POLAND'S TRANSITION AS POLITICAL REPOLARIZATION

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Poland's development since the collapse of communism reveals a contradiction. On the one hand, Poland is often represented as the paradigmatic success story of the postcommunist economic and political transformation.[1] On the economic front, the country has demonstrated the fastest growth rate and recovery in the region, despite the fact that it was perceived as an economic basket case on the eve of the transition.[2] On the political front, Poland is solidly in the forefront of the consolidated democracies, with firm institutional and constitutional foundations and strong popular support for the values of democracy.[3] There is no doubt that Poland has joined the family of democratic states.

On the other hand, these accomplishments occurred in the context of an "extremely unstable political landscape."[4] Electoral politics and party systems have been highly volatile, whether judged by voting preferences, party fragmentation, or cabinet instability. Contestation over basic institutions and rules, such as the 1997 Constitution, has been vociferous and extreme. Collective action beyond the bounds of legitimate "normal" political behavior, in the form of strikes or street protests, has been a continuing feature of post-1998 Poland. The process of politics, in short, has often been chaotic and contentious. In this regard, the Polish scene is often contrasted with the evolution of its East Central European neighbors. The Czech Republic and Hungary in particular are imputed to have solved the issue of political stability and institutional sustainability, with the deployment of mature party systems and civic political norms.[5]

What, then, accounts for the Polish paradox: success and instability? The answer lies in the nature of the political transformation in Poland over the past decade, which has evolved along two distinct tracks: that of the politics of identity and the politics of interest.[6] The first centers around a normative world infused with values and moral judgements as benchmarks of political communities. In this context, politics is built around substantive understandings and goals rather than the procedural tenets of democracy. Politics of identity form around norms of belonging to particular groups, whether Christian or Moslem in Bosnia, or Catho-

lic or secular in Poland. The constituencies defined by identity politics are attached to entrenched values build around consensus movements that use a normative discourse to advance their cause.[7] The attachment to identity politics in postcommunist Poland is a reflection of the old divide between "we" the people, Solidarity and "they" the communist regime. Indeed, it is the persistence of this old division in Polish society that has enabled its renewed political uses and the return to prior values as the language of contemporary politics. The difficulty with such an approach is that identity politics are essentially "indivisible," for normative and moral judgements cannot be easily compromised and resolved through bargaining. The tendency of identity politics, as a result, is to contribute to conflict and instability.

The second track in contemporary Polish politics evolves around the politics of interest. In contrast to the previous identity construct, interests are formed around economic and social policy issues that are primarily distributive in nature. For that very reason, the politics of interest are "divisible," so that differences can be split, bargained over, and resolved through compromise. Interest based constituencies are specific groups with defined policy preferences over the allocation of social and economic goods.[8] Rather than restrained by moral and value commitments, these groups operate in a political world attuned to the give and take of interests and policies. The trend on this track favors political negotiation, compromise, and hence stability.

The Nature of Poland's Transition

In Poland it is the interfacing between the politics of interest and the politics of identity that has contributed to the instability of its democratic pluralism. During the initial years of the transition, the attempt to institute a political space defined primarily by group interests was thwarted by the persistence of strong values and ethical codes associated with the former division between Solidarity and the regime. This produced a dual system, by superimposing identity, value politics upon the emergent political process built around interests and policy bargaining. The effect was the continued intrusion of norms derived from the past on contemporary politics. Furthermore, the appeal to values favored the recreation of communities built around identities rather than interests. This was so since the interests of many groups associated with the former Solidarity camp were too dispersed and too underrepresented to have a meaningful voice in the country's transformation. Since many groups were blocked from effective participation in the policy process, the temptation to return to the political contestation of ethical positions increased significantly. Thus during the latter part of the decade, the voice of nor-

mative, identity politics became ever more pronounced in the discourse of Polish political life. In turn, the renewed emphasis on identity politics destabilized the political process.

