

Nasze pokolenie – our generation
**Self-image and generation-talk of the
»young protest generation« of 1980s Poland¹**

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Introduction

The collapse of communism can be analyzed from the perspective of generational dynamics. »Generation« shaped the self-perception of different groups within the Polish opposition and affected how these phrased their respective ideas. Generation-specific visions of the future developed, emphasized by the self-generationalization of a »young protest-generation«. »Generation« is often portrayed as an important feature of the history of Western Europe, illustrated by the long-standing tradition of German youth movements as well as the self-mobilization of the »68ers« across Western Europe nearly twenty years after the student protests of 1968. But »generation« also matters in East Central Europe, both as a category of self-understanding as well as an analytical approach within the social and historical sciences. During the early 1980s, a strong generational consciousness arose among young members of the Polish opposition who began to distinguish themselves from the founders of Solidarity and to talk about their »generational duty«. After the collapse of communism, a large segment of this self-declared »young generation« played an important role in the construction of the Third Republic, in particular the development of a new conservatism (Matyja 2009). Many former members of oppositional youth groups became part of the politi-

1 This article is based on my PhD-project at the graduate school on generational history at Georg-August University in Göttingen. I would like to thank all participants of the workshop »Generations of Change« that was held in November 2010 in Bielefeld for their comments.

cal elite or were influential in journalism. For these reasons, it is interesting to have a closer look at their stories and at their feelings of generational belonging ex post facto.

It seems to be a characteristic of youth movements with political goals to appeal to »a new bright future« to which they must contribute. These slogans and metaphors recur in the history of European youth movements (see for example Stambolis 2003; Nehring 2007). A key aspect in this regard is whether »generation« reveals its »magic«. It can be ascertained that the oppositional Polish youth movements of the 1980s were drawn together by a strong generational consciousness and that former members still have a tendency to describe their biography in a generational matrix.

The groups and age-cohorts are too diverse to speak of a united youth generation. It is worthwhile to have a detailed look at the role of generational self-images to question its impact on the strategy to activate contemporaries for political action and on the creation of a strong group-consciousness. »Generation«, as I will argue, can be understood as a facet of self-consciousness and as a category to investigate processes of constructing collectivity. Further, whether generational feelings still exist or were lost reveals interesting questions concerning the emotional ties of youth groups and their internal dynamics. Henceforth I focus on feelings of generational belonging during the 1980s, as well as on biographical perspectives and narratives revealed in interviews since the end of communism.

My key argument focuses on generational consciousness and its potential shifts from the 1980s onwards. According to Ulrike Jureit, »generations« are regarded as a category of identity, a phenomenon in political debates and also as an element of contemporary memory culture. First, a few remarks on generational theory are given to delineate the multiple dimensions of generation, the imprints on generational awareness as well as the concept of generational history used in my studies. Secondly, two youth groups active during the 1980s in Poland, *Ruch Młodej Polski* (RMP, Young Poland Movement) and *Federacja Młodzieżowy Walczącej* (FMW, Federation of Fighting Youth) are presented (for example Zaremba 2000;

Liczbarski 2005) in order to discuss the role played by self-generation-ization during the 1980s as well as the way in which generational identity was created. Further, I will ask how generation-talk developed after 1989/1990. What role did these actors play as politicians and journalists in the creation of »the new Polish State« during the 1990s? Can they be described as a »memory generation« (*Erinnerungsgeneration*) and have they been integrated in Polish memory culture? In all, I underline the fragility of generations as regards the formation of emotional ties and the meaning of generations as a »community of last resort« (Niethammer 2009).

Generational consciousness: a concept and its fragility

Generational consciousness and »generations« in the sense of so-called generational units arise, according to Karl Mannheim, from a shared feeling of generational unity and an elite-group proclaiming a »generational cause« (Mannheim 1928). Therefore, generations have often been associated with political actors and their aim of revolutionary change. These reflections on generational phenomena were articulated by Mannheim at the beginning of the twentieth century and are still the most common frame of reference in studies dealing with generations and generational theory. But more generally, the term »generation« opens a wide spectrum of associations and is not clearly defined. Generations are regarded in the meaning of ancestry, consumer or lifestyle-generations, as a phrase used in public debates or as an individual source of the formation of memory and identity (Silies et al. 2009). While generations have often been equated with age cohorts in social sciences (Ryder 1997), with regard to Karl Mannheim they have also been discussed as a small, male-dominated and elite group representing only a small part of their contemporaries. »Generation« is slippery in meaning and a mutable approach, which has been used for different purposes such as kinship studies or analysis of age-cohorts (Burnett 2010: 1). Because it »sits between the objective, positivist world of cohort analysis, and the subjective, interpretivist world of life histories« (Burnett 2010: 42), it is an attractive, but complex concept. It combines a perspective on historical events or even soft behavioral changes on the one hand, and the open range of individual experiences on the other.

