. At the same time, these apartments often served as semi-public spaces for political discussion, deliberation and even decision-making. Yet, as Dorothee Wierling has observed, the history of everyday life is heavily gendered and thus 'it is also necessary to explore the way in which men and women move through those spheres.'<sup>30</sup> By focusing on how both women and men occupied and organized their immediate spheres of action, this dissertation also gives an account of how gender dynamics influenced, and were negotiated in both the everyday life of activists and their more public forms of political mobilization. While I do not lay out a systematic analysis and reconstruction of gender dynamics in late socialist Poland,<sup>31</sup> gender as an analytical concept contributes significantly to the conceptual and interpretative framework of this thesis.<sup>32</sup> I see gender history as an essential tool to address the ways in which diffused and decentralized power relationships are articulated through gender relations,<sup>33</sup> both within the political opposition (e.g. in the role that Kuroń's wife Gaja played) and in the context of state repression (e.g. the internment of female Solidarność activists during martial law). As will be explored in more detail in chapter five, beyond how these relations shaped the behavior of dissidents it was often the state itself that recognized and exploited gender relations in fine-tuning and legitimizing its attempts to repress and neutralize dissent.

In foregrounding social practice, *Alltagsgeschichte* opens the door to returning to the 'structures of feeling' or 'emotional habitus' mentioned above. While the notion of 'structures of feeling' highlights the historical and social character and emotional dynamic of lived experience in a general way – by emphasizing that feelings are never 'raw' or 'brute' but always structured

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<sup>30</sup> Dorothee Wierling, 'The History of Everyday Life and Gender Relations: On Historical and Historiographical Relations,' in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experience and Way of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 161.

<sup>31</sup> On gender history and socialism, see Donna Harsch, *Revenge of the Domestic: Women, the Family, and Communism in the German Democratic Republic* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Donna Harsch, 'Communism and Women,' in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Communism*, ed. Stephen A. Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 488-504; Shana Penn and Jill Massino, eds., *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Kateřina Lišková, 'Sex under socialism: From emancipation of women to normalized families in Czechoslovakia,' *Sexualities* 9, 1-2 (2016), 211-235.

<sup>32</sup> For an excellent overview of gender history, see Laura Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London: Bloomsbury, [2004] 2010).

<sup>33</sup> Joan W. Scott, 'Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,' *American Historical Review* 91, 5 (1986), 1069-1070.

by the social context in which they are embedded and in turn structuring these contexts through the practices they generate –, the category of ‘emotional habitus’ can more specifically be employed to conceptualize the embodied emotional preconditions of collective action. In the influential work of Pierre Bourdieu social practices and the habitus are intimately linked. According to Bourdieu, the habitus is a set of embodied habits, skills and dispositions – to think, feel, act and experience the world in certain ways – that, as part of their ‘second nature,’ allows agents to actively participate in societal life without explicit coordination or reflection.<sup>34</sup> For instance, the ways we eat, experience joy and sadness, and relate to others express the history of our education and socialization and are shaped by the symbolic cultural capital these have conferred on us.<sup>35</sup> In the Bourdieusian framework, the habitus is primarily a stabilizing force and ensures the reproduction of the social field as it makes compliance more likely than dissent. However, dissent has its own habitual preconditions and cannot be conceptualized in isolation from the habitus if one wishes to avoid an overly rationalistic or intellectualist perspective.

The concept of ‘emotional habitus’ was first developed in the work of the social movement scholar Deborah B. Gould who defines it as a social group’s shared and usually not fully conscious disposition to feel in certain ways that influence political action, which both enables and shapes its sense of what is possible, what needs to be done, and how to do it.<sup>36</sup> Central to the notion of emotional habitus is thus the assumption that emotions and the way we experience and express them need to be situated in terms of historically specific social conditions and social norms of conduct. That is, what and how we feel is not an unmediated expression of our true self but is largely shaped by the particular ways in which we were socialized as members of specific groups (our social class, race and gender).<sup>37</sup> An emotional habitus can thus also be characterized as an incorporated emotional competence or capacity that allows agents, by way of their emotions, to

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<sup>34</sup> See, e.g., Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [1972] 1977).

<sup>35</sup> See, e.g., Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste* (London: Routledge, [1979] 2010).

<sup>36</sup> Deborah B. Gould, *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP’s Fight against AIDS* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), esp. 32-39.

<sup>37</sup> For a feminist perspective on Bourdieu’s social theory, see Judith Butler, ‘Performativity’s Social Magic,’ in *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, ed. Richard Shusterman (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 113-128; Gill Jager, ‘Embodied Subjectivity, Power and Resistance: Bourdieu and Butler on the Problem of Determinism,’ in *Embodied Selves*, ed. Stella Gonzalez-Arnal, Gill Jagger, and Kathleen Lennon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 209-229; Terry Lovell, ‘Thinking Feminism with and against Bourdieu,’ *Feminist Theory* 1, 1 (2000), 11-32.

connect with, and disconnect from others and the broader social order. Social competence is exercised through emotional expressions and reactions, which William Reddy calls ‘emotives.’<sup>38</sup> Following the cultural and emotional turn in social movement studies, Gould herself introduces the notion to capture how, in the context of the US AIDS crisis, emotional dynamics shaped the political mobilization of ACT UP.<sup>39</sup> This is particularly significant for its shift to confrontational direct action, and its ability to sustain itself over time in a politically hostile atmosphere even as many of its activists died. In the following, I will use the notion of emotional habitus to examine Kuroń’s remarkable capacity to attract and bind people in a way that generated an affective and social basis for oppositional political action.

My claim is thus twofold. First, emotions are embedded in one’s habitus,<sup>40</sup> and agents experience and navigate concrete social spaces with their help. In other words, in helping us make sense of the surrounding social world our emotions orient the way we behave. The emotions at the center of this thesis are, thus, primarily understood as relatively stable and ‘retrievable’ affective commitments rather than as short-run, disruptive outbursts of feelings that discussions of protest often focus on.<sup>41</sup> Second, the expansion of the notion of habitus to include emotions has consequences for how we understand political mobilization. In the case of the political opposition in late socialist Poland, and specifically Kuroń’s milieu, the emotional habitus, as a set of enduring social and emotional dispositions, encompasses what I shall call ‘affective pedagogies.’ These pedagogies involved ‘counter-templates’ and embodied norms for how to act as political activists that shaped how activists related to one another and how their dissident activities unfolded over time.

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<sup>38</sup> William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling: A Framework for the History of Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 96-111.

<sup>39</sup> For her own assessment of this turn, see Deborah Gould, ‘Emotion and Social Movements,’ in *The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements*, ed. David A. Snow et al. (Malden: Wiley, 2013), 399-404.

<sup>40</sup> See also Monique Scheer, ‘Are Emotions a Kind of Practice (and Is That What Makes Them Have a History)? A Bourdieuan Approach to Understanding,’ *History and Theory* 51, 2 (2012), 205.

<sup>41</sup> See, for this distinction, James M. Jasper, *The Emotions of Protest* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2018), esp. ch. 5.

## *Problems and Topics*

Kuroń's milieu is of special historical interest because of the complex ways in which it engaged in oppositional politics and practices which in turn translated into its remarkable ability to sustain itself throughout changing political circumstances and challenges. What distinguished Kuroń's circle from other oppositional groups, such as ROPCiO (Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela, Movement for Defense of Human and Civil Rights) and other more moderate groups was not only a different, more left-leaning political outlook, but a specific way of engaging in oppositional practice, of being in opposition, i.e. a specific habitus. In tracing the ways in which this specific habitus of the political circle around Kuroń morphed over time, I examine how everyday practices of care and the informal labor of love together with intellectual interventions and protest shape the history of political mobilization against the backdrop of broader historical dynamics. How exactly and with what means did Kuroń and his closest friends and collaborators gain prominence within the national and international circles that were critical of the Polish United Workers Party? What is the role of shared values, ideas, practices *and* affective bonds in creating a sustained political opposition in late socialist Poland? In answering these questions, I investigate major political writings from Kuroń's body of work (covering a range of different genres, rhetorics and topics), political initiatives and interventions, and the social and affective world around him. In this dissertation, I argue that the specific habitus of the cluster of friends and activists around Kuroń consists of shared *values* (articulated in a variety of writings, and based in shared experience), *affective spaces* (such as Kuroń's apartment on Mickiewicza Street), and *practices* and the use of *community as a weapon* (including forms of self-organized protest and dissidence as well as bonds of care). Let me briefly examine these four elements in turn.

*Values:* Kuroń was not a systematic thinker, but he had a widely-recognized talent for storytelling and a specific writing style, which is characterized by an extraordinary personal and vernacular language that sets him apart from the highbrow and formalized literary style typical of many other opposition intellectuals. Both his way of being and his commitment to grassroots social change arguably find expression in the style and form of his writing. While some of Kuroń's writings openly attack the official party line and capture his political anger and frustrations, others

lay bare his pedagogical passion and vision and offer a moral compass for and support to readers amid pressing political developments like the implementation of martial law in 1982. Regardless of the specific genre or format, the deep political content of Kuroń's writings is almost always grounded in a concern for how to achieve social justice under the adverse conditions of late socialist Poland. By 1964 it was clear to him that the party and the institutional structure of the state were obstacles to achieving social justice rather than its guarantors.

As indicated above, the Walterowcy scout troops turned out to provide a formative experience for many of Kuroń's pupils who later became his friends, forming a tightly-knit community of political activists. As Kuroń's political writings were initially fueled by his pedagogical vision, his early writings centered around the formative and creative power of socialist scouting in changing the world and shaping both the socialist individual and society. Although his reflections on the social order evolved over time and became less constrained by socialist patterns of thinking, structures of interpretation, and vocabularies, his commitment to the struggle for social justice remained steadfast, informing both his writings as well as his political activity.

Kuroń's engagement in socialist scouting was a source of controversy as right-leaning members of the political opposition saw him as a sympathizer of an ideology that paved the way to dictatorship in Poland. The distrust and controversy surrounding Kuroń's active participation in socialist scouting, which often misrepresented his leftist outlook, loomed large throughout his life and led to a series of distortions of his pedagogical past. As a result, his pedagogical thought and writings have been underrated outside of his closest milieu of friends and former pupils. In contrast, a focus on the social vision underlying his pedagogical work demonstrates Kuroń's political evolution as well as his long-lasting and constant preoccupation with various socio-political issues that range from self-organization to the question of the good life in their embeddedness in the current political situation. Following the somewhat idiosyncratic paths of Kuroń's thinking reveals its mobilizing power both through its groundedness and its unanticipated outcomes.

A closer look at the evolution of Kuroń's socio-political thought inevitably involves a serious engagement with the underground public sphere in Poland that began to flourish in the

late 1970s. The vibrant underground press gave rise to an alternative public sphere where members of the political opposition discussed societal and political issues. As a hidden public forum, the underground publications opened up an arena for expressing, testing out and validating political projects that were championed by activists and intellectuals, individually and collectively, and that, perhaps most importantly, went against the party line. For instance, Kuroń published a series of seminal articles on the role of social movements and milieus as the vehicle for social and political change in the underground press in the second half of the 1970s. A few years later, the cumbersome dynamics of incarceration under martial law and Kuroń's emotional reactions to it were embodied in the articles he wrote from the internment camp that were published in underground newspapers. Thanks to these widely read publications Kuroń's influence was strongly felt in the community of dissidents. In turn, many members of this community were engaged in the world of the underground press, and many of Kuroń's close friends such as Joanna Szczęsna, Jan Lityński, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Ludwika Wujec, Helena Łuczywo, Ewa Milewicz and Konrad Bieliński played a crucial role in printing, storing, delivering, editing and distributing the newspapers.

*Affective Space:* In addition to his written interventions, Kuroń's high profile as a member of the political opposition was due to his charisma and his and his wife Gaja's ability to create a social space of generosity and hospitality. Virtually all of my interviewees, whether they were his close friends or distant collaborators, were enchanted by his personality and the aura of a daring dissident that surrounded him. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that the circle of friends around Kuroń was so successful in maintaining itself as a crucial part of the political opposition merely thanks to its intellectual work and Kuroń's charismatic personality. By providing a safe haven for activists and a hotbed for political brainstorming, Kuroń and Gaja's apartment on 27 Mickiewicza Street in Warsaw opened up a displaced site for political expression and practice in a realm that was seen as private. In examining the role of the apartment as a place for political socializing, deliberation and practice that involved blending the private with the public and that was sustained by Kuroń and Gaja's labor of love, I address the complexity and richness of political commitment in late socialist Poland. While access to the intimate details of Gaja's personal life is limited due to the scarcity of source materials, several interviewees



underline her role as an activist, a committed friend, and a co-creator of the place of refuge that turned out to be crucial for the social and material reproduction of the milieu and its political habitus.

Paradoxically, despite being under constant surveillance, the apartment on Mickiewicza Street offered a sense of hominess and intimacy. The members of the milieu around Gaja and Jacek Kuroń were linked by close bonds of mutual care and support that were often as important as a shared social vision that put them in opposition to everything that they perceived as unjust and corrupt. The apartment on Mickiewicza Street provided a quasi-institutional setting within a private sphere that was a less tightly controlled discursive space. At the same time, the significant role played by the apartment highlights that political opposition is inevitably tied to fundamental social practices and forms of reproduction, such as providing shelter, a sense of mutual understanding, and being together. Throughout the history of dissidence in late socialist Poland, the private easily blurs into the public as one facilitates the other. It is precisely the ways in which this milieu exemplifies the fluidity between the personal and the public that makes it so special.

*Practices and Community as weapon:* Ties of friendships, affective bonds and forms of mutual care are essential to a continuous and purposeful political opposition. The milieu around Gaja and Jacek Kuroń shared values, interests, a history, a vocabulary and a deep trust and loyalty to one another. All these threads were braided into a political and affective community that functioned as a weapon in the daily practice of opposing the state – a community that was formed in opposition to and aimed to transcend the exclusionary logic of state-led community formation in a radically democratic and open manner. With the notion of ‘affective community’ I thus intend to designate a type of community that not only shares a degree of political consciousness and a joint political project. It is also held together and characterized by a shared emotional habitus, personal bonds that are historically deep and rooted in shared experiences, and practices of care as well as forms of closeness and intimacy that go beyond the category of the milieu in the more narrow sociological sense.<sup>42</sup> This type of community has been a distinguishing feature of the

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<sup>42</sup> The term ‘affective community’ was prominently introduced by Leela Gandhi in her analysis of the sources and dynamics of ‘minor’ forms of opposition to imperialism arising from within the metropolis; despite significant differences in the respective historical contexts, her emphasis on the ‘existentially urgent and ethically inventive’ character of the ‘politics of friendship’ of an affective community resonates with the larger aim of this thesis (see Leela Gandhi, *Affective Communities: Anticolonial Thought, Fin-de-Siècle Radicalism, and the Politics of Friendship*

group around Kuroń from the shared time in the Walterowcy onwards, but it was most prominently weaponized by political activists under martial law when thousands of activists associated with Solidarity and the political opposition were put into more than fifty internment camps spread throughout Poland. While political incarceration was experienced by many as a time of tribulation, it was also a time of political solidarity, community formation, and political maturation. By that time, Kuroń and his friends could look back on a long series of moments in which they took a stand against the party. These ranged from the suspension of students who were critical of the party at the University of Warsaw in 1968 and the brutal and unfair treatment of protesting workers in 1976 to the mistreatment of political prisoners in Czechoslovakia in 1979 and in Poland in May 1980 as well as the strikes of 1980. By the 1980s, the milieu was widely recognized among the political opposition as many people shared the milieu's political concerns, supported its activities and turned to its members for help.

The case of the milieu that formed around Kuroń was also a story of the fading away of a radical commitment to building socialism that originated in late 1950s Poland and that led to the formation of one of the most committed circles in the political opposition. In spite of occasional ideological disagreements, the milieu was held together and pushed forward by bonds of care, ties of friendships, and a sense of loyalty that, in conjunction with shared values, practices and historical experiences, enabled its members not only to survive, but to adapt to new challenges and to shape the prehistory of 1989.

### *Oral History, Ego-documents, New Biography*

One of the most productive ways of accessing the everyday history of dissidence and of identifying and addressing differing accounts of the past is through the use of oral history. As part of the research for this thesis, I conducted 37 interviews, mainly in Poland, Italy and the United

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[Durham: Duke University Press, 2006], esp. 9-10, 19). See also Barbara H. Rosenwein, *Emotional Communities in the Early Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), and Jan Plamper, *The History of Emotions: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 70-71. As Plamper notes, the point of the concept of affective or emotional community is to avoid the psychologizing and individualizing tendencies the vocabulary of emotions often implies, but at the same time it challenges us to conceive of community not as pre-given, closed and clearly bounded, a point Gandhi emphasizes and Kuroń exemplified throughout his life.

States.<sup>43</sup> The pool of my interviewees consisted of Kuroń's closest collaborators and friends as well as of members of the political opposition who knew him but were never members of his closest circle. All the interviewees came of age in a Poland that was radically different from the country that was known to their parents. The families and the country in which they grew up – as Polish Jews and non-Jewish Poles – were marked by the rupture of World War II, the Holocaust, the Warsaw Uprising and the postwar reconstruction efforts. While my interviewees come from different generations and backgrounds and while the degree of their commitment to the political opposition varies significantly, virtually all of them were greatly affected by the disillusionment with socialist Poland. Whether as Poles of Jewish background coming from left-wing families or Catholics involved in progressive Catholic circles, former socialist scouts or anti-socialists, men or women, students or workers, well-known dissidents or those doing the everyday labor of love – in one way or another, the growing disbelief in the reformist potential of late socialism launched a new path in their lives either in the form of migration or of political activism. Kuroń and many of his friends, such as Adam Michnik, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Aleksander Smolar and Barbara Toruńczyk, came from families whose political sympathies lay on the left of the political spectrum. As Marci Shore points out, many of them shared the experience of belonging to the communist intelligentsia, of being brought up in Warsaw, and of having enjoyed privileges under Stalinism.<sup>44</sup> Even those who were not Jewish themselves, were directly or indirectly affected by the anti-Semitic campaign of 1968, which was another shared experience that shaped their habitus and self-understanding in opposition to actually existing socialism.<sup>45</sup>

Rather than simply confirming pre-existing assumptions, the interviews made it possible to investigate the dynamics of political mobilization in late socialist Poland from various viewpoints and thereby allowed for the emergence of a more polyphonic and nuanced narrative. In these ways, and in its interplay with the other sources I consulted (see the next section), oral

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<sup>43</sup> All interviews were conducted in Polish, were recorded and most of them were transcribed.

<sup>44</sup> Marci Shore, 'In Search of Meaning after Marxism,' in *Warsaw. The Jewish Metropolis: Essays in Honor of the 75<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Professor Antony Polonsky*, ed. Glenn Dynner and François Guesnet (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 591.

<sup>45</sup> See David Kowalski, *Polens letzte Juden. Herkunft und Dissidenz um 1968* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 2018).

history has the potential of ‘transforming both the content and purpose of history’<sup>46</sup> by providing new answers to historical questions and opening up new areas of study.

As Donald A. Ritchie writes, ‘oral history’s value derives not from resisting the unexpected but from relishing it. By adding an ever-wide range of voices to the story, oral history does not simplify the historical narrative but makes it more complex – and more interesting.’<sup>47</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, I used the interviews as a resource to learn more about Kuroń’s milieu, to seek evidence that either confirmed or problematized information from other sources, and to understand the self-image of the interviewees. While at times imprecise, oral history can provide perspectives and information that is missing from, for instance, the security service archives and the necessarily selective and biased story they tell. A serious, active and dialogical engagement with self-reflective actors – and their embodied memories, feelings, and political sympathies – can provide a fruitful method for preserving and passing on historical knowledge that would otherwise be lost or invisibilized.<sup>48</sup> Oral history is ultimately as much about adding new knowledge and treating historical agents as subjects rather than objects of history, as it is about an encounter based on a bond of trust<sup>49</sup> that can generate new historical meanings.

Although the interviews are an essential resource for learning more about the specific milieu around Kuroń and his spouse Gaja, it is important neither to romanticize nor to remain uncritical with regard to their character as sources. Historical agents are not free from their embodied knowledge that is in itself shaped by a collective script:<sup>50</sup> a shared mindset and habitus. These, in turn, were formed by specific experiences of the community of which the interviewees were part, such as the shared experience of political dissidence, the accumulated cultural capital of Poland’s post-war intelligentsia, and a strong opposition to anti-Semitism. In that sense, in providing access to their personal memories, the interviewees, as historical agents, cannot be seen as autonomous from the political contexts in which they operated and currently live. In

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<sup>46</sup> Paul Thompson, *The Voice of the Past: Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, [1978] 2000), 3, 7-9.

<sup>47</sup> Donald A. Ritchie, *Doing Oral History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), xiv; for a series of interviews with Polish intellectuals and political activists see: Wawrzyniak and Grupińska, *Buntownicy*.

<sup>48</sup> Ritchie, *Doing Oral History*, 16.

<sup>49</sup> Piotr Filipkowski, ‘Historia mówiona jako hermeneutyka losu. Doświadczenie przedtekstowe,’ *Teksty drugie* 1 (2018), 40-60.

<sup>50</sup> Joan Sangster, ‘Telling Our Stories: Feminist Debates and The Use of Oral History,’ *Women’s History Review* 3, 1 (1994), 8.

addition, precisely because of their political and personal agency, their own self-understandings, agendas and frames of interpretation also shape the narrative of the past. This does not automatically translate into diminishing the radical potential of oral history. Rather, it is to admit that oral history and interviews are also situated in specific power relations and subject to dynamics of their own.

The interviewees' accounts of the past are filled with stories of loss, discrimination, risk and a sense of alienation that simultaneously weave into a more uplifting narrative of mutual support and attempts at overcoming obstacles. It is precisely this ambivalence that creates room for a sense of empowerment and historical agency that neither excludes nor represses negative experiences. Moreover, oral history allows the agents in question to describe the events in their own words that can, in turn, help overcome the epistemic distance between the scholarly narrative and the actors' own language.

In addition to oral history, ego-documents have been another source of great importance for this dissertation. The term 'ego-document' was coined by Jacques Pesser in 1958 and encompasses a set of sources of an autobiographical nature such as memoirs, personal letters, diaries, travel journals and autobiographies.<sup>51</sup> Studying ego-documents,<sup>52</sup> historians are confronted with the subjective voice, perspective and self-image of the author who come from the upper echelons of the society as well as from its most deprived strata. While allowing the subjective experience of historical actors to take central stage, historiography based on ego-documents faces several obstacles. On a fundamental level, the concept of a coherent and authentic self or subject that reveals itself in the ego-document is problematic because subjective experiences are always historically and culturally specific and embedded. The self is not a free-floating unencumbered entity, but rather always has a historically and socially situated body, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, and class background. Ego-documents cannot, therefore, be seen as if 'they alone can provide privileged access to the inner workings of an authentic self'<sup>53</sup> as

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<sup>51</sup> Michael Mascuch, Rudolf Dekker and Arianne Baggerman, 'Egodocuments and History: A Short Account of the Longue Durée,' *The Historian* 78, 1 (2016), 11-56.

<sup>52</sup> For more on the individual, the memoir and ego-documents as a source, see Paula S. Fass, 'The Memoir Problem,' *Reviews in American History* 34, 1 (2006), 107-123; Susan A. Crane, 'Writing the Individual Back into Collective Memory,' *American Historical Review* 102, 5 (1997), 1372-1385.

<sup>53</sup> Mary Fulbrook and Ulinka Rublack, 'In Relation: The 'Social Self' and Ego-Documents,' *German History* 28, 3 (2010), 264.

historical agents' perceptions are, to some extent, dependent on social and personal circumstances. For the purpose of this thesis, I read ego-documents – such as autobiographical writings and personal letters – against the background of the specific situation in which the authors found themselves, such as confinement in an internment camp under martial law or in political exile.<sup>54</sup> These ego-documents serve as a window into everyday political and historical experience that is specific to the political opposition around Kuroń. In addition, the language, vocabulary, and tone of a memoir, and the emotional character of the political experience that they convey, cannot be seen in isolation from the author's personal political history, even if we know very little about it. Immersion in the language used by interviewees helps to capture the political reality and culture of the milieu and a matrix of their everyday lives. What can be gained from personal narratives is an insight into embedded, individual experience and knowledge of people's perceptions and general attitude.

In line with oral history and the study of everyday life based on ego-documents, the 'new biography' that emerged in the course of the 1970s, and which has translated into a growing interest in biographical practice among professional historians ever since, is also an important shift. This move, in turn, was associated with the emergence of feminist history and women's history in 'the West.' The growing interest in the lives, experiences, and self-understandings of prominent and less prominent women was driven both by the need to retrieve forgotten life histories and the need to correct the epistemic bias of traditionally male-centered historiography.<sup>55</sup> Adding to this trend, the 1990s witnessed the development of an intellectual tendency among academic historians which came to be known as 'the new biography.' This approach applies an analytical framework to the study of life stories that is informed by postmodern sensitivity to detail and micro-narratives, as well as intellectual skepticism of traditional institution-focused viewpoints. The biographical practice related to 'the new

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<sup>54</sup> For a canonical example of how a major political event was experienced and remembered by 'ordinary' people, see Jan Gross, *Revolution From Abroad: The Soviet Conquest of Poland's Western Ukraine and Western Belorussia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1988] 2002).

<sup>55</sup> On feminist biography and the history of feminism in Great Britain, see Barbara Caine, 'Feminist Biography and Feminist History,' *Women's History Review* 3, 2 (1994), 247-261. For an outstanding example of growing interest in the personal and intellectual lives of prominent women, see Janet M. Todd, 'The Biographies of Mary Wollstonecraft,' *Signs* 1, 3 (1976). 721-734; for a recent example focusing on not so prominent young black women, see Saidiya Hartman, *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments: Intimate Histories of Social Upheaval* (New York: Norton, 2019).

biography' is openly and clearly influenced by other disciplines such as literary criticism, for which culture and 'the self' are never coherent or essential but context-relative and embedded in linguistic practices (such as speech acts, discursive formations, etc.). For the historian involved in 'the new biography' this re-evaluation of basic assumptions has direct consequences for research methods and, inevitably, their outcomes. Since lives and identities are always multiple and non-monolithic, historical inquiry into individual or group biography should emphasize, or at least consider, this constantly shifting dimension of life. 'The new biography' thus prompts a re-conceptualization of biography as historical narrative, engaging readers with the subject by weaving the private, intimate and personal together with the public and political.<sup>56</sup> Indeed, this weaving together might require moving from the biography of an individual to the 'biography of a milieu.'<sup>57</sup> Put differently, whether as a part of 'the new biography trend' or not, the study of an individual life – and of the life of a milieu – can illuminate other, hitherto unknown aspects of 'known' and well-researched historical events and processes. Although this thesis does not present a full-fledged individual or collective biography, it builds on 'the new biography' methods by embedding Kuroń's life within the more encompassing biography of his milieu, as both of them were woven together in ways that undercut clear separations between the public and the private, the collective and the individual.

### *Sources and Methods*

While oral history plays a privileged role in the attempt to understand the embeddedness of political activism in everyday practices, the role of friendship and care, and the emotional dynamics shaping the political opposition, this thesis also turns to a variety of other sources to counterbalance the risk of an uncritical reproduction of agents' self-presentation. These other sources prominently include archival materials from the Institute of National Remembrance

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<sup>56</sup> For this view, see Jo Burr Margadant, ed., *The New Biography: Performing Femininity in Nineteenth Century France* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000); for the history of biography as a genre and its links to 'the new biography,' see Laura Marcus 'The Newness of "The New Biography": Biographical Theory and Practice in the Early Twentieth Century,' in *Mapping Lives: The Uses of Biography*, ed. Peter France and William St. Clair (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 193-218.

<sup>57</sup> Marci Shore, *Caviar and Ashes: A Warsaw Generation's Life and Death in Marxism, 1918–1968* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 5.

(Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN), which holds documents of the security apparatus, the Karta Foundation (Fundacja Ośrodka KARTA), which archives oppositional materials, the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego, ZHP), the Department of Manuscripts at the University of Warsaw Library, and the Polish Literary Institute (Instytut Literacki) in Maisons-Laffitte, Paris, the home of the leading Polish-émigré literary-political magazine *Kultura*; in addition, I have consulted official, underground and émigré press products.

A significant number of documents used in this thesis come from files compiled by the Security Service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (Służba Bezpieczeństwa Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych, SB), including personal files, investigation files, surveillance notes and interrogation records. There is no doubt that a considerable bureaucratic, institutional and personal effort must have gone into collecting and classifying this information, which has resulted in a rich and synthetic characterization of the political opposition and many individual activists. However, the image of political dissidence that has emerged from the files and archival knowledge production more generally is at the same time necessarily fragmented.<sup>58</sup> This immanent tension that defines the archive in general, and the security service archives in particular, poses some significant challenges for the writing of history.<sup>59</sup> When archives are the archives of state institutions that were deeply involved in one side of a conflict, it is hard not to see these institutions speaking through the archival material. More so than other archives, and despite their seemingly objective and systematic character, the security service files therefore pose the methodological challenge of how to work with the information that they contain without uncritically falling into the partial vision that ‘seeing like a state’ affords.<sup>60</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, who in his own work relies on the security service archives as well, identifies several limitations

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<sup>58</sup> On how secret police files construct biographies, see Cristina Vutulescu, ‘Arresting Biographies: The Secret Police File in the Soviet Union and Romania,’ *Comparative Literature* 56, 3 (2004), 243-261; on archival knowledge production also see Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania’s Secret Police* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2013), and Katherine Verdery, *My Life as a Spy: Investigations in a Secret Police File* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

<sup>59</sup> For an investigation into the intimate relationship between history writing and the archive, see Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002).

<sup>60</sup> For a more detailed discussion of methodological issues, see Filip Musiał, ed., *Wokół teczek bezpieki. Zagadnienia metodologiczno-źródłoznawcze* (Kraków: IPN, 2006). The term ‘seeing like a state’ is taken from James Scott, *Seeing Like A State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).



or dangers in using these files. For example, the existence of *fałszywka* – false documents produced by the security service to, for instance, discredit individuals such as Lech Wałęsa who in 1982 was considered for the Nobel Peace Prize.<sup>61</sup> For Paczkowski, the security service archives can best be used to investigate the state apparatus and aspects of society that were the objects of investigation with the precaution that they first and foremost present the interest of the state's bureaucratic apparatus.

The most severe criticism of the use of the security service files is of a political nature. The controversies around the use of security service files and their afterlives in the contemporary public sphere are an example of how archives are open to various, often contrasting, historical engagements. Some view and treat the security service files as a complete source that can reveal the truth, while others see them as a weapon in political confrontations. The historian and journalist Adam Leszczyński openly criticized the political profile of the institution that houses the archival collection, namely the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (the Institute of National Remembrance or IPN). For him, IPN is simply a political tool in the hands of a right-wing party, now in government, pushing for lustration and an official politics of memory that reflects the political interests of that party. As a result, Leszczyński has publicly and routinely called for IPN to be dissolved.<sup>62</sup> In 2011 a group of historians pointed to another problematic dimension of IPN. Sławomir Nowinowski voiced skepticism with regards to the multiple functions performed by IPN as it not only conducts research and has an educational program but also houses a department with lustration and prosecution powers: the Główna Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu IPN (Main Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation IPN). Its mere existence inevitably impacts the character of research undertaken by IPN historians.<sup>63</sup> As a result, IPN historians have been subjected to severe criticism. Rafał Stobiecki

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<sup>61</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, 'Archiwa aparatu bezpieczeństwa PRL jako źródło: co już zrobiono, co można zbadać,' *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 2, 3 (2003), 10.

<sup>62</sup> Adam Leszczyński, 'Nowy IPN – ministerstwo prawdy i policja historyczna,' *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 25, 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,19820231,nowy-ipn-ministerstwo-prawdy-i-policja-historyczna.html>, last accessed March 27, 2019; Adam Leszczyński, 'Co opozycja powinna zrobić z IPN po wygranych wyborach?,' *Newsweek* September 12, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.pl/opinie/ipn-po-wygranych-wyborach-opozycja-powinna-zlikwidowac-ipn/jz0gh76>, last accessed March 27, 2019.

<sup>63</sup> Adam Leszczyński, 'Czy IPN może być zbawiony?,' *Gazeta Wyborcza*, January 10, 2011, [http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8922040,Czy\\_IPN\\_moze\\_byc\\_zbawiony\\_.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,76842,8922040,Czy_IPN_moze_byc_zbawiony_.html), last accessed March 27, 2019.

lambasted the lack of critical and methodological reflection on the security service files as a primary source which results in 'a boundless affirmation of a historical source as a self-evident repository of truth. Merely quoting and summarizing sources is a symptom of a history writing that relies on minimal analytical skills.'<sup>64</sup> In a similar vein, Piotr Osęka identifies a widespread proclivity among right-wing politicians, journalists and writers to manipulatively use the past – with the help of security service files – in order to first resuscitate and then fight imaginary communist perpetrators in a process he calls 'zombification.'<sup>65</sup> While initially the motivation might have been historical accuracy or even justice, the process eventually led into 'a black hole'<sup>66</sup> in which both accuracy and justice have been lost.

Political controversies surrounding tendencies among historians to succumb to the temptation of simplistic politicization are of course not unique to post-socialist Poland. Comparable developments have, for example, taken place in Albania where struggles over the control of access to the archives resulted in a situation in which 'historical discussion has developed in the form of public polemic.'<sup>67</sup> What is at stake in such cases of archival politicization often goes beyond the narrow historical field and involves economic profits, symbolic capital and other benefits.<sup>68</sup>

Moreover, the grandiose nature of the effort, and the institutional desire of the socialist bureaucratic machine to know everything about everyone resulted in archives with a complex multi-layered system of their own within which individual archival documents are embedded and acquire a meaning that may be hard to understand when taken out of context.<sup>69</sup> Given the sheer size and informational richness of the archives they can be of relevance for the historical study of a large spectrum of social phenomena and cannot be simply ignored. We have to see them, however, as part of the larger constellation of socialist society. Therefore, we need an

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<sup>64</sup> Leszczyński, 'Czy IPN.'

<sup>65</sup> On recasting communist life stories after 1989, see James Mark, *The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central Eastern Europe* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 126-164.

<sup>66</sup> Piotr Osęka, 'From Neutralization to Zombification: Memory Games and Communist Perpetrators in Poland after 1989,' *Journal of Perpetrator Research* 2, 1 (2018), 141.

<sup>67</sup> Elidor Mehilli, 'Documents as Weapons: The Uses of a Dictatorships' Archives,' *Contemporary European History* 28, 1 (2018), 88.

<sup>68</sup> Mehilli, 'Documents,' 88.

<sup>69</sup> On the troubling nature of the post-socialist archives in Russia, see Andrea Graziosi, 'The New Soviet Archival Sources. Hypotheses for a Critical Assessment,' *Cahiers du Monde russe*, 40, 1-2 (1999), 13-63.

understanding of how archives relate to other sources, such as oral history interviews, how they came about and for what purpose, how they become legible only within specific frameworks of interpretation, and how they can be ‘weaponized’ when adapted to an immediate political environment.<sup>70</sup>

Another example for the multi-layered character of the sources I use in this dissertation concerns the reports from the International Committee of the Red Cross on the camps in which many political dissidents were interned during the period of martial law in 1982. The aim of the ICRC<sup>71</sup> delegation’s multiple visits was to provide medical relief and assistance to those in need in the context of legal uncertainties concerning the status of prisoners during martial law that also affected the health of the internees. After each visit a report examining the living standards and health condition was compiled. These reports are invaluable sources as they also provide detailed descriptions of the prison and a systematic comparative perspective. At the same time, it is clear that the delegates are interested in the physical and mental health of the internees, but their perspective leaves little room for the subjective experience of the internal structures and dynamics of everyday life in prison.

As with all sources, the reports cannot be detached from the institutions that produced them. In recent years, scholars and commentators have increasingly questioned the ICRC’s fundamental principle of neutrality and a variety of reasons for approaching the reports of the ICRC with caution have emerged from these discussions. Namely, its presumed neutrality all too often involved making compromises with the governing powers, and the bracketing of political questions that frequently resulted from such compromises was itself a profoundly political act (for instance, the omission of any reference to political prisoners or the reframing of their camps as ‘normal’ internment camps). The ICRC is caught in a balancing act between having to be independent and securing access to conflict zones; between ‘maintaining the neutrality or losing

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<sup>70</sup> For a now historical example of how to think about the archives in terms of new possible modes of interpretation of declassified archives, see Stephen Kotkin, ‘1991 and the Russian Revolution: Sources, Conceptual Categories, Analytical Frameworks,’ *The Journal of Modern History* 70, 2 (1998), 384-425.

<sup>71</sup> On the role and modus operandi of the ICRC, see Jakob Kellenberger, ‘The Role of the International Committee of the Red Cross,’ in *The Oxford Handbook of International Law in Armed Conflict*, eds. Andrew Clapham and Paola Gaeta (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) 21-34; Linh Schoeder, ‘The ICRC and the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement: Working Towards a Nuclear-Free World since 1945,’ *Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament* 1, 1 (2018), 66-78.

it.<sup>72</sup> This tension between commitment to neutrality and politics is also visible in the reports when, for instance, the delegates refer to the force-feeding of prisoners on hunger strike as a matter of fact. In addition, the reports were significantly shaped by interested parties such as ministries, which complicates their status as sources. At the same time, these compromises in many cases were the only way to establish access to imprisoned groups, governmental control over the writing and content of the reports was never total or perfect, and the reports at times also contain voices that transgress the imposed framing. As a result, the question of how serious they can be taken as sources is not answerable in the abstract but requires that careful attention be paid to the actual context in which the reports were written as well as to the actual content of the reports. While methodological caution is therefore called for, a general dismissal based on the impossibility of neutrality as a principle would be overly hasty and would risk neglecting the at times significant practical achievements and informational value of these reports despite their problematic character.

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In tracing the intellectual origins of Kuroń's involvement in the political opposition in the first chapter, I move into the prehistory of the timeframe of this thesis. I view the Polish October of 1956 (also known as the 'Polish Thaw') through the lens of the struggle for new institutions and meanings that intellectuals and workers engaged in in post-Stalinist Poland. I argue that this experience had a tremendous impact on Kuroń and Modzelewski's *Open Letter to the Party* from 1964, resulting in their first imprisonment for political activity, making them into reference points, and indeed putting them at the center of future dissident activity and discourse. Although the young intellectuals in their milieu experienced the wave of democratization that swept through Poland as a failed attempt to reform the communist system, the memory of this period profoundly shaped young engaged leftists and the group around Kuroń.

In chapter two, I examine the events of March 1968 and the anti-Zionist campaign as a moment of disillusionment that contributed to the tightening of the milieu around Kuroń. By

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<sup>72</sup> Barbara Ann Rieffer-Flanagan, 'Is Neutral Humanitarianism Dead? Red Cross Neutrality: Walking the Tightrope of Neutral Humanitarianism,' *Human Rights Quarterly*, 3, 4 (2009), 890.

exploring how these turbulent events led students to turn against state censorship and stand up in solidarity with students who were suspended from the University of Warsaw, I trace the formation of a rebellious habitus that was strengthened (e.g. in its commitment to a non-exclusionary form of community) rather than weakened by the traumatizing and isolating experience of the March events and their aftermath.

In the third chapter I show how, against the background of this complex genealogy, the political opposition in 1970s Poland was marked by a constant interaction between distinct forms of socialization and political activity in the narrower sense that fueled its persistence and resurgence. I also argue that the milieu's way of performing beliefs and values, and the underlying mechanisms of community formation, such as care work that contributed to the emergence of an alternative public sphere in private households, built on its members' formative experience in the socialist scouting group *Walterowcy*, which dates back to the 1950s. By bringing to light the complex historical temporalities of political opposition and how these were connected to the specific combination of distantiation from and commitment to Kuroń and the peculiar bonds of loyalty this dynamic generated, the chapter shows that dissidence had complex roots and preconditions. These disappear from view if one focuses solely on the 'public' at the expense of the 'hidden transcript,' those forms of dissent that happen 'offstage,' or on another, less publicly visible stage.<sup>73</sup>

In chapter four and five I integrate the experience of the 'carnival' of *Solidarność* – i.e. the period between August 1980 and December 1981, between its founding and its repression by the state – with that of martial law. On the basis of an analysis of close personal relations and semi-public-and-private spaces such as Kuroń's apartment as a locus of counter-politics, chapter four traces how political practices such as the underground press and intellectual debates were tied up with the creation of communities and everyday forms of sociality. While this led to a proliferation of political debates and differences and allowed new positions to emerge within the political opposition, both took on ideological as much as personal shades. Chapter five turns to prisoners' memoirs, letters, and reports in order to show that the unnerving experience of the

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<sup>73</sup> See James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990).

martial law was as formative as that of Solidarność. As political activity was pushed into 'the shadows' under martial law, I will focus on discussions on tactics that took place on the pages of prison letters and in the underground press, and on the informal network of support for those in hiding and in the internment camps, showing how both exemplify and rewrite the constitutive role of informal social relations for dissident activity. These last two chapters thus complete the case the entire thesis seeks to make in highlighting the micro-dynamics and structures of everyday life that shape the continuously evolving grammar of the dissident community around Kuroń.

## Chapter 1

### A Luxemburgian Moment? The *Open Letter to the Party* and Its Revisionist Roots

In 2009 in Białystok, a city in north-eastern Poland, a controversy broke out over the proposal of naming a street after Jacek Kuroń. One of the politicians from the right-wing party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice, PiS) who was against this proposal defended his position by describing Kuroń as being ‘red’ and a representative of ‘pure communism.’<sup>74</sup> The online comments made by some anonymous readers of newspapers that had reported on the issue expanded the scope of accusations by referring to Kuroń’s supposed clandestine Jewishness. This view, apart from exploiting anti-Semitic and racially colored stereotypes of ‘żydokomuna’ or ‘Judeo-Communism,’ is a paradigmatic expression of how fragmentary knowledge of communism and Jewishness and the belief of rescuing the ‘true past’ from oblivion merge into a powerful hybrid fantasy that can be instrumentalized for specific political ends.

In reframing the issue in terms of Kuroń’s left-wing political sympathies, his critics usually refer to and are polarized by his membership in the Polish United Workers’ Party (1952-1954, 1956-1964), in the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP) (1949-1953), and in the socialist scout troop Walterowcy. In addition, Kuroń himself emphasized how his left-wing sympathies were passed on to him by his father, Henryk, who came from a working class-family in Lviv, and that he was also influenced by the spirit of the interwar Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS). When it comes to the ambivalent position Kuroń has occupied in post-1989 public life in Poland, however, only a distorted view of his socialist origins can explain episodes like the one described above. The episode exemplifies how any Marxist or communist provenance is negatively defined for the purpose of rewriting and renewing Polish civic identity in a particularly nationalist register. A critical analysis of the complex development of Kuroń’s political thought and activism and its socialist origins, therefore, has to start from an understanding of his revisionist and radically Marxist roots. As a pedagogue, eccentric personality, eminent speaker and contested icon of the Polish political opposition, not only did Kuroń have a personal influence on many activists, but

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<sup>74</sup> ‘Radni PiS: Jacek Kuroń nie zasługuje na bycie patronem ulicy,’ <http://www.poranny.pl/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20091126/BIALYSTOK/540675766>, last accessed March 20, 2019.

through his writings, he also provided the most influential example of a left-wing position within the political opposition that contributed to the formation of Solidarność.

In this chapter, I examine how the politics of 1956 and the revisionist moment in the public sphere provided a fertile intellectual and political ground for the formation of Kuroń's political vision and commitment that led him – and some of his friends and collaborators – to probe conceptual disorientations and social problems caused by the essentially bureaucratic character of the Polish communist party. What were the characteristic features of the historical context that might have inspired Kuroń (and his co-author and close friend, Karol Modzelewski) to repudiate the party's politics? What was their aim in challenging the party? Was their challenge about redefining the meaning of socialism for themselves, for the party or for Poland at large? What was their oppositional practice productive of and how can it be situated within the broader context of the enduring historical disputes on the left regarding what form emancipatory politics should take?

What has remained constant in Kuroń's deep form of critical engagement, despite his move from being a committed party member to becoming one of the key activists of the political opposition, is what Axel Honneth, in the tradition of Frankfurt School critical theory, calls 'immanent critique.' Immanent critique is a form of social criticism that takes as its methodological basis a reconstruction of the social and ideological ('normative') embeddedness of the object of study, with the aim of providing a transformative analysis of the 'social pathologies' – forms of domination, alienation and contradiction – prevalent in this context.<sup>75</sup> In addition to this strand of an immanent critique of actually existing socialism from the left – which can be contrasted to the external critique formulated by nationalist and religious groups –, I will identify and investigate revisionist moments in the *Open Letter to the Party* co-written by Kuroń with Modzelewski in 1964, which echo the critique of party bureaucracy and the emphasis on spontaneity and self-emancipation Rosa Luxemburg defended in her debate with Vladimir Lenin about the adequate forms of socialist political organization.

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<sup>75</sup> Axel Honneth, *Pathologies of Reason: On the Legacy of Critical Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 43-53.



In what follows, I will first explain in which historical moment the concept of revisionism emerged in Poland in the mid-1950s because this was the historical context within which the thoughts expressed in the *Open Letter* emerged. As Kuroń himself notes, for him, the origins of his turn to revisionism can be traced back to a meeting of the Związek Młodzieży Polskiej (Union of Polish Youth or ZMP) in the autumn of 1954, when the young participants who were supposed to discuss the theses of the II. Meeting of the ZMP lacked any motivation to do so. For the then twenty-year-old Kuroń, the awkward and dead silence and the complete lack of enthusiasm for official institutions it expressed was a sign of a coming crisis: ‘a moment came when despondence, rejection, indifference and vodka and everything else transformed into a rebellion’<sup>76</sup> – a development that culminated in 1956. Kuroń continues: ‘it was a kind of rebellion in the name of values, a sacrum, everything that a human being needs in order to live, even if this rebellion was inarticulate. One could easily say that it was a kind of cultural revolution.’<sup>77</sup> Kuroń also mentions that at the very same meeting of the ZMP, for the first time – despite the prevailing silence – some people started discussing the importance of love and private life, as if ‘people fought for their private life and now wanted to enjoy it. To me and my friends this was unacceptable as it meant giving up. We still passionately and earnestly wanted to believe that it is possible to create a universal condition of happiness.’<sup>78</sup>

Secondly, the main arguments of the *Open Letter* will be reconstructed as they prefigure both intellectual pathways and political commitments that shaped Kuroń’s subsequent itinerary. Furthermore, in this chapter three distinct similarities between the revisionism of 1956 and the *Open Letter* from 1964 will be analyzed along three axes: (a) the object of critique, (b) the style and modes of communication, and (c) the performance of critique. Finally, linking Kuroń and Modzelewski’s revisionist intervention to Luxemburg’s critique of Leninist vanguardism will allow me to highlight the radically revisionist as well as radically Marxist perspective the *Letter* opens up in a constellation dominated by party bureaucracy and orthodoxy. With this opening Kuroń and Modzelewski go significantly beyond the revisionist moment of 1956.

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<sup>76</sup> Jacek Kuroń, ‘Wina i Wiara,’ in *Kuroń: Autobiografia* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, [1989] 2011), 94.

<sup>77</sup> Kuroń, ‘Wina i Wiara,’ 94.

<sup>78</sup> Kuroń, ‘Wina i Wiara,’ 95.

## *The Year 1956 in Poland*

It all started with Khrushchev's bold critique of Stalin in the so-called Secret Speech. In fact entitled 'On the Cult of Personality and Its Consequences,' this speech was delivered by the new First Secretary at the Twentieth CPSU Congress, held from February 24 to 25, 1956. A denunciation of Stalinism and all the distortions that came with it, the speech focused on the terror of the 1930s, the personality cult and megalomania of Stalin as a leader, and Stalin's suppression of rival tendencies within the Party.<sup>79</sup> Right at the beginning of his speech Khrushchev announced that the Party should be concerned 'with how the cult of the person of Stalin has been gradually growing, the cult which became at a certain specific stage the source of a whole series of exceedingly serious and grave perversions of party principles, of party democracy, of revolutionary legality.'<sup>80</sup> While Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin was evident, his speech 'offered no serious or systematic analysis of the ideological and political roots of the Stalinist system, nor any criticisms against its fundamentals.'<sup>81</sup> Regardless of whether it marked the end of a certain period, a transition, or a new beginning within the development of socialism, as Pavel Kolář reminds us, 'the speech can be read as an attempt to relieve the party of the responsibility for previous developments.'<sup>82</sup> Therefore, while the affinity of the speech with a sense of novelty and critique is by no means fortuitous, it was also productive of the party's desire for purification from its past political mistakes and ideological Stalinist dogmatism. In his memoir, Kuroń presents the period between 1955 and the first half of 1956 as a moment of when the Polish communists' worldview shattered and with it the ethos and messianism the party apparatus had exuded. One response was to reconstruct the truly socialist *Weltanschauung* with a revolutionary and anti-Stalinist bent.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Geoff Eley, *Forging Democracy: The History of the Left in Europe, 1850-2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 330-331; Robert Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 30; Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Poland under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 68-74.

<sup>80</sup> Nikita S. Khrushchev, 'Secret Report to the 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress of the CPSU,' in *The Stalinist Legacy: Its Impact on the Twentieth Century World Politics*, ed. Tariq Ali (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 1984), 221.

<sup>81</sup> Ronald Kowalski, *European Communism: 1848-1991* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 134.

<sup>82</sup> Pavel Kolář, 'The Party as a New Utopia: Reshaping Communist Identity After Stalinism,' in *Social History* 37, 4 (2012), 408.

<sup>83</sup> Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 146.

From this perspective, the deliberate construction of a symbolic and discursive break with Stalinism as an ideology and a political tradition – a break that was supported and defined by a renewed idealism – can be seen as essential to the Khrushchev era. The Secret Speech started a brief period in which a critical evaluation and questioning of Stalin as well as the general hypocritical ambiance of Stalinism became possible.<sup>84</sup> As Robert Hornsby writes in commenting on Khrushchev's rise to power, '[f]or a time the mid to late 1950s was a period of great ideological energy and renewed idealism'<sup>85</sup> that expressed itself in relatively open debates. The Secret Speech 'exposed publicly all the problems, which had earlier been left unsaid, denied, or pushed into a private sphere.'<sup>86</sup> What is more, in 1956 and 1957, in what was another very visible sign of the scope of the anti-Stalinist campaign, an amnesty allowed for the release of a vast number – millions, in fact – of political prisoners who were victims of Stalinist show trials.<sup>87</sup>

Khrushchev's programmatic critique of Stalin's legacy and the Secret Speech also created another long-lasting impact, namely an atmosphere of confusion and disorientation about what was considered acceptable by the Communist Party.<sup>88</sup> Soviet socialism was ambitious in its aims and demanding continuous commitments. As Stephen Kotkin observes, however, it also 'was never without ambivalence, confusion and misgivings.'<sup>89</sup> This ambivalence was massively increased by the radical rejection and critique of Stalin as a real figure but also on Stalin as an icon of Stalinism seen as an ideology that had been producing and maintaining a secular and utopian faith in a new world and a collectively shared identity. With its main pillar removed, it was unclear what was supposed to hold this system together. Although not all events in high politics have long lasting ramifications, the Secret Speech did. The profound effects of the Secret Speech were not only immediately visible in international and domestic high politics, but also manifested themselves years later on a much smaller scale and within what then seemed rather marginal events. One of the unanticipated upshots of the Secret Speech was how its spirit evolved in Poland

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<sup>84</sup> Hornsby, *Protest, Reform and Repression in Khrushchev's Soviet Union*, 34.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>86</sup> Paweł Machcewicz, *Rebellious Satellite: Poland 1956* (Washington and Stanford: Woodrow Wilson Center Press/Stanford University Press, 2009), 46.

<sup>87</sup> Kowalski, *European Communism: 1848-1991*, 135.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Hornsby, 'Voicing Discontent: Political Dissent from the Secret Speech to Khrushchev's Ouster,' in *Soviet State and Society under Nikita Khrushchev*, ed. Melanie Ilic and Jeremy Smith (London: Routledge, 2009), 164.

<sup>89</sup> Stephen Kotkin, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as Civilization* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 358.

resulting in the political culture and identity of revisionism that later served as an intellectual context for the drafting and reception of the *Open Letter*.

Naturally, Poland was among the countries in which Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign created a context that both enabled and demanded a reevaluation of a set of practices and beliefs identified with Stalinism and its repressive politics.<sup>90</sup> In Poland, a big wave of open discussion on the question of succession emerged that allowed party members and others to address and question the impact of Stalinism on Polish politics and society. An intense debate broke out between two factions within the leadership of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR): the group of hardline Stalinists, the so-called Natolin faction, and the liberal and more reformist one, the so-called Pulawian faction.<sup>91</sup> The two competing factions were engaged in a struggle for power within the party and its future direction and by July 1956, the conflict had entered the public domain. While the conservative, nationalistic Natolin faction remained relatively loyal to fundamental Stalinist ideology and did not see a need for liberal reforms, the Pulawian faction was strongly in favor of top-down liberalization that could be achieved by implementing reforms without questioning the vanguard role of the party.<sup>92</sup> The deeper causes for the great rift between the factions can be found in their divergent political experiences and networks dating back to the interwar period. Another potentially divisive line was visible in the class background of the members of the opposing groups: The orthodox Natolin faction consisted of politicians with mainly working class roots and rather low levels of education, while 'the Pulawians' were intellectuals with a significant number being members of the Jewish minority.<sup>93</sup> From the start, the Natolin faction adopted an anti-intelligentsia, populist and anti-Zionist rhetoric.<sup>94</sup> As Kuroń, who himself at that time was already a young radical reformist, recalls, it was precisely the racist, anti-Semitic and nationalist dimension of the sentiments expressed by the patriotic and conservative groups that worried him most and thereby created an unbridgeable gap between

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<sup>90</sup> For a detailed study of Stalinism in Poland, see: Dariusz Jarosz, *Polacy a stalinizm 1948-1956* (Warsaw: Instytut Historii PAN, 2000).

<sup>91</sup> Andrzej Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL: 1945-1980* (London: Aneks, 1994), 75.

<sup>92</sup> Dariusz Gawin, *Wielki zwrot: Ewolucja lewicy i odrodzenie idei społeczeństwa obywatelskiego 1956-1976* (Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 2013), 41.

<sup>93</sup> Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL: 1945-1980*, 75.

<sup>94</sup> Paweł Machcewicz, 'Intellectuals and Mass Movements. The Study of Political Dissent in Poland in 1956,' in *Contemporary European History*, 6:3 (1997), 370.

them and their opponents.<sup>95</sup> These distinct divisions created a serious risk of open polarization and even the incitation of violence and destabilization, thereby raising the threat of Soviet military intervention. Yet, though the magnified conflict between these two factions contributed to domestic instability, it also stimulated a lively discussion about the meaning of the communist movement, especially among the radical youth on the left.

While the two opposing factions remained highly divided, Khrushchev intervened and politically rehabilitated the loyal communist and reformer, Władysław Gomułka, by releasing him from prison, where he had been since 1951 after being accused of nationalist deviation. Subsequently, Gomułka was reinstated as the First Secretary of the Party.<sup>96</sup> Being both reform-minded and an experienced communist, he could serve as a remedy for the heightening conflict between the two factions, which increased his chances of being accepted despite Khrushchev's lingering skepticism towards Gomułka's candidacy.<sup>97</sup> What is more, Gomułka's return – with his past marked by the experience of being an incarcerated victim of Stalinism – seemed to perfectly fit Khrushchev's vision of a grand critique of Stalinism and of rewriting the history of the communist party.

As Kuroń notes in his autobiography, 'there was a great myth about Gomułka as a prisoner, Gomułka as an anti-Stalinist and Gomułka with right-wing or nationalist tendencies.'<sup>98</sup> This myth was most likely greatly enhanced when political amnesty, political rehabilitation and a relaxed censorship regime started to reshape the political scene.<sup>99</sup> Throughout October, on the wave of anti-Soviet sentiments, mass protests took place all over Poland in support of Gomułka as a new, but most importantly, as a truly Polish leader resisting Soviet pressure. At times, these demonstrations got out of control, resulting in unrest and aggressive confrontations. As Paweł Machcewicz characterizes the enthusiastic mass support that turned into a new leader's cult, '[t]his anti-Soviet image of Gomułka was obviously mythical and exaggerated.'<sup>100</sup> In the post-

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<sup>95</sup> Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 61, 197.

<sup>96</sup> Władysław Gomułka (1905-1982) was first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party from 1956 until 1970; for more on his life, see: Anita J. Prażmowska, *Władysław Gomułka: A Biography* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2014).

<sup>97</sup> Jerzy Eisler, *Siedmiu Wspaniałych, poczet pierwszych sekretarzy KC PZPR* (Warsaw: Czerwone i Czarne, 2014), 206-207.

<sup>98</sup> Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 129.

<sup>99</sup> Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL: 1945-1980*, 75.

<sup>100</sup> Machcewicz, 'Intellectuals and Mass Movements,' 368.

Stalinist Polish social imaginary Gomułka thus performed a specific role – he ‘embodied a national longing for independence and sovereignty.’<sup>101</sup>

The first months of Gomułka’s significantly milder form of rule created multiple opportunities to contest the deep impact of Stalinism on Poland. As such, those months were crucial for the formation of the radical revisionist movement. On October 20, 1956, at the Eight Plenum, the new First Secretary gave a famous speech in which he articulated a highly negative judgment of the impact of Stalinism and promised to implement corrective measures to lessen it. Gomułka adopted a derogatory language accusing those in favor of strict Stalinism of having ‘dogmatic minds’ and of being driven by ‘culpable thoughtlessness’ e.g. in their implementation of mining policies within the broader framework of the Six-Year Plan.<sup>102</sup> In accounting for the methods that Stalin and his heirs adopted, Gomułka described them as ‘narrow-minded, dumb executors or rotten careerists. It was precisely them who buried socialism in an absent-minded way.’<sup>103</sup> In his view, an analysis of Stalinism could not be limited to the figure of Stalin but had to take into account the whole system – ‘a system that was strictly organized and smashed any independent socialist thought.’<sup>104</sup> While the speech at times echoed and tapped into the powerful negative resentment of the Poles towards the Soviet Union, Gomułka made it clear that Poland’s relations with the USSR were not threatened.<sup>105</sup>

Only a few days later, on October 24, 1956, a public protest in support of the new First Secretary took place on the main square – Plac Defilad (Parade Square) – in Warsaw, bringing together more than 200,000 people to welcome Gomułka in his new position.<sup>106</sup> The new leader’s primary goal was to establish political stability with the dual strategy of uniting the party and meeting social expectations. To achieve this, he introduced a set of reforms that partly resulted in the liberalization of high politics, its reception in everyday life, and everyday life itself. This was the peak moment of the so-called ‘Polish October’ – a period of unrest that paved the way for the cultural and political period referred to as ‘the Thaw.’ Moreover, in his speech Gomułka openly

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Władysław Gomułka, ‘Przemówienie wygłoszone podczas VIII Plenum KC PZPR’ in *Przemówienia Październik 1956 – Wrzesień 1957* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1957), 9, 34.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>106</sup> Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL*, 79; Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżymy kobyłę historii*, 85-86.

addressed students by saying 'I express my acknowledgment to the students of Polish universities who in these days showed so much enthusiasm and trust in the Party.'<sup>107</sup> Both Kuroń and Modzelewski were ardent observers and participants in the unfolding political crisis as they believed they had to defend themselves and Poland against the creeping influence of the right-wing and conservative wing of the Party, the Natolin faction, which was opposing the political and moral revolution within the Party. Ready for political and ideological confrontation, Kuroń and Modzelewski attended the mass demonstration on October 24. They were so adamant about preventing the Natolin faction's rise to power, which they associated with PAX, Bolesław Bogdan Piasecki,<sup>108</sup> the Soviet influence and fascism, that the night after the demonstration ended, they wrote a short piece criticizing the alliance between these right-wing groups. They began distributing it in factories that same night and went to schools to discuss it with pupils the following morning. Later on, Kuroń offered a more balanced opinion on the demonstration of October 24, stating that 'today I'm thinking that people were just happy and euphoric. They had a feeling of a total victory, freedom and wanted to demonstrate and sing.'<sup>109</sup>

One important area in which liberalization took place concerned the Communist Party's uneasy relationship with the Catholic Church. The pivotal moment was when the then Primate of Poland, Stefan Wyszyński, was released from prison in 1956 together with many other priests who were incarcerated during high Stalinism in Poland. Moreover, the cultural infrastructure of Polish Catholicism was reestablished with religion lessons returning to schools (before being banned again in 1961) and with the setting up of the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK) with local branches active in major cities around the country such as Krakow, Poznań, Toruń and Warsaw.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Władysław Gomułka, 'Przemówienie wygłoszone na Placu Defilad w Warszawie, 24 października 1956,' in *Przemówienia Październik 1956 – Wrzesień 1957* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1957).

<sup>108</sup> The PAX Association was a pro-Communist Catholic association, created in 1947, which was supportive of Stalinism in Poland. The association's aim was to win over Polish Catholics through Catholic relief organizations and newspapers associated to it; Tadeusz Mazowiecki was a member of PAX and worked as its journalist between 1948-1955; Bolesław Bogdan Piasecki (1915-1979) was a founder of PAX and its chairman until his death. In the interwar period he was an ultra-right wing and nationalist politician affiliated with the fascist group ONR-Falanga. See Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in Twentieth-Century Poland: The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki* (Athens, OH: Ohio UP, 2012).

<sup>109</sup> Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 142.

<sup>110</sup> Eisler, 'Jakim państwem była PRL w latach 1956-1976?', 17; Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL*, 94-95.

The spirit of liberalization and change was in the air for everybody to feel. The main weekly women's magazine *Przyjaciółka* [Girlfriend] reported on the political situation in trying to guide its readers through the changes. In between the topics related to running a household, family, childbearing and fashion, *Przyjaciółka* published articles and op-eds on current politics. To provide just one example, on November 11 in a piece entitled 'Pracujmy spokojnie' [Let Us Work Peacefully], the author stated that 'high politics is without doubt of great importance as it impacts our lives and destiny. But what is more important is a good, frugal economy in thousands of factories, mines and state institutions.'<sup>111</sup> He then continues by saying that instead of turning a blind eye to political events, one should be careful and focus on one's everyday life and work. Viewed from this perspective, one can see that, at least in theory, no citizen should remain indifferent to the major political changes underway. Through press articles such as the one cited above, the Party asserted that the ebb and flow of major political changes and events was meant to be noticed and seriously considered by regular citizens – whether housewives, workers, men or women. In short, being in touch with the broadly defined grassroots of the Party – as represented by the working class or housewives – mattered to the rulers as it was one of the sites for the political struggle over meanings and values in post-Stalinist Poland.

### *Revisionism: Young Intellectuals and Their Press*

One of the most significant areas in which the spread of Gomułka's reforms had a visible impact was the critical left-wing press. As a mass medium, the press was the most significant platform of communication after the relaxation of censorship in 1956 and it provided one of the few means for channeling political opinions.<sup>112</sup> Probably the most prominent example of the shift triggered by the reforms was provided by *Po Prostu*, the official weekly of the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP), which turned into a platform affiliated with critical left-wing intellectuals, known as revisionists or the 'October left.' Around 1956, *Po Prostu* was run by and attracted a group of young, dynamic and vocal intellectuals. Prominent figures such as Leszek Kołakowski (1927-2009), Jan Józef Lipski

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<sup>111</sup> W. Orsza, 'Pracujmy spokojnie,' *Przyjaciółka* 45, 41 (1956).

<sup>112</sup> Machcewicz, 'Intellectuals and Mass Movements,' 369.



(1926-1991), Roman Zimand (1926-1992), Krzysztof Pomian (born 1934) and Zygmunt Bauman (1925-2017) wrote for the weekly which provided a forum in which their ideas were voiced and gradually crystallized.<sup>113</sup> What appears to be a commitment to utopian activism was an attempt to reclaim the Marxist vocabulary – most notably the vocabulary of the early Marx as it was, for instance, articulated in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (only discovered and published in 1927) – in a way that could bring together political analysis, theoretical deliberation and social change. For the intellectuals working with the weekly, the ‘Polish October’ was a moment of revival of an idealist brand of Marxism mobilized to counter the corruption and impasse of Stalinism.<sup>114</sup>

With its radical and revolutionary character, *Po Prostu* opened up a space in which its authors could comment on Gomułka’s politics relatively freely, turning it into ‘the liveliest and most outspoken paper of Poland.’<sup>115</sup> Although the milieu of the weekly was a strategic ally of the reformists in their struggle against the conservative Stalinists, the initial critical comments progressively turned into expressions of disappointment with reforms that were considered not radical enough in their goals and outcomes.<sup>116</sup> As a result, more and more articles articulated a critique of Gomułka’s political platform along these lines. On the basis of this critique and disappointment, a third, more radical position emerged in the pages of *Po Prostu*: ‘the communist left,’ which aimed to embody the true spirit of the ‘Polish October.’<sup>117</sup> The roots of this radical attitude of the youth go back to 1955 and early 1956 when in the party’s official youth organization, ZMP, a heated discussion opened up between nationalists and communists about the lack of Polish sovereignty.<sup>118</sup> Kuroń himself mentions how this discussion shaped his own turn to revisionism at that time.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 16.

<sup>114</sup> For a description of the everyday life of writers in pre-1956 Poland, see the diary of Leopold Tyrmand, *Dziennik 1954* (London: Polonia Book Fund, 1980), especially the entry from 11 January 1954.

<sup>115</sup> M. K. Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland: And Outline of History* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 263.

<sup>116</sup> Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL: 1945-1980*, 82.

<sup>117</sup> Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 16.

<sup>118</sup> Kuroń, ‘Wina i Wiara,’ 107-108.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 94-95.

Unlike the vocabulary of the nationalist and religious groups, the language used to combat Stalinism by the authors of *Po Prostu* was embedded in the orthodox Marxist tradition.<sup>120</sup> With its revolutionary rhetoric, the accentuated critique of anti-Semitic tendencies in the conservative wing of the party,<sup>121</sup> and its defense of the true and pure revolutionary foundations of the 'Polish October,' the radical left appealed to its genuinely Marxist origins and proceeded in an immanent way. There were three main characteristics at the heart of the radical left's self-understanding: a commitment to the antithesis between the left and the right, an understanding of progress as a normative and non-contingent historical dynamic, and the belief in the need for a permanent criticism and questioning of existing reality.<sup>122</sup> While the left embodied critique and permanent revisionism and aimed for progressive social transformation, the right was depicted as irrational, obscure, regressive – features that were taken to be exemplified by Stalinist conservatism. Modzelewski, one of the young students committed to reforming communism, recalls how he was trained to think that the only correct and legitimate reaction to the disillusion with the Stalinist system was a desire for revolution carried out by the working class with the help of critical intellectuals.<sup>123</sup>

As Gomułka launched his liberal reforms and as his rule unfolded, the reforms developed into a more complex phenomenon filled with its own contradictions and characterized by radical shifts. His reform program was limited in its scope and effectiveness as it allowed old structures to remain in place. As a consequence, many problems on the fundamental level of social organization remained. For example, the Stalinist Constitution that was adopted in 1952 remained intact, the restrictive legal system remained as severe as it had been, which meant it continued to include the death penalty and high penalties for illegal financial or economic activities (such as the notorious 'Warsaw meat affair'), and the reorganization of the party apparatus was very limited in scope and often only symbolic in meaning.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism: Its Origin, Growth, and Dissolution*, Vol. 3: *The Breakdown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 460.

<sup>121</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, 'Antysemita. Piec też nienowych i przestroga,' *Po Prostu* 22 (1956).

<sup>122</sup> Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 45-46; see Leszek Kołakowski, 'Sens ideowy pojęcia lewicy,' *Po Prostu* 8 (1957).

<sup>123</sup> Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżymy kobyłę historii*, 84.

<sup>124</sup> Eisler, 'Jakim państwem była PRL w latach 1956-1976?,' 19.

Despite the fact that Gomułka's rule did not mark the beginning of systematically progressive or socialist developments independent of the Soviet Union,<sup>125</sup> his reinstatement as the head of the party and his subsequent political initiative turned the year 1956 into a crucial moment in Poland in many ways. As Kolář observes, in 1956 it 'was also significant that the hitherto absolute control of the parties' leadership over ideological issues crumbled, opening up room for various "deviations" and "revisions".'<sup>126</sup> Moreover, prior to the 'Polish October,' the wave of social protest that culminated in the 1956 Poznań uprising caught the attention of the intellectuals and inspired a revived commitment to the workers' cause.<sup>127</sup> For these reasons, 1956 – independently of Gomułka's political intentions – can be seen as a moment of transition that reinforced and stimulated struggles over what a communist movement should look like and who should be seen as its subject, opening up a space for new interpretations and visions.

Although the group around *Po Prostu* did not explicitly question the role of the party as the vanguard medium of historical progress towards a communist future, in re-appropriating the idea of socialism, the grassroots radical left positioned itself in a way that necessarily led to growing conflict with the party. This, in turn, had effects on the young activist intellectuals and led them to question their own position in relation to party and state. As Modzelewski notes, confronted with wide-spread feelings of crisis and of a disappointment with Stalinism and Gomułka's rule, it 'soon turned out that we – the young revolutionaries of 1956 – are becoming weaker, lonely, and that, in addition, we ourselves lack motivation.'<sup>128</sup>

The tide was gradually turning. As Leszek Kołakowski, a participant in the radical intellectual revisionist movement at that time, summarizes the prevalent mood among the revisionists: 'The "Polish October," as it was called, far from ushering in a period of social or cultural renewal or "liberalization," stood for the gradual extinction of all such attempts.'<sup>129</sup> Gomułka turned out to be 'a sound Party man and had no intention of abandoning power to the streets or to the Party's opponents. He was also a realist: if *he* could not calm Poland's turbulence, the alternative was

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<sup>125</sup> Kowalski, *European Communism: 1848-1991*, 192.

<sup>126</sup> Kolář, 'The Party as a New Utopia,' 407.

<sup>127</sup> Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia buntu. Kuroń, Modzelewski i komandosi* (Kraków: Społeczny Instytut Wydawniczy Znak, 2010), 29.

<sup>128</sup> Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii*, 86.

<sup>129</sup> Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 454.

the Red Army.<sup>130</sup> Gomułka's balancing act, an attempt to mediate between various political groups and their expectations, such as the pressure from the conservative part of the party apparatus and the threat of Soviet military intervention after the crushing of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956,<sup>131</sup> shaped a crucial moment in Polish history but ultimately fell flat.

The limitations of the official reform project had already become crystal clear less than a year after Gomułka's famous speech at the Eight Plenum, in which he first presented his critical attitude towards the legacy of Stalinism. As early as October 1956 the leadership of the Party was deeply divided over the extent of the liberalization of the press. The uneasiness was inspired by radically anti-Soviet tendencies that could have led to tensions between Warsaw and Moscow. In addition, the defeated Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was casting a shadow over the leadership.<sup>132</sup> As a result, at the following Ninth Plenum of the PZPR on May 15, 1957 Gomułka set strict limits regarding what he understood as reforms and liberalization. The First Secretary spelled out what he considered to be acceptable and what he did not, which appeared to undermine the position he took in October 1956. In the speech from May 1957, Gomułka unleashed an attack on a reformist current that he referred to as revisionism. Subsequently, the label 'revisionism' came to be understood as a form of opposition to 'Stalinist dogmatism' and entered the broader public discourse.<sup>133</sup> While presenting his speech as a critique of dogmatism, it quickly became clear that Gomułka's main enemy was progressive revisionist thought. As he put it, '[r]evisionism is a distortion of Marxism by introducing into it incorrect and false theses' and 'revisionism holds back social progress' by being regressive.<sup>134</sup> Far from remaining on an abstract level, Gomułka directed his attack against influential leftist intellectuals such as Kołakowski, who he saw as the main representative of the revisionist tendency. At the end of the year, during the Tenth Plenum, Gomułka continued his open attack on the revisionists. This is properly illustrated by a famous quote in which he pathologizes revisionism by saying that 'the revisionist tuberculosis can only

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<sup>130</sup> Judt, *Postwar*, 312-313.

<sup>131</sup> Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL*, 104.

<sup>132</sup> Michał Przeperski, 'Odwrót od Października. Pacyfikacja prasy i dziennikarzy w latach 1956–1958,' *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 28, 2 (2016), 317.

<sup>133</sup> Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 63.

<sup>134</sup> Władysław Gomułka, 'Przemówienie wygłoszone podczas XIX Plenum KC PZPR' in *Przemówienia Październik 1956 – Wrzesień 1957* (Warsaw: Książka i Wiedza, 1957), 325, 327.

intensify the influenza of dogmatism.<sup>135</sup> Mieczysław F. Rakowski, the communist politician and journalist working at the newspaper *Polityka* [Politics] that filled the gap after *Po Prostu* was shut down in 1957, recalled the Tenth Plenum in his diary: ‘the party line is clear: we fight with revisionism.’<sup>136</sup> According to his account, the Polish October was presented at the Plenum as ‘exploding the party, attacking the Polish People’s Republic, diffusing defeatism and undermining the socialist system.’<sup>137</sup> The spirit of ‘the Thaw’ was officially abandoned before it even managed to genuinely materialize. Instead, Gomułka’s political decisions and declarations led to widespread disappointment among the politicized youth. Clearly, the mobilization of the communist identity of the young intellectuals was steadily spinning out of control.

In this context and despite the fact that the term did not have a clear-cut definition, ‘revisionism’ can be provisionally understood as a pejorative label applied by the party authorities to describe attitudes and actions that were critical of and in deep disagreement with the official politics of the Polish United Workers’ Party.<sup>138</sup> As one of the main figures that was publicly interpellated by Gomułka’s intensified campaign, Kołakowski notes that the term was used ‘to stigmatize those who, while remaining party members or Marxists, attacked various Communist dogmas.’<sup>139</sup> By placing revisionism in a relationship with dogmatism, Gomułka’s discursive move led to a radicalization of revisionist thought in response to what the young intellectuals experienced as the true dogmatism of the party. In this constellation, the accusation of being a revisionist came to be used as a tool of demarcation and polarization.

### *Po Prostu as a Critical Forum*

How, then, and in which forums did the critical discourse of the young intellectuals evolve after being framed as revisionist? In 1956 the two main newspapers for young intellectuals, *Po Prostu* and *Nowa Kultura* [New Culture], covered a wide range of matters such as anti-Semitism, unemployment, working conditions, the current party line, institutionalized knowledge

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<sup>135</sup> Quoted in Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL*, 114; Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 64.

<sup>136</sup> Mieczysław F. Rakowski, *Dzienniki Polityczne 1958-1962* (Warsaw: Iskry, 1998), 68.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>138</sup> Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 63.

<sup>139</sup> Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 456.

production and changing life-styles. Because of this great diversity of topics, these newspapers serve as a rich source for an analysis of how the post-war generation of young socialist intellectuals understood and debated among themselves the turbulent political situation which unfolded that year. These newspapers started to perform a fundamental role within the production and diffusion of revisionist discourse due to the daring criticism they offered. In addition, by openly addressing the political and social problems of the time, the articles that were published in *Po Prostu* and *Nowa Kultura* in 1956 became crucial in establishing and then conventionalizing the practice of critiquing party politics in everyday life. In so doing, while remaining committed to the larger socialist project with its universal claims to deeply transform social relations and creating a new socialist human being, these newspapers provided a shared politically revisionist framework and intellectual guidance for young disillusioned socialists. Embodying and enacting the critical spirit of the post-1956 political order, the newspapers became a forum for rethinking the old and new directions of communist politics and ideology.<sup>140</sup>

Given its previous history, *Po Prostu* was not a very likely candidate for turning into an arena for young intellectuals to lambast Stalinist pathologies, test out their ideas, and connect with others who were like-minded. Founded as a small student newspaper in 1947, *Po Prostu* was, for most of its history, clearly focused on matters related to everyday student life, such as difficult exam periods, education, and science in general.<sup>141</sup> In 1954 *Po Prostu* became the official newspaper of the Union of Polish Youth. Before becoming a major weekly read on a national scale, in 1953 the newspaper was still mirroring the official party line. For instance, one of the recurring themes was the history of the communist movement. In issue number 10 from 1953 a long and relatively detailed article was republished from the *Kommunist*, an official theoretical newspaper associated with the Central Committee of the CPSU.<sup>142</sup> Unsurprisingly, the article is

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<sup>140</sup> For an account of how press criticism unfolded in Soviet Union after 1956, see Simon Huxtable, 'A Compass in the Sea of Life.' *Soviet Journalism, the Public, and the Limits of Reform after Stalin, 1953-1968* (PhD dissertation, University of London, 2012), 61-83.

