

Utopian visions of solidarity in Polish cinema

MIROSŁAW PRZYLIPIAK

*Received 11.10.2016,
received in revised form 6.12.2017,
accepted 11.12.2017.*

Abstract

The “Solidarity” movement, especially in the first period of its activity, that is, in the years 1980-1981, instigated numerous myths. Polish cinema contributed immensely to their creation and proliferation. The most important among those myths were: the myth of solidarity between all working people, the myth of solidarity between the genders, and – perhaps the most lasting of all – the myth of the alliance between workers and intellectuals. All these forms of solidarity really existed for a short period of time in 1980/1981, but each of them collapsed afterwards. Consequently, one can say that they bore the marks of beautiful utopias which in the long run were doomed to failure.

Key words

solidarity, “Solidarity”, Polish cinema, workers-intellectual alliance, women in “Solidarity”

Utopijne wizje solidarności w polskim kinie

Abstrakt

Ruch „Solidarności”, zwłaszcza w pierwszym okresie jego działalności (1980-1981), dostarczył wielu mitów, w rozpowszechnianiu których aktywnie uczestniczyło polskie kino. Najważniejsze z nich to mit solidarności wszystkich ludzi pracy, mit solidarności ponad podziałami płciowymi, a także może najtrwalszy z nich wszystkich mit sojuszu robotników z inteligentami. Każda z tych form solidarności rzeczywiście istniała w krótkim okresie „pierwszej Solidarności”, każda załamała się w okresie późniejszym. W tym sensie wszystkie nosiły znamiona pięknych utopii, które na dłuższą metę musiały przegrać z realiami życia.

Słowa kluczowe

Solidarność, „Solidarność”, kino polskie, sojusz robotników z inteligentami, kobiety w „Solidarności”

1. Solidarity, “Solidarity”, and the cinema

In his book *Evolutionary Psychology: The New Science of the Mind* (1998), David Buss, a renowned authority in the field of psychology, asks how altruism is possible in the world where – as evolutionary psychology assumes – human behavior is determined by the laws of evolution, and therefore the two main drives that govern humans are: the drive to save one’s own life and the drive to spread one’s genes. To answer his own question, Buss refers to William Donald Hamilton’s rule whose mathematical expression is as follows:

$$C < r \times B$$

where C is the cost in fitness to the agent (altruist);
 r the genetic relatedness between the agent (altruist) and the recipient;

B is the fitness benefit to the recipient.

Fitness costs and benefits are measured in fecundity.

To illustrate this rule, Buss presents a hypothetical situation. Let's assume that a man at the river bank sees someone drowning. Is he going to jump into the water for rescue? It turns out that his reaction depends on the grade of genetic relatedness between the agent – that is the man at the river bank – and the recipient, the drowning person. When there is no genetic relatedness, the evolutionary logic is against rescuing, because in this case the man who risks his life has nothing to win. But what if there is a genetic relatedness, that is, if the drowning person is a sibling of the agent? The calculus of genes is still against him, as the agent who decides to risk his life, i.e. 100% of his genes, may save only 50% of his genes, which simply does not pay off. It takes at least three siblings to make a rescue mission viable. Now, what happens, if the drowning person is the agent's nephew or niece, sharing 25% of genes with him? When we know the rule, it is easier to count. The agent does not jump into the water until there are at least five of his nephews and nieces drowning. Then Buss passes to cousins, who share 12,5% of genes with the agent. How many cousins must be drowning to make the agent hasten to the rescue? At least nine. The argument is concluded with a confounding inference: It does not mean that people always behave that way, yet this is the logic of genes selection. Only the genes that fulfill conditions of the Hamilton law can evolve, all others are ruthlessly eliminated (Buss 2001: 251-253).

The image of nine cousins drowning in the river and their remote relative watching from the bank and calculating the percentage of genes before he takes any action seems profoundly absurd, but the logic which stands behind the situation described to prove the point is absolutely clear: altruism is contradictory to the evolutionary theory, and the genes which bear it must be ruthlessly eliminated in the process of evolution. Buss and Hamilton speak about altruism, but they could have used the word "solidarity" because it means basically the same: a selfless act on someone else's behalf. Buss and Hamil-

ton ascertain that we can act on someone else's behalf, only if we have our own interest in it, best, if the beneficiary bears our genes.

In view of the above, I would like to focus on representations of "Solidarność" (Polish Independent Self-Governing Trade Union "Solidarity", founded in 1980) and gestures of solidarity in Polish feature films. Providing that films may be treated as a mirror of social psyche, I would like to consider the following questions: To what extent solidarity motivated "Solidarity"? How did filmic representations of solidarity between the members of "Solidarity" change in time?