An often-discussed issue refers to the question whether a ›generational self-consciousness‹ has to exist to let us speak of a ›political generation‹. I believe that a self-understanding as and a feeling of belonging to a special generation is an essential criterion in order to prevent ›generations‹ from being invented by researchers. The so-called political generations should not be considered as givens, which appear in ›history‹ because of their ›social location‹, but rather as phenomena influenced by a complex process of identification and memory formation. Following this approach, the focus of the latest debates on generations has shifted to the process of generation-building and especially to the constructiveness of generation. Consequently it must be argued, as Bernd Weisbrod emphasizes, that »we should look in more detail into the ›politics of self-generalization‹ to deconstruct the ›generational fallacy‹» (Weisbrod 2007: 31).

In generational history, it has further been discussed whether a generation can emerge in state-socialist societies because of the lack of a democratic public. While some claim that the lack of intermediary structures prevented »generational units« from appearing in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) (Göschel 1999: 28), Rainer Gries has maintained that they were still possible (Gries 2006: 487). He makes a persuasive argument that even censorship and control of the media cannot completely suppress the inter-relations and communication which are needed to build up a generational consciousness. Nevertheless, the existence of a generation as a collectivity of shared feelings depends on its chances of homogenizing a variety of experiences. And these chances depend on the respective political system and on the media. A more detailed look is necessary regarding the impact of both on processes of generational self-understanding. Keeping in mind the *samizdat* press and the various networks of opposition movements in the GDR and the People's Republic of Poland in the 1980s, I suggest that a generational consciousness could have arisen via these spheres of communication even though it could not be crystallized via public media.

My suggestions are based on two main concepts of and ideas about generations. First, generations are regarded as a group of contemporaries communicating with each other about shared experiences and world-

views in their own group as well as beyond (Jureit 2006: 40). In this respect, I aim to show that »generation« served as a political argument which helped not only to underline political ideas, but also to shape the self-perception of the »young protestors« and their style of debates and communication (Nehring 2007). Following the idea that »consciousness« marks a key element in generational history, one should question how and when such emotions appear or even become crucial to a protest-movement.

Second, I will explore generations as »memory generations« which create collectivity through the process of memory formation. By remembering their common generational imprints and talking about the specificity of »their« generation, they form a generational community. It is not decisive that all of them experienced historical events and other imprints in the same way; more important is the construction or even invention of a generation by the actors themselves (Lottes 2005: 175).

A contemporary feeling of generational belonging can still have its relevance in constructing one's biography, for instance appearing in the form of a »memory generation«. This can be seen in the case of members of the 1960s student movements. A story of the »generation of 1968« emerged in the 1980s, and this label is still crucial in self-descriptions and biographies of former actors as well as contemporaries. It expresses the open and mutable shape of a generation-label, instead of a precise definition of who can refer to it. It marks a cipher for everyone who experienced the time allowing them to connect their own lives to history (Schmidt: 2006). Finally, everybody can call themselves members of a generation as long as they at least share these invented collective »generational views and feelings« (Jureit 2006: 40). Individual memory, interpreted as an »associative construction« (Platt & Dabag: 1995), as well as the creation of one's own biography, are important features of generation-building. Successful generation-talk depends further on the media power of its actors and their chances of spreading their generational story and views in public. Following the latter concept of generation, I will argue that the influential role of the »young generation« in creating

the Third Republic supported the appearance of a generational story and, afterwards, of a ›memory generation‹.

A generational phenomenon depends on self-images and memories as well as its interactions with public narratives and the chances to tell a ›generational story‹. Certainly, what can be remembered and what can be told in the respective society shapes a retrospective generational collectivity. Therefore, a ›generation‹ is unrepeatably – as Burnett notes – and has its own dynamics (Burnett 2010: 49). ›Generational belongings‹ are fragile, so that they themselves should be regarded in their historicity – shifting during time and space.

