The Legacy of 'Solidarity'

Class, democracy, culture and subjectivity in the Polish social movement

Introduction

The article draws on primary and secondary research into Polish trade unionism to assess the ongoing sociological debate on the nature of the 'Solidarity' social movement of 1980--81. The question of the nature of Solidarity holds important implications for sociological theory, as is apparent from the rich literature on it, and has a wider political relevance for understanding social mobilisation in today's Poland.

Against views that the cultural and democratic elements were dominant, it will be argued that the working class element was *essential*, if not exclusive, in Solidarity. The unusual combination of the three elements during the first period of the movement (which deserved the definition of '*total* social movement' by Touraine) was made possible by a fourth, hitherto neglected dimension, the subjective one. Unusually pure class and subjectivity elements were the 'minimum denominators' of Solidarity, due to the double nature of Polish society: an industrial society and a 'vocationally totalitarian' one.

The article is organised in three parts. The first will explain the theoretical dimension of the Solidarity debate. The second section will discuss several sociological interpretations of Solidarity (class, civil society, nation, and new social movement) using secondary research on 1980--81 including studies still unknown outside Poland and secondary

analysis of unpublished research material. The focus is on Solidarity's 'golden' period before the crisis in the Autumn of 1981, when internal divisions and external constraints emerged as insurmountable. Finally, the previous interpretations will be tested with the help of primary studies on 'the legacy' of Solidarity after 1989, and conclusions will be drawn for today's social mobilisation in Poland.

1   Four sociological dilemmas about Solidarity

A *sociological* analysis of the historically unique Solidarity movement is meaningful only if it treats Solidarity not as an 'example' of a broader phenomenon, but rather as an 'extreme case', or even as an 'exception that needs to be explained'. It is possible to test on Solidarity, as an extreme case, the limits of sociological concepts like class, totalitarianism, civil society and subjectivity, in a productive exercise of theoretical clarification.

The large number of important authors who have commented on Solidarity (Bauman, Giddens, Touraine, Habermas, Parkin, to name but a few) is itself evidence of the deep theoretical implications of that historical event. Solidarity draws attention to classic theoretical issues such as: was state socialism a class society? Are social movements and/or subjectivity possible under totalitarianism? Can a labour movement be simultaneously a cultural movement?

A first crucial issue is class. It may be summarised as follows: *if* Solidarity was a labour movement (empirical question), *then* state socialism was a class society, where class

conflicts were at least latent. This point would challenge theories of social stratification that give a fundamental role to property relations. For instance, Giddens stated clearly that state socialism was no longer a class society. There is however in his statement a core of ambiguity, which reveals that the issue needs more in-depth investigation.

> The state socialist societies (...) have genuinely succeeded in moving towards a classless order, but only at the cost of creating a system of political domination which has altered the character of social exploitation rather than necessarily diminishing it. (Giddens 1973: 294)

The issue clearly depends on the definition of class. Yet, if we define, with most of the sociological tradition and Giddens himself, a class relationship as a relation of exploitation, how could social exploitation endure under state socialism without originating in, or giving birth to, class divisions? How can we imagine an exploitative relationship where there are neither exploiters nor exploited? Giddens' contradiction mirrors that by Lane, who speaks of 'non-antagonist' class relations under state socialism (Lane 1982). Where Giddens sees exploitation without classes, Lane sees classes without exploitation, and it becomes difficult to say which of these theories is more lame. Equally challenged by the Solidarity case is labour process theory. The 'founder' of modern labour process theory, Harry Braverman (1974), was positive in arguing that his materialist approach applied only to capitalist labour relations, as historically the only ones based on both exploitation and control. Braverman himself was radically critical of state socialism and considered it as of an essentially capitalist nature (Braverman 1974: 22). Nonetheless, as has been noted in a very straight, if orthodox, way by Spencer (2000), Braverman's whole theory is based on the Marxist theory of value, which applies only to capitalism. As a result, the rare if brave attempts to use labour process theory to understand communist reality face a difficult choice. They either abandon the theory of

value, and therefore both Braverman and materialism, and argue that the class conflict occurs between 'planners' and 'producers' (Burawoy and Lukács 1992), or they have to maintain that state socialism was not socialist at all, labour relations are always and everywhere exploitative, and, in conclusion, in central Europe they show a remarkable continuity from the capitalist 1930s onwards (Pollert 1999).[1]

A second general sociological issue affected by the Solidarity case is totalitarianism. A highly disputed concept, the idea of totalitarianism possibly allow the class dilemma to be bypassed – everybody's oppression coming by an impersonal system – but on the other hand it cannot explain the emergence of a social movement. In a literal sense, a 'social movement in a totalitarian society' is an oxymoron. The possible solution, in the Solidarity case, is to argue that authoritarianism in Poland was exceptionally weak for the communist world standards. The concept of totalitarianism – at least in the 'strong' version by Hannah Arendt (1951), less clearly so in the 'softer' one by Friedrich and Brzezinski (1956) – applies only to the bleakest periods of Stalinism or Maoism. The People's Republic of Poland was, apart from 1949--53, strikingly pluralist, with an influential, irrepressible Catholic Church, a very large private agriculture sector, a considerable army of dissidents and innumerable ties to the western world. An oppressive regime was being imposed but never achieved: in this sense Poland should be more precisely defined by 'totalitarian vocation' rather than really existing 'totalitarianism'. Yet many totalitarianism-inspired, non-class accounts of Solidarity as a struggle between system and society exist. *Władza* (power) and *społeczeństwo* (society) are the most appropriate terms for defining the Polish conflict of 1980--81 according to surveys carried out in 1981 (Adamski 1996). To what extent are they conceptually congruent?

What is the precise coverage of the totalitarianism concept? The study of Solidarity calls for a more precise definition of the term – otherwise it ends up being a useful 'escape concept' to be mentioned when it is convenient and to be forgotten immediately after.