The Politics of Interests

The collapse of communism throughout the Soviet bloc ushered in a new type of politics. The single voice of a dominant ideology and ruling party gave way to multiple demands and new political actors. In the emergent democratization, one of the primary questions was which issues were the most significant dividing line of postcommunism. The adaptation of market oriented programs rapidly altered the socioeconomic landscape, particularly in a country like Poland, which embarked immediately on a strategy of shock therapy. This policy increasing differentiation around income, job, or welfare distinctions. The interests of diverse social groups were being shaped, even created, by the rapid economic transformation. The question, however, was how these interests were to be represented in politics and engaged in policy deliberations. The emergence of socioeconomic differences was not sufficient, what was also necessary was the translation of these divisions into salient political cleavages.[9]

In the context of postcommunism, this was not a simple task, precisely because of the rapidly changing economic and political environment.[10] On the one hand, this is due to the highly fluid sociological picture associated with the transition. The movement from a command to a market economy, from a monopolistic to a pluralistic polity, involves many simultaneous, complex tasks that encompass economic, social, historical, and cultural issues. Individuals and social groups have difficulty discerning priorities among the multiplicity of transformations; and remain disoriented by the apparent chaos of the transition. The confusion is enhanced by uncertainty, for many people cannot determine how the processes of marketization and democratization will affect their standing in society. They thus defer the expression of political preferences. In political terms, this signifies that interest groups tend to be weak in terms of identification, coherence, and organization.

One consequence is difficulty in channeling interests into political remedies by finding appropriate channels for representation. The political side of the transition, i.e. the propensity for the emergence of numerous political entrepreneurs forming new parties to capture a share of the electorate, further exacerbates the problem. The removal of the communist monopoly opens up the opportunity for competition, but one that is largely unrestrained by past commitments or linkages. Politics becomes an open arena, where many ambitions are expressed through a

variety of political programs, ideologies, and interests. Precisely because there are so many competitors in the political arena, the ability of the voters to distinguish among them is blurred and confusing. In such conditions, voters find problematic selection and attachment to specific political parties and programs. This political chaos reinforces the already complex sociological picture of the postcommunist transition, reinforcing the fragility of democratization. Interests tend to be too weak and politics too fluid to assure the stability of political development.

Political and institutional factors combined to reinforce this tendency in Poland, and fracture the political scene at the dawn of democratization.[11] On the political side, the solidarity exemplified by the movement of that name and built previously on opposition to communist power, splintered into a variety of groups, interests, and personal ambitions. As a political force, *Solidarnosc* was no longer an "umbrella" movement bringing together various tendencies but an expression of rival political opinions. This disintegration reinforced the already confusing socioeconomic conditions associated with the turn to a market economy. The multiplicity of interests was exacerbated by institutional choices for the new democracy. In particular, an election system based on full proportional representation for the *Sejm* contributed to the ambitions of political actors, who were not restrained by barriers to electoral success, such as a minimum legal threshold for representation in parliament. The result was an extreme fragmentation of the Polish political space around the October 1991 elections.[12] At the time, for example, 111 electoral lists competed for voter support, and 29 different political lists gained representation in the Sejm. The vote was splintered among numerous parties, with no single one attaining more than 14% of the vote. The fragmentation of the political landscape revealed the existence of multiple axes of competition around several different dimensions: left-right economic issues, tradition-modernity concerns, religious-secular differences, Europeanist-nationalist sentiments, were all part of the mix. It became difficult to translate the diversity political cleavages into effective governance, since many different political parties laid claim to representation of these interests. Governing coalitions were fragile, and contributed to the instability of the political scene through successive cabinet turnovers.

The fragmentation and volatility of the political process during the early phase of Polish democratization needed to be redressed to produce a more stable political environment.[13] While all political forces recognized the need, there were substantial disagreements as to the specific remedial course. In The end, a consensus was reached on instituting a minimum 5% vote threshold for representation in the Sejm, so as to preclude participation in the policy making process of parties with minimal voters' support. The intent of this innovation was to curb the tendency to political fragmentation by imposing both mechanical and strategic constraints on the proliferation of parliamentary parties. In the 1993 elections, however, only the mechanical effects worked as many politicians did not respond in time to the new

rules by altering their strategic behavior. This was especially true of the political right, who failed to coalesce around a standard bearer. Instead many parties on the right contested the election independently, and were unable to clear the 5% minimum requirement.

