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The Ongoing Miracle and its Historical Roots¹

Introduction: ‘Remembrance of Miracles Past’

Solidarity is a ‘miracle.’ How otherwise could we describe a phenomenon whereby strangers put radical amounts of trust in each other, enter into demanding cooperation together, and thus give rise to new quali-

ties? Cooperation based on trust usually produces not only some sort of external results, but also strengthens social ties, increases mutual reliance and the joy of acting together (as such, solidarity has an internal, *per se* value), and occasionally leads to heroic sacrifice. Understanding this phenomenon can be particularly difficult for the ‘Western man’ brought up on subjectivism combined with Protestant individualism and the Weberian ‘spirit of capitalism’ (which are all positive in their nature, although seemingly non-solidary), and often influenced by a truly non-solidary attitude in the form of Hobbesian atomism streaked with deep social fear. When Margaret Thatcher spoke her famous words “There’s no such thing as society. There are individual men and women and there are families,”² she was not aware of the centuries-long philosophical

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² Cf. <http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/apr/08/margaret-thatcher-quotes> (2.05.2017).

tradition she had invoked, being at the same time her successor.³ How, then, is it possible that against such an atomized background there is an increasing number of appeals for solidarity with the poor, the needy and the persecuted, or – especially today – with refugees and immigrants from other countries?

Solidarity is a ‘miracle,’ but world history clearly demonstrates that unexpected ‘miracles’ also happen, and no less frequently than disasters, usually expected and fearfully sensed.⁴ A clear example of this truth is the meaningful and relatively recent Polish Solidarity movement. Formed in an environment of systematically oppressed freedom, intimidation, and coercion, Solidarity exploded in that seemingly anti-miracle atmosphere of the unsubtle iron and plain scenery of the Gdańsk Shipyard. In spite of growing repressions, coercion, and an iron fist rule, the movement managed, in a non-violent way, to initiate an unexpected process: gradual transformation from enslavement to freedom. This process (in combination with many other factors, of course) managed to trigger the fall of the iron curtain and the iron world, not only in its cradle, Poland, but across the rest of Eastern Europe too. It’s no wonder then that various authors, in describing the phenomenon of Solidarity, refer to the category of ‘miracle,’ theatre, or at least Bakhtin’s ‘carnavalesque.’ Regardless of the nomenclature, one element keeps recurring: the element of festivity, being out of the ordinary, breaking free from the automatism of overwhelmingly everyday life. It was the systematic organization of hope, civic friendship and mutual assistance between people from various backgrounds, with intellectual and artistic creativity blooming in the underground, restoring the meaning of the words ‘freedom,’ ‘dignity,’ ‘cooperation’ and ‘society,’ providing mutual assistance in the face of persecution, as well as sacrifice, including the sacrifice of one’s own life – a true miracle, indeed.

³ Cf. A. Shlomo, *Demokracja bez solidarności*, in: *Solidarność i kryzys zaufania*, red. J. Kołtan, Gdańsk 2014, p. 13–25.

⁴ Cf. A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford 1990, passim.

Hannah Arendt⁵ made a bold attempt at examining the occurrence of ‘miracles,’ rooting them in the ontological structure of the world. From the point of view of natural processes and their statistically overwhelming probability, the fact that Earth emerged from cosmic processes, organic life from non-organic processes and the human world from the animal world, is a case of ‘infinite improbability,’ or in colloquial language, ‘a miracle.’ Analogically, human life, whether in the individual or social dimension, is predominantly composed of automatisms. However, there are exceptions – ‘miracles,’ or new beginnings. In the social world, the possibility of their occurrence is explicated through the inexplicable: freedom. Unfortunately, as biological sciences or the currently popular neurocognitive sciences advance, the phenomenon of human freedom (free will) is being increasingly questioned. But it is not the purpose of this article to discuss these reductionist trends in thinking. One should agree with Arendt, and adopt the position, *a fortiori*, that if inexplicable breaches can occur in the deterministic world of nature, then even more so can they happen in the social world.

Humility in the face of the miraculous nature of solidarity is an imperative to follow in the footsteps of Max Weber and stand on the shoulders of giants, thus reaching further than classic philosophical analysis allows. In this paper, Polish Solidarity movement will be discussed as a representative of the revolutionary tradition. The choice is justified by its relatively recent occurrence and its success in transforming the socio-political system in Poland and contributing to the demise of the USSR in Eastern Europe. Last but not least, it is justified by the vivacious practice of the act of solidarity, which gave this trade union its name and which allows us to assume that the meaning of solidarity came to its fullest blossom in the principles and actions undertaken by the Solidarity movement. Such presentation is intended not only to describe the phenomenon, but also to specify, on the basis of this description, the context of its emergence and the structure of the solidary associations. Certain contexts, terms,

⁵ H. Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, New York 1961, *passim*.

and rules that are constitutive of the act of solidarity appear here in a recurring and cohesive manner, and knowledge of them can contribute to experiencing the miracle of human solidarity on an everyday basis.