<sup>141</sup> For more on the exams, see: *Po Prostu* 6 (1953); for articles on the colonial past of the West and acts of international solidarity with the Pan-African movement, see: *Po Prostu* 8 (1953); for an article on studying in Moscow, see: *Po Prostu* 34 (1953); for a report on the Third World Student Congress in Warsaw, see: *Po Prostu* 37 (1953).

<sup>142</sup> 'Doniosłe wydarzenie w historii Komunistycznej Partii Związku Radzieckiego,' *Po Prostu* 10 (1953), 1; for more educational and propaganda material on Vladimir Lenin, see: 'Spotkania z Leninem' [Encounters with Lenin], *Po Prostu* 4 (1953).

critical of the revisionists Julius Martov and Leon Trotsky and, to a lesser extent, of the Bundists. One of the aims of the article is to respond to the fact that they were Lenin's rivals and opposed to his master plan for creating the Bolshevik Party as the main political vehicle of the revolution.<sup>143</sup> Even in this article from 1953, one can notice the pejorative use of the term 'revisionism' in an attempt to dismiss the party's historical opponents, as if anticipating the application of the category of revisionism in 1956. As the article argues: 'Only our party – a party of a new type – could have overcome all the immense difficulties on the road to our final aim, only our party could have led the working class, the working people of Russia to the victory of socialism and start building a communist society.'<sup>144</sup> In the discourse voiced by this article neither the proletariat nor revolution – nor any other concept associated with the Marxist vocabulary – plays a central role for the official historical narrative of the party. It seems as if the events described as surrounding the founding of the Bolshevik party serve as a historical background to explain the emergence of the party and, more importantly, enforce its legitimacy by providing a historical explanation of its mission. Interestingly, the centrality of the concept and the leading role of the organization of the party highlights the strongly institutionalized and non-spontaneous character of the official socialist discourse that stands in stark contrast to the vision of politics and the pedagogical practice Kuroń was beginning to develop around the same time.

During the turbulent year of 1956, *Po Prostu* rose to become a widely read and nationally respected weekly as well as a social force in intellectual circles. What remained the same was the writing style – passionate and with a militant tone that expressed the newspaper's socially committed profile as well as that of at least some of its authors. One of the changes is visible in the topics discussed. A gradual shift in interests took place, moving from education to domestic politics and its manifestation in the life of ordinary workers. This growing interest was most evident in the recurring independent and critical evaluation of economic and social changes.

The new understanding of the role of critical commentary on contemporary politics was made clear by Ryszard Turcki – an important and regular contributor to *Po Prostu* – who in the February 19, 1956 issue published an article entitled 'Czy odważymy się zwyciężyć?'<sup>145</sup> [Will We

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<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>145</sup> Ryszard Turcki, 'Czy odważymy się zwyciężyć?', *Po Prostu* 8 (1956).

Dare to Win?]. The article contributed to the discussion on the Five-Year Plan that was meant to partially continue the first Six-Year Plan and was about to be implemented over the course of the year. In Turski's argument, far from being an abstract decision having to do with abstract social units, economic reforms as all socialist reforms have a fundamentally social and ideological dimension. As a consequence, any discussion of socialist reforms has to take into account the economic and ideological impact that they have on concrete social groups in their daily lives. In practical terms this meant that Turski was against paying too much attention to the economic categories of analysis. For the purpose of public discussion on the effects of particular reforms he favored a dialectical approach with regard to the economy and ideology. For instance, Turski pointed out that the discussion around the Six-Year Plan was reduced to an explanation of numbers and graphs without raising fundamental questions on whether this plan managed to change people's consciousness and whether it brought about a real change in their living conditions. As he put it, 'These attitudes are, most of all, fetishizing the role of economic factors in building socialism – disregarding the ideological consequences (moral, political, etc.) of such and other economic initiatives.'<sup>146</sup>

In his somewhat humanist approach Turski identified another dimension of the problem, namely the tendency to automatically implement such an economist approach without further reflection. The press, in his view, was co-responsible for adopting such a distorted, elite-centered perspective. While pointing out the ineffective centralism of an exclusively economy-based analysis, Turski articulates a less orthodox understanding of the relationship between the economic base, the superstructure and its corresponding forms of consciousness. By recognizing the importance of ideology in reproducing social life, Turski's argument rests on the assumption that the economic structure cannot be adequately defined without the superstructure or sharply distinguished from it. As a consequence, political critique also needed to unfold on the terrain of ideology.

Given that 1956 was a year of transition, and that it was immediately viewed as such, it is no surprise that the pages of *Po Prostu* became a forum for questioning accepted notions of truth and authority and the duties of intellectual obedience attached to them. The radically critical and

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid.



at the same time immanent perspective and vocabulary developed in the pages of *Po Prostu* during this period exemplify the emergence of a revisionist discourse among the young intellectuals that would be taken up, and further developed in response to the changed political constellation in Poland, in the *Open Letter to the Party* (to which I will turn in the next section). For example, in April 1956, *Po Prostu*'s editorial team<sup>147</sup> wrote an article with the title 'Co robic?' [What Is to Be Done?] that, clearly reiterating Lenin's famous question, can in fact be read as a manifesto redefining the mission of the newspaper.<sup>148</sup> The article provides a sharp critique of the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP)<sup>149</sup> founded in 1948 and inspired by the Soviet Komsomol. While *Po Prostu* was officially associated with ZMP, the article portrayed the organization as suffering from the legacy of the 'system of distortions,' as its authors characterized Stalinism. Starting out with the claim that the ZMP, which was supposed to be a hotbed for young Polish socialists, was in stagnation due to its outdated program and paternalistic attitude towards the youth, the article went far beyond the scope of the ZMP's activity in spelling out the political problems Poland was facing. For instance, the authors complain that, although a well-functioning collective agrarian production is of importance for the whole of society, its bad management leading to a waste of production materials was still being tolerated. According to the editorial, students should not be indifferent to these malfunctioning mechanisms, but rather they should actively contribute to identifying continuous mistakes and developing alternative approaches using their expert knowledge. The reason for the impasse and inefficiency was to be found in Stalinism which, with its cult of the individual leader, was 'the wound' that is 'painful and difficult to heal.'<sup>150</sup> According to the authors, Stalinism as a system

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<sup>147</sup> The editorial team was composed of the following people: Jerzy Ambroziewicz, Anna Bratkowska, Stanisław Chelstowski, Janusz Chidzyski, Jerzy Cwiertnia, Juliusz Garztecki, Helena Grabowska, Włodzimierz Godek, Edmund Gonczarski, Zdzisław Grzelak, Edward Holda, Tadeusz Jaszczyk, Barbara Kalamacka, Jerzy Kossak, Janusz Kuczynski, Marian Kusa, Eligiusz Lasota, Zbigniew Melion, Marek Perlman, Jadwiga Rybczyńska, Danuta Sosnowska, Zbigniew Sufin, Wiesław Szyndler, Jadwiga Swiderska, Ryszard Turski, Jerzy Urban, Witold Wirpsza, Ryszard Wisniowski, and Bogusław Wojnar.

<sup>148</sup> Jerzy Ambroziewicz et al., 'Co robic?' in *Po Prostu* 15 (1956).

<sup>149</sup> For more on the youth organization, see Joanna Sadowska, *Sercem i myślą związani z Partią: Związek Młodzieży Socjalistycznej (1957-1976): polityczne aspekty działalności* (Warsaw: Trio, 2010).

<sup>150</sup> Ambroziewicz et al., 'Co robic?,' 15.

was not in favor of educating young people who could think in an independent and revolutionary manner. On the contrary, the system was in favor of educating people with an essentially fideistic mentality, not a rational one; people who are not set to fight with the existing evil but ready for an uncritical apology. We ourselves have to face all these painful and difficult issues in a frank, open and brutal manner.<sup>151</sup>

People quickly adapted themselves to the then prevailing norms in the name of fitting in and getting on. For that reason, the bad habits inherited from Stalinism still had such a pervasive influence. In response to this situation, the authors propose an open and honest discussion as an antidote to the pathologies of cynicism and indifference. They claim that for such a debate to be able to take place a new autonomous and independent student organization replacing the ZMP was needed. The new student organization should be united by a shared commitment to Marxist-Leninist ideology as opposed to technocracy and bureaucracy. Argumentative moves such as these opened up the intellectual space for revisionism to emerge and develop.

Another key revisionist article with the title 'Zeby nie powtorzylo sie wiecej' [So That It Does Not Repeat Itself Again] was written by Zygmunt Bauman and published in the same issue as the piece just discussed.<sup>152</sup> Bauman starts his article by poetically pointing out that 'truth is difficult and has a bitter taste' and then continues by suggesting that there is a risk of some revolutionaries turning blind during revolution. By engaging in this rhetorical move, which could also be seen as an attempt to speak from the position of truth, Bauman's article manages to provide a critical account of the Stalinist system. Dividing the existing political spectrum along the lines of truth-falsity, lucidity-blindness and revisionism-Stalinism, Bauman uses these distinctions in an essentializing way, assuming the moral superiority of the former. As he himself declares,

[t]he audacity and the decisiveness of the leadership of the Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party brings back the adequacy of theory for practice. Yet the system remains in place, it will be much more difficult to dismantle it – because in the meantime

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<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, 'Zeby nie powtorzylo sie wiecej,' in *Po Prostu* 15 (1956).

the system became independent, it managed to achieve an autonomous existence, it made itself independent from its historical roots and has grown into human consciousness as an imperative based in the conscience of the party.<sup>153</sup>

This quote identifies a new quality of the Stalinist system, namely its capacity to sustain itself independently from the historical events and ideology that initially served as a basis for the system's legitimacy. Interestingly, even in the description provided by Bauman, the Stalinist system became, to some extent, detached from the concrete figure of Stalin as Stalinism is depicted as a certain type of bureaucracy and mindset. It is precisely the incapacity for independent thinking associated with this mindset that secured the reproduction of institutional habits inherited from the Stalinist period. For Bauman, as for other key contributors to *Po Prostu*, independent thinking meant critical thinking performed in the public sphere, for example in the workplace but also writing in newspapers, etc. As a consequence, Bauman points to the censorship performed by official newspapers such as *Trybuna Ludu* as a tool of a pathologically centralized system and, most importantly, a tool that prevents an open and frank debate from emerging. In contrast, an open discussion within and outside the party would have potentially paved the way for a democratization of the party structures – a vision that very much resonated with Kuroń's own developing ideas. According to Bauman, there should have been no limits to this evaluative debate. Ending with a call for a renaissance of the communist movement, Bauman's criticism was later echoed in significant revisionist articles. For instance, in 'Polski Pazdziernik' [Polish October], Eligiusz Lasota and Ryszard Turcki famously declare:

In the Stalinist conception the party is a collective dictator of the masses, a gendarme ..., a god, embodying in itself an immanent and total wisdom, uninterruptedly preaching the masses, essentially despising them; a taboo, inviolable and holy ...<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Eligiusz Lasota and Ryszard Turcki, 'Polski Pazdziernik,' *Po Prostu* 44 (1956).

It is precisely on the wave of openness of 1956 that *Po Prostu's* sharp and critical analyses helped it earn a reputation as a truly revisionist newspaper. In addition, it gained the trust of its readers as one of the few credible and reliable papers, very much unlike the official party outlet *Trybuna Ludu*. This sense of trust and faith in the newspaper's credibility was continuously expressed in the letters to *Po Prostu's* editors written and sent by its readers. The letters provide a good indication of the changing intellectual climate of 1956 in society at large. For instance, Grażyna Bryłowa, a working class woman from Katowice, writes that '[y]ou write so wisely and truthfully about the situation in Poland, about democratization in Poland, and if I still trust anyone it is you.'<sup>155</sup> Another example for the belief in *Po Prostu's* uncompromising political profile can be found in a letter from an anonymous group of administrative workers of the Polskie Koleje Państwowe [Polish State Railways or PKP] in Poznań who 'urgently appeal for help because we only trust you and we believe in your effective intervention.'<sup>156</sup> In addition, the scope of the letters reveals that in 1956, the readership of the newspaper consisted not only of intellectuals (students, university professors, retired teachers, pre-war academics – those who were known to be its readers in previous years) but also of workers, administrators of factories or collectivized farms, and farmers.<sup>157</sup>

In 1956 the office of the newspaper received letters from all over the country, both from individuals complaining about their life situations as well as from groups of workers or friends complaining about the bad economic and political situation.<sup>158</sup> Longer and somewhat more essayistic letters were also sent to the newspaper, among them a long letter describing the worsening precarious working conditions of young academics. The letter was sent in the hope that it might be published in the weekly, thereby initiating a public discussion on that topic.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>155</sup> BUW RPS 4119 [1], letter by Grażyna Bryłowa, written December 3, 1956, received December 11, 1956.

<sup>156</sup> BUW RPS 4119 [1], letter by a group of anonymous administrative workers of Polskie Koleje Państwowe from Poznań, received August 10, 1956.

<sup>157</sup> Adam Leszczyński, *Sprawy do załatwienia. Listy do "Po prostu" 1955-1957* (Warsaw: TRIO, 2000), 19.

<sup>158</sup> For an example of the former, see: BUW RPS 4119 [1], letter by Eugeniusz Kurczewski, written March 5, 1956, received April 11, 1956; for an example of the latter, see: BUW RPS 4119 [1], letter by Zbigniew Czajka, received December 12, 1956; in this letter, Czajka writes on behalf of a group of students of the Czestochowa Polytechnic and Higher Economic School in Czestochowa complaining about the bad quality of the sidewalks.

<sup>159</sup> BUW RPS 4119 [1], letter by Jacek Trznadel, received May 8, 1956.

Among the diverse types of letters sent to *Po Prostu*, a growing and strong tendency to critically describe the internal politics at the workplace can be observed. Two letters written by different authors, Stanisław Podlarz and Anna Mizgalska, were sent to the newspaper to inform it about rigged elections that were held in Zakłady Azotowe Kędzierzyn (ZAK).<sup>160</sup> ZAK was a large producer of chemicals from Silesia. As one of the largest chemical plants in the People's Republic of Poland ZAK had a right to put forward a candidate in the elections to the lower house of the Polish Parliament (Sejm). According to the authors, the fierce competition was mainly between two candidates: Józef Pluskwa and Witold Łukasiewicz, with the former candidate having the strong support of the directors of the factory. Mizgalska complains about the style of competition and campaigning, which were, in her opinion, too aggressive. She gives the example of Pluskwa attacking Łukasiewicz as being a Russian and thus not 'a real Pole,' accusing him of working against Polish interests. Yet, for the authors this was not the gravest problem. Eventually, on the basis of the counted votes, Łukasiewicz turned out to be the winner. However, after the official count and the announcement of the results, a group of Pluskwa's supporters demanded that votes from different departments of the factory supporting Pluskwa be counted. Despite protests against bending the rules, Pluskwa won the elections with the support of the factory directors.

In a letter, Stanisław Podlarz openly claims that the wrong candidate was chosen and the first attempt to have democratic elections had failed. As a consequence, his trust and that of his colleagues in future elections at their workplace – for example for the workers' council but also to the Sejm – had been significantly undermined. While Anna Mizgalska shares Podlarz's concern about the future of democratic procedures, she also identifies an additional social dimension of the damaging outcome of the elections. She claims that the elections increased the gap between the high administration and the financial managers of the factory who were Pluskwa's supporters, and the workers and technicians who were supporting Łukasiewicz's candidacy. Moreover, the supporters of the latter candidate who expressed their criticism towards Pluskwa and the breaking of the rules were framed as reactionary by the factory's leadership. Mizgalska ends by

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<sup>160</sup> BUW RPS 4119 [1], letter by Stanisław Podlarz, received December 11, 1956; BUW RPS 4119 [1], letter by Anna Mizgalska, received: December 11, 1956.

poignantly asking ‘who will take responsibility for undermining the trust in democratic elections, especially after the VIII Plenum?’<sup>161</sup>

These two letters are remarkable in that their authors are not just critical of the internal politics of their workplace but, more importantly, the authors point to the damaging consequences of breaking the rules – the democratic deficit that is being revealed as taking place not only in the factory but more generally. Assuming that the readers sending these letters were truly committed to the revisionist critique of party politics, by sending these letters to the newspaper and asking for help they performed a critique that aimed to overcome the situation from within. Moreover, what emerges from these letters is a growing sense of alienation, a widening and increasingly unbridgeable distance between regular workers and the company managers and the representatives of the People’s Republic of Poland in general.<sup>162</sup> A sense of alienation at work is even palpable here – a sense that was later taken up and critically addressed by Kuroń and Modzelewski in their *Open Letter*. As these critical letters were mostly written in the language used by *Po Prostu* itself – whether this was due to a strategic decision or the fact that this was a popular vocabulary or simply a vocabulary that fit the readers’ true beliefs – the letters prove how influential *Po Prostu* was in shaping and spreading the emerging language of revisionism. As will be shown in the next section, Kuroń and Modzelewski’s *Open Letter* draws on this vocabulary and the shared desire for democratization as well as the commitment to a critique of authoritarian power in the party and beyond. At the same time, the *Open Letter* radicalizes the critique of party bureaucracy and its alienating effects.

After the exemplary reconstruction of the emergence and spread of the discourse of revisionism through newspapers such as *Po Prostu* let us now return to Gomułka’s open attack on the revisionists in May 1957. His highly negative framing of revisionism concealed the important fact that the fundamental and original aim of this critical current, which gathered a large variety of intellectuals, was to create and maintain an ideological and non-instrumentalist commitment to an affirmative and utopian understanding of advancing reforms and thereby changing limiting social conditions. Therefore, more than anything else, ‘[r]evisionism in Poland,

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> For more on this, see Leszczyński, *Sprawy do załatwienia*, 25-85.

where the critical movement in the 1950s went much further than in the rest of Eastern Europe, was the work of numerous groups of party intellectuals – philosophers, sociologists, journalists, men of letters, historians, and economists.<sup>163</sup> Not surprisingly, the tradition of the radical left intellectuals gathered around *Po Prostu* was closely interconnected with the formation of revisionist attitudes. As the pages of *Po Prostu* and *Nowa Kultura* provided an important platform where revisionist ideas could be expressed and exchanged, the university played an equally important role in creating an intellectual environment for revisionist thought and shared spaces of togetherness to emerge that were crucial for subsequent dynamics of the political opposition.<sup>164</sup> Among the most well-known intellectuals who were regarded as revisionists, many of whom wrote articles in *Po Prostu* and *Nowa Kultura*, were the sociologists Julian Hochfeld and Zygmunt Bauman, the economists Oskar Lange and Michał Kalecki, Tadeusz Kowalik, the historians Leszek Kołakowski and Andrzej Walicki and, at a certain point, Adam Schaff.<sup>165</sup> Given the heterogeneity of this group, instead of formulating a coherent political program, revisionism is thus better understood as an attitude, ethos and practice of critique directed at the actually existing political situation from within.<sup>166</sup> This critique was guided by an appeal to the Marxist framework and aimed to explore the discrepancy between what was being promised and what was in fact achieved by actually existing socialism.

After the party leadership's attack on revisionism, the environment of the young radicals began to disintegrate. The Union of Polish Youth that had attracted many young activists, including Kuroń and Modzelewski, was disbanded in 1957 and *Po Prostu* was closed down the same year, followed by protests and clashes with the police.<sup>167</sup> In response, many intellectuals and activists returned to their professional life. Modzelewski, for example, pursued his studies and Kuroń turned to pedagogy and became an educator in a scout group. Throughout this period Kuroń continued and advanced his passion for pedagogy, an orientation that would become characteristic of his future writings.

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<sup>163</sup> Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 463.

<sup>164</sup> Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL: 1945-1980*, 159-160; Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 108-109.

<sup>165</sup> Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 463-464; Friszke, *Opozycja polityczna w PRL: 1945-1980*, 147-148.

<sup>166</sup> Gawin, *Wielki zwrot*, 68.

<sup>167</sup> Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, 463; Machcewicz, 'Intellectuals and Mass Movements,' 371.

## *The Making of the Open Letter*

Before things again changed radically in 1965, the years after 1957 seemed to be characterized by a relative calm.<sup>168</sup> With the unofficial publication and distribution of the *Open Letter to the Party*, revisionism suddenly returned in 1965. In a more radical and openly confrontational form, this come-back of revisionism might have seem unexpected, but in some ways it was long in the making. Before writing the *Letter* with Kuroń, in 1961 Modzelewski spent one year in Venice, Italy, on a fellowship from the Cini Foundation where he directly experienced how student activists openly criticized the education reform pushed by the government. The experience of the student strike that ended with an open discussion between the activists and the president of the University of Venice, who came down to talk with the protesters, had a significant impact on Modzelewski. What was crucial in this context was precisely this direct observation of the political practice of freedom that turned out to be an inspiring experience which ended up shaping his own subsequent political activism. After returning to Warsaw from Venice, he founded a Political Discussion Club at the University of Warsaw in November 1962 which was active until November 1963 and which provided not only a space for critical debate, but also a forum for addressing social issues and establishing social relations within and beyond the university.<sup>169</sup>

The Club was associated with the university branch of the Union of Socialist Youth (ZMS)<sup>170</sup> and its aim was to reactivate the student milieu by reviving the spirit of the radical young left intellectuals who had been active in 1956. Another central idea behind the establishment of the open Club was an attempt to break through the political and ideological stagnation that had manifested among the students by mobilizing them around politically and economically pressing topics.<sup>171</sup> Some of the many members of the Club would become prominent future activists with the Workers' Defense Committee KOR and Solidarność. In addition to Kuroń, members included Bożena Mańkowska, Aleksander Smolar, Waldemar Kuczyński,<sup>172</sup> Ryszard Bugaj and future scholars as Zygmunt Bauman. Moreover, the members of the famous Walterowcy scout group

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<sup>168</sup> The *Letter* was written already in 1964.

<sup>169</sup> Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii*, 98, 101.

<sup>170</sup> The Union of Socialist Youth (ZMS) was a successor of the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP).

<sup>171</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia buntu*, 82.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.



that was created and led by Kuroń (and which will be discussed in detail in the third chapter) contributed enormously to organizing the Club's first events. The activities undertaken by the Club mainly consisted in its participants inviting speakers, such as the philosopher Henryk Jankowski from the University of Warsaw, to give lectures that were then followed by discussions. In addition, the participants in the Club read and discussed Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* and Włodzimierz Brus' *Ogólne problemy funkcjonowania gospodarki socjalistycznej* [General Problems of the Socialist Economy].<sup>173</sup>

Indeed, the *modus operandi* of the Club was to stimulate and engage in open political discussions. Despite the fact that the meetings of the Club often involved the articulation of sharp criticisms of the political and economic situation of the Polish People's Republic, it never turned against its ideological foundation, namely socialism or Marxism. In his autobiography, Kuroń recalls that he and Modzelewski were so fascinated by Marx's early writings, especially his *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, that they passionately read and discussed it with the Club.<sup>174</sup> Marx's ideas on alienation, as they were developed in his early writings, and especially in the *Manuscripts*, contributed to Modzelewski and Kuroń's view of class struggle that was later manifested in the *Open Letter*. Another important characteristic of the Club and a central normative commitment of its intellectual culture was the fight against, or at least the criticism of anti-Semitism and nationalism.<sup>175</sup>

Far from mobilizing and integrating the avant-garde young radicals solely around abstract or theoretical issues, the Club, most importantly, also aimed to improve the living conditions of students and collaborating closely with factories.<sup>176</sup> Modzelewski and Kuroń's vision was to bridge the intellectual labor of academics with the social, grassroots activism of workers and students by organizing evening classes at the university and being actively engaged in workers' self-organization on the shop floor of the factories.<sup>177</sup> To give just one example, Kuroń regularly organized training workshops with the Socialist Youth Organization and with workers, which took place in the steel manufactory in Warsaw. With the passage of time, the activity of the Club

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<sup>173</sup> Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 191-193.

<sup>174</sup> Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 191.

<sup>175</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia buntu*, 84.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>177</sup> Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 196.

started to spread among various departments of the university and went beyond its regular meetings. Modzelewski and his close friend Stanislaw Gomułka, who was also one of the members of the Club, distributed written critical comments on the consumerist policy of the party and on its reaction to the nurses' strike, which took place in Warsaw in 1963. While the nurses from Warsaw hospitals were protesting against low salaries, overly strict controls in their dormitories and a ban on completing a university degree and on their citizen registration in Warsaw, the secret police subjected them to severe repression. The protesting nurses were blackmailed, threatened, arrested and sent away from Warsaw.

Within a short time-span, the increasing activity and radicalism of the Club started to be seen as a threat by the Party. As a result, in the first few months of 1963, the Club and its members became the object of close scrutiny by the security service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (the Służba Bezpieczeństwa, commonly referred to as SB or Esbecja).<sup>178</sup> The secret police managed to effectively infiltrate Modzelewski and Kuroń's close environment by installing secret agents in the inner circle and turning their friends into informants, such as Andrzej Mazur.<sup>179</sup> As this kind of pressure increased and provocations by security forces became more intense, the Club was closed down in November 1963.

The activities of the Club allowed Modzelewski and Kuroń to become familiar with the still nascent network of politicized students in Warsaw. The case of Henryk Wujec and Marek Tabin, with whom Kuroń and Modzelewski got in touch in the first half of the 1960s, shows how the politicization of young students developed in significant part in and through the spaces of interaction created by the university. In that way, higher education took on an added importance as the intellectual environment of the University of Warsaw in the early 1960s enabled relationships that then turned into long and fruitful collaborations in the political opposition.<sup>180</sup> In their time as students at the Physics Department, Wujec and Tabin organized an informal discussion club that met in their student dormitory in the Muranów district. From the late 1970s on one of the most active political dissidents in Warsaw, Wujec, points to the club as a first activity

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<sup>178</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia buntu*, 92. On the history of the formation of the security service, see: Kazimierz Krajewski and Tomasz Łabuszewski, eds., *'Zwyczajny' resort: studia o aparacie bezpieczeństwa 1944-1956* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2005).

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 115; Modzelewski, *Zajeźdźmy kobyłę historii*, 103-104.

<sup>180</sup> Jan Skórzyński, *Od solidarności do wolności* (Warsaw: Trio 2005), 83-85.

that indirectly paved the way for his future dissident activities. As he recalls, the club was animated by a general interest in fundamental philosophical and sociological questions about one's being in the world.<sup>181</sup> Among the speakers invited by the students to their dorm to give a talk were various scholars from the sociology department at the University of Warsaw and priests associated with the Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK). Bothered by the activities of Wujec and Tabin's club, especially by the simple, handmade posters announcing the meetings, the secret service called its organizers for a disciplinary talk and because of this, Wujec and Tabin became known within small circles of critical students.<sup>182</sup> Around that time, Jacek Kuroń reached out to them asking for a meeting. The meeting established a life-long relationship between Kuroń and Wujec that was at times troubled, yet always productive. As Wujec recalls:

We [together with Tabin] went to the meeting with a man whose name was Jacek Kuroń. The meeting was either in 1961 or 1962 and it took place in Café Czytelnik. He was a bit older than us. I remember him telling us that the country is in a revolutionary situation because the workers will rebel and, therefore, we should be prepared for a revolution. We must develop our vision, he said, and think about how the future should look like. He quickly outlined his vision of the new order to us: the main point was that a true workers' democracy must be established where the party will not rule over people's heads but will be chosen by and from the workers .... He also emphasized that workers should have a right to self-management in the factories .... Although he was exaggerating a bit, I could see that these were not just his wild fantasies. It was exciting to know that there is at least one person who cares about something; who doesn't just want to live from day to day but who feels that he has to be part of something bigger than himself. He then also invited us to come to his apartment [on Mickiewicza Street] where he organized meetings with, for instance, workers from the Żerań factory.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> Interview with Henryk and Ludwika Wujec, Warsaw, December 19, 2016.

<sup>182</sup> Wujec, interview 1.

<sup>183</sup> Wujec, interview 1.

Wujec's recollection of his first meeting with Kuroń already conveys Kuroń's bold ideas and his habitus of contestation that would climax with the *Open Letter*. Clearly impressed by Kuroń's adamant and vibrant personality, Wujec's characterization continues:

He [Kuroń] was so bright and dynamic. It was obvious that he has an inner drive to make the world better. At that time it didn't matter if the new world from Kuroń's vision would be that much better than the current situation. What mattered is that he wanted to speak out against the injustice of the world surrounding us. I was impressed by the fact that there was someone who wants to change the world. I enjoyed how energetic he was and I was pleased we were allowed to borrow all the illegal books he kept in his apartment. He also invited me to the events organized by the club he and Karol [Modzelewski's] were running and this is where I met Karol and we had a nice time.

Exemplified by his ability to tap into young Wujec's political enthusiasm, Kuroń's charisma turned out to be a significant force in attracting younger students to critical circles. However, placing too much importance to Kuroń's personality as something that sparked critical political thinking in future members of the political opposition such as Wujec can result in an oversight of broader complexities behind political radicalization. The exposure to new ideas and critical discussions was also important in the formation of the students' critical mindset. Wujec began to attend some of the events hosted by Modzelewski and Kuroń's discussion club and was drawn into intellectual debates he found extremely complex and inspiring. He also recalls how impressed he was by seeing the famous lecture hall of the university's representative Auditorium Maximum that was packed with enthusiastic and critical youth.<sup>184</sup> As the friendship unfolded, Wujec often visited Kuroń and Modzelewski in their apartments. Although Kuroń's apartment on Mickiewicza Street was already being used for political meetings, he only later engaged more with Gaja Kuroń who will later become no less important than Kuroń in binding the milieu together. For Wujec, who was also active in other groups such as the KIK (where the emphasis was primarily on ethical and moral questions), the atmosphere around Modzelewski and Kuroń was charged with a sense of

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<sup>184</sup> Wujec, interview 1.

urgency and calls for action.<sup>185</sup> By casting the meetings with Modzelewski and Kuroń as that of friendly and political in nature, Wujec points to the fact that on the ground the distinction between political ideas and the personal was often nebulous.

In the period after the shutting down of Kuroń and Modzelewski's Club, the two of them did not give up their political activity but adapted it to the new challenges posed by the secret police by making their actions more clandestine. Driven by their desire to express the spirit of the Club's activity on a larger scale, in September 1964 Kuroń and Modzelewski informed their most loyal friends<sup>186</sup> Gaja Kuroń, Bernard Tejkowski, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Marek Żelazkiewicz, Eugeniusz Chyla, Stanisław Gomułka and Adam Michnik that they had started working on the manuscript of a critical essay, a kind of radical manifesto. As Wujec claims, they came to the decision to write the *Open Letter* in reaction to the shutting down of their Club.<sup>187</sup>

Although Kuroń and Modzelewski were not part of any institutional context, they could count on their younger friends for support in writing the *Open Letter*. Crucially, Wujec offered his own apartment as a space for the two authors to work on the draft of the manifesto. The relationship between Wujec and Kuroń worsened sometime before 1963 when the Club was shut down as Wujec refused to join the ZMS despite Kuroń's attempts to persuade him to do so. Despite all this, Wujec offered them his apartment as a safe space unknown to the secret police where they could hold political meetings. Wujec recalls that before the first meeting took place, Eugeniusz Chyla was sent to inspect the apartment. The first meeting took place sometime in the fall of 1964. Apart from Kuroń and Modzelewski the meeting included Marek Żelazkiewicz from the University of Warsaw and Andrzej Mazur from Łódź.<sup>188</sup> The meeting lasted several hours and was filled with intense economic discussions that Wujec overheard but of which he understood very little. He saw his role as that of a host and enabler, and emphasizes that this was primarily a private setting and in between the discussion he would offer tea and something small to eat. Although the *Open Letter* was not written during this particular meeting, the discussions were

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<sup>185</sup> Wujec, interview 1.

<sup>186</sup> Kuroń, 'Wina i Wiara,' 221; Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii*, 103.

<sup>187</sup> Wujec, interview 1.

<sup>188</sup> Wujec, interview 1; Andrzej Mazur became a renowned sociologist and member of the political opposition who also turned out to be one of the most productive secret agents to penetrate selected groups of the political opposition, see Mariusz Goss and Paweł Spodenkiewicz, 'Bohater, konfident, prowokator. Działalność Andrzeja Mazura, konfidenta SB,' *Więź* 2:568 (2006), 70-88.

made possible by Wujec's loyalty, generosity and willingness to assume a risk by sharing his apartment. This highlights how political dissent drew on personal and private relations and resources.

On November 14, the security service unexpectedly entered another apartment where Kuroń and Modzelewski were working on the manuscript. After inspecting the manuscript, it was confiscated and Kuroń and Modzelewski were arrested for 48 hours.<sup>189</sup> Upon their release both were formally excluded from the party and Modzelewski lost his teaching job at the University of Warsaw where he had been an 'assistant.' Kuroń's wife, Gaja, also lost her position. Despite the state's intervention, which led to their arrest and also negatively affected others close to them, Kuroń and Modzelewski decided to resume their work on the *Open Letter* with the aim of circulating it once it was done.

On March 18, 1965 the two activists distributed sixteen printed copies of their *Open Letter to the Party* at the party offices, in the office of the Union of Socialist Youth and at the university.<sup>190</sup> As we learn from the report of a secret agent, on March 22, Kuroń declared that the *Letter* was shaped by *Po Prostu* and the Polish October. The aim of the *Letter* was to connect with anyone related to the university who could 'think independently' and was 'conscious.'<sup>191</sup> On July 19, 1965 Kuroń and Modzelewski were found guilty of writing and illegally circulating the *Letter* set out to inspire a violent coup against the Polish People's Republic.<sup>192</sup> As a result, Modzelewski was sentenced to three and a half years in prison and Kuroń to three years.

### *The Open Letter to the Party*

The *Open Letter to the Party* was a fitting climax to the project of a radical critique of the party's politics from a neo-Marxist perspective. Both authors of the *Letter* were of the generation that entered their adolescence in the midst of the post-war communist campaigns which aimed to

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<sup>189</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia buntu*, 179.

<sup>190</sup> Modzelewski, *Zajeźdźmy kobyłę historii*, 109.

<sup>191</sup> AIPN BU 0 330 327/1, Notatka z dnia 22.03.1965, 2-3.

<sup>192</sup> *Ibid.*, Wyrok w imieniu Polskiej Rzeczpospolitej Ludowej, 2.

socialize the population into socialist men and women.<sup>193</sup> Indeed, it is precisely because Kuroń's and Modzelewski's hearts and minds were affirmatively communist that the disappointment with Gomułka's rule and commitment to revisionism pushed them to voice their critique in the form of the letter. Written clandestinely and escaping the limits of censorship, the *Open Letter* is uncompromising in its tone and radical in its claims.<sup>194</sup> With its spirit of Prometheus-like politics and appeal to Marxist language that in hindsight might seem quaint in a founding document of the opposition, the *Letter* continues the tradition of October 1956. It is of particular importance for understanding Kuroń's broader vision for at least four reasons: 1) the writing of the *Letter* involved the sphere of everyday life in the form of friends' support into the domain of political discussion; 2) it continues and radicalizes the revisionist critique of the monopolization and bureaucratization of politics by the party; 3) it shows that ideas, when put into action, have material consequences (such as imprisonment, in the authors' case); and 4) it provides a set of reference points to which Kuroń and other members of his circle will return, adapting and transforming them in response to changing political circumstances. Because of the impact it had among the Polish opposition and beyond and because of the fame of its authors, the *Letter* is certainly one of the fundamental texts of the left-wing political opposition in Poland and of the Marxist critique of actually existing socialism in general.<sup>195</sup>

The *Letter* offers both a descriptive analysis or diagnosis of the maladies of what was the existing political reality and ways to overcome the maladies by proposing more or less concrete solutions. Its starting point is the identification of what its authors regard as the main problem of the political system: the concentration, accumulation and monopolization of power by the ruling party.<sup>196</sup> Kuroń and Modzelewski refer to a party-state elite that monopolizes power represented by the central political bureaucracy. Theoretically, this top-down system of organized power allows individual members of the party to hold their own opinions, but structurally, it prevents

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<sup>193</sup> For an explanation of the post-war socialist youth in the Soviet Union, see Juliane Fürst, *Stalin's Last Generation: Soviet Post-War Youth and the Emergence of Mature Socialism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>194</sup> On the difficult relationship between the organization of censorship and the development of history as a discipline, see: Zbigniew Romek, *Cenzura a nauka historyczna w Polsce 1944-1970* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2010).

<sup>195</sup> See, e.g., Marcel van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A Survey of Critical Theories and Debates since 1917* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), esp. ch. 5.

<sup>196</sup> Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, 'List otwarty do partii,' in *Kuroń: dojrzewanie, pisma polityczne 1964-1968*, ed. Sebastian Liszka and Michał Sutowski (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, [1964] 2009), 12-13.

them from organizing themselves around an alternative to the party's official political program. In this way, the power structures of the party and its internal relations effectively block any form of ideological competition and critical exchange. In this context, elections as the official process of decision-making cannot but appear as a mere fiction.

For Kuroń and Modzelewski, the fundamental problem with this malfunctioning system of power is that, inevitably, the bureaucratic elite rules at the expense of the working class. As they put it, 'the working class is devoid of its organization, program and the means for self-defense.'<sup>197</sup> As they also point out, the roots of the new elite class can be traced back to the process of top-down industrialization. Industrialization, as an essential element of the reorganization that was meant to bring an end to 'private property' in the means of production, was understood as an aim in itself. Yet, it was also a means to improve the situation of the society as a whole, but with time it became supportive of the ruling class by benefitting it disproportionately.<sup>198</sup> The meaning of industrialization, therefore, started to change as the implementation of the one-party system progressed and led to further monopolization. Other processes that happened simultaneously supported these changes. The most significant of the processes being the implementation of a centrally planned economy, the expansion of the organizations of state oppression and the curtailed freedom of expression in general but especially in art.<sup>199</sup> It is this set of factors that contributed to the emergence of the new class and its problematic effects.

It is important to notice that even in the first few pages of the *Open Letter*, the authors establish an opposition between the bureaucracy or party elite on the one hand, and the working class or workers' democracy on the other. This sharp antithesis becomes a guiding thread for the rest of text. Not surprisingly, one of the central topics of the *Letter* is the situation of the Polish workers. Against the fact that the conditions that the workers' faced had been reduced to an economic relationship, Kuroń and Modzelewski recognize the necessary social component in developing an analysis of workers' experiences. Yet, as they claim, although the economic conditions of workers had improved since the Second World War, their salary only allowed for a very basic social life. While the wage of the worker was less than the total value produced by him

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<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.



or her, it covered the minimal costs related to living and raising children, thereby allowing little more than the reproduction of the workers' labor power.<sup>200</sup> Ignoring the workers' substantial contribution to the creation of surplus value as well as their political will, the workers were excluded from having any influence on decision-making regarding the means of production or the commodities to be produced and consumed.

Since within that system workers lacked the basic right and possibility to organize themselves in order to ask for economic justice, the surplus value resulting from their productivity was coercively taken away from them. As a result, the workers were put in a disadvantaged position because they did not have real power. According to the authors, this meant that the workers were being systematically exploited by the ruling bureaucratic party elite.<sup>201</sup>

The broader polemical target of Kuroń and Modzelewski's analysis, however, goes beyond the specific discussion of industrial and consumerist policies, and can be seen in the emergent and inherent contradiction of the system as a whole. In this closed bureaucratic system, the bureaucratic elite controlled the means of production and uses this power to pursue their own aims and to secure their interests against the interests of the workers and the majority of the population, if necessary. Yet, those who supervised the work of the workers but did not themselves belong to the elite, the members of the mid-level bureaucratic apparatus or the 'technocracy,' had the capacity to undertake their own, relatively independent initiatives. This created conditions for a conflict between the ruling party elite or the bureaucratic elite and the technocracy.<sup>202</sup> All these essential characteristics Kuroń and Modzelewski attributed to the system were rooted in its distinctively and inherently classist character. Within this framework, the attempts of workers to gain control over their own working conditions and the relations of production would inevitably lead to a new class conflict. The only effective solution was for the workers to look beyond existing power relations by seeking to establish a so-called workers' democracy. The authors recognize that this form of workers' self-rule could not be limited in its operation to the factories but had to be reflected in workers' self-rule on a state level. Thus, while generally developing a critique of the existing system, Kuroń and Modzelewski also aimed to

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<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 22-23.

<sup>202</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-30.

articulate a positive program. The alternative model that they were calling for was, inevitably, a decentralized system of workers' self-rule that would be able to overcome the logic of class struggle they saw as endemic in the existing system of one-party-rule.<sup>203</sup>

As a result of the economic and political reforms implemented by the communist government, such as the forced industrialization of Polish society, the economy was radically transformed. In their fragmentary analysis of the economic crisis the authors note that, on the macro level, the crisis manifested itself in the fact that despite the growth of productivity the recorded rates of economic growth were still low. In their view, this is related to the waste of surplus value by an ineffective system of bureaucratic management. The biggest problem that the economy was faced with was the discrepancy between the outcome and aim of production and the consumption rate.<sup>204</sup> Kuroń and Modzelewski thus diagnose a systematic maladjustment of production to the real needs of consumers. Along with these problems they see another mechanism involved in deepening the crisis: ineffective production resulting from the lack of materials, the bad management of labor and of resources in general, the lack of professional equipment, and the production of items of poor quality that could not be consumed.<sup>205</sup> The communist recipe for a more effective and just economy ended up creating an economy that was ailing while being neither effective nor just. Since the centrally planned economy blocked any critical or reformist initiatives, the authors continue to argue, it held back technological progress as well as political and social progress in general and thus turned into an obstacle to social development. It was, thus, both the structure itself and the incompetent new elite that were responsible for the economic crisis.

The bureaucratic machine that governs society was devoid of any genuine ideological commitment. As they write, 'nothing replaced the official Stalinist doctrine that was broken between 1956-1957.'<sup>206</sup> In order to fill in this gap and to mystify its own lack of ideological content, the bureaucracy adopted a nationalist rhetoric and suppressed autonomous, ideologically charged forms of critical thinking. For the authors, being ideologically committed

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<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>206</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

means engaging in social activism. As they argue, intellectuals engaged in any form of independent thinking have to eventually turn against the new form of oppression of the bureaucratic management. Censorship of and discrimination against critical intellectuals were proof that the ideological crisis would lead to a cultural crisis as well.

Referring to their own experience in 1956, which played an important role in shaping their political commitment, Kuroń and Modzelewski argue that the economic crisis revealed an even deeper underlying social crisis.<sup>207</sup> One of the areas in which this deeper social crisis was visible was culture, something that had been turned into a privilege and luxury beyond the financial possibilities of average workers. Limited access to theaters and cinemas and the slowdown in the promotion of culture in general were the results of massively decreasing state spending on education. The slashing of fellowships and of spending on public canteens and dormitories made access to higher education significantly more difficult for young people with a working class or farmer background.<sup>208</sup> This, in turn, imposed serious restrictions on the upward class mobility of workers. Again, the authors support their essentially Marxist analysis by pointing to the asymmetrical opposition between the ruling elite and the working class. In their view, the working class was since its inception essentially and always in opposition to the ruling class. Yet, they point out that this antithesis could not continue indefinitely because 'no class can ... maintain its rule if it is based solely on violence against the rest of the society.'<sup>209</sup> Hence the need to develop a new mechanism to overcome this asymmetrical opposition and establish a more sustainable social and political order. On the basis of this diagnosis, Kuroń and Modzelewski claim that the only and inevitable remedy for the crisis was to address the classist dimension of the organization of production by overthrowing the rule of the bureaucratic elite.<sup>210</sup>

According to this analysis, existing conditions would force the working class to rebel against the bureaucratic elite and the system in order to defend the workers' material and spiritual existence.<sup>211</sup> The means through which this could be achieved would of necessity be revolutionary

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<sup>207</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>209</sup> *Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

<sup>211</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

since not only would they challenge the relations of production but, more importantly, they would aim to install a new economic, political and social system: a workers' democracy.

Fundamental to a workers' democracy is the institutionalized autonomous self-rule of workers that is embodied in the concept of workers' councils – an idea that was first conceptualized, within the Polish context, by Lechosław Goździk. The workers' council, according to the authors, is a governing body of workers within the factory. Unlike the old, centrally managed system, the new governing councils would be an instrument for decision making by the workers and autonomous from any orders coming from Warsaw. This would allow the workers to gain control over the relations of production and thus would make it possible for them to make decisions about their own working conditions and the outcome of their work. Moreover, autonomous factories were seen as a precondition for the broader forms of independent workers' organization on the state level, especially for the Central Council of Delegates of the workers. The Central Council of Delegates would consist of representatives of the workers' councils and its aim would be to organize the domestic economy, especially in terms of the production and distribution of goods and in term of control over the working conditions.<sup>212</sup> For the Central Council of Delegates to truly express the general will of the workers and be a vital institution connected to society at large it would have to be committed to the principle of pluralism and institutionalize practices of deliberative democracy. Therefore, freedom of speech as well as artistic and academic freedom would have to be secured, and censorship abolished. For Kuroń and Modzelewski it was a basic premise of politics that freedom is an essential part of workers' self-organization: 'without full intellectual freedom, there is no workers' democracy.'<sup>213</sup>

Before we move on, it is useful to focus more closely on some core concepts that are at the center of Kuroń and Modzelewski's *Open Letter*. While focusing on the state – the party and its bureaucratic apparatus – they also formulate an analysis that considers the broader sphere of social life in which conflicts and tensions emerge – in contrast to the state- and party-centered Leninist perspective. In their project of radical revisionism and proletarian struggle, it is not the

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid., 74-75.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 75.

sphere of the state or institutions such as parliament where real politics takes place, but the shop floor of the factory and other spheres of ordinary social life.

Since Kuroń and Modzelewski's text remains relatively general on the notion of revolution and the question of violence as a means of transformation, one might wonder whether their project, as laid out in the *Open Letter*, should be seen as expressing, and contributing to, a radical political imaginary. Yet, the potential radicalism of their project manifests itself both in the means they offer and the goals they attempt to formulate, and it is borne out by the important role the *Letter* came to play in the subsequent activism of *Solidarność*.

When referring to revolution, Kuroń and Modzelewski are not referring to a past, but rather a future revolution. With their references, they thus explicitly echo the spirit of the radical left from October 1956, which identified the future with a progressive left and the past with conservative and right-wing discourse. In other words, their radicalism stems from their insistence that revolutionary change is the only adequate means to address deep social conflicts and from their conviction that revolution is the most adequate manifestation of emancipatory progress. Paradoxically, although immediate revolution with immediate revolutionary outcomes was being offered as a solution to resolve the existing class conflict, the authors devote relatively little attention to the workers' struggle or their counter-culture. Instead, in their argument, they focus mostly on describing the dynamics of the bureaucratic apparatus and its negative effects on the workers.

The *Open Letter* also reveals that the authors are convinced that human alienation and workers' exploitation cannot be overcome by formulating new ideas and critique alone. True and effective social transformation stands in need of a radical and organized political practice. This view is in line with the eleventh of Marx's famous 'Theses on Feuerbach' according to which '[t]he philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.'<sup>214</sup>

Radicalism remains at the center of their intervention also because the ultimate aim of revolution is not only seizure of power by the workers – which would leave the structure of the

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<sup>214</sup> Marx, Karl, 'Theses on Feuerbach,' in: *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, [1845] 1978), 145.

system intact and only change who is in control – but a fundamental transformation of power relations and relations of production and thus of the structural features of the system. Again, this would only be possible if the revolution were based on and guided by the explicitly political promise of institutionalizing workers’ self-government – in the form of workers’ councils.

Moreover, Kuroń and Modzelewski rely on a somewhat dual definition of class (which, not surprisingly, mirrors certain ambivalences in Marx’s own conception): On the one hand, class appears as a structural concept, and on the other it seems to be a political concept. While the structural conception defines class in terms of the primacy of structural relations of production (and, e.g., the workers’ position in them), the political understanding of class refers to a collective political agency that has its roots in shared conditions but is not exhausted by them.<sup>215</sup> The commitment to Marxism as a theoretical and political position is visible not only in the authors’ appeal to the Marxist vocabulary – such as class, alienation, class struggle – but also in how their argument is structured. The Marxist thesis that most obviously shapes their argument is the unquestioned division between base and superstructure, in which the first is taken to determine the latter. Without spelling it out, Kuroń and Modzelewski’s analysis and arguments operate within this Marxist division and framework, although they do seem to appreciate the importance of education and culture as aspects of the process of emancipation.

Another essential reference point for Kuroń and Modzelewski is Marx’s concept of *Entfremdung*, or alienation, as developed in his early writings. In Marx’s *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*,<sup>216</sup> alienation is an important diagnostic tool that describes four different types of situation: (1) alienation from the product produced by the worker, (2) alienation from the very activity of labor or from the very activity of producing that is controlled by the capitalist, (3) alienation from humanity as species-being and from its fundamental human capacity to create and produce, and (4) alienation from other workers.<sup>217</sup> Following Marx, alienation could be understood as a material and gradual process in which the worker is fundamentally disconnected from her or his social capacities and needs and thereby disempowered. Moreover, alienation is a

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<sup>215</sup> On the development of the Polish working class in the cities of Wrocław and Łódź after the WWII, see: Padraic Kenney, *Rebuilding Poland, Workers and Communists 1945-1950* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

<sup>216</sup> Karl Marx, ‘Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,’ in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, [1844] 1978), 66-125.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 72-81.

lack of meaningful social relations in which these capacities could be exercised and these basic needs could be satisfied. It is precisely these capacities and needs that constitute the human being as a particular and essentially creative being. Therefore, by having a destructive impact on social relations, which are necessary for human creativity and growth, alienation sets a limit to human transformative action.

Although the whole idea behind the *Letter* is a call to overcome structures that oppress workers by alienating them, interestingly, Kuroń and Modzelewski openly refer solely to Marx's first two dimensions of alienation ignoring its more humanist and social aspect. One might wonder whether in this early text Kuroń and Modzelewski are not ignoring the systematic prevalence of alienation and its essentially human dimension (experienced as a sense of lack), which later became more articulated in Kuroń's texts. Thus, while fundamentally agreeing with Marx, the authors of the *Open Letter* do not articulate a complete or orthodox reading of Marx's understanding of alienation. Rather, they pick those aspects that seem to them to best align with the experience of Polish workers.

In order to contextualize the authors' criticism and to indicate that their line of thought was not an isolated phenomenon, it seems useful, in conclusion, to turn to an author with whom there are points of contact: Milovan Đilas. The idea of a ruling bureaucratic class which is at the center of Kuroń and Modzelewski's continues and modifies a line of argument they were familiar with from Milovan Đilas' seminal book *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System*, published in 1957.<sup>218</sup> The prominent Yugoslav communist who held the post of vice-president in Josip Broz Tito's government, is most famous for turning from an active supporter of the Yugoslavian communist government into a major critic of its totalitarian character. Đilas was sent to prison (although not for the first time) for writing *The New Class*, which is a harsh critique of the communist party.

In his book, Đilas claims that the creation of a new exploitative and self-enriching class is inherent in the development of communism. Born out of revolutionary struggle, the new class is deeply embedded in the fundamentals of communism. As Đilas puts it, '[t]he core and the basis of

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<sup>218</sup> Milovan Djilas, *The New Class: An Analysis of the Communist System* (New York: Praeger, 1957); Modzelewski explicitly claims that they took over Đilas' ideas and expanded on them and applied them to the Polish context in *Zajeżdżimy kobyłę historii*, 117. See also Kowalski, *European Communism: 1848-1991*, 135.

the new class is created in the party and at its top, as well as in the state political organs.’ Then he points out that as a consequence, ‘[t]he once live, compact party, full of initiative, is disappearing to become transformed into the traditional oligarchy of the new class.’<sup>219</sup> Although the new class has its roots in class struggle and is dependent on the working class, it seems that the bureaucratic elite manages to erect and maintain an absolute monopoly of power over the working class.<sup>220</sup>

In a process vehemently criticized by Đilas, despite the principle and rule of collective ownership, the increasingly uneven distribution of goods turns the relations of production, and their outcomes, into property owned by the new class. Significantly, the new class enjoys the privilege of owning and controlling the administrative apparatus. It is precisely this monopolistic ownership by the new class that gives its emergence – as a social phenomenon – a new quality. Moreover, in defending its authority, the new class has to reinforce affirmative tendencies that protect and strengthen its ruling position. As Đilas points out, ‘[i]t must constantly demonstrate how it is successfully creating a society of happy people, all of whom enjoy equal rights and have been freed of every type of exploitation.’<sup>221</sup>

The analysis of the emergence of a new class, and a new form of class rule, and of the monopolistic bureaucratization of political, social and economic life provided first by Đilas and taken up and developed almost a decade later by Kuroń and Modzelewski is remarkable as it launches a critique of actually existing socialism, which was both enabled and limited by its founding in the Marxist paradigm. The particular genesis and dynamic of oppositional thought and practice that this chapter has traced can account for this position of the *Letter* within the broader history of the Polish opposition. But what remained of the *Open Letter* in later sequences of dissidence? In an interview from 1987, Modzelewski admits with some bitterness that he does not identify with the *Letter’s* Marxist tone, vocabulary and set of values anymore, which, as he says, ‘[i]s very sad because, indeed, it was a big part of my biography.’<sup>222</sup> While he himself cannot read the *Letter* from its original perspective anymore, it remained an important document

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<sup>219</sup> Djilas, *The New Class*, 40.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>222</sup> Janina Jankowska and Karol Modzelewski, ‘Na pewno czas najważniejszy, z Karolem Modzelewskim rozmawia Janina Jankowska,’ *Krytyka* 26 (1987), 127.



recording one of the most influential attempts to describe and identify the problem of post-Stalinist Polish society with the aim of eventually overcoming it. In this context, Kuroń and Modzelewski's *Open Letter* could be seen as an explanatory, diagnostic and practical political essay.

Despite the changing attitudes of the authors towards the *Letter* and the intellectual tradition from which it stemmed, the *Letter* was widely known within student and dissident circles even long after it was written. Far from being forgotten, the Polish service of Radio Free Europe even devoted the historic section of its morning show to the *Open Letter* on November 7, 1970, while Kuroń and Modzelewski were still in prison. Apart from mentioning Kuroń and Modzelewski, the broadcast reminded its listeners of the major points the two so forcefully made in the *Letter*.<sup>223</sup> Only a few months later, the same radio station hosted a show in which Wiesław Wolut – an editor-in-chief of the London-based *Polish Daily* newspaper – shared his impressions after re-reading the *Open Letter*. Wolut emotionally recalled that when he first read the *Letter* a few years after its publication he felt embarrassed and heartbroken because it was printed on cheap paper. The bad quality of the publication with its unevenly cut edges embodied, according to Wolut, 'the whole poverty of Poland and its technological backwardness.'<sup>224</sup> Yet, after reading the *Letter* Wolut felt deeply touched because on 'this primitive paper in a blurred font two young intellectuals provide a fine explication.'<sup>225</sup> After providing a short reconstruction of Kuroń and Modzelewski's argument, Wolut continued by stating that while his first reading of the *Letter* filled him with surprise and disbelief, he developed a less skeptical attitude to the authors' interpretation. Precisely because of a number of turbulent events that had taken place in Poland since the circulation of the *Open Letter* in 1965, Wolut's surprise gave way to admiration. Reflecting on his shifting opinion and newly articulated support for Kuroń and Modzelewski, Wolut ended his intervention by saying 'these young people, who are devoid of almost everything and put into prison, knew better and made a better prediction than ... Gomułka who holds all the power and who since fourteen years occupies a top position in the pyramid of bureaucracy.'<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417 vol. 1, Report from Monitoring the Polish Service of the Free Europe Radio, November 7, 1970.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid.*, January 9, 1971.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

Presenting his thoughts on the *Letter* on the influential Radio Free Europe, Wolut captured the unequivocal status and reception of Kuroń and Modzelewski's first and famous intervention which was also an act of disobedience.

Both in terms of the intention of its authors and its reception, the *Letter* highlights the perspective of those who were deeply critical of Stalinism and its ramifications but who still use and rely on a conceptual vocabulary that is embedded in Marxist or socialist categories and grammar of analysis. It is the expression of a political dynamic that led communists to question the current system on the basis of its own ideology – Marxism – and thus made them into radical revisionists. Their radical gesture was located at an intersection of anger at Gomułka's rule, disappointment with political reality and a genuine commitment to and care for socialism as an identity that is put to work in political practice. Having itself been rewritten after its first version was seized, the *Open Letter to the Party* marks a moment within a larger process of re-writing the meaning of communism and its history. At the same time, even if the *Letter* is a political intervention primarily in the realm of ideas and ideologies, its concern with worker self-emancipation and how it could be achieved in everyday life as well as the concrete social conditions – including friendships and practices of care – of its own production point to the ways in which socialism, for Kuroń, is a matter of lived and materially embedded political commitment rather than mere ideology. The intellectual debate out of which the *Letter* emerged and to which it contributed was a necessary step in Kuroń's own development but it also has to be understood in its interconnectedness with Kuroń's pedagogical practice which I will turn to in the next chapter. In many ways, the *Open Letter* is about socialism in the making – socialism as an unfinished project and a dynamic form of life and not as rigid reality –, invoking as much as it is performing the congruence between the necessity of critique and communist progress through continued struggle. As such, it is part of an extended and fraught discussion about the form of emancipatory politics on the left – and it can be seen as taking a clear stand in one of the most contested episodes of this discussion.

*Rewriting Luxemburg in Warsaw, 1965*

Vladimir Lenin published his influential *What is to be Done?* in the spring of 1902. Printed and distributed amidst the conflict between different factions of the Russian socialist movement, its theoretical and political focus is on the party as a central political organization. For Lenin, the strength of the socialist movement lay in awakening the masses by bringing revolutionary consciousness to them.<sup>227</sup> Yet, as he makes clear, the socialist movement could not solely consist of workers or intellectuals but rather had to be led by a group of professional revolutionaries that would be recruited from both workers and intellectuals.<sup>228</sup> This implies that revolution is not an outburst of spontaneity or spontaneous action but a radical practice of social transformation that is systematically organized and carried out. Revolution demands the disciplined creation and implementation of a socialist program that, in turn, can only be secured by a professional party. As Lenin himself puts it, '[w]e must take upon ourselves the task of organizing a universal political struggle under the leadership of our Party.'<sup>229</sup> In other words, for Lenin, only a well-organized, centralized and disciplined party could, on the one hand, protect the socialist movement against bourgeois influences and, on the other hand, systematically generate revolutionary consciousness. Therefore, only the party could become a vanguard of truly revolutionary social forces, leading the workers to their own emancipation.<sup>230</sup> Mediated by the CPSU and its claim to model status, this view became a cornerstone for the self-understanding of communist parties across the globe and clearly shaped how the Polish United Workers' Party saw its own mission and the need to defend it against the threat of revisionism.

As is well known, one of the most trenchant critiques of Lenin's vision of political organization was published in 1904 by Rosa Luxemburg in a short piece called *Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy*. Already her choice of vocabulary reveals her deep disagreement with Lenin whose understanding of the party she portrays as the expression of an 'ultracentralist tendency,' an 'uncompromising centralism,' a 'blind obedience or mechanical

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<sup>227</sup> Vladimir Lenin, 'What Is to Be Done?,' in *Essential Works of Lenin*, ed. Henry M. Christman (New York: Dover, 1987), 73.

<sup>228</sup> *Ibid.*, 135, 137, 175.

<sup>229</sup> *Ibid.*, 117.

<sup>230</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

submission' and a 'conservative character.'<sup>231</sup> In her view, this type of party is an artificial, top-down organization with a centralized authority that subjects its members to an 'absolute blind submission' to the party's Central Committee and thereby creates conditions for a certain type of authority to emerge. This, in turn, can lead to the creation of pathological, authoritative forms of power with the logic of obedience as its *modus operandi*.

Furthermore, such a bureaucratic and strictly controlled form of organization runs the risk of detaching itself from the social fundament of socialism which are the 'great creative acts of experimental, often spontaneous, class struggle' marked by 'remarkable diversity [and] flexibility.'<sup>232</sup> In contrast, the despotic tendency in Lenin's vision, according to her, turns against a 'positive creative spirit' because it is 'concerned principally with the control of party activity ..., with narrowing and not with broadening, with tying the movement up and not with drawing it together.'<sup>233</sup>

While Lenin turned against any form of spontaneity and spontaneous political action as he doubted that any political action taking place outside of the party logic could have a truly transformative potential, Luxemburg believed politics should go beyond the claims outlined in the party program. For Luxemburg, democratic spontaneous social movements should be at the basis of, and integrated with, the party, not attacked or dominated by it. As she argues, political demonstrations, mass strikes and 'improvised ad hoc street agitation, open air popular assemblies and public addresses' were the founding moments of the socialist movement.<sup>234</sup> It is precisely such forms of political organization that would be lost with the model proposed by Lenin and instantiated by actually existing communist parties which end up subjecting the socialist project to party bureaucracy and orthodoxy, as exemplified in Gomułka's speeches.<sup>235</sup> In the context of the return of Leninist tendencies in the party, the Luxemburgian perspective with its emphasis on spontaneity, self-emancipation and workers' democracy was reactualized by Kuroń and Modzelewski without any direct reference to Luxemburg (with whose work they were

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<sup>231</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, 'Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy,' in: *The Rosa Luxemburg Reader*, ed. Peter Hudis and Kevin B. Anderson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2004), 250, 252-53, 255.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 256.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid.*, 255.

<sup>235</sup> Dziewanowski, *The Communist Party of Poland*, 259.

familiar). In turning against the authoritarian and centralist tendencies of the party in their *Open Letter*, they echo Luxemburg's critique of the party as structurally constraining workers' and citizens' self-emancipation and self-rule. The emphasis they place on the role of the workers themselves vis-à-vis the party bureaucracy can be seen as continuing a line of 'immanent critique' of the socialist project that Luxemburg initiated – a critique that was rooted in a firm political commitment to socialism.

The price that was paid for this commitment was high: the authors were incarcerated for more than three years for writing and circulating the *Open Letter*. In this episode, we can see a change, a turning point for loyal communists who in their attempt to delegitimize the system of party domination by invoking the party's ideology (Marxism) became radical revisionists. While revealing the ideological continuity with the radical left of 1956, the *Open Letter* also documents a reassessment of socialism and of the activists' own relationship to it – hence the strong desire to write it anew and publish it even in the face of continued state repression and imprisonment. Indeed, as mentioned above, the *Open Letter*, with its sharp critique of the party's pathologies and its emphasis on the self-emancipation and self-rule of workers, marks a moment within a bigger process of re-writing the meaning of communism and its history – a moment that could be called Luxemburgian. Furthermore, the centrality of the notion of spontaneity, understood as opposed to party hierarchy and bureaucracy, would serve as an indirect template from which Kuroń would draw in his future attempts to conceptualize the forms of political opposition.

The *Open Letter* can also be seen as an expression of the agency entailed in the everyday life of committed young communists in the name of workers and intellectuals. Their utopian subversive act can be seen as aiming to re-signify the inherent structures of actually existing socialism from within. As a form of immanent critique that publicly interpellates the party, the *Letter* could be seen as an expression of the kind of organized spontaneity that for Luxemburg lay at the heart of the socialist movement. It recalls Luxemburg's concluding sentence from her critique of Lenin: 'Finally, let us speak frankly between ourselves: the mistakes that are made by a truly revolutionary workers' movement are, historically speaking, immeasurably more fruitful

and more valuable than the infallibility of the best possible “Central Committee.”<sup>236</sup> Kuroń and Modzelewski would have surely agreed.

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<sup>236</sup> Luxemburg, ‘Organizational Questions of Russian Social Democracy,’ 265.

## Chapter 2

### **'A Lot of Vodka and a Bit of Tears': Polish 1968, From Disenchanted to Rebellious Habitus**

'A lot of vodka and a bit of tears' – with these evocative words, Kajetan Skarbek described his farewell evening with his closest friends before taking a 'one-way ticket' journey out of Poland.<sup>237</sup> 'Kajetan Skarbek' was a pseudonym used by an anonymous emigrant who left the Polish People's Republic in the wake of the mass migration after the anti-Semitic campaign of 1967-1968. The tone of the article is set by the bitter confusion, sadness and bureaucratic complications that Kajetan Skarbek withstood during his hectic preparation for departure. Being forced to sell his belongings for a fraction of their value, the silence of his colleagues about his departure during the last month at work, and the experience of verbal and institutional violence in dealing with the authorities marked the context within which Skarbek and many others gave up their life as they knew it. Indeed, the last years of the 1960s in Warsaw were marked by a pervasive sense of unease and alienation experienced by those who did not fit the narratives and categories of the official Party line, and this atmosphere continued to have an important, if mediated, societal impact.

The previous chapter was devoted to Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski's *Open Letter to the Party* from 1964, which was their first semi-public act of civil disobedience and the symbolic beginning of their dissident activity. By analyzing the political context and the *Letter* itself, I reconstructed and interpreted the Marxist and revisionist roots of Kuroń's specific activist habitus and political commitment. In this chapter, I turn to the turbulent events of 'Polish 1968,' because they shaped the further development of Kuroń's political, intellectual and personal habitus and led to drastic changes in his closest political and cultural context. Furthermore, as some of Kuroń's collaborators and friends with a Jewish background had to leave Poland during that period, the role these events played in their lives will also be addressed as this had a significant impact on the activist milieu around Kuroń. For many of those interpellated by the official campaign, these events were experiences that were primarily personal in nature, as they encountered them as

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<sup>237</sup> Kajetan Skarbek, 'Wyjazd,' *Kultura* 10, 265 (1969), 38.

citizens, workers and private persons. After briefly reconstructing the prehistory of the March 1968 crisis, I turn to the anti-Zionist campaign, the interrogation of student activists during their arrest after the protest, and the emigration of Polish Jews that followed, focusing on their experiences. Later, I will show how central pillars of Kuroń's oppositional practice, namely his views on tolerance and anti-Semitism, can be read as a response to this experience – one that he was not directly exposed to because of his imprisonment between 1968 and 1971. Nevertheless it had profoundly shaped his and his friends' disenchantment with the Party's embrace of the nationalistic and anti-Semitic tendencies as well as a sense of guilt and responsibility for the events. While previous scholarship has primarily reconstructed the dramatic events of 1968 from a perspective of 'high politics,' this chapter will focus on the ways lived experiences and concrete events triggered Kuroń's response to anti-Semitism, shaped the interpersonal relations and social bonds in his milieu, and thereby contributed to the formation of the milieu's characteristic habitus and set of commitments. As I will show, in line with the revisionist roots of his political ideals and practices which was traced in the previous chapter, Kuroń confirmed his view that anti-Semitism and nationalism are deeply incompatible with the socialist project of an emancipated society.

Caught between nationalist rivalries, Kuroń's political habitus enduringly rests on an understanding of forms of the political that are necessarily open and accommodating of differences. Indeed, as Aleksander Smolar emphasizes, Kuroń 'spent a lot of time and thought on the relations with "others," especially Jews and Ukrainians.'<sup>238</sup> It thus becomes clear that, given his commitments and experiences, that Kuroń could not have remained indifferent to the dramatic events of 1968.

### *Political Dynamics Behind 'Polish 1968'*

Less than a month after his release from prison, where he served a sentence for writing the *Open Letter*, Kuroń found himself in the midst of an unfolding political tensions that culminated in March 1968. A series of developments and concrete events had a great impact on what we can call 'Polish 1968:' the Six-Day War of June 1967, the internal politics of the Communist Party of

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<sup>238</sup> Aleksander Smolar, 'Na pożegnanie Jacka,' *Zeszyty Literackie*, 88 (2004), 66.



Poland, and the myths surrounding the communist movement, especially the myth of so-called Judeo-Communism.<sup>239</sup>

By supporting the Arab states and opposing Israel and its quick victory during the Six-Day War, official Polish discourse was in line with Moscow's foreign policy. Identifying Israel as a supporter of US imperialism fit into the broader global Cold War dynamics.<sup>240</sup> A look at the official daily *Trybuna Ludu*<sup>241</sup> confirms this shift: while in previous months the main topic was the development of the Vietnam War, the Arab-Israeli conflict started to receive special attention from the end of May onwards.<sup>242</sup> The massive coverage of the Middle-Eastern conflict, during as well as after the war, was filled with univocal criticism and attacks on Israel and the United States accusing the US of an imperialist conspiracy.

On June 23, 1967, during the Fifth Emergency Special Session of the United Nations General Assembly, Józef Cyrankiewicz, the then Prime Minister of Poland, expressed the country's official position on the Middle-Eastern conflict.<sup>243</sup> After condemning the state of Israel, Cyrankiewicz stated that '[t]he very fact of Israeli aggression is clear, and no one who is in any way familiar with the course of events is questioning that.'<sup>244</sup> Leaving no doubt on which side the Polish government was on, the speech was reprinted in *Trybuna Ludu* only one day after it was delivered – an act clearly aimed at informing as well as shaping public opinion.

The first time a link was made between the anti-Zionist campaign and the domestic situation in Poland, however, was a few days earlier, in Władysław Gomułka's lengthy speech delivered on June 19, 1967 in which he castigated the state of Israel. The First Secretary started off by providing a pre-history of the Six-Day War and repeating the accusations against Israel, the United States of America, and the United Kingdom of plotting against the progressive 'Arab states.' After the more geopolitical part of the speech, Gomułka turned to the domestic situation

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<sup>239</sup> For a partly overlapping assessment, see: Aleksander Smolar, 'Jews as a Polish Problem,' *Daedalus* 116, 2 (1987), 59.

<sup>240</sup> See, e.g., Maksymilian Berezowski, 'Wielostronny kryzys,' *Trybuna Ludu*, June 18, 1967.

<sup>241</sup> *Trybuna Ludu* was the official organ of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) and one of the largest newspapers in communist Poland.

<sup>242</sup> For a characteristic example, see Monika Warneńska, 'Odpowiedź na ulotkę,' *Trybuna Ludu*, March 30, 1967.

<sup>243</sup> 'Przemówienie Premiera J. Cyrankiewicza na nadzwyczajnej sesji Zgromadzenia Nadzwyczajnego ONZ,' *Trybuna Ludu*, June 24, 1967; Official Records of the General Assembly, Fifth Emergency Session (A/PV.1534).

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*

in Poland, claiming that the Polish citizen should have only one fatherland and that the Polish People's Republic would treat all its citizens equally.<sup>245</sup> Yet, he continued by announcing that 'we cannot remain indifferent towards people who in the face of a threat to world peace, and thus also to peace in Poland ... are in favor of the aggressor, the wreckers of peace, and imperialism. Let those who feel that these words are addressed to them – independently from their nationality – draw the correct conclusions for themselves.'<sup>246</sup> After this thinly-veiled threat, he carried on by stating that 'the current international situation demands vigilance ..., social discipline and everyone's responsible work from top to bottom.'<sup>247</sup> Gomułka's rhetorical commitment to the equal treatment of all citizens and his denial of any anti-Jewish intentions in the campaign might have been in accordance with Poland's strategic concern about its image abroad, especially in 'the West.'<sup>248</sup> However, his speech can also be seen as inaugurating the anti-Zionist campaign in Poland.<sup>249</sup> Given the context, it seems plausible to interpret the intensified press campaign that followed the speech, focusing on the suffering of the Arabs in the Middle-East, and the accompanying protests as a classic example of mass mobilization.<sup>250</sup>

Initially, despite the government's attempts to shape public opinion, many Poles reacted positively to Israel's victory by expressing enthusiastic and spontaneous support for Israel.<sup>251</sup> For instance, as Antony Polonsky notes, 'the Israeli embassy in Warsaw received many letters and telegrams of support.'<sup>252</sup> Recalling the atmosphere of the period, Andrzej Sczypiorski reminds us that well-known rumors insinuated that the Israeli leaders who won the war supposedly spoke Polish and that therefore the Israeli victory could also be partly seen as a Polish victory. He then quotes the then popular saying that 'Polish Jews [from Poland] beat the Russian [USSR-backed]

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<sup>245</sup> 'Przemówienie tow. Władysława Gomułki na VI Kongresie Związków Zawodowych,' *Trybuna Ludu*, June 20, 1967.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>247</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>248</sup> Audrey Kichelewski, 'A Community under Pressure: Jews in Poland 1957-1967,' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 21 (2009), 177.

<sup>249</sup> Włodzimierz Rozenbaum, 'The March Events: Targeting the Jews,' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 21 (2009), 70; Dariusz Stola, *Kampania Antysyjonistyczna w Polsce 1967-1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2000), 46.

<sup>250</sup> Stola, *Kampania Antysyjonistyczna*, 37.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid.*, 33; Rozenbaum, 'The March Events,' 68.

<sup>252</sup> Antony Polonsky, *The Jews in Poland and Russia: A Short History* (Oxford & Portland, Oregon: The Littlam Library of Jewish Civilization, 2013), 410; see also Dariusz Stola, 'Anti-Zionism as a Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967-1968,' *The Journal of Israeli History* 25:1 (2006), 182.

Arabs.<sup>253</sup> Furthermore, it came to the attention of the Ministry of Internal Affairs that in the city of Łódź, leaflets with slogans such as 'We support Israel's struggle against the red Arabs!' were circulating.<sup>254</sup> It is worth noting, if only in passing, that even such seemingly affirmative comments about Jews are characterized by a somewhat instrumental undertone as if Jews could only be seen in a positive light when their actions were in line with perceived Polish interests and sentiments (and the anti-Soviet attitudes informing them).

Such spontaneous and grassroots support for Israel was not welcomed by the government and this partly explains why the government escalated its rhetoric. Trying to counteract the spreading enthusiasm for Israel, the communist authorities resorted to mobilizing pro-Arab support in a variety of ways, for example with the help of a press campaign but also more local initiatives such as the drafting of a resolution condemning Israel by the local community of the Wola district in Warsaw.<sup>255</sup> Subsequently, the ambassador left Poland on June 18, 1968<sup>256</sup> and full diplomatic relations were only resumed in 1990.<sup>257</sup> In the same period, the official discourse of the government invoked apparent nationwide mass support for the decision to cut diplomatic relations with Israel.<sup>258</sup> As a further reaction to the growing dissatisfaction with the widespread popular support for Israel, the Ministry of Interior Affairs initiated the surveillance of the main Jewish organizations (for instance Joint and TSKŻ with its youth club Babel<sup>259</sup>) and the most important intellectual circles.<sup>260</sup>

Another potentially relevant dimension of the genesis of the anti-Zionist campaign, one that I cannot pursue here in detail, consists in the internal power struggles among different factions within the Polish Workers' United Party.<sup>261</sup> The fierce anti-Zionist campaign, which

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<sup>253</sup> Andrzej Szypiorski, 'Polacy i Żydzi,' *Kultura* 5, 380 (1979), 11.

<sup>254</sup> Informacja Departamentu III MSW za okres 5 czerwca – 5 lipca 1967, CA MSW, MSW. II. 1976, 72, cited in Stola, *Kampania Antyżydowska*, 34.

<sup>255</sup> 'Mieszkańcy Warszawy potępiają agresję izraelską,' *Trybuna Ludu*, June 13, 1967.

<sup>256</sup> Bożena Szaynok, "'Israel' in the Events of March 1968,' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 21 (2009), 151.

<sup>257</sup> Paweł Piotrowski, 'Od konfrontacji do współpracy: polskie i izraelskie służby specjalne,' *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* 11: 58 (2005), 54; for a more detailed account of Polish-Israeli relations see: Bożena Szaynok, *Z historią i Moskwą w tle: Polska a Izrael 1944-1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2007).

<sup>258</sup> 'Pełne poparcie dla stanowiska rządu polskiego,' *Trybuna Ludu*, June 16-17, 1967.

<sup>259</sup> Joint stands for the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and TSKŻ for the Social and Cultural Association of Jews in Poland (Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne Żydów w Polsce).

<sup>260</sup> Rozenbaum, 'The March Events,' 66-67; Jerzy Eisler, *Polski rok 1968* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006), 104.

<sup>261</sup> Jerzy Eisler, *'Polskie miesiące' czyli kryzys(y) w PRL* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008), 29.

echoed anti-Semitic sentiments that were still alive in Polish society, was also instrumentally used by party members. As the Minister of Internal Affairs, the nationalist politician Mieczysław Moczar was then in control of the security service (SB) and managed to create an informal faction around him called 'the Partisans.'<sup>262</sup> For both the First Secretary of the Party and Moczar, the anti-Zionist campaign provided a useful occasion in their respective struggles to gain control over the Party.<sup>263</sup> Yet, many believe that Moczar who was intensely competing with Gomułka over power at the time, was the driving force behind orchestrating the campaign.<sup>264</sup>

Given these different explanatory factors, and following Audrey Kichelewski's interpretation, the anti-Zionist campaign did not appear out of nowhere; rather, as she puts it, 'all the instruments that would be used against the Jewish minority after the Six-Day War of June 1967, and in March 1968, had already been established.'<sup>265</sup> In other words, these events can be seen as triggering pre-existing anti-Semitic tendencies in response to a specific political situation.<sup>266</sup> Another important symbolic resource that was mobilized for the success of the anti-Zionist campaign was the old myth of 'Judeo-Communism,' a term that refers to the widely held and persistent belief that there is a special and fundamental relationship between Jews and communism. According to this myth, the proclivity of Jews to engage in the European communist project aims at 'taking over' the world, which aligns well with the broader myth of a Jewish conspiracy.<sup>267</sup> As we saw at the beginning of the first chapter, the belief in Judeo-Communism was even recently mobilized against Kuroń. As Jan Gross elaborates, according to this myth as it

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<sup>262</sup> The faction was a loose group of party members and communist activists with a common background in the communist partisan groups during the Second World War. Ideologically, the group was characterized by nationalistic tendencies.