For the political system, this meant that the prior fragmentation was replaced by another phenomenon: political disproportionality.[14] In the 1993 contest, close to 35% of the vote was "wasted," for that portion of the vote was so dispersed among numerous parties that none could clear the 5% requirement for entry into the legislature, so a third of the electorate was left without parliamentary representation. In turn, this produced extreme disproportionality, for the left coalition was able to muster 66% of the Sejm's seats based on 36% of voter support. This pattern did solve governance instability, but at the cost of political misrepresentation and legitimacy. So while a left political coalition was able to maintain power in the ensuing parliament, it was on the basis of minority support by the Polish population. In contrast, the political right had claimed a third of that support but due to its splintering was unable to have a voice in legislative policy deliberations. The post-1993 disproportionality, in other words, preempted the representation of some interests and overstated that of others. This called into question the legitimacy of the ruling SLD-PSL *(Democratic Left Alliance-Polish Peasant Party)* coalition, founded by parties previously associated with the communist regime. However, to mount an effective challenge to the status quo, the right extra-parliamentary opposition had to revert to the former politics of identity and values.

The Politics of Values

The resurgence of normative identities as the primary contestation in Polish politics after the 1993 election was driven by the political imbalance created by the disproportionality of legislative politics and the continued fragmentation of societal interests. To overcome the disequilibrium, politicians on the right turned to the former division of the "we" versus "they" to undermine the political outcome produced by the electoral process and their own strategic failures. To contest the procedural legitimacy of the democratic endeavor, the best option was to revert to the language of morality and values so as to question the identity of the emerging "community" of Poland. The reformed communists had betrayed the "true" Poland in the past, and could not be trusted to govern in the name of the renewed Polish nation. In that sense, the politics of old came to infuse with new vigor the political disputes of the 1990s.

The net effect of the new political discourse was to repolarize Polish politics around the identities of "we" and "they," a division that echoed Polish history both distant and proximate.[15] In many ways the appeal for popular support around

the moral categories of good and evil and the values of unity and community was a long-standing practice associated with the historical struggles of the Polish nation against foreign occupation and for resurgence as an independent state. In that struggle, the perception of Poland as "Christ among nations" was a deeply ingrained ethos that helped to preserve Polish culture and traditions. This historical path was reinforced by the immediate past of the communist period, when social outbursts against an alien regime expressed political struggles as normative, moral commitments — visible most forcefully in the Solidarity-regime divide of the 1980s. This powerful collective memory was an important element of the postcommunist transformation, but had been undermined by the give and take of interest politics.

In the mid-1990s, the disfranchised forces of the political right reached for this neglected symbolism to reassert their political legitimacy and regain a place in the political game. The symbols of old were to serve the needs of today, so the past divide along the communist-anticommunist axis was to serve as a political marker. The task here was to rebuild the former Solidarity ethos of freedom, dignity, and unity as universalistic message, but now serving partisan needs. The inclusive notion of national solidarity and of the true Poland was cast as a weapon of the political right against the political left, a reformulation that was appealing precisely because it echoed the values and struggles of the Polish people against communism.

Value Contestation in Polish Politics

The infusion of values as a currency of politics was manifest in a number of ways throughout the second half of the postcommunist decade. Its most significant elements were (1) the awakening of dormant, nostalgic movements as the primary political actors, (2) the framing of a political discourse of contestation around the former struggle between "we" and "they," good and evil. Both these factors have shaped the political style of Polish democratization during the latter half of the decade, which has come to be characterized increasingly around an indivisible, value mode of politics.

Political Actors

One of the primary factors affecting development in Poland was the activation into politics of institutional actors whose basic identity lay outside the realm of political action, notably the trade-union Solidarity and the Polish Catholic Church. Of course, these institutions had in the past played an important political role and

even in the post-1989 period engaged in public policy discourse. But the results of the 1993 parliamentary and 1995 presidential elections signified escalation in their public, political visibility, precisely because of the defeat of the forces associated with Solidarity and the Church. Their claim as symbols and guardians of the Polish nation came into the fore, to safeguard these values against the reviving power of the former communist side.