If we want to understand the mechanisms steering "Solidarity", we must take into account the evolution of this movement, which consists of at least four stages:

- 1980-1981 – the initial period, when the name "Solidarność" ("Solidarity") was coined during the August strike. "Solidarity" (at present often called "The First Solidarity"), founded in 1980 and banned in 1982, was the first independent organization in the whole communist bloc since 1945, which brought together all forces opposing the communist system.
- 1982-1989 – the period of "heroic Solidarity", an underground organization which continued its struggle against the communist regime.
- 1989-1991 – the period of "triumphant Solidarity", a victorious political force whose representatives, acting on behalf of the Polish society, negotiated at the "Round Table Talks" the future of Poland with representatives of the communist government. After winning the parliamentary and presidential elections, "Solidarity" and its leaders gave a new shape to this country, leading it to the system of democracy and market economy.
- 1991-till now – the trade union with evident right wing leanings.

In each of these stages the relationship between "Solidarity" and solidarity was different.

A list of feature films concerning "Solidarity" comprises about a dozen of titles. It opens with Andrzej Wajda's *Man of Iron*, the winner of the Golden Palm in Cannes 1981, shot

partly at the site of the August Strike in Gdańsk Shipyard in the spring of 1981. Then, in the 1980s, after the imposition of the martial law on 13 December 1981, several films were made that either focused on “Solidarity”, or at least alluded to it. Some of them expressed the somber mood of the defeated, showing their despair. In this context, one has to mention *Wigilia '81* (Christmas Eve '81, 1982) by Leszek Wosiewicz, *Stan wewnętrzny* (Internal State, 1983) by Krzysztof Tchórzewski, and *Bez końca* (No End, 1984) by Krzysztof Kieślowski. Two films – *Godność* (Dignity, 1984) and *Czas nadziei* (Time of Hope, 1986), both directed by Roman Wionczek, clearly expressed the communist party view. “Solidarity” and the martial law were referred to and metaphorically represented in anti-utopian sci-fi films, for example, *Wojna światów. Ostatnie stulecie* (War of Worlds: The Last Century, 1982) by Piotr Szulkin and *Seksmisja* (Sexmission, 1984) by Juliusz Machulski. Near the end of the decade, when the communist system was collapsing, several films were made which alluded to the period marked by “Solidarity’s” activity, e.g. *Stan posiadania* (The State of Possession, 1989), dir. Krzysztof Zanussi, *Stan strachu* (The State of Fear, 1989), dir. Janusz Kijowski, *Ostatni prom* (The Last Ferry, 1989), dir. Waldemar Krzystek, *300 mil do nieba* (300 Miles to Heaven, 1989), dir. Maciej Dejczer, and *Ostatni dzwonek* (The Last Bell, 1989), dir. Magdalena Łazarkiewicz. None of these films was about the “Solidarity” movement, not to mention the August strike, but as their action took place either in the period of the so called “First Solidarity” (1980-1981) or during the martial law, they referred to the complexities of the political situation in Poland.

As many as three waves of films about “Solidarity” can be distinguished after 1989. The first wave covered the period between 1990 and 1995, bringing, unsurprisingly, a surge of comedies, e.g. *Rozmowy kontrolowane* (Supervised calls, 1991) by Sylwester Chęciński, *Człowiek z...* (Man of..., 1993) by Konrad Szolajski, *Zawrócony* (Returned, 1995) by Kazimierz Kutz. One has to add to this list an allegorical film *Ucieczka z kina*

wolność (An Escape from the Cinema “Freedom”, 1990) by Wojciech Marczewski and *Śmierć jak kromka chleba* (Death Like a Slice of Bread, 1994) by Kazimierz Kutz, in which the tragic mood predominated. Then in 2005/2006, during the second wave, two films were made in commemoration of “Solidarity’s” 25th anniversary: *Strajk*, (Strike, 2006) by Volker Schlöndorff and *Solidarność, Solidarność* (Solidarity, Solidarity, 2006), consisting of thirteen short stories, each made by a different director. The most recent wave includes *Popiełuszko. Wolność jest w nas* (Popiełuszko. Freedom Is in Us, 2009) by Rafał Wierczyński, *80 milionów* (80 Million, 2011) by Waldemar Krzystek and *Wałęsa. Człowiek z nadziei* (Wałęsa. Man of Hope, 2013) by Andrzej Wajda.