A third theoretical implication of Solidarity is the link between culture and social movements. Many opponents of class interpretations of Solidarity have called for a definition in terms of a cultural and/or national movement. The class and culture interpretations are not necessarily incompatible, since there are indeed conceptions of class as a cultural, and not only material, construct (primarily E.P. Thompson and his *Making of the English Working Class*), which some Polish sociologists have explicitly accepted (Rychard 1988). The issue of the interaction between material and cultural factors, and between interests and identity, within a labour movement remains, though: few labour movements in history – and none nearly as successful as Solidarity – have made a similar use of moral and even religious symbols, and even fewer have ended up defining themselves as 'right-wing', as Solidarity officially did in the 1990s.[2]

The fourth, less classic theoretical issue raised by Solidarity is the distinction, and inter-relation, between 'old' and 'new' social movements. Chronologically, Solidarity can be considered as a 'new social movement' (NSM), possibly influenced by western counterparts through a process of international diffusion. The NSM label has been used however in a more technical sense, to define those forms of recent mobilisation which are not directly related to social stratification or to national and democratic demands; that is, movements that are not related to the *emergence* and development of the industrial society and the national state, but rather to their *crisis*. According to the theorists of

NSM, these tend rather to originate in the cultural sphere and to focus on personal identity and space of life (Melucci 1994).

Various theorists (Habermas, Touraine, Melucci) have linked NSMs to a broader sociological analysis of contemporary society, seen as moving towards a post-industrial or information type. In this regard, industrial employment in Poland was dominant over the other employment sectors from 1974 through 1991. It reached its peak at 38.9% of total employment in 1980, in a striking coincidence with the emergence of Solidarity, when employment in services was 32.2%. By 2001, industrial employment had declined to 28.6% while employment in services had reached 50.3% (data: ILO). Can we then consider Solidarity as also a 'new social movement', or as only an 'old', if epic, social movement of the industrial society? Was it something more than the labour movement's swan song?

2   The different faces of Solidarity

2.1   Working class

Solidarity was born as a trade union. The leaflets distributed at the Gdańsk Shipyards' gates on the first day of the historic August strike referred to work rhythms, safety and overtime, not to politics or national independence. Yet it was clear to everybody that it was not 'just a trade union', and thanks to its complexity and multidimensionality it has deserved the definition of 'total social movement' including a social, a democratic and a national dimension, all three being essential (Touraine et al 1983). Such stress on the

'total' nature eventually raised (not only among scientists but among its members as well) the question of whether Solidarity was in fact a trade union at all. In an important article of 1986 in the clandestine *Tygodnik Mazowsze* one of the underground leaders, Henryk Wujec, asked: 'Solidarity is a social, national, political, independentist movement… but is it a trade union?' (Wujec 1987: 1). Wujec's answer was a resolute yes, but the very fact of having asked the question shows that the issue is not self-evident at all.

Several theorists have looked at Solidarity to argue that class relations display strong similarities between capitalism and communism (e.g. Parkin 1980; Therborn 1995). Alain Touraine actually bothered testing empirically whether class consciousness in Poland was really the same as in the west (Touraine et al. 1983). In his book on the workers' movement in general, Touraine claimed to have detected the highest level of class consciousness not in France, but among Silesian workers (Touraine et al. 1987: 36). His theoretical assumption was that communist societies, although engaged in a radically different *mode de développement* when compared with their capitalist counterparts, share with the latter the same *type sociétal*, that is both belong to the industrial society (Touraine 1978). At work, this meant that:

> socialist and capitalist countries (…) to the extent that both belong to industrial society, are both based on the same central class relation between a workforce, with its strength, its skill, its experience and its group solidarity, and, on the other hand, the organisers, the managers, who impose on the workers production rates, working conditions, and a pay structure: who, in short, exploit them. (Touraine et al. 1983: 41)

According to Touraine's Franco--Polish research team (1983: 41--42), Solidarity as a trade union was not only the company-level organisation of a wider political movement; its trade union action was above all 'class' action.

> In all our research groups, but especially in Katowice and Gdańsk, the activity of the trade union was constantly defined in terms of class struggle, even where these were not the words used by the militants (…). Such language is identical to that of workers subject to the laws of productivity and profit in the industry of the West. (…) Polish workers complain as do most others that they do not understand their wage-slip, and they see this as proof that they are being robbed, that they are not being paid for the work they have done. (…) As far as their direct masters are concerned, their complaints are the same, bearing on working conditions, pay, and the exercise of authority. (41--42)

Touraine's interpretation aroused much criticism (Goldfarb 1989; Scott 1991; Perdue 1995; Martell and Stammers 1996). Indeed, the depth and continuity of both data collection and analysis were affected by unique material and political constraints (for interesting backstage information see: Wieviorka 1984; Frybes 1994; Kuczyński 1994). The Polish side of the team could not contribute to the data analysis because of martial law, and later regretted not having been able to independently analyse the research material (Krzemiński 1997: 247). Nevertheless, our secondary analysis of Touraine's data (fourteen large folders of meeting transcripts), carried out eighteen years later, confirmed that on the class point the conclusion reached by the French sociologists was basically congruent with the empirical findings, especially as far as the Katowice research group was concerned (Meardi 2000: 50--52). The limits of that material for the purpose of class analysis lie rather in the mixed composition of the research groups: since the activists

came from different workplaces, they naturally focussed on political issues rather than on specific shop-floor ones.