It is not sufficient to have a look at self-images, their shifts over time and biographical dimensions. The level of memory cultures should also be included. By this, ›generation‹ as a phenomenon of self-perception and collective self-understanding can be traced back to booms in memory cultures and ›emotional regimes‹.

Self-images.

Oppositional youth movements active in the 1980s in the People's Republic of Poland

»Our generation is the one that will decide about the future Poland«, argued the youth movement *Niezależny Związek Młodzieży »Maksymilianie«* (Independent Association of Youth) in its declaration.² They spoke of the role of youth and aimed to mobilize other young people to protest against communist rule. This quote marks a prime example of young activists claiming political change and encouraging ›the young generation‹ to join them. They not only address their contemporaries and point out young people's opposition to communism, but also invoke a shared generational consciousness. The young protest generation that emerged in the 1980s in Poland spoke intensively about the characteristics and duties of ›their generation‹ (*nasze pokolenie*). Generation mattered as a political message and as a category of self-description.

2 Deklaracja Niezależnego Związku Młodzieży »Maksymilianie«, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO IV/100.

The age-cohorts of its members were too diverse to call them a youth-generation in reference to the statistics. And they should not be associated with a unified movement, because they had various political backgrounds; their generational community sprung from a feeling they shared. Consequently, it should be questioned to what extent ›generation‹ affected their self-reflection.

Following this line of thought, it is interesting to examine whether ›generation‹ merely offers a political argument, or also an overarching concept for describing the self and creating a protest-community.

Many youth groups founded in the late 1970s and in the 1980s aimed to ›fight for Poland's independence‹. They had different political orientations, but all shared the same vision: a strong opposition by the ›young generation‹. To achieve independence, they tried to raise political awareness among young people and to construct an independent youth movement such as the Warsaw group *Ruch Młodzieżowy Demokratycznej Wolność* founded in 1985 or *Młodzieżowy Ruch Oporu Solidarność* in Wrocław. The independent student movement *Niezależne Zrzeszenie Studentów* (NZS) and the environmental peace movement *Wolność i Pokój* (WiP) are examples of movements which were active throughout the country. Groups existed with a strong generational consciousness that held lively discussion about their generational imprints, such as FMW.

This shows that for some youth groups the reference to, and identification as a ›generation‹ provided a powerful emotional link to the movement. In contrast, the independent student movement NZS and environmental peace movement WiP neither spoke of themselves as belonging to a generation nor interpreted their political programme as a ›generational duty‹. I will subsequently argue, that ›generation‹ had a different meaning to these various groups and partly became a symbol of the movement.

A self-generationalization and generational consciousness is – regarding groups of widespread appearance – most clearly reflected in articulations by the RMP and FMW. Moreover, archival resources and newspaper

articles from the 1980s allow a long-term perspective from the late 1970s onwards.

The RMP was founded in Gdansk in 1979 by a circle of young pupils who published the unofficial newspaper *Bratniak*. Its members included, among others, Jacek Bartyzel, Grzegorz Grzelak and Aleksander Hall. The founders of RMP were mostly born around 1953. Their successors, the so-called ›second generation‹, were born nearly ten years later (Marulewska 2009: 150). The younger members had their own leaders, such as Kazimierz Michał Ujazdowski and the 2010 Polish presidential candidate Marek Jurek. Founded in Gdansk, they soon spread to different cities including Warsaw, Cracow and Poznań.

In their *Deklaracja Ideowa* (Declaration of Ideas), the members of RMP summarized their political views and goals.³ Their political aims consisted mainly of the struggle for an independent nation and civil rights. In the *Deklaracja Ideowa*, members emphasize that they aspire to prepare the ›young generation‹ to defend Polish society, the national culture and to gain free access to media.⁴ Similar aims were declared by the FMW in 1985: to mobilize the ›young generation‹ for the fight for Polish independence.⁵ While the RMP discussed a new conservative movement in their newspapers, the FMW had a connection to the anarchist group *Ruch Społeczeństwa Alternatywnego* (RSA, Alternative Society Movement). In its newspapers like *BMW* (*Biuletyn Młodzieży Walczącej*, Newsletter of the Fighting Youth) or *Monit* (Reminder), the FMW discussed, for instance, the cruelties of Stalinism, the education in schools, Poland's road to independence as well as the actual situation of young people, the so-called lost generation in the People's Republic of Poland.⁶

3 Deklaracja Ideowa RMP, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO IV/6 and AO IV/130.

4 Deklaracja Ideowa RMP, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO IV/6.

5 See for example *Monit* No. 67 (1988), p. 1.

6 See for example *Monit* No. 69 (December 1988), p. 1; *Monit* No. 67 (November 1988), p. 1; *Monit* (June 1989), p. 1, Archiwum FMW, Gdansk.