The list of filmic achievements from the period under discussion appears fairly long. It can become even longer, if we add some films, in which action develops independently in the period witnessing the plight of “Solidarity”, e.g. *Ile waży koń trojański?* (What is the Weight of the Trojan Horse?, 2008), dir. Juliusz Machulski, *Obywatel* (A Citizen, 2014), dir. Jerzy Stuhr, *Kret* (A Mole, 2010), dir. Rafał Lewandowski, *Psy* (Cops, 1991), dir. Władysław Pasikowski, and *Gracze* (Gamblers, 1995), dir. Ryszard Bugajski. The situation would change, however, if instead of representations of minor strikes, desperate living conditions, such as shortages of basic goods and long queues, or everyday struggle against communism, we were to make a list of films showing the actual political events, such as the August 1980 strike, the political activity of the Solidarity leaders, or the breakthrough of 1989. The list would seem much less impressive. The August strike that moved the wheels of history and the political activity of either the “Solidarity” leaders or real-life communist politicians make their appearance only in a handful of titles: two films by Andrzej Wajda, *Man of Iron* and *Wałęsa. Man of Hope*, *Strike* by Volker Schlöndorff, and a few shorts from *Solidarity, Solidarity*. In the case of the crucial events of 1989, the list of films is even shorter – one can even say, shamefully short. Only Andrzej

Wajda in his *Wałęsa. Man of Hope* refers to the events, such as the Round Table negotiations and their aftermath.

Discussing this paradoxical refusal to celebrate the victory on the screen, Krystyna Weiher-Sitkiewicz explains:

the problem is, perhaps, not that nobody wants to tell about this, but that we don't know how to do that. Brought up in a cult of martyrology and romanticism, we cherish the struggles in which we were doomed to failure, preferring to die rather than to surrender. The need to celebrate victories has not developed in our culture. Failures and defeats bring about such noble and beautiful descriptions. One can bask in pathos and resort to romantic mythology. Victory? It is so unPolish...". (Weiher-Sitkiewicz 2017: 208)

It can be claimed that this Polish tendency to celebrate failures and defeats rather than victories is responsible for the pessimistic tone prevailing in most films about "Solidarity". Many films, especially from the 1980s, introduce this tone of gloom and sadness by emphasizing that "Solidarity" is a lost case, the country is plunging into poverty and despair, there is no hope for a better future, and the only victory we can count on is a moral one. Ironically, also films made after 1989 most frequently express a sense of disappointment: the world is not like it was meant to be. Promises and hopes have not been fulfilled. And what seems to be particularly distressing is the acute crisis of solidarity. Undoubtedly, the higher the expectations concerning the national, social and trade union solidarity, the more disappointing the fall: Poles are no "one nation under God" any more, groups and individuals pursue their own particular aims, without caring about what happens to others.

What forms of solidarity were so strongly hoped for, only to end up as part of an unrealizable and unrealized utopia? I will discuss three forms of solidarity in connection with the "Solidarity" movement:

- (1) solidarity of all workers, regardless of their profession, type of employment, status in the company or place of living, giving a new life to the old Marxist slogan “Workers of the world, unite!”;
- (2) solidarity between the genders;
- (3) solidarity between workers and intellectuals.

2. Solidarity of workers

“Solidarity” as a name for the emerging, independent and self-governing trade union was adopted during the strike in August 1980. In point of fact, the name was first given to the news-sheets (underground newspaper) mimeographed and distributed among all striking workers and inhabitants of Gdańsk. The idea, however, stemmed from the course of events. The very fact that the strike, confined at that time only to Gdańsk Shipyard named after Lenin, was sparked by a layoff of a single female worker – Anna Walentynowicz, who had been fired by the management – justifies the use of “Solidarity” as the name for the developing movement. At first only three demands were put forward: the shipyard workers demanded reemployment of Walentynowicz, a considerable wage increase, and the permission to erect a monument to commemorate the workers killed by the police in December 1970. Within a couple of days other plants, firms and companies started to join the protest. A symbol of its expansion became Henryka Krzywonos, a tram driver who stopped her tram on 15 August announcing that “The tram will go no farther. We’re joining the strike!”. The tram passengers who warmly applauded expressed their solidarity with those who had decided to go on strike. Solidarity manifested itself not only amongst workers, but also between the workers and the inhabitants of Gdańsk. Both forms of solidarity were given their symbolic, pictorial representations in documentary as well as feature films, in *Robotnicy 80* (Workers 80, 1981), dir. A. Chodakowski and A. Zajączkowski, and on a smaller scale in Andrzej Wajda’s *Man of Iron*. The solidarity of all workplaces and workers is inscribed into and symbolized

in both films by a big room dimmed with cigarette smoke and crowded with delegates from around 400 workplaces, which adjoined the smaller room where negotiations with the representatives of the government took place. The solidarity between the striking workers and the inhabitants of Gdańsk – which in itself was a synecdoche of the unity of the whole nation – was symbolized by the crowd which gathered at the Shipyard gate, at the square which bears the name of “Solidarity” now.