2. Revolution and Legal Progress

In addition to the moral and social dimensions of solidarity, Kurt Bayertz distinguished a third, revolutionary one: that of ‘solidarity and liberation.’⁶ In a sense, it combines the two previous kinds of revolution (moral and social), but also includes a political and legal dimension. As Bayertz rightly observes, this type of solidarity usually appears in response to institutional injustice (racial discrimination in the USA, apartheid in South Africa, sexual discrimination, etc.), or the oppression of national minorities, and as such leads to legal progressiveness. However, not every social movement deserves to be called a revolution. In the Western world, this lofty term is usually applied to major historical events, such as the American and French Revolutions, and secondarily (with a certain amount of embarrassment as to their purposes, course, and outcome) to the communist October and February Revolutions. Interestingly, Arista Maria Cirtautas,⁷ Timothy Garton Ash⁸ and Jadwiga Staniszkis,⁹ along with a number of other scholars, classifies Poland’s Solidarity-led revolution (1980/81–1989) as one of the ‘Great Revolutions.’

In her comparative work on these three ‘Great Revolutions,’ Cirtautas accurately reconstructs the criteria needed for a revolution to be considered revolutionary. She adopts the necessity of 1) the establishment of multiple sovereignty, i.e. alternative centres of authority in the state, and 2) the existence of social support for this alternative centre of authority by a substantial group of citizens. The former of these criteria separate revolutions from other, smaller social movements, e.g. Women’s

⁶ K. Bayertz, *Four Uses of Solidarity*, in: *Solidarity*, Dordrecht 1999, p. 3–29.

⁷ A. M. Cirtautas, *The Polish Solidarity Movement. Revolution, Democracy and Natural Rights*, London–New York 1997, passim.

⁸ T. G. Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity, 1980–82*, New York 1984, passim.

⁹ J. Staniszkis, *Poland’s Self-Limiting. Revolution*, Princeton, N. J. 1984, passim.

suffrage, which do not form an alternative centre of authority, but only formulate social postulates supported by a major group of citizens. The other element, the loud *vox populi*, separates revolutions from other self-proclaimed forms of revolt and *coups d'états*, in which a group of citizens, even if acting on the noblest of impulses, attempt to seize power. As such, they tend to remain (at best) a kind of 'Fellowship of Robin Hood.' For a social change to fully deserve its description as a revolution, it must be a two-way combination of both factors, the moral and the material, and the new *modus vivendi* must be expressed through both social attitudes and political institutions (legal progress).

It was the Polish Solidarity movement's alternative headquarters at the Gdańsk Shipyard (along with a number of other Solidarity offices ('alternative sources of authority') formed in parallel to the communist structure of many workplaces across the country), its 'other politics' inside of the trade union, non-violent ethos and new, solidary way of living, as well as the process of political transformation in Poland begun at the Round Table and the major role that it played in the pan-European process of the fall of the USSR, that determine Solidarity's place amongst the 'proper' revolutions.

3. 'Rights Against Might': A Self-Limiting Revolution

With respect to Polish Solidarity, Ash proposed the use of the term 'resolution' instead of 'revolution,' in this way emphasising its peaceful nature and 'legal flow.'¹⁰ *Right against might*, Gandhi's slogan expressing the core of his philosophy of non-violence, may also be relatable to the Polish revolution. The peaceful power of Solidarity is confirmed not only by what it ultimately achieved – peaceful negotiations at the historic Round Table meeting – but also by the entire period of its existence, during which violence was not used in spite of a number of occasions when it would arguably have been justified (especially during the attempt to suppress the miracle of Solidarity by means of a 'friendly intervention').

¹⁰ Cf. T. G. Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity, 1980–82*, op. cit., p. 53.

This self-imposed 'limitation encompassed not only the use of violence, but also the reaching for political power, and as such the Polish revolution displays features of both the Greek love for isonomy (not ruling and not being ruled) as well as post-Augustinian mistrust. This reserved attitude to power was the result not only of the geopolitical situation making it unachievable (although this was, undeniably, one of the factors), but also because it followed a different logic, the same logic of spontaneity and freedom that accompanied the establishment and functioning of modern solidary communities.