The debate on the working class in Solidarity took place mostly outside Poland, as if the 'class' nature of that movement had been embarrassing, though for different reasons, in both past and current Polish political systems. Laba (1991) and Goodwyn (1991) categorically defended the working-class character of Solidarity, as opposed to the intellectuals' and dissidents' contribution. Their main argument is that Solidarity originated in a region (the Baltic Coast) where the long-standing traditions of workers' struggles and organisation (notably, the preference for sit-in strikes during the pre-war period) were strongest. By contrast, it did not develop in places like Warsaw and Radom where oppositional intellectuals were most active. In addition, Solidarity's iconography was very indebted to labour movement traditions and symbols, and revealed a level of egalitarianism matched only by the most radical union movements in the west. Laba and Goodwyn's argument has become less acceptable in Poland because of their (apparently sociologically redundant) severe critique of the dissident intellectuals' Committee for Worker Defence (KOR) (e.g. Goodwyn 1991: 299--300). Moreover, as Bernhard (1991) has pointed out, Goodwyn's book contains serious factual mistakes and is weakened by the author's ignorance of Polish and of fundamental primary sources. Nevertheless, their main point is sociologically, if not necessarily politically, sound.

A different argument, although reaching a similar conclusion, is presented by Staniszkis. While suggesting that under state socialism collective representations are more important than social stratification (Staniszkis 1989), she also argues that Solidarity rejected the state-corporatism model, giving rise to a 'class, rather than corporatist, form of interest

representation' (Staniszkis 1984: 40). The union's rejection of industrial sector organisation in favour of a regionally based structure can be cited as evidence of this point.

In the accounts by Ash (1983), Kennedy (1991), and Bernhard (1993) the role of workers as a class emerges sharply, although it is not treated as exclusive or 'causal' as it is by Laba. Unfortunately, the historical accounts of Solidarity, starting with Holzer's early and authoritative work (Holzer 1984), concentrate on the political level of the events, with little if any interest in the factory level, although this is fundamental for the interpretation of a trade union movement. There are, nevertheless, some little-known sociological inquiries carried out by Polish sociologists, stopped by martial law and published only many years later.

The first source is a study of the birth of Solidarity, carried out in fifteen plants by sociologists from Warsaw University led by Krzemiński (Bakuniak et al. 1983; Krzemiński 1997). Although Krzemiński rejects a class analysis in favour of the concept of community, the findings speak for themselves. They reveal that, contrary to conventional wisdom, Solidarity's earliest demands were not made in reaction to a rise in prices, but in reaction to the requirement for increased productivity (Krzemiński 1997: 62). That is, the demands emerged not from distributive arguments, but from 'class' arguments against exploitation. Not only were the unions' typical shop-floor tasks of primary importance – and not limited to wage demands which were rather secondary (Bakuniak et al. 1983: 312--13) – but work conflict also played a decisive role: since the 1970s there had been work stoppages linked to effort bargaining (Krzemiński 1997: 70). Also interesting is the fact that the leading workshop was always the toolroom or a

comparable workshop, that is the factory area where interactions among workers were most frequent and skilled workers led the way (72).

A second source is a study of the strikes by the Polish Sociological Association in 1980--81 (Kulpińska 1990), including an analysis of the 1980 strikes in the Warsaw region (Drążkiewicz and Rychard 1990). Kulpińska's team, unlike Krzemiński's, uses a class terminology. Adopting an actor-centred interpretative scheme, it focuses on the definition of the conflicting sides. On the strikers' side, are found first of all the direct production workers. The first workshops to go on strike are the production and some auxiliary workshops (like the power shop, the toolroom, maintenance), and the most active are blue-collar workers. Technicians rarely go on strike and administrative workers almost never do. The ranks of the adversaries are quite large. At the plant level, they comprise foremen, workshop directors, secretaries and activists of the plant party organisations. Beyond the plant level, new opponents are met: party officers, local authorities, government authorities. The authors note that foremen actively press workers to go back to work and to cease the strike, and draw conclusions for the 'class' interpretation.

> In the debate on whether foremen are still part of the working class, which exists in the sociology of work and of organisation, the strikes in Warsaw in 1980 offered quite a clear answer (…) The behaviour of lower management, e.g. of the foremen, shows that their role in the system goes beyond the normal organisational functions originating in the requirements of work organisation. They are a sort of outpost of the proprietors of economy, placed on the frontier (or rather at the lower border of the social structure) as representatives of the ruling élite, which defends its power monopoly even at this lowest level. (Drążkiewicz and Rychard 1990: 14--15)

We would know more if systematic collections of Solidarity's shopfloor demands or of the thousands of company-level collective agreements signed in 1980--81 existed.

Nevertheless, the fragmented sources available on strikers' demands confirm the importance of workloads and pay systems (Marciniak 1990; Chmiel and Kaczyńska 1998). Chmiel and Kaczyńska collected and compared workers' demands in Szczecin and Gdańsk in the strikes of 1970 and 1980. The demands of 1970 showed an impressive effort of job analysis, with lists of up to 971 job-related points in the Gdańsk Shipyards (112--64). In 1980, workers underlined more political and social security issues, but continuity was strong and the references to norms, supervisors and working conditions were still there.

2.2   Civil society

A few analysts have contested the idea that Solidarity is a working-class movement, especially by stressing the intellectuals' role (Kubik 1994a; Ost 1990; Pakulski 1993; Tymowski 1991). According to these analyses, Solidarity happened to be a trade union for contingent and tactical reasons, but the trade union was, in fact, the umbrella for the whole society. The non-class perspective's contribution lies in the addition of other interpretative categories, most importantly civil society and culture.

The concept of 'civil society' is used in many works that consider Solidarity as above all a *democratic* movement (Arato 1981; Bakuniak and Nowak 1987; Bernhard 1993; Cirtautas 1997; Ost 1990). The definition of civil society is not consistent across authors, some preferring the Hegelian version and others the Gramscian one. The latter is not incompatible with a class-based interpretation of Solidarity, for *any* trade union movement (the main historical example being the German one) may include a central engagement in and for the civil society, without losing its class nature (Hyman 2001).

