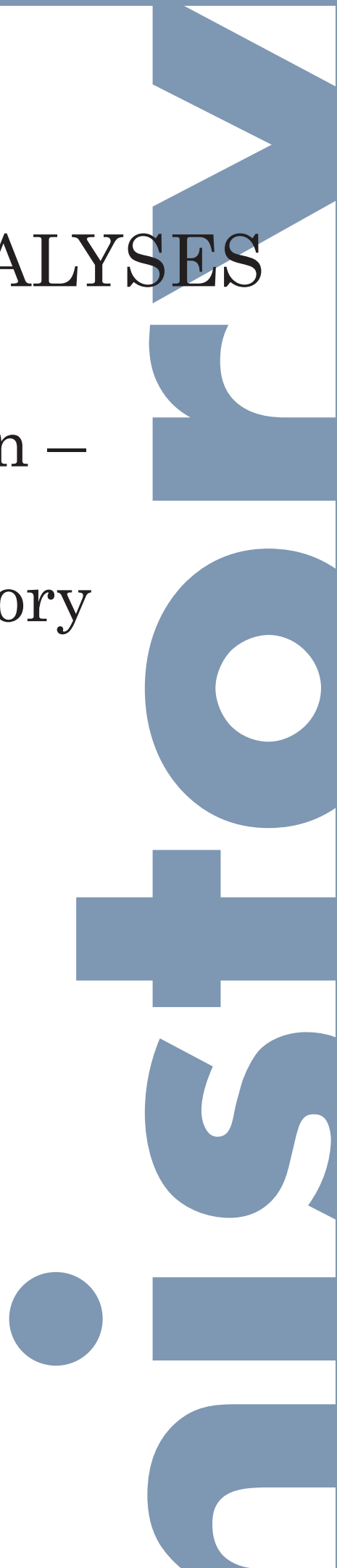


# OPINIONS and ANALYSES

OF THE INSTITUTE DE REPUBLICA

## Martial Law Children – Forgotten Heroes, the gap between history and politics

DR MONIKA MARIA BRZEZIŃSKA





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# Introduction

“Parents, as officially repressed, receive medals,  
while children with all their painful burden go into the world alone and unimportant...  
no one thought about how difficult learning at school could be for a child,  
or how much a child experienced seeing his father in prison...”<sup>1</sup>

The issue of political awareness and participation of children in politics is still marginal, both in Poland and globally. Despite the development of science and increasing focus on the subjectivity and children’s rights, studies concerning their presence and activity in political life have not been thoroughly elaborated. However, the omission of historical facts by refusing to consider children as equally important actors and participants in political life as adults may pose a risk of distorting the facts and, in retrospect, lead to a gap within the very history.

The purpose of the present analysis is thus to draw particular attention to the research deficits concerning the presence of children in politics, examined from the perspective of their opposition activity during the period of martial law in Poland and afterwards, until 1989. Hence, who were the children of martial law? How does history perceive them today and what is its attitude towards them? Are those children present in historical memory and if not, then why?

As a preliminary remark, it should be emphasised that in the present analysis the term the “children of martial law” is narrowly understood. Therefore, it includes only those persons who, especially in the period 1981–1989 were underage, but who nevertheless actively, consciously and voluntarily, for various reasons and under the influence of various motivations, most often modelled on their oppositionist parents, engaged in anti-communist activity. In many cases they suffered heavy consequences of their involvement throughout their lives. Hence, the above term does not apply to all children living at that period, which is often overlooked and disregarded, particularly by publicists.

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<sup>1</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, *The Author’s questionnaire research of 2020*. The words of one of the participants of the questionnaire research (a child of martial law) conducted by the Author of the present analysis. The interviews were conducted in the period July–October 2020, among already adult children of the communist period, from Siedlce, Mrągowo, Piła, Elbląg, Warsaw and Tczew, whose parents were actively involved in anti-communist opposition activity. The survey included 30 questions, both open and closed, single and multiple choice.

The research method adopted in the present analysis will be interdisciplinary, combining the fields of political science, historical sciences, as well as the analysis of political narrative. It will also be based on a case study, as well as partially on the analysis of documents and previously unreleased source materials, which will make the study more authoritative. The applied research techniques will include memoirs, oral accounts and questionnaire interviews. It should be noted that no extensive research on children of that period has been conducted in Poland so far. The only available research are the interviews carried out by Joanna Kaczor in the 1990s<sup>2</sup>. She interviewed 15 people, asking them about martial law as seen through their own eyes as children. Although the researcher did not undertake any thorough analysis then, it was her merit to reach a selected group of people and collect source information concerning their past experiences.