All of this could have failed, though, if gestures of solidarity had stopped too early. On 16 August, the people in power, aware of the growing popularity of the striking workers, decided to agree to their initial demands in order to quench the strike as soon as possible. The agreement was signed, the end of the strike was announced, the workers started to disperse, and then a few women raised the alarm – Henryka Krzywonos among them – crying out that the Shipyard workers betrayed the workers from other plants, whose protest in this situation would be easily crushed. In response to their appeal, Lech Wałęsa changed his mind and decided that the strike would be continued in solidarity with the other workers from Gdańsk. That decision gave a spark to the “proper” strike. Delegates from 350 workplaces gathered in the Shipyard building, 21 demands of historic importance were formulated, then negotiated with the Polish government representatives, and eventually signed.



Delegates from the striking workplaces.
A frame from *Workers 80*



Citizens of Gdańsk at the Shipyard gate.
A frame from *Man of Iron*

Andrzej Wajda's film *Wałęsa. Man of Hope* recreates the events mentioned above but as it is often the case with Wajda's films, certain more or less important facts are modified – the director does not seem to care much about the details. For example, the filmic tram does stop at the spot, where the actual tram stopped. Moreover the events of 15 and 16 August have been merged into one day, which produces a false impression that Henryka Krzywonos intervened in the strike's course right after she got off the tram. Other altered details stirred a fervent discussion, as they touched a deep and bitter split in contemporary Polish politics. In the film, Anna Walentynowicz stands next to Wałęsa and applauds his decision to finish the strike. Not until Henryka Krzywonos talks to her on the side, does she change her mind and try to prevent workers from leaving the shipyard. In reality, the paths of Anna Walentynowicz on the one hand and Lech Wałęsa and Henryka Krzywonos on the other diverged very soon after the August strike. Walentynowicz's adherents reproached Wajda for twisting the facts to fit his political objectives (Kornacki 2017: 87).

All these circumstances and discrepancies notwithstanding, it is evident that numerous scenes from the film bring the notion of solidarity to mind: first the Shipyard workers strike on behalf of Anna Walentynowicz; then the workers from other plants together with Gdańsk's inhabitants act on behalf of the Shipyard workers; then the Shipyards workers repay their support. At the end of the strike sequence we can see miners from the Silesia region and workers from all over Poland joining the strike. In face of such massive, unanimous front, the communist government decided to yield to the protester's demands.

All these filmic images of solidarity among working people have forged the myth of "Solidarity" and become the legacy of the movement and of that particular period in Polish history. True, one can perhaps doubt whether solidarity is an appropriate word for what motivated "Solidarity" members and supporters. Perhaps it was common interest rather than a sense of

solidarity that united all those people? Perhaps it was the common enemy? Anyway, whatever it was, it did not last long.

Even in the tumultuous period of the “First Solidarity” workers were less and less eager to go on strike on behalf of other workers or plants, and this form of solidarity ended up definitely after 1989 – after the introduction of market economy, when many plants went bankrupt and a hundred thousand people were laid off. A symbolic end of this form of solidarity transpired in 1994, when the miners in brown-coal mines of Bełchatów went on strike, resisting the establishment of a holding company to manage several money-losing mines. “Solidarity” called for a nationwide strike in support of the miners. In WSK Mielec, the aircraft manufacturing plant situated in another part of Poland, “Solidarity” members started to prepare for an imminent strike in solidarity with the miners. In David Ost’s account, local leaders:

Dutifully but without enthusiasm went about all preparations, informing members, preparing leaflets, arranging with management as to minimize disruption to the plant. Two days before the scheduled action, the miners abruptly settled. The national union was caught by surprise, but bigger damage ensued at the local level. Mielec activists and rank and file alike were furious to have been mobilized on behalf of others doing far better than them, only to be ungraciously “switched off” when the miners won theirs, leaving Mielec laborers in an even worse comparative position than before. (Ost 2006: 82-83)

3. Solidarity between the genders

The abovementioned scene from *Wałęsa. Man of Hope* brings into focus another meaning of solidarity – solidarity between the genders. It is significant that it was women who saved the strike and pushed it in the right direction, away from particular interests of a narrow group of the shipyard workers and towards the common good. Not less significant is the fact that despite its positive consequences, the women’s gesture of soli-

solidarity has not been sufficiently publicized. This act is mentioned neither in *Workers 80*, a documentary which captures the August strike on the spot, nor in the first feature film on these events, i.e. Andrzej Wajda's semidocumentary *Man of Iron*, nor in any other feature or documentary film that I know of.