The link between class and civil society in Solidarity is most intensely elaborated by Ost (1990; 2001). Even though Solidarity did operate with a notion of class, within a communist society that notion 'refers quite literally to everyone' (2001: 297). While being a class-for-itself, paradoxically the Polish strikers were not a 'class-in-itself', due to the peculiarity of the state-socialist society and labour process. Class consciousness was therefore inherently insufficient, the proof being that after 1989 it could not be maintained: even though labour is starting to be a class-in-itself, it 'suffers as a class but does not protest as a class' (Ost 1994: 117). To understand the 'first' Solidarity the concept of civil society is, according to Ost, much more useful than that of class. Similarly, Tatur (1989), following Habermas, sees Solidarity's most important effect in the production of a public space where the polity can develop. Tatur focuses, like Kennedy (1991), on the education sector and on the self-management movement *Siec*, as well as the areas of civil rights, research, journalism and urban planning (178--182). However, all these civil-society-like movements emerged later than the trade union: they *followed* Solidarity in the cycle of contention through the process of diffusion known to social movement studies (Tarrow 1994), and therefore cannot be seen as explicatory for the initial mobilisation.

There are strong historical arguments that may support the idea that civil society became more important than class for Solidarity. During martial law, clandestine Solidarity was the strongest in urban areas where the social composition of the union was most diverse (e.g. Warsaw, Wrocław), and the weakest in the area where Touraine had detected the strongest class consciousness, that is Silesia (although a reason may be that the regime had been particularly coercive and paternalist in Silesia at least since 1970). Additionally,

during the 1980s Solidarity started to develop neo-liberal orientations, which made

possible the shock therapy immediately after the fall of communism and which are hardly

compatible with any idea of labour movement. Yet, this trend was not so clear-cut.

Underground Solidarity continued to act as a trade union, contesting the first privatisation

attempts by the communist elites, defending wages as a share of the GDP (they increased

throughout the decade, while they fell dramatically in the following one) and stopping in

the referendum of 1987 the market-oriented reforms proposed by the Messner

government. If the leadership was increasingly attracted by neo-liberal ideas, the rank and

file were largely unconvinced. Otherwise it would be hard to understand why the

influential dissident Adam Michnik was so polemical against the rank and file unionists,

portrayed as 'new radicals' and dismissed as wanting 'wages like in America, social

security like in Sweden and workloads like in Poland' (Michnik 1990: 53).

2.3   Culture

Kubik suggested that the concept of class should be replaced with the Weberian concept

of status (1994a) and develops an alternative, cultural-anthropological explanation

(1994b). Kubik himself acknowledges that things would be different if one used a more

culturalist concept of social class, but other scholars used the example of Solidarity as a

cultural movement to launch a total attack on the concept of class itself. This is notably

the case in Pakulski's study (1993), which preceded an ambitious critique of the overall

relevance of class in current sociology (Pakulski and Waters 1994). Their studies and

others' (e.g. Bakuniak 1983; Osa 1997; Rychard 1987) depict Solidarity as, above all, a

cultural movement, of a national, ethnic and religious nature. On these lines, Carpentier

(1999) criticises the 'civil society' thesis for ignoring the union's monolithic structure and tendency to suppress internal pluralism. By contrast, he underlines the ethnic identity of the movement, whereby the Communist Party was seen as submissive to the Soviet Union. Evidence is seen in the celebration of Mass before union functions and in cases of excluding ethnic minorities (the Belo Russians).

Indeed both Polish national traditions and the Catholic Church played a huge role in the movement. The Pope's visit to Poland in 1979 is often mentioned as a decisive factor for the mobilisation. Yet it is not clear why analysts who argue that the working-class nature of Solidarity was accidental, accept uncritically that the Catholic and national one was genuine. In fact Bogdan Borusewicz, the organizer of the historical strike at the Gdańsk Shipyards, reveals that the crucial decision to hold Mass on Sunday within the Shipyard (which became an icon of the Gdańsk events worldwide) was taken for two very instrumental reasons: keeping a large number of workers within the gates during the week-end to prevent being cleared by the police, and gaining the Catholic hierarchy's sympathies, which, at the time, were far from assured (Borusewicz 2000). In this regard, it has to be remembered that Cardinal Wyszyński's homily on 26 August 1980 invited the strikers to be calm and to go back to work. It is difficult to see as decisive for mobilisation a social force that invites moderation.

As to nationalism, the case of the Belo Russians' exclusion mentioned by Carpentier is an extremely marginal one. Solidarity actually had a number of non Polish-Catholic leaders, and a 'dark' anti-Semitic side emerged only after the crisis of the movement in the Autumn of 1981 (Wieviorka 1984). Importantly, patriotism was in Poland since 1956 the language not only of opposition, but also of the regime. National feelings were under

Gomułka and Jaruzelski a factor of national unity, rather than of social conflict. The historical roots of such feelings probably lie in the experience of the catastrophic Warsaw insurrection of 1944, which demonstrated the risks and the costs of overt revolt. Without this feature of Polish national feelings it would be difficult to understand the famous sentence with which Wałęsa and the deputy premier Jagielski concluded the negotiations of August 1980: 'We have spoken as among Poles' (Gebert 2002). Being Poles and behaving as such was exactly what united Solidarity and at least part of the communists. This became even more evident after General Jaruzelski took over in 1981: the same army that carried out the 'autogolpe' was also the most popular institution in Poland, more popular than Solidarity itself. It is hard, then, to see as decisive for a social conflict a cultural factor that actually to some extent binds together the opponents.