Most important in the structuring of Polish politics at the time was the reformulation of the Solidarity trade union as an overt political force. Since the defeat of communism in 1989, Solidarity has been mainly relegated to and concentrated on its role as a union representative of the workers. Its political nature has been effaced by the mushrooming of diverse political parties and groups associated with the movement during the anti-Communist struggle. Now, the electoral defeat of these forces had deprived that political side of a meaningful presence in the formal institutions of power. To create a new equilibrium, the Solidarity trade union moved to form a political movement capable of challenging the dominance of the left coalition. To that end, Solidarity became the primary agent in the formation of a broad political movement in June 1996, known as *Akcja Wyborcza Solidarnosc* (AWS), the Electoral Action Solidarity. As its very name intones, AWS had a dual purpose. One was to engage in electoral politics as a means to revive the fortunes of the political stance left without a voice in the aftermath of the 1993 and 1995 vote. The second was to invoke the tradition and the mystique of the Solidarity trade union as a powerful weapon in the political contest.

In essence, the purpose of the June 1996 action was to revive the pre-1989 coalition that challenged the communist regime and perform once again the same task by defeating the successor communist parties. The Solidarity union was able to use its legacy to act as a pivot in the new AWS movement, bringing together a variety of political parties, trade unions, family associations, social groups, and think tanks. The new political formation was grouped around common roots and common values, exemplified foremost by a nationalist and religious identity and the former struggle with communist power. In its founding declaration, AWS openly proclaimed its identity and its aim as a political undertaking uniting diverse social and political groups committed to a rightist political agenda centered on truth and solidarity in order to build "an independent, just, and democratic Poland."[16]

A similar attempt to mobilize support on the basis of historical roles and national traditions was played out by the Roman Catholic Church. The hierarchy of the church had pursued an active social and political agenda throughout the transition period, bridging its anticommunist stance in the pre-1989 days with an effort to find a new place for the church in the days of democratization. The latter period was devoted to the safeguarding of religious values in the new Poland. To attain that goal, the church clergy and its lay supporters constructed an ambitious agenda around the issues of religious education, antiabortion legislation, ratifica-

tion of the concordat with the Vatican, and a general preservation of Christian values in Polish society. These undertakings were not without political conflicts, and precisely for that reason placed the Church in a more vulnerable position in the aftermath of the 1993 and 1995 election results. Fearful that the victory of the postcommunist left and its government would lead to an erosion of its social agenda, the Church moved to reassert its political weight by supporting the AWS initiative and engaging in the debate on the political front.[17] The urgency of the initiative was enhanced by the fact that the constitutional process that was to bestow a new democratic foundation for the country was coming to fruition, now under the hegemony of the postcommunist party coalition. The fear of a Constitution that would enshrine values and practices outside the religious nature of Poland was tantamount to a call for political vigilance. The Church engaged in the political debate on the constitution to preserve its Poland, one committed to traditional religious values.

On the other side of the political divide, the practice of building political coalitions around a diversity of organizations and interests was well established by the mid-1990s. The former ruling communists had taken on the mantle of a reformed socialist party soon after the collapse of their regime, and had moved to create a broad social democratic movement, the *Left Democratic Alliance*. The latter was compromised of the ex-communist SdrP (Social Democracy of Poland) party, the previous pro-regime trade union movement OPZZ, and several other leftist trade unions and social associations. Nonetheless, the 1993 parliamentary victory created the impetus to forge a left ruling coalition with the Polish Peasant Party, itself a satellite organization of the communist in the pre-transition period. The post-1993 ruling coalition was the recreation of forces associated with the communist regime, representing a diversity of political actors united foremost by a common political heritage rather than similar interests. Indeed, the coalition included supporters of a liberal and statist economy, of religious and secular legislation, and pro-Europe integrationists and nationalist protectionists. The point is that the political identity of this grouping was based in their past association with the communist regime; and was governed by their identity as the "they" of the previous political epoch and their fear of a new accounting with the past.