A complex interpretation of children's psyche in times of conflicts and wars has been tackled, among others, by American researcher Robert Coles. In his book *The political life of children*, he presented the results of his analysis of children's drawings collected from all over the world (including Poland), concerning both landmark and historically challenging for children political experiences, as well as those not burdened with violent systemic changes<sup>3</sup>. His research had the advantage of undertaking the work five years after the imposition of martial law, thus during the communist system in Poland, and analysing, inter alia, the level of political awareness of young children.

The further materials that will be partially referred to in the study are the retrospectives made available by the portal [superhistoria.pl](http://superhistoria.pl), which in 2018 announced a competition for the memories of various people (not only children) from the martial law period. However, no analysis was conducted of those works. They were only intended as testimonies of the past times. Another extremely extensive source of information was the documentary film *Dzieci stanu wojennego*<sup>4</sup> (*The Children of Martial Law*), directed by Jerzy Afanasjew jr., in which the children tell their own stories regarding that period. Among other scarce materials documenting the experiences of the children of martial law there is a book *Jaworowe dzieci*<sup>5</sup> by Joanna Siedlecka, published in 1988. It provides a relatively extensive account of the stories as well as the activities of the youngest oppositionists presented in the background or from the perspective of the experiences of their parents and relatives.

Finally, the source materials are also supplemented by the questionnaire research conducted by the Author in 2020, which involved a group of 16 respondents<sup>6</sup>. The enquiries, concerning the experiences and activities of the children during martial law, were addressed

<sup>2</sup> J. Kaczor, *Stan wojenny w oczach dzieci*, „Edukacja i Dialog” 10 no. 93/1996, pp. 17–24.

<sup>3</sup> R. Coles, *The political life of children*, New York 1986.

<sup>4</sup> J. Afanasjew jr. (dir.), *Dzieci stanu wojennego*, Video Studio Gdańsk [online:] <http://archiwumfilmowe.pl/baza-filmowa/filmy/49-dzieci-stanu-wojennego,1991>, [accessed:27.09.2020].

<sup>5</sup> J. Siedlecka, *Jaworowe dzieci*, Warszawa 1988.

<sup>6</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.



to 28 people from all over Poland, from which 12 refused to participate in the project due to, inter alia, traumatic experiences which they had experienced and to which they were unable or, for various reasons, unwilling to return (“denial” effect).



# I. Between history and the policy of historical memory

In the life of every community *the past continually interacts with the future through the present*<sup>7</sup>, and the awareness of the relationship between them is the foundation of the national bond<sup>8</sup>. Therefore, what appears to be extremely important here, as the French historian Jacques Le Goff emphasises, is the task of the historical sciences, which [...] *consists in speaking about the past in terms of objectivity and intersubjectively verifiable truth*<sup>9</sup>. History has to explore the past, remain neutral towards the sources and free from ideological influences<sup>10</sup>. Its purpose is thus to know the truth. It should be *a copy of the past*<sup>11</sup>, a kind of *tool of scientific translation playing the role of a framework of historical consciousness*<sup>12</sup>. Its “guardians” are mainly historians and researchers seeking, on the basis of past events and facts, objectivity and truth.

Whereas collective memory (frequently also referred to as historical policy, or policy of historical memory<sup>13</sup>), which Radosław Zenderowski, on the grounds of political science, considers to be a specific policy (as historical policy of memory), created mainly by the state and by the state-forming elites<sup>14</sup>, is a different domain. According to Eugeniusz Ponczek it

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<sup>7</sup> A. Szarkowska, *Świadomość i pamięć historyczna*, [in:] *Terror i konspiracja. Młodzież wobec indoktrynacji komunistycznej 1945–1956*, ed. E. J. Kryńska, Białystok 2004, p. 21.

<sup>8</sup> Ibidem, p. 23.

<sup>9</sup> M. Saryusz-Wolska, *Historia i pamięć – między Antykiem a nowoczesnością*, „Kultura Współczesna: teoria, interpretacje, krytyka” 2008, no. 3, p. 236.

<sup>10</sup> J. Michałek, *Współcześnie o przeszłości, czyli wpływ polityki historycznej na kształt podręczników szkolnych*, „Klio” 16 (1) 2011, p. 182.