For many years the history of "Solidarity" was presented as the history of men's struggle for a better future. Among the well-known names of the "Solidarity" leaders in the heroic times of this organization – Lech Wałęsa, Zbigniew Bujak, Władysław Frasyniuk, Andrzej Gwiazda – one cannot find women's names. Women did act in "Solidarity", and did many important things, but they were perceived and they perceived themselves as playing secondary and auxiliary roles of helpers rather than agents. As Agnieszka Graff concludes:

the fact that the history of "Solidarity" kicked off from laying off Anna Walentynowicz was in fact erased, held out somewhere in the background as an anecdote. The proper beginning of this story is the moment when the moustached Lech Wałęsa in a manly manner jumped over the fence. (Graff 2001: 26)

This suggestion can be corroborated by the fact that although most people do know that the immediate reason for the strike was the sacking of Anna Walentynowicz, barely anybody can say what she was laid off for. So, it took a considerably long time before Polish women recognized their distinct role in "Solidarity" and started to rewrite history, so that the women's contribution could be taken into account. And, significantly, this awareness of their devotion and active role was brought from the outside, by an American academic, Shana Penn, with her books: *Podziemie kobiet* (Women's Underground), published in Poland in 2003, and the highly acclaimed *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland*, published in the States in 2005, and in Poland in 2014, and an English sociologist, Peggy Watson, who authored *The Rise of Masculinism in Eastern Europe* and *(Anti)feminism after com-*

munism. Polish researchers followed in their footsteps with films (Dzido, Śliwowski 2014) and books (Dzido 2016), which for the first time appreciated the role of women in the “Solidarity” movement. Also, the influence exerted by *Marzenia i tajemnice* (Dreams and Secrets) by Danuta Wałęsa, published in 2011, can’t be overestimated. In her book, Danuta Wałęsa, Lech Wałęsa’s wife, presents a woman’s look at the tumultuous time in Poland.

Andrzej Wajda, who was always a very perceptive observer of social life, could not have overlooked this trend. The difference between *Man of Iron* (1981) and *Wałęsa. Man of Hope* as far as the women’s role is concerned is meaningful. Agnieszka, who in *Man of Marble* was such a strong and independent woman¹, in *Man of Iron*, has lost her guts – she is just a Mother-Pole, a faithful and loyal supporter of her husband. What is even more striking, a historically memorable scene with women preventing workers from dispersing is not included in Wajda’s first artistic recapitulation of the events. Good at sewing armbands or preparing meals for their brave fighting men, the women in *Man of Iron* play only auxiliary roles. One shouldn’t overlook the implications of the very first scene from this film, in which some silly women that seem not to understand the situation give a radio interview, opposing the strike and supporting the existing political system. The misogynist tone of that scene is evident. *Man of Hope* is very different in this respect. Women are presented as strong and active agents. This concerns not only the brave women workers who did not let the strike end, but also Danuta Wałęsa, who, in a sensitive performance by Agnieszka Grochowska, is a flesh and blood person and virtually steals the film. Oriana Fallaci, played by Maria Rosaria Ommagio, from whom the film starts, becomes a real match for the figure of Wałęsa. Undoubtedly, the film owes this change of tone to the surge of gender interpretation of the “Solidarity” history.

¹ Agnieszka as a character displays so many masculine traits that many critics claim she is mentally a male.



The three women who saved the strike: Henryka Krzywonos (Dorota Wellman), Anna Walentynowicz (Ewa Kurylo) and Alina Pienkowska (Anna Gryzkówna) in *Wałesa: Man of Hope*.

However, it would be difficult to seriously ponder the utopian solidarity between the genders in “Solidarity”, because such a utopia has never taken on a definite shape. From the very beginning, this organization was regarded as a domain of males’ prestige and achievement, with women playing only secondary roles, which they readily, even if not quite consciously, accepted. In her interpretation of the “Solidarity” women’s role, Agnieszka Graff goes even further. In her view, this rebellious bid for freedom, which “Solidarity” undoubtedly was, on a symbolic plane reinstated the patriarchal order, previously upset by communism. Communism was regarded in Poland as the time of “degradation, domestication and symbolic castration of all men” who couldn’t act in public as this meant servility. Instead, they were confined to domestic spheres (traditionally regarded as feminine), where, as Graf puts it, “do it yourself” meant “do a kitchen unit”. At the same time women, responsible for feeding families, went “hunting” (viz. shopping). “In a profoundly patriarchal society”, Graff

writes, “which Polish society undoubtedly was and still is, a story about the trading of gender roles is the clearest possible metaphor of chaos” (Graff 2001: 23). Therefore, the rebellion against communism meant also the struggle for the restitution of the *status quo ante* – a natural (i.e. patriarchal) order.