It is evident that several institutional political actors in the mid-1990s continued to reflect the old division in Polish politics between pro- and anti-communist regime forces. The identity of these movements was vested in their past actions and reflected the normative, value divisions of old. Driven by heritage associations and future concerns, the organization of politics was an echo of "we" the people of Solidarity and "they" the rulers of communism. In that sense, the public scene was the continuing politicization of institutional arrangements along the inherited value differentiation. In a similar vein, it meant the infusion into the political realm of actors that were a reflection of past "umbrella" movements

rather than "pure" parties. These movements were catchall, heterogeneous enclaves that grouped together diverse interests but still espoused a common ethos along a moral, normative identity that transcended their respective policy preferences and agendas.

Political Discourse

Reference to a normative political worldview was grounded in more than the institutional makeup of the political organizations active in Poland's transition. Even more so, the political discourse of the past decade was increasingly framed in the language of morality, identity and value. In many respects, the construction of a new language of politics was vested with a mission mentality driven by the struggles of the past.[18] First, as noted above, the call was for a collectivist ethos that required the sacrifice of distinct interests and separate goals for the common good: solidarity was essential for success. More important than the specific interests of social constituencies was the assurance of the historical mission embodied by the anticommunist coalition and the resurrection of the true Poland. Second, the very substance of the political discourse was framed along a stance that transcended past and present. The language of politics was a reprise of the national-liberation movement that fought the regime in the previous era, and had to echo the same values and morality to defend the Polish people against the treacherous acts of the ex-communists. In these terms, the AWS political position was vested in the values that had defined the duality of Polish politics throughout the years of communist rule.

A number of issues came to the forefront during the debate concerning the political future of Poland, represented mainly by ratification of the new constitution and mobilization for a new round of elections in 1997. In these controversies, the predominant language of politics was that of morality and history, with a virtual disregard of the economic and social interests that were being transformed by the rapid and vast socioeconomic transformation of the country. While the issues of contention were varied, they can be grouped round three principal arenas: national identity, decommunization, and social values.

The question of national identity took several forms, but was most evident in the debate on the constitution.[19] The draft worked out in the legislature for approval by the citizenry was a compromise among different political forces, but tied in the eyes of many to the dominating parliamentary side at the time, the leftist ruling coalition. For that very reason the extra-parliamentary opposition, represented by AWS and supported by the Church, denounced the working version of the constitution. It saw the document as failing to reflect the true nature of Poland, and perceived it instead as an assault on its basic values, such as sover-

eignty, faith and family. For some, it was a "foreign" creation written by former communists, and thus meriting condemnation as an act of betrayal. Instead, the AWS movement and the Church favored an alternative citizens' draft that emphasized the historical identity of the Polish nation and culture, tied to God and Christian virtues. The debate on the constitution produced intense political debate and mutual recriminations. The disagreement was particularly contentious in conjunction with the preamble to the constitution, which sought to define the very nature of the new democratic Poland. The eventual solution to the rival understandings of Poland's identity was the inclusion of two distinct definitions, reflecting both preferences. This resolution on the preamble was not a true "compromise," for neither side could give up its particular normative vision of the Polish state. Rather the compromise consisted of the inclusion of both versions of Polish identity in the constitutional foundation, joining side by side an *ethnos* definition and a civic one. Among the opening words of the 1997 constitution, we read:

> We, the Polish Nation – all citizens of the Republic, Both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice, good and beauty, As well as those not sharing such faith but respecting those universal values as arising from other sources ... Beholden to our ancestors for their labors, their struggle for independence achieved at great sacrifice, for our culture rooted in the Christian heritage of the Nation and in universal human values.

The text thus combines two views. One of the Poland as the historical nation tied to Christian faith and traditions, defining the very existence of the country through past struggles of the Polish people. The other view asserts a civic understanding of the country, where citizenship is not a reflection of religious beliefs or nationalist traditions but universal and civic values.