<sup>11</sup> B. Krauz-Mozer, *O co nam chodzi, gdy pytamy o prawdę w historii?* „Państwo i Społeczeństwo” vol. VIII: 2008 no. 2, p. 94.

<sup>12</sup> L.P. Riepina, *Historia i pamięć: korzyść zdystansowania*, „Nowa Polityka Wschodnia” 2011 (1) 1, p. 241.

<sup>13</sup> There is a dispute among researchers and academics whether such concepts should be used interchangeably or whether they are ambiguous. The positions on this matter are divided, but since a discussion on this issue goes beyond the framework of the present analysis, the rule practised by the cited authors that considers the concepts as synonymous, is adopted.

<sup>14</sup> R. Zenderowski, *Polityki pamięci w miastach podzielonych granicą państwową. Teoretyczne i metodologiczne ramy badań*, [in:] *Lokalne polityki pamięci w mieście podzielonym granicą państwową. Cieszyn – Těšín – Teschens*, ed. R. Zenderowski, Warszawa-Cieszyn 2021, pp. 15–16.

is also a way of “doing politics” which is not impervious to manipulation, selectivity and mythologisation of the message behind which certain political goals may hide<sup>15</sup>. Collective memory is closely related to historical knowledge because, on the one hand, it cannot do without it and, on the other hand, it selectively uses it *as the material for creating images of the past according to its own rules*<sup>16</sup>.

Moreover, *public opinion surveys clearly demonstrate the gap between historical science and mass historical consciousness. The image of the past in mass consciousness corresponds to social demands rather than to the tasks of historical knowledge*<sup>17</sup>. This is by no means an isolated view, since as Andrzej Szpociński aptly notes, collective memory is created on the memories held by members of a certain group (or groups) and it represents a form of the group’s self-image. Furthermore, such memory is conditioned by a specific system of values of a given community, thus it is selective and changeable in time (dynamic)<sup>18</sup>, strongly marked by emotional and behavioural elements<sup>19</sup>. Hence, it encodes what is important, what moves or as a certain historical experience motivates to further activity or warns against it.

Memory performs several key functions, the first of which is the reconstruction of a neutral history, the reference to facts, the elimination from the narrative of what is false or unnecessary. On the other hand, it is also *a tool for reflecting on the issue of what role in the history of the [...] national community determinism and subjective action, necessity and coincidence, fate and choice, “superior force” and individual responsibility have played*<sup>20</sup>. Memory, also through its emotional element, serves as evaluative assessment of the past and present. Contrary to objective history, it is subjective and distorted<sup>21</sup>. Finally, it also provides a basis for activity in the field of submitting normative, legal or moral claims<sup>22</sup>.

In principle, all those who preserve the historical narrative, i.e. both individuals and entire groups, may be considered actors of collective memory. Thus, family, acquaintances and strangers whose memory is “interwoven” into *the broader memory [...] of a commune, a town or a generation*<sup>23</sup> become its actors. Aleida Assmann, however, points to a generational change that makes *individual memory subordinate to the broader perspective of generational memory. [...] Individual memories are averaged to the collective background of experience*<sup>24</sup>, they put, as R. Zenderowski aptly claims, group interest above personal interest<sup>25</sup>. They may be absorbed,

<sup>15</sup> E. Ponczek, *Polityka wobec pamięci versus polityka historyczna: aspekty semantyczny, aksjologiczny i merytoryczny w narracji polskiej*, „Przegląd Politologiczny” (2), 7–22, <https://doi.org/10.14746/pp.2013.18.2.1>

<sup>16</sup> B. Szacka, *Czas przeszły. Pamięć i mit*, Warszawa 2006, p. 24.

<sup>17</sup> L.P. Riepina, op. cit., p. 241.

<sup>18</sup> R. Zenderowski, *Pamięć i tożsamość narodowa*, „Atheneum” vol. 28/2011, p. 153.

<sup>19</sup> A. Szpociński, *Pamięć zbiorowa a mass media*, „Kultura Współczesna” no. 4/1999, p. 43.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>21</sup> R. Zenderowski, *Pamięć i tożsamość narodowa...*, p. 154.

<sup>22</sup> M. Ziółkowski, *Cztery funkcje przywracanej pamięci*, pp. 63–67.

<sup>23</sup> A. Assmann, *Miedzy historią a pamięcią*. Antologia, Warszawa 2013, pp. 41–48.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem p. 46.