Logic was, indeed, the main tool of this new type of politics: solidary politics. Logic allowed for the imposition of one's views not through violence, but through rational debate. Solidarity opened the floodgates of words. In a year of its activity, over 400 titles were published on the illegal reading market. Discussion, at the levels of workplaces, regions, and the National Committee, continued forever. The word was a symbol of freedom regained, subjectivity, and the feeling of one's own dignity, and was manifested in two areas: artistic creativity and public debate. The flourishing of language was also the flourishing of creativity. The terms 'miracle' and 'carnival' are accurately applied here because artistic activity actually flourished during the time of Solidarity. This included a strong theatrical movement,¹¹ clandestine circulation of books, the popularity of the works of the poet and writer Czesław Miłosz among 'simple,' uneducated people, the creativity of the New Wave poets (spearheaded by Barańczak), and the cellars of Kraków vibrant with jazz.¹² These are just some of the Solidarity-related phenomena that created the artistic shape of the cultural revolution¹³ Solidarity truly was. But apart from the artistic scene and the flourishing of the word in its best artistic version, Solidarity also created a public scene in which man could pursue his passion of standing out. Elżbieta Matynia¹⁴ classified this area of public

¹¹ Cf. D. Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics*, Philadelphia 1990, passim.

¹² Cf. F. Falk's film *Był Jazz/There was Jazz* (1981).

¹³ Cf. D. Ost, *Solidarity and the Politics of Anti-Politics*, op. cit., passim.

¹⁴ E. Matynia, *Performative Democracy*, Oxford 2009, passim.

debate – which was held in private homes, during never-ending trade union meetings, and in the course of peaceful negotiations – as ‘performative democracy.’ The concept of performativity is naturally a reference to John Langshaw Austin and his theory of performative words.¹⁵ There are words that have a particular power to create reality. These include, for example, promises that entail justified expectations, and as such are germs of contractual relationships. The Polish ‘Solidarity experiment’ can be understood as an arena for performative words that, both by virtue of artistic expression and the power of non-violent argumentation, led to the establishment of a new type of social relations, a new type of agreement, including the new social contract.

4. ‘The Flying Republic’¹⁶

The carnival atmosphere of feasting, happiness, flourishing poetry and theatrical arts that accompanied Solidarity was the sign of a new beginning (the birth of internal freedom and the creation of a new performance arena), a new individual ethos, and a new social *modus vivendi*, which however does not detract from the phenomenon of Solidarity. Its actions were much more organized and material than words such as ‘miraculous’ or ‘carnival’ could suggest. Solidarity would not deserve to be called a revolution if not for its being a new, alternative centre of authority. The structure of this new ‘authority’ was highly decentralised. It was composed of basic organisations operating in workplaces around the country that formed provincial organisations, which in turn formed regional trade unions, headed by the national Trade Union Coordination Commission. In parallel with this territorial structure, a sectorial structure was formed, bringing together employees of the particular sectors of the state-run economy. Each of these cells functioned like a small republic,

¹⁵ J. L. Austin, *How to do Things with Words. The William James Lectures delivered at Harvard University in 1955*, Oxford 1962, passim.

¹⁶ The title of this section is a reference to an underground educational enterprise that operated in Poland under communist occupation.

sparkling with never-ending debate: regional authorities were evaluated during meetings, postulates were formulated with respect to those wielding executive power, and envoys were appointed to negotiate with state authorities. This his model of cooperation can be defined as ‘organic self-governance,’ referring to the still topical distinction between repressive mechanical solidarity (functioning on the basis of tradition and a collective conscience) and a liberal organic solidarity (utilising the differences between people and division of labour), as introduced by Émile Durkheim.¹⁷

This authentic self-governance resulted in both law-making and law-abiding, which could be observed primarily inside the movement: resolutions, statutes, and agreements were written, respected and consistently enforced, despite the devaluation of state law. The second manifestation of self-governance was respect for external law: employee postulates reaching beyond the workplace were formulated, and demands made that ratified international treaties and human rights be observed. This last activity shows that abidance by law and respect were universal or even transcendent in nature. Arendt was right to point out the need to root the achievements of a revolution in a higher, objective order. She called it the problem of the absolute, or more literarily, “...the problem of the presence of gods.”¹⁸ In Poland, the problem of gods may seem to be clearly decided in favour of the Catholic option, considering the major role played by the Catholic Church and the pilgrimages of John Paul II. It was, however, rather of general, supra-religious character and led to a peculiar kind of conversion – conversion to fundamental hope, which at that time applied to both atheists and exemplary Catholics, who ceased to fear, raised their heads, and decided to live dignified lives, without compromise. It seems therefore, that as in the case of the French and American Revolutions, the emerging legal order found its ultimate legitimisation in Max Weber’s value-rationality (which ascribed the highest value to human dignity and human rights) rather than in a particular religion.