The FMW was founded in 1984 by pupils protesting for, among other aims, more self-determination and less indoctrination in the educational system. Its members, like those of RSA and *Wolność i Pokój* (WiP, Freedom and Peace), became active after the proclamation of martial law in 1981 and were several years younger than the founders of RMP. FMW groups appeared in various cities and were most active in Gdansk, Warsaw, Cracow and Wroclaw (Liczbarski 2005: 138).

»Generation« was a meaningful category for describing their identity and the character of their group. Talk of generational experiences and differences can therefore transport the motives and passions that drive a protest movement, as Holger Nehring has shown for student movements in the 1960s in Western Europe. So how did they characterize their generation and construct a collectivity?

In many documents, the actors of RMP and FMW communicated with each other about the character of »their generation« and about common generational imprints. Speaking of themselves as the »generation which was born and raised in the Peoples Republic«,⁷ the members of RMP regarded two historical events as crucial to their childhood experience: the »Carnival of Solidarity« and the period of »Martial Law«. Aleksander Hall for example, a member of RMP, mentioned the importance of the August strikes of 1980 in an article in the newspaper *Bratniak*.⁸ These two historical experiences became the main sources of a constructed generational unity. They created a base of common experiences and feelings which bound members together. Their »generation-talk« also advanced to a »founding myth« of their oppositional movement.

Comparable to the members of RMP, the actors of FMW spoke of themselves in the 1980s as the »young generation« growing up during the cruel times of martial law. They emphasized that they could not forget the tanks on the streets, as a FMP pamphlet typically iterates: »Representing the young generation that grew up in these cruel times and re-

7 Deklaracja Ideowa RMP, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO IV/6.

8 Aleksander Hall: Artykuł dyskusyjny. *Bratniak* No. 26, p. 5, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO V/85.

members the tear gas and tanks on the streets, we cannot forget.⁹ Furthermore, they described themselves in contemporary documents as a generation with no alternatives, and as a »lost generation«.¹⁰

A community of young protesters was constructed which stuck together not only by talking about common experiences, but also by distinguishing themselves from the older generation. Members of RMP and FMW differentiated themselves from older dissidents, whom they characterized as the »solidarity generation«. By questioning the appearance of a generational conflict they discussed the generational differences between the »old« members of the opposition and the »youngsters«. An edition of the *Federacyjny Biuletyn Informacyjny* (FBI, Newsletter of the Federation) for example, a newspaper put out by FMW in Cracow, deals with the different cultural styles represented by the »older« and »younger« members of oppositional movements.¹¹

The »youth groups« supported *Solidarność*, but they wanted to create their own movement. They felt a difference between the »old« and the »young« members of the opposition and talked about their specificity: their changeable character, a potential for adaptation as well as bias towards innovation. For example Krzysztof Grzelczyk, a member of RMP, mentioned in *Bratniak* that this characteristic was due to circumstance, that they are still searching for their »place in life« and their own tradition of oppositional activity.¹² To be »young« and oppositional meant being focused on future perspectives. Partly, they emphasized their difference from the older members of the opposition by describing themselves as non-co-

9 »Reprezentując młode pokolenie wyrosłe w tych strasznych czasach, doskonale pamiętające czolgi i gazy na ulicach, nie możemy zapomnieć.« FMP: Ulotka wydana w osma rodnice wprowadzenia stanu wojennego, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO IV/ 31.1.

10 *Monit* No. 82-83 (1989), p. 2; *Monit* No. 67 (1988), Archiwum FMW, Gdansk.

11 *FBI* No. 8/9 (20.5.1989), p. 3, Archiwum FMW, Gdansk.