Graff claims that this complex psycho-sociological syndrome has been best exemplified by the allegedly most popular Polish comedy of all times, *Seksmisja* (Sexmission). One has to admit, there is something to it. The film’s enormous popularity in Poland may have resulted not only from multiple references to the reverse roles the genders played under communism but also from nostalgia after the lost world of male values. *Sexmission*, a dystopian comedy, was produced during the martial law in Poland and contains many pictorial allusions to this time. What is more important, it depicts a totalitarian state inhabited only by women, as all males have become extinct in the aftermath of a nuclear war. In this world, two men, who had been hibernated before the war, wake up. The women in power decide to “normalize”, that is, castrate them, but they manage to escape assisted by one rebellious woman. They eventually succeed in reinstating the proper, natural order. The analogies are clear. The rulers of this totalitarian state, that is, women, represent communists, the two awakened rebels stand for the Solidarity movement (the more so as they form a worker–intellectual alliance, so characteristic of the “First Solidarity” – more about this further), and the main goal of their rebellion against women and the pending castration is to reconstitute the natural order, that is, the natural domination of males over females.

On a less symbolic and more down-to earth level, the utopian solidarity of the genders, which had never been more than a phantasmal phenomenon anyway, broke down decisively in the early years of the 1990s, during the transformation. According to David Ost, who carried out a thorough research on the subject, women were the first to be disposed of during the massive layoffs, especially in big plants. The trade union lead-

ers in the large state-run manufacturing firms of the early and mid-1990s – all men, obviously – thought that their firms employed too many female workers and that women ought to be laid off before men. They used to justify it on the ground of professional inadequacy saying that without prior technical training women were insufficiently qualified for the jobs, and therefore disposable. Sometimes the previous socio-political system was to be blamed. For example, in the big steel plant at Stalowa Wola, a Solidarity leader, asked whether there had been large-scale layoffs at his plant, answered equivocally at first: “Yes, sort of, but this was limited to people who had, let’s say, a ‘light’ attitude to work”. It turned out that the only reason he did not take layoffs seriously was that the majority of those affected were women.

The situation was this: a steel mill, metal plant – this is men’s work. But these men had wives, and in the 1960s something had to be done with these wives. Since there were no textile firms here, the factory took them on, just like a good mother. Administrative offices were built up, entirely unnecessary, without economic justification, and the women were hired. When the crisis came, naturally women were first to be fired. We didn’t object. (Ost 2006: 145)

4. Solidarity between workers and intellectuals

I have already mentioned the difference between Agnieszka from Andrzej Wajda’s *Man of Marble* and the same character from the sequel, *Man of Iron*, which can be interpreted in the context of gender. But another interpretation is also viable, especially if we focus on the class context. Agnieszka is a filmmaker, an artist, an intellectual; Birkut is a worker. Her submission stems from the respect that she, as an intellectual, pays to the worker. In David Ost’s words, she realizes that “her struggles are nothing compared to those of average worker. The intellectual gives up her craft to become a wife to the Gdańsk shipworker valiantly fighting for social justice” (Ost

2006: 39). This refers to another form of solidarity, highly publicized, belonging to the core of the “Solidarity” myth and legend: the solidarity between workers and intellectuals.

The event which laid a solid foundation for this kind of solidarity took place on 22 August, on the ninth day of the strike. Two opposition intellectuals from Warsaw, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, the future prime minister, and Bronisław Geremek, the future minister of foreign affairs, brought a letter of support, signed by 64 intellectuals, to the shipyard. The striking workers asked them whether they could help, by organizing a team of advisers, to which they agreed. In a documentary film *Workers 80*, Wałęsa, Mazowiecki and Geremek give an account of this crucial moment. Two days later, on 24 August, the team of advisers, consisting of about ten intellectuals, mostly academics, was officially appointed and started its work. They advised the Inter-Enterprise Striking Committee, prepared projects for a future agreement, negotiating the particular points with the experts from the government side. All of this is presented in *Workers 80*.

The decision to co-operate must be put in a wider context of relationships between intellectuals and “ordinary people” in Polish culture. Our romantic poets promoted the idea of alliance between common people and noblemen, which is best epitomized in a famous quote by Zygmunt Krasiński: “Jeden, jeden tylko cud, z polską szlachtą polski lud” [There’s only one miracle: Polish peasantry and Polish nobility acting as one]. The quote is sometimes considered to be a prophetic vision of the “Solidarity” movement. Krasiński assumed that Poland might regain independence only on the condition that lower-class people, whom he regarded as a dangerous mob – the ignorant rabble, would ally with the nobility and act under supervision and direction of aristocracy. In the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth centuries, some eminent Polish writers who exerted a great influence on Polish national mentality, e.g. Stefan Żeromski or Eliza Orzeszkowa, claimed that the educated have moral obligation to support and spread cul-