2.4   New Social Movement

The hypothesis of Solidarity as an NSM was put forward by Crighton and Mason (1986), who noticed a number of similarities with the German Greens: shared values, beliefs in grass-roots participation, community, non-violence, non-hierarchical organisation, avoidance of state incorporation. It is easy to notice how such features are of too generic a nature to be treated as being exclusive to NSMs. It is more convincing to identify an NSM character in collective action that followed Solidarity. In 1980--81 a number of social actors emerged within or at the margins of Solidarity, from the student movement to neighbourhood initiatives. Such actors adopted clearer NSM traits in the second half of the 1980s, like the counter-cultural *Alternatywa Pomarańczowa* ('Orange Alternative') in Wrocław or the anti-militaristic *Wolność i Pokój* ('Freedom and Peace'). Wylie (2001:

349), focusing on the *Wolność i Pokój* experience (1985--9) concludes that given Solidarity's materialist concerns as a trade union, Catholic ethos and conservatism on peace, environment and gender, 'neither the classification "new" nor "old" sits easily on the generation of Polish social movements that existed prior to the mid-1980s'.

The contribution of an NSM perspective can be seen as adding to the classic concepts of the Solidarity debate – class, democracy and culture – that of subjectivity. In Touraine's sociology of social movements subjectivity is defined as 'an individual's will to act and to be recognised as an actor' (Touraine 1995: 207). In this sense, subjectivity is not opposed to (and it may be combined with) class, but is distinguished by the will of transforming – instead of being defined by – social relations. It is most visible in NSMs (Touraine 1999).

Solidarity has been seen as a victory for subjectivity, and indeed it had attracted the sympathy of both Foucault and Touraine, two theorists of subjectivity. Yet it is questionable to what extent Solidarity involved core components of subjectivity like the recognition of the Other and reflexivity (Touraine 1995). In fact, in their critique of Touraine's work Martell and Stammers (1996: 137) detect an interesting contradiction. After having stated that reflexivity is allowed only in post-industrial society, and is therefore a distinctive feature of NSMs (Touraine 1981), he stressed the reflexivity of Solidarity while maintaining that Poland was an industrial society (Touraine et al. 1983). How was that possible?

Solidarity's reference to subjectivity is quite evident. The term human being (*człowiek*), which has strong subjective and moral connotations, was omnipresent at every level of Solidarity's discourse, as noted in particular in the accounts by Krzemiński (1997), Tatur

(1989) and Touraine et al. (1983). The dignity of the individual is at the centre of the elaboration by Father Tischner (1981), possibly the most popular and influential 'ideologue' of Solidarity.

Yet is this moral centrality of the human being an *alternative* dimension to the class one stressed in the previous sections? Touraine (1995) has strongly argued, drawing on a broad stream of research including E.P. Thompson, Hoggart and Willis, that the labour movement has actually always included a subjective dimension of defending human prerogatives at work. It seems reasonable to assume that within a vocationally totalitarian society that dimension acquired further significance and visibility: under those condition, any resistance was first of all the defence of the individual. Nevertheless, just like the democratic and the national explanations, the subjectivity, and therefore NSM, thesis cannot stand alone as a dominant, let alone exclusive, explanation of Solidarity. Collectivism and egalitarianism were too strong in the movement to be considered as only exterior features.

3   Answers from the legacy

3.1   *Testing class*

It is possible to add to contemporary sources an 'ex post' perspective based on research carried out after 1989. This section will discuss the four interpretations presented above with the help of the author's own research on Polish trade unionism undertaken between 1995 and 2001. Notably, use will be made of: two in-depth company case studies (Fiat

and Lucchini steel group), based on 33 unstructured interviews with Solidarity or Solidarity breakaways members on the transformation of class identity (1995--99); qualitative research (interviews and non-participant observation) into cases of nationalistic, anti-Semite mobilisation in Ursus and Oświęcim (Auschwitz) in 1998; two studies (interviews and questionnaire) on union attitudes towards the European Union and international union co-operation within European Works Councils (2000--01); qualitative research (interviews and non-participant observation) on the nurses' movement of 1999 and on industrial action in the textile Cotex company in Płock in 1998--99. This research is integrated by more general information and further literature. Opponents of the class interpretation have argued that by 1992 Solidarity 'had disappeared from the Polish social landscape almost without a trace' (Kubik 1994a: 461). If one looks at the workplaces, it is easy to contest this statement. In 2003 Solidarity as a trade union is indeed much weaker than it was – as are all central-eastern European trade unions and, after all, most western trade unions. Nonetheless, Solidarity survives as the largest social organisation in the country after the Catholic Church. Even if it has only around one million members (a tenth of the 1981 membership), it is much more active in the workplaces than its post-communist rival OPZZ (Gardawski 2001) and it has a much more 'blue collar' nature. In 2001, 55 per cent of Solidarity members, as against 31 per cent in OPZZ, were manual workers, and the average salary of a Solidarity member was 1,112 zlotys as against 1,847 for their OPZZ counterparts (CBOS 2001).

It is true that throughout the 1990s Solidarity often played the role of 'protective umbrella' for the government and of promoter of reforms within the workplaces, even when this went against the immediate interests of employees. This has led analysts to

define its action as 'unionists against unions' (Ost and Weinstein 1999). Yet with the beginning of the 2000s that orientation has been definitely condemned by the rank and file, with the abandonment of politics and the uneasy return to a 'union' role. According to CBOS (2001), in 2001 for the first time a majority of Solidarity members vote for the post-communist Left and the general opinion of members about the Solidarity-based government of 1997--2001 is absolutely negative – more so than among non-members or even OPZZ members.

Comparative research on Polish and Italian union activists within two multinational companies carried out in 1995--9 confirms the class interpretation by showing a *parallel* transformation of class consciousness in the two countries (Meardi 2000: 106--51). In Poland some pockets of nearly pure worker movement identity and class consciousness actually endure, even if they are no longer linked to political projects. Class unionism has remained isolated in a society where political divides have largely become post-industrial, but when it does emerge, it refers back directly to the 'first' Solidarity of 1980--81. This is notably the case with a small radical trade union, originating in a Solidarity breakaway, which eloquently chose as its name 'August 80' (*Sierpień 80*). Its activists establish in their discourse a strong link between their struggle against work organisation and supervisors in 1980--81 and the one they are leading now. Their opponents in the workplaces are often identified as the very same people as in the 1980s, regardless of the intervening political and economic changes. Particularly striking examples are the struggles against piecework (one of the classic indicators of class consciousness), which started in the 1980s and continued until the early 1990s.