12 Krzysztof Grzelczyk: Nasze miejsce w opozycji, *Bratniak* No. 14, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO V/85.

operative and more radical regarding talks and agreements with the Communist Party (cf. Błaszkiwicz et al. 1994: 134).

Like other youth movements in the twentieth century, these groups were based on the idea of youth as a force which can drive political change. The myth of youth, the belief that youth can spread revolutionary power, played an important role in their self-portrayal as well as in their political thinking. They often spoke of representing the »young generation«, which has the duty of resistance and political influence: »As young people we must wake society from their lethargy«.¹³ And members of RMP declared, »we have to take our share of responsibility for the future Poland«.¹⁴ Therefore, they interpreted belonging to the »young generation« as a duty to achieve political change and determine the future Poland. This is also expressed by stating that the future depends on youth: »It is mostly the young people on which the future will depend on«.¹⁵ Referring to the »power of youth«, they tried to gain influence and underlined their purpose as a »political voice«. Youth was estimated to play an important role in society and for the future of Poland. Moreover, the »young generation« embodied the hope of a new, free country. To speak of another »young generation« of protest – an image which goes back to Adam Mickiewicz (Henze 2008: 257) – was meaningful in order to connect to the tradition and history of Polish opposition against foreign influence.

»Generation« not only affected the self-images of oppositional movements or mattered as a political argument in the sense that its members referred to the »duty of the young« to influence the future. Furthermore, the future of the »communist project« and the development of society

13 »[...] jako młodzi ludzie, obudźmy nasze społeczeństwo z letargu« FMW: Ulotka wydana w osma rodnice wprowadzenia stanu wojennego, Archiwum Opozycji- Karta, Warsaw, AO IV/ 31.1.

14 »Musimy [...] przejąć naszą część odpowiedzialności za przeszłą Polskę.« Deklaracja Ideowa RMP, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO IV/6.

15 »I to przede wszystkim ludziom młodym od których to głównie zależy będzie przyszłość nas wszystkich.« *Bratniak* No. 14 (1978), p. 23, Archiwum Opozycji-Karta, Warsaw, AO V/8.

itself was discussed within a generational framework. From the beginning of the construction of communism in Poland as well as in the GDR, the communist rulers emphasized how important the support of the ›young generation‹ was to fulfill this task of a ›new society‹. »The future depends on youth« was a slogan which appeared repeatedly in the speeches and documents of the Communist Party and its youth functionaries (see for example Mc Dougall 2004: 1). Within communist society, ›youth‹ had the task of engaging actively in the ›communist programme‹ and carrying on the historical vision of the ›founding fathers‹. But ›youth‹ could not completely be shaped by the state, as can be seen by the emphasis youth groups placed on speaking for themselves and creating their own space by breaking away from the party or from communist youth organizations.

Youth-debates resemble the future perspectives of a society as Valeska Henze argues (Henze 2008: 255). If it has been interpreted as a potential for historical change, even as a social redemption or a threat to the society, ›youth‹ had various connotations since it was accepted as an independent phase of life in the nineteenth century (see for example Passerini 1997: 375; Mitterauer 1986; Speitkamp 1998). In state-socialist societies, youth was overloaded with the mission of creating ›a new socialist society‹. For communists as well as for youth groups, the future seemed closely tied to the question of youth. But the youth activists had different goals in mind. Instead of guaranteeing the development of socialism – as the communist rulers proclaimed – they interpreted ›youth‹ as a main force for achieving radical political and social change. In this way the independent youth-groups referred to this bias towards future and youth, but gave it a revolutionary touch.

Dealing with these youth groups inevitably raises the question of their impact on the end of communism. By publishing newspapers, remembering parts of Polish history and creating a sphere of free discussion within their groups, they shaped an alternative world that deviated from the socialist model. They contributed to a new rising hope of overcoming communist rule. The ›young generation‹ can be interpreted as an important force that mobilized the protests during the 1980s. By creating a

new culture of protest, organizing happenings and representing a new lifestyle, they mark a turning point in the history of Polish opposition against communist rule (Marciniak 2002: 35). Acting in groups such as FMW, WiP or *Pomarańczowa Alternatywa* (Orange Alternative) they discussed various topics such as freedom, environmentalism and a new political agenda.

In some of these groups ›generation‹ served to underline their group-identity as well as their political programme. Looking at history, this is an exception rather than a rule. This underscores that generations are »cultural constructs and usually come in particular kinds and times and for particular purposes of self-promotion« (Weisbrod 2007: 20).