¹⁷ É. Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, London 1997, passim.

¹⁸ H. Arendt, *On Revolution*, London 2006, p. 126.

As in the French and American Revolutions, this legitimisation through values led to a legal legitimisation, which began with the winning of the 1989 elections, was expanded with the adoption of a new constitution in 1997, and continues today.

5. Cooperation and Humanitarian Help

The word ‘solidarity’ is usually given two meanings and placed on two different levels. The first defines a certain type of ‘group solidarity’, a solidarity deeply rooted in existing social relations. This kind of solidarity is dense, solid, and particularist. The other meaning is of a supra-group nature, going beyond existing relations, and sometimes intended to bridge gaps in social relations. This solidarity is diluted but universal. The source of the first meaning comes from a lasting community of fate and resulting co-responsibility. The source of the other lies in acts of humanitarian aid spurred by pity for the suffering of other human beings. Since the nature of human suffering has no territorial boundaries, this act is, just like the noble actions of many doctors, potentially *sans frontières*. The first of these solidarities is located on a specific, local level, the other on a universal and potential level. The first type of solidarity can be called cooperative, the second, humanitarian.

Controversies at the level of ideas have far-reaching practical repercussions, for instance, in the currently hot European debate on refugees. Adherents of humanitarian solidarity usually offer potentially bottomless benefit packages for refugees, while their cooperatively-oriented colleagues recommend gradual social inclusion intended to build future partnership. Analogically, the traditional, welfare-based models of solidarity prevalent in European health care systems (which, due to increasing costs of new medical technologies, the constant aging of society and the high cost of new technology have proved to be unsatisfactory) recommend all-encompassing state care for the ‘needy’, while the, newly emerging, cooperative model is aimed rather at raising their health, literacy, and where possible, capability for self-care. These and many other detailed controversies show that the scope and content of the concept of

solidarity is not only a scholastic dispute over definitions, but an issue of utmost social importance.

The dialectics of both – humanitarian and cooperative – elements is revealed by the activities of the Polish Solidarity movement, which can be understood as the most in-depth practical actualization of the idea of solidarity. Solidarity was born from the Workers' Defence Committee, founded in 1976. Initially, its work in helping workers evoked mistrust, even among its beneficiaries. However, workers quickly understood that the assistance offered by poets, professors, and lawyers was not motivated by pity or feeling of intellectual superiority, but by a sense of citizenship and co-responsibility: living in the same territory, speaking the same language, and being in the same situation of slavery, carrying a common burden. This is even more evident in the circumstances of the creation of the Independent Self-Governing Trade Union 'Solidarity' (to give it its full name) in 1980. The constitutive moment was the unifying strength of a meeting with the Pope in 1979, when the people saw that they were not alone in their desire for freedom and a dignified life, so different from the one proposed by the state. This illustrates that the solidarity was primarily a social fact, not a humanitarian endeavour, even if humanitarian help was widely provided. Solidarity movement presents the purpose of solidary assistance in the proper light: not only to offer support or relief, but to create a common space that allows freedom, human capacities, and dignity to flourish. This worked more as a safety valve than as assistance for assistance's sake; a kind of safe ground. It helped people boldly express their objections, for example, in the workplace, as they knew that there would be someone who, in case of retaliatory repression, would be there to defend and support them. Solidarity combined both dimensions of solidarity in a creative way: it was, originally, a symmetrical relationship, an empirically-oriented sense of fellowship and co-responsibility that was expressed through cooperation and the striving for a common good, with occasionally asymmetrical aspect of humanitarianism as its consequence ('solidarity in need is a solidarity indeed'), aimed however not at potentially endless assistance, but at restoring personal capabilities, damaged social bonds, sense of co-responsibility and trustful partnership.