To recapitulate, previous studies on Solidarity have provided a list of evidence for the appropriateness of the worker movement label: a) union egalitarianism (Laba); b) roots in previous revolts and in worker communities (Laba/Goodwyn); c) strikes against norm increases (Krzemiński); d) supervisors' opposition (Kulpińska); e) similar class consciousness (Touraine); f) detailed job-related demands (Chmiel and Kaczyńska). The new evidence presented in this section, apart from confirming that the main legacy of Solidarity is a trade union, adds two important arguments: g) protest against piecework; and h) continuity in shop-floor opposition after 1989.

Solidarity was certainly not 'just a trade union'. Yet it is possible to state that a class component was *both present and significant*, though not necessarily the *most important* one.

An assessment of the nature of class conflicts under state socialism calls, therefore, for a narrower, but more precise, focus on the labour process as control over labour power. In this respect, a number of disparate observers have noted important similarities between east and west (e.g. Bendix 1956; Burawoy and Lukacs 1992; Héthy and Makó 1974; Lane 1987; Rolle 1998). In spite of differences originating in the nature of the socialist economy (like paternalism, disruptions, shortage economy and atomisation), the case of Solidarity provides proof that at the labour process level the decisive features of exploitation, effort bargaining and collective consciousness are present in both systems. There is, sociologically, something structurally antagonistic common to any industrial work situation – whatever the law of value says (Tinker 2002: 271, 275).

3.2   Testing civil society

The move away from class towards the promotion of a generically pluralist society is most striking in the union attitude after 1989 that has been defined as 'desperately seeking capitalism' (Hardy and Rannie 1995). The above-mentioned comparative research on union activists in Italy and Poland within the same multinational companies shows indeed that Polish unions are more likely than their western counterparts to welcome privatisation, restructuring, pay and working-time flexibility, internal mobility, and outsourcing. This would seem to confirm the strength of neo-liberal opinions, and the primacy of civil society concerns over class ones. But those standpoints are not necessarily evidence of labour weakness. Working-class roots and acceptance of neo-liberal reforms do not necessarily exclude each other: what seems formally inconsistent to external observers can display an internal logic if we adopt an interpretative approach and pay attention to the local experiences and frames of reference, which do not include comparisons of working conditions but do include comparisons of consumption patterns (Meardi 2001). Post-communist workers may accept the market as a symbol of change (if probably not forever), without watering down their class opposition in the workplaces – as was shown above.

More generally, the time test shows that if the Solidarity union has its own weaknesses, the civil society originating in Solidarity is much frailer. Of the innumerable small parties stemming from Solidarity since 1990, none has ever organised more than a very few thousand people – and most have not gone beyond a few dozen. Civil society in general is strikingly weak: the Poles have the record of the lowest electoral participation in Europe, and non-governmental organisations are weak and mostly based on professional interests (Kurczewski and Kurczewska 2001). The Solidarity trade union with its million

members and its extended organisation is a giant in comparison, and it was only under its umbrella that the Right could win the elections of 1997. No other form of associational life is vibrant in today's Poland. Can we really state, then, that in 1989 it was the Polish civil society who won? If it was, why did it instantly vanish?

The democratic nature of Solidarity is indisputable, but is not an alternative explanation to the class one: trade unions can be, and in most historical cases have been, spontaneous promoters of democratisation (Rueschemeyer et al. 1992).

3.3   Testing culture

Solidarity's legacies as a national or religious movement are not clear either. It is true that Solidarity makes extensive use of national flags and national rhetoric. Nonetheless, it has not become a nationalist movement in any way. This can be seen especially in two contexts, which could encourage nationalistic feelings but actually do not: the attitude towards foreign investors and towards the European Union. On the first issue, nationalistic rhetoric is rare and superficial, generally a pure colourful dressing of conflicts which are not cultural at all (Marcinowski 1998; Meardi 1998a), while international union co-operation within the European Works Councils is developing well (Meardi 2004). On the latter, in spite of the existence in Poland of important political actors promoting anti-EU campaigns, Solidarity has avoided associating itself with that side and has actually officially and organisationally promoted European integration (Meardi 2002). Exceptions exist but, while they are greatly highlighted by the media, remain marginal and involve very few workers.

Not only was the Solidarity prime minister in 1997--2001 (Jerzy Buzek) a Protestant, not

a Catholic. Nationalism's marginality can be proved *a fortiori* by taking the two most

extreme cases. The first is the situation at the Ursus tractor factory, where Solidarity, led

by the nationalist and anti-Semite Zygmunt Wrzodak, now an MP for the extreme-right

Polish Families' League, organised demonstrations against 'Brussels and Jerusalem'.

Observation as well as interviews in street demonstrations and in the factory proved that

workers' support for Wrzodak (who tellingly refused to be interviewed by a non-Pole)

was limited to one workshop and was mostly instrumental, based on a rational calculation

of a 'political exchange' (Meardi 2000: 203--5). Workers endured Wrzodak, with

embarrassed smiles, on the assumption that only his political noise would attract the

government's intervention necessary to save the plant. It is notable that even a liberal and

union-unfriendly newspaper like *Gazeta Wyborcza* eventually admitted the economic

rationality of Solidarity at Ursus (Gadomski 2000). The second case, reported by the

world press, was the supposed Solidarity support for anti-Semitic demonstrations in

defence of the so-called 'Pope's cross' on the concentration camp Auschwitz I in the

Summer of 1998. Qualitative research on site as well as documentary analysis of public

debates over the period revealed remarkable ambiguities on the part of most of the

Catholic hierarchy, but no involvement of trade unions from either the town of

Oświęcim/Auschwitz or the rest of the surrounding heavily industrialised area of Upper

Silesia (Meardi 1998b). It is true that Father Jańkowski, confessor of Solidarity and

Wałęsa in 1980, supported the anti-Semitic occupation of the Auschwitz gravel-pit. Yet

he does not have any official role in Solidarity and the only union delegations appearing

in Auschwitz came from very marginal organisations, like Fiat's 'Solidarity 80' that

represents less than one percent of the company workforce. In Solidarity latent anti-Semitism may be a problem – but it is certainly not a mobilising factor.

