

Visegrad Scholarship at the Vera & Donald Blinken Open Society Archives

Final Report

Research Project:

Narratives of Crisis. Great History and a New Emotional Regime in Polish Personal Diaries and Memoirs of the 1980s.

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My research proposal for the Open Society Archives in Budapest was conceived as a part of the project entitled “Narratives of Crisis. Great History and a New Emotional Regime in Polish Personal Diaries and Memoirs of the 1980s.” It is divided into two parts with two main research objectives. The first is to examine the process of formation of the new emotional regime in Poland during the crisis of the 1980s. The second is to investigate how this new emotional regime shaped the narrative strategies employed by individuals who submitted their diaries and memoirs to memoir writing competitions organized by both official and dissident and foreign media during the 1980s., how it provided them with terms and categories to understand and describe the crisis situation.

The research conducted in the Open Society Archive in November 2023 (from October 29 to November 20) was aimed at the first part of my project and was based on the analysis of materials from the OSA archival collection of Radio Free Europe. It helped me to verify the preliminary research hypothesis, to answer some questions and to ask the new ones.

Research Background and Preliminary Hypothesis

The Polish crisis of the 1980s. can be seen as a “historically immanent transitional phase”, in which the intense changes took place, everyday life became unstable and people were “forced to choose between adapting to the existing conditions and participating actively, collectively in their transformation”¹. It was a time when people experienced unusually strong emotions in the face of dramatic political events and a dynamic social situation. The “emotional

¹ R. Kosseleck, Crisis. *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2006, no 67(2), p. 371; M. Dafermos, Discussing the Concept of Crisis in Cultural-historical Activity Research: a Dialectical Perspective, Human Arenas <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42087-022-00289-4>

climate”² was changing, from one of hope and solidarity in autumn 1980 to one of danger and fear after the declaration of martial law (December 13, 1981). Jan Kublik described the “unusual symbolic climate” of the August 1980 and later the “Solidarity culture”, which emerged on the basis of the counterhegemonic subcultures (or discourses) of the Catholic Church and the organized opposition³. It was manifested in the public sphere by religious and patriotic symbols that became permanent elements of “Solidarity’s décor.” According to David Ost, passions and emotions, particularly the anger, were the crucial factors affecting the process of social transformation that took place in the socialist bloc during the 1980s.⁴

Although the first symptoms of the economic and political crisis appeared in the late 1970s., my research focuses on the years 1980-1983, which saw the emergence of new political power and new political actors, and when the symbolic/discursive polarization between the Party-state and the populace (the category “Nation” was commonly used) gained momentum. On the other side, it was the time of the crisis of the optimistic emotional regime of the 1970s. and of the communist newspeak. All these phenomena were conceptualized and described at that moment in time. For example, as early as in January 1981, during the seminar on the contemporary linguistic changes held at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, the clash between the “old” communist propaganda language and the new one, based on the counterhegemonic symbols was diagnosed⁵. The emergence of the powerful “counterhegemonic subculture” of the Catholic Church and “Solidarity” movement began the process of remodelling the public debate and was, according to Foucault’s theory of counter-discourse, a “practical engagement in political struggle”⁶.

Personal narratives, diaries and memoirs, are a good source to examine how the new mode of emotional expression and new language to talk about politics worked. I argue, that it

² Marta Cobel-Tokarska and Marcin Zaremba made the first attempt to analyze the emotional climate in Poland during the 1980s. in: *The emotional climate in Poland in the 1980s.: a new perspective on the social history of the Polish People’s Republic*, “Remembrance and Solidarity” 4 (2015), pp.109-125.

More on the concept of emotional climate see: Joseph de Rivera, *Emotional Climate: Social Structure and Emotional Dynamics*, “International Review of Studies on Emotion” 2 (1992), pp. 197–218.

³ Jan Kublik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994, p. 2.

⁴ David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity. Anger and Politics in Postcommunist Europe*, Cornell University Press 2005, Introduction pp.1-5.

⁵ Zeszyty Edukacji Narodowej. Dokumenty. Nowomowa (Materiały z sesji naukowej poświęconej problemom funkcjonowania języka we współczesnych społeczeństwach (16-17 stycznia 1981, aula UJ), zorganizowanej przez NSZZ S. Wydziału Filologicznego UJ).