<sup>263</sup> Włodzimierz Rozenbaum, 'Anti-Zionist Campaign,' *Canadian Slavonic Papers*, 20:2 (1978), 223, 230.

<sup>264</sup> W. Z., 'Rzeczywistość polska – inaczej,' *Kultura* 3, 270 (1970), 4-5; Rozenbaum, 'Anti-Zionist Campaign,' 228.

<sup>265</sup> Kichelewski, 'A Community under Pressure,' 185; see, e.g.: Paweł Machcewicz, 'Antisemitism in Poland in 1956,' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 9 (1996):170-183; Audrey Kichelewski, 'Imagining the "Jews" in Stalinist Poland: Nationalists or Cosmopolites?,' *European Review of History*, 17:3 (2010): 505-522; Franciszka Toruńczyk and Filip Ben, 'Żydzi polscy w nowej ojczyźnie,' *Kultura* 11, 133 (1958), 4-5.

<sup>266</sup> Kichelewski, 'A Community under Pressure,' 159.

<sup>267</sup> André Gerrits, *The Myth of Jewish Communism: A Historical Interpretation* (Brussels: Peter Lang, 2009), 65, see also Paweł Śpiewak, *Żydokomuna – interpretacje historyczne* (Warsaw: Czerwone i Czarne, 2012); Alina Cała, *Żyd – wróg odwieczny? Antysemityzm w Polsce i jego źródła* (Warsaw: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny/Nisza, 2012); Marci Shore, "'If We Were Proud of Freud ...' The Family Romance of "Judeo-Bolshevism",' *East European Politics and Societies* 23, 3 (2009), 298-314; Yuri Slezkine, *The Jewish Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 105-203.

operated in post-war Poland (after the consolidation of communist power) Jews 'enjoyed a privileged position in the regime and benefited from it while imposing it on everybody else.'<sup>268</sup>

The most burning and at the same time delicate factual issue in this context concerns the question of Polish Jews' participation in the communist apparatus of oppression, especially in the security service (*bezpieka* or UB, as it was called until 1956), which for many, embodies the violence and cruelty of communist rule in Poland in general and of Stalinist coercive rule in particular. Difficulties in defining someone's Jewishness based solely on archival materials poses serious methodological challenges to any attempt to investigate whether the majority of top positions in the *bezpieka* were occupied by Poles of Jewish background.<sup>269</sup> Despite these challenges and on the basis of careful archival research, some Polish historians have concluded that indeed there was 'large-scale participation' of Polish Jews in the directorship of the security service.<sup>270</sup> The myth of 'Judeo-Communism' could thus point to perceived facts and thereby become an even more powerful resource for the government's political mobilization, adding to the complex dynamics of the anti-Zionist campaign that would soon directly impact the circle of dissidents that had formed around Kuroń.

#### *A Play with Consequences: The March 1968 Protest*

The anti-Zionist campaign reached another level in March 1968 when student protests broke out at the University of Warsaw. The open antagonism between politically engaged students and the government opened up new spaces of conflict between authorities and citizens. It all started at the beginning of January 1968 when it was announced that the play *Dziady*,<sup>271</sup> directed by Kazimierz Dajmek, would be taken off the stage at the National Theater in Warsaw. The decision was a response to the anti-Russian reactions of the audience during the first performance of the

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<sup>268</sup> Jan Gross, *Fear: Anti-Semitism in Poland after Auschwitz* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 192.

<sup>269</sup> Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, 'Żydzi w kierownictwie UB. Stereotyp czy rzeczywistość?', *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* 11:58 (2005), 40-41

<sup>270</sup> Szwagrzyk, 'Żydzi,' 44; Andrzej Paczkowski, 'Żydzi w UB. Próba weryfikacji stereotypu,' in *Komunizm – ideologia, system, ludzie*, ed. Tomasz Szarota (Warsaw: Neriton/Instytut Historii PAN, 2001), 197.

<sup>271</sup> *Dziady* [Forefather's Eve] is a theatrical play that premiered on November 25, 1967 at the National Theater in Warsaw as one of the events commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the October Revolution. The play is based on a canonical poetic drama by the Polish poet Adam Mickiewicz.

play, which was on the schedule until January 30. Małgorzata Dziewulska, a student at the National Higher School of Theater, initiated what she thought would be a small protest on that day. After the play, a group of approximately two hundred students gathered in front of the theater and blocked the entrance, rolling out a banner on which 'We demand more performances!' was written. Then, as the group started marching, they were slowly approached by the militia and agents of the security service. Approximately 30 people were arrested, including Teresa Bogucka, Andrzej Seweryn, Jan Lityński, Marta Petrusiewicz and Józef Dajczgewand, all of whom were released after a short detention.<sup>272</sup> As early as February 1 Radio Free Europe reported on the events during the evening news program. The reporter described the protesters as acting 'on behalf of Polish society as a whole' and compared them to the revisionist youth of the 'Polish October' of 1956 who, as we saw in the last chapter, protested against plans to shut down the major critical newspaper *Po Prostu* which was closed down in 1957.<sup>273</sup> The reporter then continued by stating that the academic youth 'defended the freedom of the theater and national culture.'<sup>274</sup> With time, the play and the protest that followed have become an epitome of the struggle for freedom of expression and against censorship among the Polish late socialist intelligentsia.<sup>275</sup>

In this context, it is important to note the role played by a group of students from the University of Warsaw, who were known as the 'Komandosi' ['the commandos'], in spreading critical attitudes at the university in the 1960s.<sup>276</sup> The members of the Komandosi group shared a set of similar experiences of growing up in families supportive of the communist project already in the interwar period. Many of them were also from secular Jewish families. The complexity of their set of practices and the diverse usages of this name makes it difficult to provide a clear-cut definition.<sup>277</sup> Interested in philosophy and searching for their own understanding of Marxism people such as Adam Michnik and others read writers such as Zygmunt Bauman and Czesław

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<sup>272</sup> Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu: Kuroń, Modzelewski i komandosi* (Kraków: Znak, 2010), 514-521.

<sup>273</sup> AIPN BU 443/11, vol. 1, Serwis nasluchu Polskiego Radia z radiostacji zagran. dot. 'Dziadow.'

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Natalia Popłonikowska, 'Dziady w reżyserii Kazimierza Dejmka – próba demitologizacji,' *Acta Universitatis Lodzensis* 1:27 (2015), 112.

<sup>276</sup> According to Henryk Szlajfer the name of the group has been in use since around the mid-1960s, see: AIPN BU 443/18, vol. 8, Henryk Szlajfer's Interrogation Transcript, April 24, 1968.

<sup>277</sup> See Shore, 'In Search of Meaning After Marxism', 590-612.

Miłosz, which shaped their future intellectual and practical commitments to the political opposition.<sup>278</sup> Emphasizing this critical ethos, Marci Shore described the Komandosi as being part of ‘a generation of critique and a search for alternative values.’<sup>279</sup>

Irena Grudzińska-Gross (b. 1946 and in the 1960s, Irena Grudzińska<sup>280</sup>) also refers to the Komandosi, of which she was a member, as ‘Michnik’s Club.’ Having met Michnik in high school in Warsaw through common friends, she recalls that meeting him seemed ‘natural and automatic’ as they had similar intellectual interests and found school ‘boring and oppressive.’<sup>281</sup> A group of teenagers that clustered around Michnik followed him, attracted by his bold ideas and daring behavior. Smoking cigarettes, skipping school and organizing private events such as parties where they would dance to Rock and roll music, the group members frequently met to discuss books on political and social issues.<sup>282</sup> Aleksander Perski (b. 1947), who was active during the March events in 1968, left Poland in 1969 and who is now a well-known psychotherapist in Sweden, points out that at these meetings, listening to Swedish Radio or Radio Luxembourg, which played songs by The Beatles and rock and roll was as important as listening to Radio Free Europe.<sup>283</sup> In the private sphere where the politicized youth danced to the rhythm of The Beatles after having read banned publications, the divide between the political and the intimate was nebulous.

Later, many of the members would become leading figures in the March protest of 1968. The most active members of the group included Barbara Toruńczyk, Jan Tomasz Gross, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Irena Grudzińska, Irena Lasota, Jan Lityński, Aleksander Perski, Jagna Dzięgiel, Henryk Szlajfer, Marta Petruszewicz, Adam Michnik and Józef Dajczgewand. For many, it was obvious that Adam Michnik was the unofficial leader of the group.<sup>284</sup> Members of this somewhat ‘exclusive’<sup>285</sup> collective shared similar family backgrounds, strong interests in politics and intellectual

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<sup>278</sup> For the afterlife and continuity of the bonds formed during the 1960s in the Komandosi group see the following chapter.

<sup>279</sup> Shore, ‘In Search of Meaning,’ 612.

<sup>280</sup> Grudzińska-Gross is now a retired professor living in the United States and Poland.

<sup>281</sup> Interview with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, January 20, 2016, New York.

<sup>282</sup> Irena Grudzińska-Gross, interview.

<sup>283</sup> Interview with Aleksander Perski, October 22, 2016, Lucca, Italy.

<sup>284</sup> Jacek Kuroń, ‘Wiara i wina,’ in *Autobiografia* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, [1989] 2011), 298-299; Irena Grudzińska-Gross, interview.

<sup>285</sup> Kuroń, ‘Wiara i wina,’ 294-296.

discussions as well as personal bonds.<sup>286</sup> Barbara Toruńczyk (born 1946) described the specific sense of belonging to her politicized group of friends by affectionately referring to it as 'us.' According to Toruńczyk, 'this "us" was strongly defining us since March '68. We managed to create a milieu glued by a strong bond; we identified with it [the milieu].'<sup>287</sup> Such a strong identification framed the group's assessment of political events and invisibly separated its milieu from others.

As a group of friends and engaged students they were full of admiration for Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski who were conditionally released from prison after the term they had to serve for writing the *Open Letter to the Party* in 1964 (Kuroń was released on May 2, 1967 and Modzelewski on August 3, 1967). One of the former Walterowcy and close friend of Kuroń and Gaja, claims that Kuroń and Modzelewski were surprised with the new situation that they found themselves in:

When they imprisoned in 1965 there were only the two of them, perhaps they were lonely and now in 1967 they found a large group of politically engaged students ... while they were in prison the youth became more radical and the situation was more radical. The group was larger, younger and more radical.<sup>288</sup>

The Komandosi knew Kuroń and Modzelewski from their earlier times as some were in the Walterowcy scout troops, and still looked up to them since they were older and more experienced. In addition, the Komandosi respected Modzelewski's seniority because he was a teaching assistant at the University of Warsaw before 1964. Although she was not very close to them, Irena Grudzińska-Gross remembers that Kuroń and Modzelewski had 'an absolutely positive reputation' and acted like 'signpost' for the younger generation.<sup>289</sup> She had an image of Kuroń as an incredible educator and pedagogue and thought of Modzelewski as remarkably

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<sup>286</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu*, 460.

<sup>287</sup> Barbara Toruńczyk, 'Jacek Kuroń. Opowieść o pokoleniu 1968,' *Zeszyty Literackie Online*, 2009, available at: [http://zeszytyliterackie.pl/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=999&Itemid=2&limit=1&limitstart=0](http://zeszytyliterackie.pl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=999&Itemid=2&limit=1&limitstart=0), last accessed March 20, 2016.

<sup>288</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>289</sup> Irena Grudzińska-Gross, interview.



intelligent, but, most importantly, she knew they were severe and outspoken critics of the party line. All of these combined factors contributed to the Komandosi group's positive attitude towards Kuroń and Modzelewski.<sup>290</sup>

This is confirmed by Aleksander Perski's recollections. According to him, Kuroń's release was a major event for the young students and especially for those who were former Walterowcy scouts. Perski recalls that he and his friends experienced Kuroń's absence mainly through the lens of Gaja whom Aleksander Perski together with Seweryn Blumsztajn, Andrzej Topiński and Mirosław Sawicki visited at least once a week. For many of them she was closer to them than Kuroń who was constantly busy. Although Gaja was then a very active person and was busy with her work as a psychologist, as well as with her small son, Maciek, and her family, Perski acknowledges that it was a tragedy for such a young person with a child to have an imprisoned partner. In order to help her survive the financial hardship of single parenthood, Kuroń and Gaja's younger friends collected money among themselves and passed it on to Klaudiusz Weiss who then gave it to Gaja.<sup>291</sup> In Perski's straightforward assessment, Gaja was as important as Kuroń for the milieu because she was his 'moral barometer who navigated him through decision making processes as Kuroń was always a very enthusiastic person with tons of ideas and could sometimes go overboard.'<sup>292</sup> According to Perski, she was also 'a person with whom everybody was a bit in love'<sup>293</sup> and she would remain one of the most important persons in his life until his last days.

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<sup>290</sup> Irena Grudzińska-Gross, interview.

<sup>291</sup> Klaudiusz Weiss, interview with Nguyen Vu Thuc Linh, 16 April 2016, New York City. Weiss left Poland in the wake of 1968 and is now a retired neurologist residing in New York.

<sup>292</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>293</sup> Perski, interview.



Figure 3: Warsaw, Łazienki Królewskie Park; Serweryn Blumsztajn, Barbara Toruńczyk, Grażyna or Gaja Borucka-Kuroń, Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik. Photograph: Archiwum Zeszytów Literackich/FOTONOVA

The closeness between the Komandosi and Kuroń was mutual. As he himself recalls, 'I came out of prison in May 1967 straight into the arms of the Komandosi group.'<sup>294</sup> What was particularly important is that despite different views on the *Open Letter to the Party*, it was still regarded as providing a significant critical analysis of the political and social situation in Poland.<sup>295</sup> Indeed, as I showed in the previous chapter, the *Letter* encapsulated the critical and rebellious habitus and steadfastness of post-war revisionism. Gradually, the group grew into a political milieu where friendships lasted for decades and created strong political as well as personal bonds.<sup>296</sup>

After the protest, students associated with the Komandosi group prepared a petition protesting the cancellation of *Dziady*. Throughout February they continued to meet and work on possible ways of resolving their disagreement regarding government censorship and what to do about it. As one of their activities, the group produced relatively large-scale leaflets and

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<sup>294</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 288.

<sup>295</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu*, 467; Piotr Osęka, *My, ludzie z marca. Autoportret pokolenia* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2015), 176, 178.

<sup>296</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu*, 461.

distributed them at the university – a new strategy Modzelewski refers to as ‘a leaflet war.’<sup>297</sup> In the meantime, the prosecutor started an investigation against Adam Michnik and Henryk Szlajfer for passing information to a foreign journalist and as a result they were suspended from university on February 13, a decision that was made public on March 4.<sup>298</sup> One day earlier, on March 3, Kuroń’s birthday party<sup>299</sup> turned into a political meeting of the group and a discussion evolved on possible reactions to the suspension of their friends. It was decided that a rally would be organized at the university on March 8<sup>300</sup> and that leaflets announcing the event would be distributed in advance. The rally was a response to the suspension of Michnik and Szlajfer.<sup>301</sup> According to the plan, the rally would start at noon.<sup>302</sup> On the day of the protest, five minutes before noon, the rector’s office announced a ban on the rally.<sup>303</sup> In violation of the ban, Irena Lasota and Mirosław Sawicki publicly read out the students’ resolution proclaiming the defense of democratic traditions, condemning state repression, and expressing support for Michnik and Szlajfer.<sup>304</sup>

Meanwhile, an organized group of men arrived by bus<sup>305</sup> and started to surround the protesting students. When some of the protesters were pulled into the busses, several professors of the university succeeded in liberating the students who were held and they managed to retrieve their student IDs and other belongings.<sup>306</sup> The remaining students at the scene decided to sit down on the ground while another group demanded to talk with the rector of the university. Eventually, Vice-rector Rybicki invited five students in to negotiate. Despite the ongoing negotiations, the student protest was violently crushed by the militia and the Voluntary Reserve Militia (ORMO). As for many of the students it was the first time they were directly affected by

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<sup>297</sup> Karol Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżymy kobyłę historii. Wyznania poobijanego jeźdźca* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2013), 133.

<sup>298</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu*, 538; Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, 227.

<sup>299</sup> Apart from Kuroń and his wife Gajka the list of present guests included, inter alia, Adam Michnik, Henryk Szlajfer, Karol Modzelewski, Mirosław Sawicki, Jacek Tarkowski, Aleksander Smolar, Nina Smolar, Irena Grudzińska, Sylwia Polewska and Józef Dajczgeward; see: AIPN BU 443/21, vol. 11, card 42; Barbara Toruńczyk’s Interrogation Transcript, March 28, 1968.

<sup>300</sup> AIPN BU 443/18, vol. 8, Henryk Szlajfer’s Interrogation Transcript, April 24, 1968; Kuroń, ‘Wiara i wina,’ 312.

<sup>301</sup> AIPN BU 443/23, vol. 13, Wiktor Górecki’s Interrogation Transcript, May 15, 1968.

<sup>302</sup> AIPN BU 443/11, vol. 1, Memo regarding calling the rally at the University of Warsaw by S. Slaroiniski, March 8, 1968.

<sup>303</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu*, 566.

<sup>304</sup> AIPN BU 443/21, vol. 11, card 80, Barbara Toruńczyk’s Interrogation Transcript, April 2, 1968.

<sup>305</sup> Eisler, *Polski rok 1968*, 237.

<sup>306</sup> *Ibid.*, 242.

police violence, being physically assaulted by the police who used their batons to beat the protesters was a formative experience. As Anna Hertzberg<sup>307</sup> recalls, after the protest, her older brother Leon 'came home with a smashed head, he got hit with a baton, there was so much blood, it all looked so dramatic.'<sup>308</sup> Following the protest, 137 people were questioned, out of whom 18 were detained including Kuroń, Toruńczyk, Modzelewski, Lasota, Szlajfer, Blumsztajn, Lityński and Grudzińska.<sup>309</sup> The protest that was initiated by the Komandosi group continued even after the incarceration of some of its members and turned into a national student movement with further protests taking place, for instance, on March 11, 18, 21 and 23.<sup>310</sup> Without any doubt, the March events turned out to be one of the turning points in the history of late socialist Polish communism and the resistance to it.<sup>311</sup>

Henryk Wujec was present at the protests and was actively involved in resisting police brutality by singing, escaping police, warning his friends and helping them look for shelter. He remembers how students under attack from the police shouted 'Gestapo, Gestapo.' Wujec was scared of physical violence during the protests but he admits that ultimately the events on March 8 were a school in political training and gaining political consciousness.<sup>312</sup> In that sense, March 8 was the first open collective political action that turned into a formative experience for the politicized milieu of students.

For some of the young students with relatively little political experience who were involved in the organization of the March protests, the reaction of the state was shocking as they did not expect such a harsh response. As Perski recalls, being young and immature, they were taken aback with how the events unfolded:

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<sup>307</sup> Anna Hertzberg (*née* Masiewicka), born in 1950, left the Polish People's Republic with her parents and brother in 1968 for the United States of America, where she currently lives.

<sup>308</sup> Interview with Anna Hertzberg, February 25, 2016, New York.

<sup>309</sup> Friszke, *Anatomia Buntu*, 577-578.

<sup>310</sup> For a somewhat personal and comparative reflection on the March Protest, see Aleksander Smolar, 'Years of '68,' *Eurozine*, May 26, 2008, <https://www.eurozine.com/years-of-68/>, last accessed March 20, 2019.

<sup>311</sup> On the 1968 in other places, see for instance Madigan Fichter, 'Yugoslav Protest: Student Rebellion in Belgrade, Zagreb and Sarajevo in 1968,' *Slavic Review* 75: 1 (2016), 99-121; Kristin Ross, *May 68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002); Robert Gildea, James Mark, and Annette Warring, eds., *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Vladimir Tismaneanu, *Promises of 1968: Crisis, Illusion, Utopia* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2011); Martin Kimke and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *1968 in Europe: A History of Protest and Activism, 1959-1977* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).

<sup>312</sup> Wujec, interview 1.

It was harrowing to see such a brutal reaction. I was shocked that it turned out to be such a big movement and that so many people showed up to protest in various universities. What frightened me most was the feeling of responsibility for all of this.<sup>313</sup>

Perski's words subtly point to a sense of guilt and responsibility for sparking the political turmoil that affected so many of his friends that he cared about. Perski felt responsible in particular for the fact that the events landed Kuroń in prison for three more years, which left Gaja alone with a small child again. The March events had a profound influence on the participants in terms of becoming politically self-aware but they also had a lasting traumatizing effect on the milieu. Regardless of how March '68 played out for its participants individually, the participants and witnesses of the state brutality lost hope for the system's potential for revival.

### *The Campaign Continues*

In trying to understand the emotionally tense and hostile atmosphere that surrounded Kuroń's close friends (and Kuroń as well, to a lesser extent, because of his imprisonment and lack of access to newspapers), and the role it played in shaping Kuroń's attitude towards nationalism, it is necessary to look more closely at the press campaign itself. On March 11, a Catholic weekly, *Słowo Powszechne*, which was supportive of the communist party, published a short yet powerful appeal to the protesting students. Far from being merely persuasive, the appeal, with its accusatory tone blamed the protesters for Stalinism and linked them to 'Zionist nationalism.'<sup>314</sup> In order to make the accusation more explicit, the appeal listed particular students focusing on those with the most 'Jewish sounding' surnames such as Seweryn Blumsztajn, but also others such as Marta Petruszewicz and Adam Michnik.

Following the student protests, *Trybuna Ludu* also published a series of articles that provided a one-sided account of the events. On March 11, the newspaper published a short note

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<sup>313</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>314</sup> 'Do studentów Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego,' *Słowo Powszechne*, March 11, 1968.

on the events of March 8, naming specific students, such as Adam Michnik, Aleksander Smolar and Henryk Szlajfer, and mentioning their parents' occupations. It was also suggested that the parents were co-responsible for the misbehavior of their adult children.<sup>315</sup> Only two days later, the First Secretary of the Warsaw Party Committee, Józef Kępa, named Kuroń and Modzelewski in a speech as leaders of a group of students responsible for sparking the protest. While mentioning Michnik, Smolar and Szlajfer, he emphasized their links with the Jewish youth club 'Babel.' The students were presented as hooligans and troublemakers. Later on, Kępa's anti-Semitic rhetoric became more pronounced as he said that '[w]e vigorously oppose anti-Semitism, but we will not allow Zionist propaganda and activity to be cultivated amongst us. We will also not allow Zionists to defend themselves by accusing us of anti-Semitism.'<sup>316</sup> During that period, many party-orchestrated rallies were organized in factories and at workplaces against the students. At the rallies, anti-Zionist slogans were shouted, which led to widescale media coverage.<sup>317</sup> The press campaign, which can be described as anti-Zionist in theory but anti-Semitic in practice,<sup>318</sup> cut across various segments of the population – it was aimed at students and Polish Jews but also intellectuals, who were targeted in a variety of different newspapers.<sup>319</sup> For reasons explored previously in this chapter, the official Party-line and its ideology had been gradually losing credibility. For Kuroń, the anti-Semitic campaign occupied a special place in his personal and political history of disappointment with the post-war order. As it will become clear, Kuroń's worldview as a sympathizer of communism, a political activist, a socially sensitive pedagogue and a close friend to many Polish Jews was at odds with the anti-Semitic rhetoric which was being used as a political weapon.

In an unpublished and undated article draft written a few years after 1968 Kuroń tries to critically address the anti-Semitic campaign. According to him, the anti-Semitic campaign, which unfolded during his time in prison, forced the rethinking of the notion of the nation and the value attached to it. For him, this revision of one's attachment to certain ideas also takes place within

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<sup>315</sup> 'Wokol zajsc na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim,' *Trybuna Ludu*, March 11, 1968.

<sup>316</sup> 'Co kryje sie za ulicznymi awanturami? Przemowienie Przemówienie I sekretarza KW PZPR tow. Józefa Kępy,' *Trybuna Ludu*, March 13, 1968.

<sup>317</sup> *Trybuna Ludu*, March 14, 1968.

<sup>318</sup> On how the official discourse defined Zionism, see also: 'Co to jest syjonizm?,' *Trybuna Ludu*, March 15, 1968.

<sup>319</sup> For instance in *Żołnierz Wolności, Życie Warszawy, Słowo Powszechne, Express Wieczorny i Sztandar Młodych*.

the sphere of emotions.<sup>320</sup> Opposing the idea of ‘patriotism based on hatred,’ which was prevalent during the occupation, it became clear to him that according to his understanding Poland would have to be unequivocally open to everyone.<sup>321</sup> It does not come as a surprise, then, that for Kuroń, the anti-Semitic campaign itself was an expression of a nationalist ideology that supplemented an oppressive system. In his view of the events of March 1968, articulated in the short draft, this ideology was shared by ‘the majority of Polish society and that is precisely what made the March propaganda so effective.’<sup>322</sup> What is important is that the nationalist-totalitarian political culture and the anti-Semitic campaign in their interaction, had a damaging impact on the society and its members, as ‘in this atmosphere for the last thirty years the social bond is being destroyed and with it, social initiatives and responsibility.’<sup>323</sup>

In the article draft just quoted, Kuroń also adopts a somewhat anthropological stance and tries to explain, in a fragmentary fashion, why people are so susceptible to nationalist and anti-Semitic discourse. In order to do so, he schematically explains social mechanisms and psychological conditions that allow individuals to remain indifferent to or even supportive of anti-Semitic attacks. Kuroń writes:

Lonely, weak and humiliated people very easily seek compensation for their mutilations and deformations by identifying themselves with strength, violence and a rule of a strong hand. They resign from their weak and subjugated individualism for the sake of the group that is strong and arrogant on their behalf. The easiest way to overcome anxiety, weakness and humiliation is through aggression: in the contempt for others, foreigners, the weak, in creating a severe punishment for everyone, who violates order and the unity of the community.<sup>324</sup>

For Kuroń, it is clear that the nationalist and oppressive state bears double responsibility: on the one hand, for not preventing such a sense of alienation and loneliness from spreading among

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<sup>320</sup> See also Kuroń, ‘Wiara i wina,’ 300.

<sup>321</sup> See also *ibid.*, 301.

<sup>322</sup> AO III/12K.21, Jacek Kuroń, Tekst o wydarzeniach marcowych i kampanii konstytucyjnej, 3.

<sup>323</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>324</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

people, and on the other, for creating and normalizing such an exclusive understanding of the community. Thus, for Kuroń, in line with his persistent materialist orientation, popular support for nationalism and anti-Semitism does not come out of nowhere. Rather, it is the outcome of concrete political measures of a government that subjugates its own citizens and members of its society which ultimately leads to their sense of alienation. In Kuroń's view, since communism was never realized in Poland, it was nationalism, not communism that was the main adversary of the political opposition.<sup>325</sup> Indeed, in line with his revisionist roots, Kuroń saw anti-Semitism and nationalism as deep distortions of socialism and ultimately as incompatible with the socialist ideal of a society that sought to realize freedom and equality for all.

Kuroń's reflections on the anti-Semitic campaign seem to be partly in line with a much earlier article published in the revisionist weekly, *Po Prostu*, in May 1956 by Leszek Kołakowski which presents a series of descriptive and polemic arguments against anti-Semitism.<sup>326</sup> In his critique of anti-Semitism, Kołakowski develops the following theses: (1) there are two prevailing forms of anti-Semitism that can be characterized as a passive and an active one; (2) anti-Semitism is neither a theory nor a doctrine; (3) anti-Semitism contains a cultural and social marker potentially applicable to almost all persons, objects and situations; (4) anti-Semitism is in itself reactionary; (5) anti-Semitism does not provide a basis for collective political subjectivity but rather leads to a form of political pseudo-agency.

Although Kołakowski makes a distinction between these aspects of anti-Semitism in his analysis, they are intertwined, to some extent dependent on each other, and thus only in their combination provide a means to understand anti-Semitism. It is precisely this integration of anti-Semitic practices into the everyday that allows it to creep out in an almost unnoticed manner, not necessarily tied to physical violence, which was employed on a much larger scale in Poznań in 1956 than in 1968. This was what made it so difficult to grasp and to combat. Yet, for Kołakowski, anti-Semitism was irreducibly an immoral form of 'anti-culture and anti-humanity, anti-theory and anti-science.'<sup>327</sup> Moreover, for Kołakowski, anti-Semitism was clearly an embodiment of a backward and defensive identity-formation that operated against reason and by doing so is

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<sup>325</sup> Ibid.

<sup>326</sup> Leszek Kołakowski, 'Antysemita. Pięć tez nienowych i przestroga,' *Po Prostu* 22, 384 (1956).

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.



ultimately counter-revolutionary. While there is substantial overlap between Kuroń's interpretation of anti-Semitism and Kołakowski's analysis, which highlights the continuities between the revisionist movement of 1956 and Kuroń's later reflections, the comparison also reveals differences in style and intellectual rigor. By studying Kuroń's writing, which was immersed in and a response to his immediate experience (for instance of anti-Semitism as a breaking of social bonds), one can see that for him thinking about politics and acting to change the world are not limited to 'big politics' but inherently linked to experiences of everyday discrimination and suffering. Furthermore, it becomes clear that the experience of the anti-Semitic campaign itself and the impact it had on Kuroń's close friends further widened the gap between his understanding of communism and the one enacted by the state. As a consequence, the process of gradual disappointment that led to the decoupling of the notion of communism from the state's hegemony had continued.

### *In the Interrogation Room*

According to Andrzej Friszke, in the period between March 7 and April 6 'the militia and security service put into custody 2725 people, out of which 937 were workers, 642 students and 487 schoolchildren.'<sup>328</sup> Among those incarcerated were Kuroń and Modzelewski and members of the Komandosi group. Kuroń and Modzelewski had already gained some experience of prison life in the past but for many of their collaborators incarceration itself and especially the provocations by the security service, such as the circulation of false information, proved to be challenging. As a result of such provocations, after weeks of refusing to cooperate, some of the suspects, not including Kuroń, Modzelewski, Blumsztajn, Lityński and Michnik, began to confess.<sup>329</sup> Studying the interrogation transcripts provides partial insights into the internal dynamics of the group, the relations among the members, and their political and intellectual interests and what emerges is a sense of a specific habitus characteristic of this activist group and evidence of Kuroń's capacity

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<sup>328</sup> Andrzej Friszke, 'Miejsce Marca 1968 wśród innych "polskich miesięcy",' in *Oblicza Marca*, ed. Konrad Rokicki and Sławomir Stępień (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2004), 17. On workers' participation in the March protest see: Zbigniew Bujak, 'Robotnicy 1968,' in *Marzec 68: Referaty z sesji na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1981* (Warsaw: Fundacja Batorego, 2008), 77-84.

<sup>329</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 320-322.

to build a community around him. Furthermore, the interrogation transcripts give a sense of what was often the first experience of a face-to-face confrontation with the state authority in an isolated situation.

Most of the existing historical literature reconstructs these events and highlights an interpretation focusing on 'high politics.' The following analysis turns to the interpersonal relations and social bonds that emerged in and through the lived experience of these events and that became formative dimensions of activist commitment and its corresponding habitus. With this aim in view, the interrogation transcripts can be read as a rich source describing social interactions that illuminate the processes by which the group functioned as a whole as well as its self-image by clarifying, even if only partially, how the group perceived itself. Indeed, even Modzelewski noted somewhat sarcastically during the interrogation that 'conversations, private discussions, social relations ... became the topic of the investigation.' He then refused to discuss his private life 'unless a conversation on social mobility at a meeting with a few people in one's own house is a crime.'<sup>330</sup> Interestingly, some members of the group would later strategically use the personal dimension of their relations and private meetings in the courtroom in order to belittle the political role of these relations. For instance, Mirosław Sawicki testified as a witness in court on January 8, 1969 that 'it was a group based on social and personal bonds, drinking wine and discussing.'<sup>331</sup>

In an interrogation dated March 24, 1968 Barbara Toruńczyk provided an insightful description of a group of her close friends who co-organized the protest on March 8 with her. Toruńczyk pointed out that many of her friends grew up in families with communist sympathies and therefore internalized communist ideology.<sup>332</sup> In her description the group was characterized by 'a strong interest in social issues and social activity [here understood as engaged social activity], autonomous thinking, political, intellectual and academic interests.'<sup>333</sup> Mastering critical literature and championing non-orthodox ways of thinking and values allowed the group to position itself within the revisionist tradition (of the 'Polish October' of 1956 which I discussed in

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<sup>330</sup> AIPN BU 443/13, vol. 3, Karol Modzelewski's Interrogation Transcript, July 23, 1968.

<sup>331</sup> AIPN BU 443/6, cards 55-57, Minutes of the Main Court Session, January 8, 1969.

<sup>332</sup> On Jewish children growing up in Warsaw, see: Joanna Wiszniewicz, 'Jewish Children and Youth in Downtown Warsaw Schools of the 1960s,' *Polin: Studies in Polish Jewry* 21 (2009), 204-229.

<sup>333</sup> AIPN BU 443/21, vol. 11, card 20, Barbara Toruńczyk's Interrogation Transcript, March, 24 1968.

the previous chapter). Toruńczyk singles out the Klub Poszukiwaczy Sprzeczności (Club of Contradictory Seekers) founded by Adam Michnik in 1962, which was linked to the Union of Socialist Youth (ZMS). Central to the group's ethos was a commitment to internationalism, leading the group to 'cut links with any possible form of nationalism and chauvinism.'<sup>334</sup> A few days later, Toruńczyk provided her definition of the contemporary left and identified Leszek Kołakowski, Włodzimierz Brus, Maria Ossowska and some of her friends and fellow protesters as representative of that left.<sup>335</sup>

Careful attention to Toruńczyk's description of Michnik's spontaneous small birthday party on October 17, 1967 also prompts a reconsideration of the role of private events such as birthday parties as it challenges the still prevailing understanding of the political as inherently tied to a clearly demarcated public sphere that is defined in opposition to the private realm. Such an understanding is especially problematic for the study of the emergence of dissident forms of consciousness and practice in authoritarian contexts where the official public sphere is highly regulated and restricted. Initially Toruńczyk and Michnik planned to spend his birthday evening together at his home due to the high costs of throwing a party, but some of their friends spontaneously showed up at Michnik's home to spend the birthday with him. The guests who were present that evening were Jan Gross, Andrzej Mencwel, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Mirosław Sawicki, Irena Grudzińska, Jan Lityński, probably Jacek Kuroń and others whose names Toruńczyk did not remember. According to Toruńczyk, Karol Modzelewski, Henryk Szlajfer and Adam Zambrowski were not present.

At the party a discussion evolved on the best strategy to show solidarity with the Vietnamese during the Vietnam War. While Gross and Mencwel were in favor of an intellectual intervention, others claimed that intellectual interventions without concrete political actions were pointless. They argued that a political position would need to be expressed in materially concrete actions. As a result of the disagreement, those in favor of primarily intellectual support left the party. Although Grudzińska did not necessarily agree with Mencwel and Gross on that matter, she decided to leave the party because of her then boyfriend Andrzej Mencwel. The

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid.

<sup>335</sup> AIPN BU 443/21, vol. 11, Barbara Toruńczyk's Interrogation Transcript, March 26, 1968.

disagreement cast a shadow over the relationships within the group, as Gross and Mencwel stopped seeing Adam Michnik. Yet, the dispute was an important occasion for the participants to clarify their ideas on political activism. Eventually a flyer was produced, which contained the following telling slogan: 'Fighting for a sovereign and free Vietnam, we fight for a sovereign and free Poland.'<sup>336</sup> In expressing an internationalist spirit, the flyer emphasized solidarity with the Vietnamese and the common struggle which could be seen as an example of what solidarity means and how it should be enacted by these young students. According to Ludwika Wujec, who was close to the Komandosi group, birthday parties and private events were a natural place to have intense and deep political discussions given that there was little official support for such activities.<sup>337</sup>

The interrogation transcripts also reveal what books were read by the members of this activist circle, giving us some insight into the discourses they were interested and potentially engaged in. For instance, Wiktor Górecki reported reading a book by the young writer Marek Hłasko,<sup>338</sup> then famous within these circles, as well as the émigré journal *Kultura*,<sup>339</sup> which was popular among young activists and developed into a forum for dissident intellectuals.<sup>340</sup>

While being a rich source of information on the students' activist circle and some of their private relations, the interrogation transcripts are also incomplete as the questions asked by the interrogators are heavily redacted and reduced to a minimum. Guided by specific principles, embodying the ideologically-colored imaginary of the institution behind it and its situated hierarchy, the security service archives are an example of what Ann Stoler calls an 'archival form.'<sup>341</sup> As such a form, they neither provide reliable information on the interrogation methods nor do they allow us to reconstruct the atmosphere of interrogation and the verbal and

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<sup>336</sup> AIPN BU 443/21, vol. 11, card 57, Barbara Toruńczyk's Interrogation Transcript, March 30, 1968, for another example of a private party that turned into a heated political discussion see also the interrogation transcripts from May 15, 16, 17, 1968.

<sup>337</sup> Ludwika and Henryk Wujec, interview 1.

<sup>338</sup> AIPN BU 443/23, vol. 13, Wiktor Górecki's Interrogation Transcript, May 21, 1968.

<sup>339</sup> For more information on *Kultura* and the significant role played by the journal in the formation of dissident circles, see chapter three of this dissertation.

<sup>340</sup> AIPN BU 443/25, vol. 15, card 9, Envelope with a photocopy of *Kultura* 1/243-2/244.

<sup>341</sup> Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 20.

psychological pressure that was brought to bear on the suspects.<sup>342</sup> As a powerful site of knowledge production – through the material that is being stored and made accessible and by either reinforcing or weakening certain social categories (for instance by classifying certain people as dissidents and others as secret agents) – the archives also conceal the complexity of the past situation they pretend to record. It is precisely this grey or shadowy dimension of concealment within the archives that calls for continued critical reflection. Furthermore, the dynamic of processes of cultural and political interpretation often functions independently from the very material stored in the archive and, thus, can distort our contemporary judgment of it.

To provide just one example, Irena Grudzińska-Gross (then Irena Grudzińska), who was detained between March 10 and September 17, 1968 recalls that the interrogator continuously made anti-Semitic comments and suggestions which are not recorded in the archival material. For instance, she was told that the Kielce pogrom from 1946, in which an estimated 37 Polish Jews were killed by Polish civilians supported by militia and secret police, was organized by Jews themselves.<sup>343</sup> Grudzińska-Gross recalls that the hostile and anti-Semitic undertone and character of the interrogations had a profound impact on her. During interrogations she was made to think that she ‘has no right to say anything as a Jewish person but also as someone coming from a relatively privileged background.’<sup>344</sup> This, together with the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968, made Grudzińska-Gross feel overwhelmed and caused a serious depression in her. Despite the isolation of imprisonment, Grudzińska-Gross’s recollection suggests that the anti-Semitic campaign and atmosphere sometimes reached all the way into the prison.<sup>345</sup>

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<sup>342</sup> On archives and knowledge production, see: Verdery, *Secrets and Truths*; on how colonial documents interact with the production of practices and perceptions, see Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*.

<sup>343</sup> Interview with Irena Grudzińska-Gross, January 20, 2016, New York; on anti-Semitism and the internal dynamics of the security service in the People’s Republic of Poland, see Przemysław Gasztold-Seń, ‘Siła stereotypu. Aparat bezpieczeństwa PRL a antysemityzm,’ in *Między ideologią a socjotechniką. Kwestia mniejszości narodowych w działalności władz komunistycznych – doświadczenie polskie i środkowoeuropejskie*, ed. Magdalena Semczyszyn and Jarosław Syrnyk (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2014), 277-316.

<sup>344</sup> Irena Grudzińska-Gross, interview.

<sup>345</sup> Grudzińska-Gross’s recollection is supported by the testimony of another one of my interviewees, namely Andrzej Rapaczyński, who also remembers that during a short interrogation the comments made by the secret agents were hinting at his Jewish background; interview with Andrzej Rapaczyński, March 25, 2016, New York. Grudzińska-Gross’s and Rapaczyński’s recollections point to a methodological question – namely, how to write about a phenomenon that took place but is not – whether deliberately or not – captured in the archive. In other words, how to tell the story of what is untold in the official script and only told in discourses that do not leave an archival trace?

Moreover, during their incarceration, the young students were manipulated by the security service with the help of fabricated *grypsy* (illegal letters smuggled both inside and outside of prison). The fake *grypsy* were made to look as if they came from other inmates and encouraged the inmates to testify against one another. While some of the arrested, including Kuroń, quickly realized that this was some skillful manipulation, others believed the *grypsy* were authentic and consequently revealed information that was then used against their own friends. Unsurprisingly, these events cast a shadow over friendships as they imposed burdens on some and created temporary splits among others.<sup>346</sup>

As a result of the spreading and escalation of the anti-Zionist campaign that infiltrated the public as well as the private sphere, the everyday life of Poles with Jewish backgrounds, became difficult, if not unbearable. In August 1968 a special, clandestine team was formed by the Central Committee with the aim of creating a list of ‘revisionists’ and ‘Zionists’ who were later removed from their positions.<sup>347</sup> Those who failed to identify with the official party line and those who did not condemn Israel were labelled ‘Polish Zionists’ and categorized as a Zionist threat to Poland. As a result, many Poles of Jewish background were eventually excluded from the party and lost their jobs,<sup>348</sup> which often left whole families in financially precarious situations. This, in turn, exacerbated their existential insecurity.<sup>349</sup>

This highly antagonized atmosphere and the public attacks on ‘Zionists’ who were encouraged to leave for Israel led to a mass emigration of Poles with Jewish background. ‘Facilitating’ the process, the Passport Bureau at the Ministry of Internal Affairs created new guidelines, which made it easier for those who defined themselves as Jewish, and who indicated Israel as the final destination of their trip, to receive the needed documents.<sup>350</sup> The applicants for emigration papers were forced to renounce their Polish citizenship, which meant that their

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<sup>346</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 1, A Report on the Conversation with Grazyna Kuroń, February 25, 1969, 1.

<sup>347</sup> Rozenbaum, ‘Anti-Zionist Campaign,’ 236; Seweryn Blumsztajn, ‘Zrobili nam żydowski Marzec. 48 lat temu wygnano z Polski 15 tys. ludzi,’ *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 12, 2016, <http://wyborcza.pl/magazyn/1,151481,19753299,zrobili-nam-zydowski-marzec-48-lat-temu-wygnano-z-polski-15.html>, last accessed March 16, 2016.

<sup>348</sup> Jan Józef Lipski, ‘Kwestia żydowska,’ *Marzec 68: Referaty z sesji na Uniwersytecie Warszawskim 1981* (Warsaw: Fundacja Batorego, 2008), 167.

<sup>349</sup> Bożena Irena Werbert, ‘Mój Marzec ‘68 i ulica Górskiego,’ <http://warsze.polin.pl/pl/przeszlosc/terazniejszosc>, last accessed March 10, 2016.

<sup>350</sup> Dariusz Stola, ‘Emigracja pomarcowa,’ *Prace Migracyjne* 34 (2000), 7.

decision to leave Poland was final and that they thereby became stateless persons.<sup>351</sup> It was a condition that – as Hannah Arendt had emphasized in 1943 with regard to European Jews who were deprived of their political status – is characterized by the loss of home and of one’s familiarity with daily life, ultimately by the loss of one’s world.<sup>352</sup> As a result of these political and bureaucratic efforts, the post-March emigration was of massive proportions as approximately 15,000 Poles left the country. Among those who left Poland, many were highly educated which could be explained by the fact that the anti-Zionist campaign had a strong anti-intellectual dimension, targeting academics and other intellectuals. Of the total number of emigrants, 36% came from Warsaw<sup>353</sup> and many Jewish institutions such as Joint were shut down. Prominent Yiddish and Jewish figures active in Jewish institutions such as David Sfar and Hirszt Smolar, famous academics such as Zygmunt Bauman and Leszek Kołakowski, and journalists such as Leopold Unger were among those who were forced to leave. Although only few members of the Komandosi group and among Kuroń and Modzelewski’s collaborators identified themselves as primarily Jewish rather than Polish, some of them or their family members left the country, including Jan Gross, Aleksander Smolar, Eugeniusz Smolar, Aleksander Perski, Marta Petrusiewicz, Irena Grudzińska, Seweryn Blumsztajn’s family, and Klaudiusz Weiss.

It is not surprising that for many of the rebellious students, this was a period of radical disenchantment that would have a long-lasting impact on their future lives. Indeed, as Irena Grudzińska-Gross highlights, ‘this was a horrible period in my life, a total catastrophe and tragedy.’<sup>354</sup> The emigrants themselves along with their friends-turned-witnesses remember the emigration and the preparations for it as a stressful, chaotic and in many ways humiliating experience. Articulating a sentiment common among those who had to leave Poland, Seweryn Blumsztajn recalls that ‘everyone felt excluded and wronged.’<sup>355</sup> Blumsztajn also writes that the emigrants ‘remember fear and solitude’ and many cannot forgive their colleagues who ‘were silent at the official meetings when people were accused of Zionism, lost their jobs. They

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<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>352</sup> Hannah Arendt, ‘We Refugees,’ in *Altogether Elsewhere. Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson (Boston: Faber and Faber, 1994), 110-119.

<sup>353</sup> Stola, ‘Emigracja pomarcowa,’ 11.

<sup>354</sup> Irena Grudzińska-Gross, interview.

<sup>355</sup> Blumsztajn, ‘Zrobili nam żydowski Marzec.’

remember neighbors who stopped saying “good morning.”<sup>356</sup> The anti-Semitic campaign not only animated a growing sense of anxiety among Poles with Jewish background but also triggered the break-down of social bonds among colleagues and neighbors. The resulting sense of isolation and alienation from others added another layer of discomfort for those who decided to, or were made to leave. For Irena Grudzińska-Gross, her departure on October 28, 1969 was an escape triggered by her losing a sense of trust in herself and because of seeing so many people leave.<sup>357</sup>

Having realized that he never wanted to be imprisoned again during his 48-hour imprisonment on March 8, Aleksander Perski left Poland in November 1969 with his mother who was his only family member left. Echoing Konstanty Skarbek’s recollections with which this chapter starts, Perski found the last year of his life in Poland to be highly dramatic and traumatizing:

I remember one particularly disturbing moment. Once I submitted all the papers that were needed to be granted the permission to leave the country all kinds of people showed up to claim my apartment. One day in spring 1969 I was sitting with Gaja in my kitchen in the apartment on Plac Unii Lubelskiej and suddenly I hear knocking on the door. I open the door and see ten people, families with children who were about to take over our apartment. Gaja didn’t know then that I was leaving. It was one of the worst moments in my life; that my departure had to look like this.<sup>358</sup>

Feeling stripped of his agency to decide when and how to inform his closest friends about his decision to leave Poland, Perski’s memory highlights the fact that the state’s violence encroached on the most intimate spheres of life. Perski also adds that the anti-Zionist campaign and the anti-Semitism that followed was the first moment in his life that forced him to think of himself as a Polish Jew as he had until then lived in a social bubble in Warsaw surrounded either by other Poles with Jewish background or by non-Jewish Poles who did not pay attention to any type of ‘Jewishness.’ The sense of detachment from his Jewishness was accentuated by his family’s

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<sup>356</sup> Ibid.

<sup>357</sup> Irena Grudzińska-Gross, interview.

<sup>358</sup> Perski, interview.



atheism that went back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Perski decided to leave Poland because 'it became obvious that I could neither work nor study, that the world around was closing down on me and there was anti-Semitism that I didn't understand much of. There was a quick way out of all of this but the way in which it all took place was humiliating.'<sup>359</sup> Perski chose Sweden as his new home because of its geographic proximity to Poland, as opposed to the United States or Israel, as he was convinced that he must still help his friends in Poland. Out of loyalty and a sense of commitment, despite only being a student of psychology, for the first two or three years of his life in Sweden he regularly sent parcels to Gaja in the hope that it would 'help her function and cope' with the situation and that maybe she would send some of the goods to the imprisoned Kuroń.<sup>360</sup> Given the context of continued product scarcity, Perski's help was of symbolic as well as material importance. In addition, even in making major and life-changing decisions, Perski considered how the new country where he was about to move could enable him to maintain his friendships and political commitments that cut across the Iron Curtain.

Anna Hertzberg was 18 at the time she left Poland with her family. In my interview with her, she remembers this period in the following way: 'I had an awareness of who I was, I identified with people who surrounded me. I don't remember if I then realized how lonely I would feel after leaving Poland.' For Hertzberg, the turning point came when she had to say farewell to everyone at the Gdański Station in Warsaw. It was a place from which a large contingent of émigrés departed and for Hertzberg and for others it has become a troubled *lieu de mémoire*: 'this farewell was my life tragedy. I remember that so many tears have flown. I only started feeling despair the moment I stood on the steps to the train wagon and saw the sea of people, who came to say goodbye to me. Everyone came .... It was only then that I realized the enormity and scale of all of this.'<sup>361</sup> The train station came to have a special status in the memory of emigrants<sup>362</sup> as it was from here that the trains were leaving for Vienna where two agencies, Sochnut and Hias, would welcome emigrants and then assisted them in their further trip to Israel or other countries. It was

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<sup>359</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>360</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>361</sup> Interview with Anna Hertzberg, February 25, 2016, New York; for more on the perspective of post-March emigrants themselves see: Kamila Chylińska, 'Emigracja po 1967 roku,' *Kultura* 11, 278 (1970), 17-55; for other testimonies of migrants who left Poland in reaction to the anti-Semitic campaign, see: Teresa Torańska, *Jesteśmy. Rozstania '68* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2008); Sabina Baral, *Zapiski z wygnania* (Kraków: Austeria, 2015).

<sup>362</sup> Blumsztajn, 'Zrobili nam żydowski Marzec.'

here, at Gdański Station that those who left finally had to say goodbye to friends, family and the city they had lived in. For Hertzberg, the departure was experienced as a sad moment of loss, but it was also a moment of brutal realization as she only then grasped how much she appreciated the life she had. As she puts it, 'I was a happy girl in Warsaw, I loved life ... If one is used to one's life then one doesn't know how it feels if one loses it.'<sup>363</sup> What was immediately waiting for her after her departure was not a new life to which she was or could have been looking forward to, but an insecurity, longing and isolation that she describes as an 'enormous emptiness.' It is worth noting here, if only in passing, that Kuroń's reflections on anti-Semitism should be situated precisely in strict political and ethical opposition to such an imposed sense of loneliness and isolation – the breaking of bonds among those in a structurally weaker position by those in power.

On January 15, 1969 Kuroń was sentenced to three and a half years in prison. At least one of his friends, Aleksander Perski, who was only twenty at that time, felt responsible for this sentence. Before the sentence was announced, the trial became a platform for Kuroń and Modzelewski to voice and spread their political visions. Yet, it was also an occasion for Kuroń and Modzelewski to see their friends who, after first being broken by the system, eventually managed to remain loyal to the authors of the *Open Letter*.<sup>364</sup> During their incarceration, both Kuroń and Modzelewski were very much aware of and troubled by the anti-Semitic campaign. As a result, they used the courtroom as a platform to repeatedly voice their critical stance towards the persistently divisive political atmosphere.

In reaction to the anti-Semitic tensions, at the court hearing on January 3, 1969, Modzelewski pointed out the worrying dissemination of anti-Semitic attitudes.<sup>365</sup> Kuroń's reactions to anti-Semitism were similar. Two days later, he delivered a long and emotional speech in court in which he addressed a number of issues including the situation of the working class, but focused on anti-Semitism. Kuroń tried to make it clear that the discrimination against Polish Jews in Poland was not an imaginary problem of the few but a serious and thus all-too-real phenomenon affecting society as a whole. Leaving little space for ambiguity, Kuroń bluntly

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<sup>363</sup> Interview with Anna Hertzberg, New York, February 25, 2016.

<sup>364</sup> For instance Andrzej Mencwel.

<sup>365</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 15, Information No. 192/69, 3 January 1969, 2.

declared that ‘anti-Semitism is a form of killing.’<sup>366</sup> Weaving his personal experience into a broader view of the problem of discrimination, he continued by revealing that when he was asked during the investigation about his nationality he wanted to reply that he was Jewish although he was not. Furthermore, Kuroń underlined how, due to the spread of anti-Semitic attitudes and discourses, one’s Jewish background and heritage became a stigma rather than a source of pride.

During the court hearing on January 11, Modzelewski delivered another speech in which he clearly referred to the anti-Semitic atmosphere in public discourse. As he critically addressed practices of identification and differentiation on the basis of someone’s surname, Modzelewski also claimed that ‘no one should have to prove his or her Polishness.’<sup>367</sup> In his view, such practices resembled the official state practices of Nazi Germany. In a somewhat sarcastic and metaphorical manner, Modzelewski referred to himself and Kuroń in saying that they had both for four years eaten prison bread and that this was their ‘ID of Polishness.’<sup>368</sup> Two days later, in a short speech in court, Kuroń again made his critical stance towards anti-Semitism explicit by vehemently opposing any suggestion that the Komandosi group was embracing xenophobic and nationalistic ideas and sentiments.<sup>369</sup>

Even in such decisive moments as the court hearings, Kuroń and Modzelewski remained open about their political commitments and loyal to the values they believed in. Significantly, despite the danger of repeated prison sentences, they defended their friends and others who remained anonymous against the anti-Semitic hate-speech and continued attacks they were subjected to. Turning the courtroom into a political forum and public stage, Kuroń and Modzelewski’s pronouncements can be viewed as acts of ‘speaking truth to power’ on behalf of those who were denied their Polish identity let alone the access to the institutionally supported press. Therefore they exemplify the critical practice of parrhesia, speaking the truth out of a position of relative powerlessness and a strong, emotionally embedded sense of ethical and political obligation even if it puts oneself in danger.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid., Information No. 193.69.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., Information No. 199/69, January 11, 1969, 3-4.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid., Information No. 200/69, January 13, 1969, 1.

<sup>370</sup> See Michel Foucault, *Fearless Speech* (New York: Semiotext(e), [1983] 2001), 19.

There are many ways of interpreting the set of complex developments and events, which have come to be known as the 'March Crisis'. For Zygmunt Bauman, the student protest of March 1968 turned around reclaiming a sense of subjectivity by those who were dispossessed of their own subjectivity.<sup>371</sup> On an institutional level, it could also be seen as an assault on the autonomy of the university and the special, and until then relatively stable, position of the academics within Polish society.<sup>372</sup> For Adam Michnik, who was one of the victims of the hate campaign, it was 'the greatest abomination that he ever saw in his whole life.'<sup>373</sup> The true complexity of these events only comes into view, however, if one combines the focus on the official political side, such as Polish-Israeli relations and official pronouncements, with the dynamic of the evolving student protests and the personal experience of those who became entangled in the anti-Zionist campaign. The campaign was conducted by the party at least as much for internal as for external reasons.

Against this background, I now turn to the development of Kuroń's critical stance on anti-Semitism and any other form of ethnic or religious discrimination. Although due to his imprisonment, Kuroń was not directly exposed to the mass emigration and the experiences many of his friends went through, his writings can be read as an indirect response to this experience.

#### *Kuroń's Tolerance – Genesis of a Political Commitment*

Kuroń was arrested on March 8, 1968, sentenced on January 15, 1969 to three and a half years in prison, and imprisoned until 1971 – his second imprisonment after he had already spent three years in prison after writing the *Open Letter to the Party*. As a result, Kuroń was not a direct witness to the post-March emigration that saw many of his friends leaving Poland. It is nevertheless worthwhile to search for his thoughts on this period in his writings, as in retrospect, his opposition to anti-Semitism and other forms of racializing discrimination and bias seem clearly shaped by this dramatic turn of events even though he experienced them at a distance. After his release from prison in 1971, Kuroń continued his political activism and remained in touch with his

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<sup>371</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, 'O frustracji i kuglarzach,' *Kultura* 12, 255 (1968), 7.

<sup>372</sup> *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>373</sup> Adam Michnik, 'Rzecz o Jacku. Wolność, sprawiedliwość, miłosierdzie,' *Zeszyty Literackie*, 88 (2004), 52.

friends who had left the country. Moreover, Kuroń's commitment to tolerance and anti-nationalism remained unchanged throughout his life and had a deep impact on his young collaborators and friends.

How, then, did Kuroń's enduring commitment to tolerance come about? The initial drive behind Kuroń's disapproval of any form of racializing discrimination can be linked to the fact that he was born in 1934 in the city of Lviv where he spent his early years with his parents and younger brother. Despite Poland's attempts to 'polonize'<sup>374</sup> Lviv in the interwar period, the Lviv of Kuroń's childhood was a multi-ethnic city with a Polish, Ukrainian and Jewish population.<sup>375</sup> Recalling life in multi-ethnic Lviv as filled with ethnic tensions, Kuroń writes in one of his autobiographies: 'I grew up with a cult of the "Lwów Eaglets" ... but I was fascinated by difference and otherness.'<sup>376</sup> The 'Lwów Eaglets' refers to a group of young Poles active in the popular uprising of the Polish inhabitants of Lviv against the Ukrainian soldiers of the Habsburg Army in November 1918 during the collapse of the Empire. The Ukrainian soldiers declared Lviv to be a Ukrainian city and proclaimed the founding of a Ukrainian state. Polish civilians of Lviv who volunteered to join the clashes with the Ukrainian soldiers included young scouts and other youth – hence the diminutive 'Eaglets.'

In spite of his patriotic education, Kuroń's positive relationship to the city and Polish-Ukrainian relations went beyond a Polish-centered perspective. In 2002, when his health condition was already deteriorating, Kuroń delivered a lecture in Lviv in which he attempted to address and overcome the negative sentiments Poles and Ukrainians have towards one other. After recognizing and admitting the historical injustices experienced by Ukrainians, Kuroń emphasized the entangled history that binds these two nations together.<sup>377</sup> Furthermore, the lecture also allowed him to express his emotional attachment to Lviv and Ukraine by stating that 'I am absolutely in love with Ukraine, since my early childhood.'<sup>378</sup> At the end of his talk, Kuroń

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<sup>374</sup> Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus 1569-1999* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2003), 134-136.

<sup>375</sup> On the history of Lviv and the political developments in the interwar period see: Tarik Cyril Amar, *The Paradox of Ukrainian Lviv* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2015), 22-43; on the history of Lviv more generally see: Yroslav Hrytsak, 'Lviv: A Multicultural History through the Centuries,' *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 24 (2000), 47-73.

<sup>376</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 21.

<sup>377</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Wspólna ojczyzna wspólnych grobów,' *Zeszyty Literackie*, 88 (2004), 43.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

called for a mode of co-habitation that would overcome antagonisms without denying differences, ending by saying that 'I owe the richness of my inner and spiritual life to Ukraine.'<sup>379</sup>

Another formative experience in Kuroń's early life was the story of a Jewish girl who lived with him for some time during the Second World War in occupied Lviv. One day after a serious fight with his father, whom he regarded highly, Kuroń spent a night outside on a square where he found a Jewish girl in hiding. He knew her face as she had once come to his home to ask for shelter but was sent away when his father realized that she was a Jewish girl from the ghetto. When young Kuroń recognized her, he returned home to inform his father that she was hiding in the square. Eventually the family decided to help the girl, giving her a fake name, Zośka Czarnecka, and pretending that she was Kuroń's cousin. For reasons of precaution, Kuroń's father decided to move young Kuroń and Zośka to a secret apartment where they spent the whole autumn and half of winter.<sup>380</sup> Since the apartment was a clandestine transit point for hiding Jews they sometimes had to share it with other people, for instance with members of the Roma minority who were also in hiding. As Zośka was older than Kuroń, she knew Polish literature and told him a lot about books, educating him not only about literature but also about how to relate to the 'Other' through relations of mutual care and responsibility. Much later, Kuroń's description captures the bond of affection he felt for her: '[I]t was my great and childish love. ... I was probably the only close person she had and she was probably the closest person to me.'<sup>381</sup> This experience came to an abrupt end, when one day Kuroń woke up and realized that Zośka was ice-cold. It turned out that Zośka had committed suicide by taking a cyanide pill that was stored in the apartment for use by resistance fighters or the members of the Roma minority who were in hiding. Kuroń recalls that he knew that he should go home as quickly as possible to inform his father about Zośka's death, but his body refused to co-operate. He simply could not stop crying.

For a young boy who had to take care of a girl in a life-threatening situation by buying her food, keeping her company and making sure she was not lonely, her suicide was a deeply upsetting experience that cast a shadow over the rest of his life. Later on, Kuroń also had the impression that Zośka might have been blackmailed and sexually harassed by the caretaker of the

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>380</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 28.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 21.

house, although he admits that he may as well have been mistaken.<sup>382</sup> Regardless, he was haunted by a sense of guilt because, as he writes, 'I had the feeling that I was the only one in the world who could have helped her, and I couldn't.'<sup>383</sup> According to his friend, Aleksander Smolar, Kuroń's self-understanding was shaped by a strong sense of individual guilt, that accompanied him whenever he thought he had not done enough, and a sense of collective guilt on behalf of his community that in the past had not done enough.<sup>384</sup> Yet, there is another dimension to the impact the relationship with Zośka had on Kuroń's subsequent life, as it also served as a moral compass guiding him in the future: 'it was the most important story from the times of occupation, the story of my attitude towards Jews, the story of all my life choices marked by death.'<sup>385</sup> Turning back to this experience Kuroń had as a child, we can see the roots of his encompassing and steadfast commitment and sensitivity.

It is worth pausing here over the somewhat atypical, if not unique, character of this formative experience in Kuroń's life and the meaning he ascribes to it. In order to better understand the particularity of this concrete experience, it might be fruitful to bring it into comparison with a short piece Sławomir Mrożek<sup>386</sup> published in *Kultura* in 1984. In a likely autobiographical short story, 'Nos' [The Nose], Mrożek captures the subtle nuances that denote anti-Semitism as well as the power of obvious, embodied and normalized anti-Semitism biases present in post-war Poland. In his typically absurd style, Mrożek writes that in 1946 at the age of 16, the narrator suddenly discovers a new nose that appeared on his face. Unhappy with his new nose as it was big and could be compared to Chopin's nose, he concluded that 'the nose was a failure.'<sup>387</sup> Eventually, he frankly admits that '[m]y nose was unambiguous: it was Jewish. How am I supposed to show myself to other people? They will take me for a Jew and if it comes to anything they will not believe my innocence.'<sup>388</sup> The story then explores how the protagonist's 'goddamn

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<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>383</sup> *Ibid.*, 30.

<sup>384</sup> Smolar, 'Na pożegnanie Jacka,' 66.

<sup>385</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 28.

<sup>386</sup> Sławomir Mrożek (1930-2013) was a Polish playwright, cartoonist and satirist who left the Polish People's Republic in 1953.

<sup>387</sup> Sławomir Mrożek, 'Nos,' *Kultura* 7, 442/8, 443 (1984), 37.

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

nose,' or maybe rather what it may have stood for, worries him and fills him with fear and a feeling of helplessness.<sup>389</sup>

The way in which he sets up the story allows Mrozek, who was not Jewish himself, to reflect on the mechanisms of anti-Semitism and to connect them to his own family's experience during the occupation. He wonders about anti-Semitic undertones in what his family members said and did and cautiously admits that there might indeed have been faint traces of this prejudice. Recalling that during the Second World War no Polish Jew ever came to his family's house to ask for help, he wonders if someone in need would have received help: 'what next? To risk a life for a Jew?'<sup>390</sup> The attitude expressed in this episode stems from a then prevalent sense of distance from the situation of Polish Jews because '[u]ltimately what was happening between Germans and Jews was an issue between Germans and Jews ... It was unpleasant ..., maybe even dreadful, if one looks at it, but it's not our issue.'<sup>391</sup> Clearly, the shape of his nose disturbs this safe and undisturbed world.

Later in the story the narrator tells us of his classmate Cwibelsztajn who was of Jewish background and openly proud of his Jewishness, going beyond the role of the submissive Jew that was ascribed to and expected from him. Cwibelsztajn's brightness and commitment to learning aroused envy among his classmates which was buttressed by rumors that he clandestinely belonged to the Jewish organization Haganah.<sup>392</sup> For these reasons, Cwibelsztajn was bullied and mocked by other children. The polarized atmosphere escalated to the point that he was provoked to enter a physical fight. Because of his small stature and the fact that he faced several opponents he lost the fight. Witnessing how he was fiercely being beaten by small as well as bigger boys, Mrozek describes the narrator's incapacity to act with great sincerity: 'I was stuck as I was stuck from the beginning, I was stuck even more, I was absolutely stuck.'<sup>393</sup> The melee ended when Leszek Herdegen,<sup>394</sup> who enjoyed wide-spread respect because of his participation in the Warsaw Uprising, appeared. Herdegen saved Cwibelsztajn by screaming at his opponents, prompting the

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>390</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

<sup>392</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>393</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>394</sup> Leszek Herdegen (1929-1980) was a famous actor and close friend of Sławomir Mrozek.



narrator to admit his surprise at hearing Herdegen using such words as ‘immorality, meanness, disgrace and shame’ in the middle of all the cursing.<sup>395</sup> To the narrator these words seemed weirdly out of place as they suggested a reversal of the roles, as if a Pole was being beaten by Jews. After Herdegen’s intervention, everyone felt relief as if he had saved them from something worse that was about to happen. Mrożek ends the story by letting the narrator state that he learned to like his nose despite the fact that it caused him suffering: ‘had it not been there, I would understand less now and I would feel even less.’<sup>396</sup>

The aloof protagonist captures the inherent detachment from ‘the Jewish question,’ a remoteness which helped non-Jewish Poles to cope with wartime cruelty and that could be viewed as a breeding ground for the anti-Zionist campaign. Yet, it does not follow that the gap cannot be bridged as attitudes and affects are not static and learning processes can happen both on the cognitive and the affective level, as the final quote above suggests. The comparison between Mrożek’s and Kuroń’s accounts, one (semi-)fictional, the other a non-fictional memory, also reveals the difficulties of coping with the price one has to pay for both indifference and participation in relation to the situation of Polish Jews. In addition, it highlights that Kuroń’s commitment was not at all representative of his generation and stands out against a broader background of the memory of wartime fear, apathy, and indifference that was only overcome in certain circumstances.

Rather than being governed by an overarching theoretical structure, Kuroń’s views on tolerance were fragmented and situational. From his early childhood onwards, his views were embedded in concrete, even mundane, experiences that triggered deep reflections and concrete actions,. Another example of this is provided in a short unpublished article with the title *Granice mieć z miłości* [To Have Borders Made of Love] that Kuroń wrote under a pseudonym E. B. G. He describes the meeting of a group of young people that he observed as he was wandering in the Bieszczady Mountains in the Southeast of Poland at the moment when ‘the leaves, turning yellow, are most beautiful.’<sup>397</sup> The group was singing ‘I will lift across the borders the viburnum, ears of

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<sup>395</sup> Mrożek, ‘Nos,’ 45.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> AO III/12K.35, E. B. G. [Jacek Kuroń], *Granice mieć z miłości*.

grain and lilac and out of them borders will be made – of love not of blood.<sup>398</sup> These lines come from a poem by the young writer and critic Andrzej Trzebiński (1922-1943)<sup>399</sup> who joined the nationalist and anti-Semitic underground organization Konfederacja Narodu [Confederation of the Nation] in the summer of 1942. Trzebiński was killed in the city center of Warsaw on November 12, 1943 by the Nazi Germans for eating in a canteen with a fake document. Kuroń writes that hearing Trzebiński's poetry in the mountains had both a 'beautiful and sad meaning.'<sup>400</sup> He was touched by and found beauty in the very fact that the poetry of those who were murdered is still alive despite their death. At the same time, he admits that it was

[s]ad because I deeply believe that Trzebiński and his colleagues accepted gloomy and senseless as well as dangerous stupidities about an empire with all its xenophobia, intolerance and dogmatism. This occurred under the pressure of contempt during the times in which they happened to grow up.<sup>401</sup>

At the end of this short article Kuroń states somewhat melancholically that 'one would like to believe that the shot poet's contemporary colleagues [the students he met in the mountains] are not merely moved by him but that they will learn from him.'<sup>402</sup> Concluding on a pessimistic note, he doubts that the youth he met in the mountains will actually try to avoid Trzebiński's mistakes.

Even events that appeared innocuous, such as the one during the hiking trip in the mountains, inspired Kuroń to reflect on the mistakes of those who followed an ideology that he considered to be wrong and the implications of those mistakes for those living under the socio-political conditions of the time. In condemning xenophobia and intolerance, Kuroń also remained sensitive to the tragic death of the young Trzebiński. This episode can be taken to exemplify Kuroń's character which was often described as charitable and almost unconditionally forgiving. His close friend Adam Michnik remembers how he was 'struck by how Kuroń thought and spoke without hatred. And there was no other person as attacked, discriminated and spat at as he

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<sup>398</sup> Ibid.

<sup>399</sup> For more on his life, see his diary: Andrzej Trzebiński, *Pamiętnik* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2001).

<sup>400</sup> AO III/12K.35, *Granice mieć z miłości*.

<sup>401</sup> Ibid.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

was.<sup>403</sup> Because of his political activism Kuroń and his family were under continuous surveillance and were exposed to the bullying and violence of the secret police. For instance, in 1978 his beloved dog, Fisia, was poisoned.<sup>404</sup> According to Michnik, in the face of these experiences Kuroń still remained forgiving and free of any revenge-driven thoughts. As Michnik recognizes, 'I cannot think about his determined mercy without envy.'<sup>405</sup>

While anti-Semitism was experienced by Poles of Jewish background before their departure, during and after the anti-Zionist campaign in terms of isolation and alienation, Kuroń's ethical commitments were precisely based on a principled reaction against such forms of politically and socially imposed isolation and alienation. Politically and ethically he believed in caring for others and creating bonds of collective solidarity. Unlike those who believed anti-Semitism was an abstract phenomenon – a set of wrong ideals or irrational beliefs that could be refuted on a purely intellectual level – for Kuroń, anti-Semitism was embedded in concrete social situations, practices and habitus. For him, it had an affective logic of its own, and stemmed from concrete political actions and projects. This understanding of the dynamics of politics, especially in the context of late socialist Poland, had an enormous influence on the closest group of his younger collaborators. His political commitment, which formed an essential part of his political habitus, inspired them to act and supported them in their decisions and activism. As Kuroń emphasized, politics is never solely about abstract ideas and mechanical action because 'in the process of collaboration strong emotional bonds are being formed'<sup>406</sup> – emotional bonds that were characterized by sensibility and openness as much as by steadfast political commitment even in the face of long periods of incarceration and isolation. As the interrogation transcripts that I discussed above reveal, the worldview and passion for politics of Kuroń's closest milieu overlap with his ethos. The milieu's worldview was informed by a habitus that was tied together by a set of ideological and personal commitments that in their combination served as a motivational source and affective life-line for this very resilient form of political activism. When Kuroń felt the pain and fear of the Polish Jews and acted in solidarity with them, he did so as a

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<sup>403</sup> Michnik, 'Rzecz o Jacku,' 54.

<sup>404</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdny czas,' 475.

<sup>405</sup> Michnik, 'Rzecz o Jacku,' 54.

<sup>406</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 296.

sentient human being, committed friend and political activist. Indeed, being open to the pain of others and acting in solidarity was an essential part of his vision of the social, of being left-wing, of being a Pole, of his habitus. As Michnik described Kuroń, 'Jacek loved people, real people, people made of blood and bones ... in their suffering, with the hardship of existence, with disease, with death.'<sup>407</sup>

Similarly, as I suggested above, Kuroń's understanding of anti-Semitism as a breaking of social bonds urges us to understand the complexity of the crisis of March '68 in Poland not only in terms of the large-scale political dynamics I reconstructed in the first section, but also as a lived reality to which individual and collective reactions formed on the ground. It was a reality that was lived, remembered and carried on in the future political activism of those who stayed and those who left. Although Zośka, Cwibelsztajn and many of the Polish Jews with whom Kuroń's and his friends' paths had crossed were no more, he and his collaborators provide an exemplary case of solidarity in a struggle they saw as a struggle 'For our and your freedom!'<sup>408</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Adam Michnik, 'Wolność, Sprawiedliwość, Miłosierdzie. Rzecz o Jacku,' *Gazeta Wyborcza*, June 18, 2004, <http://wyborcza.pl/1,93057,2138617.html>, last accessed March 1, 2016.

<sup>408</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 301.

### Chapter 3

#### Affective Community – Kuroń's Emotional Habitus in the 1970s

Go where the others went to the dark boundary  
For the golden fleece of nothingness your last reward  
Go upright among those who are on their knees  
Those with their backs turned and those toppled in the dust  
You have survived not so that you might live  
You have little time you must give testimony  
Be courageous when reason fails you be courageous  
In the final reckoning it is the only thing that counts  
And let your helpless Anger – may it be like the sea  
Whenever you hear the voice of the insulted and beaten  
... Be faithful Go  
— Zbigniew Herbert, *The Message of Mr. Cogito*<sup>409</sup>

The first few pages of Tadeusz Konwicki's (1926-2015) acclaimed novel *Mała apokalipsa* (A Minor Apocalypse)<sup>410</sup> contain a scene in which the protagonist, a writer himself, receives an unannounced visit from two old friends, Henryk and Rysio. From the conversation between the narrator and the guests, the reader learns that the narrator spends much of his time alone at home and has gradually withdrawn from social interactions. After having some shots of vodka, the somewhat intrusive guests try to convince the protagonist to set himself on fire in front of the party headquarters in an act of resistance and protest against the government. As the narrator tries to persuade Henryk and Rysio that he is not the best person to commit such a public and defiant act of self-immolation, his friends, despite his doubts, firmly and stubbornly insist that he commit suicide.

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<sup>409</sup> Zbigniew Herbert, 'The Message of Mr. Cogito,' *The Collected Poems* (London: Academic Books, 2017), 333-334.

<sup>410</sup> Tadeusz Konwicki, *Mała apokalipsa* (Warsaw: Alfa, [1979] 1988).

Even though today's reader might not know much about the characters of Henryk and Rysio or about the details of the political situation in which the story is set, to readers in 1979, when the novel was first published by an underground publishing house, the context was easy to identify. While they are a somewhat odd couple, Henryk and Rysio can be seen as embodying the figure of the charismatic and radical dissident wholeheartedly devoted to challenging the political system through dramatic acts and, in so doing, presenting an ambivalent moral authority. The claustrophobic conversation between the guests and the narrator reiterates the intense, destructive, vodka-infused and generally challenging nature of political activism in the 1970s Warsaw. Rather than being an explicitly activist-minded novel, *Mata apokalipsa* is about ambiguous pronouncements, captivating moral visions and the price one is willing to pay for critique and the public articulation of dismay. Indeed, the novel's sense of the complexity of the relationships between the characters and the grim description of the main protagonist's world has been recognized as a story fundamentally about everyday life under late socialism and the dissident milieu in Poland. Although Kuroń knew of Konwicki's book and was aware that the figures of Henryk and Rysio give a crude caricature of his personality and passionate political commitment, Kuroń found the book brilliant.<sup>411</sup>

Just as the first scene in the book challenges the conventional category of a distinctly heroic form of political activism, the life and legacy of Jacek Kuroń can be seen as undermining the narratives of unencumbered individual struggle that even inform stereotypical representations of his own political practice. In order to highlight the essentially affective and communal dimension of political opposition, this chapter will further explore Kuroń's impact on the group of university students living in Warsaw who were introduced in the previous chapter and who became activists in the milieu they formed around Kuroń.<sup>412</sup> This milieu in turn sustained Kuroń's activism and that of the students through the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s. I shall also argue that the milieu's way of performing beliefs and values built on its members' formative experience in the socialist scouting group *Walterowcy*, which started in the 1950s. This complicates linear

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<sup>411</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Gwiezdny czas. „Wiary i winy” ciąg dalszy,' in *Autobiografia* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, [1991] 2011), 476.

<sup>412</sup> On the evolution of systematic approaches to emerging social settings and the idea of the 'milieu,' see: Paul Rabinow, *French Modern: Norms and Forms of Social Environment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989).

narratives of a progressive build-up of capacities and repertoires of contestation. Membership in the Walterowcy and the fact that the milieu adapted its methods to changing political circumstances helped it orient its political action over time.