To conclude, it may be argued that in Poland culture became an oppositional element only when it was combined with class, while it could never have an exclusive large-scale effect on its own.

3.4   Testing new social movements

The 'ex post' approach cannot test whether Solidarity was an NSM in 1980--81, but it may test the thesis of an indirect, generative link between Solidarity and later NSMs. In a longer time perspective it may be that Solidarity, even if it was not itself an NSM (as seen in the previous section), did already contain some 'seeds' of NSMs, which might bear fruit once Poland, twenty years after the Gdańsk August, appears to be entering into a 'post-industrial' societal type. Solidarity's legacy would then lie not only in the trade union, but in the emergence of NSMs as well. There are two theoretical grounds to advance such a hypothesis. First, Touraine (1987) argued that the workers' movement, even if its history is coming to an end, may help NSMs to develop. Second, Tarrow (1994) has shown that a cycle of contention may provide incentives for new, apparently unrelated movements.

NSMs in Poland after 1989 apparently show no links to Solidarity, which, on the contrary, raises fierce antipathy in the feminist, environmentalist and anarchist movements (Żak 2001). However, it is necessary to distinguish more carefully between Solidarity of the 1990s (largely institutionalised and politically conservative) and the movement of 1980--81. As far as the latter is concerned, Żak, like Wylie (2001) in his

study of the anti-militaristic *Wolność i Pokój*, finds that NSMs' activists appreciate it and contrast it, as a 'spontaneous' mobilisation, to the later developments that, in their views, have been expropriated by other forces and notably the Catholic Church. There is, then, a latent 'Solidarity matrix' in them (Frybes 2002: 61). The life-course of social movements and activists is still important, and it is possible to clearly distinguish, among Polish movements, between those with some Solidarity genes, like ecologists and feminists, and those without, like the 'Self-Defence' peasants' movement, whose activists had more in common with the Communist Party than with Rural Solidarity, and for whom 1989 was a national catastrophe. The former – including ecologists and feminists – are more 'subjective' than the latter. Aware of being minority movements, they struggle for their own affirmation and recognition.

Nevertheless, contrary to Touraine's (1990) expectation of a surge of social movements after 1989, NSMs are altogether very weak in Poland: outside the industrial and peasants' unions collective mobilisation is rare and generally not centred on the affirmation of subjectivity (Frybes and Kuczyński 2002). In the 2000s, signs of youth protest emerge, largely due to the dramatic labour market situation, but only in cultural forms (hip-hop music, deviance) and, interestingly, against, not in continuity with, the generation that made Solidarity. Although Polish society has been defined as one of the most rebellious in the world (Ekiert and Kubik 2001), the opposite seems true.

3.5   *Explaining subjectivity without NSM: the case of gender difference*

The specific case of the role of gender in social mobilisation is telling for two reasons.

First, gender difference is an *archetypal* form of difference, and if subjectivity is to be

based on the recognition of diversity ('the Other', in Touraine's words), this is a crucial point. Second, this is the case of most apparent contrast between NSMs (feminism in particular) and the political-cultural orientations of today's Solidarity. If any positive link can be demonstrated between the Solidarity experience and feminist mobilisation, this would be a strong *a fortiori* argument to claim that the movement of 1980--81 can be a resource for further, different mobilisations.

Trade unions developed into male-based organisations everywhere (Colgan and Ledwith 2002), and Poland is no exception. Few working women (unlike numerous intellectual women) played a leading role in Solidarity in 1980--81, although, after all, the historical strike at the Lenin Shipyards in Gdańsk of August 1980 started with the firing of a woman, Anna Walentynowicz, who was among the leaders of the clandestine free trade unions. Women were as unionised as men (Radźko 1981) and constituted almost half of the union membership, but at the first Solidarity Congress in 1981 they made up only 7 per cent of the delegates and among the 82 members of the national commission there was only one woman (Tobiasz 1999). After the introduction of martial law (when most male leaders were interned) women became essential in the underground activity: four women were at the very top of regional clandestine structures, and the most important clandestine periodical, the weekly *Tygodnik Mazowsze*, was edited by a women-only board (Kondratowicz 2001). However, women's role has remained unheralded and dismissed (Long 1996), deserving the definition of 'national secret' (Penn 1994). After 1989, most of the top-level female activists quit public commitment and in any case the overwhelming majority was not sensitive to gender issues (Reading 1992).

Nor was democratisation women-friendly. In 1990 the first Solidarity's Women's Department was rapidly dissolved because of its opposition to the prohibition of abortion (Tarasiewicz 1999). Solidarity still claims to have 45 per cent of women among its members, but national-level surveys show that this is a gross overestimation (CBOS 2001). Women are heavily underrepresented in Solidarity: at the Fifteenth National Congress in 2002, they made up only 12.6 per cent of the delegates. The number of women decreases the higher the level in the hierarchy, from 18.5 per cent on the regional executive boards down to zero in the national presidium in 1998 (Tobiasz 1999).