6. Conclusions: Solidarity as a Regulative Ideal

Ireneusz Krzemiński entitled one of his books *Solidarność. Niespełniony projekt polskiej demokracji* (Solidarity – the unfulfilled project of Polish democracy)¹⁹ and the lucid diagnosis contained in this phrase confirms its accuracy over time. Solidarity in its very beginnings was ‘miraculous’ in the philosophical sense of the term, coined by Hannah Arendt. Arendt used ‘miracle’ to mean the surprising, and inspiring the mystery of human freedom that comes out of nowhere (“where am I when I think?”), operates in a revolutionary way and brings novelty into the world. So did ‘Solidarity,’ which sprang suddenly from an underground civil society, operated as a carnival, reviving political *agorae* and theatrical stages, and brought about a radical transformation of political and social life. ‘Miraculous’ and ‘paradoxical’ were also the foundations of Solidarity in a country under communist regime, which called to the same values of workers’ brotherhood, as well as the oppositional, but non-violent and self-limiting character of the new worker’s revolution. But the ‘miraculous’ nature of Solidarity does not absolve it of its shortcomings: politicization of its mission, divisions and conflicts inside the movement, and the constantly deepening de-solidarization after 1989. However, these pragmatic failures and the gradual decay of the social union makes the investigation of the noble beginnings of Solidarity and its original meaning even more important. One of Thomas Jefferson’s main post-constitutional preoccupations was the question of how to preserve the spirit of the revolution. Jefferson was well aware that after the outburst of revolutionary ardour that triggered the American Revolution, freedom could easily turn into a political declaration or legal catalogue of liberties, devoid of the excitement of a real political agora and the pathos of creating a new social order. Therefore, he postulated the introduction of a system of *polis*-type participatory democracy, which would permit constant discussion on local, civil matters and thus allow future generations to taste political freedom in action. The practical realization of this ideal in the US today might

¹⁹ Cf. I. Krzemiński, *Solidarność. Niespełniony projekt polskiej demokracji*, Gdańsk 2013.

seem far from Jefferson's concept, but the latter still serves as a regulative idea inspiring other theories (for example, Hannah Arendt's theory of small republics), and guiding many practical solutions. The problem of 'legalization of freedom' and its slow decline thereafter, diagnosed by Jefferson, as well as the disintegration of Polish 'Solidarity' after the free elections in 1989, is a manifestation of the same original sin of imperfection that characterizes all historical efforts to realize higher values. The value of solidarity is particularly hard to bring about because of the plurality of ideas, conflicting political views and different lifestyles that undermine intellectual agreement and social unity. However, the ethos of mutual trust, creative cooperation and radical commitment ('one for all, all for one'), embedded in the idea of solidarity can still serve as a regulative ideal. Regulative ideas in the original, Kantian sense remain transcendental – they may be approached, but not fully accomplished. Kant was aware of the burden of original sin and corrupted human nature, but still he did not lose hope in the persistent striving towards the Kingdom of Ends. Polish 'Solidarity' and other historical manifestations of this value can be interpreted as an imperfect realization of the regulative idea of human fraternity and united pursuit of a common good. But its failures do not render the idea itself invalid or extinct. The regulative character of solidarity gives the phrase 'unfulfilled project of Polish democracy' a new meaning: this project, initiated over 30 years ago, despite all its past missteps and actual controversies, is still open to new, perhaps more successful forms of solidarity. The idea of solidarity as freedom-inspiring power and fruitful social capital is worth exploration and a constant questing for its improved and actualized social expressions.

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Abstract

The Ongoing Miracle and its Historical Roots

Solidarity enhances freedom. Firstly, because it creates freedom-friendly environments, and secondly, because it brings radical novelty into the world, in the form of intellectual, social and artistic revolutions. It is also a reservoir of mutual trust and responsible humanitarian help. All of these aspects were present during Poland's ‘Solidarity’ revolution of the 1980s, which triggered the social and political transformation of the country

in a non-violent way. Now, the theory and practice of solidarity inherited since that movement can be treated as a regulative idea, still to be explored and extended.

Keywords

solidarity, freedom, cooperation, revolution, trust, Hannah Arendt, Arista Maria Cirtautas

Abstrakt

Cud solidarności i jego źródła historyczne

Solidarność pomnaża wolność. Stwarza ona bowiem środowisko przyjazne wolności oraz wprowadza w świat radykalną nowość w postaci rewolucji intelektualnej, społecznej i artystycznej. Solidarność jest także rezerwuarem wzajemnego zaufania i odpowiedzialnej pomocy humanitarnej. Wszystkie te aspekty cudu solidarności były obecne podczas polskiej rewolucji „Solidarności” z 1980 roku, która zapoczątkowała pokojową, społeczną i polityczną transformację kraju. Teoria i praktyka solidarności, odziedziczone po tej rewolucji, mogą być traktowane jako ideał regulatywny, który warto badać i kontynuować.

Słowa kluczowe

solidarność, wolność, współpraca, rewolucja, zaufanie, Hanna Arendt, Arista Maria Cirtautas