My hypothesis is that viewing political mobilization in socialist Warsaw through the lens of the emotional habitus of Kuroń's milieu as it was shaped by its members' experiences in the Walterowcy, rather than in the narrow terms of their rational critiques of state abuse or dramatic individual acts of protest, allows us to understand the significance of bonds of friendship<sup>413</sup> for political mobilization. In so doing, I hope to reveal an essential aspect of oppositional practice. In order to understand the unique characteristics of Kuroń's close environment and its political dynamics, it is thus necessary to provide an account of the broad variety of ways in which he engaged with his closest collaborators, forming lasting social and political bonds that had powerful afterlives and shaped the very logic of maintaining political opposition.

Framing the analysis in these terms, makes it clear that in order to more fully articulate the trans-individual experience of political activists and the emotional engagement on their side in late socialist Poland, it is helpful to include the role that embodied emotions had in helping to create and sustain the political milieu. In an attempt to tentatively define the emotional habitus, I draw out its key characteristics based on a close study of Kuroń's milieu: (1) the emotional habitus is inherently related and relational and linked to a set of practices; (2) it has an enabling dimension by transmitting affective states and producing bonds; (3) just as political mobilization, it is embedded in and shaped by the historical context and thus calls for historical reflection and historicization; (4) it integrates the private with the public. These characteristics will not be taken up one by one in the further analysis but rather woven together throughout the analysis in order to avoid the risk of imposing a theoretical framework onto the historical material.

While Kuroń dedicated his life to developing and putting into action his ideas on pedagogy, collaboration and social movements into action, social bonds and the emotions they encompass

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<sup>413</sup> On the crucial role of friendship circles in the Soviet Union see Juliane Fürst, 'Born Under the Same Star: Refuseniks, Dissidents, and Late Socialist Society,' in *The Jewish Movement in the Soviet Union*, ed. Yaacov Roi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2012), 137-163; Brian Porter-Szűcs argues that the cultivation of family bonds, friendships and other networks of support and trust was unavoidable during the continued economy of shortage in late socialist Poland, see Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 273.

gripped Kuroń's critical reflection and shaped his self-image. As he highlights in his autobiography, 'my whole life is in fact about creating friendships, love and comradeship in the service of a noble cause. This is the most important thing in my life.'<sup>414</sup>

I will focus on Kuroń through interviews with two of his closest collaborators, Karol Modzelewski and Joanna Szczęsna. This will allow me to go beyond the overdetermined aspect of Bourdieu's notion of habitus because in the case of Kuroń and his friends' specific emotional community, the reproductive character of the habitus converged with its enabling, empowering and transformative dimension. Belonging to a group – an affective community – with dissident political ambitions, based on historically deep personal bonds, interpersonal rapport and with its own rituals, also involved continuous work on the self and transformative identity formation. This, in turn, could be seen as allowing members to gain a sense of moral orientation and empowerment that provided an affective base for their activism. Studying Kuroń and his milieu in 1970s Warsaw, but also how their activism was influenced by his vision of critical pedagogy from the late 1950s and the shared early experience in the scout movement sheds light on the fluctuating lived experience of political mobilization. It also brings to light the historical temporalities of political opposition and how these were connected to the specific combination of distancing from and commitment to Kuroń and the peculiar bonds of loyalty this dynamic generated.

### *Affective Pedagogies: Kuroń and the Walterowcy Scouts*

In analyzing Kuroń's remarkable capacity to create and maintain relationships, it is necessary to turn to his pedagogical vision, even if only briefly. Pedagogy was one of his passions and his pedagogical ideas were integral to his attempts to theorize about politics and social movements. More importantly, they formed an essential part of his personal relationships. Kuroń's close friend and collaborator Jan Lityński writes that Kuroń 'felt like an educator. He was not a politician. Politics was for him a tool to carry out his educational ideas.'<sup>415</sup> A similar note is struck by a

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<sup>414</sup> Kuroń, *Wiara i Wina*, 30.

<sup>415</sup> Jan Lityński, 'Nie był politykiem,' *Zeszyty Literackie* 22, 4 (2004), 128.



reference letter written by the vice-director of the Scouting Association Wojciech Jaskot in 1962 in which Kuroń is characterized as ‘a gifted, hard-working, deeply ideological [scout] who can organize people around him, convince them and mobilize them to work.’<sup>416</sup>

Kuroń’s commitment to pedagogy can be traced back to 1953-55<sup>417</sup> when, together with Stanisław Czuby, Aleksander Musiał, and Stefan Garwacki, he organized scouting excursions out of which emerged the left-wing scout groups Walterowcy. The name came from ‘Walter,’ the pseudonym of the Polish communist general Karol Świerczewski (1897-1947). The troops flourished on the wave of the post-1956 renaissance of Polish scouting and remained active until 1961.<sup>418</sup> They had links to the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP)<sup>419</sup> which, in turn, was inspired by the Soviet Komsomol. As a key mass youth organization, the ZMP was under strict party supervision from its inception in 1948 until its dissolution in January 1957.<sup>420</sup> In the same period, seven scout clubs officially formed the Walterowcy Scout Troops.<sup>421</sup> Of the seven clubs located throughout Warsaw,<sup>422</sup> the one in the northern district of Żoliborz, where Kuroń’s apartment was located, was best known.

Committed to creating a better and more just world, the Walterowcy troops were known for being fully engaged in promoting socialism. Hence, they opposed the nationalistic tradition of Polish scouting, which was associated with the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association (ZHP), by actively spreading a communist vision of the world and engaging in practices of socialist upbringing. Known for their secular, coeducational and anti-hierarchical character, the aim of this ideologically-colored and communist scout group was to ‘emotionally bind children to the project of building communism in Poland and in the world.’<sup>423</sup>

On their regular camping trips, even the youngest scouts participated in the decision-making process along with playing games, swimming and singing songs in Russian, Ukrainian and

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<sup>416</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 12, Reference on the Comrade Jacek Kuroń, son of Henryk, born 1934, September 17, 1962.

<sup>417</sup> *Krag Walterowski: Walterowcy* (Warsaw, 1959), 5.

<sup>418</sup> On the history of Polish post-war scouting, see Andrzej Friszke, *Związek Harcerstwa Polskiego 1956–1963. Społeczna organizacja wychowawcza w systemie politycznym PRL* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2016).

<sup>419</sup> Wojciech Hausner and Marek Wierzbicki, *Sto lat harcerstwa* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2015), 99.

<sup>420</sup> Sadowska, *Sercem i myślą związani z Partią*, 43-50.

<sup>421</sup> Olgierd Fietkewicz, ed., *Leksykon Harcerstwa* (Warsaw: Młodzieżowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1988), 487.

<sup>422</sup> *Krag Walterowski*, 6.

<sup>423</sup> Hausner and Wierzbicki, *Sto lat harcerstwa*, 90.

Chinese. Through camping, scouts and their leaders formed strong bonds, and children learned self-governance and responsibility through teamwork. Social hierarchies and political ideologies were, of course, not completely absent from this realm. Called 'red scouts' because of the red neckerchiefs, they contested xenophobic (anti-Semitic) right-wing discourses that were present in Polish society. Seweryn Blumsztajn, one of Kuroń's closest friends and collaborators, was also one of his first pupils in the Walterowcy. His experiences in the red scouts, which launched him on his turbulent career of political dissidence, has had a lasting impact on his life. In 1974, Blumsztajn submitted a master's thesis on the Walterowcy, written under the supervision of Jan Turowski, at the Catholic University in Lublin, in which he stated that 'the red scarfs were treated as an ideological declaration, an identification with the tradition of the working-class movement. It was important given that in post-war scouting we were probably the only scouting group to wear such scarfs.'<sup>424</sup>



Figure 4: Walterowcy summer camp, late 1950s

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<sup>424</sup> Seweryn Blumsztajn, *Rola Zadania społecznego w funkcjonowaniu grupy wychowawczej*, unpublished MA Thesis, Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 1974, 43.

In the self-understanding of the *Walterowcy*, a proper socialist education presupposes as much as it seeks to inculcate and strengthen a fundamental commitment to relationships with other members of society. By extension the group was opposed to an education that puts the child as an individual at the center of the society in a way that could foster an individualist attitude. As Kuroń noted in his book on scouting from 1960, 'in everyday scouting practice the human being has to learn to think about others and to work for others. We must help him find his own worldview that will be connected to the interest of the whole of society.'<sup>425</sup>

Kuroń's socialist and pedagogical vision also consisted of engaging scouts, and children in general, in active participation that would instill a sense of care for their immediate surrounding in them. He stressed that to instill these socialist values it was not enough for troop leaders to teach scouts to follow their orders and those of the state, for obedience to authority was only a small part of a truly socialist life. During the Second General Congress of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association, which took place in Warsaw April 18-21, 1959, Kuroń stated that a proper socialist education involved children's participation both in theory and practice so that they learn how to set rules that they will follow and, as a result, learn to be responsible for others. As he put it:

We must realize that such a [pro-state] training constitutes only one part of a socialist education and cannot under any condition serve as its replacement. What, then, is socialist education? ... The point is to teach children in our scouting groups to make decisions that must stand in relation to their scouting team and to teach them to take full responsibility for their decisions. The point is to teach children to be responsible for their own work and for the team. This is relevant not only to scouting but also for socialist democracy in general, and this is the only way for our scouting groups to give young people a socialist training.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>425</sup> Jacek Kuroń, *Uwaga Zespół! Z drużyną i w drużynie* (Warsaw: Harcerskie, 1960), 7.

<sup>426</sup> *Nasz Zjazd: II Zjazd Walny Związku Harcerstwa Polskiego, Warszawa 18-21.IV.1959, referaty, dyskusja, uchwały* (Warsaw: Harcerskie, 1959), 176-177.

In other words, according to Kuroń, socialist education could not be narrowly limited to enabling passive and total obedience to the state; rather, he believed children, like the working class, should be trained to participate in co-rule and feel responsible for their closest environment. Thus, scouting should be an empowering training experience in which power is evenly shared and enacted by scouts. Even in the late 1950s, then, Kuroń did not see the role of pedagogy as authoritatively instilling an attitude of unequivocal support for the state. He wanted to inculcate socialist norms of conduct in a cooperative and non-authoritarian way, which he believed to be of universal significance. Thus, even a community as small as a scout troop could be a laboratory for socialist pedagogy and grassroots pedagogical practice.

Kuroń's attitude towards the state's authority had a lasting impact on the young scouts who later formed a key dissident milieu. In his master's thesis on the *Walterowcy*, Blumsztajn describes how the young scouts distanced themselves from the party and developed a more critical attitude as they realized that it did not represent the whole of the communist movement.<sup>427</sup> Thus, while the activists' criticism of the party's official discourse was shaped by the immediate political situation in the 1970s, it had its roots in the *Walterowcy* experience of the late 1950s and the way in which the scouts were embedded in a larger political context shaped by Stalinism and de-Stalinization, which was addressed in the first chapter.

Kuroń articulated his vision of a pro-active upbringing on multiple occasions. Critical of what he saw as the enduring maladies of the traditional pre-war Polish scouting tradition, Kuroń tried to identify the problems facing late socialist education in an article published in the official scouting monthly *Harcerstwo* [Scouting] in the fall of 1959.<sup>428</sup> The article begins by stating that the views articulated in it had not been formed 'behind the desk,' but were rooted in the author's practical experience in the *Walterowcy*. Echoing thoughts he had expressed elsewhere, Kuroń then goes on to criticize a socialist education that promotes narrow pro-state attitudes and to emphasize and defend the inherently social character of scouting, which, he believed, manifested itself in scouts' critical engagement in social affairs.<sup>429</sup> The article ends with Kuroń's hope and expectation that by 'actively including the youth in building socialism the youth will attach itself

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<sup>427</sup> Blumsztajn, 'Rola Zadania społecznego w funkcjonowaniu grupy wychowawczej,' 49.

<sup>428</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Niektóre problemy wychowania socjalistycznego,' *Harcerstwo*, 5, 1959, 6, 49-55.

<sup>429</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

emotionally to the very process of creating socialism as well as the idea of socialism itself.<sup>430</sup> Even in 1959, bringing about a socialist world for Kuroń involved a labor of love as well as intellectual and practical engagement.

Unsurprisingly, Kuroń consistently, though indirectly, emphasized the novel character of the proper socialist education (as opposed to the traditional one) that was at the same time in line with the most important values of the proletarian tradition. It was obvious to him that this pedagogical project had to focus on teaching shared norms, such as class solidarity.<sup>431</sup> For him, it meant a specifically socialist morality that is centered around the collective determination of the conditions and rules under which people live so that all members of society can regard themselves as both the authors and addressees of these rules and conditions.<sup>432</sup> This principle of autonomy as shared authorship was key to the Walterowcy practice in general and the good functioning of the scout groups in particular.<sup>433</sup> As a consequence, Kuroń opposed the competitive and hierarchical character of traditional scouting and emphasized the centrality of the scout team in the collective and shared practice of scouting<sup>434</sup> that he thought of as egalitarian and inclusive.<sup>435</sup>

The politically and socially engaged character of the Walterowcy was based on three principles: internationalism (as opposed to nationalism), egalitarianism (as opposed to a society based on privilege), and democracy (as opposed to any form of authoritarian rule).<sup>436</sup> For Kuroń, pedagogy was central to social life, for

it is an obligation of the human being ... not only to live in a society but primarily to create it. ... He has to consciously and actively participate in remaking human relations: he has to organize people to act, submit himself to the will of the majority but also to disagree, to

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<sup>430</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>431</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 52-53.

<sup>433</sup> *Krag Walterowski: Walterowcy*, 30.

<sup>434</sup> Kuroń, 'Niektóre problemy wychowania socjalistycznego,' 53-54.

<sup>435</sup> Kuroń's article was met with criticism: his argument was framed as being naively idealist and his conceptual apparatus as messy; see Andrzej Mazur, 'Utopia i wychowanie,' *Harcerstwo*, 10, 1960, 37-43; for Kuroń's reply, see Jacek Kuroń, 'Jeszcze jeden (anty) mazur ...,' *Harcerstwo*, 10, 1960, 44-50.

<sup>436</sup> AOK, AO III/12 K, Jacek Kuroń, *O związku wiedzy z postawa zaangażowania*.

listen and to lead, he has to be not only a comrade but also a friend, a lover, and a father.<sup>437</sup>

As this quote illustrates, Kuroń's understanding of the social roles and commitments of conscious political agents was holistic because for him, politics encompassed all of one's relationships and everything else in one's life. He framed the individual's commitment to building a just society, one based on a practice of collective collaboration and long-term emotional commitments, not as an individual choice but as a moral obligation an individual incurs by being situated in specific social contexts and relations. The imperative to change the world was fundamental to Kuroń's self-understanding, as it was an expression of his emotional habitus, his understanding and sense of social bonds, and his warmth and openness to others, rather than of a merely instrumentally rational or purely cognitive judgment.

The guiding idea of the mobilizing pedagogic ethos of the Walterowcy scout group was to challenge and change existing social and political reality instead of simply accepting it. One of their basic rules was that children and youth need to be treated as equals and treated respectfully. Such treatment is a necessary precondition of successful political pedagogy because only then will the children gain a consciousness and subjectivity of their own. Kuroń believed that his scout groups should be a place where his pupils could go through meaningful experiences and organize themselves around specific tasks that would fulfil their various needs.<sup>438</sup> Another important dimension of Kuroń's pedagogy was his commitment to encouraging his pupils to act collectively with specific goals in view, aiming at tangible and concrete results that would be immediately available to them. According to his strong belief, the right kind of upbringing should always involve active participation that manifests itself in actions which he often called 'social actions.'

In its general vision and especially in its continued emphasis on an ethical-political, if not utopian training and the necessarily collective character of socialist upbringing and education, Kuroń's pedagogy echoes that of the famous Soviet pedagogue Anton Makarenko (1888-1939).<sup>439</sup>

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<sup>437</sup>Jacek Kuroń, 'System wychowawczy Związku Harcerstwa Polskiego,' *Kwartalnik Pedagogiczny*, 8:2 (1962), 116.

<sup>438</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' in *Autobiografia* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, [1989] 2011), 185.

<sup>439</sup> Nicholas Hans, *The Russian Tradition in Education* (London: Routledge, 1963), 166-167, 170; see Anton Makarenko, *Makarenko, His Life and Work: Articles, Talks and Reminiscences* (Honolulu: University Press of the Pacific, 2004); Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 77-78.

While Makarenko claimed that the human being is at her weakest when driven by individualistic impulses and at her strongest when understanding herself as part of a collective, Kuroń went a step further and framed the collective character of the group in terms of the collaboration and cooperation inherent in true teamwork. Despite his anti-individualism, however, Kuroń insisted that collective effort and organization had to go hand in hand with the recognition of the individual. As a result, Kuroń's pedagogy was not only more oriented toward action than Makarenko's, its emphasis on the collective was also less orthodox, as it made space for the claims of the individual.

As I have shown in this section, Kuroń's pedagogy was essentially linked to his understanding of the social. Social collaboration and positive bonds of friendship and love were central to his understanding of a just social order. Yet, despite its clearly ideological and utopian dimension, his pedagogy also had more mundane goals. Kuroń believed that it fulfilled young people's need to work together with others in a group and provided them with the types of experience that would help them find their places in society.<sup>440</sup> Encouraging the children in his group to act collectively with specific goals in view and to aim for tangible results that they could immediately relate to, to engage in what he often called 'social action,' was at the center of what he considered to be the right kind of education.

### *Pedagogies of Care: The Walterowcy's Embodied Practices of Communalism*

The better-known members of the Walterowcy included Mirosław Sawicki, Marta Petrusiewicz, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Marcin Kula, Aleksander Perski, Ewa Milewicz, Konrad Bieliński, Andrzej and Wojciech Topiński, Grażyna Kuroń, Andrzej Seweryn, Irena Lasota and Adam Michnik.<sup>441</sup> As we saw in the second chapter, many of them were leading figures in the student protest in March 1968 and later played key roles in political opposition. Some of them have remained close friends until today, bound by their shared experience of political activism under communism and their

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<sup>440</sup> Archiwum Ośrodka KARTA, Warsaw, AOK, AO III/12K. 1, Jacek Kuroń, *Robinsonowie, Potrzeby dziecka a system*, 5-6.

<sup>441</sup> Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw, AIPN BU 01263/478/Jacket, 'Petrusewicz – Mizzan Marta,' Wyciąg z akt archiwalnych KSMO Warszawa, nr. 1940/II.

friendships with Kuroń. Most importantly, Gaja and Kuroń met each other during one of the Walterowcy camps. It is characteristic of the members of this group that, in one way or another, they perceive themselves as a subtly distinguishable group.

Kuroń's pedagogy mirrored his understanding of how to lead a political life which for him encompassed a 'good life.' This profoundly shaped the circle around him. For Seweryn Blumsztajn, for instance, membership in the Walterowcy shaped his life ethos by providing a 'rulebook for life.' Anchored in the Walterowcy experience, his moral compass was pointed at sensitivity to others and guided how to co-exist and how to understand and talk to others.<sup>442</sup>

Some former members of the Walterowcy also acknowledge the less positive aspects of the process of group formation within the scout troop. Even though Perski's time in the Walterowcy was of invaluable importance, he admits that there was also an aura of elitism, which could be viewed as a negative side of the scout troops. As a result, he adds, perhaps those who never participated in the Walterowcy might have felt excluded.<sup>443</sup> Konrad Bieliński's (b. 1949) memory of his brief period in the Walterowcy is also equivocal as he neither aggrandizes nor romanticizes his past in the troop. According to Bieliński's recollection, while some aspects of the Walterowcy summer camps were rewarding, such as participation in decision-making processes, some children found the collective character of the troops daunting and too rigid.<sup>444</sup> Although children were taken very seriously as participants in co-rule, he found the rules of the Walterowcy to be too strict in terms of how the importance of collective needs was enforced at the cost of individual needs. Despite this at times unattractive rigor of the Walterowcy, Bieliński acknowledges that his political outlook became more left-wing thanks to their influence.<sup>445</sup>

One of Kuroń's pupils in the Walterowcy scout groups, Mirosław Sawicki<sup>446</sup> was involved in the March protests and remained friends with Kuroń until the end of his life. Importantly, Sawicki himself became a pedagogue and acknowledges that he has drawn on his experience in the Walterowcy scout groups and his memory of Kuroń's pedagogical ethos as a guiding template

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<sup>442</sup> Interview with Seweryn Blumsztajn, Warsaw, February 27, 2015.

<sup>443</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>444</sup> Interview with Konrad Bieliński, September 28, 2016, Warsaw.

<sup>445</sup> Bieliński, interview.

<sup>446</sup> Mirosław Sawicki (1946-2016) was a teacher of physics in Warsaw high schools and a state employee. He was one of the participants of the students' March Protests in 1968 and a collaborator of KOR. Sawicki also served as Minister of Higher Education from September to October 2005.



for his self-understanding as a pedagogue and to guide his practice of supporting young people. Sawicki recalls that he was taught in the Walterowcy that if one witnesses evil and social injustice then 'social involvement becomes an obligation from which one cannot be discharged. Because if one sees injustice and discharges oneself from the corresponding duty to act then one commits injustice.'<sup>447</sup>

In line with Sawicki's testimony, Aleksander Perski acknowledges that his experience in the Walterowcy scouting team had a long-lasting impact on him by indirectly influencing his life choices and providing a compass when interacting with patients.<sup>448</sup> He adds that 'it was an absolutely formative experience that inspired an interest in psychology in me and that instilled political passion in me.'<sup>449</sup> Indeed, such a pro-active outlook buttressed by the attitude of sensitivity and care for others and anchored his ethical commitment was central to Kuroń's pedagogical vision. Without a doubt, being part of the Walterowcy for Perski meant becoming the person that he is now. He pinpoints three main elements of his political and social personality that emerged from his experience in the Walterowcy:

First of all, the Walterowcy was all about friendship as it was oriented toward friends. My understanding of what friendship is, namely that it must be until the end of our lives, stems from the Walterowcy. Also my friends from my time in the Walterowcy and the way I relate to others are still the same as then. This is something that people in Sweden where I currently live don't quite understand. Secondly, my fundamental comprehension of democracy is also rooted in the Walterowcy. We were taught the principles of democracy by the mere fact that everyone in the troops had a right to have a say and that everything had to be discussed collectively. It was our basic procedure. Thirdly, my political commitment was profoundly shaped by the Walterowcy. By this I mean a conviction that a human being does not live on his or her own but that there must be a broader goal that should involve changing the world into a better place and tackling evil.<sup>450</sup>

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<sup>447</sup> Paula and Mirosław Sawicki, interview, November 13, 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>448</sup> Aleksander Perski, interview, October 22, 2016, Lucca, Italy.

<sup>449</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>450</sup> Perski, interview.

As this quote shows, friendship, political practices and values and political commitment cannot be easily disentangled in the prehistory of Warsaw-based political opposition. For the participants in the events, such as Aleksander Perski, these imbrications capture the totality of the process of becoming involved in political opposition which was inseparable from everyday life and the participants' personal histories that ultimately formed a collective history of the milieu.

Paula Sawicka (b. 1947), Mirosław Sawicki's wife, a former director of an NGO devoted to countering anti-Semitism and racism, who herself was never part of the scout troop, describes her relationship to the group as 'marrying into the Walterowcy family through her marriage with Mirosław.'<sup>451</sup> For her, former members of the Walterowcy display a certain unifying quality which she defines somewhat vaguely as a 'social sensitivity that is above average.'<sup>452</sup> Interestingly, Sawicka's emphasis on the specific kind of social sensitivity that was decoupled from its 'original' context – the then official political ideology of Polish 'red' scouting in the late 1950s and its attempt to create a 'true' communist subjectivity – shows that for her, certain values were not exclusive to the communist project but became markers of differentiation and conduits for ethical commitments in general. Even if this socially sensitive habitus often demanded a deliberate refitting to contemporary cultural and social conditions, it is precisely because the values and attitudes associated with Kuroń and his circle could be transferred that there has been an enduring impact on his friends' self-image. Furthermore, Sawicka's invocation of the lasting influence of the scouting experience could also be seen as reproducing the very bonds of friendships based on common experience that she is referring to.

Marta Petrusiewicz was born (in 1948) into a family with roots in the interwar Jewish communist tradition. In 1956 her mother Irena remarried and Marta moved to Warsaw's Żoliborz district. Her stepfather, Kazimierz Petrusiewicz (1906-1982), served as a deputy minister in a number of ministries in the late 1940s.<sup>453</sup> During the protests in January 1968 Marta Petrusiewicz was charged with physically assaulting policemen. After marrying Giorgio Mizzan in December

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<sup>451</sup> Paula and Mirosław Sawicki, interview

<sup>452</sup> Paula and Mirosław Sawicki, interview.

<sup>453</sup> Joanna Wiszniewicz, *Życie przecięte. Opowieści pokolenia Marca* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2008), 36.

1968 she left Poland for Italy (departing in 1969).<sup>454</sup> While growing up in Żoliborz, Petruszewicz joined the Walterowcy, and she points out that for many years her father and Jacek Kuroń were the most important mentors in her life.<sup>455</sup> Being part of the Walterowcy allowed Petruszewicz to learn more about the world through collective and playful interaction with other children and, most importantly, to participate in open discussions in which anything could be questioned. Like other former scouts, Petruszewicz appreciated Kuroń's radical and boundary-crossing openness that opened up the possibility of political self-emancipation of the Walterowcy youth. As she puts it, 'everything there [in the Walterowcy] led us, paradoxically, towards political dissidence. It is precisely Jacek's encouragement to discuss and question everything that made us see the fissures in the system.'<sup>456</sup> In line with Petruszewicz's observation, Alexander Perski adds that his political instincts come from the scouting experience, which, through summer camps, learning history and team work, taught him how to engage with the social and political world regularly, actively and in a myriad of ways.<sup>457</sup> Thus, we can see how Kuroń's socialist pedagogy initiated the formation of a political self-understanding that brought about unexpected outcomes in the form of shaping a whole generation of dissidents.

Embodied practices were more central to the social identity and distinctiveness of the Walterowcy group than one might expect. Giving a concrete and emblematic example, Petruszewicz recalls the widely shared conviction that one could recognize a former Walterowcy member from the way that he or she would eat an apple, cutting it into equally large pieces and sharing them with everyone. This very way of treating food, by automatically sharing it with others, is believed to be a marker differentiating ex-Walterowcy scouts from others.<sup>458</sup> These seemingly innocuous yet distinctive gestures reveal the specific bodily habitus of the members of this group. Under the influence of Gaja and Kuroń, the young activists learned to embody a set of shared norms such as a radical solidarity and care for one another.<sup>459</sup> Echoing Perski's statement, Paula and Mirosław Sawicki also emphasize how Kuroń's way of being and relating to the world

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<sup>454</sup> AIPN BU 01263/478/Jacket, 'Petruszewicz – Mizzan Marta,' A note on Marta Petruszewicz-Mizzan from January 6, 1979.

<sup>455</sup> Wiszniewicz, *Życie przecięte*, 40.

<sup>456</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>457</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>458</sup> Marta Petruszewicz, interview, October 21, 2015, Rome.

<sup>459</sup> *Krag Walterowski: Walterowcy*, 16.

imbued others with a mobilizing commitment to change the world that would last until the end of their lives.<sup>460</sup> The Sawickis underscore the remarkable endurance of this legacy and the extended temporality of the activism it enabled. In that sense, the specific habitus embodied by Kuroń as a pedagogue could be seen as a legacy that, despite undergoing a series of adjustments, cuts across different, often contradictory, political, cultural and emotional regimes. It could be seen as a legacy that has shaped the behavior and worldviews of his friends under various geographical and historical conditions from socialist and post-socialist Poland to late capitalist Western Europe.

Members of the political opposition in socialist Poland who knew about but did not join the Walterowcy scouts, confirm Petruszewicz's and the Sawickis' observations. What Irena Grudzińska-Gross always found striking about the former Walterowcy group is the joy its members found in passionate and collective singing.<sup>461</sup> Indeed, collective singing was an important form of entertainment during the camps organized by the Walterowcy scout groups. For Grudzińska-Gross their style of singing was an expression of a specifically collective character of the Walterowcy scout groups' political aesthetic and culture. As Petruszewicz recalls, teaching scouts to sing certain songs was a skill that was passed on from one generation of scouting educators to another. She remembers being taught how to sing by Kuroń and Seweryn Blumsztajn, until she herself started to teach younger scouts how to sing.<sup>462</sup>

Jan Krzysztof Kelus (b. 1942), a poet, composer and singer, who was a member of a more traditional, non-communist scout troop and who was later active in the political opposition, remembers the Walterowcy as a red scout group singing unfamiliar songs in an ostentatious manner. Yet, Kelus acknowledges that despite the differences in the musical repertoire, identity and ideology of the scout groups, they also shared a surprising commonality: both scouts teams wanted to perform glorious and noble deeds.<sup>463</sup> Kuroń described the importance of the daily collective performance of such deeds in the following way: 'everything that the group creates collectively – a house, a garden, a boat, habits, poems, songs and norms – is for each person both

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<sup>460</sup> Paula and Mirosław Sawicki, interview.

<sup>461</sup> Irena Grudzińska-Gross, interview.

<sup>462</sup> Wiszniewicz, *Życie przecięte*, 40.

<sup>463</sup> Jan Krzysztof Kelus, *Był raz dobry świat... w rozmowie z Wojciechem Staszewskim* (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 1999), 89-90.

a collective value as well as a symbol of the community.<sup>464</sup> Thus, singing songs<sup>465</sup> could be viewed as a collective performative speech act that bound members of the community together and, in so doing, expressed its values in ways that were embodied and thus durably shaped the individual and collective habitus of the members of Kuroń's closest circle.

The memories of Andrzej Rapaczyński (b. 1947), who left Poland in 1968, also elucidate Kuroń's impact on others. According to Rapaczyński, who was never part of the Walterowcy group, the members of Kuroń's milieu had a special bond with Kuroń as if they were symbolically his children.<sup>466</sup> Analyzing my interviewees' repeated emphasis on the kinship-like and pedagogical relationship between Kuroń and his friends reveals Kuroń's complex and rich 'affective pedagogy,' which cannot be limited to rational deliberation and communication but expanded to fields of embodied and enacted emotionality and care. It is precisely this blending of the ideological, ethical and private spheres, which materialized in concrete bonds of friendship and solidarity, and rapport that made Kuroń's milieu so successful, and somewhat unique, as a group of activists.

### *Forging Political Commitments: The 1970s and the Prehistory of KOR*

After serving his three-year sentence for being one of the leaders of the March protest in 1968,<sup>467</sup> Kuroń returned to his family, his parents, brother, beloved wife Gaja<sup>468</sup> and son Maciek,<sup>469</sup> on September 17, 1971. He also returned to a circle of friends that has become smaller as some of them, such as Aleksander and Eugeniusz Smolar, Marta Petruszewicz, Aleksander Perski, Irena Grudzińska-Gross and Jan Gross had to leave Poland in the wake of the anti-Semitic campaign of 1967-1968.<sup>470</sup> In a documentary made in 1990, Kuroń describes the immediate context in the

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<sup>464</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 79.

<sup>465</sup> On the related link between emotions and war songs see Serguei A. Oushakine, 'Emotional Blueprints: War Songs as an Affective Medium,' in *Interpreting Emotions in Russia and Eastern Europe*, ed. Mark D. Steinberg and Valeria Sobol (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2011), 249-276.

<sup>466</sup> Andrzej Rapaczyński, interview, March 25, 2016, New York.

<sup>467</sup> Karol Modzelewski and Adam Michnik were also sentenced to three years in prison for the participation in the March Protests.

<sup>468</sup> Grażyna Borucka-Kuroń (1940-1982), also known as Gaja or Gajka.

<sup>469</sup> Maciej Kuroń (1960-2008).

<sup>470</sup> See Dariusz Stola, 'Anti-Zionism as Multipurpose Policy Instrument: The Anti-Zionist Campaign in Poland, 1967-1968,' *The Journal of Israeli History*, 25, 2006, 1, 175-201.

following way: ‘when we came out [of prison] it was like a graveyard; for a while there was almost no activity, no friends as they had all left ...; it was the beginning of a very interesting period because the fact that there was no activity going on had nothing to do with us, the group hadn’t lost its dynamism ...; the prosperity of the Gierek era had begun.’<sup>471</sup>

The political reality that awaited Kuroń and Modzelewski was also somewhat different as during their time in prison Poland underwent a change in leadership and Gomułka was no longer the party leader. Although the years before the founding of KOR in 1976<sup>472</sup> are generally considered to be a time of political stagnation and consumerist expansion that was unfavorable to dissident activism, Kuroń’s political and social commitment remained steadfast. Against all odds, he managed to maintain a group of committed young activists around him, which was a continuity through change that would prove crucial for future dissident political activity.

In December 1970, the government declared a dramatic increase in the price of basic food products.<sup>473</sup> As an immediate response to the skyrocketing prices, workers from the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk began protesting on December 14. The resulting conflict turned out to be one of the bloodiest events in post-war Poland (with officially 45 deaths)<sup>474</sup> and threw the country into a deep political crisis. On December 20 Gomułka, who had lost his political support, was replaced as the Party’s First Secretary by Edward Gierek.<sup>475</sup>

Poland under Gierek experienced a period of relative peace and a more flexible state-led regime of consumption in the first half of the 1970s.<sup>476</sup> After fourteen years of Gomułka’s rule, Gierek’s economic policy was meant to enable a ‘harmonious development’ as opposed to Gomułka’s ‘selective development’ that prioritized the heavy industry. Central to Gierek’s propaganda was the slogan ‘Second Poland,’ marking the new period and encapsulating his vision

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<sup>471</sup> Marcel Łoziński (dir.), *45-89*, Poland 1990.

<sup>472</sup> See Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR. Komitet Obrony Robotników – Komitet samoobrony społecznej* (London: Aneks, 1983); Andrzej Friszke, *Czas KOR-u. Jacek Kuroń a geneza Solidarności* (Kraków: Znak, Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2011); Jan Skórzyński, *Siła bezsilnych. Historia Komitetu Obrony Robotników* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2012).

<sup>473</sup> Jerzy Eisler, ‘*Polskie miesiące*,’ czyli kryzys(y) w PRL (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008), 37; see also: Jerzy Eisler, *Grudzień 1970. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje* (Warsaw: Sensacje XX wieku, 2012); Anthony Kemp-Welch, *Poland Under Communism: A Cold War History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 180-190.

<sup>474</sup> Eisler, ‘*Polskie miesiące*,’ 42.

<sup>475</sup> Edward Gierek (1913-2001) served as the first secretary of the Communist Party of Poland from 1970 until 1980. For a critical and partly biographical account of Edward Gierek, see Eisler, *Siedmiu Wspaniałych*, 255-311.

<sup>476</sup> Lech Wałęsa, *Droga nadziei* (Kraków: Znak, [1990] 1998), 97.

of creating a socio-economic boom on a structural level as well as in everyday life.<sup>477</sup> By continuing to support large investments such as the building of the Katowice Steelworks, offering real salary increases, opening access to motorization for larger parts of society and meeting the growing consumerist needs of the population, Gierek's administration aimed to ameliorate the living standards of the population. Significantly, the boom was fueled by long-term loans from the West.

At the heart of the differences between Gierek and Gomułka was their divergent style of governing and their political narratives. While Gomułka was an old-fashioned communist and ideologue who embraced an aggressive nationalistic rhetoric, Gierek was focused on promoting economic and social development.<sup>478</sup> Although better standards of living were the bedrock of Gierek's official political vision, this did not signal a turn away from ideological politics. If the traditionally communist coding of the rules of the game was still compelling and their widespread acceptance still relevant, Gierek's new type of communist administration played a role in redefining the parameters of this period. Part of Gierek's administration could be seen as a cadre of younger, pragmatic and, in that sense, technocratic communist apparatchiks who came of age with the post-Stalinist political order and communist youth organizations as the immediate and formative context.<sup>479</sup> With the relaxing of the censorship and passport regime, the 1970s (especially its first half) are remembered by many as a relatively prosperous period. Pragmatic as it was, the modality of Gierek's rule relied partly upon the contentment of citizens as consumers, their sense of stable growth, and the arrival of a new generation of communists.<sup>480</sup> Moreover, in January 1971 Gierek initiated the rebuilding of the Royal Castle in Warsaw, which had been destroyed in World War II, and in December 1975 he officially opened the new Warsaw Central Station. While both projects chronicle the metamorphosis of the late socialist cityscape, each of them could be seen as standing for different meanings. The reconstruction of the Royal Castle formed an optimistic watershed moment in the continued post-war reconstruction efforts. The

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<sup>477</sup> Janusz Kalinski, *Gospodarka w PRL* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012), 43-44.

<sup>478</sup> Douglas Selva, 'Poland,' *Encyclopedia of the Cold War*, ed. Ruud Van Dijk, 2 vols. (New York: Routledge, 2008), vol. 2, 701-702.

<sup>479</sup> Małgorzata Choma-Jusińska, Jerzy Eisler, Andrzej Zawistowski, and Barbara Polak, "'Drogi" Towarzysz Gierek,' interview, *Biuletyn IPN* 3:110 (2010), 7.

<sup>480</sup> On the gradual disappointment with Gierek's rule in the first half of the 1970s, see Henryk Wujec, Interview by Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski in *Niepokorni: rozmowy o Komitecie Obrony Robotników*, ed. Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski (Kraków: Znak, [1981] 2008), 233.

new Central Station, in turn, symbolized Gierek's broader modernization program and ambition. As a result, many remember the first half of Gierek's rule through rose-tinted glasses as the belle époque of Polish socialism, when consumer goods like Coca Cola and jeans were first available.<sup>481</sup> These goods in combination with small summer houses pointed to a type of prosperity that Marcin Zaremba characterizes as 'bigos socialism.'<sup>482</sup>

David Ost describes the complex position of workers as a class in Polish state socialism as guided by an 'unwritten social contract' according to which 'benefits came to workers precisely to the extent that they stayed out of the political realm.'<sup>483</sup> Building on and expanding Ost's observation, one could claim that the relative ease of life in the early 1970s came at a price. The precondition for Polish society as a collective of socialist citizens, consumers and workers to enjoy the relative liberalization was that they would stay out of politics. This was true at least until June 1976, when Gierek's administration, trying to stimulate the flagging economy, committed the same mistake as Gomułka did by surprisingly and dramatically increasing food prices, which triggered major protests.<sup>484</sup> It is not surprising that Kuroń and his friends carefully observed these events unfold. The disproportionately violent response of the state prompted them, with a sense of urgency, to provide support to the incarcerated workers and their families. As a result, he and thirteen other committed intellectuals founded the Workers' Defense Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników, or KOR), an event to which I will return in another section below.

In spite of the seeming improvement of the standard of living and the generally experienced depoliticization of this period, it is thus the first half of the 1970s that provides a

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<sup>481</sup> Jerzy Eisler, *Siedmiu wspaniałych. Poczet pierwszych sekretarzy KC PZPR* (Warsaw: Czerwone i Czarne, 2014), 255-256; Brian Porter-Szűcs, *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014), 280; see also Jan Dziadul, 'Edward Wspaniały: dyskretny urok gierkowszczyzny,' *Polityka*, April 7, 2010, available at <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/1507524,1,dyskretny-urok-gierkowszczyzny.read>, last accessed March 20, 2019.

<sup>482</sup> Marcin Zaremba, 'Bigosowy Socjalizm: skąd ta nostalgia za dekadą Gierka?,' *Polityka*, January 8, 2013, available at: <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/1534295,1,skad-ta-nostalgia-za-dekada-edwarda-gierka.read>, last accessed March 20, 2019. Bigos is a hunter's stew or slowly cooked cabbage stew that is a popular festive as well as comfort food in Poland; the term 'bigos socialism' is a variation of the term 'goulash socialism' that refers to a style of rule in Hungary during the Thaw, see Heino Nyssönen, 'Salami Reconstructed: "Goulash Communism" and Political Culture in Hungary,' *Cahiers du Monde russe* 47, 1/2 (2006), 153-172.

<sup>483</sup> David Ost, 'Polish Labor before and after Solidarity,' *International Labor and Working Class History* 50 (Fall 1996), 36.

<sup>484</sup> On the economic crisis after 1973, see Ivan T. Berend, *Central & Eastern Europe 1944-1993: Detour from the Periphery to the Periphery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 222-253; on the events of June 1976, see Paweł Sasanka, *Czerwiec 1976. Geneza, przebieg, konsekwencje* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2017).



distinct context within which the activist milieu that founded KOR consolidated and operated. Instead of being held back by the apparent apolitical context, the circle of friends around Kuroń, Gaja and their apartment continued to be critical of the political situation and took the next step.

In a decade where wide-spread desires for stability and individual consumption seemed to have been met, social atomization became the norm as well.<sup>485</sup> This somewhat new political reality prompted a fundamental, if gradual, rethinking of effective and justified forms of political critique and opposition by Kuroń himself. After leaving the prison on September 17, 1976, Kuroń found himself amidst family and friends who had been waiting for him. In a secret and lengthy note from November 25, 1976 Major Syroczyński, who had been working on Kuroń under the clandestine surveillance operation 'Watra',<sup>486</sup> wrote that Kuroń's and Modzelewski's release had 'sparked a revival and activated the former Komandosi group.'<sup>487</sup> Indeed, one of the first things Kuroń did after his release was to have a considerable number of visitors over, including his closest friends such as Karol Modzelewski, Jan Lityński, Barbara Toruńczyk, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Adam Michnik, Józef Chajń, Teresa Bogucka, Anna Dodziuk-Lityńska and Jan Józef Lipski.<sup>488</sup> The major noticed that even though Kuroń and Modzelewski had been in prison for three years it was evident that they still played a key role in integrating the activist milieu. With a group of new and old friends, Kuroń threw himself into a life filled with meetings and discussions. Even in the first months after Kuroń's and Modzelewski's release from prison, Jan Lityński, Adam Michnik and Teresa Bogucka attempted to organize a petition and public speeches in support of imprisoned political activists associated with the underground organization Ruch (movement), which was active in the second half of the 1960s.<sup>489</sup>

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<sup>485</sup> Hanna Świda-Ziemba, *Młodość PRL. Portrety pokoleń w kontekście historii* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2010), 477.

<sup>486</sup> Given the ambivalent nature of the archives of the security service that are now part of the Ministry of Internal Affairs archives, the information obtained from its files should be treated with caution as it can often not be independently verified; for more on this difficulty, see Robert Spatek, 'Gracze' – Komitet Obrony Robotników w propagandzie PRL, stereotypach oraz dokumentach Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych,' *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 2:4 (2003), 79-81; Andrzej Paczkowski, 'Archiwa aparatu bezpieczeństwa PRL jako źródło: co już zrobiono, co można zbadać,' *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 2:3 (2003), 9-21.

<sup>487</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 14, Note from November 25, 1971, 2 (there is a duplicate of this note in a file with a different signature and date, see AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 16, Note from November 11, 1971).

<sup>488</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>489</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

To introduce Kuroń and Modzelewski to new and young people, Adam Michnik organized a birthday party on October 16, at which, according to the security service, approximately seventy people were present, the majority of whom were in one way or another related to the Komandosi group.<sup>490</sup> The birthday party served as an opportunity to meet old friends and new people but also to foster discussions during which Kuroń stated that the Komandosi group should be seen as '[political] opposition, a symbol of relentlessness and a general political symbol.'<sup>491</sup> Clearly, Kuroń did not return to a markedly less politically active life but intended to create a political milieu. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the seemingly private meetings with friends on different occasions were also a site where the politicized atmosphere created conditions for Kuroń and his friends to socialize by voicing and debating their political stance. Ryszard Bugaj (b. 1944), an economist and academic who was close to dissident circles, describes Kuroń and the forms of political opposition in the early 1970s in the following way:

The life of the political opposition was woven into leisure – both dimensions of life unfolded in 'the salons' [private apartments]. By that time Kuroń was a professional political activist (with financial problems) and participated in the salon life (like many of us he drank but he never got addicted). Most importantly, he was always busy with organizing events and writing. He never gave up – he always looked for a way to act.<sup>492</sup>

Bugaj points to the intertwinement of various spheres that ultimately constituted the world of the political opposition in 1970s Warsaw. To be a political activist meant having to deal with continued financial problems, socializing by drinking at parties as well as being persistent and active writing and doing other activities.

In much of the security service's notes and actions, such as surveillance protocols, which I will discuss in detail later in this chapter, one can detect a concern with the politically subversive activity, which materialized mostly in private, but to some extent in public as well. In recognizing 'private' life and relations as a site for covert political activities, the security service was undoing

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<sup>490</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>492</sup> Ryszard Bugaj, *O sobie i innych* (Warszawa: De Facto, 2010), 120.

and recasting the superficially fixed distinction between the invisible ('private') and the visible ('public').<sup>493</sup>

*Experiments in Living: The Politics of Friendship, Care, and Publishing*

Kuroń's personality was crucial both to his role in the *Walterowcy* and to the formation of the activist milieu around him. He was known for his emotional honesty and self-confidence, which could be seen both as his strength and as his limitation. It is precisely this side of Kuroń that two of his closest collaborators, Karol Modzelewski and Joanna Szczęsna, address in the interviews I conducted with them.

Karol Modzelewski,<sup>494</sup> Kuroń's close friend and collaborator, with whom he wrote the *Open Letter to the Party* in 1964 (discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation), decided to withdraw from political activism after leaving prison in 1971. In 1972 Modzelewski moved to Wrocław where he focused on his academic career as a historian. He defended his doctoral dissertation on March 8, 1974.<sup>495</sup> He did not return to political activism until the strike that founded the *Solidarność* movement in 1980. As Kuroń's political companion and friend, Modzelewski shared with him a unique experience of mutual loyalty, readiness to take risks, and extended time in prison.

When asked to characterize Kuroń, Modzelewski describes him as a charismatic person with a strong, but not an authoritative personality.<sup>496</sup> As Modzelewski recalls, while he himself was neither charismatic nor a good speaker, he remembers Kuroń as a gifted impromptu orator, especially at mass rallies. Modzelewski acknowledges that Kuroń was loud and at times coarse but emphasizes that he was also open to reasoning and respectful towards others. Even when disagreements became heated, Kuroń tried to establish a connection and to find common ground.

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<sup>493</sup> I would like to thank Esther Wahlen for helping me develop this thought.

<sup>494</sup> Karol Modzelewski is a retired historian and academic. He is a former member of the Polish United Workers' Party and a prominent dissident involved in the students' revolt in March 1968 and the Solidarity Trade Union. After 1989 he served as a senator between 1989-1991. See Karol Modzelewski, *Zajeździemy kobyłę historii. Wyznania poobijanego jeźdźca* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2013), and Andrzej Friszke, *Anatomia buntu. Kuroń, Modzelewski i komandosi* (Kraków: Znack, 2010).

<sup>495</sup> AIPN BU 1417/14, Information, July 10, 1975, 16.

<sup>496</sup> Karol Modzelewski, interview with Nguyen Vu Thuc Linh, 18 February 2014, Warsaw, Poland.

Agreeing with Anka Kowalska (1932-2008), another of Kuroń's collaborators, Modzelewski claims that 'this part of Jacek was internally contradictory.'<sup>497</sup> In his view, Modzelewski's relationship with Kuroń was a friendship in which they complemented each other, for instance, when Kuroń loudly and strongly expressed his political vision and arguments, oftentimes shouting at Modzelewski, Modzelewski always tried to remain calm. Accepting and sometimes balancing Kuroń's charismatic character was thus central in shaping the relationships others had with him. Ludwika Wujec (b. 1941), one of the KOR collaborators and co-founder of the underground newspapers *Robotnik* and *Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR*, recalls that while Adam Michnik was an intellectual, a man of letters, Kuroń was a man of action, rushing to factories, eager to be at the center of events.<sup>498</sup>

Encountering Kuroń's particular and magnetic character and his political commitment captivated and inspired most of the young people who met him even in prison. A note from October 1971 about Kuroń's conduct in prison emphasized his ability to tap into fellow inmates' needs and win their sympathy. It was becoming increasingly evident to the management of Wronki Prison, where Kuroń was held, that he was displaying the disposition 'of creating a milieu around him and to support himself upon others' attachment to him.'<sup>499</sup>

In Modzelewski's recollection, Kuroń attracted a group of young, loyal and politically engaged collaborators of different backgrounds who were 'raised by him not to accept the world as it is but rather to try and change it.'<sup>500</sup> Many of them were significantly younger than Kuroń<sup>501</sup> and had been scouts in the *Walterowcy*<sup>502</sup> making their relationship similar to the one between an educator and his students. Modzelewski describes Kuroń's closest collaborators in the early 1970s as a very dynamic, politically engaged group of close friends that would meet regularly to discuss politics and just spend free time together. It is not surprising that such close friends who also shared an ambivalent political commitment – one that was as much imposed on them as it

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<sup>497</sup> Ibid.

<sup>498</sup> Ludwika Wujec, *Związki przyjacielskie* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2014), 166.

<sup>499</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 16, Note, October 1971, 2.

<sup>500</sup> Modzelewski, interview, February 18, 2014.

<sup>501</sup> For instance Anna Bikont, Anna Dodziuk, Joanna Szczęsna, Barbara Torunczyk.

<sup>502</sup> Some of the members were Mirosław Sawicki, Marta Petruszewicz, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Marcin Kula, Andrzej Seweryn, Irena Lasota and Adam Michnik.

was chosen, and one that was in significant and often risky ways different from the mainstream – had an emotional and psychological need to continue to see each other.

It is precisely within this shared context of closeness, intimacy and friendship that the powerful loyalty of this group and its strong sense of political activism can be situated. According to Modzelewski, Kuroń's circle was ready for political action and its members were committed to standing by one another in the face of state repression. This meant that new political initiatives could emerge, which proved crucial for future mobilizations. Although the composition of the group changed over time, Kuroń always managed to maintain a group of loyal and dedicated people around him throughout his life. To Modzelewski, these bonds of friendship and loyalty among Kuroń's friends amounted to a sort of love, comparable to the love one can find within a well-functioning and caring family.<sup>503</sup> Striking a more ambivalent note, my interviewee also noticed that although he was close to both Gaja and Kuroń, although he knew most of Kuroń's friends, and although he had a special bond with Kuroń based on their shared experience of political activism and of imprisonment, he kept a distance, thus occupying a position that offered a unique perspective on the milieu's internal dynamics.

In order to paint a fuller picture of Kuroń's personality, another dimension also has to be considered, namely the characteristic honesty and self-confidence with which he verbalized and expressed his emotional state. It was a feature for which he was known and which could be seen both as his strength and as his limitation. It is precisely this side of Kuroń that another of my interviewees, Joanna Szczęsna, addresses.<sup>504</sup>

Szczęsna (b. 1949) met Kuroń in 1971 after both were released from prison. While he and Modzelewski had spent more than three years in prison for being among the leaders of the March '68 protests, she had been incarcerated for six months for her political activity in the student movement Ruch in the city of Łódź, west of Warsaw. Having grown up in the city of Łódź, at the beginning Szczęsna felt like an outsider among the former Walterowcy scouts. During her studies at the Catholic University in Lublin (KUL), to which she was relegated for her political activism, she often visited Warsaw and stayed at Jacek and Gaja's apartment on Mickiewicza Street. They

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<sup>503</sup> Karol Modzelewski, interview with Nguyen Vu Thuc Linh, 18 February 2014, Warsaw, Poland.

<sup>504</sup> Joanna Szczęsna, interview with Nguyen Vu Thuc Linh, 16 February 2015, Warsaw, Poland.

quickly became friends although by the early 1970s Kuroń was already a famous political activist while Szczęsna was a young student. As their friendship deepened and she gained Kuroń's trust, she became an editor of KOR's newspaper *Biuletyn Informacyjny*.

Szczęsna recalls the significant role played by Jacek and Gaja in creating a second home for her which was crucial to her everyday functioning, well-being as well as her political growth. The everyday contacts and closeness in the intimate settings of a home also meant that Szczęsna could always enjoy a warm meal and find a bed to rest at their apartment. More importantly, she felt that she could always count on Jacek and Gaja as they were always there for her when she needed them, which gave her a sense of security and comfort. Eventually, even their dog treated her as one of the members of the family. As she recalls it:

In any case their house was open and friendly. One just had to push the door knob and the door would open. ... Fisia – their dog ... – treated me as a family member and whenever I would come she would show me how disappointed she was that I did not come home more often.<sup>505</sup>

Szczęsna's emphasis on the unofficial labor of love performed by Kuroń but also by Gaja, the dog and the home itself, reveals Jacek and Gaja's remarkable hospitality and openness and how strongly she was attached to them. This attachment can be taken as having formed an emotional and social condition that formed her political development and choices. What also becomes clear from her recollections is that, at least for Szczęsna, the strong and mutual ties of trust and friendship filled with warmth led to a sense of belonging. As Paula Sawicka puts it, in the apartment on 39 Mickiewicza Street, there was always a group of young people who came for advice and information and somewhat spontaneously this group turned into 'a mass around Jacek performing tasks.'<sup>506</sup>

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<sup>505</sup> Ibid.

<sup>506</sup> Paula and Mirosław Sawicki, interview, November 13, 2015.



Figure 5: Joanna Szczęsna and Jacek Kuroń in the Kuroń's apartment in the late 1970s. Photograph: Joanna Szczęsna archive/FOTONOVA

Szczęsna recalls how important it was for the group clustered around the Kurońs to meet, to have parties, but also to discuss politics. By 1973, the security service noted that intimate birthday parties that took place in private apartments of, for instance, Jan Lityński and Mirosław Sawicki were 'old forms of establishing contacts.'<sup>507</sup> The security service also noted that at Kuroń's birthday party organized in March 1973 the list of guests in attendance included Adam Michnik, Jan Lityński, Barbara Toruńczuk, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Joanna Szczęsna, Andrzej Seweryn and others.<sup>508</sup> In his note, Colonel Pawłowicz described the party as opening up the opportunity to discuss 'current affairs.'<sup>509</sup> We learn that Michnik knew that the publication of the first issue of the émigré journal *Aneks* (that was founded by Aleksander Smolar and Aleksander Perski in Sweden) was delayed and that the next issues would contain articles on the events in 1968 in Czechoslovakia. Clearly, these intimate get-togethers, while being personal in character, were simultaneously shaped and filled by political affairs. Of special importance were events such as organized thematic talks and discussions of the Paris-based monthly *Kultura*. As noted in the

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<sup>507</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 14, Information, June 9, 1973, 1.

<sup>508</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 14, Information, March 17, 1973, 1.

<sup>509</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

previous chapter, *Kultura* was a forum for critical thinking and the expression of opinions beyond the reach of state censorship. The monthly journal played an important part in forming young activists prior to 1968 and it continued to be of great importance in the 1970s.

*Kultura* was published by the publishing house Instytut Literacki (Literary Institute) whose foundation in 1946 in Rome was initiated by General Władysław Anders (1892-1970). Initially the Institute was associated with Polish military institutions. The first team of the small Institute consisted of Jerzy Giedroyc (1906-2000), Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (1919-2000), and Zofia (1910-2003) and Zygmunt Hertz (1908-1979),<sup>510</sup> who managed to turn it into an émigré institution for independent Polish culture with an emphasis on publishing. The primary objective of the institute was to create and promote alternative points of view countering the monopoly of Polish post-war and socialist official discourse. The monthly *Kultura* was launched in 1947. In 1954 the publishing house relocated to the commune of Maisons-Laffitte, located in the northwestern suburbs of Paris, which soon became an important site, both symbolically and literally, for Polish migrant literature and migrants themselves. One of the best-known examples of the significant role played by the publishing house in providing different types of support is the fact that Czesław Miłosz, after his defection from Poland in 1951, was offered shelter in France with the help of *Kultura*. By publishing such magazines as *Kultura* and *Zeszyty Historyczne* (History Notebooks) and by providing a platform for such various authors such as Czesław Miłosz, Wisława Szymborska, Witold Gombrowicz, Marek Hłasko, Sławomir Mrożek and Leszek Kołakowski, Instytut Literacki quickly acquired a special and cult-like status. Informed by his political commitment and critical attitude toward the Polish government, Giedroyc himself enjoyed high prestige as an editor and political activist.<sup>511</sup>

Despite being banned in Poland in 1950, thanks to informal networking and the clandestine efforts of some individuals, *Kultura* managed to reach out to critical readers in Poland and establish its own loyal transnational readership. Due to the fact that the distribution of *Kultura* had been outlawed, it was difficult to get hold of the monthly magazine. This gave rise to

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<sup>510</sup> Jerzy Giedroyc, *Autobiografia na cztery ręce* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Opieki nad Archiwum Instytutu Literackiego w Paryżu, [1996] 2009), 134-136.

<sup>511</sup> For more information on Giedroyc, see the excellent historically oriented reportage by Magdalena Grochowska, *Jerzy Giedroyc: do Polski ze snu* (Warsaw: Świat Książki, 2009).



a whole set of precarious practices. For instance, the delivery of *Kultura* was dependent on people crossing the border. They were either foreigners or Polish citizens who received a passport and a permission to leave the country, and who then smuggled illegal journals, magazines and books into Poland.

One of the common, fundamental and yet unwritten rules of the milieu of the political opposition established that underground literature had to be shared, which actually worked well, given the restriction on some pieces of literature. As a result, one copy was often passed from hand to hand and read by many different people.<sup>512</sup> Hence, even those who owned a small collection of sought-after books and journals rarely had them in their homes or kept them to themselves. Furthermore, internal group pressure was at work and guided young activists not to keep the books for too long as the demand for them was high and the supply short. The members of the group were urged to keep on passing the books around while making sure they remained within a trusted and closed circle.<sup>513</sup> Books by Czesław Miłosz, Leszek Kołakowski, Gustaw Herling-Grudzinski and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn were of particular interest and in high demand.<sup>514</sup> The critical quarterly *Aneks*, which was founded in Uppsala, Sweden in 1974 by Aleksander Smolar (with the help of Aleksander Perski) and which focused on sociological and political analysis is particularly noteworthy. The same year Smolar co-founded the publishing house *Aneks* with Nina Smolar and his brother Eugeniusz Smolar. A note by the security service states that Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń, Jan Litynski and Edward Lipinski were among those who had the largest collections of books and journals.<sup>515</sup> The document, presumably far from a complete list, the document contains the names of 41 individuals involved in the process of smuggling and distributing publications of interest.

Kuroń was greatly attracted by *Kultura* and the Instytut Literacki. He believed it to be the most progressive publishing house that provided a platform to authors who had recently left Poland. He was convinced that by drawing on their own experience these authors were well

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<sup>512</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 16, Note, December 22, 1973, 1.

<sup>513</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>514</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>515</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

informed about internal politics and the situation in Poland.<sup>516</sup> Unsurprisingly, *Kultura* was on the radar of the secret service and was recognized as holding obvious appeal for the political opposition. Unambiguously identified as ‘anti-communist literature,’ the journal was said to be ‘published by a center of political sabotage.’<sup>517</sup> Furthermore, the note by the security service contains the interesting observation that to the milieu centered around Kuroń, the distribution of émigré journals and books was one of the key strategies devoted to ‘awakening social consciousness.’<sup>518</sup> Kuroń and his closest friends were committed readers of the publications that came out of the Instytut Literacki and admirers of Giedroyc. This not only helped them to secure regular access to the issues of *Kultura* but allowed many of them to be published in the magazine under pseudonyms. For instance, Adam Michnik published a remarkable essay on the intellectual roots of and alternatives to the existing political choices made by the ruling party and his contemporaries under the pen name Bartłomiej.<sup>519</sup>

In 1974, Kuroń anonymously published an article titled ‘Polityczna Opozycja w Polsce’ (Political Opposition in Poland) in *Kultura* in which he attempted to provide guidance for the political opposition so that it would respond ‘properly’ to the political situation of 1970s Poland.<sup>520</sup> While offering a multifaceted definition of political dissidence, the bottom line for Kuroń was that political opposition must fundamentally be against any form of totalitarian rule by which he means a lack of national<sup>521</sup> sovereignty over its own politics.<sup>522</sup> Being strongly opposed to anti-Semitic nationalism, Kuroń also warns against the dangerous coupling of totalitarianism and nationalism.<sup>523</sup> Characterizing totalitarianism as the ‘continuous destruction of every kind of social bond different from the formal structure of state organizations,’<sup>524</sup> he sees

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<sup>516</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 14, Note from November 25, 1971, 9 (there is a duplicate of this note in the file with a different signature and date, see AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 16, Note from November 11, 1971).

<sup>517</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 16, Note, December 22, 1973, 1.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid.

<sup>519</sup> Bartłomiej [Adam Michnik], ‘Cienie zapomnianych przodków,’ *Kultura* 5, 332 (1975), 3-22.

<sup>520</sup> Anon. [Jacek Kuroń], ‘Polityczna opozycja w Polsce,’ *Kultura* 2, 326 (1974), 3-22.

<sup>521</sup> The use of the word ‘national’ remains a bit unclear. My suggestion is that by using this word, Kuroń does not narrowly refer to the concept of the nation and nationalism as an ideology, as he was continuously critical of nationalism, but rather to the power of the people, thus to what could more appropriately be called popular sovereignty.

<sup>522</sup> Anon. [Jacek Kuroń], ‘Polityczna opozycja,’ 4.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., 5.

the social bond as an indispensable and crucial point of reference for his own thinking. As he puts it, 'the social bond of a village, a small town, a local community and a professional community is based on a free agreement and cooperation on the issues related to the community.'<sup>525</sup> It was precisely in the independent and uncontrolled character of such cooperation and of the bonds that emerged from it, that Kuroń saw an enabling potential. Here the emphasis placed by Kuroń on the spontaneous dimension of the social bond echoes his and Modzelewski's critique of the Party-led centralism as voiced in their *Open Letter to the Party* from 1964.<sup>526</sup> Kuroń was convinced that creative social initiatives, freedom of speech and unlimited circulation of information are a necessary precondition for the formation of a political community.<sup>527</sup> Furthermore, forms of political opposition are present whenever people are aware of the political character of their actions. In that sense, his understanding of what makes social interactions political is not overly restrictive and therefore allows for a variety of practices to count as politically relevant.<sup>528</sup>

While Kuroń acknowledges the role played by the Catholic Church, the émigré press, and human rights discourse, the centrality of the concept of social bonds enables his articulation of the links between the theoretical and everyday life. Such a relatively open definition, as presented by Kuroń, appears all the more important as it allows him to include the various activities of social milieus in the sphere of the political. For him, a milieu is a group of people who enjoy personal relationships and 'visit each other on different occasions, and even without such occasions, discuss with and borrow books from each other.'<sup>529</sup> Kuroń continues by making an even stronger point by adding that 'one could say that each social milieu that discusses public affairs is a part of a [politically] oppositional movement.'<sup>530</sup>

The concept of the social milieu can be seen as key to Kuroń's understanding of political opposition in late socialist Poland as it served multiple functions. Firstly, discussions within groups of friends or milieus could turn into sites of systematic self-education. He was convinced that grassroots and politicized knowledge production and exchange inspired by émigré publications,

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid.

<sup>526</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the *Open Letter* see chapter 1 of this dissertation.

<sup>527</sup> 'Polityczna opozycja,' 5.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>529</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid.

poetry and foreign (for instance Russian) examples of activism could take place.<sup>531</sup> Secondly, a political milieu enabled public acts against the 'self-willed power of the state.'<sup>532</sup> Without the support of a group of like-minded friends one is devoid of a safety net. In this way, Kuroń seems to be suggesting that a social milieu could act as an antidote to the sense of alienation and atomization that was often a risk attached to acts of critique and disobedience. For Kuroń, this sense of 'togetherness' and safety attached to a milieu expressed itself in concrete practices such as offering financial support and other forms of care.<sup>533</sup> Thirdly, being a member of a social milieu or group could serve as a guiding compass in making one's own judgments.<sup>534</sup> For Kuroń, the Komandosi group and their activities in the late 1960s could be seen as an example of such a social milieu.<sup>535</sup> Kuroń's reference to the activities of the Komandosi seems to fit well as the group did participate in regular and informal meetings with the milieu of the open Club of Catholic Intelligentsia (KIK) and the more traditionally oriented scout group 'Czarna Jedyńka' (The Black One). While these get-togethers were held during the 1974-75 academic year, their purpose was to study and discuss the unofficial history of post-war Poland.<sup>536</sup>

The crux of the issue discussed by Kuroń lies in treating somewhat loose and seemingly insignificant personal bonds as an alternative to the dysfunctional and essentially undependable state apparatus, and to also act as a camouflage, a cover for an activity that was intensely political although it would not seem so at first sight.<sup>537</sup> Yet his understanding of a social milieu cannot be narrowly viewed as simply a reaction to everyday life in a totalitarian state as Kuroń was clearly interested in affirmative community-building and envisioning a just society. This utopian dimension of his thought and practice resembles a horizon that is always there, even if beyond one's practical reach. The text published in *Kultura* was not the first one in which Kuroń wrote about social bonds. In his earlier 1972 article 'Postawy ideowo-etyczne a więź społeczna' (Ideological and Ethical Attitudes and the Social Bond) he was already interested in the

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<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>533</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>534</sup> *Ibid.*, 18, 20.

<sup>535</sup> *Ibid.*, 18; for a more detailed account of the Komandosi group, see chapter two of this dissertation.

<sup>536</sup> Wujec, interview, 1980, 234-235.

<sup>537</sup> 'Polityczna opozycja,' 18.

transindividual dimension of the creation of social bonds.<sup>538</sup> While not being as explicitly political, the article reverberates with his fascination with social mobilization and anticipates some of Kuroń's later concepts such as that of a social movement. What is already present in his explication is the centrality of the intertwinement and mutual dependence of social collaboration and the social bond.<sup>539</sup>

Kuroń's article on the political opposition in *Kultura* from 1974 documents his turning away from the orthodox Marxist part of his political roots. In an effort to come up with a new diagnosis he turns to a different vocabulary offering different concepts. To be sure, some of his ideas stand in a relationship of continuity and alteration rather than that of a simple break or rejection with his previous intellectual choices. For instance, the prominence that Kuroń gives to education is reminiscent of his lifelong commitment to pedagogy. Furthermore, the at times chatty tone of the article captures something of Kuroń's remarkable gift to mobilize people to act without grand flourish. Clearly, the arguments presented in the article were attuned to his own experience and continued practice because, as he himself claimed, everything that has to be done is based on friendship.<sup>540</sup>

One of my interviewees, Klaudiusz Weiss, who left Poland in the late 1960s and knew Kuroń and Gaja, claims that both Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik were certainly interested in creating a specific milieu and, in so doing, expanding critical thinking and practice.<sup>541</sup> A report by a security service agent on July 10, 1975 states that one of the main goals of the Komandosi group was to integrate differing groups critical of the communist party, such as KIK (Club of Catholic Intelligentsia).<sup>542</sup> In order to prevent such contacts from being established, the security service aimed to isolate the Komandosi group.<sup>543</sup> This proved to be difficult in light of the variety of ways in which these contacts were set up and organized.

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<sup>538</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Postawy ideowo-etyczne a więź społeczna' in *Opozycja: Pisma polityczne 1969-1989* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, [1972] 2011), 9. The article originally appeared under the pseudonym Elzbieta Grazyna Borucka in *Znak* (216, 1972).

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>540</sup> 'Polityczna opozycja,' 18., 18-19.

<sup>541</sup> Weiss, interview.

<sup>542</sup> AIPN BU 1417/14, An Information, 10 July 1975, p. 7.

<sup>543</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

The assemblage of shared practices that could be seen as characterizing the milieu went far beyond reading *Kultura* and other books. As Szczęsna highlights, socio-political activities such as listening to and singing the songs of Bulat Okudzhawa<sup>544</sup> as well as Czechoslovak songs about the Prague Spring and the invasion of Czechoslovakia, shaped the group's political habitus.

Jan Szpotański's (1929-2001) satirical musical pieces were especially appealing to the young activists because they were witty and intentionally encapsulated the idiosyncrasies of everyday life in the People's Republic of Poland. In reference to the *Letter 34*, written in 1964 by the acclaimed poet and writer Antoni Słonimski (1894-1976) and signed by 34 intellectuals in protest against censorship, Szpotański wrote a satirical quasi-opera *Cisi i gęgacze, czyli bal u prezydenta, opera w trzech aktach z uwerturą i finałem* (The Quiet and the Babblers or the Ball at the President's).<sup>545</sup> Written in 1964, the piece ironically reconstructs different positions vis-à-vis the communist party by using the metaphor of a ball held at the president's palace. With Gomułka being represented as a Troll or Mr. Gomułka, the security service as the quiet guests, and the forming political opposition as the babblers, the 'opera' is an apt and critical description of the situation in 1960s Poland. Some of the phrases from Szpotanski's satirical songs entered the everyday culturally and politically coded language shared within the activist circles. In his second autobiography, Kuroń recalls that name-day parties organized by and held Jan Józef Lipski's apartment, were playfully called 'balls at the president's' by his friends. Lipski was one of Kuroń's closest friends and collaborators who was involved in the distribution the *Letter 34*.<sup>546</sup>

Indeed, Andrzej Rapaczyński recalls that 'the opera' was 'astonishingly witty and smart' and that 'Jacek [Kuroń] knew all the songs by Szpotański and was phenomenal at singing them.'<sup>547</sup> Rapaczyński even remembers having a stroll with Kuroń on the street when Kuroń started singing the part from 'the opera' about the security service in front of a police officers on patrol who

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<sup>544</sup> Bulat Okudzhava (1924-1997) was a Russian songwriter, poet and writer who was popular in intellectuals' circles in Poland.

<sup>545</sup> Janusz Szpotański, *Cisi i gęgacze, czyli bal u prezydenta, opera w trzech aktach z uwerturą i finałem*, available at <https://www.polskieradio.pl/97/>, last accessed March 20, 2019; see also Antoni Libera, 'Duch Szpota,' available at <http://www.polskieradio.pl/97/1401/Artykul/447644,Antoni-Libera-Duch-Szpota>, last accessed March 20, 2019.

<sup>546</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiezdny czas,' 401, 404.

<sup>547</sup> Rapaczyński, interview, 25 March 2016.

were unaware of the meaning of the song and its lyrics.<sup>548</sup> Kuroń's flamboyant behavior as well as the whole setting of the scene left Rapaczyński impressed.

A communal language is always governed by its own norms. Here, the knowledge of the original source – a mocking song which is critical of the official politics and language – is a precondition for understanding and intimately communicating with the group of young and critical political activists in the Warsaw of the late 1960s and 1970s. The idea that one has to be critical of the state was implicitly accepted by members of the group and, in that sense, their use of coded cultural references could be viewed as a powerful means of self-identification, self-consciousness and demarcation. Seen in this light, literature, music and singing were transmitters of political ideas because they conveyed political messages, as well as served the purpose of embodied social integration and acted as a proxy for collective belonging.

Significantly, attention to such shared norms materializes through time and political divides. During my interviews with them, Andrzej Rapaczyński and Klaudiusz Weiss, who both knew and respected Kuroń but were never themselves part of his closest milieu, spontaneously enacted the embodied attention to the cultural norms of the activist milieus and the specific youth subculture from the 1960s and 1970s. While recalling and reciting the lyrics of Szpotański's 'opera,' the song clearly triggered in Rapaczyński a subjective and embodied memory of Kuroń and of that period. The interviewee's account of Szpotański's song and Kuroń's singing was vivid as it was accompanied by Rapaczyński's delighted and infectious laughter. Weiss had a similarly immediate and spontaneous reaction to his memory of a song. Shortly after Jan Krzysztof Kelus, a singer and songwriter well-known in young activist circles during the 1960s and 1970s for his critical music, was mentioned, Weiss went to his computer and started looking for the songs online in order to play them.<sup>549</sup> As the song was being played, Weiss was visibly enjoying the music, carefully listening to the lyrics that he seemed to remember very well.

In addition to the informative role played by songs that were critical of everyday political reality, in both cases during the interviews the songs elicited and unearthed emotionally-colored reactions and associations shifting back and forth between the past and the present. The work of

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<sup>548</sup> Ibid.

<sup>549</sup> Weiss, interview, 16 April 2016.

cultural transmission that became visible here lies in bodily and emotionally driven reactions: laughing, reciting, listening to songs and singing along. In certain situations, re-enactments of habits and norms seem to be far more important than differing ideological perspectives and the parting of ways caused by migration. Indeed, the webs of personal attachments that bound people to places and to other people rather than to a narrowly understood purposive rational deliberation or ideology often turned out to be central to the generation and reproduction of political sympathies.

*An Ethos of Radical Solidarity: The Workers' Defense Committee (KOR)*

On June 24, 1976, in typical propaganda-like language, prime minister Piotr Jaroszewicz announced the rise of food prices in Polish parliament. As his speech was broadcasted live on public television, he declared that the government was committed to the 'modernization of the structure of consumption' necessary in order to continue a 'dynamic salary politics.'<sup>550</sup> As a result of the planned 'restructuring,' the price of beef, pork and other meat products would increase on average by 69%, with meat, ham and sausages being the most expensive products, and the price of lard 'only' increasing by 50%. While poultry would cost 30% more, butter and selected types of cheese would cost more than half of their usual price. Moreover, it had been decided that the consumption of sugar would be regulated from then on. Jaroszewicz added that the new prices would be valid as of June 28, 1976, thus only four days after the announcement. After this tour de force of dramatic announcements, the prime minister continued his speech in a characteristically paternalistic way by warning the citizens against the senseless waste of food.<sup>551</sup>

The next day, on June 25, mass protests, including strikes and demonstrations, began with '70-80.000 protesters in at least 90 workplaces that spread across 24 voivodships.'<sup>552</sup> The most numerous popular protests took place in the cities of Radom, Płock and in the suburb of Warsaw Ursus. In Radom, after the major strike in the General Walter's Metal Factory, the demonstrations

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<sup>550</sup> Piotr Jaroszewicz, 'Przemowienie premiera,' *Słowo Powszechne*, June 25, 1976, 2.

<sup>551</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>552</sup> Paweł Sasanka, 'Czerwiec '76. Refleksje wokół rocznicy,' *Biuletyn IPN* 4:125 (2011), 2. A voivodeship is a Polish administrative unit corresponding to a sphere of administrative authority defined under the term 'province.'



took a violent turn during the clashes with the police, its paramilitary formations and the security service. Strikes were also organized in the Ursus Factory and in the Płock Refinery. The brutal response of the police was not limited to the street. Those arrested in Radom and Ursus were transported to police stations and forced to walk through the infamous 'paths of health' (*ścieżki zdrowia*) along lanes lined by militia members who would beat them with their batons. Those who were arrested had to run as quickly as possible if they wanted to minimize the duration of the beating.<sup>553</sup> According to Kuroń's recollection, those who fainted during their run on these 'paths of health' could have considered themselves lucky as they did not have to experience the full ordeal.<sup>554</sup>

Although on June 26 the prime minister reversed the decision to increase the food prices,<sup>555</sup> symbolic and physical state violence continued. In the face of the mysterious death of the 28-year old Jan Brożyna,<sup>556</sup> the murder of priest Roman Kotlarz and the manifestly excessive court sentences for protesters<sup>557</sup> many intellectuals felt they could not remain silent. In June, Jan Olszewski (1930-2019) initiated a letter in support of the workers. The letter was signed by fourteen intellectuals and was called List 14 (*Letter 14*).<sup>558</sup> On July 18 Kuroń wrote an open letter to the national secretary of the Italian Communist Party Enrico Berlinguer (1922-1984). In the letter, Kuroń asked Berlinguer for support for the workers who were abused by the police and the by the partial legal system. Kuroń wrote that 'the workers, devoid of their own organizations and information, are utterly defenseless against the oppression.'<sup>559</sup> Because of Kuroń's past sympathies with the communist party and because of the letter to Berlinguer, Kuroń gained the

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<sup>553</sup> Sasanka, 'Czerwiec '76,' 6; for a more immediate account on the events, see Bolesław Sulik, 'Robotnicy,' *Kultura* 10, 349 (1976), 65-76.

<sup>554</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdny czas,' 407.

<sup>555</sup> 'Oświadczenie Prezesa Rady Ministrów,' *Słowo Powszechne*, June 26, 1976, 1-2.

<sup>556</sup> Jan Brożyna was most likely murdered by the militia, see Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR: A History of the Workers' Defense Committee in Poland, 1976-1981* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1983] 1985), 95-96.

<sup>557</sup> Sasanka, 'Czerwiec '76,' 6-7.

<sup>558</sup> The signatories included Jan Olszewski, Ludwik Cohn, Jakub Karpiński, Stefan Kisielewski, Władysław Siła-Nowicki, Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń and Edward Lipiński, see *Kultura* 9, 348 (1976), 63-64.

<sup>559</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'List otwarty Jacka Kuronia do Enrico Berlinguera,' *Kultura* 9, 348 (1976), 62; the Letter was also mentioned in the Polish service of Radio Free Europe, see AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol.12, Note on the Monitoring of Radio Free Europe, July 20, 1976.

unenviable reputation of being a Eurocommunist.<sup>560</sup> As a pre-emptive measure, he was sent to do a mandatory military training for reservists on July 19, 1976,<sup>561</sup> where he stayed until the late fall of the same year.