Ten years after 1989, however, important events suggest that there is some potential for women's subjective action in Poland. First, the strong and relatively successful nurses' movement, which unlike any other employees' mobilisation in recent years has been politically independent, has received overwhelming public support, and has used an explicitly gendered language (underlined by female verb conjugation, allowed by Slavic grammar). Secondly, in 1999, after many years of delay, a participative debate, mainly in the pages of the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, was opened on the role of women in Solidarity during the 1980s. Third, there has been an extreme case of female workers' revolt at the Cotex textile factory in Płock. A four-month sit-in strike involved hundreds of women, organised in the 'Solidarity 80' union, against the almost entirely male management, foremen, and other union leaders, and had strong gender connotations (Meardi 2000: 260--63). Finally, the women's magazine *Wysokie obcasy* launched a protest against the reform of the pension system, allegedly discriminating against women under the disguise of protective measures. Far from being passive, Polish women can and do mobilise, albeit in their own way, even within Solidarity-originated organisations.

Malinowska (2001) points to the fact that in 1980--81 both sexes, as far as they participated in the movement, remained in 'their' places. In Penn's (1994: 11) words, women organised union groups, managed money collections, found contacts in western embassies, communicated and organised contacts with the clergy, while men appeared on the public scene. Malinowska accepts Touraine's point of the triple nature of Solidarity (union, democratic and national movement), but claims that none of them had anything to do with feminism. Does this mean that women's mobilisation has nothing to do with Solidarity? Not exactly, since Malinowska also crucially argues that 'if considered globally as a social movement, Solidarity created nonetheless also an indispensable ground for the emergence of feminist identity: it raised society's subjectivity, making the individuals aware of the right to define themselves in individual categories, as well as of freely constructing collective identities' (Malinowska 2001: 27). As with the previous observations on Polish female mobilisation, it can be argued that there may be an indirect link between Solidarity and feminism, and therefore *a fortiori* between Solidarity and NSMs.

How has it been possible for Solidarity to be at the same time a classic labour movement as well as the promoter of reflexive subjectivity in a way typical of new, post-industrial social movements, which is most apparent in female mobilisation? Although Poland in 1980 was at the peak of industrial development, the society's vocationally totalitarian nature made the union's 'subjective' element more crucial than elsewhere and may explain why Solidarity could combine so strongly collectivist and subjective elements.

Conclusion

The debate on what dimension of Solidarity was the most important is not over. The triple dimension (class, democratic, national) view by Touraine remains a fair assessment. This article stressed the importance of the class element against the tendency to forget it in favour of democratic and/or cultural interpretations. The unique social movement of 1980 is best understood by reference to its two 'minimum denominators', class and subjectivity, originating in the unique double nature of the Polish society: an industrial society and a 'vocationally totalitarian' one. The additional democratic and national aspects respond to the two main constraints (political and international) the Polish society was facing, but the sociological analysis developed in this article indicates that these were not the primary and deepest mobilisation factors.

On the way we understand Solidarity depend many issues about future social mobilisation in Poland. By re-stressing the class origins of Solidarity (even though in a specific form due to the specificity of the state socialist labour process) the article suggests that union activity, if undergoing a period of crisis, is not going to disappear from the Polish social landscape. Just the opposite, it will probably remain for quite some time the most visible legacy of the social movement of 1980--81. Some of this activity is already apparent in Solidarity's large demonstrations against the deregulation of labour law in 2002, the organisation campaigns in the new western-owned hypermarkets (Gardawski 2001), or more generally the revival of industrial conflict since 2001. The collapse of Solidarity's political 'super-structure' in 2000--2001 has allowed the unionist side to re-emerge more visibly.

Nevertheless, the existence of an equally important subjective side means that NSMs, too, can, if indirectly, stem from the experience of 1980--81: while they are not based on Solidarity's classic cultural resources, and may even appear opposed to them, they have roots in the 1980--81 social movement experience.

In this regard, Ost has argued, drawing on a Polish--Czech comparison, that the social movement origin of Solidarity has turned out to be more of a hindrance than a resource (Ost 2002). The implication is that union recovery can happen only through a refocusing on economic issues, since workers' material needs have been neglected for too long while political initiatives meet growing discontent or indifference. This point fits well with recent developments, but at a deeper level of analysis the social movement dimension of Solidarity should not be dismissed altogether. In fact, no union movement (not even the Anglo-Saxon ones) has ever been able to be *just* business unionism (Hyman 2001). While Solidarity can clearly give more space to classic union activity than it has done, the subjectivity side of the social movement will also leave its mark. First, within the union, through cultural resources stressing workers' prerogatives as human beings (the *człowiek* discourse). Second, more generally for the Polish society, by diffusing (in Tarrow's sense) the capacity to develop collective action under the unfavourable conditions of post-communism – even in the last places one would expect it.

Notes

[1] At a very high level of abstraction, it may be logically argued that state socialism was a sub-species of capitalism, and that the law of value, in the sense of 'the mass of direct labour time (…) as the determinant factor in the production of wealth' (Marx 1939/1973: 704), did apply there – only in a more 'mediated' form. For the purpose of this article, however, such theoretical abstraction would undermine analytical and comparative precision. Even if the law of value applied under state socialism, the crucial point for the issue of class conflict is that the contradiction between the theory of value of bourgeois production and its development (*ibid*) did not take place in a comparable way. State socialism production, unlike bourgeois, was not based (or it was so to a much a smaller extent) on the exchange value, so that it is almost impossible to calculate the rate of exploitation in Marxist terms. Moreover, the controllers of the factories did not own the production, to the point that they were not always interested in maximising it, which lead to what Kornai (1992) defined as 'shortage economy'.

[2] The political entity created by Solidarity in 1997 (Solidarity Electoral Action) was explicitly right-wing and ended up, in the subsequent elections of 2001, calling itself 'Solidarity Electoral Action of the Right'. Since then, Solidarity has formally abandoned the political arena (XIV Congress, 2001).

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