›Generation‹ as a self-image was probably most striking for those groups who were able to connect their ideas and aims to the Polish tradition of young opponents fighting for Polish independence. By speaking of a »young protest generation«, they could refer to the long history of Polish opposition against foreign rule, but also to the revolutionary future. In this sense did their self-image fit well to the widespread interpretation of such a ›generation‹ as a symbol of a ›young hero«. In the case of fighting for environmentalism or underlining the importance of environmental consciousness, ›generation‹ might not have transported the appropriate message. This shows the fragility of ›generation‹ as a form of constructing the self and creating the identity of a political movement.

As argued above with regard to the members of RMP and FMW, they not only used generational arguments but also identified themselves as a generation, even up to today.

Memories and narratives. Generation-talk of former members

Generational consciousness and self-image change over time. They can disappear, be reinvented or remain a part of a self-portrayal. They possess the potential to become a widespread label to describe one's sense of belonging. In its biographical dimension ›generation‹ can give orientation in tracing back one's life to history and subscribing oneself to a community of people who supposedly had the same experiences.

Do these actors still describe themselves as a generation or talk of a »generational burden«? Members of the youth movements in Poland who were active during the 1980s still share a feeling of belonging to a generation and talk about their »generational character«. Therefore it is interesting to analyze their narratives and memories after the fall of communism, as well as their role during the period of transformation.

Several years after the fall of communism in Poland, Władisław Watendziak, a former member of an independent youth movement, in 1997 described the characteristics of his contemporaries in an interview with the magazine *Fronda*: »It is the generation [...], named Pampersi, who were constructing the political culture in which we are living now« (Watendziak 1997: 334). By this, he emphasized the importance of »his« young generation, active in the 1980s in independent youth movements against communist rule and in the construction of the Third Republic of Poland.

Many former members of these youth groups acted in media or made a career as politicians, like Aleksander Hall or Arkadiusz Rybicki, who are both former leaders of RMP. Another expression of their influential role can be seen in the example of the group Pampersi. During the 1990s a group of young conservatives, the so-called Pampersi, gained influence in the media and tried to promote their colleagues to high political positions. After Wiesław Watendziak became chairman of TV Polska, he gathered many young journalists with similar worldviews around him. In *Fronda* and other publications, many former members of RMP initiated a debate about the new conservatism in Poland. Actually, they continued a debate that already played a role in their political thinking during the 1980s. After their most well-known TV shows folded, they were portrayed as a generational phenomenon whose time had already passed (Zdort 2002).

The term »Pampersi« is moreover a good example for the ambivalent meaning of a generation-label, changing from an offending term to a popular self-image. Pampersi was used by older journalists trying to discredit their emphasis and influence in media – but it ended up backfiring. The youngsters soon started to accept this label and used it in their descriptions of »their« generation. It most likely developed into a wide-

spread self-image so quickly because it marks a self-ironic, but also concise and vivid story of their successful journey through life: seizing power at a young age. Revolting against communist rule in the 1980s, most of the members of this group were in their late twenties or in their thirties and influential in constructing the Third Republic of Poland in the 1990s. They were proud enough of what they achieved that they could easily shun the insulting meaning of the term Pampersi.

It is not by accident that the boom of this generation-label occurred in the 1990s. It became a symbol of those young members of the opposition who were staking their claims in the transformation period. They were a small group with access to the media, so they were able to spread their political ideas and their generation-talk. They were joined together by a political programme, the new conservatism, which kept awake their generational story.

Although different approaches existed in how the shift to the Third Republic and their structure – as a part of *Solidarność* or in the form of an own party – should look like, they were still united in their memories as representing a »successful generation«. These actors, whether they describe themselves concretely as Pampersi being connected with a programme of a new conservatism in Media or more general as *Młodopolacy* (Young Poland Movement) – another prevalent generation-label – still harbor a strong feeling of belonging to this generation.

Further, they nowadays regard their activism in RMP as an important phase in their lives, so that it is interpreted as a biographical experience. In retrospectives, they often trace their life story back to these times, calling them crucial to their future. In the perspective of Jarosław Sellin, for example, it has been »a political, moral and intellectual adventure« and besides that a »good school for citizens' action« (Marulewska 2009: 153). Comparably, Maciej Grzywaczewski notices in retrospect that engaging in RMP was an »important phase of my life, which shaped my social consciousness« (ibid.: 145).