When the first court sessions in the cases against the workers started in the summer, a group of committed intellectuals attended the trial. Their continued commitment resulted in an informal meeting on September 12, 1976 to discuss the founding of a committee that would defend the workers.<sup>562</sup> The Workers' Defense Committee (KOR) was founded during Kuroń's short leave from the army, on September 23, 1976; its founding members were Jerzy Andrzejewski (1909-1983), Stanisław Barańczak (1946-2014), Ludwik Cohn (1902-1981), Edward Lipiński (1888-1981), Jan Józef Lipski (1926-1991), Antoni Macierewicz (born 1948), Piotr Naimski (1951), Antoni Pajdak (1894-1988), Józef Rybicki (1901–1986), Aniela Steinsbergowa (1886–1988), Adam Szczypiorski (1895–1979), father Jan Zieja (1897–1991) and Wojciech Ziemiński (1925–2001).<sup>563</sup>

KOR's main aims were to shed light on the state's acts of repression and breaches of law, to circulate uncensored information on the June protests and their aftermath, and to offer legal advice and social as well as financial support to victims of police violence, the defendants and their family members. By publishing and contributing to the underground press<sup>564</sup> the names of KOR members were often made known to the readers. For instance, Kuroń's name and phone number were provided as a contact in cases of emergency.

The principle of transparency became KOR's trademark and allowed KOR's activists to reach out to a broader audience but also to introduce a new quality into the political opposition. Zbigniew Bujak was a worker in the Ursus factory and later became an important member of the

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<sup>560</sup> Jacek Kuroń, Interview by Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski in *Niepokorni: rozmowy o Komitecie Obrony Robotników*, ed. Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski (Kraków: Znak, [1981] 2008), 180; AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 8, Information, March 15, 1977.

<sup>561</sup> The decision was made on July 2, 1976, see AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 12, Note, August 2, 1976.

<sup>562</sup> Jan Józef Lipski, Interview by Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski in *Niepokorni: rozmowy o Komitecie Obrony Robotników*, ed. Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski (Kraków: Znak, [1981] 2008), 46; for a more comprehensive perspective on KOR, see Skórzyński, *Siła bezsilnych* and Friszke, *Czas KOR-u*.

<sup>563</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdny czas,' 410.

<sup>564</sup> The underground press that was associated with KOR included: *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (edited by Seweryn Blumsztajn and Joanna Szczęsna), *Głos* (which involved Antoni Macierewicz), *Krytyka* (which involved Adam Michnik), *Robotnik* (which involved Jan Lityński, Wojciech Onyszkiewicz, and Ludwika Wujec), *Placówka* (which involved Wiesław Kęcik), *Zapis* (which involved Wiktor Woroszyński, and Jacek Bocheński) and *Puls* (which involved Jacek Bierezin and Witold Sułkowski).

political opposition and a friend to Gaja and Jacek Kuroń. Bujak learned about Jacek Kuroń for the first time during Bujak's term in the army when the Radio Free Europe informed its listeners about the June Protests. The audacity of KOR's members to make their names known to everyone in the context of state oppression left a profound impression on Bujak:

From its onset KOR followed the rule of transparency that I found to be brilliant. It was such an eye opener. Back then in Poland one thought in terms of conspirational activities and then suddenly there is a bunch of people with real names, providing their private addresses and being open about their political activity. The rule of transparency became a role model for and benchmark in the political opposition but it also showed the internal power of their political actions and courage. To me, a working-class man, it was such a novelty, a true discovery. ... I realized that somewhere out there is a group of intellectuals that is on the same side of the barricade as me.<sup>565</sup>

Bujak also adds that those who decided to remain anonymous were treated by the secret police as an anonymous person who could be harassed and physically assaulted. Although KOR's programmatic transparency about its political activism did not automatically translate into KOR's members being untouchable by the secret police, Bujak's statement points to the sense of empowerment stemming from having a known political identity that functioned as a protective shell.

By acting in public and applying the principle of openness and transparency, even if on such a grassroots level, KOR members hoped to create a specific political ethos as well as a concrete infrastructure of support for the victims of state oppression, to break open the political atmosphere of repression, and to relieve the sense of alienation among those critical of the Party. The KOR ethos of activism consisted of commitment to non-violent, legal and autonomous political interventions buttressed by providing the necessary information on state repression.<sup>566</sup> Unsurprisingly, immediately after its foundation, the security service launched a special covert

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<sup>565</sup> Interview with Zbigniew Bujak, October 9, 2015, Warsaw.

<sup>566</sup> Krzysztof Brzechczyn, 'Korowska filozofia *społecznego* oporu,' in *Opozycja demokratyczna w PRL w latach 1976-1981*, ed. Wojciech Polak, Jakub Kufel, and Przemysław Ruchlewski (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2012), 152.

operation titled 'Gracze' [Players].<sup>567</sup> The number of KOR members and of its sympathizers gradually grew. Anka Kowalska, Halina Mikołajska and younger people such as Mirosław Chojecki, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Henryk Wujec, Joanna Szczęsna, Bogdan Borusewicz, Emil Morgawicz and many others joined and enhanced the already pluralistic character of KOR.<sup>568</sup>

Central to the functioning of KOR were the attempts to establish relationships with the workers' families. This involved regular trips to Ursus, Radom and Płock during which KOR members or associates gathered information about current developments and offered various types of support.<sup>569</sup> Providing accurate information and documenting the events were key, as the official media coverage was filled with misinformation and a hateful tone against the accused and KOR, and thus proved entirely unreliable.<sup>570</sup> Eventually, KOR managed to publish its own and independent publications such as *Biuletyn Informacyjny* (News Bulletin), *Głos* (Voice), and *Krytyka* (Critique).

While Mirosław Chojecki,<sup>571</sup> with the help of the Starzewscys, the Romaszewscys and Jan Lityński,<sup>572</sup> was the representative of KOR in Radom, the support action for the Ursus workers was coordinated by Henryk Wujec and Wojciech Onyszkiewicz.<sup>573</sup> Legal advice was arranged by KOR with comprehensive legal support being provided by lawyers who sympathized with KOR such as Władysław Siła-Nowicki, Jan Olszewski and Stanisław Szczuka.<sup>574</sup> Moreover, the logistics and scale of the financial aid system coordinated by Jan Józef Lipski clearly expressed the serious ambition of KOR and their willingness to take considerable risk. The support also extended to the realm of the private as Ludwika Wujec and the scouts were also involved in babysitting the children of the accused workers so that their wives could attend the trial.<sup>575</sup> Zofia Romaszewska, in turn, tried to

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<sup>567</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1405 vol. 14, Motion to Launch a Covert Action under the Cryptonym 'Players,' September 23, 1976, 1-2.

<sup>568</sup> See Skórzyński, *Siła bezsilnych*; Lipski, *KOR*; Friszke, *Czas KOR-u*.

<sup>569</sup> Kuroń, interview, 1981, 196.

<sup>570</sup> Robert Spatek, 'Gracze' – Komitet Obrony Robotników w propagandzie PRL, stereotypach oraz dokumentach Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych,' *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 264 (2003), 81-82.

<sup>571</sup> Mirosław Chojecki, Interview by Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski in *Niepokorni: rozmowy o Komitecie Obrony Robotników*, ed. Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski (Kraków: Znak, [1981] 2008), 447.

<sup>572</sup> Jan Lityński, Interview by Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski in *Niepokorni: rozmowy o Komitecie Obrony Robotników*, ed. Andrzej Friszke and Andrzej Paczkowski (Kraków: Znak, [1981] 2008), 363-364.

<sup>573</sup> Wujec, interview, 1981, 241.

<sup>574</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiezdny czas,' 419.

<sup>575</sup> Wujec, interview, 1981, 239,

make sure that the unemployed workers actively looked for a new job. Unsurprisingly, for Kuroń the unifying factor of KOR members, with their different ideological backgrounds, was the desire to help oppressed workers after the events of June 1976.<sup>576</sup>

It is not the primary aim of this chapter to explicate the internal rivalries among the members of KOR. Rather, in focusing on the group's habitus in the context of the challenging and repressive political conditions it was facing, I will seek to understand the enabling effect of the everyday functioning of this milieu. As Kuroń highlights, the role of this milieu with its own rituals such as parties, readings and sharing journals such as *Kultura*, played a significant role in creating the conditions for KOR to emerge and to sustain itself.<sup>577</sup>

### *Politicized Milieu and Oppressed Habitus*

The political involvement of the committed intellectuals in KOR did come at a price. Activists associated with KOR were not only under continued surveillance but also exposed to symbolic and physical state violence expressed most directly in oppressive interactions with the security service. Indeed, as will be shown in this section, the security service was successful in bringing together different forms of bullying ranging from regular house visits via threatening phone calls and letters to acts of physical violence.

A more concrete sense of the situation can be gained from the case of Halina Mikołajska (1925-1989), an acclaimed film and theater actress who joined KOR and became one of its most well-known members. She was married to Marian Brandys (1912-1998), a renowned writer and screenwriter, who kept a personal diary that contains invaluable information about that period.<sup>578</sup> Reading it, we learn that the everyday experience of the political activists deserves attention as they were often confronted with the price the activists of 'Gierek period' had to pay for their political involvement. The fall of 1976 was particularly difficult for Mikołajska as the security service, or 'the entertainment department' as it was sarcastically called by Brandys, unleashed its harassment campaign against her. Mikołajska's car was regularly damaged by anonymous

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<sup>576</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417 vol. 7, Note from a Conversation with Jacek Kuroń, November 24, 1976, 1.

<sup>577</sup> Kuroń, interview, 1981, 160.

<sup>578</sup> Marian Brandys, *Dziennik 1967-1977* (Warsaw: Iskry, 1996).

perpetrators.<sup>579</sup> After her KOR-related trip to Kraków, where she was held under a false accusation of stealing a coat at the police station, Mikołajska, who was in a state of despair, told her husband in despair that 'one can cope with all these brutal, monkey-like, nasty, and unpleasant issues but the growing desolation is difficult to handle.'<sup>580</sup> As the situation unfolded, it became clear that a sense of alienation amplified by fear would become a recurring experience. The life of Mikołajska and Brandys' family was filled with a somewhat paranoid atmosphere and hatred towards the security service. As Brandys aptly put it, the atmosphere 'smells with blood' and reminded him of the anti-Semitic campaign from 1968.<sup>581</sup> Furthermore, Mikołajska had been receiving threatening and bullying phone calls and letters almost daily.

In this context, on December 15 when their phone was suddenly out of order, Halina Mikołajska received an unexpected visit from three unknown men who claimed to be workers wanting to talk to a KOR member. In a confrontation with Mikołajska, the guests turned verbally violent and threatened her that rotten eggs would be thrown at her during her next performance in the theater. In his entry from that day, Brandys again referred to the March events.<sup>582</sup> As a result of the continued harassment, exposure to high levels of stress and despite gestures of support, Mikołajska tried to commit suicide the day after the visit. Devastated by his wife's tragic decision, a few days later Brandys expressed pessimistic thoughts about joining KOR and the family's current state, writing that 'the situation is very difficult and doomed to fail. But I know one thing: after knowing the truth one could not live a different life.'<sup>583</sup> While the actress was one of the most harassed activists of the committee, her situation was far from atypical.

The end of the year was accompanied by continued aggressive pressure from the secret police as Mikołajska received defaming phone calls suggesting she was sexually promiscuous.<sup>584</sup> Sexual intimidation as a disciplining strategy was driven by the intention to humiliate and involved sending around derogatory information about Mikołajska. For instance, one of her younger collaborators in KOR, Piotr Zaborowski (1950-1978), who was also a Warsaw-based actor,

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<sup>579</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>580</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>581</sup> *Ibid.*, 31, 39, 74.

<sup>582</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>583</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>584</sup> *Ibid.*, 55, see also 100.

received a comic-book containing defaming information about the intimate relationship between Mikołajska and her husband. Zaborowski was convinced that the comic-book was sent by the security service with the aim of damaging Mikołajska's reputation. In describing this unpleasant event, Zaborowski added that 'it is difficult to believe that anyone in the milieu [of political activists] could be convinced by the insulting drawings and descriptions from the comic-book.'<sup>585</sup> If the strategy was to isolate Mikołajska by defaming her, it turned out to be partially counter-productive as the bonds of solidarity became stronger in response and intensified with time. However, these actions left their traces, since, at least for that period, the bones of the disobedient were no longer broken by the security service as during Stalinism, their gendered bodies were exposed to disciplining, repressive, and symbolically violent sexualized narratives.

In his second autobiography, written years later, Kuroń describes this difficult period in the life of Mikołajska and her family. He points out that her family had to face 'a phalanx of young secret police bulls' and that she basically lived in terror.<sup>586</sup> Kuroń reveals that he believed that with her attempted suicide, Mikołajska saved the whole of KOR from an escalation of the activities of the security service. Had she decided to suspend her political activity, someone else would have become the new object of aggressive bullying. In Kuroń's interpretation, the case of Mikołajska was a tragic wake-up call for the security service.<sup>587</sup>

Unsurprisingly, Kuroń together with Gaja and their son Maciek were exposed to continued bullying from the security service which took different forms. As already mentioned, one of the main strategies of the security service was to send intimidating letters. The last months of 1976 were marked by an intensified hate campaign that was unleashed in private letters sent to Kuroń. In many of them, Kuroń was verbally abused by anti-Semitic and xenophobic insults.<sup>588</sup> In one letter from December 17, 1976, Kuroń was also called a parasite on the healthy body of society. The unknown author of the letter ends by stating that he feels such an overpowering repulsion against Kuroń that the author cannot even sign the letter.<sup>589</sup> In a similar vein, Stefan M., in his letter, asked Kuroń 'how long will the Polish state tolerate your hostile activities against the

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<sup>585</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol. 8, Note, 15 March 1977, 1.

<sup>586</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdny czas,' 429.

<sup>587</sup> *Ibid.*, 430.

<sup>588</sup> AO III/12 K. 9, Letter to J. K. from an anonymous sender, December 15, 1976.

<sup>589</sup> AO III/12 K. 9, Letter to J. K. from an anonymous sender, December 17, 1976.

working class who rebuilt the country after the wartime destruction? For how long will you be enjoying the privileges of having a Polish citizenship? For how long will you be eating Polish bread made by the working class?’<sup>590</sup> Michał S., a student from Zielona Góra, a town close to a western border, wrote to Kuroń to tell him that he was an anarchist and a lunatic.<sup>591</sup> Reproducing all the classist clichés, a group of anonymous miners in their letter asked Kuroń ‘[w]hy all of you are intellectuals and there is no miner among you? We don’t have time to spend money in sitting in cafes. We would like to see your Polish and international bank accounts. What do you do with all the money that you hustle from naïve people?’<sup>592</sup> The format of the letters turned out to be a surprisingly eclectic bullying strategy. Combining various shallow propaganda threads that mobilized public opinion at that time, they included references to the fear of Jews, foreigners and the supposedly immoral conduct of members of the political opposition. The letters also reveal how political dissidents were imagined and with what discursive means they were made into outcasts undeserving of the respect owed to proper socialist citizens. By extension, the letters provide a distorted, if not caricaturist image of a proper socialist citizen who is nationalistic, anti-Semitic and anti-elitist.

Kuroń always tried to react with a sense of humor to the various forms of harassment by engaging in short and ironic or overly pleasant conversations with the person calling him to threaten him.<sup>593</sup> Indeed, his warm, loud and easygoing mode of talking often had a relaxing influence on others. On January 1, 1977 Kuroń paid Mikołajska and Brandys a visit that temporarily improved their wellbeing. Clearly in a better mood, in recalling the visit Brandys described Kuroń in the following way:

I like to look at him (he looks like the revolutionary leader from a sculptor’s dream) and listen to him when he speaks. ... Since then [since they have met] I have adored him like everyone who had the luck of being in his sphere of influence. I adore him for his forceful

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<sup>590</sup> AO III/12 K. 9, Letter to J. K. from Stefan M., December 17, 1976.

<sup>591</sup> AO III/12 K. 9, A Letter to J.K. from Michał S., 20 December 1976.

<sup>592</sup> AO III/12 K. 9, A Letter to J. K. from a group of anonymous miners, 22 December 1976.

<sup>593</sup> Kuroń, ‘Gwiezdny czas,’ 430.



character, unlimited energy for life, for his great heart and for his absolutely unique sensitivity to human injustice and misfortune.<sup>594</sup>

Brandys' description of Kuroń expresses his high regard for one of the most famous KOR members but it also shows that Kuroń's visit and his way of being was experienced by Brandys and probably Mikołajska as uplifting.<sup>595</sup> The power of Kuroń's personality was not situated in his subtlety or ambivalence. Rather, Brandys' description captures Kuroń's emotional richness that in the context of continued state oppression could be seen as inspiring and boosting one's sense of happiness, if only briefly.<sup>596</sup> Indeed, later on, when experiencing some irritation caused by an interview Kuroń gave to *Le Monde*, Brandys did address the potentially problematic aspects of Kuroń's politics and personality.<sup>597</sup> Despite disagreements Brandys remained positive about Kuroń's role in organizing one of the central milieus of the political opposition in Poland.<sup>598</sup>

The situation of Mikołajska's family provides an example of the long-lasting effects of alienation and the feeling of powerlessness triggered by the security service, as depression, disappointment, and fear grew with each incoming phone call or letter.<sup>599</sup> Living in this atmosphere of anxiety and with the awareness that their apartment was wiretapped, Brandys felt powerless in his attempts to protect his family, and their life, stating that 'my apartment ceased to be my apartment just as my phone ceased to be my phone.'<sup>600</sup> Clearly, such a negative re-evaluation of a private life that no longer feels private is an immediate reaction to the strategies of the security service brutally politicized the private sphere in order to re-establish the normative understanding and practice of life in late socialist Poland. Adding to this difficult situation, the official press was in the midst of an anti-KOR propaganda campaign with clearly anti-Semitic undertones.<sup>601</sup> For instance, the second most influential daily in the Polish People's

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<sup>594</sup> Brandys, *Dziennik*, 58.

<sup>595</sup> See also *ibid.*, 82.

<sup>596</sup> For instance, following Kuroń's advice on how to deal in a witty way with harassing anonymous phone calls, Brandys noticed that the method was working; *ibid.*, 62.

<sup>597</sup> *Ibid.*, 96.

<sup>598</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>599</sup> *Ibid.*, 64, 70, 73, 75, 77, 123, 127, 130, 153, 174, 190, 218, 224, 305, 310.

<sup>600</sup> *Ibid.*, 79, 99, 184

<sup>601</sup> *Ibid.*, 125, 157, 226, 243.

Republic, *Życie Warszawy* (Warsaw's Life), published a short and critical article on one of Kuroń's closest friends, Adam Michnik, and his brother Stefan Michnik. The defaming article referred to Michnik's role in the March 1968 events and to his brother's career in the judiciary during Stalinism.<sup>602</sup> While clearly worried and depressed in the light of these developments, Brandys did remain wholeheartedly supportive of the committee, expressing his ambivalence and shifting feelings in the following way on April 20, 1977: 'I love them all and I am proud of them but simultaneously I am dying out of worrying about them.'<sup>603</sup>

While expressing support for the mistreated workers was at that time far from self-evident,<sup>604</sup> KOR continued to act in solidarity with them. The activity of the committee continued to provoke intense reactions from the security service such as the beating of Mirosław Chojecki and the physical attack on KOR activists who were at the court hearing in the case of Józef Smagowski in Radom (Smagowski was accused of inspiring workers to burn the office of the provincial committee of the PZPR).<sup>605</sup> After the incident with Chojecki, KOR decided to attend the next hearing as a group. When Kuroń, Anka Kowalska, Seweryn Blumsztajn, Jan Józef Lipski, Mirosław Chojecki, Wiktor Nagórski and others, arrived at the court in Radom on January 10, they were welcomed by a significantly bigger and already drunken group of men, in their early 20s to early 50s. They were workers protesting against KOR's involvement in the other workers' case. The atmosphere was tense as the men were becoming more agitated and increasingly confrontational. Entering the courtroom turned out to be difficult for the KOR members as they were blocked by the men opposing them.

The worst was yet to come. During a break the KOR activists had eggs, some of them rotten and foul-smelling, thrown at them by the thugs. In addition, the perpetrators were verbally abusive, shouting slurs at the visitors from Warsaw such as 'Jewish servants'<sup>606</sup> and 'traitors, spies,

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<sup>602</sup> 'W czym sie kręcą,' *Życie Warszawy*, December 28, 1976. In January 1977 Kuroń and Leszek Kołakowski were verbally attacked in an open letter written by a right-wing Polish Club based in New York City. The letter was addressed to Poles abroad as well as in Poland, see: AIPN BU 0204/1417 vol. 8.

<sup>603</sup> Brandys, *Dziennik*, 183.

<sup>604</sup> For an audio-visual account of different ethical attitudes among Polish intellectuals in the 1970s see the film *Barwy Ochronne* (Camouflage), dir. Krzysztof Zanussi, Poland 1977.

<sup>605</sup> Anka Kowalska, 'Z dziejow jednej rozprawy sadowej,' *Kultura* 4, 427 (1983), 28.

<sup>606</sup> Kuroń, interview, 1981, 185.

you sell Poland for Israeli dollars, go to Israel!’<sup>607</sup> According to the testimony of Kowalska, Kuroń then shouted back as loudly as possible ‘And you [sell Poland] for [Russian] rubles!’<sup>608</sup> Despite attempts to find help from the police that had an office in the very same building, the KOR activists were left on their own. Recalling the dramatic and unpleasant event that lasted more than three hours, Kowalska described the faces of the perpetrators as ‘brutal and coarse.’<sup>609</sup> Few months later, Stanisław Pyjas (1953-1977) a student working for KOR in Kraków, mysteriously and unexpectedly died on May 7, 1977. After that incident, members of the political opposition lived and acted in fear of political repression; especially since after the students’ protests organized in Kraków, many KOR activists, including Kuroń, were arrested.

Kuroń, of course, was not immune to the stress and the enduring political pressure caused by the harassment from the security service. Increasingly realizing this. By the end of 1976 one of Kuroń’s friends reported noticing that Kuroń was exhausted by the work related to KOR.<sup>610</sup> According to a note from the security service, Barbara Toruńczyk observed that Kuroń ‘acted as if in fever’ and she was worried about the extremity and intensity of his reactions.<sup>611</sup> The friend felt that with Modzelewski out of the political opposition and with Michnik temporarily in France, Kuroń was more prone to making mistakes since he lacked his usual day-to-day interactions with them. Interestingly, this description does not only reveal Kuroń’s state of mind but also highlights the power of friendships in stabilizing his responses to personal and political issues. Undeniably, Kuroń was in a bad shape. In a note by the security service after a house search on December 29, 1976, Kuroń ‘was clearly tired and low-spirited – symptoms not observed before.’<sup>612</sup>

The excessive workload also had an impact on Kuroń’s physical health. Kuroń’s younger brother, Andrzej Feliks Kuroń (b. 1943), believed that his older brother was paying an enormous price for his political commitment which the younger Kuroń metaphorically described as ‘trying to pull down the wall.’<sup>613</sup> The exhaustion lasted for months and in the beginning of March 1977 Kuroń suffered from a bacterial infection that was seen by some of his friends as a complication

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<sup>607</sup> Kowalska, ‘Z dziejow jednej rozprawy,’ 30.

<sup>608</sup> Ibid.

<sup>609</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>610</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417 vol. 7, Information, December 10, 1976, 1.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417 vol. 20, Report from the Operation, December 29, 1976, 1.

<sup>613</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417 vol. 8, Information, January 17, 1977.

resulting from untreated influenza and overwork. During their meeting on March 7, Mikołajska expressed concern for Kuroń's bad shape and urged him to see a doctor.<sup>614</sup> Indeed, this sense of care connected to a close group life or milieu of friends and activists was as important as the activists' commitment to political ideals.

### *A Complex Web of Sociality: Between Milieu and Social Movement*

The significance of personal bonds is underlined by Kuroń himself when he observes that, when state repression intensified after June 1976, a milieu already existed that 'immediately knew what to do.'<sup>615</sup> In one of his major articles written in November 1976 'Myśli o Programie Działania' (Thoughts on the Program for Action)<sup>616</sup> Kuroń focuses on the concept of the social movement as a key category and form of political opposition. The argument of the article echoes some of Kuroń's previous thoughts such as the idea that the political opposition should be against submission to what he identified as a totalitarian rule. The tone and vocabulary of the article was set by his previous articles in many, ways. Furthermore, the fragmentary definition of the concept of society provided in 'Myśli...' is in line with his pedagogical thought and practice, as well as the article on political opposition from 1974. For Kuroń, a society is a large-scale collective that is centered around cooperation. In his understanding collaboration is an essential working mode and an enabling condition for each individual because through and in collaboration with others the individuals can express their aspirations as members of the society.<sup>617</sup> Since society is made up of diverse and at times conflicting aspirations and political languages, pluralism becomes another fundamental value that needs to be properly recognized. Pluralism here appears to be a value and a necessary precondition that also fulfils a stabilizing function. It is clear that Kuroń does not spell out a definition of a social movement that is totalizing, monolithic and unrealistically unified. Rather, he defines a social movement as the collective cooperation of

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<sup>614</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417 vol. 8, Information Note, March 12, 1977.

<sup>615</sup> Kuroń, interview, 1981, 160.

<sup>616</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Myśli o programie działania,' in *Kuroń: Opozycja, pisma polityczne 1969-1989* (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna [1977] 2010), 77-95. For an interesting analysis of this article, see Tomasz Ceran, "Trzecia Polska ruchów społecznych.' Teoria działania Jacka Kuronia,' in *Opozycja demokratyczna w PRL w latach 1976-1981*, ed. Wojciech Polak, Jakub Kufel, and Przemysław Ruchlewski (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2012), 156-173.

<sup>617</sup> Kuroń, 'Myśli o programie działania,' 78.

different groups that provides the means for its individuals to pursue their common goals. In terms of its internal logics of organization, a social movement is inherently different from state-organized and hierarchical institutions.<sup>618</sup>

Kuroń provides several examples of possible social movements: (1) the resistance of individual farmers; (2) workers strikes and demonstrations; (3) the active defense of the Catholic Church by open-minded Catholics; (4) the activity of intellectuals such as writers, academics and artists aiming to create independent forms of thought and culture.<sup>619</sup> Meaningful and autonomous collaboration, thus, cannot be one-sidedly viewed as focused on a sum of individual needs and ambitions. Rather, Kuroń's understanding of social cooperation seems to suggest a scheme for collective action out of which a new and better form of the political would emerge.

Significantly, Kuroń insisted on the fact that the political opposition should organize itself in the form of social movements that would cooperate with each other. Unsurprisingly, the founding of KOR in support of protesting workers was an event around which a social movement was created. The ultimately guiding conviction behind KOR is the belief that solidarity is more important than concrete political demands because, as Kuroń writes, 'solidarity and agreement are the most important [values].'<sup>620</sup> Contextualizing this novel dimension of Kuroń's thinking requires addressing the essential point of his argument, namely that everyday practices can have a politically relevant dimension. Rather than dismissing mundane and communal practices, Kuroń offers an inclusive and affirmative account of the political. As he himself puts it at the end of the article:

It is not my aim to list here all possible social movements. Each case that good-willed people will recognize as relevant can turn out to be an occasion for the creation of a social movement. ... It is, thus, a program for creating a Third Poland<sup>621</sup> through social

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<sup>618</sup> Ibid., 86-87.

<sup>619</sup> Ibid., 87-89.

<sup>620</sup> Ibid., 93.

<sup>621</sup> By using the term 'Third Poland' Kuroń refers to the phrase 'Second Poland' associated with Edward Gierek's progressive rule.

movements; in fact, for creating the only Poland – a civil Poland based on care and social action.<sup>622</sup>

Clearly, Kuroń's argument in the article is partly in line with his pedagogical ethos, reflections on the political opposition and the vision and experience shared with his friends in the 1970s. The very centrality of the social dimension of life could be seen as a trace of his Marxist and revisionist roots.<sup>623</sup> While the sense of mobilization visible in his article aligns well with his and Modzelewski's *Open Letter* from 1964, the article provides a somewhat different theory of social action. Here, social action is clearly not rooted in a theory of labor. Moreover, unlike in the *Open Letter*, the article from 1976 is not a clear-cut act of a radical critique aimed to reform the system from within. In 'Myśli o Programie Działania,' Kuroń seemed to suggest that political transformations are neither inherently immanent nor apposite to the ruling political system as they need to take place within more autonomous circles and practices.

A note by the security service from 1976 shows that Kuroń's ideas about social movements were known and discussed among his friends and colleagues. For instance, Modzelewski observed that for Kuroń the idea of a social movement was a means of sketching a broader vision of the political opposition. Apparently, there was a series of misinterpretations as older members of KOR were afraid that Kuroń's article would be viewed as KOR's official program and ideological line.<sup>624</sup>

In line with Kuroń, Brandys and others, Szczęsna believes that the politicized atmosphere within her group of friends was a powerful 'natural' factor determining the decision to support the workers from Radom and Ursus. According to Szczęsna the bonds that were established and continued in the early 1970s turned out to be vital for the events of 1976 when the Workers' Defense Committee was founded. Szczęsna describes how these friendships materialized themselves in concrete acts of solidarity and support:

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<sup>622</sup> Kuroń, 'Myśli o programie działania.'

<sup>623</sup> See for instance the well-known book by Adam Schaff, *Marksizm a jednostka ludzka* (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1965).

<sup>624</sup> AIBN BU 0204/1417, vol. 7, Verbal Description of a Threat, 3.

When June 1976 arrived it turned out that there are structures, there are networks, there are people, there is readiness [for action] ... What is more, it turned out that this milieu based on friendships was incredibly effective ... Strong bonds of friendships were established but also from the very beginning there was something special about this group ... when some of us were arrested our families didn't know each other, there were official channels of support and they [the political friends] helped us. Our KOR-group we just had these impulses of helping one another. For instance, if the news spread that police is doing searches at Kuroń's house then people would show up there to show to the police "we are not afraid of you!" One also had to come to pick up the underground press or the notebook with important contacts before the police would do so. We did it so that there's no feeling of being alone but that there is a group that will stand like a wall behind each of us.<sup>625</sup>

Krystyna Starczewska (b. 1937), a well-known Polish pedagogue and KOR collaborator in the late 1970s, agrees with Szczęsna regarding the significance of personal networks and friendships from the early 1970s in the formation of political milieus.<sup>626</sup> Szczęsna continues by emphasizing the central role played by Jacek and Gaja within the group:

Jacek's phone number played such an incredible role, this number was known by heart by many people in the whole of Poland. One knew that one could call there with the information that something's happening, that someone got arrested. From the very beginning Jacek had this intuition that this is how it should all function ... I saw another generation of students fascinated by Jacek and later on these people founded the students' committee of Solidarność. Without any doubt he was the leader.

Despite being under constant surveillance as the apartment was wiretapped, Kuroń and Gaja's phone number – 393964 – was an anchoring point for many of those in need of help and

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<sup>625</sup> Szczęsna, interview, February 16, 2015.

<sup>626</sup> Krystyna Starczewska, interview, June 8, 2017, Warsaw, Poland.

information. As Kuroń recalls, 'in this way, an information center started its activity in my apartment in which, just as in a farmer family, Gaja, my son Maciek and me were working together.'<sup>627</sup> While describing Jacek as the unquestioned leader of the group, Szczęsna characterizes Gaja's contribution in the following way:

Gajka played an enormous role. Today it's difficult to imagine how poor the country was and how miserable it was and it was a house where one could always find tea, meatballs made by Gaja and a soup and one could just get some food there. Gaja used to make such a great mutton pilaf.<sup>628</sup>

Kuroń's own words should supplement Szczęsna's recollection of Gaja. During the late 1970s Kuroń was one of the key dissident figures in Warsaw who collaborated with the Student Committees of Solidarność (SKS), which were founded in 1977 after the murder of Stanisław Pyjas, on May 7, 1977, most likely, by the security service.<sup>629</sup> Kuroń's tasks involved holding regular meetings with students, providing them with guidance and organizing regular trips to Kraków.<sup>630</sup> In emotionally describing his relationship to the milieu of SKS Kraków, Kuroń weaves in his appreciation of Gaja: 'I often went to Kraków with Gaja who got to know everyone and, like me, she fell in love with them. I saw many of them through Gaja's eyes; back then, I saw everyone through her eyes.'<sup>631</sup>

Analyses of the political opposition in Poland from a gender-studies perspective suggest that dissident groups were organized on the basis of highly gendered norms.<sup>632</sup> One might therefore be tempted to view Gaja as performing a supportive and traditionally feminine role in relation to Jacek's charismatic personality. But this would be an oversimplification. According to

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<sup>627</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdny czas,' 415.

<sup>628</sup> Szczęsna, interview.

<sup>629</sup> The Student Committees of Solidarity were operating in Kraków, Warsaw, Triple City (Gdańsk, Gdynia, Sopot), Wrocław and Szczecin. There were attempts to spread the SKS activities to other cities such as Łódź.

<sup>630</sup> Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw, AIPN BU 0 222/701/5/54100/II/5.

<sup>631</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 465.

<sup>632</sup> See, e.g., Natalia Jarska and Jan and Olszek, eds., *Płeć buntu. Kobiety w opozycji społecznej w Polsce w latach 1944–1989 na tle porównawczym* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2014). For a more general discussion of gender history see, e.g., Joan W. Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), and Laura Lee Downs, *Writing Gender History* (London: Bloomsbury, [2004] 2010).



many living activists from the milieu, there would have been no Jacek without Gaja, and their ties with her were as strong as their ties with Jacek. Gaja was a loyal friend and lover to Kuroń already before and after their marriage in 1959.<sup>633</sup> Moreover, Gaja who was more collected and composed, often balanced Jacek's intense emotionality.<sup>634</sup>

A psychologist specializing in child psychology, she was then employed in a local Educational-Professional Clinic in one of the northern districts of Warsaw. When Kuroń was imprisoned on May 16, 1977 after the students' demonstration in Kraków protesting against the death of Pyjas, Gaja actively participated in KOR activities by distributing underground newspapers, joining meetings and managing contacts with foreign journalists and émigré activists such as Eugeniusz Smolar and Natan Tenenbaum (1940-2016).<sup>635</sup> Furthermore, Gaja made her and Kuroń's apartment available for 'illegal and collective meetings and informal political discussions with the participation of studying youth.'<sup>636</sup> Drawing on her experience and intelligence, Gaja also played a crucial role in meetings where the tactics for future political oppositional practice were discussed.<sup>637</sup> Known for his great love for Gaja, Kuroń explained the new division of labor according to which Halina Mikołajska became the press spokesperson and Gaja turned into the main coordinator with the help of Anka Kowalska and Aniela Streinsbergowa. He described this period: 'we were imprisoned and they were organizing a movement defending us ... It turned out that we could be in prison because the movement not only did not die out but got activated.'<sup>638</sup> In general, but especially while she was trying to temporarily replace Kuroń during his time in prison, Gaja clearly did not play into the fantasies of a voiceless wife simply assisting a charismatic leader.

In this context, it is also worth noting the significant role played by Kuroń and Gaja's apartment on Mickiewicza Street in Warsaw in creating a kind of small-scale alternative public sphere. The door to the apartment was always open and quite literally everyone could just come in and talk to Kuroń. Kuroń recalls that the flow of information that was channelled through his

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<sup>633</sup> AIPN BU 0204/1417, vol.12, Jacek Kuroń's Biography, August 14 [no year].

<sup>634</sup> Perski, interview.

<sup>635</sup> AIPN BU 1204/1417, vol. 8, Information on the Current Political Attitudes of Grazyna Kuroń, the daughter of Edmund, born January 2, 1940; May 1977, 1-2.

<sup>636</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>637</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>638</sup> Kuroń, *Gwiezdny Czas*, 435.

apartment and via his telephone made him feel as if he participated in person in every event.<sup>639</sup> Indeed, Kuroń used his phone on a regular basis to disseminate information about domestic events that would not make it past censors into the mainstream media. He usually called Aleksander Smolar, who passed the information to Radio Free Europe. For instance, on March 29, 1979 he informed Smolar about the arrest of some of the audience of the 'Jazz nad Odrą' festival and the subsequent abuse by the police.<sup>640</sup>

For many, like for Szczęsna, the apartment was a space of comfort and an important site for socializing. Paula Sawicka and Mirosław Sawicki recall that it even became fashionable in the 1970s for young people to show up on March 3 for Kuroń's birthday party.<sup>641</sup> As they put it, 'one could always enter the apartment, the door was always open and everyone came to the birthday party.'<sup>642</sup> Sawicka also recalls that there was always a group of young people in the apartment who came for advice and information, and that somewhat suddenly they turned into 'a mass around Jacek performing various [political] tasks.'<sup>643</sup> The hospitality of both Jacek and Gaja and the symbolic as well as literal openness of the apartment turned it into a site of vivid exchange, safety and trust. The busy apartment and its atmosphere embodied Gaja and Kuroń's vision of social life and personal bonds as inherently open and collective. Despite the different characters of the soviet communal apartments and of the type of openness embodied by Gaja and Jacek Kuroń's flat, Svetlana Boym's description of the former, namely that they were 'a revolutionary experiment in living, an attempt to practice utopian ideologies,'<sup>644</sup> seems to resonate in the spirit of Kuroń's apartment and in how it was remembered by his friends.

While cooking was an expression of sociality and sharing food was part of the everyday life of a supportive community,<sup>645</sup> most interviewees make it clear that the complex web of

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<sup>639</sup> Kuroń, 'Wiara i wina,' 466.

<sup>640</sup> Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw, AIPN BU 0 222/701/5/54100/II/5, Meldunek Operacyjny, March 31, 1979, 1.

<sup>641</sup> Paula and Mirosław Sawicki, interview with Nguyen Vu Thuc Linh, November 13, 2015, Warsaw, Poland.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid.

<sup>643</sup> Ibid.

<sup>644</sup> Svetlana Boym, *Common Places: Mythologies of Everyday Life in Russia* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 124.

<sup>645</sup> Food, cooking and food sharing continued to play an essential role within the Kuroń's family even after Gaja's death. Gaja and Jacek's son and grandchildren became professional chefs and in 2013 one of their grandsons, Jakub, published a family cookbook that included some of Jacek and Gaja's favorite recipes. See Jakub Kuroń, *Kuroniowie przy stole* (Warsaw: Czarna Owca, 2013).

practices of care and sociality performed by Gaja involved her in different roles which escaped a one-sided and rigid gender division. Such a view is reinforced by the following memory of Gaja's role Seweryn Blumsztajn shares:

One dropped by to see Gajka – that is what Jacek and all of us always called her – during the day and at night for tea, dinner and to chat. It stayed like this through all of Jacek's prison sentences and KOR. The house was always open. One didn't come to Kuroń's place only to talk or do business with Jacek. You went there to hang out with Gajka, when you were hungry and miserable. This home, which was the apartment that was most besieged by the police in all of Warsaw, was simultaneously a place where you were a bit less afraid and this home was Gajka.<sup>646</sup>

Along similar lines, Barbara Malak-Minkiewicz (b. 1945), who started to collaborate closely with Kuroń during the period of *Solidarność* (1980-1981), recalls that it was a genuinely open house and that 'one used to spend endless time there having discussions.'<sup>647</sup> It was not merely heated political discussions with Kuroń and Gaja that made them and their apartment so special and dear to their friends. The memory of food made by Jacek and Gaja, of their dog and of their apartment underlines the private and close relationship that *Szczęсна* and others had with her friends.

Given the continuous shortage economy<sup>648</sup> and the sense of alienation political activists experienced during the first half of Gierek's decade of rule, such forms of informal labor of love, such as cooking, and providing emotional support offered by both Jacek and Gaja were central to maintaining the group's well-being and expanding its capacity for collective political action. The unofficial emotional labor often confined to the 'invisible' private sphere of private houses could be viewed as oscillating between material and immaterial labor. It is material in the sense that it involves practical housework and immaterial as it is based on a mobilization of a whole set of shared feelings. In this way, the material and symbolic reproduction of the conditions of collective

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<sup>646</sup> Seweryn Blumsztajn, 'Gajka,' *Aneks*, 29-30 (1983), 233-234.

<sup>647</sup> Barbara Malak-Minkiewicz, interview, September 7, 2017, Amsterdam, The Netherlands.

<sup>648</sup> On the history of scarcity and shortage in post-war Poland see Małgorzata Mazurek, 'Keeping It Close to Home: Resourcefulness and Scarcity in Late Socialist and Postsocialist Poland,' in *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe*, ed. Paulina Bren and Mary Neuberger (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 298-324.

action are inextricably intertwined, thus challenging the hierarchization of public life over the private, in which the private is identified as non-revolutionary or even non-political.<sup>649</sup>

Paying close attention to personal and professional problems faced on an everyday basis was also part of the way in which Kuroń and Gaja cared for others. For instance, since Joanna Szczęśna did not have a full-time job, she earned her living by taking on small, precarious jobs such as transcribing book manuscripts on the typewriter for publishing houses. As she recounts, once, when she was in despair after losing the original of a hand-written book manuscript that she was working on, she went to the apartment on Mickiewicza Street looking for support from Kuroń and Gaja. In a situation such as this one, they comforted her, caringly addressing Szczęśna in diminutives, and trying to cheer her up. Kuroń also wanted to help by going to the publishing house to explain the situation on Szczęśna's behalf. Through their language and behavior, Jacek and Gaja Kurońs created a supportive atmosphere that proved important in the situation of economic precarity and which cannot be easily separated from Kuroń's energetic and spirited personality as well as his commitment to a set of strong political values.

The informal affective labor performed by the Kurońs, in which a sense of care for others is put to work, was not merely an expression of family-like resourcefulness but also prompts us to revise the often reified boundaries between (private) social reproduction and public activism.<sup>650</sup> From this perspective, the participation of individuals and groups in public acts of disobedience in late socialist Poland has to be situated in the context of intimate everyday labors of love and close social relations that often do not feature in historical accounts or political representations as they are relegated to the 'private' realm. By addressing the lived reality of private life, we can get a better sense of how political activism came about and how this period, and the possibilities of resistance it afforded, was experienced by the actors themselves. It was precisely this immediate context of collective care for one another that provided the background for the political and emotional growth of a whole group of activists including Szczęśna and Zbigniew Bujak, former members of the Walterowcy scouts and other students who protested in

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<sup>649</sup> On the division between the public and private sphere and how their revolutionary potential was understood in relation to gender roles, see Anne E. Gorsuch, "'A Woman is Not a Man': The Culture of Gender and Generation in Soviet Russia, 1921-1928," *Slavic Review* 55, 3 (1996), 636-660.

<sup>650</sup> For a fascinating, yet bitter account of care work and sacrifice within the context of the political opposition in Poland, see Danuta Wałęsa, *Marzenia i tajemnice* (Kraków: Literackie, 2011).

1968. This context was also crucial for young people involved in the critical political opposition in creating a sense of identity for themselves.

### *Kuroń's Ambivalent Emotionality*

Kuroń's personality and emotional behavior at times also caused mixed feelings in his friends. Szczęsna's account seems to align well with how Modzelewski and others saw him. According to her, 'Jacek was an incredibly charismatic person. He had a gift of gathering people around him.'<sup>651</sup> Emphasizing his pedagogy and their impact on others, she continues:

Jacek was exuberant, emotional, spontaneous and because of this he was sometimes perceived negatively. ... I saw it with my own eyes that during the time of KOR, thanks in part to Jacek's strength, the space of freedom expanded. ... Jacek's strength was his determination, courage and the fact that he was to a lesser extent a politician and to a larger extent a pedagogue. ... his personality also played a huge role and the emotions he inspired in people.<sup>652</sup>

As this quote suggests, Kuroń's emotional personality was crucial for the formation of the loyal milieu around him. In this way, Kuroń's open, caring and radiant character could be seen as instantiating a somewhat democratized and horizontally embedded version of Weberian 'charismatic authority.' Although certainly not a charismatic leader in the classical sense, as he rejected any pretension of exceptionality that would separate him from the ordinary, Kuroń can also be seen as 'proving his powers in practice ... by bringing well-being to his faithful followers,' revolutionizing them 'from within.'<sup>653</sup> Kuroń was a leader to the extent that he had charisma, authority and a specific type of cultural capital that resonated with young people who wanted to

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<sup>651</sup> Joanna Szczęsna, interview with Nguyen Vu Thuc Linh, 16 February 2015, Warsaw, Poland.

<sup>652</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>653</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretative Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, [1922] 1968), 1114-1115.

get involved in illegal political activism, but within the activist circle he practiced a decidedly egalitarian ethos. Bujak's description of Kuroń's ethos summarizes it well:

First of all, he was good with people because he was open, friendly and knew how to talk and relate to them. He knew that everyone is different and has to be approached differently. Jacek as an intellectual and pedagogue had a remarkable ability to talk and reach out to everyone. He would talk to homeless and drunk people on the street and be kind to them, and rightly so because in his eyes they should be treated as subjects with all their rights.<sup>654</sup>

Bujak also points to Kuroń's tendency to raise his voice during emotional discussions:

Jacek shouted at people a lot. But he never did so in a patriarchal way as if he wanted to show that he is better than others. One could always shout back at him. His raised voice and shouting meant that he is very committed and takes the problem very seriously. Behind his shouting was his deep and emotional commitment.<sup>655</sup>

The last two quotes reveal the immediacy of Kuroń's emotionality and the fundamentally emotional character of the ways in which he communicated with others. At the same time, his emotionality, while essential to his charismatic personality, also created a gap between him and other people. In other words, his emotional intensity produced strong bonds that played a significant role in the political mobilization of March 1968 and the founding of KOR in 1976, but it simultaneously generated non-affiliation as for many he might have been too overwhelming.

That Szczęsna's relationship with Kuroń was very complex and rich in its own internal dynamics is shown by the two following quotes: 'From the very beginning ..., I'm not afraid to use this word, I fell in love with them, him and Gaja. I was young and they were my home, my haven.'<sup>656</sup> And: 'I didn't take a distance from Jacek. I accepted him the way he was. I exploded

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<sup>654</sup> Bujak, interview.

<sup>655</sup> Bujak, interview.

<sup>656</sup> Szczęsna, interview.

from time to time, a few times during our long friendship. Because Jacek had such a dominant personality sometimes, in order to resist him, one had to have an argument with him. At least I had to because he demanded so much from me [in terms of political activities].’

To be more precise, it was a consequence of this warm and straightforward attitude that Kuroń attracted people but also confused them. One of Kuroń’s main collaborators in KOR, Anka Kowalska (1932-2008), who met him in the late 1970s and became politically engaged partly thanks to him, accurately narrates this aspect of his personality in her autobiography. Kowalska poetically describes Kuroń as someone:

who one adores and from whom one runs away because his passionate desire for life and action is as contagious and indispensable as it is sometimes unbearable; someone who cannot and does not want to save his own and others’ physical strength; someone who, with the same directedness, can touch and deeply offend anyone.<sup>657</sup>

In describing his emotional behavior during heated discussions, Kowalska echoes Modzelewski’s and Bujak’s observations, characterizing Kuroń as ‘someone who, while wanting to push through his ideas, screams, gets mad, interrupts others, doesn’t let anyone speak ..., and then suddenly accepts the opposing position if he gets convinced.’<sup>658</sup> Kowalska emphasizes Kuroń’s contradictory nature, saying that he was ‘rude, without manners, brutal, and simultaneously tender, sensitive and kind; he ate with a full mouth and brought girls flowers to a “business” meeting; he was a psychological terrorist and a great democrat, hog, alcoholic, blabberer.’<sup>659</sup> Most importantly, in explaining her own political motivation and commitment, she acknowledges Kuroń’s significant and positive impact on the political choices she made: ‘In short, thanks to Jacek Kuroń I familiarized my fear; I think that this is very important.’<sup>660</sup> Indeed, also for Andrzej Rapaczyński there is no doubt that Jacek Kuroń had a fascinating and charismatic personality.<sup>661</sup> This contradictory and yet powerful, communicative emotional and corporeal intensity Kowalska

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<sup>657</sup> Anka Kowalska, *Folkor tamtych lat* (Warsaw: Towarzystwo Więź, 2011), 40.

<sup>658</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, 44.

<sup>661</sup> Rapaczyński, interview.

and many of his other friends describe was central to Kuroń's joyful, jovial and outgoing personality.

In this chapter, I have traced the renegotiations of the rules and language of socialist pedagogy by Warsaw-based activists who played a key role in establishing and sustaining an activist milieu in Gierek's era and the habitus of political withdrawal into private life which the era encouraged. Careful investigation of personal testimonies has made it possible to claim that Kuroń's embodied emotionality, emotional intelligence and strong commitment to values such as solidarity, care and collective cooperation were crucial in the formation of his political group. Additionally, the lived experience and memory of Kuroń and of his relationship with people also proved to be central to the sustainability of friendships over time and in often adverse circumstances.

This chapter has focused not on emotions themselves but on how they were put into action. In studying how emotions materialize in the form of an intensified sense of loyalty, care, and responsibility for others, which, in turn, become a set of almost obligatory behaviors, we can see how the milieu offered relief from everyday life and how it helped in shielding individuals from a sense of loneliness and alienation. Everyday generosity and solidarity made the years of shared struggle even more meaningful and rewarding. We can also see that collective emotions have positive consequences as they can lead to a resilient commitment and have explanatory power regarding the sustainability of political mobilization<sup>662</sup> and the power of alternative visions of social order. Finally, the dovetailing realms of the intimate, the political, and friendships and familial relationships in Kuroń's milieu prompt us to recognize the political significance of a private life thickly layered with social and political meanings and practices that were constantly being renegotiated in response to a shifting political landscape and the dynamics of oppositional activism.

In Konwicki's novel, in the brief but telling conversation between Henryk and Rysio and the novel's main character they complain about their everyday reality. Barely self-conscious and largely defined by consumerist interests, the youth enters into adult life and in a direct

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<sup>662</sup> Helena Flam, 'Emotions' Map: A Research Agenda,' in *Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Helena Flam and Debra King (London: Routledge, 2005), 34-35, 20.



relationship with the surrounding world by getting married, having children, buying a little Fiat car and planting tomatoes.<sup>663</sup> For Henryk and Rysio this apparent social stabilization means that society is *de facto* colonized by the lifestyle of a Soviet-style middle-class. As the activist circle is getting older and seems to be disintegrating, the dissidents themselves are losing touch with one another, experiencing increasing atomization and isolation. This micro-dialogue in an already seemingly minor scene reveals that for political activism to take place in 1970s Poland, social bonds such as friendships proved to be crucial, and their absence could be demobilizing. Indeed, in seeking a possible candidate for the desperate act of self-immolation, the first thing that Henryk and Rysio do is to reach out to a friend, even if an old one.

But while this story captures many aspects of the dissident scene of the 1970s, the case of Kuroń and his friends shows that Henryk and Rysio's description is incomplete and that depressed isolation could give way to a more empowering intertwinement of shared experiences, emotionality, caring loyalty and political activism. Together with other KOR members, Kuroń was arrested on May 16, 1977 and remained in custody until July 23. On July 17, he wrote in a letter to Gaja from prison: 'Thanks to you [our] love ... can embrace many more, those who are very close and those far away. Since you are there, others are there as well, and so is their loyalty, courage, reliability and kindness.'<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>663</sup> Konwicki, *Mała apokalipsa*, 14.

<sup>664</sup> Jacek Kuroń, Letter to Gaja, July 17, 1977, in *Listy jak dotyk. Gaja i Jacek Kurońowie*, ed. Maria Krawczyk (Warsaw: Ośrodek Karta, 2014), 242.

## Chapter 4

### Being and Acting in Solidarity: Communities as Weapons

After the inception of KOR in 1976 the scope and scale of political dissidence changed. Firstly, with the proliferation of the underground press, the unofficial public sphere had grown as newspapers and journals reached a broader audience in various parts of the country.<sup>665</sup> More and more newly founded journals were published and circulated and gradually turned into a hotbed of dissident politics and critical thinking in Poland.<sup>666</sup> The emphasis shifted from émigré journals, such as *Kultura*, to ones published in Poland under precarious conditions of illegality. Another important change that followed from the expansion of the illegal press was that it enabled a diversification of political positions and opinions within the political opposition. Importantly, the more diverse underground sphere, which was more accommodating of different views, served not only as a means to inform and politicize society but also as a site for sharpening existing political analyses, positions and divides within the growing circles of the political opposition. Secondly, thanks to Studencki Komitet Solidarności (Student Committee of Solidarity or SKS)<sup>667</sup> and the growing illegal press, circles of the political opposition became more interconnected in different parts of Poland as the growing distribution of newspapers and journals required a vast network. Moreover, as the underground public sphere began to flourish, exercising and risking one's freedom to print, publish, store and distribute illegal publications became an expression of

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<sup>665</sup> Paweł Sowiński, *Zakazana książka. Uczestnicy drugiego obiegu 1977-1989* (Warsaw: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2011); Justyna Błaziejowska, *Papierowa rewolucja. Z dziejów drugiego obiegu wydawniczego w Polsce 1976–1989/1990* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2010); Jan Olaszek, *Rewolucja powielaczy: Niezależny ruch wydawniczy w Polsce 1976-1989* (Warsaw: Trzecia Strona, 2015); Siobhan Doucette, *Books Are Weapons: The Polish Opposition Press and the Overthrow of Communism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2018).

<sup>666</sup> For a comparative perspective on the underground press, see Przemysław Gasztold, Natalia Jarska and Jan Olaszek, eds., *Drugi obieg wydawniczy w PRL na tle historii samizdatu w państwach bloku sowieckiego po 1956 roku* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2016); Friederike Kind-Kovács and Jessie Labov, eds., *Samizdat, Tamizdat and Beyond: Transnational Media During and After Socialism* (New York: Berghahn, 2013).

<sup>667</sup> The Studencki Komitet Solidarności (Student Committee of Solidarity or SKS) was founded on May 15, 1977 in Cracow by, inter alia, Liliana Baczek, Bronisław Wildstein and Bogusław Sonik who were students at the Jagiellonian University. The main objective of the SKS was to spread underground press products and to organize small workshops for self-education. The SKS spread to other major university cities.

dissident activity.<sup>668</sup> One could say that the political opposition itself proliferated, in large part, thanks to the underground press.<sup>669</sup>

### *The Late 1970s and Polemics in the Underground Press*

In November 1977, Kuroń published a polemical piece entitled 'Uwagi o strukturze ruchu demokratycznego' (Remarks on the structure of a democratic movement) in the monthly journal *Głos* (Voice).<sup>670</sup> The article was a response to Leszek Moczulski (b. 1930),<sup>671</sup> who belonged to a different dissident organization named ROPCiO, and who published a polemical piece with the title 'Memoriał.' In his article, Kuroń identifies a fundamental feature of democratic movements, namely that they should be structured in a way that allows all of their members to shape the goals and organizational form of the movement.<sup>672</sup> For Kuroń, a democratic social movement should be understood as 'a broad platform for collaboration' based on the self-organization of its members which was also at the heart of KOR's *modus operandi*.<sup>673</sup> By emphasizing pluralism and lack of hierarchy Kuroń expressed his opposition to any attempts to monopolize the meanings and actions of political opposition. As a result, he argued in favor of a diversified underground press and the spread of discussion clubs and centers for independent cultural production.<sup>674</sup> While being aware of potential conflicts that could lead to the compartmentalization of the movement, Kuroń still favored a multiplicity of activist milieus as opposed to one single political

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<sup>668</sup> Interview with Ewa Milewicz, September 26, 2016, Warsaw; interview with Konrad Bieliński, December 16, 2016, Warsaw.

<sup>669</sup> Doucette, *Books Are Weapons*, 33.

<sup>670</sup> *Głos* – was a monthly magazine that was founded by KOR collaborators Antoni Macierewicz and Adam Michnik, who later left the magazine as the result of a conflict and founded his own magazine *Krytyka*. *Głos* was in print between 1977 and 1981. The magazine focused on social and political problems; originally *Głos* was supposed to be a magazine that would unite the political opposition around KOR but due to disagreements and protests from, for instance, Joanna Szczęsna who was one of the main activists responsible for *Biuletyn Informacyjny* and who was against merging it with *Głos*, it became associated with Antoni Macierewicz and his closest collaborators.

<sup>671</sup> Moczulski is a historian known for his right-wing and nationalistic political sympathies in dissident circles. On 23 March 1977, he co-founded Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela (ROPCiO) together with Andrzej Czuma. ROPCiO was a separate dissident organization from KOR. ROPCiO's main magazine was *Opinia* [Opinion] and was founded in April 1977, see Grzegorz Waligóra, *ROPCiO. Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela 1977-1981* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006).

<sup>672</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Uwagi o strukturze ruchu demokratycznego,' *Głos*, 2 (1979).

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>674</sup> *Ibid.*

organization that would unite and represent the whole of the political opposition, which was the suggestion in Moczulski's article. In criticizing Moczulski for proposing a hierarchical structure, Kuroń also attacks ROPCiO for creating the impression of being the only political organization dedicated to political opposition while, in fact, according to Kuroń, ROPCiO lacked a particular political character of its own.

Kuroń goes further: in his view, there is another principle that is essential for democratic social movements, namely transparency as opposed to the conspiratorial and clandestine tactic promoted by a new dissident group named Polska Walcząca (Fighting Poland).<sup>675</sup> In addressing the necessarily transparent dimension of the democratic political opposition, Kuroń seems to be pointing to the prefigurative character of social movements, namely that already their actions and strategies already embody the values and goals they strive to achieve. The article ends with Kuroń's reflection on the ideological conflicts in the political opposition and the resulting splits. While recognizing both the significance and value of ideological differences, Kuroń calls for a unification of the opposition around the shared struggle for freedom. As if trying to tone down his statements and avoid personal conflicts, Kuroń ends his article with a reconciliatory call to use the unofficial press as a forum to crystallize of differing opinions, the expressions of conflicts and the resolution of controversies.<sup>676</sup>

While Kuroń's article is about the contrasting ways the political opposition thought about the role of informal organizations, institutions and milieus, what seems to be at stake is not only a matter of tactics and strategies but more fundamental issues that touch upon the meanings and values attached to dissident practices. The splits within the political opposition were an outcome of substantial differences and conflicts that run along ideological lines (the left vs. the right), visions of the best strategy (transparency vs. conspiracy) as well as personal sympathies and rivalries. The article and the arguments laid out by Kuroń against Moczulski and Polska Walcząca were able to resonate with the readers also because they were backed up by concrete political activists with known dissident biographies and informal organizations with established reputations. In that sense, the article is a reminder that in late socialist Poland abstract rational

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<sup>675</sup> Ibid.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.

argumentation could not simply be translated into effective political action, as all political views and arguments were embedded in a complicated web of personal and political sympathies and histories. The conflict between Moczulski and Kuroń was an open secret. Even Jerzy Giedroyc, the editor in chief of *Kultura* who was based at Maisons-Laffite, was informed in a letter from Bolesław Sulik about the quarrel within the political opposition. Sulik had been a contributor to *Kultura* and, even though he had not been residing in Poland, had vast network of contacts in Poland. In a letter from July 24, 1979 Sulik said that he learned from Moczulski that it was time to 'take care of Kuroń' and that he was a traitor.<sup>677</sup> Sulik adds that while Kuroń is 'a great strategist he is perhaps the worst tactician in the world' and ends the letter stating that the political opposition is filled with personal conflicts that translate into the search for possible differences on various topics among factions even when 'such differences are objectively not there.'<sup>678</sup> The letter not only captures the personal dimension as a decisive factor in a process of distinction within the political opposition but also shows that personal conflicts were a known fact even to those involved in political opposition outside of Poland.

Commenting further on the question of ideological differences, in his autobiography, Kuroń explains that together with Gaja they could feel the significant differences between those who were more left-wing and those who were more right-wing and, consequently, he developed his own, context-dependent definition of right and left.<sup>679</sup> Both right-wing and left-wing groups of the political opposition consisted of like-minded individuals who had distinct ideas, mindsets or *Weltanschauungen* and sets of behavior. Right-wing members of the political oppositions seek relationships based on tradition and sameness best captured in the family, nation and Catholic Church. Left-wing members, by contrast,

reject all stereotypes, rules, bans and all of this in the name of freedom and love that are sacred for a left-wing person. But a person who declares himself to be left-wing is also ready to laugh at it [what he takes to be sacred] and question everything. Being left-wing

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<sup>677</sup> AILK KOR RED Sulik Boleslaw, 1958-2000, Letter from July 24, 1979.

<sup>678</sup> Ibid.

<sup>679</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Gwiezdny Czas' in *Kuroń: Autobiografia* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, 2011), 491.

also implies that “to belong” is tied up with a free choice, and he often values friendship over kinship, love over family, and remains suspicious of nationalistic declarations.<sup>680</sup>

The differences in habitus became most clearly visible during the hunger strike that took place in the St. Christopher Parish in Podkowa Leśna between May 7 and May 17, 1980. It was organized by activists associated with KOR and participants were from the workers’ activists milieus from Gdańsk. The strike was organized by members of the political opposition against the state’s increased harassment of those involved in political opposition such as Andrzej Czuma, Bronisław Komorowski, Wojciech Ziemiński, Józef Michał, Mirosław Chojecki and Bogdan Grzesiak. In addition to the detention that usually lasted 24 hours, more and more activists than normal risked imprisoned for months. For instance, Andrzej Czuma, Bronisław Komorowski, Wojciech Ziemiński and Józef Michał were arrested for three months and Mirosław Chojecki and Bogdan Grzesiak were accused of stealing a duplicator and detained for 18 months in prison. The detention of Chojecki sparked dismay among the members of the political opposition and the underground channels were mobilized to publish his letter from prison. As a result of the protest, Chojecki was released on May 10.<sup>681</sup>

It was on the occasion of the hunger strike in Podkowa Leśna that Zbigniew Bujak met Jacek Kuroń in person for the first time. Bujak, then a young worker from Ursus, heard of the strike and went there with the two friends of his: Zbigniew Janas and Arkadiusz Czerwiński. Disturbed by the fact that the inhabitants of Podkowa Leśna kept a safe distance from the strikers, Bujak and his friends on the spot spontaneously wrote a letter in support of the protesters in the St. Christopher Parish and read it aloud to the bystanders. They also encouraged the bystanders watching the strike from the outside of the Church to enter the Church to meet and talk to the strikers.<sup>682</sup> Bujak approached Kuroń to ask him how it was possible that young workers were able to do something that the strikers themselves, despite their experience and education, were incapable of doing: namely to reach out to the bystanders and engage them. Kuroń responded

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<sup>680</sup> Ibid.

<sup>681</sup> Leszek Budrewicz, ‘Głodówka w Podkowie Leśnej,’ *Biuletyn IPN*, 55, 3 (2010), 84; Justyna Błażejewska, ‘Potworne i niebezpieczne słowo – powielacz. Sprawa Mirosława Chojeckiego i Bogdana Grzesiaka,’ *Biuletyn IPN*, 12, 83 (2008), 57–65.

<sup>682</sup> Bujak, interview.

that political opposition only matters if it enables young people to truly express their political will. Feeling acknowledged and empowered by Kuroń's reaction back then, Bujak recalls that 'it was his and the whole milieu's method and way of acting – to create in people a capacity, ability and will to act.'<sup>683</sup>

Kuroń, who participated in the hunger strike, noticed that the protesters automatically divided themselves into two groups: one left-wing and one right-wing. Unlike the right-wing group, the group centered around Kuroń was messy, never wore pajamas, had long discussions until late at night, and when they were finally getting ready to sleep at 7am, the right-wing group would get up to attend the mass. The right-wing group also paid particular attention to hygiene and order. The most important observation concerned gender relations, as the right-wing group mainly consisted of young men wearing suits and the left-wing group contained a significant number of women.<sup>684</sup> Kuroń adds that his seemingly irrelevant observation on habits and behavior can be backed by his and Gaja's long experience of being part of the political opposition. Even if somewhat schematic, the way in which Kuroń understood the right vs. the left is representative of his attitude toward political life. For Kuroń and his cluster of friends, political divides could not be isolated in a realm of abstractions and rational exchange of arguments but encompassed social behavior and personal relations.

For Kuroń, the embodied and ideological differences between the right and left, and their important implications for social interactions within the political opposition, served as an explanatory framework with regard to personal rivalry. For example, he openly admitted that there was a conflict between him and Antoni Macierewicz, one of his collaborators (who after 1991 served as Minister of Internal Affairs and most recently as Minister of National Defense),<sup>685</sup> that was well-known among political dissidents and whose afterlife is still present in contemporary Poland. A closer look at Kuroń's commentary reveals that the conflict unfolded along the ideological split of left vs. right as Macierewicz, Piotr Naimski (b. 1951), Urszula Doroszevska (b. 1954) and Ludwik Dorn (b. 1954), who were also part of a group around the monthly *Głos*, sympathized with the conservative Polish political tradition. Although Macierewicz

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<sup>683</sup> Bujak, interview.

<sup>684</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiezdny Czas,' 492.

<sup>685</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.

never identified himself as right-wing, Kuroń could sense that Macierewicz's hostile attitude towards Kuroń was based on his open embrace of the left-wing tradition and its values. Macierewicz and his group's distrust and suspicion of Kuroń were also related to the different scouting traditions behind each group. Macierewicz was an instructor in a more traditional scout troop, namely the 1<sup>st</sup> Warsaw Scout Troop named after Romuald Traugutt,<sup>686</sup> unofficially called 'Czarna Jedyńka' (The Black Number One) and founded in 1911 at the prestigious Tadeusz Reytan high school in Warsaw.<sup>687</sup> Along with Naimski, Doroszevska and Dorn, Wojciech Onyszkiewicz (b. 1948) and Andrzej Bohdan Celiński (b. 1950) were also among Macierewicz's former pupils from Czarna Jedyńka. The strong tradition of conspiratorial, underground and anti-Russian politics among the urban youth that can be traced back to the Scout Troop's early history, during the partitions, the Second Republic and the Nazi Occupation, has shaped the character of Czarna Jedyńka. Its characteristic commitment to a nationalistically oriented tradition in scouting meant that there were objective and substantial differences between Kuroń and Macierewicz given that Kuroń and the Walterowcy were considered to be 'red scouts.' The group around Czarna Jedyńka and *Głos* criticized and resented Kuroń's involvement in late socialist scouting which they viewed as Stalinist and running against the truly Polish national scouting tradition.<sup>688</sup> In this vein, according to Kuroń, the group around Macierewicz viewed all anti-totalitarian political opposition in late socialist Poland as necessarily rooted in the history of Polish independence and as a nationalist struggle buttressed by Catholicism. What bothered Kuroń most was not only their sense of moral righteousness but the fact that it was expressed with such certainty. In his view, this conflict combined ideological clashes and personal judgments in a way that later precipitated the largest split within KOR.<sup>689</sup>

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<sup>686</sup> Romuald Traugutt (1826-1864) was one of the leaders of the January Insurrection (1863-63) against the Russian occupation of Poland.

<sup>687</sup> Anna Szczykutowicz, 'Harcerze z "Czarnej Jedyńki" i geneza KOR,' *histmag.org*, September 23, 2017, <https://histmag.org/Historia-dzialaczy-KOR-u-to-tez-historia-harcerzy-Czarnej-Jedyńki-15755>, last accessed January 14, 2019.

<sup>688</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdny Czas,' 494.

<sup>689</sup> *Ibid.*, 493.





Figure 6: Antoni Macierewicz, Jacek Kuroń and Bieliński at a KSS KOR meeting in the Kuroń's apartment in Warsaw, January 1980. Photograph: Tomasz Michalak/FOTONOVA

As this example is meant to illustrate, the expansion of the underground public sphere provided a new arena for discussion and amplified splits and conflicts within the political opposition. While political differences and new positions gained new weight within the political opposition, both took on ideological as much as personal shades. Kuroń's current and past ideological choices, such as being a co-founder of the 'red scouts,' weighed heavily on how he was perceived by younger generations of activists of different backgrounds, and often these differences were exploited for personal purposes.

Despite significant changes in the internal dynamics of the political opposition, some of its aspects remained stable such as the importance and social function of often unrecognized places such as private apartments (which will be more extensively discussed below). For instance, in January 1979, at one of the parties in Henryk and Ludwika Wujecs' apartment in Stegny (a southern district of Warsaw), Kuroń for the first time met key activists from Gdańsk who were behind *Wolne Związki Zawodowe Wybrzeża* (Free Trade Unions of the Coast or WZZW) and the

biweekly *Robotnik Wybrzeża* (The Worker of the Coast). Activists like Anna Walentynowicz (1929-2010),<sup>690</sup> Lech Wałęsa (b. 1943),<sup>691</sup> and Alina Pienkowska (1952-2002) would later play central roles during the founding strike of *Solidarność*.<sup>692</sup> At the party, other activists from Gdańsk were also present, such as: Bogdan Borusewicz (b. 1949) and the married couple Andrzej Gwiazda (b. 1935) and Joanna Duda-Gwiazda (b. 1939). Private apartments continued to be a meeting space for activists from various regions, of differing political backgrounds and from different generations.

Echoing what many activists and friends said about the apartment on Mickiewicza Street, Bujak recalls how touched he was by the openness of the apartment and the openheartedness of Jacek and Gaja Kuroń. When Bujak and his friends visited their apartment for the first time sometime in June 1980, he was struck by the fact that the apartment was open, despite the fact that nobody was home, and that he and his friends were able to just let themselves in and sit on a couch in the living room. After a while, Kuroń came in and greeted them. When Bujak asked him if he was not afraid to leave the house open for everyone to come in, Kuroń replied that there is nothing to be worried about. Astonished by the answer, Bujak immediately established a deep sense of trust in Kuroń.<sup>693</sup>

### *Producing the Underground Press*

The thin protective veneer surrounding apartments that were supposed to be kept private and thus apart from politics proved to be helpful in spreading the underground press. Ewa Milewicz, who was one of the mediators responsible for selling the underground press, used her apartment in Żoliborz on Stołeczna Street (now renamed to Popiełuszki Street) in Warsaw as an unofficial kiosk where everyone who knew about it could buy illegal publications.<sup>694</sup> In her own words, 'public life came into my house,'<sup>695</sup> when public and private had mingled in her apartment. In line

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<sup>690</sup> See Sławomir Cenckiewicz, *Anna Solidarność. Życie i działalność Anny Walentynowicz na tle epoki (1929-2010)* (Poznań: Zysk I S-ka, 2010).

<sup>691</sup> See Jan Skórzyński, *Zadra. Biografia Lecha Wałęsy* (Gdańsk: ECS & słowo/obraz terytoria, 2009).

<sup>692</sup> Interview with Ludwika and Henryk Wujec, December 19, 2016, Warsaw; Kuroń, 'Gwiezdny Czas,' 463.

<sup>693</sup> Bujak, interview.

<sup>694</sup> Interview with Ewa Milewicz, August 29, 2017.

<sup>695</sup> *Ibid.*

with Milewicz's observations, when writing on 'the politics of small things,' Jeffrey C. Goldfarb describes a similar situation in which a private apartment becomes a selling point for illegal literature and newspapers, while 'they [the buyer and the seller] were not oppositionist heroes. This was the everyday life of the opposition.'<sup>696</sup>

Given that the black market was a common phenomenon and that the practice of carrying on an illegal and unofficial business from one's apartment or in the hallways of housing blocks was not unusual in late socialist Poland, it is unsurprising that the apartments were also used to print, stock and distribute the underground press.<sup>697</sup> The distribution of the underground press did, however, have a distinct character of its own that made it somewhat different from other transactions in the shadow economy. According to Milewicz, Konrad Bieliński and Mirosław Chojecki, from the underground publishing house NOWa, came up with the idea of *przebić się na jawność* which literally translates as 'breaking through with transparency' and meant that transparency was central to the type of political activism they wished to engage with. Since the inception of KOR, with its embrace of the principle of transparency, the notion of transparency began to sprout in other activist circles that closely collaborated with KOR and Milewicz saw here a strong inspiration by KOR for it.<sup>698</sup> Along similar lines, Bieliński argued that the very idea of founding an independent publishing house should have almost been viewed as an extension of KOR's activities.<sup>699</sup>

The transparency in question, however, was self-limiting for strategic and security reasons. As much as this principle implied that the places that distributed underground newspapers should not be kept secret from those interested in acquiring the publications, the processes of production was carefully protected from the police and anyone the activists did not trust. Milewicz describes this situation of partial transparency in the following way:

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<sup>696</sup> Jeffrey C. Goldfarb, *The Politics of Small Things: The Power of the Powerless in Dark Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 10-11.

<sup>697</sup> On the black market in the Polish People's Republic, see Jerzy Kochanowski, *Tylnymi drzwiami: 'czarny rynek' w Polsce 1944-1989* (Warsaw: Neriton, 2010).

<sup>698</sup> Ibid.

<sup>699</sup> Interview with Konrad Bieliński.

To be sure, we neither announced in *Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR* nor in *Komunikat* [Communique] that here, under this address the underground press can be bought. It was through word of mouth, without any huge conspiratorial protection, that people knew that I'm selling newspapers and books at my place. Often, people would come from other cities and buy in bulk, for instance 10 issues of a specific newspaper. They would take it and then they would leave. The big secret was where I was hiding the newspapers and who delivered them. So, the fact that I was selling the newspapers was neither widely advertised nor a closely-guarded secret. Quickly, the secret agents started coming to my place but they never arrested me and, somehow, I managed to continue selling the newspapers.<sup>700</sup>

Before the newspapers arrived at Milewicz's place, however, they had to go through production and postproduction processes, which consisted of several steps. Firstly, once there was enough paper and ink and the matrices were ready, the printing process would start on printing machines in special locations dedicated solely to printing. These locations were only known to a few trusted people. While paper and ink were relatively accessible as they were usually bought illegally or with the help of bribes, it was very difficult to obtain printing machines. Some of them were illegally smuggled into Poland. The printing itself was usually done by two or three men who would get paid a small salary for their work.<sup>701</sup> Then, the fairly simple reproduction process would start with the help of duplicating machines to make enough copies. Bieliński recalls that in the summer of 1977<sup>702</sup> they received four duplicators that were bought via someone from the US Embassy in Warsaw who had been organizing auctions on a regular basis in order to sell their old office equipment.<sup>703</sup> Since it was illegal to privately own either a printer or a duplicator, Bieliński said he tried not to ask too many questions about whether it was an intentional move on the side of the Embassy to sell the machines to him and his friends.<sup>704</sup> Bieliński, who together with

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<sup>700</sup> Interview with Ewa Milewicz, August 29, 2017.

<sup>701</sup> Interview with Ewa Kulik.

<sup>702</sup> According to Siobhan Doucette they were purchased in the fall of 1977; see Doucette, *Books Are Weapons*, 41.

<sup>703</sup> Most likely it was Zbigniew Romaszewski who bought the duplicators; one of the duplicators got lost and two went to Antoni Macierewicz.

<sup>704</sup> Interview with Konrad Bieliński.

Mirosław Chojecki, was one of the most important figures in NOWa and played an essential role in the printing process, proudly explained in the interview that although the mimeographs from the US Embassy were old, he managed to keep one of them in such good shape that it was used intensively for four years, reproducing key magazines such as *Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR* and *Krytyka*.<sup>705</sup> As the reproduction process was based on already old-fashioned technology, it allowed only for a limited and rather small number of copies. The newspapers and books published using this method were often of poor quality as the paper was very thin.

The next step involved transporting the printed material with small cars (usually small Fiats) to different locations. The printers who would then take on the role of drivers would memorize the addresses of the apartments by learning them by heart. On the way to the apartments, in case they were being followed, the drivers took a longer route and would drive in circles in order to lose the potential tail. As with many pre-emptive security measures, driving around became an inevitable part of the whole process. Once the printed pages arrived at the right apartments, the process was taken over by binders. Once ready, the publications were distributed by car to another apartment that served as storage space. The last step was to transport the actual publications to the selling location such as Milewicz's apartment. Sometimes not everything that was published by NOWa, such as books, reportage, poetry, leaflets, etc., was available in her apartment.<sup>706</sup> For safety reasons, the drivers, printers and distributors exchanged sensitive information by writing it down on a piece of paper and then burning it instantly in ashtrays. All the leftover paper and matrices were also burned.<sup>707</sup> There was, however, an exception to this printing process as sometimes the material was printed illegally in official printing houses when they managed to bribe the workers there to let the machines run overtime.<sup>708</sup>

The printing process and distribution was based on self-taught skills that were acquired by trying out different methods. While a smart division of labor, good logistical skills and team work based on trust were central to the whole enterprise, Bieliński also adds that participating in

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<sup>705</sup> Ibid.

<sup>706</sup> Interview with Ewa Milewicz, August 29, 2017.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid.