The two definitions of Poland found in the basic document are testimony to the politics of identity and values defining the contemporary political scene in the country. They represent core elements of a moralistic faith that sees the world in terms of right and wrong, of we and they, and of truth and betrayal. Under such circumstances, there is little room for a true compromise that helps to narrow the difference between the two sides by reducing the difference, and instead moves to a solution where both worldviews are simultaneously incorporated into the very definition of Poland. Even this solution proved problematic, for the constitutional draft was opposed by social forces associated with AWS and the Church, which called for a rejection of the document in the referendum. The October 1997 popular vote did endorse the constitution, by a 54% to 46% margin, but with a turnout of only 43% of eligible voters. In the end, then, the acrimonious debate surrounding the constitutional issue led to the adoption of the supreme basic law by only one-quarter of the Polish citizenry.

The problematic nature of the politics of value in Poland was further evident in the growing resurgence of the decommunization issue. An earlier attempt sought to remove the matter from the political agenda. Thus the first postcommunist Prime Minister of Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, proclaimed a policy of the "think line" – a clear demarcation between past and present, preferring to look to the future rather than settle accounts with the past. But the thick line policy was never fully accepted by the entire political spectrum, and was denounced early on by some groupings with Solidarity lineage, even becoming fodder for political intrigue. The turn to the left in the 1993 and 1995 elections and the ensuing infusion of the politics of identity revived the saliency of the issue. The power of ex-communists was again visible, and brought into sharp relief the question of settling accounts with the past. Opportunity came again in the aftermath of the 1997 election and the alteration in power in favor of the AWS coalition. Concerns with the communists' role in the nation's history became once more a prominent political dispute between forces of the right and left, couched in the discourse of value politics. For the right, lustration was part of a moral indignation that targeted the continuing influence of the "reds" in Polish politics and society, and decommunization was equated with the salvation of the Polish nation. For the left, the lustration policy was nothing but a political witchhunt design to remove legitimate political opponents and impose a religious, conservative cloak on the country.

The two contrasting visions of decommunization became the object of intense political rhetoric and contestation. The predominance of the conservative political wing in the post-1997 Sejm, however, led to the passage of several acts and laws aimed at imposing a screening of the past, both through condemnation of the communist era and the association of individuals with its regime.[20] Reflecting the first aspect was a June 1998 bill that held responsible "in the highest degree" the former ruling communist party, the PUWP, for the imposition of the communist system on Poland. Decommunization of the second type was pursued through a series of legal actions that limited the right of former communist officials to hold public office, set-up a Screening Court as a mechanism for the lustration of officials, and created an Institute of National Remembrance to house communist secret police files. In all, these various steps represented a systemic attempt to come to terms with the immediate past. As such, the policy negated the concept of the "thick line" between the communist and democratizing periods of Poland's political life. Instead, it reintroduced the old divisions as a litmus test in contemporary politics; divisions concerning attitudes under the former communist regime as symbolic elements in the competing vision of the new Poland.

Another contentious arena in the definition of what the country represented and stood for concerned social and cultural understandings build around Christian and secular values. The discourse here was as intense as in the constitutional and

lustration debates, for the very identity of Poland was also vested in policies concerning specific policies that enhanced or challenged the Christian roots of the nation. In that respect, history and morality were once again played out in the political battlefield. On one side stood the reading of Poland as a historically fashioned set of values and moral precepts that were at the core of its self-identity, free to emerge after years of suppression, whether in the distant or more immediate past. To that end, the obligation of the people and its representatives was to encode those values in the constitutional and legal framework of the free, democratic Poland. The range of social and cultural concerns falling in the "identity" column was broad. It ranged across such steps as cementing the special relationship between Poland and the Vatican through a Concordat, legalizing a strict abortion law and a family planning policy, and placing a ban on the sale of pornographic materials. Despite the Sejm's approval of legislative acts aimed at instituting this vision of Poland, the entity of the sociopolitical agenda was derailed by presidential vetoes. President Aleksander Kwasniewski, coming from a political lineage associated with the former communist party, stood on the opposite side of the normative discourse, and favored a more universalistic, civic, and secular identity for Poland.