»Generation« still provides a code which allows them to express their »self-image« as well as their political message. It seems as if their generational image is still very clear. To this day, pursuing a political goal and remembering their »youth« strengthens their generational contours and allows them to stick together emotionally.

The »generation-talk« was crystallized in the debate about the Pampersi. This label was spread via the media, evoked interests of the public and marked a political vision. It became so popular because it explained the career of young journalists but was also used by actors themselves to underline their conservative project. But a boom of a generation-label cannot itself create a generation. Beyond this, the generational consciousness is latent in self-portrayals and can be interpreted as a persistent potentiality to characterize the »self«. In this sense, generation is deeply rooted in »doing biography« (Fetz 2009: 37). Independent of its »performance«, if it is transmitted by a political agenda, becomes public by a »media-boom« or is simply common in shared narratives, it is meaningful unless it loses its »biographical relevance«.

Members of FMW also feel they belong to a generation *ex post facto* and discuss their lives in a generational matrix. Although their generational consciousness, as former member Mariusz A. Roman explains, seems to become blurred.¹⁶ He notes that many of his former colleagues do not actively refer back to these times. He talks of those who, now around forty years old, experienced the 1980s strikes and martial law as children or young adolescents. He speaks about his engagement in FMW and names his contemporaries the »generation of 1988«, remembering their activism in the protests and strikes. In his memories, it was the »young« and not the »old« who were most active during the 1988 strikes.¹⁷ This image of the »young, brave revolutionaries« already prevailed in self-portrayals during the 1980s. It seems that their generational nostalgia

16 See the memories of Mariusz A. Roman on the website of FMW: http://www.fmw.org.pl/index.php?option=18&action=articles_show&art_id=557&menu_id=732&page=291.

17 Ibid.

is still virulent up to today. An example of this attachment to preserving their own history are the archival projects and the collections of remembrances of former actors. On the website of FMW we can find many photos and stories about these times collected by the actors themselves.¹⁸ Jacek Górski, for instance, has written down his life story, describing his activism in the FMW. It is striking that these actors are aware of their history and try to transmit it to the next generations.

In their narratives, members of RMP and FMW refer to their anti-communist actions. They emphasize their importance within the opposition during the 1980s in Poland. By sharing their memories and talking about them in public, they are still drawn together and emotionally linked to the former collective.

Crucial to the appearance of a »memory generation« is not only its relevance regarding biographical constructions, but also the interrelations with memories and interests of the public. The young Polish activists who joined independent youth movements during the 1980s are well-known in public and have been integrated in the memory culture of 1989, even though they complain about »staying in the shadow« of the older members of *Solidarność*.

This reveals the historiography of the fall of communism in Poland, in which these young actors are mentioned as an important part of the oppositional movement (Machcewicz 2002). To date, several monographs have been published dealing with these movements, such as Wojciech Polak's examination of the NZS (Polak 2001) and Tomasz Sikorski's book on the history of RMP (Sikorski 2011). Further, they have been discussed in the long perspective of »youth opposition« since 1945 (Sudziński 2005; Seranka/Stępień 2009).

This can also be seen in the press coverage of the end of communism in Poland. For example in September 2009, the thirtieth anniversary of the founding of RMP, several newspapers reported on the youth movement, including *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita* (Katka 2009; Wybranowski

18 See the website of FMW: <http://www.fmw.org.pl/>.

& Kubiak 2009). Regarding the question of why these »youngsters« have remained in public memory, Bogusław Chrabota, in an article published in *Newsweek*, suggests that they represent »a symbol of the young and intellectual Poland joining the workers in the fight for freedom« (Chrabota 2009).

And they themselves contribute to the remembrance of the youth groups. Talking of the »youngest dissidents« of the Polish Republic, Jacek Górski for example, himself a former member of the FMW, referred back to the history of this group (Górski 2009: 6).

Concerning the »memory generation«, the narrative of belonging to this generation still, in contrast to young East Germans, has its effect on political discourse as well as on biographical stories. Former actors of these youth groups such as RMP not only engage in political debates, but also emphasize that it was »their generation« that influenced the new conservatism or the new political culture in Poland.