<sup>708</sup> Interview with Konrad Bieliński; Bieliński adds that there was a bigger black market of illegal printing with the use of official printing houses that were used for printing material for religious groups.

the production and distribution of the underground press went beyond the material process. He felt that by being continuously and deeply involved in illegal printing he helped create an alternative public sphere and, at times, an alternative reality in which he himself was living.<sup>709</sup>

### *The Hot Summer of 1980*

The immediate run-up to the events of summer 1980 can already be seen in the economic situation in the late 1970s. In the second half of the 1970s, Poland was struggling to repay foreign debts<sup>710</sup> and by the end of 1979 it became clear to the Party leaders that the overall economic situation was entering a difficult phase.<sup>711</sup> The signs of the plummeting economy became more visible and translated into a deteriorating social mood and public opinion as early as the spring of 1980.<sup>712</sup>

As the temperatures rose during the summer of 1980 so did the political tensions among the workers. The hot summer of 1980 was marked by literally and metaphorically rising temperatures and momentous political events that would radically transform Polish society and the Party in the coming years. The seemingly innocent atmosphere around Gdańsk is aptly mirrored in the following quote from an anonymous memoir sent to *Kultura* in 1983. The author, a woman from Warsaw, who was on a short visit to the Tri-City (Gdańsk, Gdynia and Sopot) when caught in the middle of political turmoil that filled the city: ‘the August sun was burning and the cloudless sky made me think of a careless holiday rather than the threat of riots.’<sup>713</sup> In the same memoir she recalls that despite the holiday-like surrounding and beautiful weather once she learned about the strike in the Lenin Shipyard she was overwhelmed and disoriented by ‘the atmosphere of uncertainty and excitement.’<sup>714</sup>

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<sup>709</sup> Ibid.

<sup>710</sup> Anita Prażmowska, *Poland: A Modern History* (London: I. B. Taurus, 2010), 200.

<sup>711</sup> Anna Machcewicz, *Bunt. Strajki w Trójmieście 1980* (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2015), 165.

<sup>712</sup> Marcin Zaremba, ‘Zimno, ciepło, gorąco. Nastroje Polaków od „zimy stulecia” do lata 1980’ in *Solidarność od wewnątrz 1980-1981*, ed. Andrzej Friszke, Krzysztof Persak and Paweł Sowiński (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej & Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2013), 31.

<sup>713</sup> AiKK 09/02.07, ‘Salamandra,’ 4.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid., 3.

At the core of the heated political atmosphere lay the frustration with the economy. As a result of the worsening economic situation, on July 1, 1980, the prices of fundamental food products dramatically increased which led to growing dissatisfaction among workers.<sup>715</sup> Strikes broke out immediately in various factories in Poland starting with the ones in Lublin. In July, 177 factories joined the strikes and approximately 81,000 workers were involved in protests in thirty provinces.<sup>716</sup> The political atmosphere became increasingly more heated and dramatic.

The workers' disaffection with the increase of food prices and their excitement with ongoing strikes culminated in the most famous strike that started on August 14 in the Gdańsk shipyard named after Lenin. Importantly, the protest in the Gdańsk shipyard was also aimed against the management's decision to sack well-known political activist Anna Walentynowicz and Lech Wałęsa, a known charismatic worker and labor activist. The fact that the strike broke out in Gdańsk was not accidental as this particular shipyard and the city itself, in the years before, had been home to intense and wide-ranging forms of workers' activism such as the yearly commemoration of the victims of the December 1970 protests. This was possible thanks to local activists such as Andrzej and Joanna Gwiazda, Bogdan Borusewicz, Alina Pienkowska, Bogdan Lis and Andrzej Kołodziej who along with Walentynowicz and Wałęsa were main figures in the local activist scene. The workers occupying the factory demanded, among other things, the reinstatement of dismissed activists, an increase in wages and the building of a monument commemorating the protesters killed in December 1970. The strike in the Gdańsk shipyard sparked a wave of strikes that spilled over into the rest of the country. An Inter-Factory Strike Committee (MKS) was set up in Gdańsk to represent the protesters during the negotiations with the Party officials. After an agreement with Party officials was reached and the strike almost called off by its leader Lech Wałęsa, the strike in the Gdańsk shipyard resumed. In his autobiography Wałęsa recalls the dynamic nature of the strike by underlining that 'a strike isn't harmonious, there are emotional and tactical phases as well as a phase of fear.'<sup>717</sup> By August 17 MKS had

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<sup>715</sup> Andrzej Friszke, *Rewolucja Solidarności* (Kraków: Znak, 2014), 24.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>717</sup> Lech Wałęsa, *Droga Nadziei* (Kraków: Znak, [1990] 1998), 134; for an analysis of the grassroots dimension of strikes, see Adam Leszczyński, 'Mikrosocjologia strajku,' in *Solidarność od wewnątrz 1980-1981*, ed. Andrzej Friszke, Krzysztof Persak, and Paweł Sowiński (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2013), 250-256.

issued a list of 21 demands that were made public the day after.<sup>718</sup> The first and key demand that was put forward was for a right to establish free trade unions. In Ewa Kulik's recollection, the strike in the shipyard was 'an absolute and total surprise [for me] and the revolutionary atmosphere was in the air and I could feel that it's of a new quality and that nothing will be the same after the strike. I felt that something special is happening.'<sup>719</sup> On August 24, an Expert Committee that was attached to the MKS was founded. It consisted of various and experienced intellectuals representing different disciplines and its aim was to offer advice to the MKS. Tadeusz Mazowiecki became a leader of the Committee and he was joined by: Bronisław Geremek (1932-2008), Bohdan Cywiński (b. 1939), Tadeusz Kowalik (1926-2012), Waldemar Kuczyński (b. 1939), Andrzej Wielowieyski (b. 1927) and Jadwiga Staniszkis (b. 1942).<sup>720</sup>

The underground media coverage of strikes in general, and of the strike in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk in particular, adopted different strategies when framing the events: some portrayed them as objectively as possible by sticking to the facts, others as intellectually stimulating as possible by providing a political commentary, and others, as human as possible by publishing personal testimonies that attempted to transmit the atmosphere.

The best example of a more personal perspective is the summer issue of *Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR* from 1980 in which a lively testimony of the August strike from within the shipyard in Gdańsk by Ewa Milewicz was published. The first-hand reportage is entitled 'Ja, happening, stocznia' (Me, The happening, The Shipyard) and captures the internal dynamics and intensity of the strike.<sup>721</sup> While being a participant Milewicz was also an outsider in the sense that she is from Warsaw, associated with KOR and was only on a short visit which allowed her to see and report nuances that would perhaps otherwise have gone unnoticed. Together with Konrad Bieliński, with whom she had been working at KOR and NOWa, she arrived in Gdańsk on August

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<sup>718</sup> 'Document No. 7: The Gdańsk Agreement August 31, 1980,' in *From Solidarity to Martial Law: The Polish Crisis of 1980-1981, A Documentary History*, ed. Andrzej Paczkowski and Malcom Byrne (Budapest: CEU Press, 2007), 70; on the legal history of the Gdańsk Agreement, see Jarosław Kuisz, *Charakter prawny porozumień sierpniowych 1980-1981* (Warsaw: Trio, 2009).

<sup>719</sup> Kulik, interview.

<sup>720</sup> See Waldemar Kuczyński, *Burza nad Wisłą. Dziennik 1980-1981* (Warsaw: Iskry, 2002); Bronisław Geremek, 'Między groźbą i nadzieją,' *Wolność i Solidarność Studia z dziejów opozycji wobec komunizmu i dyktatury* 1 (2010), 84-96; Anna Herbich, *Dziewczyny z Solidarności* (Znak: Kraków, 2016), 219-224.

<sup>721</sup> Ewa Milewicz, 'Ja, happening, stocznia,' *Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR*, 6 (40), August-September, 1980 42-56.



18, 1980 with a pile of underground newspapers. Upon their arrival at the shipyard, they saw the main gate adorned with bouquets of flowers, pictures of Catholic saints and colorful photographs of Pope John Paul II.<sup>722</sup> In the middle there was a wooden cross surrounded by light coming from little lamps.<sup>723</sup> Quickly Milewicz and Bieliński were circled by a crowd of workers as Bieliński started distributing free copies of *Robotnik*.

From the very beginning of her stay in the shipyard, Milewicz was absorbed the developments of the strike with fascination. She was mesmerized by the atmosphere and by being in the midst of a revolutionary fire that was also accompanied by her fear of death and imprisonment. Her anxieties were intensified by a lack of sleep. At the same time, Milewicz was clearly impressed by the enthusiastic reactions and commitment of people as she saw the eyes of protesters fill with tears as they sang the national anthem. Milewicz was assigned the task of keeping a track of factories that joined the strike, and the speed with which the strike was spreading (around a hundred of factories per day were going on strike) together with the whole situation seemed like an unreal spectacle that was unfolding in front of her.<sup>724</sup>

At first, she was skeptical of the excessive security measures and the degree of organization on the side of the workers. But as the strike quickly turned into a national phenomenon, the protest intensified, and the shipyard gradually became filled with delegates from different factories joining the strike security measures were needed. The delegates exchanged ideas and brainstormed trying to provide help to smaller factories that needed moral and concrete support. It seemed, to Milewicz that the spirit of the strike transformed not only those present in the shipyard but the whole city of Gdańsk. The strike embodied unflinching courage that filled everyone with pride. There was, however, also another side of the strike. Milewicz noticed that the intensity of the experience took a toll on protesters' physical and psychological well-being as they were dealing with tiredness and a feeling of uncertainty and nervousness. Under these challenging conditions, Wałęsa's role as a leader was unquestionable

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<sup>722</sup> Jan Kubik observes that while the visual culture of the strike in the Lenin Shipyard was infused with religious symbolism, the slogans and inscriptions contained more economic and political claims, see Jan Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1994), 188-189.

<sup>723</sup> Milewicz, 'Ja, happening, stocznia,' 43.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid., 45.

as his confidence and optimism provided an anchor for workers among shifting moods and feelings.<sup>725</sup>

Milewicz provided a complex account of the shipyard that – as a site of dissent – appeared to be a busy and humming place bustling with life, meetings, planning, counting money, meeting new people, speeches, singing, attending mass, but also filled with such innocuous scenes like workers gossiping while counting money donated for the striking workers.<sup>726</sup> Despite the great importance of the protest and the intense negotiations, planning and coming up with a strategy, during the strike people also did mundane things during the strike because the shipyard had temporarily become an extraordinary place of everyday life. Emotionally charged discussions and confrontations were accompanied by immediate reactions such as booing, cheering or whistling that, together with singing and attending mass, amounted to what Colin Barker calls ‘ritualized forms of collective expression.’<sup>727</sup> As rituals, both spontaneous and planned group activities are layered with complex meanings and are vehicles of shared and embodied feelings, values and beliefs or simply as ‘ways of formalizing shared feelings.’<sup>728</sup> The following quotation captures the complexity of the experience and its flickering nature:

I look at all of this and I feel that ... the crucifix, Poland, the white eagle [that is in the coat of arms of Poland], the smiling face of the Pope John Paul II, Wałęsa, Polish United Workers’ Party factory units,<sup>729</sup> and hammer and sickle are all spinning together in a frenzied dance in my head. All of this creates some kind of inseparable entity that in this room, here, symbolizes Polish communism.<sup>730</sup>

The visual culture of the protest in the Lenin Shipyard drew upon different, even opposing, political traditions. Instead of competing with each other, the political dimension blended with

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<sup>725</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>726</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>727</sup> Colin Barker, ‘Fear, Laughter, and Collective Power: The Making of Solidarity at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk, Poland, August 1980’ in *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, and Francesca Polletta (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 187.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid., 188.

<sup>729</sup> POP PZPR stands for Podstawowa organizacja partyjna (Basic Party Cell or Unit).

<sup>730</sup> Milewicz, ‘Ja, happening, stocznia,’ 50.

the aesthetics of protest. In the above quotation, the description of the way in which different facets of official, public and private spheres of life permeated the discursive space of the strike in a swirl of symbols and practices is as important as the impact such an unrivalled experience had on participants of the strike. In her article, Milewicz keeps on repeating that the events unfolded with great speed: 'I cannot keep up with experiencing all of this. Information, numbers, rumors, other people's worries, leisure activities filled with singing the national anthem, the announcements of another mass, negotiations with Jagielski [deputy prime minister] and the whole spectacle of MKS were spinning in my head.'<sup>731</sup> Once again, Milewicz shows that attending a mass and singing uplifting religious and traditional, celebratory Polish songs was as important as discussing politics and economics. In fact, thanks to their collective character, and their ritualistic and emotional intensity, collective cultural expressions were a fundamental component of the protest.<sup>732</sup>

Songs, for instance, could be seen as a source of meaning and knowledge about the protests, even as a means of communication for protesters and as having a mobilizing power.<sup>733</sup> The lyrics of two songs that emerged from the protest whose authors are unknown and that were only released in Sweden in 1981 deserve careful attention. The songs 'Piosenka dla córki' (A Song for My Daughter) and 'Ewie, mojej 12-letniej córce' (For Eve, My Daughter of 12)<sup>734</sup> tell the story of a striking worker who misses his daughter who he has not seen in a while because of his involvement in the strike. The lyrics of these two songs are worth remembering because they suggest that singing songs also had a therapeutic function for striking workers who had to put their closest relationships with, for instance, family members on hold. Workers used songs that touched upon a topic that was particularly close to them at the time of the strike as a way of venting their longing and perhaps a sense of guilt for being absent from the lives of their families.

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<sup>731</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>732</sup> On the significant role of music and technology in social movements, see William F. Danaher, 'Music and Social Movements,' *Sociology Compass* 4:9 (2010), 811-823.

<sup>733</sup> Ron Eyerman and Anrew Jamison, *Music and Social Movements: Mobilizing Traditions in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 161.

<sup>734</sup> *Solidarity! - Postulat 22: Songs from the New Polish Labour Movement (Nowe Polskie Piesni Robotnicze)*. Recorded January 1, 1981. Folkways Records, 1981, Streaming Audio.

'Piosenka dla córki' (A Song for My Daughter):

I have no time for you  
Your mother haven't seen you for a while  
A little bit more, wait, grow up  
We will tell you about these events  
About the days full of hope, discussions and heated disputes  
About the bad nights  
About our strong heartbeats  
About people who finally felt at home  
I am fighting out of solidarity for present and for your future  
So don't be sad  
And wait patiently until we will take you in our arms again  
In our home that has never existed because there was no true happiness in it.

'Ewie, mojej 12-letniej córce' (For Eve, My Daughter of 12):

Hang in there just a bit more, my little girl  
...  
It's nothing that I'm away from you for so many days  
It's nothing, the sleepless nights, tired eyes and arms  
Belief heals people and today people are with us  
Our heartbeat is here  
In the distance, your little heart  
Our heartbeat is for the same cause: the better future  
For a day as bright and clean as your soul  
Devoid of lie, hypocrisy and falsehood  
For a free word and a bright smile  
For another person's happiness

Free fatherland is your reflection  
You do not know what a lie is  
And this is why you give me strength on these hard August days  
Your faith in me helps me get through the nights slept on chairs  
Hang in there just a bit more, my little girl  
The sun is smiling at us.

The communicative power of the songs is evident as they both narrate and explain the unique strike to a dear person who still cannot fully understand the political situation. In dealing with the longing for one's child, the lyrics also balance it with a sense of pride and necessity. Thanks to their lyrics and the explanatory power of music, the songs function as carriers of values behind the father's decision to risk his freedom in joining the strike and as reminders of parental care and love. Not only do these songs share a similar topic, in terms of style, both songs are built primarily on a sense of intimacy as the male voice singing the song is accompanied only by the soft sound of a guitar. Contrary to songs that tap into the mobilizing power of music, songs that are confrontational, self-affirming and optimistic or use irony as a weapon to mock and ridicule the Party, both of these songs express an empowering melancholy and unapologetic tenderness that befit the moments of the strike that are filled with longing. In that sense, the two songs also have a documentary function as they register another, often omitted, intimate and personal dimension of political activism.

When leaving the shipyard, Milewicz was accompanied by a feeling of being overwhelmed and of ambivalence: 'I feel that I have to describe all of this, it feels as if there is too much to describe and it is way too unequivocal; one cannot not eulogize it; and one cannot only eulogize it.'<sup>735</sup> Precisely because Milewicz's memory of the strike is written in the genre of an eclectic reportage composed within weeks after her departure from Gdańsk and immediately published in the underground press, it allows for a subjective as well as realistic account of what the protest looked like and what its building blocks were. The strike, as through a magnifying glass, allows us to see more clearly the everyday reality of being part of a striking group and the role of an

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<sup>735</sup> Milewicz, 'Ja, happening, stocznia,' 56.

organized and collective commitment to protest. Rather than providing a sanitized, glorified and ethically uplifting narrative that sugarcoats precarity and doubt, Milewicz presents a realistic account in which protest takes a toll on one's body and psychological well-being. Above all, during the fourteen days of the strike, empowerment and joy were often accompanied by fear.

After an intense and exhausting strike and difficult negotiations<sup>736</sup> between the MKS and the government, the Gdańsk Agreements were signed on August 31 and eventually the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union Solidarność (NSZZ) was founded on November 10, 1980.<sup>737</sup> Kulik recalls that when the protesting workers entered the phase of negotiations with the government and when they were aired on public television, she 'felt it was a turning point, an absolutely revolutionary moment.'<sup>738</sup> And indeed it was a turning point: Solidarność was a single and autonomous trade union divided into regional structures whose chairman was Lech Wałęsa who, for many, 'had come to personify August 1980.'<sup>739</sup> It had offices in almost all state-run enterprises and factories and thus became omnipresent.

The newly established precarious coexistence between the Party and Solidarność was threatened by the Bydgoszcz Crisis<sup>740</sup> which took place in March 1981 in Bydgoszcz when the local branch of Niezależny Samorządny Związek Zawodowy Rolników Indywidualnych 'Solidarność' (Independent and Self-Governing Union of Individual Farmers 'Solidarność' or NSZZ RI

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<sup>736</sup> For a full English text of negotiations between the Inter-Factory Strike Committee and the Polish Government Commission at the Lenin Shipyard in August 1980, see Anthony Kemp-Welch, *The Birth of Solidarity: Gdańsk Negotiations, 1980* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1983).

<sup>737</sup> For more on Solidarność, see Lawrence Goodwyn *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Roman Laba *The Roots of Solidarity: A Political Sociology of Poland's Working-Class Democratization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, [1991] 2014); Jack M. Bloom, *Seeing Through the Eyes of the Polish Revolution Solidarity and the Struggle Against Communism in Poland* (Leiden: Brill, 2013); Jerzy Holzer, *Solidarność, 1980-1981: Geneza i historia* (Warsaw: Agencja Omnipress, 1990); Jadwiga Staniszkis, *Poland's Self-Limiting Revolution* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984); Alain Touraine, *Solidarność. Analiza ruchu społecznego 1980-1981* (Gdańsk: Europejskie Centrum Solidarności, 2010); Neal Ascherson, *The Polish August: The Self-Limiting Revolution* (London: Allen Lane, 1981); Kubik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power*; Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution* (New Haven: Yale University Press, [1983] 2002); John Taylor, *Five Months With Solidarity: A First-Hand Report from Inside Hotel Morski, Gdansk* (London: Wildwood House, 1981); Colin Barker, *Festival of the Oppressed: Solidarity, Reform and Revolution in Poland, 1980-81* (London: Bookmarks, 1986).

<sup>738</sup> Kulik, interview.

<sup>739</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, *The Spring Will Be Ours: Poland and the Poles from Occupation to Freedom* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, [1998] 2003), 413.

<sup>740</sup> For a more detailed description of the Bydgoszcz Crisis, see Krzysztof Osiński, Piotr Rybarczyk, *Kryzys bydgoski 1981. Przyczyny, przebieg, konsekwencje* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2013).

Solidarność)<sup>741</sup> supported another organization that represented the rights and goals of workers of the province against the organization's management. The disagreement quickly turned into a conflict that escalated into a strike. As one of the key historians of socialist Poland, Andrzej Friszke, notes, the decisions regarding the strike were made in haste and on impulse and under the strong pressure of local activists.<sup>742</sup> The Bydgoszcz branch of the Inter-Factory Committee (MKS) decided to support the farmers and represent the protesters against the authorities of what was then Bydgoszcz province. March 19 was a pivotal moment for the striking activists in Bydgoszcz, as well as for Solidarność as a whole because during and after the negotiations on that day, the conflict intensified and resulted in an impasse. As a consequence, some Solidarność activists refused to leave the room in the headquarters of the Provincial National Council in which the negotiations took place. Jan Rulewski (b. 1944), the leader of the MKS Bydgoszcz, decided to stay despite the advice of both Wałęsa and Kuroń in a phone conversation not to occupy the room.<sup>743</sup> The building was surrounded by the police and before eight in the evening the police entered the room, forcefully removing everyone. Some activists, including Rulewski, were heavily beaten either by the police or secret agents who were among them.<sup>744</sup> The violent reaction led to a major crisis during 'the carnival of Solidarność' as, out of fear for the safety of its activists and members, Solidarność called for four-hour strikes as a warning to the Party. Consequently, the negotiations resumed and the general strike was called off. Many on both sides of the negotiating table were frustrated with the situation. In his autobiography, Karol Modzelewski observes that the political atmosphere was tense and heated. Public feelings centered around anger at the Party for using force against Solidarność activists and against the broad support enjoyed by the union.<sup>745</sup> Both sides worked towards an agreement and by the end of March, a compromise was reached. While during the warning strike, Solidarność had broad social support, according to Modzelewski, once it reached the agreement with the Party, the union lost touch with its base.

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<sup>741</sup> Although the NSZZ RI Solidarność was legalized only in May 1981, it was founded at the beginning of March in Poznań after merging a few other organizations representing farmers.

<sup>742</sup> Friszke, *Rewolucja*, 320.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid.*, 322; Kuroń, 'Gwiazdny Czas,' 580.

<sup>744</sup> It is unclear whether police brutality and misconduct were in this case an outcome of a planned political provocation, a strategic, preparatory move before the implementation of martial law, or an individual and impulsive decision of police officers to use excessive force.

<sup>745</sup> Modzelewski, *Zajeżdżimy*, 297.

Because, in his view, public emotions are dynamic and can change, workers were frustrated and angry after the general strike was called off, and this led to ‘the irreversible diffusion of the emotions of the Union’s base that were once mobilized.’<sup>746</sup>

Ultimately, despite many turning points and despite the Bydgoszcz Crisis, the ‘carnival’ of *Solidarność* lasted sixteen months, from August 1980 to December 1981. There can be no doubt that it was a novel and transformative experience for most of late socialist Polish society and that it shaped subsequent forms of political dissent, but at the same time, dissent took many forms and happened in many different locations, and not all dissent fit the scripts taken to be central to the ‘carnival of *Solidarność*.’<sup>747</sup>

### *The Apartment on Mickiewicza*

During the ‘hot summer,’ as almost every year, Gaja and Jacek Kuroń went on a short summer holiday in a small village called Kruczy Borek on the river Narew close to Warsaw. They left Warsaw by the end of July and on August 11, as they were about to hitchhike back home, Gaja noticed that something was different. After seeing a crowd of people waiting for the bus, she told her husband ‘I can feel the strike.’<sup>748</sup> Gaja observed that despite significant bus delays people seemed happy and excited. Even remote places like Kruczy Borek were impacted by the changing political climate. Kuroń was impressed by what he saw on the way, so rather than continue his holiday and return to Kruczy Borek, as he had initially planned, he decided to stay in Warsaw to assist striking workers while Gaja went back to their holiday home on her own. During the hot summer of 1980 the Kurońs’ apartment in Warsaw once again became a social hub of dissident activity.

In the same period, Ewa Kulik played a key role in collecting and passing on information about the strikes to international media. After returning from her holiday in August, Kulik realized that the underground printing house in Kraków had been discovered by the police. As she needed

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<sup>746</sup> Ibid., 297-298.

<sup>747</sup> For the discussion on whether *Solidarność* was a revolution or a social movement, see Tomasz Kozłowski, *Anatomia rewolucji. Narodziny ruchu społecznego „Solidarność” w 1980 roku* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2017), 15-35.

<sup>748</sup> Kuroń, ‘Gwiezdny Czas,’ 509-510.



to print leaflets informing workers about the strikes that were taking place all over the country, she decided to go to Warsaw to have them printed there and stayed in the Kuroń's apartment. While it was primarily others<sup>749</sup> who were busy with printing, Kulik and during those days observed the process of collecting and spreading information on the strikes. She learned who to contact, how to confirm the information and which street phones and neighbors' phones were safe to use. Kulik recalls that during this busy period, there were around thirty people working in the apartment. On August 18, two large police vehicles pulled up in front of the Kuroń's apartment and almost everyone who was there was arrested, including Kuroń himself. The act of arrest itself lasted a few hours during which Kuroń managed to communicate to Kulik that in order to avoid incarceration, she should pretend to be the caretaker of his aging father. The plan succeeded as the police were convinced that Kulik had to stay because someone had to take care of the father. Since Gaja was still on holiday in Kruczy Borek, Kulik took over Kuroń's activities. As Kulik explains:

Normally, Gaja would take over the information center and provide instructions and guidance to the wives of the incarcerated activists. She would tell them how to make a request for a visit in prison and what they should bring to the prison visit. So these were the practical things. I looked up to her as if she was a figure from books and stories about mothers, wives, daughters and sisters during the past uprisings in Polish history.<sup>750</sup>

Even though Gaja was not present, for Kulik the experience of being the person responsible for the maintenance of the information center was closely linked with Gaja as Gaja was Kulik's role model.

Kulik's main task was to answer the phone calls, decode the information about strikes, double-check the information and pass it on to international outlets:

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<sup>749</sup> Kulik recalls that Ludwika and Henryk Wujec together with Helena Łuczywo were in charge of printing.

<sup>750</sup> Kulik, interview.

When the person who called said there is a strike in 'N Hu' then I had to guess that they meant Nowa Huta [New Steelworks in a district of Kraków] or that there is a trial in 'Stara' then it means Starachowice [a town in Poland]. I had to solve the puzzle, I had a special book with all the phone numbers of the members of the political opposition and I tried to think who could confirm that there was a strike in Nowa Huta. Then, I would leave the house and look for a safe public phone to call friends who could confirm the information and wait for them to call back. I made a daily report and once a day I would go to Kuroń's neighbor to call Nina, Gieniek [Eugeniusz Smolar] and Alik [Aleksander Smolar] and pass them the content of the report. They would hand down this information on to Radio Free Europe and Radio France Internationale. International journalists also came over or called me.<sup>751</sup>

Once again, the effort that went into spreading information about the strikes was due to the skillful use of informal networks and bonds of friendship. Kulik adds that amidst the revolutionary atmosphere she was so excited about what was going on around her that she had no time to be scared of the consequences of her political involvement. Contrary to fear, she felt that:

Everything made sense ... I had a feeling that everything that I had done until now was assembling small building blocks of something that has suddenly accelerated. We've never dreamed that this will happen so quickly ... in general this is what we wanted: for people to fight for their rights. We always said that to strike is a right of every working person, that people should be able to articulate their needs and demands ... It [Solidarność] was a fulfillment, a totally new phase.<sup>752</sup>

When Gaja returned from holidays, she learned that Kuroń was arrested together with other KOR members and found out that that Ewa Milewicz was in the shipyard. She wrote to Milewicz urging

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<sup>751</sup> Kulik, interview; for an account of the call center in the Kuroń's apartment based on secret police archives, see Andrzej Friszke, 'Telefon Jacka Kuronia. KSS „KOR” wobec strajków latem 1980,' *Wolność i Solidarność. Studia z dziejów opozycji wobec komunizmu i dyktatury* 1 (2010), 16-29.

<sup>752</sup> Kulik, interview.

her to raise the issue of imprisoned KOR activists. Milewicz describes the letter in the following way: 'the way Gajka writes is very dramatic. She has a grudge against the MKS for remaining silent on that issue, against me for doing nothing.'<sup>753</sup> Milewicz decided to intervene and took with her the list of imprisoned activists that Gajka attached to the letter. Thanks to her persistence, Milewicz managed to get access to Wałęsa who was extremely busy and surrounded by the press and delegations from various factories. As Milewicz was trying to push Wałęsa to include the situation of the imprisoned KOR activists in the negotiations with Jagielski, she encountered reluctance on Wałęsa's part and on the part of some of the intellectuals from the Experts Committee. In that sense, her reportage also shows that there was a tension between the members of the Experts Committee and activists associated with KOR that would later continue to play a role within Solidarność. Thanks to Bogdan Lis' active support, eventually the striking workers convinced Jagielski to rethink the decision to detain KOR activists. On September 1, 1980, as part of the Gdańsk Agreement, KOR activists were released from prison. Acting under a lot of internal pressure and in fear of failing her friends, Milewicz remained skeptical during the tense negotiations that her friends would finally be released, and she, along with many others, was surprised by the political success.<sup>754</sup> In his autobiography, Kuroń emphasizes Gaja's efforts in putting the situation of the arrested KOR's activists on the table in Gdańsk as she went to shipyard to put pressure on the striking workers during the negotiations.<sup>755</sup> In a typically chatty manner, Kuroń recalls that when he arrived home, the first thing he saw was Gaja wearing a t-shirt with a Solidarność logo and that she had also brought one from Gdańsk for him.

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<sup>753</sup> Milewicz, 'Ja, happening, stocznia,' 53.

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid.*, 54-56.

<sup>755</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdy czas,' 522.



Figure 7: Jacek Kuroń and Adam Michnik in the Kuroń's apartment in Warsaw, September, 1990.  
Photograph: Tomasz Michalak/FOTONOVA

### *Kuroń's Role in Solidarność*

One day after Kuroń's release from prison, on September 2, he went to Gdańsk to visit Andrzej Gwiazda and others involved with the Międzyzakładowy Komitet Założycielski (Inter-Factory Founding Committee, previously known as MKS and then renamed into MKZ). From then on, he spent his time commuting between Warsaw and Gdańsk until he eventually moved in temporarily with Anna Walentynowicz in her apartment in Gdańsk. September was a turbulent moment in Kuroń's life as a member of the political opposition as it was marked by attempts to isolate him from the hotbed of decision-making processes in Solidarność. Firstly, he was wrongly accused of trying to overthrow Wałęsa as the leader of Solidarność. Secondly, Tadeusz Mazowiecki and his group were hostile towards Kuroń and his milieu because of Kuroń's reputation as a member of the political opposition that could exert undue influence on the negotiations with the Party. Thirdly, some factions of the Catholic Church close to Wałęsa were actively against Kuroń.

These three points are interconnected and best illustrated by an event at the beginning of September when Kuroń was chosen to be an expert with the MKZ. During a larger meeting at Jacek Taylor's<sup>756</sup> place on September 3,<sup>757</sup> he expressed his vision of the future character of Solidarność. Kuroń opposed the centralization of the newly founded union as he was convinced that workers should not become union bureaucrats but remain workers. Therefore, Solidarność should have a relatively weak central bureau and a strong regional structure. One of the activists present at the meeting, Krzysztof Wyszowski (b. 1947),<sup>758</sup> was skeptical of Kuroń's ideas. When Kuroń returned to Warsaw the day after, he was told that Mazowiecki and his closest collaborators were displeased with Kuroń for accepting the role as an expert without prior consultation on the matter with Mazowiecki. Kuroń was not only accused of splitting the Experts Committee but also seen as unfit for the role, given his reputation as an extreme dissident. Irritated, Kuroń met with Mazowiecki to talk through the problems. Mazowiecki remained determined and opposed to Kuroń as an expert claiming that his presence would create negative public attention.<sup>759</sup> Kuroń found Mazowiecki's attitude unacceptable:

[Such] discrimination for what I have done until now? I saw it as a great injustice. My experience could have been of great help: first my experience in ZMP that was a social movement killed by bureaucracy and ideology, but where I had gained organizational skills, then scouting and KOR. Frankly, those from KOR knew more about how to organize a movement than the experts from TKN who were not experts on how to organize and run a mass movement; Bronek [Bronisław] Geremek – a medievalist, Tadeusz Mazowiecki – a journalist and columnist for the Catholic press.<sup>760</sup>

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<sup>756</sup> Jacek Taylor (born 1939) is a lawyer who was based in Gdańsk and was involved in supporting workers. He was also a member of Solidarność and helped political prisoners.

<sup>757</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdy czas,' 526; Friszke, *Rewolucja*, 81-82.

<sup>758</sup> Krzysztof Wyszowski was a worker who was involved in KOR and the smuggling of émigré journals. Wyszowski also worked as a printer for NOWa and was a participant in the strike in the Lenin Shipyard in August 1980.

<sup>759</sup> Kuroń was also criticized by Andrzej Celiński (born 1950) from Warsaw who had been working with KOR and co-founded TKN.

<sup>760</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdy czas,' 527.

By pointing out Mazowiecki's lack of experience, skills and know-how in mobilizing a political movement, Kuroń was more broadly addressing the limits of a model of the political opposition that was based mainly on intellectual activities. He left the meeting in an unflinching spirit and in open conflict with Mazowiecki. The next day, Kuroń went to Gdańsk. Before his departure he was informed about a rumor according to which he and Bogdan Borusewicz were planning to become key leaders of the newly forming union. Kuroń was supposed to have said this during a meeting at Taylor's place.<sup>761</sup> According to the historian Andrzej Friszke, the rumor was exaggerated by Krzysztof Wyszowski who was present at the meeting and who, over time, had changed his testimony about what actually happened, placing the blame on Kuroń's supposed intention to overthrow Wałęsa.<sup>762</sup> Together with Lech Kaczyński (1949-2010), Kuroń was asked to help Wałęsa prepare for the meeting with the representatives of the Catholic church. During Wałęsa's stay in Warsaw, where he went in the company of priests and a primate, either priest Alojzy Orszulik, priest Henryk Jankowski or cardinal Stefan Wyszyński told Wałęsa that Kuroń's reputation, biography and political outlook did not fit Solidarność. As a result, upon his return to Gdańsk, Wałęsa clearly distanced himself from Kuroń – a move that culminated in banning Kuroń from coming to the MKZ office.<sup>763</sup> Kuroń moved in temporarily with Anna Walentynowicz and, isolated from the center of power of the newly formed Union, found himself in an ambivalent position as many main figures in Solidarność would still consult with him on their decisions. He felt deeply hurt<sup>764</sup> and excluded by the hostility towards him.<sup>765</sup>

In this situation, the hostile intentions of the other side were not subject to guessing anymore and it became clear there were two camps at war with each other: Wałęsa and Mazowiecki with the Experts Committee on one side and Kuroń with KOR and WZZW on the other.<sup>766</sup> From Kuroń's side, the roots of rivalry were in the Expert Committee's initial reluctance to push for the release of Kuroń and other KOR activists during the negotiations with the Party authorities in August 1980. At the same time, Kuroń looked for other alliances. During his official

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<sup>761</sup> Friszke, *Rewolucja*, 90.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>764</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdy czasu,' 529.

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid.*, 533.

<sup>766</sup> Brzeziecki, *Biografia*, 286.

isolation from Solidarność, Kuroń met with students from the University of Gdańsk at large public gatherings where he would try to bring them closer to his ideas. Still, he recalls that upon the announcement of the one, official union of Solidarność on September 17 – pushed for by Jan Olszewski and Karol Modzelewski – he felt that his proposal had failed and that this, perhaps, indirectly led to the imposition of martial law.<sup>767</sup>

In the meantime, in trying to antagonize and weaken Solidarność, the Party had been framing Kuroń and KOR as the radical wing of Solidarność. *Trybuna Ludu* unleashed an open attack on Kuroń claiming that he was a dangerous revolutionary. In addition, *Der Spiegel* published an article in September that presented Kuroń as the leader of the political opposition and his apartment on Mickiewicza Street as the headquarter of dissidence.<sup>768</sup> In fact, the day Kuroń left prison, on September 1, and arrived home, he was welcome by a crowd of journalists, among them Siegfried Kogelfranz, *Der Spiegel's* Moscow correspondent who decided to write a short piece without consulting with Kuroń. Kogelfranz ascribes a leading role behind the August strike to KOR and downplays Wałęsa's contribution: 'Wałęsa was the lieutenant in the trenches, but certainly not the headquarters at the frontline of the strike. The latter was occupied by a brain trust of KOR that advised the strike committee in all situations and juridically fine-tuned the negotiation texts with the government.'<sup>769</sup> The article was distributed by party members as a proof that Kuroń was trying to take power in Solidarność. Wałęsa read the article and drew his own conclusions.

Although Kuroń could not foresee the scale of the consequences of the media campaign against him and of the piece in *Der Spiegel*, he tried to defend himself by writing an open letter to the workers of the shipyard.<sup>770</sup> In the letter, which was distributed among workers, he addressed the article in *Der Spiegel* and corrected the false statements about him calling for a burning of the committees. Not only did he remind the workers that since the late 1970s he had been calling for workers to build their own committees instead of burning them and that KOR had always been on the side of the workers. He also warned them that, ultimately, this conflict was

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<sup>767</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdy czas,' 532-533.

<sup>768</sup> Siegfried Kogelfranz, 'Jetzt können wir alles erreichen,' *Der Spiegel* 37 (1980); Kuroń, 'Gwiazdy czas,' 532-534.

<sup>769</sup> Kogelfranz, 'Jetzt können wir alles erreichen,' 126.

<sup>770</sup> AO III/12K.02.04, Jacek Kuroń, *Do Stoczniovców i wszystkich robotników Wybrzeża*.

not about him, but about the Party using him to divide Solidarność.<sup>771</sup> The goal of the state authorities was, according to Kuroń, to be able to influence who was part of Solidarność. Despite these attacks on him, Solidarność leaders supported him, at least publicly, and in so doing signaled the Party that Kuroń should be regarded as untouchable.<sup>772</sup> Yet, it was a difficult moment for Kuroń:

At that time I felt very tired. Mentally. These fights, suggestions and accusations without trying to understand what happened. It made me feel terrible. I felt as if only part of my huge efforts contributes to reaching the goal. I started doubting. What if I do more harm than good? I hadn't seen Gaja almost the whole summer and also now, I haven't been seeing her almost at all. Our home became a public place.<sup>773</sup>

As a result, Kuroń decided to return to Warsaw and convinced Gaja to spontaneously go on holiday to the Tatra mountains. The break from all the chaos and time with Gaja allowed him to recharge his batteries and get some distance from everything that was happening around Solidarność. They returned from holiday on October 28. Upon his return, he was contacted and asked to come to Gdańsk to help Solidarność solve the problem with its official registration. Kuroń reconnected with major leaders of Solidarność and joined them in trying to calm down the tense atmosphere among workers who were ready to call a general strike if the Party did not give in and allow Solidarność to be registered as an autonomous union. When Mazowiecki asked Kuroń for his opinion regarding the general strike, Kuroń – still surprised at how at ease Mazowiecki was with him – replied that Solidarność should announce readiness for a strike but no strike yet.<sup>774</sup> From then onwards, Kuroń acted in agreement with Mazowiecki and Wałęsa to try to prevent a harsh confrontation with the Party. Solidarność was registered on November 10, 1980 and throughout its existence Kuroń was active at different levels of the organization, for instance as an advisor to the National Committee of Solidarność, as a member of the Krajowa Komisja

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<sup>771</sup> Ibid.

<sup>772</sup> Kuroń, 'Gwiazdy czas,' 535.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid., 536.

<sup>774</sup> Ibid., 540.



Porozumiewawcza (National Coordinating Commission or KKP), and on a regional level in the Mazovia region. Most interestingly, as a response to growing political tensions between Solidarność and the party, he developed the notion of a national government (Ruch Narodowy) that would be based on a coalition between the Catholic Church, Solidarność and the PZPR.<sup>775</sup>



Figure 8: Adam Michnik, Helena Łuczywo and Jacek Kuroń in front of the Kuroń's apartment in Warsaw, September 1980. Photograph: Tomasz Michalak/FOTONOVA

### *Kuroń's Voice on Emancipation: The Sharp Turn and What Next?*

Like many other members of the political opposition as well as ordinary members of society, Kuroń carefully observed the events of the summer of 1980. In trying to make sense of the July strikes, he published a short piece entitled 'Ostry zakręt' (The Sharp Turn) in *Biuletyn Informacyjny*

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<sup>775</sup> Jerzy Holzer, *Solidarność 1980–1981. Geneza i historia* (Paris: Instytut Literacki, 1984), 332.

KOR the same month.<sup>776</sup> Apart from information on the strikes, the article also offers some political commentary. Kuroń characterizes the strike waves of July using the metaphor of a sharp and potentially dangerous turn that Polish society was about to take. While the workers challenged the power of the Party on a mass scale, for the first time, Kuroń observes, both sides of the conflict managed to avoid a violent confrontation. According to him, the dynamics of protest that refocuses attention away from a clash with the state to the self-organization of workers is best captured by the slogan 'Found your own committees instead of burning them.'<sup>777</sup> The slogan was a call for the self-organization of workers in factories which had been a fundamental value and guiding principle promoted by KOR since its inception in 1976. Creating committees as opposed to destroying them, as a real and symbolic gesture, also stood for the power of grassroots politics that compensated for the absence of a formal and official support system for workers.

The immediate background of the strikes was an economic crisis that affected everybody's lives. Despite the fact that the worsening economic situation had an impact on society as a whole, Kuroń observes, not all strikers gained public support. He gives the example of female low-skilled hospital workers in Lublin who were in one of the weakest positions,<sup>778</sup> exemplifying his sensitivity and empathy with the weakest in underlining the diverse character of the Lublin strikes. Most importantly, Kuroń stresses that 'the strikes are necessary because thanks to them workers transform into a social power and movement'<sup>779</sup> that can be of importance for the whole of society. By demanding the same employment and salary benefits as those enjoyed by the police and secret police, the workers indirectly challenged existing social policy and the ruling system of privileges. This is best reflected in a slogan that was popular among striking workers in Lublin: 'The whole of Poland is hungry – feed the nation.'<sup>780</sup> One of the main points of Kuroń's argument is his insistence on the strong link between the workers movement and the existing networks of the political opposition:

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<sup>776</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Ostry zakręt,' *Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR* 5, 39 (1980).

<sup>777</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

[T]he strikes initiated a mass process of the self-organization of workers. And as long as the waves of strikes do not collapse the readiness of the workers to strike turns them into a power that is truly present and felt in the current political landscape. At the same time, the existence of the political opposition is important for the workers' movement. Thanks to us [the political opposition] the rest of society is kept informed about the strikes. The experience of a particular factory can serve as a guide and knowledge resource for other factories.<sup>781</sup>

In Kuroń's view, instead of being pitted against one another, workers and intellectuals could provide mutual support. While the workers were the agents of real social change – through self-organized strikes –, the activists and intellectuals who formed the political opposition could actively help by circulating information about strikes and contributing in other ways to the logistic and organizational effort. For Kuroń, real political change could only come about if it involved collaboration between different segments of society because the power of the opposition lay in the wide social spectrum it encompassed. He also provides a description of the Party as unreliable and politically bankrupt, leaving no hope for its revival: 'too often have the rulers abused the trust placed on them by society, broken agreements, lied and tricked us. Therefore, they are right to fear that once they enter the path towards democratization they will activate a power that they will not be able to contain.'<sup>782</sup> He then continues by asking rhetorically whether 'the rulers of the Polish People's Republic will take the risk of democratization?', and answering 'I'm afraid not.' To justify his view that the Party could neither be democratized nor an agent of democratization, Kuroń lists past examples of failed attempts to reform the Party. Surely, his own history of imprisonment for political dissidence shaped this negative assessment.

Kuroń was adamant that society was undergoing a major change: 'I'm convinced, however, that Polish society can successfully democratize itself and overcome the current crisis – against the authority of the Party. The political opposition must be the initiator of this move ... There is a great demand for our support, information, political advice and expertise. It is our duty

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<sup>781</sup> Ibid.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid., 9.

to act in a way that enables the workers to organize themselves autonomously from the state's institutions, through workers' committees, autonomous trade unions.<sup>783</sup> Advocating for society to be an active agent of political change, Kuroń calls on politically engaged intellectuals to use their experience in assisting workers – as it is the workers who will play the main role in social change – by providing information and participating in a dialog between different segments of society. This kind of political involvement was already very much reflected in KOR's activities, and according to this model, for Kuroń, political opposition was as much about providing political commentary and analysis on an argumentative level as it was about the existence of self-governed organizations based on everyday practices. In this context, Kuroń's understanding of the bonds of solidarity and the practices of support expanded to encompass not only his closest circle of friends but the whole community of workers fighting for their rights. In part, Kuroń's argument goes back to his earlier writings and activism, such as the *Open Letter to the Party* (in which workers committees play a crucial role) and his pedagogical work (with the strongly normative character of his pedagogical vision being based on his concrete experience in the *Walterowcy*).

Kuroń's article also assigns an important role to independent social initiatives. In case the Party did not introduce economic reforms in responding to the new social movement that emerged from the strikes, the responsibility would fall on autonomous initiatives – such as the independent farmers and workers' movements, *Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych* (The Society of Scientific Courses or TKN) – to come up with a broad program for democratization including socio-economic reform.

In making his case for a self-organized social movement and grassroots initiatives, Kuroń recognizes the fear of a USSR invasion and warns that the 'Party-state apparatus' would want to 'destroy democratic institutions: to curb their activities, to challenge their decisions, to compromise and corrupt their activists, to frighten and blackmail society. We will have to defend ourselves and simultaneously, step by step, limit the spheres of social life that are subordinated

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<sup>783</sup> Ibid.

to the Party-state apparatus.<sup>784</sup> The article echoes, and to some extent scales up, the role of social movements in line with Kuroń's long-term political vision for a just and democratic society.

Only a few weeks later, Kuroń published a second article on the political situation in the August/September issue of *Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR* titled *Co dalej?* [What Next?].<sup>785</sup> The protests that shook Poland during the hot summer of 1980 seriously challenged the fundamentals of the political system as the political monopoly of the state had been broken up. In emphasizing the incommensurability of the positions taken by *Solidarność* and the Party, Kuroń uses the following metaphor:

Try to imagine that in the Polish State Railways, where train traffic is controlled by a single train schedule determined in advance, suddenly a number of trains start running following their own schedule democratically designed by ticket inspectors and passengers. In a system where the whole socio-political life is controlled by 'a state-Party' central apparatus, autonomous trade unions would represent such trains. ... [The system] cannot operate according to two contradicting laws.<sup>786</sup>

For Kuroń, the existence of *Solidarność* evidently posed a threat to the Party's monopoly of power, which could lead to unpredictable outcomes. What was already happening, he notes, was that even regular people were mobilizing and organizing themselves to take over housing cooperatives, for instance, and they were trying to have a say about such fundamental issues like the management of their houses. These and similar grassroots initiatives would inevitably lead to the disintegration and reconfiguration of existing power relations. Kuroń only sees two solutions to the resulting situation: (1) the absorption of the social movements by the party; (2) a rapid transformation of the system toward democratization.<sup>787</sup> The first scenario would be highly unlikely as the self-organized character of the social movements, then a driving force of society, were both a sign and a motor of democratization. When confronted with a self-organized society,

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<sup>784</sup> Kuroń, 'Ostry zakręt,' 10.

<sup>785</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Co dalej?,' *Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR* 6, 40 (1980), 66-71.

<sup>786</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>787</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

Kuroń argues, the Party is ultimately powerless as it has lost its social basis, with the army as the only one to turn to for help. But Kuroń is also unsure about how realistic the second scenario is as he fears that the Party might engage in ‘a suicidal attempt’ to stop the movement by force.<sup>788</sup> That the state could resort to violence had always been a realistic threat in Kuroń’s eyes. The declaration of martial law on December 13, 1981 proved Kuroń right.

It is evident that for Kuroń, *Solidarność* was a social movement and, from then on, social movements would be the vehicles of social change. Therefore, his main idea was that in order to understand recent political developments one had to grasp the dynamics of social movements. In his understanding, social movements are processes in which masses of people, who have been humiliated, intimidated and denied their basic rights for decades, realize that they can gain power through collaborative self-organization. The pivotal moment is when the participants of the movement start believing that they, too, can realize their political, social and personal aspirations. Often, the starting point of a social movement that triggers people to organize themselves is a revolt. Based on his observation of the origins of *Solidarność*, Kuroń claims that for protest to be effective its initial demands have to be minimalist and realistic, as what is demanded has to be truly anchored in people’s minds and must be within reach.<sup>789</sup> Each success would push the participants of the social movement to make more demands and more radical demands – ones that are closer to their fundamental political and social aspirations.<sup>790</sup> At this point, Kuroń’s utopian vision coalesces with his pragmatism. According to Kuroń, a similar point of convergence had been reached in reality as the social movement for democratization that emerged from the strikes was about to be propelled forward by the further radicalization of protesters in response to the state’s attempts to curb people’s social rights.

Powerful as they are, however, Kuroń also acknowledged that social movements have their limits. Once a movement has started operating on a mass scale, it is necessary to set the limits of the movement by having a clearly articulated program that is publicly known. During this stage, having a clear program that can be discussed and developed further is central because it is

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<sup>788</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>789</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

a way to avoid a lack of transparency and a reliance on gossip and unofficial negotiations.<sup>791</sup> Against the backdrop of tense political discussions about the character of the newly found Union, Kuroń's statement on transparency could be read as a radical invitation to bypass Party bureaucracy and push for a radically democratic shape of Solidarność. When Kuroń wrote the article, he underwent one of the most difficult periods of his involvement in the political opposition. His claims on transparency can, thus, be read either as a direct commentary on the internal struggles within the political opposition or almost as a prediction of his political situation in September 1980: because of its long history of political opposition, some of the main figures in Solidarność, such as Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Tadeusz Kowalik, saw the milieu around Kuroń as a group of radical trouble makers that could turn out to be a burden during negotiations with Party representatives.<sup>792</sup> Perhaps Kuroń's proposal to create a widely known program with clear demands would make the movement more open to everyone and ease the pressure on members who were perceived as more radical. Political as well as personal conflicts between different actors within Solidarność could thus be seen to resonate in the article as he acknowledges initiatives that supported him in his rivalry with Mazowiecki.

In sum, for Kuroń the overarching goal of the movement was to allow democracy to blossom at a grassroots level. Kuroń declared that the milieus behind KOR, the journal *Robotnik* and Wolne Związki Zawodowe Wybrzeża (Free Trade Unions of the Coast or WZZW), among others, had already been operating according to the principle of self-organization. Ultimately, democratization was connected to, and resulted from, a large number of widespread social initiatives that involve trade unions but also free and autonomous activities in the realms of culture and education.<sup>793</sup> The sheer existence of such a movement and its informal institutions would pose a serious challenge to the Party's monopoly of power, as it meant that 'we took a path from which there is no way back. I think that for now the USSR will let the grassroots democratization process unfold so that it can avoid military intervention.'<sup>794</sup>

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<sup>791</sup> Ibid.

<sup>792</sup> On the competition between Kuroń and Mazowiecki, see Andrzej Brzeziecki, *Biografia Naszego Premiera* (Kraków: Znak Horyzont, 2015), 285-288.

<sup>793</sup> Kuroń, 'Co dalej?', 69.

<sup>794</sup> Ibid.

Kuroń's article provides an analysis of social movements embedded in the immediate aftermath of the summer strikes of 1980 which he saw as a symptom and trigger of a broader process of democratization. The social movement that he portrays revolves around a form of collective social action that is dynamic and expresses an enabling form of power because of which participants could transform themselves from weak and vulnerable individuals into a group that together could articulate and realize its socio-political needs. While it is obvious that Kuroń's analysis is based on the strikes that directly led to the creation of Solidarność, some of its core elements resonate in other historical and geopolitical contexts.

To be sure, the article also contains some contradictions and leaves some of Kuroń's ideas underdeveloped as is evident from his discussion of the threat of Soviet invasion or the violent backlash from the state. It remains unclear what the exact role and implication of the permanent threat of military intervention is in the context of his argument. Does it merely suggest that national security should not be forgotten in working out the negotiation tactics with the Party? Should national security be one of the key factors in setting the limits of the social movement and the broader process of democratization? Was he gripped by fear of an invasion or is it just a sign of Kuroń being acutely conscious of the historical and geopolitical moment? In a similar way, it remains somewhat unclear how exactly Kuroń understands the kind of democracy he views as an end result of the process of democratization. Is the ultimate aim to create a parliamentary democracy or to democratize the Party and living conditions more generally?

In any case, what is clear for Kuroń is that the process of democratization entails the right to dissent and to rebel. This implies that unwanted and disobedient citizens who are on the margins of society are those who performatively embody the fundamental principle of democracy in a pluralist spirit in the collective act of dissent. Around the same time, left-leaning Western political theorists who closely followed the developments in Poland began to emphasize that the process of democratization would come from outside official institutions, be based in grassroots activism and involve various forms of 'unruly' and 'disobedient' citizenship.<sup>795</sup> Finally, by

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<sup>795</sup> Two thinkers that come to mind here are the Canadian radical-democratic political theorist James Tully, who includes Kuroń in the acknowledgments to his edition of John Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration* (Indianapolis: Hackett 1983, p. ix) as a source of inspiration, and the French post-Marxist philosopher Etienne Balibar, whose publisher François Maspero lived in Poland for some time. Maspero included Kuroń among his friends and published some of Kuroń's writings in French translation (see the interview with Maspero on



acknowledging the radically transformative potential of collective action in political mobilization, Kuroń links different dimensions of protest – from social power and psychological dynamics to intellectual interventions. His framework thus offers a way of grasping how workers learned to make demands that just a few months prior seemed unthinkable or at least impossible to achieve, actively rejecting the intolerable elements of the existing order. Although Kuroń’s ideas are undoubtedly less theoretically articulate, they echo those of Hannah Arendt on the power that is generated out of acting together, or, as she prominently calls it, ‘acting in concert’: ‘power needs no justification, being inherent in the very existence of political communities; what it does need is legitimacy ...Power springs up whenever people get together and act in concert, but it derives its legitimacy from the initial getting together rather than from any action that then may follow.’<sup>796</sup> In a somewhat ‘un-Arendtian’ twist, however, Kuroń’s diverse experiences and commitments, which all exemplified the embeddedness of the political in the social, can also be united under a slogan articulated by David Ost: ‘the social is political!’<sup>797</sup>

### *The Cold Winter of 1981: Martial Law*

As much as the experience of Solidarność was unrivalled, the declaration of martial law could be identified as a collective and individual trauma.<sup>798</sup> The imposition of the state of exception was

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<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1937-an-interview-with-francois-maspero-a-few-misunderstandings>, last accessed January 24, 2019). Both have developed influential theories of democratization ‘from below’ (see, e.g., James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key*, Vol. 1: *Democracy and Civic Freedom* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008]; and Etienne Balibar, *Citizenship* [Cambridge: Polity, 2015]). For a general assessment of the influence of Eastern European dissidence on Western political thought in the register of civil society, see Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992).

<sup>796</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1970), 52, see also Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1958] 1998), 244-45, where she speaks of ‘the power generated when people gather together and “act in concert,” which disappears the moment they depart. The force that keeps them together, as distinguished from the space of appearances in which they gather and the power which keeps this public space in existence, is the force of mutual promise or contract.’

<sup>797</sup> David Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of the Anti-Politics* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 66. Arendt famously claimed that politics (in its strict sense) needs to be kept entirely separate from any social concern as the latter would necessarily introduce particular interests and compromise the logic of freedom; for Kuroń, political practice is unthinkable apart from its social, cultural and emotional preconditions, which necessarily introduce a moment of the particular without necessarily compromising its emancipatory potential.

<sup>798</sup> Conservative scholars see martial law as a national and cultural trauma, see Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska, ‘Trauma stanu wojennego w pamięci i tożsamości Polaków,’ in *Zbrodnie stanu wojennego – aspekty prawne*, ed.

associated with a sense of deprivation standing in stark contrast to the sense of empowerment during the period when *Solidarność* was legally active. Martial law officially began at midnight between Saturday and Sunday December 12-13, 1981 and lasted until July 22, 1983.<sup>799</sup> As the decisions and details of the preparation for martial law were top-secret military and political information, the concrete day of its implementation was chosen by the prime minister and general Wojciech Jaruzelski alone. Even most members of the Politburo did not know about the exact time of its declaration and implementation.<sup>800</sup> It was clear that the imposition of martial law was mainly aimed at *Solidarność* and other institutions and groups active in the political opposition such as the Catholic Church.<sup>801</sup> Jaruzelski's order was accompanied by the announcement of the formation of the Military Council of National Salvation (WRON or WRONa) which would be a military authority that would administer the country for the duration of the state of emergency.<sup>802</sup>

Given that the implementation of martial law was a major political challenge that involved large-scale cooperation between different state apparatuses, it was carried out relatively smoothly and systematically. The daily lives of ordinary people were affected by martial law even in the first hours of its declaration as two secret operations carried out immediately restricted the political and civil rights of citizens. The first one was known under the code name 'Jodła' and was a joint operation of the secret police and the police deployed to arrest *Solidarność* activists and other members of the opposition. Andrzej Paczkowski estimates that by 7 am on December 13, 2874 people had been arrested.<sup>803</sup> In Warsaw alone, between 303 and 425 people were incarcerated as part of 'Jodła,' and around 3000 activists were arrested in the whole of Poland.<sup>804</sup> In total, 9784<sup>805</sup> people were placed in approximately 50 internment camps that were spread all over the country. As a result of the arrests, most of the leaders and prominent activists of

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Adam Dziurok (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2017), 12; see also Barbara Fedyszak-Radziejowska, 'O przemocy, która staje się akceptowalną normą: stan wojenny, 13 grudnia 1981 roku,' *Biuletyn IPN* (2011), 3-17.

<sup>799</sup> See Jakub Karpiński, *Dziwna Wojna* (Paris: Instytut Literacki Kultura, 1990).

<sup>800</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, *Wojna polsko-jaruzelska. Stan wojenny w Polsce 13 XII 1981 - 22 VII 1983* (Warsaw: Prószyński i S-ka, 2006), 27.

<sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>802</sup> Wojciech Jaruzelski, 'Przemówienie gen. armii W. Jaruzelskiego,' *Trybuna Ludu*, 13 December 1981.

<sup>803</sup> Paczkowski, *Wojna polsko-jaruzelska*, 45.

<sup>804</sup> Grzegorz Wołk, 'Internowanie działaczy opozycji w stanie wojennym,' *Biuletyn IPN* 11-12 (2011), 80.

<sup>805</sup> AIPN Po 161/1.

Solidarność were incarcerated, including Lech Wałęsa, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Jacek Kuroń and many others. The second operation known as 'Azalia' aimed to seize and block all means of communication. For instance, phone calls were blocked and in Warsaw, buildings belonging to public radio and television were placed under strict army control.<sup>806</sup> Both operations aimed to paralyze basic Solidarność activity such as the staging of strikes. The goal of another major operation 'Klon' was to turn as many political activists as possible into covert agents who would work for the secret police. 'Klon' was mainly carried out by the security service and involved holding meetings and interrogating the internees.<sup>807</sup>

Workers responded by organizing mass strikes that occurred in various regions in Poland, all of which were crushed one by one. One of the most tragic events of martial law took place in town Katowice in Silesia on December 16 when the striking miners from the Wujek Coal Mine were shot at by ZOMO and, as a result, nine miners were killed and 47 were wounded.<sup>808</sup> The degree of violence that broke out in Silesia was higher than in the rest of the county as many other factories, such as the July Manifesto Coal Mine, were pacified by ZOMO with the use of tanks and guns.<sup>809</sup> Miners were usually assaulted by ZOMO, which was assisted by the police and security service, as they were trying to defend themselves. Many factories continued striking out of solidarity and against the state's brutality until the end of December. The events in the Wujek Coal Mine came as a shock to many and contributed to an understanding of martial law as defined by a logic of violence.<sup>810</sup>

A brief look into the ways the official state narrative regarding martial law tried to shape and generate meaning by referring to public feelings reveals that what was at stake was much more than physical order, namely winning the hearts and minds of the population. The official state discourse justified the implementation of martial law by presenting it as an objective necessity in order to preserve social order in the context of a growing conflict between the anarchist forces of Solidarność and the Party in the role of the stabilizing force. As the public

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<sup>806</sup> Tadeusz Ruzikowski, *Stan wojenny w Warszawie i województwie stołecznym 1981–1983* (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2013), 33.

<sup>807</sup> Antoni Dudek, Introduction, in *Stan Wojenny w Polsce*, ed. Antoni Dudek (Warsaw: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2003), 18; Paczkowski, *Wojna*, 86.

<sup>808</sup> Andrzej Sznajder, 'Czego nie wiemy o pacyfikacji Kopalni „Wujek”?', *Biuletyn IPN* 5, 6 (2006), 40-41.

<sup>809</sup> Paczkowski, *Wojna*, 80-82.

<sup>810</sup> Paczkowski, *Wojna*, 85.

sphere was shut down, the official party outlet *Trybuna Ludu* along with *Żołnierz Wolności* [The Soldier of Freedom]<sup>811</sup> were the only two newspapers available. The blame game that unfolded on the pages of *Trybuna Ludu* over who was truly responsible for making society go through the ordeal of martial law was based on a rekindling of old rhetoric gestures against the political opposition. Firstly, reading the Party discourse one could get the impression that *Solidarność* and the Party stood in a symmetrical power relationship, as if the two sides of the conflict were equal. Secondly, the official narrative was fixated on demonizing *Solidarność* and particular activists while lionizing the Party's efforts at rebuilding society. Thirdly, in lieu of prompting a public dialog, the Party's discourse attempted to create communal, public and ethical sentiments of attachment to the Party.

On January 2, 1982 Kuroń was attacked in one of the typically sensationalist articles in *Trybuna Ludu* as an enemy of the very values – such as dialog – that he had promoted in his writings. The main point of the article was to create a highly negative, if not mendacious, image of *Solidarność* as instrumentally using workers' rights to overthrow the Party and gain power.<sup>812</sup> Kuroń, Michnik and Modzelewski were framed as the main ideologues and driving forces behind *Solidarność* who 'unpunished, used the liberalization coming from the state for their demagogic propaganda among workers in factories, at universities and within the milieu of academics and culture.'<sup>813</sup> The article claims that the Party was too lenient in its treatment of these dissidents. While its tone was sympathetic to workers, the article presented *Solidarność* as quarrelsome, conflict-driven and destructive for society: 'a never-ending series of strikes, occupations of state buildings, blockades of almost all decisions made by the authorities, provocations of social conflicts that lead to anarchy and outlawry ... have become the daily practice of *Solidarność*.'<sup>814</sup> The author of the article ends with the dramatic claim that there could be no return to the political situation before December 13, 1981.

The media campaign of defamation against *Solidarność* consisted of various discursive strategies that also included attempts to evoke public sympathy for the Party. On January 4, an

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<sup>811</sup> *Żołnierz Wolności* had been an official outlet of the Polish People's Army. Alongside *Trybuna Ludu* it was considered the outlet closest to the Party and had a reputation of representing the hardline wing of the Party.

<sup>812</sup> 'Na zakręcie historii,' *Trybuna Ludu*, January 2, 1982.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>814</sup> *Ibid.*

article entitled 'Co Dalej?' [What next?] written by Anna Pawłowska was published in *Trybuna Ludu*. The piece reads as a self-reflective and sentiment-centered attempt to give a voice to a Party that is at the same time concerned and caring as well as strict and determined. The implementation of martial law is explained in 'a socialist-kitsch' style as 'stopping the speeding film reel of a tragic national movie' and as a search for answers that could perhaps only be given based on intuition and desire.<sup>815</sup> According to the author, despite the Party's strong and honest desire for democratization, it had to declare martial law as it came to the painful realization that the opponent's (Solidarność) real intentions were to take over power. It was a painful discovery as the Party was full of worry about repeating past mistakes. In response to her question about the next step the Party should take, the concerned author answers that the priority is to fight for unity within Party ranks. Society should know that the future of the country depends on the unity of the Party. Solidarność is presented as being intolerant and in total negation of the Party. While society was shocked when confronted with the 'true face' of Solidarność, its leaders remained in denial of the truth and unable to admit that they had engaged in 'acts of terrorist striking' and manipulating public emotions.<sup>816</sup> As she notes, the future of Solidarność depended on the workers themselves who, with the caring help of the Party, should come to understand that 'true' Solidarność should be in line with the Party. The article ends with a call to deal with the political opposition once and for all: 'the anti-socialist opposition in Poland is a fact. This opposition has to finally and, this time, for real and until the end be politically broken.'<sup>817</sup> Ultimately, Solidarność should be politically crushed and absorbed by the system.

By curtailing the public sphere and limiting it to two official outlets, the Party turned *Trybuna Ludu* into a site of confrontation and struggle over the meaning of martial law, although it was a very one-sided struggle as far as its pages were concerned. The political narrative presented by *Trybuna Ludu* was centered around a few key tropes and framed martial law as a period of normalization. The aim was to divide Solidarność by placing the whole blame on a number of trouble-makers such as Kuroń who were accused of manipulating workers into confrontation with the state. Following the logic and intention of the Party, the workers were

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<sup>815</sup> Anna Pawłowska, 'Co Dalej?,' *Trybuna Ludu*, 4 January, 1982.

<sup>816</sup> Ibid.

<sup>817</sup> Ibid.

asked to turn against people like Kuroń, Michnik and Modzelewski. A related tactic consisted in humanizing the Party and its harsh decision by adapting emotional language centered on the pain and care of the Party itself. By turning itself into an object of such emotionally charged language in the politically difficult phase of martial law, the Party, in a way, acknowledged the potency of public sentiments in the struggle for political legitimacy and the challenges it was facing. As if sensing that it had lost the war with Solidarność regarding society's need for emotional attachment, the official narrative of martial law still attempted to provide a convincing political and emotional explanation of the events. It is important to focus on the official narrative, which was filled with blame games and appealed to the need for peace, normality and stability, to understand what was framed as 'normal' and to understand what the political underground was up against. Ultimately, what constructed the established, the visible and the 'overground' sphere of politics was related, in one way or another, to what happened in the underground sphere.

Martial law was a shocking event for many activists as many did not see it coming in such a form.<sup>818</sup> On the night between December 12 and 13, the National Committee of Solidarność was having a meeting in the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk. Kuroń also participated in the meeting and was arrested in his hotel room in hotel Novotel.<sup>819</sup> Not only were almost all of those attending the meeting arrested, including Mazowiecki and Modzelewski, but almost all of the major figures of the political opposition were detained. Only few managed to escape and go underground, for instance: Zbigniew Bujak, Władysław Frasyniuk, Bogdan Lis, Joanna Szczęsna, Wiktor Kulerski, Ewa Kulik, Helena Łuczywo, Eugeniusz Szumiejko, Władysław Hardek, Bogdan Borusewicz, Aleksander Hall, Kornel Morawiecki, Władysław Hardek and Zbigniew Janas. On the night of December 12 Ewa Kulik went to the cinema with her partner Konrad Bieliński and after returning to his place in the district of Ochota to have dinner, Bieliński was arrested around midnight:

As we were eating blood sausage a friend called to say that the telex stopped working. After a while the phones also stopped working. Then we heard knocking on the door and they took Konrad, I hadn't been on the list yet for the arrest. This is how I learned about

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<sup>818</sup> For a grassroots perspective on the first days of martial law, also see Leszek Próchniak, "Precz z komunistyczną junta." Pierwsze dni stanu wojennego w Łodzi w relacjach mieszkańców,' *Biuletyn IPN* 12 (2017).

<sup>819</sup> Wojciech Polak, 'Internowania w nocy z 12 na 13 grudnia 1981,' *Biuletyn IPN* 11-12 (2011), 92.

the implementation of martial law. After they took Konrad I waited a bit and then left the house. I was driving around Warsaw to find out what was going on. Few weeks earlier in Gdańsk Jacek Kuroń had an idea of creating a national movement that would go beyond the structures of a union, something similar to a party and Konrad supported it. My first thought was that they are arresting KOR activists so I went to see Halina Mikołajska ... it turned out she was detained. Marian Brandys who went with her to the police station and returned home told me that he saw many people being arrested, even artists. This is when I have realized that it is a much larger political action that I have thought.<sup>820</sup>

From there, Kulik took a cab to the regional headquarters of Solidarność and she saw that the Mokotowska street was closed off. The presence of ZOMO and soldiers made a deep impression on her. After 2 am, Kulik went to the printing office of the newspaper *Życie Warszawy* on Marszałkowska Street to learn that there was no preparation for a strike, in fact, the printing office was empty. Kulik convinced a garbage truck driver to give her a lift to the district of Żoliborz and she paid Gaja a visit:

Gaja opened the door and she did know what was happening. When we learned that Jacek was taken in Gdańsk I saw how bad the situation was. Gaja was without energy and inactive. There was no general mobilization – there was no rushing that we must call this and that person, we must organize this and that. She acted and looked as if someone had deflated air out of her, she looked like a little cloth puppet, as if she was helpless and vulnerable. From there I went to Ewa Milewicz's apartment. Later, they took Gaja and Maciek and it was the last time I saw Gaja.<sup>821</sup>

The above quote grasps the ferment and chaos in the immediate hours after the introduction of martial law. With means of communication such as telephones being cut off, people were disoriented and often scared after seeing military tanks on the street and realizing that mass

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<sup>820</sup> Kulik, interview.

<sup>821</sup> Kulik, interview.

arrests had taken place. The only way to find information about what had happened was by visiting friends and close ones.

The spectacle and threat of large-scale state violence that unfolded on the streets was intertwined with the fear of death. The presence of the army and ZOMO on the streets seemed unreal and petrifying to most of those who were not arrested. For Kulik, the soldiers wearing helmets and holding batons, together with the military tanks looked like visitors from another world. As she puts it 'as if they were from the Middle Ages.'<sup>822</sup> When driving through the city center and to factories close to Warsaw, Milewicz was struck with how her hometown looked. To her, it felt like the city was being plundered.<sup>823</sup> Konstanty Gebert (b. 1953), a journalist and was a member of *Solidarność* and an advisor of the *Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów* (Independent Students' Union or NZS) in Warsaw, recalls that at first he thought that martial law was a military coup that ultimately could not do much to *Solidarność*, which had 10 million members.<sup>824</sup> Only when he started realizing the massive scale of the arrests, when he learned about the shootings in the Wujek Coal Mine and, in particular, when he started noticing the moving military tanks did he become gripped by fear as his first association was with the military's seizure of power in Chile in 1973. Gebert remembers that when he learned, on Monday December 14, that there was no general strike taking place, he was filled by fear as he again thought of the murders of the Chilean leftists following the Chilean coup d'état and told himself: 'now they will kill us all.'<sup>825</sup>

The aesthetic of the first days of martial law that was captured in the militarized public sphere on the streets and in the press amplified fear for those who were kept in internment camps. The internees were detained in around 52 special internment camps located in various parts of the country.<sup>826</sup> Kuroń was first incarcerated in a camp in Strzebielinek and then moved to Warsaw-Białołęka. Gaja and their son Maciek and many friends were also detained. The mass incarceration of the most well-known *Solidarność* leaders and activists was a major event and caused growing concern and at times even panic among supporters and friends of the political opposition about the fate of the internees. One way of gaining a sense of control of the situation

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<sup>822</sup> Kulik, interview.

<sup>823</sup> Milewicz, interview, August 29, 2017.

<sup>824</sup> Konstanty Gebert, interview, December 16, 2016.

<sup>825</sup> Gebert, interview, December 16, 2016.

<sup>826</sup> Wołk, 'Internowanie działaczy,' 83.



that could ease the sense of insecurity and confusion was to learn who was held where. For instance, the female writer of a memoir who lived in Warsaw and knew some members of Kuroń's milieu reflects the worry about the whereabouts of activists. For her sake, she chronicles and speculates about where Gaja and other activists were being held and with whom Gaja and others were sharing their cells.<sup>827</sup> In her memoir, another woman who helped distribute the underground press, recalls in her memoir that she was in a state of shock and disbelief days after the beginning of martial law. In particular the situation of the internees worried her a lot after learning more about them from Radio Free Europe: '[the declaration of martial law] has shaken up my life. So this is true and it doesn't seem as if it was about to change anytime soon. This is neither my hallucination nor my delusion. We are in the state of war and the chain of suffering has just started.'<sup>828</sup>

The attribution of so much significance to the fate of the internees could be viewed as an expression of collective identification with the precarious condition of political prisoners. As if in solidarity with the internees, what was at stake was the fate of the symbolic and real community of political sympathizers – as if the whole political community of dissent was symbolically put on hold just as the lives of political prisoners were under detention.

In her recollection of the spontaneous reactions of her friends and collaborators to the implementation of martial law Ewa Milewicz highlights how people felt the need to turn to the informal networks in the volatile situation:

People started to come to see one another. ... A large number of members of the political opposition were living in Żoliborz. Everybody who worked with KOR and Solidarność reached out to others with whom he or she have been working. ... There were lots of people in my apartment, constantly someone was just coming in or just leaving. It was very chaotic. Wiktor Kulerski who ended up hiding for eight years kept on coming to my place. It irritated me, I tried to push him out because it was obvious that they were after

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<sup>827</sup> AiKK 09/05.17, Pseudonym: 'Zawał,' 113-114.

<sup>828</sup> AiKK 09/10.14, Pseudonym: 'Sowa,' 7.

him and by coming to my place he has put everyone else in danger. Everybody visited everybody out of need of being together and of acting together.<sup>829</sup>

While the imposition of martial law aimed to put an end to the social movement behind *Solidarność*, often the first and immediate reaction of members of the political opposition in Warsaw was to reach out to others. To mobilize the ties of friendships was to create a safe haven as the milieu acted as a soft cushion on which those who were not incarcerated could fall while hiding from the new and intimidating political reality of martial law. For instance, during her time in hiding, Ewa Kulik would drop by Ewa Milewicz's apartment to spend time, work and to get some rest. On one such occasion and as Kulik was napping in the bedroom of Milewicz's daughter, the police came looking for those in hiding. The agents did not round up Ewa Kulik because she was curled up on a child's bed and remained unnoticed.<sup>830</sup>

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<sup>829</sup> Milewicz, interview, August 29, 2017.

<sup>830</sup> Milewicz, interview, August 29, 2017.

## Chapter 5

### A New Political Reality and Old and New Weapons

The declaration of martial law, especially the mass incarceration of political activists affiliated with *Solidarność* and the ban on political activity, had an enormous impact not only on Polish society as a whole but also on the newly formed political underground also known as *podziemie*.<sup>831</sup> Under martial law, political underground activity consisted of more than resistance as it involved a variety of forms of political practice ‘in the shadows.’ In this chapter, I will particularly focus on two of its main features and areas of activity: discussions on tactics that took place on the pages of prison letters and in the underground press, and the informal network of support for those in hiding.<sup>832</sup>

#### *Going Underground*

Out of those who managed to avoid arrest on December 13, 1981 or escaped from prison, some had been living in hiding for as long as five years. The exact number of those in hiding or active in the underground remains unknown, some historians estimate that during the first months of martial law a few hundred activists were in hiding.<sup>833</sup> While the activists had to improvise and learn how exactly to move operations underground, they quickly developed a complex system of diverse methods of hiding, printing and supporting each other. What united the system was the principle of strict secrecy and confidentiality. One of the central features behind underground oppositional activism was to provide a vast network of safe houses for hiding dissidents as well as the creation of an underground press as a platform for exchanging ideas. Understanding that trusted and loyal communities were central to the day-to-day activities of the underground

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<sup>831</sup> See Jerzy Holzer and Krzysztof Leski, *Solidarność w podziemiu* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Łódzkie, 1990).

<sup>832</sup> See also Shana Penn, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 100-241.

<sup>833</sup> Andrzej Paczkowski, *Revolution and Counterrevolution in Poland, 1980-1989: Solidarity, Martial Law, and the End of Communism in Europe* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2015), 155.

movement involved realizing that hundreds of persons, who were not per se involved in the political opposition, provided safe havens for hiding fugitives.

From January until May 1982, Ewa Milewicz had been one of the central figures finding and managing safe houses in Warsaw and its surrounding areas for her hiding friends such as Wiktor Kulerski and Zbigniew Bujak. In May 1982, Ewa Kulik took over Milewicz's part. The apartments used by the political underground were divided into four types: *mieszkaniówka* (apartments used as safe houses for hiding fugitives), *spotkaniówka* (apartments used as meeting points for discussions), *przechowalnia* (apartments used as storage space for the underground press) and secret locations for printing.<sup>834</sup> According to Milewicz, the fundamental rules were simple: the apartments that were selected could not be in the close vicinity of police stations, the hiding activists were not allowed to leave the house on their own, and they never stayed longer than a month in one apartment.<sup>835</sup> After some time had passed, the fugitives would sometimes return to apartments in which they had already stayed. Jan Lityński who had been arrested and detained in Warsaw-Białołęka since the beginning of martial law, was granted a one week leave from prison to attend his daughter's First Communion in June 1983. During his leave, he escaped police control and went into hiding until September 1986. He recalls that while the rules were strictly followed in the first year of his life underground, with time, gradually everyone became less strict about them. For instance, after approximately a year of hiding, he would feel safe enough to leave the safe house on his own to meet his friends in their apartments.<sup>836</sup>

Ewa Milewicz did not act alone in her search for families willing to provide a shelter. As many others who had the same task, Milewicz turned to her friends for help. She emphasizes that the search process had to be 'very, very discreet as we found the apartments through word of mouth asking friends of friends and acquaintances.'<sup>837</sup> The point was to avoid any direct connection between the hiding activist and the hosts that could be easily traced by the security service. The apartments were checked by Milewicz who visited the host families to meet them and make sure they were reliable. If the apartment was deemed safe, it was put on a list of

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<sup>834</sup> Milewicz, interview, August 29, 2017; Kulik, interview.