⁶ Michael Foucault, Gilles Deleuze, *Intellectuals and Power*. In: *Michel Foucault, Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Ed. Donald F. Bouchard, Cornell University Press 1977, p. 209.

was the new *emotional regime* that shaped the ways in which individuals responded to the dynamic political situation, tried to construct themselves as members of the national community and to redefine the national community itself. It opened a new space for articulating attitudes, beliefs and political emotions that had previously been censored, changed the ways individuals were talking about democracy, human rights, and about themselves as political subjects. Following William Reddy, I understand the emotional regime as a mode of emotional expression and thought that is dominant in a particular time period and cultural context. As a set of normative emotions and the official rituals, practices, and emotives that express and inculcate them, it is a necessary foundation of any stable political regime⁷. It can also, I think, be a basis for counter-hegemonic discourses struggling for legitimacy.

The first basic question for my research project was about the conceptual basis of the new emotional regime that emerged in Poland in the 1980s. The research I have done so far has allowed me to formulate some preliminary hypotheses, such as:

- It grew out of the counterhegemonic discourses of the Catholic Church and the organized opposition
- foreign media, primarily the RFE, contributed to the emergence of this emotional regime by producing and mediating the knowledge about the crisis situation; they also introduced the language of democracy and human rights into the Polish political vocabulary
- on the one hand, the new emotional regime developed the language of human rights, but on the other it privileged the community/"Nation" over the individual, which later led to the process of excluding minority rights from the human rights discourse.

OSA archival materials and their contribution to my research

I made use of the OSA archival materials to examine how RFE contributed to the emergence of the counterhegemonic discourses and a new emotional regime in Poland. To do so, I first asked the basic question: how significant was the RFE's influence on the attitudes of its' Polish listeners? For this purpose I investigated the analyzes produced by the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute on its' listenership in Poland, and other countries of the bloc. First, they showed that it was highest in Poland, probably because of the political climate. Then, that compared to Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania, there was

⁷ William M. Reddy, *The Navigation of Feeling. A Framework for the History of Emotions*, Cambridge University Press 2004

no gender difference in the general listenership of RFE (68% of both men and women)⁸. The analysis of further materials showed that foreign media were not perceived by the Polish audience to be of a generally propagandistic nature, they were believed to be objective and trustworthy⁹. Moreover, Polish audiences expected RFE firstly to provide otherwise unobtainable information about political events and their background, then to reinforce or to shape their political attitudes. Tasks such as entertainment and relaxation, as well as educational knowledge were perceived as less important. RFE was generally seen as an antidote to the ubiquitous regime propaganda¹⁰. However, a 1984 analysis by a group of independent Polish journalists showed that RFE had overestimated its impact on Polish listeners¹¹. The analysis of the above mentioned materials produced by the RFE/RL Research Institute contributed to the better recognition of the emotional climate that affected Polish audiences' attitudes toward western media.

The next question I asked was about the production and transmission of knowledge about the political crisis. To see when and how the RFE conceptualised the Polish crisis coming, and how it selected the sources of its knowledge, I examined Polish Monitoring Bulletin from the years 1979 -1983 and selected materials from the Polish Underground Publications Unit 1976-1992. The collection of samizdat excerpts and the content analysis developed by the RFE/RL Research Institute provide insight into the process of selecting information providers from the Polish underground media¹². Since the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR) adopted a strategy of openness in most of its activities and continued to provide information to RFE¹³ through informal channels, it is crucial to examine the mechanism of information selection.

To answer the next question: what strategies did RFE use to influence Polish listeners? I investigated numerous studies developed by the RFE/RL Research Institute. This is my belief, that foreign political actors, such as radio broadcast stations (primarily the RFE) appealed to the emotions of its Polish audience in order to form/ reinforce their political attitudes. Thus, I

⁸ *Listening to Western Broadcasts during the Polish Events of August to November 1980/ East European Area Audience and Opinion Research*, HU OSA 300-6-2 box 5

⁹ *East European Perceptions of Propaganda in Western Broadcasts/ East European Area Audience and Opinion Research*, HU OSA 300-6-2 box 6

¹⁰ *RFE's Tasks as Perceived by its Listeners (Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Polish, Romanian and Bulgarian Results)/East European...*, HU OSA 300-6-2 box 6

¹¹ *Uwagi o Radiu Wolna Europa, Vacat/ Polish Underground Publications Unit (1976-1992): HU OSA 300-55-10 box 26*

¹² Materials from: HU OSA 300-120-13 box 75.