ture and education among the poor and the uneducated. Simultaneously another important trend appeared, called “chłopomania” (peasant-mania), depicted superbly by Stanisław Wyspiański in his groundbreaking masterpiece of Polish literature, *Wesele* (A Wedding). “Chłopomania” signifies admiration of simple people, predominantly peasants, by artists and intellectuals fascinated by simple people’s vitality. Under communism workers were worshipped, officially at least, as “the ruling class”, and “the salt of the earth”, whereas intellectuals were downgraded. The phrase used very often by communist propaganda was that the communist party rules on behalf of all working people, namely, “workers, peasants and *working intelligentsia*”, which implied that some part of intelligentsia avoids work, living a parasitic life at the cost of others. Apparently, the relationship between “simple people” and intellectuals was in fact a power relation, and it was never easy, fluctuating from fear and contempt, through a condescending sense of moral obligation toward the less able, to admiration and worship. It is amazing how all of these attitudes surfaced in “Solidarity”.

At this point, it is worth mentioning that the rise of “Solidarity” was preceded by a number of important events that paved the way to the August strike and also constituted the basis for the “Solidarity’s” self-awareness – the movement’s identity. The Polish 1968 political crisis, also known as “March events”, when students in several Polish cities, e.g. Warsaw, Łódź or Gdańsk, protested against political restrictions, opens the list. A complaint, which is often voiced in connection with these protests, is that the working class did not support the students. Two years later, in December 1970, there was a workers’ protest, which ended in bloodshed – this time students did not join in. In June 1976, the workers in Radom, a middle-size Polish town, went on strike, protesting against the rise in food prices. This protest was violently stifled, the participants were persecuted. In response, opposition intellectuals from Warsaw established the Workers’ Defense Committee (KOR), which

gave financial and legal aid to the persecuted workers and their families. A widely held view is that KOR laid a foundation under the alliance between Polish workers and intellectuals, which proved to be so effective during the August strike. This evolution of a sense of solidarity, from initial mutual indifference and lack of understanding between workers and intellectuals to successful co-operation in the name of the common good belongs, as I have already pointed out, to the core ingredients of the “Solidarity’s” identity, and are alluded to or overtly depicted in many films.

The close alliance between workers and intellectuals after 1989 proceeded in several stages, and was not limited to the Advisers’ Board. As David Ost reminds us:

intellectuals travelled to the workplaces to form solidarity with workers and worked with them in strike committees and union offices. Polish academics even abandoned the union they had formed soon after the strike in Gdańsk in order to join Solidarity, before the latter became the powerhouse it would become. Intellectuals established multiple venues of direct contact with workers and maintained them for the sixteen months of legal Solidarity. (Ost 2006: 39)

During this period artists and intellectuals gave concerts and lectures, produced films, participated in discussions with the working class, treating its representatives as partners in a national dialogue and/or the target audience. This is well depicted in *80 Million* by Waldemar Krzystek. The film opens with a scene which takes place in a depot in Wrocław, on 31 August, the day when the agreement in Gdańsk was signed. Workers in the depot, who were on solidarity strike, watch the moment of singing the agreement on television. Suddenly a bus comes in, from which musicians from the Philharmonic Orchestra get out. They take out the instruments and the conductor addresses the surprised workers: “Gentlemen, this is for you from all of us. Dworzak – ‘Symphony of the New World’”. A small, improvised concerto ensues.



A concerto at the depot. *80 Millions*

Intellectuals held workers in such a high esteem that David Ost called it “a deferential exaltation that was positively Maoist in its self-flagellation”, citing examples: a film director, Janusz Kijowski, who “vowed to abandon his subtle films in favor of “anti-films” and documentaries”, for “the subtlety of the intellectuals needed to be replaced by the forthrightness of the workers”; Musia Sierotwińska, a teacher from Kraków, who said:

I used to think that books and culture were the important things. But it turned out that these were completely marginal. It's the factories, economics, the workers who are important. Their issues are the crucial ones. [...] In intellectual circles, we all got along. The oppositionist and party secretary meet and we're all polite with each other. But for the worker, everything's clear: that one's a red! And that's that. The nuts-and-bolts wisdom of the working

man is the healthiest thing. They alone knew how to judge what's true and what's false. (Ost 2006: 39)

In one of the memorable scenes from *Wałęsa. Man of Hope*, workers want to talk to the Shipyard director, but his assistant does not let them in, dismissing them as “robols”. This Polish word is a derogatory term for a worker, presenting him or her as a brute, primitive person, who sees no further than the end of his/her nose. One of the reasons of the aforementioned “deferential exaltation” was that workers ceased to be “robols”, that they saw further ahead, that they did care not only about their own interests, but also about the well-being of the whole country, and not only about economic welfare, but also about such abstract values as freedom and human rights.