In many ways, then, Polish political discourse over recent years has centered on the overarching question of national identity, whether in the context of constitutional, lustration, or social policies. The political confrontation is taking place against the backdrop of profound economic, social, and cultural transformations often too complex and too chaotic for easy comprehension. In these circumstances, the intensity of the change contributes to the desire to simplify reality through a "language of morality, memory, ideology, and faith."[21] But the recourse to a normative worldview is not simply an escape from the politics of interests and its transformative socioeconomic reality. The language of values, the politics of identity, are no less real, and represent a genuine attempt to reclaim the very identity of the nation. For many, this struggle reflects echoes of the past around the former divide between "we" the nation and "they" the power. It is manifest foremost in the attempt to build a country rooted in the Christian traditions of the past, in the rejection of an alien communist ideology and its postcommunist variant, and in the preservation of moral strictures formed around the Church and the nation. For others, the revival of historical memory and Christian faith as definitions of political identity signify a too narrow understanding of Polish-ness, and seek a conceptual expansion to a civic, secular, and democratic Poland that overcomes the past and its political divisiveness.

Conclusion: Repolarization

Polish politics during the course of the postcommunist decade has moved to a more polarized setting, in terms of the main actors, their political discourse and style. Political space has come to be defined by extreme ideological positions that emphasis normative, value positions rather than pragmatic, interest policies. This is manifest first in the coalescence of the opposing camps at different ends of the political spectrum: the AWS coalition grouped around the Solidarity trade-union and rightist parties is clearly distinguished form a leftist coalition built around parties whose identity is vested in the former communist regime.[22] These conglomerate political actors have attained the predominant position in politics, and in the process have displaced parties with more narrow or centrist positions. For example, the PSL (Polish Peasant Party) representing the specific sectoral interests of rural Poland has declined significantly as a major player in politics. Similarly, the UP (Labor Union), a centrist party that sought to bridge the gap across the value divide by incorporating elements from both the Solidarity and excommunist camp has been eradicated as a voice of the working class.

While fewer political actors signify an improvement over the previous fragmentation, it is their political stance and their emphasis on an irreconcilable moral stance that has proved problematic. This is most manifest in the framing of the political discourse over the past several years, a language of politics that emphasizes identities rooted in the past, the embrace of moral and value positions, and the use of symbolic interactions. Such an approach precludes the exercise of moderate, give and take politics in favor of entrenched, polarized agendas. The consequence is a kind of "polarized pluralism," a political system defined primarily by parties and coalitions that are separated by wide value distance.[23] In the case of Poland, this gap is created by the attachment to past identities and constructed around a collective ethos that perpetuates the former political abyss between Solidarity and the communist regime. In turn, these politics of identity and moral codes affects the style of politics. Rather than pluralist politics in the sense of bargaining and compromise around divisible interests and policies, we have a polarized political structure. The latter accounts for the turn to an "indivisible politics" mirroring entrenched positions in a zero-sum politics, where neither side is willing to give in on its substantive, normative positions. For the moment, the postcommunist transition is marooned in identities of the past that continue to define Poland's future.

Notes

1. Valerie Bunce, "The political economy of postsocialism," *Slavic Review* 58:4 (Winter 1999): 759–761.

2. Ben Slay, "The Polish economic transition: Outcome and lessons," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 33:1 (March 2000): 50–51.

3. See the surveys by Freedom House, in Adrian Karatnycky, Alexander Motyl, and Charles Graybow, eds, *Nations in Transit 1998: Civil Society, Democracy and Markets in East Central Europe and the Newly Independent States* (Piscataway, N.J.: Transaction Publishers, 1999), and the public opinion data from CBOS, "Spoleczna ocena democracji i institutcji politycznych," *Serwis Informacyjny,* April 1999.