¹³ Paweł Machcewicz, *Poland's War on Radio Free Europe 1950-1989*, Stanford University Press 2015, p. 227

asked what kind of *emotives*¹⁴ they used to do so, and tried to find out what their real impact was. The analysis of the archival findings showed that RFE referred to religious imaginary and religious symbols based on the knowledge of the Polish society's attitudes towards the Church¹⁵, and on the good recognition of the emotional climate of the time. RFE appealed to the emotions of the listeners by: selecting the information, referring to symbols that were vivid in the counterhegemonic discourses and in popular catholic religiosity, introducing terms and categories that worked as *emotives*, such as junta – for military government during the martial law. In this way RFE contributed to the emergence of the new emotional regime that was based on the discursive polarization between the Party-state and the population and the Church.

To sum up, during the three-week research period at OSA, I identified the most valuable collections for my research, which were: the analysis produced by the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute, the Polish Media Monitoring bulletins, articles from the Polish samizdat publications (those not available in Polish libraries) and articles from Western press from the years 1979-1983. Research conducted in the OSA Archivum contributed a lot to my project by providing relevant documents to verify initial hypotheses and to answer most of the questions. It opened also a new insight in the studies on the role of the historical emotions.

Now, I began using the collected materials to analyze the narrative strategies employed by individuals who submitted their diaries and memoirs to memoir writing competitions during the 1980s. I am convinced that they are crucial to my work on the book. I have already used the OSA Archivum findings for my presentation at the conference *Genealogies of Memory 2023: Pandemics, Famines and Industrial Disasters of the 20th and 21st Centuries* (Warsaw, November 22-24, 2023).

My three-week research stay at the OSA Archivum was a great experience not only because of the uniqueness of the archival collections. I am greatly indebted to the professionalism and remarkable kindness of the OSA staff who were always extremely helpful. I am especially thankful to Katalin Gádoros and Bianka Horvath for all their help, and to Ioana Ioana Macrea-Toma for her kind supervision and our long conversations. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor István Rév, who was supposed to be my supervisor.

¹⁴ Emotive- a type of speech act which both describes (like constative utterances) and changes (like performatives) the world (W. Reddy, op. cit.)

¹⁵ For example: Hart Henry O., Youth revolt and socialist values. Media and Opinion Research Dept. East Europe Area and Opinion Research/ HU OSA 300-6-2 box 4

The list of consulted archival holdings:

From HU OSA 300 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute:

-HU OSA 300-50 Polish Unit (1951-1994):

HU OSA 300-50-16 Polish Monitoring Bulletin 1979 -1983

boxes 379-420

HU OSA 300-120-13:62 Martial Law: Poland

boxes 1-4

HU OSA 300-120-13:63 Martial Law: Poland

boxes 1-5

HU OSA 300-50-1:962/4 Martial Law. Letters from the country

box 4

HU OSA 300-50-1:963/2-4 Martial Law. Letters from the country

boxes 2-4

HU OSA 300-55-13:10 Martial Law Documents 1 (Dec.1981-May 1982)

HU OSA 300-55 Polish Underground Publications Unit (1976-1992):

box 7: Printed Ephemera

HU OSA 300-55-10 Subject Files

**HU OSA 300-6-2 Records of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Institute:
Media and Opinion Research Department: East Europe Area and Opinion Research:**

boxes 4-6

HU OSA 300-120-13 Subject Files Relating to Eastern Europe:

HU OSA 300-120-13:2/1- Birth Control, Abortion: East Europe: Poland (1975-1993)

HU OSA 300-120-13:1/1 - Alcoholism: East Europe: Poland (1975-1993)

HU OSA 300-120-13:100 [Poland:Religion 1/2]

HU OSA 300-120-13: 75