<sup>835</sup> Milewicz, interview, August 29, 2017.

<sup>836</sup> Lityński, interview, August 30, 2017.

<sup>837</sup> Ibid.

apartments and individual activists were assigned to specific apartments. According to Ewa Kulik's recollection, the underground network in Warsaw had around 300 apartments at its disposal during its existence until 1986 when the members of the Regionalna Komisja Wykonawcza NSZZ 'Solidarność' Regionu Mazowsze (Regional Executive Committee of Solidarność of the Mazovian Province or RKW Mazowsze) decided to end hiding as the state announced a political amnesty for political prisoners.

While trust was an essential dimension of a successful network, underground activists also relied on a well-calibrated sense of closeness. Milewicz emphasizes that those who had a personal contact with the fugitives should either be very trustworthy (coming from a close-knit milieu of activists) or unknown to the fugitive. In that sense, the search for apartments relied on a strategic use of closeness and social bonds making degrees of closeness intrinsically linked to safety measures. It is also worth noting that it was easier to find apartments in larger cities such as Warsaw and, as Ewa Kulik adds, it also helped when those responsible for looking for apartments were from Warsaw as they had more local networks unrelated to the political opposition. For instance, existing webs of friends from childhood years were an important resource when looking for apartments.<sup>838</sup>

Ewa Kulik, who, while hiding, was also active as a liaison between activists and apartments, draws attention to the commitment of the individuals and families who provided shelter to the activists and some important aspects of this commitment:

Indeed, here one must think of the private and the public sphere. By giving us their apartments, these people did something incredible. They let us into the most private space of their lives. Home is a place that one usually wants to protect because it is an intimate space. It is one thing if someone like Jacek Kuroń decided to sacrifice his apartment for the cause, for it to be like an office [of the political opposition] and it is another thing to have those who had been politically passive offer their apartments. In fact, out of a concern for security they should not have gotten involved. Although their task was to do nothing it was still hard for them. A stranger moves in with them and they

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<sup>838</sup> Kulik, interview.

had to find a way of explaining to their extended family and children who that person was and that no one is allowed to tell anyone about this stranger. It is important to note that the housing situation in the Polish People's Republic at the time was bad and so it is not as if giving away one room to a stranger for a month did not have any impact on the family's life. Also, all those people who gave us apartments for holding meetings. I had such a deep admiration for those who helped us. I could feel that sometimes they were very scared and then I would go to see them, to talk to them and to make sure that they were not being treated instrumentally but as subjects. I didn't want to instill fear in them but I couldn't lie to them. There was always a tension between making them aware of the risks that we all were taking and making sure that they were not paralyzed by fear.<sup>839</sup>

What emerges from this quotation is a complex picture of various forms of political involvement under martial law. The hidden dynamics behind the already clandestine political activities also involved recognizing and taking seriously into account how emotions like fear were experienced by others. Kulik tried to address the hosts' fear and sense of discomfort not only for strategic purposes but also out of a sense of care and responsibility for those who shared an apartment with her, her husband and her friends. It seems clear to Kulik that not trying to understand how those who were inexperienced in political activism feel about their immediate situation would mean disrespecting them and treating them in purely instrumental fashion. In her reference to the private and public sphere, Kulik implies a porous border between the two as an enabling condition for the clandestine political activities members of the political opposition engaged in. It is perhaps in the sphere of emotions – with the way in which they were articulated, read and to what kind of behavior they led – that everything that mattered for underground political organization came together. Under martial law, grassroots and clandestine political mobilization was also a matter of feelings and emotions as much as it was a matter of ethics and political thinking.

When asked why often seemingly 'ordinary' and apolitical people would risk their and their families' safety to help those in hiding, Jan Lityński points to an ethically driven decision that

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<sup>839</sup> Ibid.

was also inspired by the brutalizing context of martial law: ‘they helped out of ethics, out of a feeling and imperative that one has to help.’<sup>840</sup> As the search process for safe houses relied heavily on a strategic use of networks and ties of friendship, Lityński’s comment adds another aspect to the understanding of political mobilization: the decisions of seemingly apolitical agents did matter for a successful underground network to come into existence and sustain itself. It is precisely thanks to the involvement of often entire families and people who, while leading ‘a normal life overground,’ provided shelter or acted as couriers, that the secret activities could take place at all, let alone continue. In an anonymous diary written under martial law and published in the émigré journal *Aneks* in 1982, the author points to the soft radicalization of seemingly apolitical people in this context:

The first thing that one of my friends did when he came to a small meeting was to unzip his trousers. From the darkness of his pants he took out folded pieces of paper – the *bibuła*<sup>841</sup> of *Solidarność*. Information, instructions on how to act under martial law, a speech by [Czesław] Miłosz and simple directions for how to duplicate articles. More and more people get involved in political activity. Those who have been passive until now today become politically activated.<sup>842</sup>

The anecdote described in the above quotation captures one of the daily micro-forms in which political involvement under martial law was expressed. Such seemingly irrelevant and perhaps even ridiculous activities like carrying illegal press products in one’s underwear with the aim of sharing the newspapers with friends convey a change in people’s political attitude; a change that was important for the sustainability of underground political activities and for the morale of the activists.

Equally, if not more important for the formation of the political underground, was the exchange of ideas that took place on the pages of the newly founded *Tygodnik Mazowsze*; an outlet which was closely linked to the leaders of regional underground structures of *Solidarność*

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<sup>840</sup> Lityński, interview, August 30, 2017.

<sup>841</sup> *Bibuła* – a colloquial word for underground press.

<sup>842</sup> ‘Z dziennika stanu wojny,’ *Aneks* 27 (1982), 45.

such as the Tymczasowa Komisja Koordynacyjna NSZZ 'Solidarność' (Temporary Coordination Committee of Solidarność or TTK) which was founded on April 22, 1982<sup>843</sup> and the Regional Executive Committee RKW that was created later, on May 8, 1982.

*Tygodnik Mazowsze* was run by Helena Łuczywo, its editor in chief,<sup>844</sup> and was the most important unofficial outlet in the region of Mazovia. The outlet was initially prepared for its first publication in the fall of 1981, but its first editor in chief Jerzy Zieleński (1928-1981) committed suicide on December 13, 1981, the day martial law was declared, by jumping out of a hospital window.<sup>845</sup> The first issue of *Tygodnik Mazowsze* appeared in February 1982 and opened with an important interview with Wiktor Kulerski and Zbigniew Bujak who were the leaders of the underground structures in Warsaw and the province of Mazovia. In the interview, both activists laid down tactical and ethical principles of the underground political opposition that was still in its early stage. At the beginning of the interview, Kulerski stated that 'already now we have to create a second, informal and decentralized structure of Solidarność that will also be invisible and elusive.'<sup>846</sup> It was obvious for Kulerski that these principles were rooted in the specific and immediate context of martial law, as 'the [historical and political] moment we found ourselves in is demanding from us to decentralize: to find structures [of political activity] that consist of ... small groups whose members share bonds like those between neighbors, friends and colleagues.'<sup>847</sup> To ensure total secrecy, a mobilization of unofficial ties of friendships was added as the ultimate strategy for political and social survival of the structure and spirit of Solidarność under martial law. Martial law – with its curfew, heightened state control, and fear among citizens – also required a creation of a realistic horizon of what was possible in terms of political organization and social readiness for action. Zbigniew Bujak put it as follows: 'today it seems pointless to fight against the increase in food prices. Today we must, above all, fight for martial law to be lifted, for the existence of the Union [Solidarność]. We must wait for the right moment

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<sup>843</sup> Paczkowski, *Revolution*, 171.

<sup>844</sup> The collaborators of *Tygodnik Mazowsze* included Tomasz Burski, Zofia Bydlińska-Czernuszczyk, Barbara Dąbrowska, Anna Dodziuk, Wojciech Kamiński, Anna Bikont, Krzysztof Leski, Piotr Pacewicz, Joanna Szczęsna, Marta Woydt, Ludwika Wujec, Piotr Bikont, Agata Niewiarowska, Małgorzata Pawlicka, Brygida Pytkowska, Elżbieta Regulska, Gwido Zlatkes, Olga Iwaniak, and Joanna Kluzik.

<sup>845</sup> Słowo o Jerzym Zieleńskim, *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 2 (1982), 1.

<sup>846</sup> Interview with Wiktor Kulerski and Zbigniew Bujak, *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 2 (1982), 1.

<sup>847</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.



with our struggle when it will be safe to fight without the risk of blood flowing.<sup>848</sup> The struggle for Solidarność came to mean maintaining its existence by outlasting martial law. The shift in emphasis from active participation in reform making processes in the period of legality to the notion of endurance under martial law, is a sign that, despite the shock and hardship of martial law, leaders in hiding tried to adapt swiftly to the new political situation. In line with Ewa Kulik's observations on the importance of those who provided shelter to those in hiding, Kulerski expressed a deep appreciation for the underground initiatives and everyone who offered support for the underground: 'it is remarkable that so many social initiatives are being launched, that there is so much underground press, that so quickly and efficiently help has been organized for the prisoners and their families, and, of course, for us – without this help we would have never managed to survive these two months in hiding.'<sup>849</sup> Kulerski's statement is not only a recognition of all the grassroots efforts that helped underground Solidarność survive martial law but also an expression of a feeling of gratitude that acts as gesture aimed to lift the spirits of everyone involved in the emerging political underground. Therefore, in pushing for the total secrecy of political actions, Kulerski and Bujak emphasized consolation and mutual help. In that sense, the *modus operandi* of underground political actions had to deviate from the strategies and ethics – indeed the orthodoxies – of the carnival of Solidarność, which were centered around political representation,<sup>850</sup> while maintaining some of the old tactics of the political opposition such as the reliance on personal bonds.

There were controversies regarding the relevance and applicability of the principles formulated by Kulerski and Bujak. While incarcerated in the Warsaw-Białołęka prison, Kuroń wrote a short article entitled 'Tezy o wyjściu z sytuacji bez wyjścia' (Theses on the Way Out of a Situation from which there is No Way Out)<sup>851</sup> that was published in *Tygodnik Mazowsze* on March 21.<sup>852</sup> Set in a somewhat alarmist tone, the article contains strong claims as Kuroń forcefully challenged the principles articulated by his colleagues and friends. Kuroń began by stating that

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<sup>848</sup> Ibid.

<sup>849</sup> Ibid.

<sup>850</sup> By political representation I mean both the representation of the opinions, interests and discourse of workers involved in Solidarność as well as the political consequences of their political participation on the formal political stage in late socialist Poland which was a political setting that tried to quash any grassroots participation.

<sup>851</sup> The article had also been reprinted in the émigré journal *Aneks* in 1982.

<sup>852</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Tezy o wyjściu z sytuacji bez wyjścia,' *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 8 (1982).

Polish society was, in fact, in a state of war and that the declaration of martial law was directed against society as a whole. The main goal of martial law was to strip society of its collective means of self-defense in a particularly brutal way. As he put it, 'violence, threats and desperate calls for order are the only language that the state uses to communicate with society. What does it want to and, in fact, what does it manage to achieve? Fear and obedience in some, determination and will to fight back in others, despair and hatred in everyone.'<sup>853</sup> Kuroń pointed to an important mechanism of the political culture promoted by the party during martial law: it was not only direct military control but also the intensified and brutalizing language of the state that contributed to a political culture that imposed normative meanings and judgments of *Solidarność*. Aware of how *Trybuna Ludu* one-sidedly chronicled the perspective of the state, Kuroń's remarks on the consequences of such antagonizing discourse indirectly document a political culture that was distinctive during the period of martial law. Defined by mutual distrust, this political culture lionized differences and stirred prejudices while claiming to return Poland to supposed normalcy. In this development, Kuroń saw one particularly extreme danger: terror. While warning that terror can lead to terror, he underlined that:

No calls for peace can stop the young and the committed ones from joining the struggle. On the contrary, these calls can push them into the dead end of terrorism. ... no calls for restraint can weaken despair and hatred. It is an explosive mix that only needs a spark to trigger an explosion. A healthy society reacts with violence to violence, especially against a power that imposed itself by resorting to violence.<sup>854</sup>

By focusing on violence and terror, Kuroń's dramatic and mobilizing account of the political situation provided a somewhat one-dimensional diagnosis of the current crisis. His reading of the political and social conditions under martial law had consequences for how the political underground thought about the tactics of. Kuroń viewed a well-organized resistance movement as the only way to put an end to the state-sanctioned 'wave of terrorism.'<sup>855</sup> Although

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<sup>853</sup> Ibid.

<sup>854</sup> Ibid.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid.

acknowledging the important role played by the underground press, informal channels for the independent flow of information, street demonstrations, the articulation of political slogans in the public sphere, and strikes, Kuroń did not seem to exclude the need and possibility of resorting to violence in resisting the state and pushing it towards making a compromise. Kuroń claimed that non-violent political activities, including the general strike that was *Solidarność* ultimate weapon, would indeed be effective in lifting the spirit of society and exerting pressure on the state. He stresses that they might, however, not have been effective any longer in confronting the frustration and desire of some parts of society given that the underground had not manage to come to a compromise with the Party.

It is unclear exactly who exactly Kuroń had in mind as he wrote down this passage. He seemed to take violence into consideration out of a deep concern for an uncontrolled eruption of violence that could lead to military intervention by the Soviet Union. Here, the invocation of violence therefore has a strategic and self-limiting function as he proposed that in embracing violence as a tool in a confrontation with the state, the leaders of the underground movement would be able to control what he sees as an otherwise uncontrollable social reservoir of, or readiness to employ, violence. He thought the leaders of the underground movement should therefore be ready to do everything, give up almost everything, to reach the needed compromise with the state. Although he officially endorsed the instrumental use of violence to make a compromise with the state in order to end martial law, which seems to be the highest priority in Kuroń's thinking about political activism at that time, the structure of his argument inevitably conjures an autotelic logic and ultimately an uncontrollable character of violence. These immanent tensions in the text gave rise to a set of possible readings and misreadings of Kuroń's his arguments. To talk about violence as he did during a turbulent period was an invitation to think about the meaning and form of political action, albeit in a more forceful way than Kulerski and Bujak did.

Violence had never occupied a central stage in Kuroń's writings and reflections on the political opposition. He had always focused on more expansive and inclusive forms of political activism, so it is somewhat surprising that this text reductively engages with physical violence. Perhaps this shift came from the frustration of imprisonment under harsh conditions (see the

following sections of this chapter) and a feeling of not being able to live up to the demanding ideals he and the rest of the opposition had embraced. In this respect, the article could be seen as being as much about violence as about uncertainties and as an attempt to articulate deep moral needs and frustrations in relationship to the precarious life under martial law.

Kuroń's views on violence touched a nerve and became a matter of heated debate because, ultimately, a call for violence would not only have an effect on tactics but also the nature of the movement and its core values. Especially Wiktor Kulerski and Zbigniew Bujak in particular were not in agreement with Kuroń regarding the use of physical violence. They responded to him right away by defending their position. Bujak<sup>856</sup> rejected Kuroń's idea that coordinated violence would be the best response to martial law as he believed that physical confrontation with the state would involve putting society at risk. Moreover, he believed that violence is simply ineffective as a way of resolving the conflict with the state, given the obvious power advantage the state had under martial law with its militarized apparatus and political culture. The best weapon against the uncontrolled eruption of violence, according to Bujak, would be a well-organized, disciplined and conscious society. Unlike Kuroń, Bujak was in favor of a de-centralized, and medusa-like, underground organization that would be harder to trace by the security service and that would, as a result, be more resilient.<sup>857</sup> In addition, a centralized underground *Solidarność* would be perceived as a greater threat by the state, which could react with military might in order to neutralize and pacify the underground structures. Bujak proposes a long-term strategy – a 'long march' – that would focus on small and systematic steps that would involve all spheres of life and avoid head-on confrontations with the state. Emphasizing the need to secure the structures of independent social life, Bujak understood resistance as aimed to ensure the survival and protection of certain forms of social life. For instance, he claimed that with the help of the charity initiatives from the Church, the underground could create autonomous economic networks.<sup>858</sup>

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<sup>856</sup> Zbigniew Bujak, 'Walka pozycyjna,' *Kultura* 5, 416 (1982), 27-32.

<sup>857</sup> *Ibid.*, 33-34.

<sup>858</sup> *Ibid.*, 34-35.

Kulerski's views are largely in line with those of Bujak, in particular his central idea of creating 'an underground society'<sup>859</sup> with a de-centralized structure and multiple smaller centers of command. This underground social structure, he believed, should be based on informal networks and bonds, and involve loosely connected committees, centers and groups. The larger the participation of ordinary people in the networks of the underground society, the stronger it would be. The basic goal of such an underground social structure would be for people to control fundamental decisions about their lives such as access to independent education. In time, all social power would shift from the public, official and 'overground' sphere controlled by the state to the underground one. Seemingly defining and identifying underground social life with freedom, Kulerski was convinced that a large underground society would gradually lead to a weakened state, which, when left with no social credibility and only the army to rely on, would have to relax the regime of total control and end martial law.<sup>860</sup> This vision of the political opposition is very much in line with Kuroń's writings from before martial law: an alternative social life that would be made up of loose bonds and networks and that would function as an enabling condition and launching pad for political activity in the strict sense. As both Bujak and Kulerski were friends with Kuroń for years, it is interesting to note how in this exchange and disagreement they internalize and mobilize the ideas, values and discourses Kuroń had been developing since the late 1950s and turned those ideas against him. In this somewhat twisted way, the debate could be seen as evidence for how Kuroń's ideas functioned as dynamic tools adaptable to different contexts and how the invocation of political arguments in the Polish opposition was always, some way or another, entangled with friendships and personal relations.

Kuroń responded to his two critics in *Tygodnik Mazowsze* on May 12, 1982, under the title 'Macie teraz złoty róg: list otwarty do Zbigniewa Bujaka, Wiktora Kulerskiego i innych działaczy ruchu oporu' (Now You Have the Golden Horn: An Open Letter to Zbigniew Bujak, Wiktor Kulerski and Other Activists of the Resistance Movement).<sup>861</sup> In his response, he did not abandon his ideas

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<sup>859</sup> Wiktor Kulerski, 'Trzecia możliwość,' *Kultura* 5, 416 (1982), 35.

<sup>860</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>861</sup> The golden horn in the title of Kuroń's article refers to a famous line in Stanisław Wyspiański's play *Wesele* (The Wedding) that was first staged in 1901. The play is about the missed opportunity for national independence during two unsuccessful uprisings. The golden horn stands for the national mission of political mobilization for the self-determination of Poland under the partitions. The metaphor of the golden horn is also used in everyday language.

on violence,<sup>862</sup> but he acknowledged his own role in the late 1970s and during *Solidarność* in articulating the importance of a broad social movement that would be centered around various activities of self-defense. Stressing that new political times like the martial law called for a rethinking of tactics, he emphasized the distinctive political character of martial law, which is in line with his previous article:

Today the generals and the secretaries decided to rule not only without the permission granted by society but against it. Their rule stems from their ability to disperse mass demonstrations, to crush strikes, to arrest, to place in internment camps, to beat with batons, and to shoot. As long as the generals and the secretaries hold such power they will not concede even a millimeter under the pressure of the society.<sup>863</sup>

The strong emphasis that Kuroń placed on the repressive and violent character of power under martial law leaves little room for political maneuvering. According to him, the effects of such harsh political conditions translated into worsening living conditions in general and, most importantly, had devastating effects on the general psyche of Polish society. Kuroń asked: 'on what evidence do you base your conviction that the Poles will keep on enduring this catastrophe with patience, especially since the powerful party-state continues to provoke them with arrogance and terror?'<sup>864</sup> The answer to the question is immediately provided by his claim that feelings of despair, rage and anger are a dimension of life under martial law and a social force that cannot be ignored even if Polish society's '[political] maturity'<sup>865</sup> expresses itself in its belief in *Solidarność* and the underground resistance. These feelings are a result of inflicted physical and symbolic violence. It is precisely because of the abnormal situation of intensified state violence, and deep feelings on the part of the society that is subjected to state harassment, that Kuroń fears for the destruction of society. This leads him to claim that violence can only be stopped by violence. Other forms of resistance such as lighting a candle every evening on the windowsill to

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<sup>862</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Macie teraz złoty róg: list otwarty do Zbigniewa Bujaka, Wiktora Kulerskiego i innych działaczy ruchu oporu,' *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 13 (1982), 3.

<sup>863</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>864</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>865</sup> *Ibid.*

show solidarity with those in internment camps, collective hunger striking, and short strikes, are primarily important to the extent that they show that people and the movement are ready to mobilize politically. Kuroń ends his article urging the leaders in hiding to take into account the use of violence if necessary in order to avert a major catastrophe from occurring.

The architecture of political choice under martial law and the political setting Kuroń sketches merit attention in their own right. What was shocking for his contemporaries was his view that violence might need to be used in a collective effort to achieve political goals. Since violence was usually seen as a domain of the state and given the entrenched principles and ethics of *Solidarność*, Kuroń's views seemed to clash with the fundamental logic of political contestation. Yet, his argument could also be viewed as an attempt to experiment and broaden the repertoire of action in a changing political environment. Perhaps his views on violence need to be anchored in the wider context of social action that he considered at the time he wrote the article. Ultimately, his understanding of collective action under martial law can be reconciled with his earlier line of thinking on social movements in which the state is a powerful actor controlling and abusing the instruments of power and the subjugated society as well as the dynamic and organized underground resistance movement must act as a mediating force by responding to new political situations. In the end, for Kuroń, the overcoming of an illegitimate political and social order called for a daring political imagination and an open discussion – even under the shadow of imprisonment and a life in hiding – on fundamental tactics and values along the lines of violence vs. non-violence, confrontation as resistance vs. survival as resistance, and centralization vs. decentralization.

*'I can't breathe'<sup>866</sup> – Prison Life*

'I'm feeling very low. The prison seems like a rock that is placed on my chest. Not even for a moment can I forget about it.'<sup>867</sup> These are the words with which Waldemar Kuczyński characterized his incarceration in an internment camp during martial law. Another prisoner,

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<sup>866</sup> AiKK 09/09.34, Pseudonym 'Banita,' 50. This file contains a memoir by a dissident arrested in Szczecin on 13 December 1981, and interned at Wierzychowo Pomorskie.

<sup>867</sup> Waldemar Kuczyński, *OBÓZ* (London: Aneks, 1983), 76.

Halina Mikołajska, recalls the seemingly trivial activity of making cards to play traditional card games: ‘with great patience I painted with colorful felt-tip pens on small cardboard cards made of various packaging ... I worked with great ambition for hours, at times until late at night, throwing away the bad ones while stretching my sore neck.’<sup>868</sup> While expressing significantly different experiences, both quotes encapsulate the everyday life of incarcerated activists that oscillated between gloomy thoughts and mundane activities such as crafting.

During the turbulent period of martial law, many Solidarność activists were detained, went through political incarceration as internees,<sup>869</sup> and were at times treated as political prisoners,<sup>870</sup> framed and treated by the state’s official discourse as disobedient subjects. What daily practices allowed these supposedly intractable subjects to cope with, survive and organize themselves under the precarious conditions of internment camps? What was the role of prison communities and social bonds in internment camps for political prisoners who tried to live their lives despite the extraordinary situation they found themselves in? What can their prison experience tell us about the nature of power in post-Solidarność socialist Poland? In this chapter I will reconstruct life in four different internment camps – Strzebielinek, Warsaw-Białołęka, Gołdap and Darłówko, the camps in which Jacek Kuroń and Gaja were held – to answer these questions.

### *Strzebielinek*

After his arrest, together with many other well-known political activists, Jacek Kuroń was first placed in an internment camp in Strzebielinek,<sup>871</sup> north-west of Gdańsk, and then, from the

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<sup>868</sup> Halina Mikołajska, ‘Z notatnika i listów,’ *Kultura niezależna*, 62 (1990), 74.

<sup>869</sup> On internment camps in southeastern Poland, see Grzegorz Wołk, *Ośrodki odosobnienia w Polsce południowo-wschodniej 1981–1982* (Rzeszów: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2009); see also Marek Żukowski, *Ośrodki odosobnienia w Polsce w latach 1981-1982* (Warsaw: Trio, 2013).

<sup>870</sup> For the purpose of this dissertation, the terms ‘political prisoners,’ ‘detainees’ and ‘internees’ will be used interchangeably and in the widest sense to refer to all persons deprived of their freedom by the declaration of martial law on December 13, 1981; on the history of prison see Padraic Kenney, *Dance in Chains: Political Imprisonment in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Anna Müller, *If the Walls Could Speak: Inside a Women’s Prison in Communist Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).

<sup>871</sup> For an overview of harsh living conditions in internment camps, see ‘Internowanie,’ *Tygodnik Mazowsze* 3:17 (1982).



beginning of 1982, in a prison in Białołęka, now a northern district of Warsaw. In Strzebielinek, Kuroń was held in cell number 10, which he shared with fifteen activists, including Henryk Wujec, Jan Rulewski and Janusz Onyszkiewicz.<sup>872</sup> Tadeusz Mazowiecki and Waldemar Kuczyński<sup>873</sup> were held in the same camps as Kuroń, albeit not during the same periods, and each of them published an account of their internment. Focusing on their recollections as well as archival material provides an insight into the prison conditions under which Kuroń and other internees were kept. Prompted by deep concerns about the situation of the detainees, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) managed to secure access to many of the internment camps. In providing a relatively detailed and synthesizing description of the material living conditions, the reports of the visits are an invaluable source of information on an otherwise relatively opaque site of political life. Since the reports from Strzebielinek do not cover the short period in which Kuroń was housed in this camp, they will be omitted and I will draw on ego-documents to reconstruct the everyday life under confinement in Strzebielinek.

Mazowiecki was in Strzebielinek until December 22, 1981 and the first days of his stay were marked by disorientation and uncertainty.<sup>874</sup> From day one, the detained activists were forced to listen to recordings of military parades, official songs and Jaruzelski's speeches through the loudspeakers, which were installed in all of the cells. In a context marked by fear and fragmented channels of communication, prisoners tried to find out as much as they could about the new reality of martial law. Gradually, as they learned more about the curtailed public sphere and the suspension of rights, Mazowiecki notes, prisoners wondered what their own status was:

Among the new terms of martial law there was one that was supposed to define us: *internowani* [the internees]. But what does it mean within the context of a domestic war? Who are we? Prisoners of war? Political prisoners? Or someone else? What do they take us to be and what does it mean? What rights do we have?<sup>875</sup>

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<sup>872</sup> AO IV/56.4.7

<sup>873</sup> See also Andrzej Szczypiorski, *Z notatnika stanu wojennego* (Poznań: Kantor Wydawniczy SAWW, 1989).

<sup>874</sup> Tadeusz Mazowiecki, *Internowanie* (Londyn: Aneks, 1982), 13.

<sup>875</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

Despite not being able to immediately establish their legal and political status, many detained activists saw themselves as political prisoners and, in fact, acted – through protests, for instance – as political prisoners. The community of prisoners in Strzebielinek tried to have an immediate impact on the new reality of martial law as it was mediated through prison by adapting strategies known to them from when *Solidarność* was legal. As they formulated demands and used noise protests to express their disagreement, the most powerful weapon at their disposal was the community that they formed.<sup>876</sup> In the early days of internment, prisoners had not yet come to see themselves as different: ‘we were the same. Only the world around us wanted to negate everything that we lived for.’<sup>877</sup>

Underlining the gradual process of adaptation, Mazowiecki emphasizes the important role played by cell windows through which prisoners could gaze out, observe what was happening and communicate with those in other cells. In that sense, cell windows were literally and metaphorically windows to the world outside of the cell as they allowed for the circulation of information and enabled a sense of being part of a larger community. Mazowiecki writes: ‘windows were not just for observation and communication. They also helped us rebuild our “solidarity identity” (*solidarnościowa tożsamość*), manifesting that although we are divided into cells – we are still in unity.’<sup>878</sup> Singing was a practice that allowed internees to perform and express their belonging to a community of political prisoners. It also took on a more directly political meaning as prisoners sang patriotic and political songs that were carriers of specific political values and meanings that they viewed as opposing the Party’s official line. Prisoners usually sang songs three times a day, a practice that also gave a structure to their days. As Mazowiecki recalls: ‘singing was our only defense. Our only way to protest and to make ourselves stronger. Internal freedom – is what a human being is left with. But a group persecuted for being a group and for being part of a broader collective must have its ways of preserving its own identity.’<sup>879</sup>

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<sup>876</sup> *Ibid.*, 22, 26.

<sup>877</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>878</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>879</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

While being part of a community and participating in coordinated protests made a major difference in how prisoners felt about themselves and their confinement, everyday life in Strzebielinek was full of repetitive ordinary activities. Prisoners were served simple food consisting of bread, margarine, at times butter, very rarely marmalade, onions, soup and a second course. The daily routine oscillated between smoking cigarettes and leftovers of old cigarettes, cleaning up their cells, reading, playing bridge, chatting, walking back and forth in their cells and turning the volume of the loudspeakers down or up. For Mazowiecki, political conversations were of particular importance,<sup>880</sup> as they signaled the failure of the state to break its disobedient subjects, reshape their identity, and neutralize their potential to resist as a collective. In the self-understanding of the internees, heroic tales of prison resistance that position resistance in contrast to everyday life played no role. Rather, in their life in prison resistance and the everyday were impossible to separate. Under the conditions of political imprisonment, the defense and enactment of one's capacity to live an everyday life by necessity involved an engagement in forms of resistance, some of which were more recognizable as forms of resistance like hunger strikes (more below) and some less so, like communal singing (as discussed above).<sup>881</sup>

### *Warsaw-Białołęka*

The delegates of the ICRC visited Warsaw-Białołęka many times and their visits in January (twice), April, June and September overlapped with Kuroń's stay (he arrived in Warsaw-Białołęka in early 1982). When the delegates visited the prison for the first time on January 24,<sup>882</sup> 244 men were held there. Built in the 1950s, its facilities consisted of four prison blocks and several additional buildings. Two of those prison blocks housed 48 cells in total and were occupied by the internees. The facilities were surrounded by a high wall, barbed wire and prison towers.

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<sup>880</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-27.

<sup>881</sup> Although most of the internment camps shared the same power structure, the differences in living conditions were at times profound. For instance, the internees in the camp in Wierzchowo Pomorskie were exposed to violent treatments from the prison guards, see AiKK 09/09.35, pseudonym 'Banita.'

<sup>882</sup> AIPN BU 529/4, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Warsaw-Białołęka Prison, January 24, 1982; The delegation consisted of Frank Schmidt and Michèle Mercier (ICRC delegates). They were accompanied by representatives of the Polish Red Cross (J. Krol and A. Kusmierczyk) and a liaison officer from the Ministry of the Interior (W. Romanowski).

Since the internees housed in Warsaw-Białołęka were living in an actual prison that was still operating as such, their living conditions differed from those of internees at other camps, which had been solely set up for the purpose of internment. The prisoners complained about the poor hygiene, ubiquitous dirt, lack of cleaning detergents, outdated equipment and the presence of rats and mice in the cells. In an unusual acknowledgment, the prison warden, Colonel Kazimierz Parciak, admitted that at times rats and mice entered the cells. Taking all the evidence into consideration, the delegates noted that the buildings and cells were outdated and in bad shape. As in many other camps or prisons, the quality of everyday life under conditions of detention was dependent on direct support from the ICRC and the charity organizations linked to the Catholic Church. The detainees relied heavily on the material aid and support from these organizations for essentials such as food, soap and sometimes medical care and the repair of dysfunctional equipment.

One of the most serious challenges was the welfare of prisoners as some of them suffered from chronic depression, epilepsy, and claustrophobia, and needed special medical treatment. It was, thus, obvious that the physical and psychological integrity of the prisoners was affected by living in confinement. The delegates also noted that prisoners were often served cold food that was poor in nutrients due to inadequate transportation and storage. After trying the prison coffee, the delegates even noted that instead of real coffee it resembled a tasteless dark liquid. As in many other camps, prisoners complained about too little contact with their families, asking for two visits a month. Maintaining contact with relatives and the outside world was of key importance for prisoners' welfare as it partially alleviated the stress and anxiety they endured. Internees from Warsaw-Białołęka were also subjected to a more rigid daily schedule in comparison to internees at other camps. For instance, they had to get up at 6.30 am instead of 7 am as it was the case in most of the camps.<sup>883</sup>

A particularly striking detail concerns the way in which cell searches took place. Prisoners drew the delegates' attention to the humiliating treatment they were subjected to during personal searches: the cell doors were opened and the prisoners were searched by a large number of policemen and guards wearing shields and helmets and wielding batons. This imposed

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<sup>883</sup> Ibid., 1-6

lack of privacy felt humiliating and aimed to demonstrate the asymmetry of power. Another form of ill-treatment prisoners endured involved malicious deception: prisoners were called for an unexpected visit by their families but were in fact brought to a private meeting with the security service of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (SB, commonly known as Esbecja). During the meetings, pressure was put on them to sign a declaration of loyalty to the communist system and a commitment to suspend any political activity. Prisoners were told that if they refused to sign the declaration, their families would be put under investigation, their relatives would be fired from any jobs they might occupy, and the prisoner's stay in prison would be extended.<sup>884</sup>

At the final meeting with the prison warden and the liaison from the ministry, the delegates made a series of recommendations to Colonel Parciak based on the information obtained during interviews with the internees. The advice they gave, which aimed to safeguard prisoners' rights to judicial and legal protection and to guarantee a more human treatment during personal searches and by the SB, seems to have played a major role in improving the welfare of prisoners.<sup>885</sup> The denial of access to official administrative and legal proceedings stripped prisoners of their rights to legal protection against arbitrary internment. Many internees complained that they had never received an official warrant for their internment, let alone court orders. The lack of transparent information about their legal status during detainment led to an increased sense of anxiety and insecurity among prisoners and their families. Similarly, humiliating personal searches contributed to the frustration and a sense of living a life devoid of dignity that negatively affected prisoners' welfare. Again, somewhat unusually, Colonel Parciak conceded that some of the behavior of the guards and policemen towards prisoners during the searches was inappropriate. In trying to meet some of the demands of the prisoners, Colonel Parciak said he would recommend a more humane treatment of prisoners. It is also worth noting that both representatives of the prison and of the ministry acknowledged the ill-treatment of prisoners during searches by the security service.

During their first visit in the prison on January 24, the delegates were not granted access to block IV where some of the internees – including Kuroń – were held during ongoing

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<sup>884</sup> Ibid 6-7.

<sup>885</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

renovations. The ICRC delegation therefore returned to Warsaw-Białołęka on January 27<sup>886</sup> and while the delegates were allowed to have a conversation with prisoners from block IV, their access to the building itself was again denied. As a result, the delegates based their description of the block solely on interviews with the prisoners. Although not based on the delegates' first-hand experience, the report of this visit still reveals striking dissimilarities between this block and the rest of the prison. The internees from block IV expressed grievances about cells that were small (around 10 square meters according to their estimate), dark (permanently blinded windows), overcrowded (four inmates per cell) and cold (10°C). The heating system and the radiators broke down and were never fixed which caused a serious health risk during cold winter weather. Poor hygiene standards also significantly contributed to the bad living conditions in block IV: prisoners had no running water and were given buckets of water to clean the lavatories and the cells were infested with insects and bugs.<sup>887</sup> As block IV had its own kitchen and infirmary and prisoners were only allowed 30 minutes in a small exercise yard once a day, they never left the block itself. Most importantly, some of the prisoners detained in block IV had not been in touch with their family members since their incarceration. Being locked in overcrowded and cold cells for over 23 hours a day exacerbated their frustration and grievances. Given their poor living conditions and the lack of contact to the outside world, it is perhaps no surprise that the prisoners turned to one of their last and most radical options and organized a series of hunger strikes, demanding the same treatment as other internees.

In their final meeting with the prison warden, the ICRC's delegates raised all the problems that the prisoners in block IV were facing. The delegates advised that the heating be fixed, that health care be provided more systematically and that the attitude and behavior of the security service towards the prisoners change.<sup>888</sup> Aware of the distinctly different living conditions of the other inmates in the same prison and of their friends in other prisons, on January 27, 1982, almost all prisoners participated in a one-day hunger strike to protest the much worse living conditions

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<sup>886</sup> AIPN BU 529/4, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Warsaw-Białołęka Prison, January 27, 1982. The delegation included: Frank Schmidt and Georges Muheim (the ICRC doctor). They were accompanied by representatives of the Polish Red Cross (W. Sztomberek and A. Kusmierczyk) and a liaison officer from the Ministry of Interior (W. Romanowski).

<sup>887</sup> *Ibid.*, 2-3.

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid.*, 5-7.

in the cells on the fourth floor of block IV, where, among others, Jacek Kuroń, Karol Modzelewski, Bronisław Geremek, Janusz Onyszkiewicz, Anatol Lawina<sup>889</sup> and Henryk Wujec were interned.<sup>890</sup> Block IV was isolated from other parts of the facility by a wall and reserved for key activists, such as members of the National Committee of Solidarność.<sup>891</sup> As already briefly indicated above, prisoners living in this part of the prison had no access to daylight as the windows were permanently blinded and the cells were dimly lit, making it hard for prisoners to read or even keep track of what time of the day it was. The internees also suffered from having to use one single bucket of water a day for both drinking and cleaning.<sup>892</sup> On February 3, 1982, prisoners from cell number 21 tried to address the water situation and the poor hygiene in the cells by writing a letter to three members of parliament, Romuald Bukowski, Karol Małcużyński and Ryszard Reiff.<sup>893</sup> In the letter, the authors complained about their fellow prisoners having to wash themselves with cold water in badly heated cells and the fact that prisoners were only allowed to see visitors once a month for less than an hour.<sup>894</sup>

Critical of the miserable living standards, prisoners informed the outside world, for instance via the Kościelne Komitety Pomocy Więzionym, Internowanym, Represjonowanym i ich Rodzinom [Church's Help Committees for Prisoners, Internees, Repressed Ones and Their Families] about their situation in letters that were smuggled out of the prison. As these letters detail, prison cells were usually 18 square meters large, except for those in block IV which were assessed to be around 14 square meters, and held between 12 and 6 prisoners.<sup>895</sup> The equipment of the cells was basic as it consisted of bunk beds, a metal table and around 8-10 stools. The cells were often chronically overcrowding and cramped. All windows were barred but the windows in block IV were smaller and were triple barred. Some cells were thickly covered by dirt and infested with rats, mice and cockroaches. Most importantly, the cells were always closed. Prisoners also voiced complaints about the poor quality of the food that mainly consisted of cold meals high in

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<sup>889</sup> Anatol Lewina (1940-2006) was a member of Walterowcy, supplier of the NOWa publishing house and collaborator of KOR.

<sup>890</sup> AOIV/56.23.6.

<sup>891</sup> AOIV/56.23.4.

<sup>892</sup> AOIV/56.23.6; AOIV/56.23.9.

<sup>893</sup> AOIV/56.23.3

<sup>894</sup> Ibid.

<sup>895</sup> AOIV/56.23.4.

fat and low in protein and vitamins, leading to fears of malnutrition. Thanks to the ICRC's visits and the prisoners' protest, over time the living conditions of the prisoners minimally improved as some prisoners received new bedding<sup>896</sup> and some cells were repainted.<sup>897</sup>

When the larger delegation of the ICRC visited the prison between June 22 and 25, it had access to almost all prison buildings with a few exceptions such as the prison's pharmacy, which was closed as the pharmacist was away.<sup>898</sup> The living conditions the delegation encountered were not as harsh as they had been a few months prior and the medical care had visibly improved. For instance, on Wednesdays a psychiatrist, a dermatologist and a laryngologist came to the prison to see the prisoners.<sup>899</sup> Yet, the health care was still deficient as the doctor-patient relationships were irregular due to a lack of continuous medical care and long waiting times for specialized treatment. Importantly, as in previous visits, medical examinations by the ICRC's medical delegates were part of the visit. According to the diagnosis based on the physical examination of 58 out of 249 prisoners,<sup>900</sup> the prisoners suffered from dental problems and psychosomatic illnesses such as duodenal ulcers, asthmatic bronchitis, nervous disorders and depression. The medical delegates saw the causes of the psychosomatic disorder in the fact that prisoners were locked in their cells for 23 out of 24 hours and had too little exercise time, which, in combination with the sense of insecurity and stress, had a negative impact on the prisoners' health. In addition, three prisoners were suspected of having tuberculosis and were still waiting for their release.

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<sup>896</sup> AIPN BU 529/4, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Warsaw-Białołęka Prison, April 14-16, 1982, 3. The delegation included: Peter Küng, Peter Lütlof, Bernard Grünefelder (delegates), Bruno Zimmerman (interpreter), Marco Brandner (medical delegate). They were accompanied by the representatives of the Polish Red Cross (W. Sztomberek and I. Michalska), a liaison officer of the Ministry of Interior (W. Romanowski) and a liaison officer and representative of the Ministry of Justice (colonel Pawlaczyk).

<sup>897</sup> AIPN BU 529/4, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Warsaw-Białołęka Prison, June 22-25, 1982, 3.

<sup>898</sup> The delegation included: Claude-Alain Zappella, Peter Lütlof, (delegates), Heinz Schlaepfer, Hans Jann (medical delegate). They were accompanied by the representatives of the Polish Red Cross (Alina, Zoledowska, Leon Stelmachow), a liaison officer of the Ministry of Interior (W. Romanowski) and a liaison officer and representative of the Ministry of Justice (colonel Pawlaczyk). At a later point during the visit, the delegation was joined by Bernard Grünefelder, Alexandre Hay (the president of the ICRC), Frank Schmidt, Peter Küng, Jean-David Chappuis, Janina Krol and Alina Kusmierczyk.

<sup>899</sup> AIPN BU 529/4, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Warsaw-Białołęka Prison, June 22-25, 1982, 6.

<sup>900</sup> Out of the 249 prisoners two were released during the visit, six were sent to hospital and 15 were on temporary leave, AIPN BU 529/4, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Warsaw-Białołęka Prison, June 22-25, 1982, 2.



Kuroń was listed among the prisoners in need of medications and further examinations due to a cardiovascular disease and a polyneuropathy that he was suffering from.<sup>901</sup> Despite the ICRC's attempt to advocate for better access to medical treatment, on July 21, Kuroń was still waiting for a medical examination for his heart disease and his fellow inmates were still waiting for their respective medical examinations. In the meantime, he had been taking medication.<sup>902</sup> The delegates also tried to assess the medical condition of a prisoner who had been on hunger strike since May 10. They learned that the striking inmate 'had been subjected to forced feeding with a feeding tube, which introduced one liter of a nutritive liquid made up of milk, beaten egg and semolina. He was also given coffee.'<sup>903</sup> Another factor impacting the health of the prisoners was poor hygiene. The delegates strongly recommended that the showers be disinfected on a regular basis to prevent the spread of foot mycosis that had become endemic among prisoners.

Because the ICRC's delegation was accompanied by Alexandre Hay, the president of the ICRC, the delegates were granted access to block IV. While the inmates of blocks I and II could play volleyball and table tennis in the exercise yard, after being granted a special permission to do so, prisoners from block IV were not granted that privilege. They were allowed one hour of exercise a day in an exercise yard that was approximately 100 square meters large and surrounded by a four-meter-high wall topped with barbed wire. Prisoners were only allowed to exercise with the inmates from their cells. According to the report, the presence of Alexandre Hay played a significant role in convincing the prison warden to relax the rules and allow prisoners from block IV to be able to exercise for a two-hour period and to be able to interact with inmates from other cells during that time. Prisoners from block IV also complained about the smaller collection in their library (1000 books) in comparison to the larger library other blocks had access to, which contained 22000 books. Prisoners also asked for permission to study in groups and for access to academic books in various languages that were necessary for their education and work.<sup>904</sup> What also made life in block IV harsher in comparison to the rest of the prison was the

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<sup>901</sup> AIPN BU 529/4, The Working Document of The International Committee of the Red Cross's Visit to Warsaw-Białołęka Prison, June 22-25, 1982, Annex number 4.

<sup>902</sup> AIPN BU 529/4, A Note, 2.

<sup>903</sup> AIPN BU 529/4, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Warsaw-Białołęka Prison, June 22-25, 1982, 7-8.

<sup>904</sup> *Ibid.*, 9-11.

daily schedule and routine. While also being permanently locked in their cells, prisoners from blocks I and II were woken up half an hour later (7 am) and could play table tennis and watch television from time to time.<sup>905</sup> The fact that this evidence contained in the reports now sounds rather repetitive only underlines the fact that despite this relatively high-level intervention little changed in the daily circumstances of the political prisoners.

As in almost all internment camps, there was a deep feeling of dissatisfaction and annoyance among the prisoners at the treatment they experienced at the hand of the security service, which involved regular blackmailing and threats. This only exacerbated their sense of insecurity. Prisoners from blocks I and II complained about a particular event that took place on June 11. In the afternoon of that day, prison guards and militia (police) wearing helmets, equipped with tear gas spray cans and shields, conducted searches in cells in blocks I and II. According to the prisoners, as the searches unfolded, the guards and policemen violently attacked prisoners and demanded that they undress for personal searches. In the course of these searches, prisoners were physically assaulted and some were beaten by the guards and policemen. The report also mentions the striking fact that some guards took photographs of the naked prisoners. Rather than accepting such treatment as a fact of prison life, the prisoners made it clear that while they were used to searches, they opposed the brutality and violent attitude of some of the guards and policemen.<sup>906</sup> What was at stake for them here was a humiliation that they saw as an attempt to break their political will.

Presenting the prisoners' complaints to the prison authority at the last meeting, the delegates advised the administration to invest in the poor infrastructure (damp cells, faulty plumbing, loose toilet bowls and damaged ceilings) and to allow internees to take showers twice a week. In order to counteract and prevent the diminishing welfare of prisoners, the prison authorities were urged to allow prisoners to do more exercise and leave the cells open. The delegates said that the prisoners in block IV, in particular, should have more access to outdoor and indoor games and, most importantly, should be treated less strictly as they suffered from total isolation, that 'gave rise to extremely difficult conditions of internment.'<sup>907</sup>

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<sup>905</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>906</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>907</sup> Ibid., 21.

While Colonel Parciak did not dismiss all the comments and suggestions made by the ICRC's delegates, he insisted that the searches on June 11 were carried out solely by prison guards and that the possible escalation of tension between the guards and the prisoners was a result of the prisoners' provocative behavior. He claimed that the morning of that day, prisoners had organized a noise protest (by beating their aluminum dishes against the bars of their cell windows) for almost an hour and had refused to calm down. According to the report, during the final discussion with the ICRC, Parciak did not show any signs of remorse or even regret for his staff's brutal and brutalizing behavior. By responding that 'he was not authorized to take any decisions on isolation, exercise and leisure especially with regards to the internees in block IV,'<sup>908</sup> Parciak invoked the often non-transparent power dynamics and institutional hierarchy at play in the prison management. Although the prison's material infrastructure had been improved in part thanks to prisoners' complaints and protests and the ICRC's advice to the prison warden, the overall situation remained deficient. In light of the information on living conditions in the prison in the early months of martial law – particularly in block IV – the question about whether the prison facilities were suitable for detention at all arose. Deficient living conditions and poor management, as well as a probable lack of good will, rendered the prison an unhealthy environment that made daily life into a struggle of its own.

Of all the features of prison life, boredom and a sense of powerlessness were among the hardest aspects of life for some prisoners. The days in prison looked the same and prisoners struggled to cope with boredom. In an anonymous *gryps*<sup>909</sup> from prison that was written on June 1, 1982, the author who identifies himself only as P. M., writes that 'the prison rhythm and repetition really annoy me: bowl, walk. Especially since everybody seems to give in to it. Prison sayings, lilt and words fly around the cells like flies that weren't swatted. Trying to break this mood also seems desperately hopeless. And rebellion often looks like a simple, wayward and school-like defiance.'<sup>910</sup> Highlighting the boredom of prison life, the author points to the ritualized and predictable daily routine that was centered around such simple activities as having a meal and taking a walk. Even protest seemed to have lost its transformative potential both against the

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<sup>908</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>909</sup> Gryps – a word in Polish prison slang that refers to a smuggled letter from prison.

<sup>910</sup> AOIV/56.23.15.

prison system and for the prisoners themselves. The highly negative tone of the short letter reflects the fact that the author had little to look forward to and perhaps even lost interest in the world around him. Deprived of more complex and diverse external stimuli and meaningful social and political interaction, prisoners struggled to stay mentally fit and avoid depression.



Figure 9: Henryk Wujec in Warsaw-Białołęka, 1982. Archive Ośrodek Karta, AOK 6 11 65

One coping behavior that would lift prisoners' spirit was writing, which was also part of a broader effort to maintain communication with the outside world. Prisoners not only wrote to their close ones in search of contact but also as an attempt to overcome loneliness. In their prison writings, they tried to make sense, however imperfectly, of the political situation under martial law by providing political analysis and guidance for themselves and others. In a letter written in August 1982 and smuggled out of Warsaw-Białołęka, Andrzej Gwiazda, a key member of the political opposition, called for a struggle based on 'universal and passive modes of resistance.'<sup>911</sup> What he meant by this was daily practices of sabotage which would translate into working and following the rules as if nothing had happened with the intention of creating chaos, confusion

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<sup>911</sup> AOIV/56.23.23, 2.

and low productivity. According to Gwiazda, workers' low engagement in work could damage the overall economic performance of the workplace. Somewhat in line with a general strike, the ultimate goal of day-to-day passive resistance is to negatively affect economic growth in order to increase the pressure on the authorities and galvanize the public. Another important feature of this strategy of resistance is its mass dimension. The collective character of the clandestine sabotaging actions also serves as a shield that protects participants from the risk of imprisonment. Such forms of resistance involved forms of leadership that were taken up by the Solidarność activists who had been hiding. Gwiazda also discusses the fundamental role of solidarity in maintaining effective resistance. By solidarity he means a network of fellow political activists who would offer help and support in case of state repressions. As Gwiazda underlines, 'everyone who will doubt whether to defend his friend, who is risking his life for the common cause, will lose his right to bread and freedom. He only deserves being a slave.'<sup>912</sup> In this context, Gwiazda understands solidarity as an ethical imperative, a fundamental condition for collective acts of sabotage and a tactic for self-defense.

Another example of how prisoners used writing the *grypsy* as a practice of giving meaning to the confinement and martial law is a long *gryps* written by Adam Michnik.<sup>913</sup> The letter reflects the prisoner's attempts to understand and explain how Poland came to be under martial law and the possibilities of resistance that this situation affords. I will analyze this *gryps* in some detail as it highlights two important points, namely that the discussion about political tactics (addressed in the previous section) continued under political incarceration and with contributions by the internees who were smuggled out, and that contributing to such discussions not only within the internment camp but also in writing for an audience outside prison was part of the everyday intellectual and political activity of the internees.

Michnik starts with a description of the then familiar sensation of being alienated from the outside world: 'the absence deprives you of the flavor of everyday life. After four months of isolation you lose your feeling for the melody of the streets of Warsaw and the moods of its

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<sup>912</sup> Ibid.

<sup>913</sup> Adam Michnik, 'On Resistance: A Letter from Białołęka,' in *Letters from Prison and Other Essays* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); for the original, see AOIV/56.23.27.

people, whom you have known for so many years.’<sup>914</sup> The letter captures the sensory dimension of being cut off from ordinary life. Despite attempts to go about life in the internment camp, the internees were always accompanied by the awareness that they were confined and of the material reality of their confinement. In his short historical overview of the emergence of the political opposition, Michnik places great emphasis on the role of the Catholic Church and the Catholic press in creating – literally and symbolically – an asylum and refuge for those critical of late socialist political reality. According to him, the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* ‘was an opportunity to survive, an attempt to save fundamental values, common sense and balanced psychological well-being in a world dominated by police terror and ideological madness.’<sup>915</sup> The *gryps* captures one of the moments leading to Michnik’s ideological and political reorientation turning his outlook more liberal-conservative. Again, the shift is not surprising given that under the conditions of political incarceration under martial law the internees relied heavily on the Catholic Church’s support as a supplier of goods as well as a mediating political power.

Michnik identifies the roots of the situation he found himself in in what is, according to him, the intrinsically dictatorial nature of the late socialist system that had always been against its own people: ‘the precondition of socialist dictatorship was to destroy social bonds so that the state apparatus could be the only form of social organization that aimed at breaking solidarity and keeping society under a constant threat of punishment.’<sup>916</sup> Instead of belonging and attachment, the socialist regime offered coercion and obedience. This mode of governance was reflected in society’s ‘psychology of the slavery’ which leads to apathy and alienation.<sup>917</sup> Despite its seemingly total and absolute power, the socialist state system had already once been broken – during the August strikes that led to the creation of *Solidarność* which in turn allowed the striking workers and the rest of society to regain their political subjectivity. Michnik argues that during the phase in which *Solidarność* operated legally people ‘had a taste of freedom; they

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<sup>914</sup> Since the published version of the letter differs from the original one in the archives, I will rely on the longer version from the archives; AOIV/56.23.27, 1.

<sup>915</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>916</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>917</sup> *Ibid.*

forged their solidarity and discovered their strength; they again felt themselves to be a civic and national community.<sup>918</sup>

With the declaration of martial law, the socialist state system became a symbol of illegitimate rule and, once again, its citizens were thrown back to feeling helpless and deprived of their freedom. Deeply concerned about possible modes of resistance under martial law, the author sees hope in well-organized underground activities. Because the implementation of martial law was imposed on society by General Jaruzelski, the members of society had no choice but to follow their natural drive to resist state violence. For Michnik, the need to organize against the state had something natural and unquestionable about it – it was almost like an impulse, which would make citizens turn to civil disobedience. Michnik adds that embracing civil disobedience was the only political approach that deserved social respect.<sup>919</sup> Although in his view the best way of organizing collective forms of civil disobedience was through the political underground, instead of copying the structures of the Polish underground resistance to the Nazi occupation – creating a parallel, underground Polish nation state – the political underground under martial law, he thought, should focus on a struggle for democratic representation. As if distancing himself from Kuroń's views on violence published in March of the same year, Michnik underlines that the political underground should shy away from violent tactics that involve acts of terrorism as they 'reinforce hatred and brutality and can be off-putting for vast parts of society. It's not terrorism that is needed in today's Poland. We need a broad underground movement that will fight for the reconstruction of civil society; a movement that will involve cities, villages, workplaces and educational institutions, universities and high schools.'<sup>920</sup> Although a thriving civil society with an active underground press and leadership should be key to a well-functioning and effective underground resistance movement with the autonomous circulation of ideas and knowledge,<sup>921</sup> Michnik also points to the potential limits of civil society. He warns against the risk of the apparatus of underground resistance being alienated from everyday life under martial law. By emphasizing the centrality of building a civil society – instead of simply provoking the 'junta' –

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<sup>918</sup> Ibid.

<sup>919</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>920</sup> Ibid.

<sup>921</sup> Ibid., 7.

Michnik suggests that the actions of the political underground should take an affirmative and creative form. In order to change the political landscape, the underground had to create a broad political movement of social resistance that would focus on creating political actions open to participation from everyone. The more open and tolerant the movement was, the more people would get involved.

A successful movement of political resistance should offer a 'strategy of hope' that would motivate people to take up the risk of political involvement and, more importantly, function as a compass that would guide them to a better future, a future beyond martial law.<sup>922</sup> While Michnik does not develop a detailed analysis of the exact function and meaning of this 'strategy of hope,' and while it is unclear if he was influenced by the link the revisionist Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch made between the principle of hope and the need for 'concrete utopias,'<sup>923</sup> he makes it clear that a political vision of democratic institutions and civil society needed to encompass concrete actions as well as emotional attachments among political participants. By paying attention to the need to create conditions for people to flourish through political action against the terror of the Polish United Workers' Party, Michnik expands the role of the underground social movement beyond bringing about political change. The clandestine resistance movement had to be a true training ground for freedom and democracy that would create an authentic society and help citizens protect their values – such as truth and dignity – against the state's attempts to mold citizens into obedient subjects by means of martial law. According to Michnik, what it meant to be a true citizen was defined in opposition to those obedient subjects with 'wooden heads and spines made of rubber' one should be afraid of.<sup>924</sup> In other words, the task of the underground resistance was to provide and maintain a democratic basis for the post-martial law political landscape and society while preventing violent confrontations from emerging.

Counterbalancing the ambitious 'strategy of hope,' Michnik also recognized that the underground political movement would be limited given the mass incarceration and the

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<sup>922</sup> Ibid.

<sup>923</sup> The three volumes of Ernst Bloch's *The Principle of Hope* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) were first published in 1954, 1955, and 1959 in the GDR where Bloch was a professor at the University of Leipzig. His work had a significant influence on students and young academics who were critical of the regime, leading to his nonvoluntary retirement in 1957 and his move to Western Germany in 1961. See also the highly critical assessment of Bloch's philosophy and politics in Kołakowski, *Main Currents of Marxism*, ch 12.

<sup>924</sup> AOIV/56.23.27, 9.



suspension of most of civic rights under martial law. As a result, on its own it would never be able to fulfill all the needs of its members. Those involved in the underground resistance would, therefore, have to view themselves as part of a broader movement that should be united and pluralistic. More concretely, Michnik had in mind the important role played by the Catholic Church in supporting and protecting underground initiatives. In his view it was thanks to the Church's concrete efforts to help and shield the weak and humiliated and to care about social order and truth that real human subjectivity could be rehabilitated against the backdrop of martial law.<sup>925</sup> It is clear that Michnik pushed for the creation of 'a democratic alternative' based on hope rather than for a confrontational politics based on hatred and a desire for revenge. This could only be achieved if the members of the underground resistance shared a common goal and politics of solidarity.<sup>926</sup>

In the last part of the letter, Michnik acknowledged that many participants in the movement would have to sacrifice their professional careers and family lives in the name of its success. The costs of political activism under martial law were high and involved the risk of imprisonment, loneliness and operating within the sphere of illegality. Convinced that the ultimate drive behind political participation in the underground movement was not tactical but moral, Michnik thought the movement needed people who saw political activism as a form of 'a moral testimony' that was of greater significance than mere political efficiency. As a result, these activists would not treat their commitment to the underground movement as a career move.<sup>927</sup>

In the longer version of his letter from Warsaw-Białołęka, and in conversation with many other major members of the political opposition, Michnik tried to reimagine what dissident political activism should and could be under martial law. He was convinced that political opposition had to be non-violent and action-oriented. While for him political action included various activities such as underground publishing and support for the victims of martial law, in contrast to Gwiazda he saw the passive sabotage of work, which might lead to the slowing down of the economy as ultimately irrelevant. In addition, for Michnik, the underground resistance movement should integrate a concern for the emotional well-being of its participants by providing

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<sup>925</sup> Ibid.

<sup>926</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>927</sup> Ibid., 11.

a sense of hope with action-driven organization. Imagining underground resistance under martial law, according to Michnik, required seeing hope, moral obligation and political struggle as intimately related. This insistence on hope and the importance of ethical commitments as a driving force of political perseverance shows that Michnik was acutely aware of the potential risks that could threaten the movement from within.

While Michnik's letter provides an account of the political opposition and an antagonistic view of the political situation under martial law, it also vividly captures and documents the dynamics and possibilities of political thinking under adverse conditions of political incarceration. However, if one evaluates the programmatic efforts and proposals Michnik puts forward, the letter is also an attempt to imagine a political world beyond the prison walls and to contribute to the formation of the underground resistance under martial law. As a tool for thinking and a medium for sharing political ideas, Michnik's prison letter is also an expression of belonging to a precarious underground polity that was still in the making.

Although Michnik's letter has little to say on the everyday life in Warsaw-Białołęka, everyday life under political incarceration is precisely the focus of Waldemar Kuczyński's memoir of the internment camp, with which I started this section. Kuczyński recalls that the prisoners were given simple kitchenware that was bent, sticky, covered with dust and scratched by previous users and that the meals that were served were minimal. Prison bedding was also of bad quality as the linens were made of hard fabrics and were thin from intense use.<sup>928</sup> Keeping the kitchen utensils clean was not easy as only cold water was available for cleaning.<sup>929</sup> In addition, the prison routine around food, such as sharing meals squeezed side by side at the table and sitting on bunks, waiting in line to wash the dishes, often led to minor conflicts that sometimes turned bitter. Deprived of their personal belongings, a sense of privacy and the ability to cope with the stress of confinement, prisoners were sensitive when it came to seemingly small things like sharing their plates and cups with others. With time, inmates learned to recognize which kitchen utensils belonged to who and to keep them separate.<sup>930</sup>

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<sup>928</sup> Kuczyński, *OBÓZ*, 31-32, 36.

<sup>929</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>930</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

But of course, everyday life in the prison was filled with political meanings and possibilities. According to Kuczyński's account, which is in line with Mazowiecki's in this respect, this context, in which minor encroachments on each other's personal space could have significant repercussions, allowed prisoners to learn about the importance of internal and unofficial channels that, in turn, enabled the transmission of information. Having a window in a cell was not only a matter of having access to fresh air and natural light but also of being able to communicate with other cells, thus 'contributing to the creation of strong bonds within the community, a sense of collective fate, an awareness that one is part of a larger group that is ready to lift up those with a flagging morale and to defend those in need of it. A code of conduct of the internes is quickly developed, peoples' necks harden and they regain their spirit of resistance.'<sup>931</sup> But although he was in the company of good friends from Solidarność and witnessed the high morale of the community of the internees first hand, Kuczyński regularly suffered from boredom<sup>932</sup> and the repetitive daily routine in addition to being haunted by worries about his family. Although he managed to sleep for long periods and even to dream, he rarely woke up feeling rested:

Waking up from sleep as a prisoner is depressing. It's as if every morning one would lose freedom all over again. The sleep brings us out of the cell. Night is an illogical and fantastic life among delusions ... that is free from life behind the bars, barbed wire and walls. I had never dreamed of confinement when I was in prison. I returned to my cell by opening my eyes and sometimes by the noise coming from the loudspeakers before I even saw the bunk beds and bars. This terrible feeling when the prison reality rapidly pushes out the free world of sleep and overwhelms you with the prison's power. When you again realize that you are imprisoned. So you try to nap, you dig in your memory so that you can relive, during the day, what you dreamt of during your sleep. Your memory resists but you know that something was there, something pleasant.<sup>933</sup>

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<sup>931</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>932</sup> Ibid., 75-76.

<sup>933</sup> Ibid., 70.

Sleeping through most of the day was his individual way of coping with the repetitive rhythm of the internment camp. It also provided an escape from the most painful aspect of imprisonment, namely the constant anxiety about the whereabouts of his partner Halina and their children: 'when I'm not asleep I'm being constantly vexed by insecurity – what is happening at home? Is Halina in prison? How to find out about her? What can I do to make sure that my children are taken care of, especially Dorota [the daughter who was severely sick] if Halina is imprisoned?'<sup>934</sup> Kuczyński was convinced that it was a matter of time before the remaining *Solidarność* activists would need to take care of the families of those confined in internment camps. The first thing he did was write to his daughter Dorota, who had been in hospital for medical reasons, with advice about whom she could reach out to for help. He also wrote letters to his colleagues and friends asking for support. Again, imprisoned members of the political opposition turned to and activated activist bonds that were inseparably intertwined with personal ones.

Striking a more ambivalent note, Jan Lityński who had also been incarcerated in Warsaw-Białołęka since the beginning of martial law, remembers his stay in the internment camp in less dramatic terms. As he acknowledges, this is perhaps because he, unlike most of the internees, already had a history of imprisonment for his participation in the March Protests of 1968 and for his membership in the political opposition in the 1970s. He recalls that in order to maintain a smooth co-existence among prisoners, he and his fellow inmates from the cell came up with a daily routine and habits that they then observed throughout most of their time in detention. The daily pattern involved sharing meals solely made of food from parcels they received from charity, having a few hours of silence for reading or writing, and playing bridge or having a discussion in the evening. One way of relieving the boredom of daily routine was through the consumption of illegal alcoholic beverages. According to Lityński, there were two ways of getting alcohol, both of which were strictly prohibited: from *pędzić bimber* (brewing prison moonshine) and from smuggled contraband. Prisoners learned how to make alcohol from fermented fruit stored in buckets in the cells. This simple brewing technique resulted in brews, with approximately 15% alcohol content, which Lityński remembers as 'disgusting.'<sup>935</sup> The second way of getting alcohol

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<sup>934</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>935</sup> Lityński, interview, August 30, 2017.

involved sneaking alcohol into the prison in juice cans. Visitors were asked by the prisoners to empty juice cans, refill them with alcohol and reseal them before bringing the cans to the next visit as a part of a food parcel.

Smuggling, in general, involved collective collaboration and played a crucial role in breaking the prisoners' sense of total emotional and political isolation from the world beyond the prison walls. Lityński remembers that smuggling *gryps* was part of mundane prison rituals. Before the visit, the prisoners would hide the *gryps* that were ready to be taken out of prison in small holes of their shoes or in their underwear and then waited in line to be searched by a guard known for being less hostile and punitive when handling inmates. The *gryps* was then handed over to the visitor during official visits. In his account of life under confinement, Lityński acknowledges the general importance of prison know-how for ensuring the smooth flow of everyday life. For instance, he recalls that the goods that prisoners received in parcels from the ICRC, the Church, supporters from abroad and family members, were not only used for consumption by themselves but also as bribes offered to prison guards in return for small favors.<sup>936</sup> In this sense, some prisoners relied on a distinct type of prison savviness and used food and other gifts as a tool to increase their maneuvering room in prison and to relax the impositions of the prison regime.

Lityński's account also highlights how often political activists took up different roles in detention. One of the youngest internees was the 18-year-old Robert Kozak who was about to take his final exams in high school. Out of care and a sense of responsibility, another prisoner called Stefan Starczewski (1935-2014), who was a pedagogue and sociologist, organized lessons on a regular basis for the young prisoner to counteract his educational deprivation due to imprisonment.<sup>937</sup> Starczewski was married to another pedagogue and member of the political opposition, Krystyna Starczewska, and was affiliated with KOR. Moreover, in October 1982 Starczewski was one of the founders of Komitet Helsiński (Helsinki Committee or KH)<sup>938</sup> whose tasks were to monitor the protection and violation of human rights in the Polish People's

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<sup>936</sup> Ibid.

<sup>937</sup> Ibid.

<sup>938</sup> Other founders of KH included Marek Nowicki, Jerzy Ciemniowski, Jarosław Kaczyński, Marek Antoni Nowicki and Danuta Przywara.

Republic. Kozak not only managed to pass his final exams in high school but later also became a BBC correspondent in Poland.

Despite differing testimonies of everyday life under confinement, all prisoners seemingly agree that there was one golden rule that should not be violated. To give in to the security service was the most severe breach of the code of conduct put forward by the prisoners' community. To accept any offer from the SB was viewed as a gesture of weakness and betrayal of the community. According to Kuczyński, prisoners were often pushed towards collaborating with the SB by an affective state specific to prison that he calls *gorączka wolności* (freedom fever). Once at work, it made the prisoner weak in confrontation with the security service. *Gorączka wolności* was an intense, emotional and psychological state that was hard to control and that was impossible to be tamed once the prisoner allowed it to take over. While 'freedom fever' combined a longing for freedom and a fear of imprisonment, it also made the prisoner deaf to the voices of his fellow inmates. *Gorączka wolności* made the prisoner view the meeting with the SB as an opportunity that is very desirable. Suffering from 'freedom fever,' the prisoner showed the following symptoms: he impatiently awaited his turn to have a meeting with the SB, at night he was filled with emptiness and when the lights turned on and new meetings with the agents were about to start, he was full of hope. If the desire to preserve one's dignity succumbed to *gorączka wolności*, the prisoner would totally subjugate himself to the SB. Kuczyński went on to argue that the price for giving in to 'freedom fever' was high as it translates into contempt and marginalization from fellow inmates in the cells and beyond. The worst consequences awaited the prisoner once he was released from prison as he then had to confront his disappointed political milieu, which expected an unflinching commitment and determination from him. Although the dynamics of prison psychology are of course complicated, for Kuczyński, the most damaging psychological consequences came from giving in to *gorączka wolności* and the collaboration with the security service.<sup>939</sup>

In illuminating the psychological mechanisms behind collaboration, Kuczyński did not seem to be filled with compassion and understanding towards the emotional needs that pushed prisoners to follow 'freedom fever.' To use, as he did, the metaphor of an increasingly powerful

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<sup>939</sup> Kuczyński, *OBÓZ*, 53-54.

disease that one could still resist at its onset was to equate collaboration with the security service and the elevation of one's own needs above those of the community with a form of pathology. His explication assumes and highlights the importance of the psychological dimension in the development and maintenance of a healthy everyday life in prison. Failing to control one's desires could lead to the destruction of social and political relationships among political prisoners and with the outside world.

While it might be easy to dismiss Kuczyński's observations as too moralizing, they could also be viewed as highlighting how the everyday politics of control, desires and needs, far from being an exclusively individual preoccupation, were embedded within a broader dynamics of the prisoners' community and its complex politics. It seems as if the prison ethics articulated and exemplified by those whose memoirs and writings have provided the material for this section, were at least partly based on fundamental principles according to which almost all forms of behavior regarding the authorities were intrinsically political and of concern for the community. Ultimately, this had an affective side as well that turned out to be of crucial importance for the individual as it was mostly thanks to being part of the tight community that prisoners did not feel lonely.

#### *Micro-structures of Togetherness: The Women's Internment Camp in Gołdap*

Among those who had to radically reorient themselves after the shock of martial law was also a less visible group of activists, namely incarcerated women who were struggling to adapt to the reality of life under political incarceration. That, in their experience, a sense of the failure of *Solidarność* was intimately connected to collective attempts to build a community under adverse conditions is evident in a report-like document from a women's internment camp in Gołdap, a town situated in what is now Warmia-Mazury province in the northeastern part of Poland. Women who were held in the camp occupied an ambivalent position as professionally active women, political activists coming from various regions of Poland and often mothers of young children. The camp, despite its relatively good shape, was still run like a regular prison.

The camp was in operation between January 6 and July 24, 1982 and housed in an adapted facility of a former state-run holiday resort for radio and television employees. In total, 392 female activists from different regions of Poland were held in the internment camp in Gołdap, including Ludwika Wujec, Gaja Kuroń, Barbara Malak, Halina Mikołajska, Joanna Gwiazda, Alina Pienkowska, Krystyna Kuta, Anna Walentynowicz, Anka Kowalska and Joanna Szczęsna's mother Jadwiga Szczęsna.<sup>940</sup> Gaja was first held in the prison of Olszynka Grochowska and was moved to Gołdap with Barbara Malak and others in the beginning of 1982 as part of a larger transportation of female internees from Olszynka Grochowska.<sup>941</sup> The oldest inmate was sixty-three and the youngest one was twenty years old.<sup>942</sup> According to the report from the ICRC's visit to the camp on February 10-11, Captain Kazimierz Rolka was in charge of the internment camp and on the day of the visit, 239 women were held in it.<sup>943</sup> While the character of the camp differed significantly from that of Warsaw-Białołęka or Olszynka Grochowska, which were housed in regular prisons, it was structurally similar to many of other camps. The facilities in Gołdap comprised rooms, a kitchen, a refectory, a dispensary, a library, a terrace and a kiosk where internees could buy small goods. The internees occupied 60 out of 100 rooms. Each room was four by four square meters and was shared by four inmates. The rooms had beds with bedding, a table, two chairs, a carpet and windows that provided a lot of natural light. In addition, the internees could use two bedside lamps and a floor light. Each room also had its own bathroom with unlimited access to hot and cold water. Initially, women were locked in rooms, but in the beginning, some of them resisted by removing the door from the frame and, as a result of the protest, the rooms were never locked.<sup>944</sup> Women were not allowed to leave the premises of the camp and the camp's terrace served as a prison yard. In these ways, the facilities at Gołdap were significantly better than those at Warsaw-Białołęka.

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<sup>940</sup> AO IV/56.22.7.

<sup>941</sup> Interview 2 with Barbara Malak, July 12, 2019, Amsterdam.

<sup>942</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 1; the report has no page numbering – all the page numbers come from me.

<sup>943</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Gołdap Internment Centre, February 10-11, 1982; The delegation included: Bernard Grünfeld, J.-F. Labarthe (delegates), Dr. H. Schlaepfer (medical delegate), B. Zimmerman (translator). They were accompanied by the representatives of the Polish Red Cross (A. Kukła), a liaison officer from the Ministry of Interior (W. Romanowski) and a liaison officer from the Ministry of Justice (Anna Szydłowska).

<sup>944</sup> Malak, interview 2.



More importantly, thanks to the ICRC's support in January, women were regularly allocated feminine hygiene products.<sup>945</sup> Women complained about irregular access to detergents that, according to Captain Rolka, was due to the widespread shortage of cleaning detergents throughout Poland. Struggles about sufficient levels of hygiene are important in understanding the gendered character of prison life. Often detention facilities were created by men and for men's bodies, their traditionally defined social roles and needs. As a result, the way in which the prison worked in many respects often overlooked the specific situation of women, for instance by disregarding the need for feminine hygiene products. Perhaps the additional discomfort women were subjected to as women during their incarceration also points to the lack of an understanding of what it meant to be a female internee. One could easily get the impression that prison authorities and the Ministry of Justice were not fully capable both mentally and in terms of policy to 'take advantage of current gender differences to minimize the social harms caused by prisons.'<sup>946</sup> This structurally embedded lack of attention to women's basic needs manifested itself in the irregular availability of hygienic supplies and contributed to women's unnecessary discomfort, sense of degradation and poorer care that was corrected by the donations from the ICRC. More importantly, the lack of female hygiene products made women more vulnerable to diseases. Given the social expectation and pressure that women control, manage and conceal their period it is striking that the prison administration was not able or willing to provide women with the means to do so without the ICRC's support. Perhaps it is therefore out of an entrenched feeling of shame and taboo that the women who I interviewed did not mention the issues surrounding access to hygiene products in the internment camp.

Despite the fact that in comparison to other camps the internment camp in Gołdap offered relatively good medical services, in the camp itself and in the town of Gołdap, the delegates observed psychosomatic disorders that affected prisoners' gastrointestinal and respiratory systems. According to the doctors, women kept in confinement were prone to the psychosomatic disorders precisely because of their environment and its effects, such as social and psychological

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<sup>945</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>946</sup> Nicole Hahn Rafter, 'Gender, Prison and Prison History,' *Social Science History* 9:3 (1985), 244.

tensions and the separation from one's family.<sup>947</sup> The cost of maintaining contact with the families was high and female internees were aware of this. Women expressed regret about the bureaucracy, which made it hard for women to maintain connections with their family. In order to visit an internee, the visitor had to first obtain approval for a leave from their employer and then request a permission to travel between voivodships as often the camps were located in remote areas far from where the prisoners' families and friends lived. Finally, visitors had to request permission to enter the special restricted military area where the camp was located. Often, the trip involved travelling long distances for days.<sup>948</sup> In addition, one of the most serious complaints arose from the interactions with the security service that threatened the internees and their families. As the report underlines, apart from the separation from their families which was magnified by irregular visits, women experienced the antagonistic and bullying attitude of the SB as the most deplorable aspect of political incarceration.<sup>949</sup> When combined, these two factors made women feel more isolated and extremely vulnerable. The delegates did not remain silent on the women's situation and tried to bring to the prison authorities' attention the deteriorating mental well-being of female internees. The members of the delegation pointed to the anxieties and worries of the internees that stemmed from the insecurity about their future and the pressures of life in confinement. Because of the role that was usually played by women in family life, mothers of infants and small children were especially anxious about their families. The delegates urged the authorities to find a way to relieve their suffering.<sup>950</sup>

Female internees, however, were neither voiceless nor defenseless victims. Not only did they openly vent their grievances about their treatment to the ICRC's delegates, but they also organized a strong political community. Their efforts at documenting their experiences of political incarceration provide insight into the untold stories and micro-dynamics of prison life. In particular a report that was written in 1982 and entitled 'Za szklaną ścianą' (Behind the Glass Wall) paints a vivid and complex picture of how inmates organized their lives in Gołdap.<sup>951</sup> Most

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<sup>947</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Gołdap Internment Centre, February 10-11, 1982; 5-6.