In a nutshell, members of RMP and FMW are aware of their own history. By dealing with the past, creating archival platforms or continuing political debates of the 1980s, they recall and homogenize their experiences. Former members regard their political activism as an important phase of their life, so that »generational belonging« is one way in which they make sense of their own biographies. A generational story is made possible by the formation of individual memories, but also by the interchange of memories and the creation of collective awareness. But also the fact of having media power, being known in public and the interest with which they were observed in the 1990s allows them to tell and spread their generation-story.

Furthermore, their story of a generation of youth fighting against communist rule fits well into Polish memory culture and is a useful means of collective self-understanding. National identity is focused on the memorization of various oppositional movements and the long-standing domination by foreign rule, as Krzysztof Ruchniewicz has pointed out (Ruchniewicz 2005: 18). The history of opposition is therefore a main part within history and national identity (Ruchniewicz 2005). That enables

them to interpret their action in terms of keeping a tradition of national resistance.

Resumee

The young protest generation acting during the 1980s in Poland possessed a strong generational consciousness. »Generation« not only influenced their group identity as well as their political argumentation, but also appeared in their biographical narrations afterwards. Finally, their understanding of themselves as a generation and their generation-talk has been integrated into the culture of memory regarding the fall of communism in Poland. Based on individual memory and memory formation, they have formed a group drawn together by a strong feeling of »generational unity«. By communicating with each other about their generational imprints and being acknowledged by the public, they became a part of the »collective memory«. During the 1990s, a part of these actors debated about the new conservatism in the Third Republic and were influential as politicians and journalists, supporting their story of a »victorious generation«. In this respect, they can be described as a self-appointed political generation that has created »generational unity« and successfully continued its generation-talk after 1989.

It must still be examined whether we are faced with the last emphatically »political generation« in Poland. After the appearance of this self-declared »youth generation« protesting against communist rule, we can hardly find a comparable self-image or proclaimed generational project. Since the 1990s, several generational labels have appeared in the media – such as »Generation X« (*generacja X*) and the generation of Johannes Paul II (*pokolenie JP2*) – but never again was a strong generational consciousness claimed by young people themselves and connected to a political programme. In times of radical historical changes, generational projects are more likely to be a part of self-identities and play a role in the creation of a collective. So we have to ask whether »generation« has perhaps lost its emotional attachment as a powerful self-description of a political movement and has instead been replaced by »media and lifestyle generations« (Zinnecker 2003: 54).

To date, the focus of generational history and theory has been on western European protest movements, particularly youth movements; but we can find a strong emotional attachment to ›generation‹ as a political argument and as a self-image in state-socialist societies as well. In Poland, Hungary and East Germany for example, a youthful upheaval developed during the final crisis of communism. In Hungary, a political group referred to its generational character and transferred its activism to a political party, *Fidesz* (Dalos 2009: 78), which later became part of the political system. In East Germany as well, a youth movement appeared in the late 1980s that possessed an image of itself as a ›new generation‹ that must follow a historical duty. In contrary, they later mostly joined their West German partners. Finally, the movements in these countries had different chances of maintaining their organizational structures and prolonging their emotional community after 1989/1990. Generational rhetoric and self-portraits have to be studied in more detail in former state-socialist societies.

Interestingly, ›generation‹ appeared as a political argument within independent youth groups in other countries besides Poland – such as the GDR and Hungary – but had a different outcome in terms of its role in emotional and biographical binding. ›Generation‹ helped to form a strong emotional attachment to the Polish movements and was used to subscribe the individual into history as well as to characterize the self. Even today the generational matrix is in parts an appropriate figure for describing one's identity or for underlining a political message. The potentials and factors enabling a generation are shifting over time, so that a long-term observation of ›generational feelings‹ can contribute to an explanation of why they appear or why they might remain part of the silent knowledge of sharing age-related experiences.

Future researches on generational history will have to deal more intensively with comparative or transnational, as well as biographical and intergenerational, perspectives. Within a transnational view on generational phenomena a discussion might well be fruitful on the extent to which national traditions of collectivity and emotional styles have an impact on processes of generation building. Finally, analyses of biographical narra-

tions (see for example Fietze 2009: 135) as well as intergenerational relationship have to be connected with a generational history perspective. Such projects would contribute to a detailed examination of the imagination and creation of generational belongings.

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