<sup>25</sup> R. Zenderowski, *Pamięć i tożsamość narodowa...*, p. 161.

“blurred”, fade away or be displaced by stronger narratives. Therefore, memory and oblivion go hand in hand. Forgetting can become a tool for rejecting that which is inconvenient, which destroys *the well-being of the members of a particular community*<sup>26</sup> and can be performed in both active and passive ways. The former consists mainly in forgetting the victims and their sufferings, thus in an attitude of “erasing” facts and the past. Such actions are often the result of deliberate manipulation, especially by decision-makers or political leaders at various levels. The latter consists in silencing the facts in order not to penetrate the compiled history and not to disturb its idealised image<sup>27</sup>. The determinant of such approach may be, for instance, previous experience of trauma and reluctance to recall difficult and incomprehensible events of one’s own life or the life of the nearest community.

Moreover, the policy of memory may be implemented on various levels: as state policy and as local policy, which does not determine their mutual compatibility and coherence. They may complement each other, coexisting in symbiosis, as well as antagonize, remaining in contradiction with each other. This is particularly evident in non-democratic systems: totalitarian or authoritarian<sup>28</sup>, though it is also present in democracies.

The “leaders” called “carriers” of historical memory are also different. While at the national level they are mainly state bodies or entities acting on their behalf (the institutional infrastructure of the state and its representatives), at the local level they are mainly local *politicians, journalists, teachers, scientists, people involved in art and culture, museum workers, librarians, priests, leaders of historical re-enactment groups*<sup>29</sup>. Historical memory is also often referred to as a “mirror”<sup>30</sup>, since it is reflected in such dimensions as *topos* (architectural landscape as an expression of memory), *genos* (awareness of characters treated as role models and referring to them), *ethos* (celebration of interpreted history and creation of a kind of myth on its basis) and *logos* (symbols of communication as images recalling the past)<sup>31</sup>.

Summarising, we may claim that history, neutral in its assumption, is the foundation of each policy of historical memory. Since without the knowledge of one’s own roots and ancestors it is difficult to define both oneself and one’s own place among others (perception of “ours” and “theirs”). Whereas historical memory preserves or erases monumental memories of the past in a subjective way by means of diversified formal and informal, national or local actors. Thus, it is reflected both in the oral narrative as well as in the material record of history, in the images recalled, monuments and references to the heroic attitudes of past events. Politically interpreted history may thus balance between collective memory

<sup>26</sup> Ibidem, p. 163.

<sup>27</sup> R. Zenderowski, *Pamięć i tożsamość narodowa...*, p. 164.

<sup>28</sup> R. Zenderowski, *Polityki pamięci w miastach podzielonych granicą państwową...*, pp. 19–20.

<sup>29</sup> Ibidem, p. 23.

<sup>30</sup> E. Litak, *Pamięć jako „lustro i lampa” tożsamości. Pamięć i tożsamość zbiorowa oraz wybrane aspekty relacji między nimi, Pamięć i tożsamość zbiorowa oraz wybrane aspekty relacji między nimi*, [in:] *Pejzaże tożsamości: teoria i empiria w perspektywie interdyscyplinarnej*, eds. E. Litak, R. Furman, H. Bożek, Kraków 2011, pp. 249–261.

<sup>31</sup> C. Tullio-Altan, *Ethnos e Civiltà. Identità etniche e valori democratici*, Milano 1995, p. 21.

and oblivion. It may also revive or die, depending on the actions undertaken by the actors of historical policy, although it also appears to follow the rule that alive heroes are mostly forgotten. They enter the sphere of historical memory not until after they have passed away, with the following generations.

## II. Testimony to history: childhood experience of political reality

Shaping patriotic attitudes, including political maturity requires time, it is a long and indispensable process. The research conducted mainly by American scholars has proven that political education is a lifelong process that begins at a very young age<sup>32</sup>. This is mainly *a process of informal learning that almost everyone experiences through a lifetime as a result of interactions with parents, family, friends, neighbours, peers, colleagues*<sup>33</sup>. Michael X. Delli Carpini notes that all political attitudes develop and concretise depending on the external environment<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, the events in which children participate also have an influence on their political attitudes, and according to the research of Larry M. Bartels and Simon Jackman, the most sensitive and influential period starts at the age of 7<sup>35</sup>. It is confirmed not only by research concerning political socialisation and psychological studies on children, but also by children's real-life stories.