This romance between workers and Solidarity did not last long – perhaps it couldn't have lasted long. David Ost notes that during the “heroic” period of illegal “Solidarity”, somewhere around mid 1980s, intellectuals gradually changed their attitude. This tendency could be observed in the writings of Adam Michnik, “the most influential member of the liberal intellectual opposition”, as Ost dubs him. One can read there that “labor activism is a main danger to democracy”, and “the rational intellectual elite would have to take the place of workers in the ‘Solidarity’ leadership if the organization was truly to be the agent of democratic society” (Ost 2006: 41). And this is what happened. The representatives of “Solidarity” in the Round Table negotiations were mainly liberal intellectuals from the circles of the former advisers, so were the “Solidarity” candidates for the semi-democratic parliamentary elections in 1989, and members of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's first non-communist government. Very harsh market-oriented reforms which were implemented, hit the working class in the first place, bringing about mass unemployment, a phenomenon unknown in communist Poland, and enormous reduction of spending power. Mutual admiration was replaced by bitterness and reproach. Intellectuals were accused of betrayal, of “making careers” on the workers' shoulders, of caring only about

their own class interests, of not listening to common people. David Ost seems to voice a view that this intellectual-workers alliance was detrimental to the latter from the very beginning, because it prevented the working class from forging its own, class-oriented language and focus.

A lot has been written about whether the union was created by workers or intellectuals, but posing the question this way misses the point. Solidarity was undoubtedly created by workers, who went on strike in August 1980 and stayed on strike until the authorities acquiesced to the existence of an independent union, something intellectuals thought the Party would never allow. But once the union was created, it quickly lost its labor locus. It was not a working-class trade union but a universalist political movement, always emphasizing civil rights over labor conditions. Ideologically and politically, Solidarity followed the path laid out by opposition intellectuals, pushing for an open civil society, not for labor empowerment. (Ost 2006: 126)

Strangely enough, the above reproach hits exactly the same point which previously was the reason for pride. Workers used to be praised for going beyond their class interests, for pushing for an open, civil society. Now, it turns out, at least in David Ost's account, that this was their mistake, because they should have talked, as Ost points out elsewhere, "of forced overtime, the erosion of wages by inflation, declining safety conditions, deteriorating health care, or the continued inability of young workers to find housing" (Ost 2006: 126). The question is, however, whether we could still talk about solidarity between "Solidarity" members and supporters if that was the case. All in all, this hard-won alliance failed – this form of solidarity turned out to be nothing more than another utopia (viz. mirage).

5. Conclusions

To sum up, the three forms of solidarity discussed here – solidarity of the working class, solidarity between the sexes, solidarity between workers and intellectuals – have not endured the test of time. Perhaps David Buss was right after all: human behavior is usually framed by the logic or interests, and not by selfless desire to aid other people. That, however, does not invalidate the idea of solidarity. On the contrary, it makes it more precious. Utopias are beautiful dreams that from time to time, for a short period of time, come true. And let it stay this way.

References

- Buss, David M. (2001). *Psychologia ewolucyjna*. Trans. Marek Orski. Gdańsk: Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne.
- Dzido, Marta (2016). *Kobiety „Solidarności”*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Świat Książki.
- Dzido, Marta, Piotr Śliwowski (dir.) (2014). *„Solidarność” według kobiet*.
- Graff, Agnieszka (2001). “Patriarchat po Seksmisji”. In: Agnieszka Graff. *Świat bez kobiet: Płeć w polskim życiu publicznym*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo W.A.B.
- Kornacki, Krzysztof (2017). “Tworzenie obrazu przeszłości w trylogii robotniczej Andrzeja Wajdy”. *Przestrzenie Teorii* 27: 77-91.
- Ost, David (2006). *The Defeat of Solidarity. Anger and Politics in Post-communist Europe*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Penn, Shana (2003). *Podziemie kobiet*. Warszawa: Rosner & Wspólnicy.
- Penn, Shana (2005). *Solidarity’s Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Wałęsa, Danuta (2011). *Marzenia i tajemnice*. Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie.
- Watson, Peggy (1993). “(Anti)feminism after Communism”. In: Ann Oakley, Juliet Mitchel (eds.). *Who’s Afraid of Feminism? Seeing Through the Backlash*. New York: The New Press, 144-161.

Watson, Peggy (1993). "The rise of masculinism in Eastern Europe".
New Left Review 198: 71-82.

Weiher-Sitkiewicz, Krystyna (2017). "Wizerunek 'Solidarności' w polskim filmie fabularnym po 1989 roku". *Panoptikum* 17 (24): 207-222.

Mirosław Przyłipiak
Instytut Badań nad Kulturą
Uniwersytet Gdański
ul. Wita Stwosza 51
80-308 Gdańsk
Poland
fpomp@ug.edu.pl