4. Aleksander Smolar, "Poland's emerging party system," *Journal of Democracy* 9:2 (April 1998): 122.

5. *Ibid.,* 122–123, and Anna Seleny, "Old political rationalities and new democracies: Compromise and confrontation in Hungary and Poland," *World Politics* 51:4 (July 1999): 487.

6. For an early distinction between interests and values, see Jack Bielasiak, "The dilemma of political interests in the postcommunist transition," in Walter D. Connor and Piotr Ploszajski, eds, *Escape from Socialism: The Polish Route* (Warsaw: IFiS Publishers, 1992), 204–205, and Jack Bielasiak and Barbara Hicks, "Solidarity's self-organization, the crisis of rationality and legitimacy in Poland," *East European Politics and Societies* 4:3 (Fall 1990): 489–512.

7. Michal Wenzel, "Solidarity and Akcja Wyborcza 'Solidarnosc:' An attempt at reviving the legend," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 31:2 (June 1998): 149.

8. See Aleks Szczerbiak, "Interests and values: Polish parties and their electorates," *Europe-Asia Studies* 51:8 (1999): 1401–1432.

9. Herbert Kitschelt et al., *Post-Communist Party Systems: Competition, Representation, and Inter-party Cooperation* (Cambridge University Press, 1999), 43–92.

10. Jack Bielasiak, "Substance and process in the development of party systems in East Central Europe," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 30:1 (March 1997): 24–28.

11. Krzysztof Knyzewski, *Partie i System Partyjny w Polsce w Okresie Transformacji Ustrojowej* (Warsaw: Scholar, 1998).

12. For a discussion of elections in Poland, see for example Francis Millard, "The Polish parliamentary elections of October 1991," *Soviet Studies* 45:5 (1992): 837–955; Kenneth Ka-Lok Chan, "Poland at the crossroads: The 1993 general election," *Europe-Asia Studies* 47:1 (1995): 123–145; and Aleks Szczerbiak, "Electoral politics in Poland: The parliamentary elections of 1997," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics* 14:3 (September 1998): 58–83.

13. For an overview of the period, see Richard F. Staar, ed., *Transition to Democracy in Poland* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998).

14. For a discussion of this issue, see Krzysztof Jasiewicz, "Dead ends and new beginnings: The quest for a procedural republic in Poland," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 33:1 (March 2000): 110–114.

15. See Jasiewicz, "Dead ends and new beginnings;" Smolar, "Poland's emerging party system;" and Wenzel, "Solidarity."

16. For a discussion of the movement see Leszek Graniszewski, "Akcja Wyborcza Solidarnosc – Sojusz prawicy demokratycznej" in Stanislaw Gebethner, ed., *Wybory '97: Partie i Programy Wyborcze* (Warsaw: Elipsa, 1997), 59–85; and Wenzel, "Solidarity," 143–144.

17. For a discussion of the role of the Church, see especially Mirella W. Eberts, "The Roman Catholic Church and democracy in Poland," *Europe-Asia Studies* 50:5 (July 1998): 817–842; and Andrzej Korbonski, "Poland ten years after," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 33:1 (March 2000): 123–146.

18. Smolar, "Poland's emerging party system," 126.
19. See Wiktor Osiatynski, "A brief history of the constitution," *East European Constitutional Review* 6:2 and 3 (Spring/Summer 1997); and Pawel Spiewak, "The battle for a constitution," *East European Constitutional Review* 6:2 and 3 (Spring/Summer 1997).
20. See the reports in the "Constitutional watch – Poland" in *East European Constitutional Review* 7:1 (Winter 1998); 7:3 (Summer 1998); 7:4 (Fall 1998); 8: 1–2 (Winter/Spring 1999); and 8:3 (Summer 1999).
21. Smolar, "Poland's emerging party system," 129–130.
22. For a general discussion see Andrzej Kojder, "Systemic transformation in Poland: 1989–1997," *Polish Sociological Review* 3 (1998): 247–266.
23. For the original concept, see Giovanni Sartori, *Parties and Party Systems* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976). On the Polish case, see Jasiewicz, "Dead ends and new beginnings," 114–121.