Moreover, the research carried out by Jan van Deth<sup>36</sup> or Larry M. Bartels and Simon Jackman demonstrate that *children in the first year of primary school, not yet literate, are able to recognise political issues and present coherent, structured political orientations*<sup>37</sup>. Thus, they already have at least certain basic political knowledge and orientation, which enables them to develop their own worldview of political reality. The experience and knowledge acquired that influence their judgement depend, however, on the strength and intensity of socialisation

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<sup>32</sup> D. Easton, J. Dennis, *Children in the Political System: Origins of Political Legitimacy*, McGraw-Hill 1969.

<sup>33</sup> A. Neundorff, K. Smets, *Political Socialization and the Making of Citizens*, „Political Science, Political Behavior” 2017, pp. 1–3, DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199935307.013.98.

<sup>34</sup> M.X. Delli Carpini, *Age and history: generations and sociopolitical change*, [in:] *Political Learning in Adulthood: A Sourcebook of Theory and Research*, ed. R. S. Sigel, Chicago 1989, p. 18.

<sup>35</sup> L.M. Bartels, S. Jackman, *A generational model of political learning*, „Electoral Studies” 33 (2014), p. 16.

<sup>36</sup> J.W. van Deth, et. al., *Kinder und Politik. Politische Einstellungen von jungen Kindern im ersten Grundschuljahr*, Wiesbaden 2007.

<sup>37</sup> L.M. Bartels, S. Jackman, op. cit., pp. 7–18.

agents such as family, school, friends and religious beliefs<sup>38</sup>. The circumstances that determine children's decision-making and cognitive processes are also significant.

Furthermore, the questionnaire surveys conducted in 2020 on a group of now-adults whose childhood fell on the period 1981–1989, and whose parents were very actively involved in anti-communist opposition movements in Poland, appear to confirm the previous results. Since the surveys proved that all analysed children who were born before martial law understood the then political situation and were capable of outlining its deficiencies. Most of them were also able, for instance, to recognise a “ubek”<sup>39</sup> on the street or read prohibited books addressed to children. Their parents also in all cases (except one) talked to the children about the current political issues and explained them<sup>40</sup>.

*Polegała ona głównie na roznoszeniu ulotek, malowaniu tzw. „kotwicy” na drzwiach funkcjonariuszy Milicji Obywatelskiej (MO) i Służby (SB), noszeniu „opornika” wpiętego do ubrania, prowadzeniu rozmów „uświadamiających” wśród koleżanek i kolegów z własnego środowiska.*

The analysis of the surveys showed that 6 of the respondents were also involved in the underground and opposition activities (hanging up posters, taking part in secret meetings and illegal demonstrations, printing and distributing underground press, delivering secret messages and oral information, under the cover of going to school, e.g. regarding searches: where? when? and at whom? they were currently being held). However, only 3 children admitted that they had independently initiated activities against the then communist authorities. It consisted mainly of distributing leaflets, painting the so-called “anchor” on the doors of officers of the Citizens Militia (MO) and Security Service (SB), wearing a resistor pinned to their clothes (as a symbol of resistance), as well as conducting “awareness-raising” talks among their classmates. The vast majority of children also experienced physical and psychological violence: having a machine gun put to their torso, being taken to the militia station with their parent in order to be interrogated, witnessing the search of their personal belongings, including school bags, notebook marks, wardrobes and even bedding. It is confirmed both by the conducted questionnaire surveys as well as by the recollections of their parents referring to that time<sup>41</sup>. The children were bullied on the street while walking home alone (which they often kept silent), their school marks were lowered, e.g. in history or for school behaviour, they

<sup>38</sup> M.R. Merelman, *Revitalizing Political Socialization*, [in:] *Political Psychology: Contemporary Problems and Issues*, ed. M. Herman, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass 1986, pp. 279–319.

<sup>39</sup> Officer of the Security Service (UB/SB) in the People's Republic of Poland.

<sup>40</sup> See also in: G. Walczak, *Dzieci stanu wojennego*, reportaż, [online:] <https://www.radio.bialystok.pl/reportaz/index/id/150391>, [accessed: 23.11.2021].

<sup>41</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., p. 79.



were humiliated by teachers and peers at school and in the yard, they were vulgarly insulted, and they were constantly questioned about *what was going on at home?* by their teachers<sup>42</sup>.