<sup>948</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>949</sup> *Ibid.*, 13-14.

<sup>950</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>951</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 1, see also Paweł Bryszkowski, *Getto w Gołdapi* (Bydgoszcz: Świadectwo, 1999).

likely, the document was written by Aldona Jawłowska (1934-2010), an experienced political activist and academic who had been associated with KOR and involved with illegal publishing<sup>952</sup> and who arrived in Gołdap on February 11, 1982.<sup>953</sup> During the ICRC's between April 27-29, the medical delegate of the visiting team urged that Jawłowska be immediately released due to a brain tumor that needed immediate treatment. The medical delegation also urged that other ill women be released. From May 15 on, Jawłowska stayed in the Banacha Hospital in Warsaw in the neurosurgery department.<sup>954</sup>

According to the document, everyday prison life in Gołdap was strongly shaped by the relationship between the individual and the collective in which the latter played a more defining role. Housed in the facilities of a former summer retreat, the camp was treated by the authorities as a flagship camp to be presented to the international press as proof of the excellent and humane living conditions in the internment camps meant to counter the overwhelmingly negative accounts of martial law in the international press.<sup>955</sup> For instance, 'the tacky interior [of the internment camp] was visible in the corridors decorated with palm trees, soft couches and armchairs and television.'<sup>956</sup> Yet, the relatively good material living conditions (both in terms of both food and accommodation) clashed with the reality of various forms of repression that directly and negatively impacted the well-being of the inmates. As hundreds of politically active women were abruptly taken away from their work, lives, and families and as they were incarcerated for an unknown period of time, they were deprived of basic needs for a sense of security, self-esteem and dignity, stable contact with their loved ones, and productive activity.<sup>957</sup> The abundance of food and hygiene products (with the temporary exception of female hygiene products), in no small amount thanks to donations from the Church, relatives and sympathizers, was experienced as absurd and unbearable relative to the dual reality of detention in the camp and the day-to-day shortage of consumer goods outside of it. According to the report, in January, the very first month of its operation, the prison kitchen staff was fired as punishment for

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<sup>952</sup> Barbara Malak, interview; Ludwika and Henryk Wujec, interview 1.

<sup>953</sup> AO IV/56.22.3

<sup>954</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, Delegacja MCKC w Polsce, Dokument roboczy nr 29, Załącznik III.

<sup>955</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 5; see also 'Poland's Primate Calls for Release of Women,' *New York Times*, 19 April, 1982.

<sup>956</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>957</sup> *Ibid.*

accepting food and hygiene products from the prisoners. This type of benevolent oppression was so omnipresent in Gołdap that it was experienced as what the author calls 'a golden cage' in which the fragile illusion of a stable and comfortable life could be shattered within a second.<sup>958</sup> While the good material living conditions in the internment camp in Gołdap might suggest that female prisoners enjoyed more privileges than male internees because of their gender, the example of the women-only internment camp in Olszynka Grochowska (today located in a suburb of Warsaw), which was an actual prison facility, proves that gender differences did not always translate into a better treatment of women. According to an anonymous testimony, female prisoners in Olszynka Grochowska lived in underheated cells and received buckets of ice to be used as water to flush lavatories. The women in that camp suffered from many deprivations. Because of extremely low temperatures, some female internees suffered from tuberculosis while women who were mothers of small children were worried about the fates of their children.<sup>959</sup> Barbara Malak, who was incarcerated in Olszynka Grochowska together with Gaja before arriving in Gołdap, confirms that the living conditions in the former camp were worse than at Gołdap. For example, in Olszynka Grochowska women were allowed to shower only twice a week and had irregular access to warm water.<sup>960</sup>

As women arrived in Gołdap, they made their way into the reality of the internment camp by learning about and following the unofficial rules created by the community of inmates. The fundamental and underlying rule was to understand and respect the sharp divide between the inmates and the prison officers (approximately 12), the army unit from the city of Białystok, which had been deployed for security purposes (approximately 60 soldiers), and the security service.<sup>961</sup> While formally the prison warden was in charge of the internment facility, all the decisions were actually made by the SB. The split between inmates and representatives of the state apparatus was inscribed in all aspects of the relationships between these two groups. Most of the interactions between them were regulated by unofficial rules and codes of conduct that were set

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<sup>958</sup> *Ibid.*, 5, 7.

<sup>959</sup> AiKK 09/07.23, Pseudonym 'Gedka,' 91.

<sup>960</sup> Malak, interview 2.

<sup>961</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 2.

up by the community of inmates, chief among them the injunction to keep a safe distance from all prison officers.

The main objective of the army units was to prevent prisoners from escaping and to protect the facility from possible attempts by underground *Solidarność* activists to storm the facility. Different units were deployed based on a monthly rotating schedule, undergoing training upon their arrival in Gołdap during which the political prisoners were framed as prostitutes, potentially dangerous criminals, Jews, single mothers, anarchists without any family, and more broadly as ‘social waste.’<sup>962</sup> By protecting ‘the socialist fatherland – the Polish People’s Republic’ from its perceived enemies,<sup>963</sup> the soldiers were, therefore, carrying out a public service of the highest importance. Despite the mobilization of a discourse that would stigmatize sex work, ethnic and religious minorities, single parenthood, and ideological differences, and cast the detained women as deviating from entrenched conservative norms of gender behavior – all belonging to the clichéd repertoire of official narratives on the political opposition by the time –, most of the soldiers were kind and friendly to the inmates in their daily interactions. In fact, many soldiers would go as far as helping prisoners by giving them tip-offs about imminent searches and prisoner transfers. At times, soldiers would listen to dissident songs sung by prisoners and even write down the lyrics. With the help of soldiers, prisoners would also manage to pass information among themselves in return for small gifts such as food and cigarettes. In the spring, some soldiers would pick flowers and blossoming tree branches as gifts for prisoners. Ludwika Wujec, somewhat jokingly, calls the innocuous chatting, laughing and joking between women who stood on the balcony and soldiers who patrolled the camp a ‘balcony romance.’<sup>964</sup> Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, a translator and KOR collaborator in Warsaw, sees a deeper meaning behind these brief and ephemeral encounters. According to Łukasiewicz, the relatively good relationships with the soldiers were important in making the internees feel that they were not only surrounded by political enemies and were treated by some representatives of those on the other side as humans and with a certain degree of kindness.<sup>965</sup> Nowhere in the report is there a suggestion of an erotic

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<sup>962</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>963</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>964</sup> Ludwika Wujec, interview, September 11, 2019, Warsaw (Poland).

<sup>965</sup> Małgorzata Łukasiewicz, interview, September 13, 2019, Warsaw (Poland).

undercurrent between prisoners and soldiers or of rape or sexual assault and harassment. According to the author of the report, these unexpected interactions between political prisoners and soldiers highlighted the absurdity of the whole situation.<sup>966</sup>

Everyday life in the camp was affected by all sorts of repressive instruments and mechanisms that, ultimately, were often a defining factor for the experience and recollection of the political incarceration. Sudden incarceration brought with it a disruption to work life and family. Trying to make sense of the new situation, women understood the main aim of martial law and the mass incarceration of political activists as 'rehabilitation' that involved psychologically breaking their political and moral spine. While direct physical violence was not part of the repressive tactics employed by the camp's apparatus in Gołdap, many women suffered from mental breakdowns as a result of psychological pressure from the secret police.<sup>967</sup> Equally significant was the lack of information about their immediate futures. For instance they did not have any information about the length of their incarceration or court ruling, which translated into an enduring sense of anxiety and existential insecurity. This sense and the accompanying distrust of the incarceration system were responses to concrete examples of abuse, such as the experience of one woman who was released two weeks after the official release date without any warning or justification.<sup>968</sup>

The most obvious way of controlling prisoners' lives was through bans imposed on all kinds of activities and relations: 'all type of intellectual, artistic and collective activity apart from language courses, radios, typing machines, tape recorders, photo cameras, glue, gluing tapes, and calque' was banned.<sup>969</sup> Although the internees were expected to obey rules, they were often not informed about them by the prison authorities in advance. Rather, they would only learn that they had broken a rule once banned objects were confiscated or in the course of confrontations with prison officers, which often involved verbal threats.<sup>970</sup>

The most common and unpleasant kind of interaction with the authorities consisted in private meetings with secret police agents. Most of the inmates went through such meetings

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<sup>966</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 2.

<sup>967</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>968</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>969</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>970</sup> *Ibid.*

during which they were interrogated about Solidarność and pressured into signing the *lojalka* – a statement of allegiance to the communist authorities that involved renouncing political activism. In return for signing the *lojalka*, the authorities usually promised immediate release. Over time, the secret police in Gołdap gradually turned to more psychologically damaging means to try to elicit information on how Solidarność had been operating and to get as many *lojalka* signed as possible. During the meetings, some internees were shown a falsified telegram, allegedly from their husbands, declaring that they would take the children and leave if the wife did not return home immediately.<sup>971</sup> Alongside deceit, other interrogation techniques included threats and blackmailing that aimed to intimidate the women. For example, the internees were told that their families would bear the consequences of their lack of collaboration or that the secret police was in the possession of compromising information about the internees that would be used in public if they refused to collaborate.<sup>972</sup> In the spring of 1982, the security service also began to use techniques that emphasized the positive effects of collaboration by promising career opportunities and trying to convince prisoners that their collaboration was a matter of patriotic duty.

It is not surprising that the social structure and organization of the community of the internees was based on the fundamental rule to refuse to answer any questions and to sign the *lojalka*, which was referred to as ‘a pact with the devil.’<sup>973</sup> Not only did this rule regulate the prisoners’ behavior and decisions in the interrogation room, compliance with it also defined their social status within the community in general – just as it had in the men’s prison in Warsaw-Białołęka. After leaving the interrogation room, women had to immediately give a report of the questioning to other inmates.<sup>974</sup> It was obvious to everyone that a refusal to cooperate was highly valued and seen as ‘a heroic act.’<sup>975</sup> Only a few women signed the *lojalka* and this usually happened during the first few weeks of incarceration. While some women who refused to sign the *lojalka* were left in peace by the authorities or even released from the camp, most of them were subjected to harassment from secret police agents as a punishment. Sometimes, prisoners

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<sup>971</sup> Ibid.

<sup>972</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>973</sup> Ibid., 9-10.

<sup>974</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>975</sup> Ibid.

were suddenly transferred to the police station in Gołdap. One inmate, Teresa T.-W., a teacher from Warsaw who suffered from a chronic heart disease, was suddenly taken to the police station, denied the possibility of contacting her doctor and had her medicine confiscated. When she complained about this treatment, which put her life at risk, she was told that ‘we could also give you a rope so that you can hang yourself. We will not cry after you.’<sup>976</sup> Teresa T.-W. was kept in a cell at the police station for eight hours together with two prisoners with a more political profile from the same camp, Barbara H. and Ałła G. According to the report, despite their uncertain situation the women sang political songs from Gołdap internment camp during their stay at the police station.<sup>977</sup>

In June and July 1982 more women arrived who were arrested after the mass demonstrations against the state became more confrontational and, as a result, the interrogation methods became more brutal. More and more political prisoners from Gołdap were abruptly transferred for a short time to several police stations. According to the author of the report, two young students from Gdańsk were physically assaulted after they had been arrested. New interrogation methods included more aggressive displays of power by the investigators, for instance, a secret police agent placing a gun, a police baton or a syringe on the table, suggesting a direct threat of physical violence aimed to instill fear in the internees.

In Gołdap, the psychological manipulation of the women was thus both a tool and a result of state oppression. The security service was familiar with the prisoner’s background and used this knowledge for its own purposes during the interrogations. Women who were caregiving parents of infants were particularly vulnerable to the psychological and emotional abuse by the SB, especially in the context of an enduring lack of family contact and emotional precarity. The logic behind these meetings was to instrumentally use the prisoners’ family bonds, their care and sense of responsibility for and emotional attachment to their loved ones to overcome resistance to signing the *lojalka* and to pressure the women into collaborating with the secret police.<sup>978</sup> In the interrogation room and the prison at large, women were subjected to the mechanisms of intimidation precisely because of their gender and wide-spread and internalized norms of

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<sup>976</sup> Ibid., 10.

<sup>977</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>978</sup> Malak, interview 2.



femininity and motherhood. In this context, gender-based intimidation was not a contingent component of the tactics of interrogation but fundamental to them.

The complete lack of or only very irregular contact with the outside world, through letters, parcels and visits, turned out to be another related and major challenge for the political prisoners. Especially restrictive and unclear visitation rules prevented prisoners from staying in touch with family and children. The author of the report notes that sometimes children who wanted to visit their incarcerated mothers were subjected to harsh or unclear prison rules. The then nine-year-old daughter of Barbara O. from Wałecz, while unaccompanied, was subjected to a body search after leaving the visiting room.<sup>979</sup> Another child, the six- or seven-year-old son of Alina P.,<sup>980</sup> was not allowed to enter the visiting room because of an alleged administrative error.<sup>981</sup> As if it was not hard enough for children to have to visit their mothers in a remote internment camp – a sort of no man’s land that neither accommodated love nor allowed intimacy – they had to pay, as if by extension, for their mothers’ behavior in the camp by being exposed to contingent rules and arbitrary decisions that often led to intimidating situations. Often, as a punishment and without prior announcement, the women would also be denied the right to send and receive letters.<sup>982</sup> Not knowing if and when prisoners would be able to see their children was an essential factor that contributed to the worsening mental health most women experienced. While not suffering from physical wounds, women, deprived of liberty and information, were vulnerable; they had to live and suffer through the uncertainty about the fate of their children, spouses and other loved ones.

Yet, the unofficial rule among women was to try not to show their vulnerabilities and sadness during visits, which was very difficult for them at times.<sup>983</sup> In light of their political commitments and practices, it would be a mistake to view the imprisoned women through the narrow lenses of gendered stereotypes that defined women primarily as mothers and wives.

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<sup>979</sup> On one of its visits, the Red Cross delegation noted that some visitors were subjected to unpleasant body searches and some were turned away: AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Gołdap Internment Centre, Second visit, April 27-29, 1981, 8, 13.

<sup>980</sup> The author of the report gives the name Anna but, most likely, she meant Alina P. who was a member of the National Committee of Solidarność.

<sup>981</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 12.

<sup>982</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>983</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

Female internees also suffered from the inability to continue their professional careers. For instance, one of the prisoners who was an academic was denied an official visit from the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Science, which was her home institution.<sup>984</sup>

Women were also subjected to searches in which letters, illegal newspapers, notes, song lyrics and art (hand-made drawings, stamps, etc.) were confiscated. During the more extensive searches, the police from Gołdap and Suwałki would join and help the prison officers carry out the searches that also involved undressing the prisoners.<sup>985</sup> According to the author of the report, the main goal of the searches was to maintain an atmosphere of insecurity and tension and to disrupt the flow of information among the prisoners.<sup>986</sup>

In the view of the women, the primary purpose of the internment camp was to destabilize them mentally, to make them question the sense of ‘the carnival of Solidarność’ and of political activism in general, to destroy their political identities and to disintegrate their prison community. From this perspective, the stay in the Gołdap internment camp did not succeed in ‘reforming’ the prisoners as many of them saw it as ‘a school for political maturation’ during which they learned first-hand how the state operates and treats its citizens and how it can be resisted.<sup>987</sup> Despite the many differences in age, background and political experience among them, the women managed to create and maintain an atmosphere of mutual support filled with kindness and loyalty.<sup>988</sup> Barbara Malak’s recollection of her time in Gołdap is in line with the report’s findings. As she underlines: ‘I became stronger after my stay in the camp, before I did not think much about gender and sex but in Gołdap I learned a lot of good things about women’s skills as we were zestful women.’<sup>989</sup>

When the first internees arrived in January 1982, members of the prison community in formation entered into a heated discussion about how best to organize themselves vis-à-vis the prison authorities. As the body of prisoners consisted of activists from different regions and associated with various dissident milieus such as KOR, WZZW and the National Committee of

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<sup>984</sup> The said prisoner was Aldona Jawłowska who was, most likely, also the author of the report, *Ibid.*, 12-13.

<sup>985</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>986</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>987</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>988</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>989</sup> Malak, interview 2.

Solidarność, prisoners worried about reproducing regional and personal conflicts and rivalry among these groups, which was felt during the period in which Solidarność operated legally. Eventually, in order to avoid the risk of disunity due to conflicts, the women decided not to form a unified representative body that would represent their voices in a semi-official way within the camp. In this and other ways, throughout the existence of the camp, the internees managed to prevent major political conflicts from emerging.<sup>990</sup> Instead, as mentioned previously, the women's community developed a set of unofficial rules, codes and norms of behavior that became a reference point for all prisoners to rely on in moments of doubt or conflict.<sup>991</sup> Those who breached the strict rules on minimizing interactions with the prison officers and refusing to collaborate were shamed and treated with hostility.<sup>992</sup>

A sense of mutual dependence and responsibility also shaped the rule 'to help other inmates survive' the time under political incarceration.<sup>993</sup> As some inmates were not allowed to receive any parcels, this meant that all received goods were equally shared. If someone was caught putting food aside for herself, she would be heavily criticized for her behavior. In principle, everyone could ask everyone for help. Support and kindness were part of a larger effort to try to maintain as peaceful, supportive and well-organized a life in the camp as possible. As a result, the women tried not to actively look for secret police agents among them. Their priority was to prevent witch-hunting and to keep the atmosphere of mutual suspicion and potential conflicts at bay so that 'our golden cage does not turn into hell.'<sup>994</sup>

Being forced to live in confinement with people one has not chosen to be close to inevitably led to tensions and more or less minor outbursts of aggression. While recognizing their inevitability, the point of the self-commitment of the women was to prevent these tensions from turning into lasting and exploding forms of hostility. A kind, understanding and caring attitude to fellow inmates was seen as a remedy against the escalation of conflicts that was recognized as a structural risk of life in prison.<sup>995</sup> At the same time, the women tried to not to overburden one

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<sup>990</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 16.

<sup>991</sup> Ibid.

<sup>992</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>993</sup> Ibid.

<sup>994</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>995</sup> Ibid.

another with personal problems as they knew that they were all in the same boat.<sup>996</sup> Consistent with this outlook, they also subscribed to a rule protecting their privacy: if one of the prisoners was feeling down and needed to be alone, she informed the others via a paper note and was left undisturbed.

The general model of 'proper' prison behavior thus consisted of the following points: (1) a commitment to personal development; (2) using one's skills to make meaningful contributions to the prisoners' community; (3) resisting violence; (4) being kind and helping others; (5) staying positive and believing in the victory of *Solidarność*.<sup>997</sup> Central to these principles was a commitment to the internees' community. The incarcerated women saw themselves as carrying out a mission: they had to serve as examples in terms of their value commitments and their behavior for others living in political confinement and for the activists who were in hiding. While trying to offer comfort to one another, their self-image was also that of strong, determined, unflinching and diligent women activists.<sup>998</sup>

Despite the very limited possibilities for intellectual life in the camp, the women organized themselves in order to meet their cultural and intellectual needs. The unofficial group of prisoners responsible for organizing activities and collective actions consisted of fewer than a dozen women. They were respected members of the women's community because of their activist past in *Solidarność* but, most importantly, because of their everyday behavior, kindness, wisdom and commitment to and support for the day-to-day well-being of the collective.<sup>999</sup>

Throughout their stay, women staged plays, produced illegal journals, and also, at least in part, celebrated religious holidays. Prison press products were obviously of key importance for sharing information. The 'newspaper' *Informator* (the Informant) was especially sought after as it contained information gained from illegally smuggled small radios. A weekly named *Internowanka* (The Internee, female form) contained short pieces of political commentary, advice on how to behave during interrogations, poems and information from other camps.<sup>1000</sup> Alongside these titles, the prisoners also published Catholic newspapers.

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<sup>996</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>997</sup> *Ibid.*, 20-21.

<sup>998</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>999</sup> *Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>1000</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

Drawing from their experience in *Solidarność*, political prisoners put effort into self-organization and bonds of solidarity and used them as survival tactics. On the level of everyday life, all women were encouraged to use their professional skills to contribute to the productive passing of time during incarceration: hair dressers cut hair, academics gave lectures, psychologists provided psychological training and actresses staged plays. Women worked around the denied access to educational programs by organizing lectures on topics that felt relevant to them, such as the history of philosophy, the history of Polish architecture, semiotics, the psychology of stress, the sociology of totalitarianism, mathematics and logic.<sup>1001</sup> To give just one example, Barbara Malak, a psychologist and then a vice-dean of the psychology department at the University of Warsaw, remembers giving talks and offering women psychological support.<sup>1002</sup> Moreover, women also organized German, English and French language courses. Since all the educational programs, except for language courses, were banned, only a few women could attend individual lectures without alerting the guards. As the demand was high, some lectures were repeated several times during the week so that more women could benefit from them. Weekends were free from classes and lectures. Without any access to educational materials, the internees had to prepare their lectures without any support. Recognizing the importance of education opportunities and attempts to provide open access to knowledge, the internees' community acted in line with one of the fundamentals of dissident activity, which was embodied in the existence of TKN (*Towarzystwo Kursów Naukowych/The Society of Scientific Courses*, an autonomous network of academic activists that aimed to break the state monopoly on knowledge production). Aldona Jawłowska, who is most likely the author of the report, was an academic and member of the scientific Program Board of TKN. In that sense, educational activity within the camp not only reduced a sense of boredom during incarceration by keeping women intellectually busy, but was also an expression of dissidence.

Although the rules of the camp forbade any cultural activity, the women managed to create their own cultural life. For instance, Halina Mikołajska, a professional actress, performed monodramas based on texts by Thomas Mann. At the beginning of April, the internees prepared

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<sup>1001</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>1002</sup> Malak, interview; AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Gołdap Internment Centre, Second visit, April 27-29, 1982, 5.

a play with references to the independence tradition. A few weeks later, they prepared a play on the Katyń massacre, which was based on poems by the young poet and member of the Home army, Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński (who died during the Warsaw Uprising), and which were blended with poems by one of the prisoners, Krystyna K.<sup>1003</sup> While many of the spectacles were staged multiple times, the women made sure that new plays had their 'premiere' on special, political occasions such as the anniversary of the adoption of the Constitution of May 3, 1791. Women also enjoyed listening to readings of contemporary poetry by Anna Achmatova, Sergei Yesenin, Osip Mandelstam, as well as singing Bulat Okudzhava's songs. Finally, it was common for prisoners to engage in heated political discussions until late at night.<sup>1004</sup>

Barbara Malak points out that during her stay in the camp she engaged twice in a particular leisure activity, namely drinking grain alcohol that other inmates shared with her. Although it was impossible to get hold of alcohol, some family members managed to smuggle it in food parcels. Since access to alcohol was very difficult, its consumption was not a main recreational activity and Malak does not recall ever seeing any drunk internees.<sup>1005</sup>

Whenever the women felt that their truncated freedom, the little specks of freedom with which they were left, was in danger of being suppressed, women resisted. Preparing and participating in protest also helped reinforce existing friendship ties and care among the internees that, in turn, strengthened the community as a whole. The situation in the camp reached a crisis point when the most significant protest action took place on February 2<sup>1006</sup> in response to the treatment of Halina G., a teacher from Szczecin, whose son passed away during her incarceration. When a security service agent informed Halina G. about her son's death, he added that she would be allowed to attend the funeral under the condition that she sign the *lojalka*.<sup>1007</sup> Despite being devastated by the sad news, Halina G. refused. Clearly, the SB used her personal tragedy to

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<sup>1003</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 26; A poem 'Hamlet' by Krystyna K. was smuggled out of the internment camp and printed in the underground *Tygodnik Mazowsze* in issue 17 from June 9, 1982.

<sup>1004</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>1005</sup> Malak, interview 2.

<sup>1006</sup> See the entries on Gołdap in the online Encyklopedia Solidarności, [www.Encysol.com](http://www.Encysol.com), last accessed March 20, 2019.

<sup>1007</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 28; Barbara D. was another prisoner who could not attend the funeral of a family member, AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Gołdap Internment Centre, 10-11 February 1982, 15.

achieve its goal, namely, in the words of the author of the report, 'to break and subjugate the opponent who, in this case, was a mother in despair.'<sup>1008</sup> It seems as if refusing to approve release from the camp to attend one's child's funeral was either a deliberate punishment or way of putting pressure on Halina G. Out of anger at the cruel treatment by the secret police and in solidarity with Halina G., the community of the internees decided to organize a hunger strike. The plan was for the strike to continue with as many women as possible until Halina G. was allowed to return home, even if it was too late for her to attend her son's funeral. The internees informed Kazimierz Rolka, then the prison warden, about the decision to start a hunger strike that would start the next day and last until Halina G. received permission to leave. The deadline for the prison warden was 11 am of the following day. The announcement of the hunger strike caused panic among the prison staff, and the police from Gołdap and Suwałki got ready to intervene in case of an escalation.

On the day of the strike, the women emptied their cells of all the food and placed it in front of their doors. Only a handful of the internees who were sick and exempt from the strike showed up at the prison cafeteria for a meal. Shortly after noon, an evidently very nervous Rolka informed Halina G. about her imminent release.<sup>1009</sup> The women had won: with the help of the local priest, Aleksander Smędzik, who had been offering masses to the prison community, Halina G. drove home by car.<sup>1010</sup> According to Malak, the hunger strike was 'an extremely dramatic event' whose aim was to 'show the power of solidarity.'<sup>1011</sup>

On May 13, the women of Gołdap called for another hunger strike in solidarity with prisoners from Białołęka and against martial law. This time, state authorities reacted more harshly and issued a series of threats, pressuring the women into ending their hunger strike three days later.<sup>1012</sup>

Hunger strikes have for a long time been part of the repertoire of resistance and collective action.<sup>1013</sup> The fact that the women in the camp resorted to a hunger strike in solidarity with

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<sup>1008</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 28.

<sup>1009</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1010</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>1011</sup> Malak, interview 2.

<sup>1012</sup> Ibid., 32-33.

<sup>1013</sup> Begona Aretxaga, 'Striking with Hunger' in *States of Terror* (Reno: Center for Basque Studies, 2005), 31-56.

Halina G. shows that under political incarceration, the boundaries between the private and the political were blurred in the very bodies of the protesting women. Since state violence crept into the most intimate moment of Halina G.'s life by instrumentalizing her personal tragedy, the internees responded as starkly as they could. As the women felt pressured to use whatever weapons they had at their disposal, they turned to what was most intimate and closest to them – their bodies and lives.<sup>1014</sup> By pushing their physical vulnerability to the limit, female internees tried to flip the asymmetrical power relations within the camp and to reclaim the power to make decisions about their own bodies. In that sense, the bodies of these women literally became a site of the political struggle over who controls punishment. Both on the individual and the collective level, hunger striking can therefore be seen as a radical gesture aimed to undo the monopoly of state power within a space seemingly under the total control of the state: internment camp during martial law. In this way, collective self-harm could, paradoxically, serve as a means of reversing state violence. The irreducibly individual decision of a political detainee to use her body as a weapon was both an expression of a deep commitment to the community and a radical form of loyalty with Halina G.

When Audre Lorde said that 'the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house,'<sup>1015</sup> she did not have prison in mind – one of the most literal manifestations of 'the master's house' – but society as a whole. In the latter case, it is certainly true that there is always a choice among a diversity of tactics and tools and that those engaged in political resistance must decide how far they want to and can use 'the master's tools.' In the internment camp under martial law, within the 'master's house', however, there was no such choice, as this total institution aimed to gain total control of the individual and the community and the tools at their disposal. In this regard, hunger strikes occupied an ambivalent position. On the one hand, the prison system subjected the prisoners' bodies to a regime of total control. On the other hand, it is precisely their bodies which turned out to be the only tool of resistance they could lay claim to and turn into a weapon with which to fight for their cause – based on the kind of knowledge about

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<sup>1014</sup> See Banu Bargu, *Starve and Immolate: The Politics of Human Weapons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 1-37; 163-223.

<sup>1015</sup> Audre Lorde, 'The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House,' in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, [1984] 2007), 110-113.



their own situation Lorde so powerfully invokes. However, rather than the individual body in isolation, it is precisely the body in alliance with other bodies which were blocked from appearing in public that could mobilize this form of collective agency.<sup>1016</sup>

The hunger strike in solidarity with Halina G. also had a strongly performative dimension, enacting 'what it seeks to show, and to resist,'<sup>1017</sup> performing a series of gestures, such as clearing the cells of food, refusing to walk to the cafeteria to eat, and articulating demands addressed to the internment camp authorities, the security service and the internees' community, that is, a kind of hidden public, one that is distinct from and invisible to 'the public.' The message that was conveyed to the internees was that they were strong while acting in concert and in solidarity. Hunger striking could therefore be seen as an example of a radical practice of togetherness that had the power to reinforce existing bonds of solidarity among women while challenging the state's control.

The repertoire of collective protest enacted in the camp also included more playful forms of protest such as making noise, singing, mocking, and writing open letters.<sup>1018</sup> Whether the women were opposing bans on radios by ironically performing their hyper-obedience of the rules or by celebrating the monthly anniversary of the implementation of martial law by singing loudly for hours, all these strategies stemmed from the experiences of women had in Solidarność and political opposition that were adapted to the reality of political incarceration. In their attempts to shape their lives in the camp through protest, women relied on a blend of spontaneity, discussions and well-thought out collective action.

Despite exemplifying different ways of coping with and resisting their confinement, all prison protest shared the feature of actively resisting the mistreatment of women. Their protest was both a means of self-defense and a process that bound the community more tightly together. Close ties of friendship and care were put to work turning solidarity into a weapon against and out of loneliness and, in turn, strengthening precisely those ties.

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<sup>1016</sup> See Judith Butler, *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015), 136-137.

<sup>1017</sup> Butler, *Notes*, 137 (the hunger strike as 'bodily enactment'). On the performative dimension of hunger striking in Turkey, see Patrick Anderson, "To Lie Down to Death for Days: The Turkish Hunger Strike, 2000-2003," *Cultural Studies* 18:6 (2004), 816-846.

<sup>1018</sup> AO IV/56.22.16, 30-34.

As my close reading of the report shows, both life in the camp and the response of women response to it was highly complex and organized. Although it was a relatively safe camp with no mutiny and violence among inmates, women who continuously faced anxiety found being part of a community with a cultural and intellectual life to be more than merely a coping strategy. It was also an expression of their political and personal ambitions and their will to survive. Confined and isolated from the outside world, they built strong bonds of mutual care. The community thus performed various functions, from pragmatic ones in the managing and organizing of daily lives to pedagogic ones in helping women advance their education, to existential ones in feeling safe, and political ones in engaging in new forms of resistance. In effect, though, all of these functions were political and thus served to destabilize all-too-rigid distinctions between political resistance and the everyday, the collective and the individual, or the principled and the strategic. In this context, women were punished not only for their political activism but for the transgression of gender norms that such activism involved. It seems as if the political confinement under late socialism in Poland followed a twisted and cruel logic: in order to protect socialism and ‘rehabilitate’ women, the prison’s rules were put into practice in a way that punished women *and* their children, family members and friends who were caught between those incarcerated and the state apparatus.

Despite its virtues as a window into the complex, and usually opaque world of the internment camp, the report also has its limits as a source. In providing a rich and detailed account of community formation and its political manifestations in the internment camp and in emphasizing the importance of rules and organization, it seems to leave little or no room for contingency and disagreement. However, according to Barbara Malak, there were significant disagreements between women from different regions.<sup>1019</sup> Moreover, it is important to note that the report tends to reproduce the perspective of the intellectuals in the camp, which might differ significantly from the experience of activists with a working-class background. Still, the declaration of martial law and the experience of being a prisoner in an internment camp, even if only for a relatively short time, proved to be a life-changing experience with profound consequences for all those involved. In the following section I will show, how Gaja, who was

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<sup>1019</sup> Malak, interview.

among the women detained in Gołdap before being moved to an internment camp in Darłówko, paid the highest price for her and her relatives' involvement in the political opposition.

### *Darłówko and Gaja's Death*

Although the facilities and infrastructure of the internment camps in Gołdap and Darłówko were comparable, living conditions in these camps were somewhat different. The crucial difference was that, unlike Gołdap, Darłówko was a mixed sex internment camp, although, male and female internees or inmates were only allowed to be together during the Sunday mass. The ICRC visited the camp several times. One report of the visit that took place between April 21 and 22 is of special importance as it covers the period when Gaja was held at the camp.<sup>1020</sup> The camp in Darłówko was located in the then Koszalin Voivodship (province) by the Baltic sea and the facilities of the camp used to belong to the sanatorium 'Gniewko.' The camp was fenced in by a fence approximately 2 meters which was under permanent watch. Women occupied the first floor and men the second and the third ones.<sup>1021</sup> In comparison to many other internment camps, living conditions in Darłówko were relatively better as, for instance, windows did not have bars and the rooms or cells had more and better equipment. In each rooms, the internees had at their disposal, among other things, two regular beds with good quality bedding, a wardrobe, bedside table, two ceiling lights, a mirror and pictures.<sup>1022</sup> As in many other camps, the medical service at Darłówko was limited due to the shortage of basic medical device, such as disposable syringes, cotton wool, and medicine such as penicillin and many antibiotics, especially ampicillin. Although internees with medical problems that required more specialized examinations and treatment had been sent to Darłówko, even there, such specialists as psychiatrists, neurologists and radiologists were not available.<sup>1023</sup> What had also come out repeatedly during interviews with the internees were

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<sup>1020</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Darłówko Internment Centre, 20-21 April, 1982; The delegation included: Bernard Grünenfeld, Peter Lütolf (delegates), Dr. M. Brandner (medical delegate), B. Zimmerman (translator). They were accompanied by the representatives of the Polish Red Cross (A. Kukła), liaison officer of the Ministry of Interior (W. Romanowski) and liaison officer of the Ministry of Justice (B. Pawlaczyk).

<sup>1021</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>1022</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1023</sup> Ibid., 5.

complaints about their unclear legal status and the limitations imposed by rules on the internees' freedom of movement within the camp.

Gaja arrived in the internment camp in Darłówko on March 2 as part of a larger transfer of twenty-six female prisoners from Gołdap. During their visit on April 21-22, the delegates of the ICRC learned from some of the internees that the long and unnecessarily unpleasant transfer from Gołdap to Darłówko on March 1 gave rise to a shared discontent among prisoners. Women expressed annoyance at the fact that they left Gołdap at 12.45 pm and arrived in Darłówko at 3 am and that there was only one stop at 5 pm at a prison in Olsztyn. The transferred internees also claimed that the exhausting trip caused illness in two women who, as a result, had to stay in bed for two weeks.<sup>1024</sup>

In the days following their arrival, many of women who came from Gołdap including Gaja complained to Jan Tupko, the visiting judge from Koszalin, about the excessive rigor of prison rules at Darłówko in comparison to the ones that they were used to in Gołdap.<sup>1025</sup> While the internees might have initially seen the inspection visits by judge Tupko as an occasion to voice their criticisms, in his note from the inspection, Tupko portrays the new internees at Darłówko as violating prison rules and thus as disobedient and rebellious subjects. Tupko regretted that the newly transferred women ignored the wake-up calls and evening lockdowns by refusing to turn off all the lights in their rooms or cells by 10 pm. As a result, he noted, up until mid-March punishment was imposed on six women and thirty reports were written on eighteen female internees.<sup>1026</sup> On March 8 and 9, a group of former female prisoners from Gołdap filed an official complaint against the camp rules to the Ministry of Justice. Women also sent a copy of the complaint to the Primate's Support Committee.<sup>1027</sup> The tension between the internees and the guards did not defuse until April 20-21 when the ICRC delegation visited the camp as the delegates raised this issue with major J. Kowalski who was the commandant of the internment camp and with the representatives of the ministries. Despite the neutral character and standardized forms of all the ICRC's reports from visits in internment camps in 1982, perhaps the summary of the

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<sup>1024</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Darłówko Internment Centre, 20-21 April, 1982, 11.

<sup>1025</sup> AIPN BU 529/29, A Note from an inspection visit by judge Jan Tupko, 12 March 1982, 1-2.

<sup>1026</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

<sup>1027</sup> *Ibid.*, 1-2.

final interview between the delegates and the representatives of the prison and state authorities captures, even if a truncated form, a real moment of confrontation. Not only did Major Kowalski admit that there was intense tension between the internees and the guards, he expressed his willingness to act as a mediator between two sides of the conflict.<sup>1028</sup> The final conversation at the end of the visit became a moment in which a highly ranked officer admitted to a third party – an international humanitarian organization – that there was an antagonizing atmosphere in a confinement camp that was not supposed to be a prison. Even though this exchange might have been a purely symbolic or diplomatic gesture, it nevertheless captures the essentially political character of these visits and the reports as they also involved advocacy and negotiations. The reports not only contain first-hand information about the material living conditions but also show how parts of the system of internment worked: the command apparatus becomes clear. Although the prison authority was the addressee of the ICRC's delegation's suggestions and recommendations, ultimately the prison authorities were not in charge. Those who were in charge were other state agencies and institutions.

In a letter written by the unknown author on March 20, 1982 to her colleagues from work, the female author writes that living at Darłówko was slightly harder than in Gołdap as, for instance, women lived in simple cells with shower facilities located in the corridors.<sup>1029</sup> The major problem was the hostility of the prison authorities and strict rules that often did not correspond to the official rules. Women were punished for such mundane things as spending too much time on a meal and not standing straight when ordered by being denied access to daily walks and parcels from family and supporters. Yet, the most severe sanction was not being allowed to have visitors.<sup>1030</sup> The author of the letter was previously held in other internment camps and states that by and large Darłówko was the worst camp. She described the general atmosphere of the prisoners' life as filled with 'lack of a sense of security, continued psychological terror and arbitrary decisions of the prison guards. Nowhere has it been as bad as here.'<sup>1031</sup>

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<sup>1028</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross Report on Darłówko Internment Centre, 20-21 April, 1982, 15.

<sup>1029</sup> AO IV/56.09, Informacja o sytuacji internowanych w Darłówku na podstawie oryginalnego listu od internowanej, 1.

<sup>1030</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>1031</sup> Ibid.

During the ICRC's visit, Gaja underwent a medical examination and the ICRC's doctor M. Brandner made clear that Gaja required additional medical examination due to 'a gynecologic cancer with unknown sources.'<sup>1032</sup> Following the recommendation of the delegates of the ICRC, on May 11 a request was filed to the Komenda Wojewódzka Milicji Obywatelskiej (Provincial Headquarters of the Citizens' Militia or KW MO) for an early release of Gaja Kuroń for medical reasons. As a result, she received a medical release for a period of a month between May 29 and June 29<sup>1033</sup> and on May 30, 1982<sup>1034</sup> she left the camp in Darłówko.

Upon her release she was enjoying her regained freedom while undergoing medical treatment in Łódź where she was taken care of by Marek Edelman.<sup>1035</sup> Ewa Milewicz recalls that Gaja spent her time between living in Edelman's apartment and the hospital in Łódź. In between her medical treatments, Gaja also spent her last months of life in a summer house of her good friend Janina Słusznik (1930-2014) in Kruczy Borek.<sup>1036</sup> During the summer, Gaja visited Kuroń in an internment camp in Warsaw- Białołęka and in his recollection, despite being ill, Gaja seemed fit: 'One summer day, Gaja came to visit me. She was tanned, beautiful, full of life and sex. Jesus, how great did my wife look ... my beautiful wife.'<sup>1037</sup> Despite the fact that Kuroń remembered Gaja as beaming with life, she was slowly dying. In the fall, Kuroń was transferred from Warsaw-Białołęka to a prison in Warsaw-Mokotów and he was only given approval to spend the last evening of her life with her. Although everyone knew that she was about to die, he was not allowed to spend the night with her and was transported back to prison. Upon his arrival at the hospital in Łódź, Marek Edelman informed Kuroń that Gaja was about to die. Kuroń described their last meeting in the following way:

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<sup>1032</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross, 27 April 1982, Working Draft number 25, Appendix 3.

<sup>1033</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, Telex message number 568.

<sup>1034</sup> AIPN PO 161/1, 68.

<sup>1035</sup> Marek Edelman (1919 or 1922-2009) was a Polish-Jewish activist and cardiologist who was also one of the leaders of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in 1943.

<sup>1036</sup> Ewa Milewicz, interview, 29 August, 2017.

<sup>1037</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Spoko! Czyli kwadratura koła,' in *Kuroń: Autobiografia* (Warsaw: Krytyka Polityczna, [1992] 2011), 762.

She had a respiratory machine in her mouth. She was so beautiful. So smart. We talked about something but it did not bear any meaning. I remember each word and I remember what I told myself deep inside of me. Everything lost meaning. I felt as if I was deceived. Because everything that I have done in my life, I did it for her. Prison sentences, Solidarność – everything was for her. To whom am I supposed to give all of this? Why I do need all of this? I don't need any of this. ... She had problems breathing. I didn't know how to help her. I didn't know anything.<sup>1038</sup>

After November 23, 1982, the day that Gaja died, the cause of her death became a subject of speculations and discussions among her friends.<sup>1039</sup> Although the archival material from the internment camp suggests it might have been cancer, many of her friends take the cause to have been idiopathic pulmonary fibrosis.<sup>1040</sup> On the night of her death Kuroń was in a prison cell. As he was struggling to come to terms with the enormity of the situation, he recalled walking back and forth, talking to himself about how his destiny had tricked him. When the night arrived, he had felt pain the whole night until it stopped and this is when, he believed, Gaja died.<sup>1041</sup> Gaja's death was one of the saddest and most traumatizing events for Kuroń and his and Gaja's circle of friends. Ewa Milewicz thinks that had Gaja not been imprisoned, she would have lived a bit longer.<sup>1042</sup> Wiktor Woroszyński (1927-1996)<sup>1043</sup> was a writer, poet and friend of the family who was held at the same camp in Darłówko and was released on October 18 due to a worsening health condition.<sup>1044</sup> Woroszyński gave the funeral eulogy on November 26, paying tribute to Gaja by describing her in the following way:

If loyalty and solidarity exist, then who if not Gaja was an embodiment of them both? If there is cheerfulness, persistence, adamancy, compassion, and readiness to bear a burden

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<sup>1038</sup> Ibid., 766.

<sup>1039</sup> Milewicz, interview, 29 August, 2017.

<sup>1040</sup> Bikont and Łuczywo, *Jacek*, 548.

<sup>1041</sup> Kuroń, 'Spoko!', 766.

<sup>1042</sup> Milewicz, interview, 29 August, 2017.

<sup>1043</sup> For a rich story of his life, see Wiktor Woroszyński, *Dzienniki*, Vol. 1 & Vol. 2 (Warsaw: Ośrodek KARTA, 2017-18).

<sup>1044</sup> AIPN BU 529/27, The International Committee of the Red Cross, 26 August 1982, Working Draft number 58, Appendix 1.

that is heavier than what a human can bear, confidence, and dedication – to family, friends, people ... – then all of this will be kept in our memory in association with Gaja’s delicate face. She was someone who would not like to be in the spotlight and although she was living in the shadows she beamed with light and warmth that turned the world around her more human and livable. Everyone around her, beginning with those close to her and up to those who met her only briefly, absorbed her light and warmth and thanks to her became brighter, warmer, different – simply better. ... She was a kind friend and a hospitable host. Who among us who had ever crossed the doorstep of the 27 Mickiewicza Street apartment did not enjoy Gaja’s attention? She was a hard-working and committed assistant and adviser to her husband. Although these are all mundane things, they convey something special.<sup>1045</sup>

The quotation highlights Gaja’s hospitality and warmth which could be viewed as part of household work. By addressing Gaja’s role in providing a haven for political opposition, Woroszyński shed light on a type of work that usually remains invisible. In a way, Gaja’s labor of love was like a glue that held everything together – Gaja was holding her home and, thus, by extension also the dissident milieu together. Woroszyński depicted her as a hero with a typically Polish destiny, a history filled with the imprisonment of her family and herself. For him, hers was a political biography. As if trying to nuance the oversimplified assumption that Gaja could be easily locked into a subordinate role, he added that ‘since years she belonged to a milieu, an environment that was formed by a moral and intellectual imperative, and a complex reflection on society ... She was an important member of this milieu: she was humble and reserved, she was a partner to the best’<sup>1046</sup> Woroszyński’s eulogy also humanized Gaja by recalling her emotional attitude and character: ‘she was demanding, strict, and anger and pitifulness were not alien to her. But I do think that what was alien to her were hatred and contempt.’<sup>1047</sup> The funeral speech

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<sup>1045</sup> Wiktor Woroszyński, Listopad 1982, *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, 2.

<sup>1046</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1047</sup> Ibid.



ended with the following affectionate words: 'If love exists then this is how we should remember Gaja: she was love. Farewell, our dearest and unforgettable.'<sup>1048</sup>

While Woroszyński portrayed Gaja first and foremost as a member of the political opposition who performed a fundamental role in keeping the milieu together, she was also a friend close to many political activists. Gaja's life epitomizes an important, and yet often omitted, dimension of the late socialist political opposition, namely the unofficial labor of love and community building that happened behind the scenes, or on that other scene of everyday practices of care, that was so crucial to what happened in public.

Barbara Malak who was in the same internment camp in Olszynka Grochowska and Gołdap at the same time as Gajka and many other female activists, recalls that she learned about Gaja's death from their friend Paula Sawicka. Malak took the sad news very badly as, despite the fact that she was closer to Jacek than to Gaja, she got along with Gaja very well and respected her.<sup>1049</sup> Ewa Milewicz was also informed about Gaja's death by Paula Sawicka and was shocked. As she describes, Gaja's death was a loss for the milieu as a whole because:

Gaja was right in the center of the milieu. Everyone knew that Gaja had such an enormous impact on Jacek. They had a very strong bond. For Jacek, she was his bedrock. Not only was she absolutely loyal but also she helped keep Jacek grounded when he was flying away with his ideas. For the milieu she was part of him. She was an amazing person. She always knew what needs to be done and when. To me, she was an oracle. I once wanted to join a hunger strike in May 1977 in St. Martin's Church in Warsaw and Gaja told me that if something happened to me, I would be a burden to the cause. I did not even cross my mind to go against her will. Although she was not a member of KOR she meant more and did more than many KOR members.<sup>1050</sup>

In a similar vein, Jan Lityński sees the premature death of Gaja as having an enormous impact on Jacek as their relationship had a distinctive character of its own as 'Jacek was co-existing with

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<sup>1048</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1049</sup> Malak, interview.

<sup>1050</sup> Milewicz, interview, August 29, 2017.

Gaja since forever. He was so dependent on her, he could not function without her. She grounded him. Without Gaja, Jacek was not the same.<sup>1051</sup> Zbigniew Bujak makes a larger point about the gender relations within the milieu: 'it is hard to understand Jacek's successes without seeing the role played by women. If you took them away, there would be no Jacek or you would end up with a completely different person. Female activists such as Gaja Kuroń, Helena Łuczywo, Anka Kowalska, Aniela Streinsbergerowa, Halina Mikołajska, Ewa Kulik and many others have shaped us.'<sup>1052</sup>

Seweryn Blumsztajn, who was then in France organizing financial support for the interneers, wrote a touching obituary in the émigré journal *Aneks*, pointing out that although the cycles of political activism seem to be repeating themselves like in a bad dream – with imprisonment being preceded and followed by hate campaigns against political opposition – something felt fundamentally different and that was because Gaja was gone. As he put it 'with Gaja's death, some things just ended.'<sup>1053</sup> As it was pointed out in the previous chapters of this thesis, for many activists, Gaja stood for a sense of belonging and provided a home to many of them. By being Jacek's and the milieu's anchor, Gaja was the backbone of the political opposition.

Along similar lines, Ewa Kulik recalls her feelings and thoughts surrounding Gaja's death in the following way:

That was terrible. We were hiding and I knew she was ill and that after leaving the internment camp she spent some time at home and then left to Łódź. We all knew it was a strange disease, a bacteria. I was so extremely close to Gaja. She replaced my mother after I moved from Kraków to Warsaw because when I left Kraków I broke the ties with my mother. Gaja was a bit like mom and a bit like an older sister. We lived together for a bit and we were so close to each other. For her I was like... you know, she never had a daughter and she *ucórkowita*<sup>1054</sup> me. Gaja's death was horrible and I felt that for Jacek this

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<sup>1051</sup> Lityński, interview, August 30, 2017.

<sup>1052</sup> Bujak, interview.

<sup>1053</sup> Blumsztajn, 'Gajka,' 235.

<sup>1054</sup> *Ucórkowita* is a past form of a neologism or portmanteau created by Kulik that blends two words: *usynowić* which means to adopt, to turn someone into one's son and *córka* which means a daughter. *Ucórkowić* means to adopt someone and to turn that person into one's daughter.

marked the end of the world. They were so close. He kept on saying that, but in fact he didn't have to say it, everything he did was for Gaja, to impress her so that she would always admire him. We knew that when they let him out of the prison to see her for the last time and then to attend her funeral his world collapsed and that it will be very difficult for him to pull himself together in this new world without Gaja.<sup>1055</sup>

Kulik's use of the portmanteau *ucórkowiła* in her testimony reveals the intimate and gendered dimension of their relationship. Gaja's death was experienced by Kulik as a catastrophic turning point after which there was no turning back. Since Kulik and her partner Konrad Bieliński had been hiding they were not able to go see Gaja in person, leaving Kulik not alternative to writing two letters, one to Gaja and one to Jacek. In the letter to Jacek, Kulik told him that Gaja was more important to Kulik than Jacek, which confirms the closeness and strength of her bond with Gaja. Kulik also adds that she knows from Gaja's doctor Marek Edelman that Gaja loved her.<sup>1056</sup>

Even if women were not among the main leaders of the political opposition, their commitment and participation was as important and deep as that of men. Gaja's death was a reminder that women shared the same vulnerable lives and risks of being a dissidents and, ultimately, some of them paid the same – the highest possible – price for their political opposition.

Stanisław Barańczak (1946-2014), a well-known contemporary Polish poet, wrote a poem dedicated to Gaja in November 1982 that best reflects the struggle in understanding and accepting her death:

*Grażynie* (For Grażyna)

To remember about the cigarettes. To always have them around.

Ready to be inserted in his pocket when he is being taken away.

To know by heart all the rules about visits and parcels.

To know the art of forcing face muscles to form a smile.

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<sup>1055</sup> Kulik, interview.

<sup>1056</sup> Kulik, interview.

To cut a policeman's shout short with one cold gaze.  
To calmly brew tea when they are gutting the drawers.  
To send letters from the camp or hospital to say that everything is fine.  
So many skills, so much perfection. I mean it.  
...  
They should be awarded with immortality.  
Or at least with its imperfect version, life.  
Death. No, this is not serious, I refuse it.  
You dealt with way more difficult issues.  
If there was anyone I admired, it was you.<sup>1057</sup>

The verses read like an ordinary conversation between him and Gaja in her apartment on Mickiewicza Street in which he tries to convince her that she should not die but stay with everyone, alive. In his poem Barańczak reveals multiple layers of political activism rooted in everyday life somewhere between doing chores and pushing one's own boundaries. It is also precisely because of the daily bureaucratic battles that Gaja had to fight that she was so respected and dear to her friends. While for Barańczak, political opposition encompassed everything that Gaja did, it seems as if death, as part of the price paid for activism, was stubbornly being denied. The boldness of the poem makes it neither exclusively about loss nor death as it also conveys the truth usually covered by a taboo of the underbelly of the political opposition: fear of death. Barańczak writes about Gaja without mythologizing her. In the poem, the glaring accuracies of the description pictures the abrupt shift that comes with death when the familiarity of Gaja's everyday life becomes unnerving. Reassuring objects, such as parcels and tea, are confronted with small unsettling gestures: gutted drawers and a forced smile that echo the unspeakable truth about the risks of political involvement that bound members of the milieu together.

In the weeks after Gaja's funeral, around Christmas, Jacek Kuroń wrote to his family from prison a reflective letter in the form of a story titled *Opowieść Wigilijna o miłości czyli o Gajce* (A Christmas Story on Love meaning on Gajka). In recalling his life with Gaja, he wrote:

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<sup>1057</sup> Stanisław Barańczak, *Wiersze zebrane*, (Kraków: a5, 2006), 286-287.

The more our love is open to the world, the bigger, the more diverse and the less prone to turning into ashes and death our love is. ... Living with so little intimacy as I had, I was paralyzed by Gaja's death just as all aspects of my life were. I lost my drive. I lived the way I lived only with her and for her. I wouldn't dare to recommend to anyone our way of opening up to the world.<sup>1058</sup>

Documenting his confrontation with the painful moment of rethinking his political choices and the consequences that followed for his life and his relationship with Gaja, Kuroń's *mea culpa* inevitably conjured up a sense of guilt. The letter that was addressed to his closest family ended with the following sentences:

Christmas night. It's cold and dark outside. The light and warmth is in us. ... Even in this Christmas night we know that love is not a feast. Love is work. It is also pain, fear, anger, sorrow, and worry... Right here and right now I know: Love is immortal, it's only life that is too short.<sup>1059</sup>

The letter is rife with emotions and embodies Kuroń's struggle with depression, mourning, and loss. As his life crumbled after Gaja's death, he had to continue living in a prison where he stayed until July 1984. In September 1982, the main figures in political opposition associated with KOR: Jacek Kuroń, Jan Lityński (who escaped in June 1983), Adam Michnik, Zbigniew Romaszewski, Henryk Wujec and later in December 1982 the members of the National Committee of Solidarność: Andrzej Gwiazda, Seweryn Jaworski, Marian Jurczyk, Karol Modzelewski, Grzegorz Palka, Andrzej Rozpłochowski, Jan Rulewski were charged with the intention to overthrow the political system of the Polish People's Republic. This resulted in a change in their legal status as they were not internees anymore but prisoners. Throughout the years that they spent under arrest while awaiting trial, the state and the Catholic Church attempted to work out a

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<sup>1058</sup> Maria Krawczyk, ed., *Listy jak dotyk: Jacek i Gaja Kuroniowe* (Warsaw: Ośrodek KARTA, 2014), 322.

<sup>1059</sup> *Ibid.*, 323.

compromise. All offers made by the state were rejected by the political prisoners as they involved disavowing all political activity on their side. For instance, in 1983 General Czesław Kiszczak, who also headed the Ministry of the Interior, offered Michnik and Kuroń an opportunity to leave the country – an offer that they both declined. Under growing pressure from the international media such as *The Guardian*, *Libération*, *The Times*, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, *L'Osservatore Romano* and *Basler Zeitung*,<sup>1060</sup> which were all providing coverage of the trial, as well as the Catholic Church, on the second day of the trial on July 18, 1984, the defendants were granted political amnesty. Together with others, Jacek Kuroń was released.

When he returned to his apartment on Mickiewicza Street he noticed that 'I left prison and there was no martial law. Gaja was there no more and with her a part of me died. And although I was still there, I lived, I was involved in political actions, and I was writing, at the same time I wasn't there.'<sup>1061</sup> Szczęsna notes a striking continuity in Kuroń's personality in the period around Gaja's death: 'Jacek was not afraid to show his emotions, to cry, and to loudly show his despair. It probably didn't even cross his mind that he should try to tame them and that maybe he should not show some of his emotions. ... this would be against his nature.'<sup>1062</sup> After being released from prison, Barbara Malak was one among the friends who continued to visit him to keep him company. Although Kuroń still had a relatively large number of visitors, the flat was neglected and felt different. Given Malak's professional training as a psychologist, Kuroń was convinced that she would be able to understand his predicament. She recalls how she was regularly paying him a visit. They usually ended up spending time listening to his stories about Gaja:

I was worried that he might have problems with drinking. He was going through a terrible time. When he was released I was spending time with him because he thought that as a psychologist I will understand him. He was constantly talking about Gaja. Day after day, I was coming around the same time and he would tell me about Gajka. Sometimes he would

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<sup>1060</sup> Andrzej Friszke, *Sprawa jedenastu. Uwięzienie przywódców NSZZ "Solidarność" i KSS "KOR" 1981-1984* (Kraków: Znak, 2017), 592-593.

<sup>1061</sup> Kuroń, 'Spoko!', 763.

<sup>1062</sup> Szczęsna, interview.

keep on retelling me the same stories all over again. He just had to talk. He needed to process what happened.

After two very intense years Kuroń was then facing the scale and effects of his continued involvement in the political opposition. As Henryk Wujec emphasizes, observing Jacek mourning Gaja's death and suffering from missing her was terribly painful to watch.<sup>1063</sup> That Malak and others supported Kuroń during these dark times is an expression of how their milieu shared the burden of grief and collective mourning and helped him process the situation. Although the apartment on Mickiewicza Street was not bustling with life as it used to, its intimacy was again used as a shield and tool against individual sadness. Konstanty Gebert recounts how overwhelmed he was when Kuroń left prison, it felt like a nightmare and Gebert did not know how to help Kuroń and so Gebert decided to keep a distance.<sup>1064</sup> Although some people continued to come to the Mickiewicza apartment to visit Kuroń, everything was different according to Gebert. To help reconfigure pain and loss into something else was a difficult task for Kuroń's friends and collaborators. Ultimately, their sense of being lost was as much about Gaja's death as it was about the disappearance of the pre-martial law world. In the second half of the 1980s, the Regional Executive Committee RKW and the Temporary Coordination Committee TTK played a prominent role in setting the tone of underground activism and as Kuroń was not a member in any of them, his political engagement slowed down significantly.<sup>1065</sup> While still being active, Kuroń endured wretched years marked by difficulties until he met his second wife, Danuta.

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<sup>1063</sup> Henryk and Ludwika Wujec, interview, August 16, 2019, Warsaw (Poland).

<sup>1064</sup> Konstanty Gebert, interview, June 3, 2017.

<sup>1065</sup> Lityński, interview.

## Conclusion

Despite the more complex picture painted by recent historical research on the political opposition to communist power, the majority of historians as well as commentators in Polish post-1989 mainstream political and media discourse still tend to identify and focus on the ‘carnival of Solidarność’ and other turning points as the decisive episodes in the history of the political opposition. As a result, historians have neglected the extent to which the main figures of the political opposition like Jacek Kuroń were shaped by long-term trajectories of activism and drew on the seemingly unimportant everyday micro-histories and shared commitments of their lesser-known collaborators, friends and family members.<sup>1066</sup> Consequently, in order to understand the complexity of political mobilization in late socialist Poland, it is not enough to focus on spectacular public acts or trace the roots of the opposition through the narrow history of state policy or intellectual history. Thus, while the communist past has been a prominent topic of publicly visible historical research and its political interpretations, the personal affinity with, and transformative appropriation of communist ideology and its values – such as a pedagogy and politics built on solidarity and cooperation – in the practice of the opposition stands in need of further critical analysis, especially in light of the mobilizing force of these value commitments.

In this dissertation I have explored how the political opposition both in its emergence and its unfolding relied on everyday practices of togetherness and shared forms of life. Taking the case of Jacek Kuroń and his milieu as a vantage point, I have reconstructed how extraordinary practices of political mobilization in late socialist Warsaw were anchored in ordinary bonds of friendship, affective pedagogies first developed in scout troops, practices of care, and forms of emotional attachment that, in turn, constituted intimate and elaborate micro-structures of being together. This robust political experience and collective life was deeply entangled with intellectual critique, collective political action and the channeling of emotional engagement. At the heart of this political formation were emotions and affective commitments such as loyalty, care, and love, all of which informed both everyday practices and extraordinary political actions. The close-knit

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<sup>1066</sup> For one of the most prominent accounts pointing out this neglected dimension of the political opposition, see Wałęsa, *Marzenia i tajemnice*.



yet essentially open political community around Kuroń functioned as an emotionally stabilizing force as relying on one another and practices of togetherness provided everyday 'weapons of the weak' which were shaped by, but also turned against extreme vulnerability.<sup>1067</sup> In this political space, the established dividing lines between supposedly private relations of friendship, care and love, and public political engagement were undermined and reconfigured, building on bridging practices such as pedagogy which mediate between the community and the individual. As Kuroń wrote in 1981/1982, 'to care about the collective interests of a community is perhaps the fullest realization of love towards other human beings; it is a form of a far-sighted, wise and noble love.'<sup>1068</sup> In an interview from 1986, Kuroń comes back to this point and reformulates it in terms of social roles:

A person cannot bear being reduced to only one role in life – a person will always look for relationships with others in which he or she won't be reduced to having to perform only one role. A person will try to change the world so that he or she can always be himself or herself. So people connect to others in and through activities that I call social movements that are anchored in personal bonds – namely in love – that can remold and create a new world.<sup>1069</sup>

Although Kuroń never produced an overarching discourse on personality development or a theory of action, being together buttressed by joint action lied at the heart of his political and social vision. As much as the fullness of life can be captured only when a person performs multiple roles, the figure of the political activist meant and stood for many things but always together with others, never alone. The political milieu around Kuroń allowed for practices of political opposition to be built from the ground up in ways that were always anchored in everyday interactions and personal relationships without relying on a closed and exclusionary communitarian logic.

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<sup>1067</sup> The notion of 'weapons of the weak' is taken from James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

<sup>1068</sup> Jacek Kuroń, 'Zło które czynię,' *Krytyka* 10/11 (1981-1982), 160.

<sup>1069</sup> AO III/12.K.5, 'Taki upór,' 11.

The study of Kuroń and his milieu illuminates the extent to which the political opposition came with its own understanding of the world that was articulated in its rituals, vocabulary, political passions, personal and emotional engagements and commitments, and bonds of solidarity, all of which encompassed a diverse repertoire of contestation ranging from collective cooking via bypassing censorship and street protesting to hunger striking. In other words, the milieu was integrated by a shared material and immaterial political culture that was backed by, and in turn shaped oppositional consciousness and mentality. Understanding the discourse of the political opposition requires knowledge of when and where certain vocabularies, signs, and rituals emerged, how and why they continued to be invoked, and how they fit together. In other words, the grammars of oppositional practices of togetherness have to be studied in a holistic manner, without isolating and privileging certain elements such as intellectual interventions. By focusing on the complex dynamics that enabled the emergence and sustained the reproduction of political mobilization, we can see Kuroń's life, the lives of his friends and their joint political activism as giving rise to a more complex and multi-layered story of thinking and doing the seemingly impossible – of resisting through survival, through a self-organized network of everyday care and support, and through political actions that more easily fit established frames of interpreting political activism. In mapping the personal, intellectual and social world of the political opposition without separating these strands from one another in an artificial way, my goal has been to compel us to broaden our understanding of extra-institutional participatory politics and modes of resistance in late socialist Poland. To recast the framework within which grassroots political mobilization is examined involves challenging what counts as political opposition, who is a dissident, where practices of dissidence take place, and what drives and sustains them.

Just as knowing the life stories of figures like Kuroń is crucial for understanding the entanglement of personal bonds and socialist ideas, the history of political activism in late-socialist Warsaw would be incomplete without considering Kuroń's closest collaborators and the ways in which they formed an 'affective community' that sustained his and their activism. The emotional habitus of the group around Kuroń then comes into view as a set of communicable emotional and social attitudes and commitments that allowed its members to capture and enhance their emotive states. Moreover, the specific habitus of the milieu served as a buffer zone

in which the group recognized and authorized itself through the practices of care that the members engaged in. In that way, the emotional habitus and its temporary emotional effects, such as the intimate and safe space Jacek and Gaja created in their apartment, contributed to a kind of affective disobedience.

Gaja's own life is revealing in this respect as it highlights central dynamics of the everyday reality of the political opposition, especially the value of care for the political milieu's reproduction, as she contributed to the community in manifold ways. Her commitment cannot be narrowly viewed as an expression of ethical obligation or a gift from a loving and caring person but is, perhaps, better captured as a labor of love that should be seen as a dissident activity in its own right rather than reinscribing it in a naturalized and gendered vision of the political. Her role thus provides a paradigmatic example of how affective disobedience and community formation went hand in hand.

The type of dissidence that emerged out of Kuroń's milieu also produced empowering experiences and meanings which acted contrary to the intention of the state. In Warsaw in the 1970s, this process often took place in opposition to what can be called 'public emotions',<sup>1070</sup> in this case, the officially endorsed display of public feelings of joy and accepted attitudes of indifference to the sphere of the political that actually veiled the unarticulated acceptance of a communist system and its ideology. Furthermore, the emotional habitus offers an account of emotional 'training' – or an affective pedagogy – which was part of a more encompassing process of attuning oneself to and distancing oneself from the rules of the social game that first took shape in the shared scouting experience of the *Walterowcy*.

As the burgeoning literature on the history of youth and politics in Europe underscores, the youth came to stand at the center of newly formed political realities, imaginaries and practices. This took various forms, from popular education and ideological formation to alleviating child suffering and displacement.<sup>1071</sup> In the Poland of the 1950s it also opened up a

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<sup>1070</sup> See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

<sup>1071</sup> See, for instance, Laura Lee Downs, *Childhood in the Promised Land: Working-Class Movements and the Colonies de Vacances in France, 1880–1960* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002); Tara Zahra, *The Lost Children: Reconstructing Europe's Families after World War II* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011); Tom Junes, *Student Politics in Communist Poland: Generations of Consent and Dissent* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2015).

new political space that would become a significant part of the historical genealogy of dissident practices. The history of the Walterowcy, with its strong current of left-wing politics and its stress on cooperation and the active involvement of children, shaped the childhoods of many of Kuroń's future collaborators. The educational, ideological and personal aims were imbricated in the figure of the young scout from the Walterowcy troops as they developed from the mid 1950s. This confluence of practices and goals – as shared templates and personalized historical reference points – proved to be generative for the specific milieu around Jacek and Gaja Kuroń with its distinctive political consciousness, vision *and* a set of emotional and cultural dispositions and commitments.

From the perspective of collective care and affective labor, public acts of disobedience in late socialist Poland can be situated in the context of intimate practices of everyday care and close social relations, which are too often excluded from historical accounts because they are relegated to the 'private' realm and thus deemed inapt.<sup>1072</sup> Referring to samizdat culture, Susan Gal describes seemingly 'private' activities as an 'anti-politics' centered around the 'public-inside-the-private as a significant dissident gesture.'<sup>1073</sup> What is essential to this type of 'anti-political' politics is the persistent insertion and creation of public spaces within presumably private spaces such as homes. This accords with Starczewska's claim that Kuroń and Gaja gave their apartment to the political cause so that it was, in fact, a public space and his phone could be viewed as a public channel of communication.<sup>1074</sup> The apartment on Mickiewicza Street was an ambivalent and peculiar space. It was in some ways public, by virtue of its constant exposure to the control, gaze and ears of the secret police and the fact that everyone who wanted to could enter it, and in some ways it was highly intimate, as it provided shelter and a meaningful sense of home for many young people.

The notion of the habitus has been challenged for providing an overly objectified, totalizing and unified understanding of society, which leaves little room for understanding and

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<sup>1072</sup> See also Lewis H. Siegelbaum, 'Introduction: Mapping Private Spheres in the Soviet Context,' in Lewis H. Siegelbaum, ed., *Borders of Socialism: Private Spheres of Soviet Russia* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 1-24.

<sup>1073</sup> Susan Gal, 'A Semiotics of the Public/Private Distinction,' *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 13, 2002, 1, 89.

<sup>1074</sup> Starczewska, interview.

explaining social change and inconsistencies.<sup>1075</sup> The relationships and practices of togetherness in which the milieu around Jacek and Gaja was enmeshed exemplify that emotions and a sense of care for one another existed in concrete times and spaces, minds and bodies, and had a dynamizing effect, leading to a habitus that was transformative rather than stabilizing. Thanks to this embeddedness and concrete materiality, emotional attachments to others and to ethical and political ideas formed a resource that allowed the members of the milieu to exert control over their lives within and against the existing social structures of late socialist Poland. Relying on an intersection of resources and mental schemes from political cultures that could be traced back to previous decades and past experiences, prominently the pedagogical practices and commitments first developed within the *Walterowcy*, the political opposition applied these to new contexts and, in so doing, they co-created as much as they went along with and against social changes. Rather than simply expanding the notion of habitus by including emotions, reconstructing Kuroń's milieu in terms of its 'emotional habitus' thus serves to dynamize the notion of the habitus and make it less totalizing by inserting it into the emotional dynamics underlying political activism.

In more general terms, such an analysis of the political opposition raises the question of how to conceptualize the relationship between the social and the political sphere. Social and political order depends on and is produced and reproduced by institutions. As a result of the end of the 'Polish October,' March '68 and the crushing of *Solidarność* prior to 1989, the sphere of politics was locked in institutions that were often – due to their political nature – not seen as a politically, socially and ethically relevant field in which citizens could seek political representation or participation. For precisely this reason, citizens did not always turn to institutions to, for instance, fight for their rights or for social justice.<sup>1076</sup> For Kuroń, as for most of the members of the opposition, the political therefore came to be seen as a moment that occurred outside of the realm of state institutions and the politics they represented. It was a moment that had to be built in grassroots social and political work that was close and relevant to members of the community because 'every one of us is a social person – as he or she can realize his or her aspirations through

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<sup>1075</sup> William H. Sewell, Jr., *Logics of History: Social Theory and Social Transformation* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 2005), 139.

<sup>1076</sup> For a somewhat different take on how the socialist state was, in fact, weak, see Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 19-39.

and thanks to social collaboration.<sup>1077</sup> In that sense, self-organization that aimed to activate people – in the form of scouting camps, social movements, autonomous trade unions, networks of support – in the social sphere functioned as a precondition for the political moment to arrive and to disrupt and reconfigure politics as usual. As political moments were fleeting in the absence of an institutionalized politics that would provide uptake and support, this also implied that the boundaries between the social and the political became permeable as these two domains – rather than being autonomous from one another – were interconnected and at times overlapped. Strictly opposing civil society to the sphere of the political, or speaking of an ‘anti-politics,’ thus requires further elaboration if it is not to be misleading.

At the same time, one has to be wary of the risk of the ‘overpoliticization’ of the social sphere. The genesis, endurance and nurturing of a radical political potential was embedded in seemingly innocuous everyday practices of and commitments to the political opposition, such as providing shelter to activists in hiding. Yet, it would be a case of conceptual overstretch to fuse the social with the political in a way that masked the need to decide what to include in and what to exclude from the history of the political opposition. That everything is connected might be true on one level but is analytically counterproductive. Thus, ‘overpoliticizing’ the social should be avoided as should be the tendency to exceptionalize and purify moments of the political, which can lead to isolating them from their social enabling and limiting conditions. As I hope to have shown, it is also this balance that Kuroń tried to find, both on an intellectual and conceptual as well as on a practical and political level. For him, this balance was to be found not in an abstract way but in responding to the local challenges he and his milieu were facing. The commitment that remained constant over time, however, was inextricably and at the same time political and social and the practices it animated blurred established distinctions between the private and the public.

In identifying key components of political mobilization and its multiple, often competing, dynamics it is inevitable that certain aspects and actors fall out of the scope of the analysis. Future possible research could expand the analysis developed here to include the role of political friendships and bonds within the Catholic milieu or the overlaps and differences with the milieu around Adam Michnik in the 1960s. In addition, the perspective of this thesis could also give rise

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<sup>1077</sup> Kuroń, ‘Zło,’ 166.

to new questions regarding Kuroń's relationship with Adam Michnik and the role of the Catholic Church from the late 1970s onwards.

The argument of this thesis begins with how socialism and the pedagogical practice in socialist scout troops enabled the young Kuroń and his pupils to create a common ground to exchange ideas and to develop shared practices to bring about a new and just world. For them, in the late 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, socialism became associated with scout trips, pedagogical experimentation, and the establishment of bonds of friendships that would last a long time and that fused ethical, social and political commitments. Belonging to the political opposition provided tools for meaningful forms of self-fashioning like membership in the *Walterowcy* and the milieu's adaptation of its methods to changing political circumstances helped it to orient its political action. By unveiling the historically specific activities of the oppositional milieu around Kuroń – and by identifying some of the core values attributed to them by activists – my goal was to contribute towards a more inclusive and complex understanding of the political opposition

As much as the story of the political opposition in Poland is a story of shared interests and bonds, it is also a story of loose ends and conflicts as being in opposition meant very different things to different members. As the thesis attempted to show, communal bonds and emotional commitments – together with political actions in the public sphere and intellectual interventions – were at the heart of political mobilization. As Jacek wrote to Gaja from prison sometime in the second half of 1965:

The thought of growing apart from those who are close to me, from one another, from those who are together is more dreading to me than partings, prison, and, who knows, maybe even death. When everything that they had in common atrophies – slowly, day by day, almost invisibly they become alien to one another. But everything that they went through together links and binds them together ... I'm thinking, *I know*, that this cannot threaten us. Day by day we become closer to each other – what is between us is fuller and more beautiful than ever before – and it has already been full and beautiful.<sup>1078</sup>

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<sup>1078</sup> AO III 12/K, Letter from Jacek Kuroń to Grażyna Kuroń from 1965, no 14.

## Annex

### *Interviews*

Zygmunt Bauman and Aleksandra Kania	June 30, 2015, Leeds (UK), 57 mins.
Konrad Bieliński	December 17, 2016, Warsaw (Poland), 124 mins.
Anna Bikont	February 15, Warsaw (Poland), 2015, 72 mins.
Seweryn Blumsztajn	February 27, Warsaw (Poland), 2015, 45 mins.
Zbigniew Bujak	September 10, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 66 mins.
Anna Dodziuk	February 26, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 87 mins.
Konstanty Gebert	September 28, 2016, Warsaw (Poland), 91 mins. December 16, 2016, Warsaw (Poland), 93 mins. June 13, 2017, Warsaw (Poland), 59 mins.
Irena Grudzińska Gross	January 20, 2015, New York City (USA), 75 mins.
Anna Hertzberg	February 25, 2016, New York City (USA), 63 mins.
Ewa Kulik-Bielińska	December 16, 2016, Warsaw (Poland), 103 mins.
Jan Lityński	September 9, 2016, Warsaw (Poland), 61 mins. August 30, 2017, Warsaw (Poland), 63 mins.
Helena Łuczywo	January 3, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 65 mins.
Małgorzata Łukasiewicz	September 13, 2019, Warsaw (Poland), 70 mins.
Barbara Malak	September 7, 2017, Amsterdam (The Netherlands), 97 mins. July 12, 2019, Amsterdam (The Netherlands), 51 mins.
Adam Michnik	October 8, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 49 mins.
Ewa Milewicz	September 26, 2016, Warsaw (Poland), 98 mins. August 28, 2017, Warsaw (Poland), 112 mins.
Karol Modzelewski	February 18, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 96 mins.
Aleksander Perski	October 22, 2016, Lucca (Italy), 98 mins.



Marta Petrusiewicz	October 21, 2015, Rome (Italy), 153 mins.
Włodzimierz Rabinowicz	November 11, 2016, Lund (Sweden), 74 mins.
Andrzej Rapaczyński	March 25, 2016, New York City (USA), 83 mins.
Mirosław Sawicki and Paula Sawicka	November 13, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 90 mins.
Aleksander Smolar	October 11, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 40 mins. December 11, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 70 mins.
Paweł Smoleński	August 3, 2016, Warsaw (Poland), 83 mins.
Krystyna Starczewska	June 8, 2017, Warsaw (Poland), 73 mins.
Joanna Szczęsna	February 16, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 115 mins.
Barbara Toruńczyk	February 27, 2015, Warsaw (Poland), 67 mins.
Klaudiusz Weiss	April 16, 2016, New York City (USA), 55 mins.
Ludwika Wujec and Henryk Wujec	December 12, 2016, Warsaw (Poland), 135 mins.
Ludwika Wujec and Henryk Wujec	August 16, 2019, Warsaw (Poland).
Ludwika Wujec	September 11, 2019, Warsaw (Poland), 89 mins.

### *Archives*

Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warsaw (Poland)

Institute of National Remembrance

Archiwum Opozycji Ośrodka KARTA, Warsaw (Poland)

Archive of the Political Opposition Ośrodek KARTA

Gabinet Rękopisów Biblioteki Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego

The University of Warsaw Library Department of Manuscripts, Warsaw (Poland)

Archiwum Instytutu Literackiego, Kultura Paryska, Maisons-Laffitte (France)

Archive of the Literary Institute Kultura Paryska

Archiwum Związku Harcerstwa Polskiego, Warsaw (Poland)

Archive of the Polish Scouting and Guiding Association

*Newspapers*

*Aneks*

*Biuletyn Informacyjny KOR*

*Bratniak*

*Drużyna*

*Gazeta Wyborcza*

*Głos*

*Harcerstwo*

*Krytyka*

*Kultura*

*New York Times*

*Nowa Kultura*

*Polityka*

*Po Prostu*

*Przyjaciółka*

*Słowo Powszechne*

*Der Spiegel*

*Trybuna Ludu*

*Tygodnik Mazowsze*

*Zapis*

*Zeszyty Historyczne*

*Żołnierz Wolności*

*Życie Warszawy*

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