However, as far as the cooperation and contacts within the anti-regime activity among children of oppositionists are concerned, they were infrequent (4 cases) and tended to remain linked within the structure of the closest group of friends or own family. Thus, it was the adults who formed the network of cooperation, initiated and managed the course of events, while the children performed the vast majority of executive functions, which was generally related to their age. The older they were the more independent they became in their activities, which is confirmed by very similar stories and statements of other people, not included in the survey<sup>43</sup>.

The children, who were small and also quite clever, often carried printing matrixes<sup>44</sup>, distributed newspapers and delivered confidential letters or safe conduct documents: *I collected and distributed leaflets in the city, painted anchors on the secret service officers' doors and threw leaflets into their mailboxes. I was a courier and even once I took a letter to Lech Wałęsa*<sup>45</sup>. The children acted as liaisons and informers. They would sneak out of their homes and pass on information about arrests, internments and searches. They would take photos, observe the surroundings, but were also often able to bravely express their opinions and views. Sometimes it was the children who made decisions and called adults to order. *When asked by my parents if we were leaving the country, my ten-year-old brother said no, because if everyone left, who would stay in Poland? So, we stayed*<sup>46</sup>. Teresa Bondyra, in her memories, wrote that her son was recognised as *anti-socialist element*<sup>47</sup>, because *he tore down the October Revolution anniversary school newspaper from the wall and hated Lenin*<sup>48</sup>. Minors would often print underground press, rewrite texts on typewriters (which were priceless at that time), hide brochures and illegal newspapers in cellars (preferably belonging to militiamen, as no one would check them).

The children also tried to protect their parents, especially during house searches, by diverting attention or cleverly hiding "forbidden" materials in various places: *It often happened that during a search at home, I hid "bibuła" [underground leaflets] in my trousers because I knew that no one would check it there*<sup>49</sup>, recalled one of the interviewed. The children would wear clothes with the inscription "Solidarity" on them, e.g. during mass meetings or pilgrimages to Jasna

<sup>42</sup> G. Walczak, op. cit. Those events are also confirmed by the questionnaire surveys conducted by the Author in 2020.

<sup>43</sup> Morawiecki: *13 grudnia zomowcy z esbekami weszli do mojego domu, szukali ojca*, [online:] <https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/16451/morawiecki-13-grudnia-zomowcy-z-esbekami-weszli-do-mojego-domu-szukali-ojca>, 09.12.2016, [accessed: 25.09.2020]; J. Afanasjew jr. (dir.), op. cit.

<sup>44</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., p. 95.

<sup>45</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>46</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cyt.

<sup>47</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>48</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>49</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

Góra Sanctuary, and would hand flowers to the militiamen who were guarding them. They were brave and boldly go to places where adults could not.

*"We met in secret scout meetings, learned forbidden songs. We could talk about everything and we felt free at last. I also really liked it when my dad would meet young people at our house and they would learn different things – it was like secret classes. For me personally it was the best school of historical and political knowledge. I learnt more at that time than during my entire school education"<sup>50</sup>.*

According to the children's opinion, those events had a significant impact on their psyche (nine of them), however, in varying dimensions. Five of them found them traumatic to such an extent that they became more closed to the external environment (four admitted that it made them more open, the rest of the respondents failed to specify the effects of the martial law experience on their psyche). They also had a further impact on their life attitudes, as they had developed the conviction that they were not allowed to do everything and that they had no right to take decisions on their own, including the choice of school and future professional career. Moreover, their self-esteem decreased significantly, as they believed that they did not have the same rights and opportunities as children beyond the opposition movement. Furthermore, the great majority of respondents (seven persons) declared that currently they are not actively engaged in politics, although each of them still recalls their work for Poland (more or less frequently) and passes on patriotic values to their children<sup>51</sup>. However, the above research was not confirmed by Joanna Kaczor's study of the image of martial law in the eyes of the children, conducted in the 1990s. Her interlocutors indicated that martial law did not cause any damage to their psyche<sup>52</sup>. On the other hand, the research in the field of political awareness was proven<sup>53</sup>. Adults who were involved in the opposition movement or sympathised with it introduced their children to the world of politics (by explaining it), recognising:

*"the affairs of the country as so important and affecting the children's future that they wanted to prepare them as best they could for the events that might happen in their aftermath. They informed the children what martial law was and why it was declared. They provided the children with magazines and books. They talked about what might happen during demonstrations. They explained how to behave in the case they were arrested. They introduced their children to the secrets*

<sup>50</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>51</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>52</sup> J. Kaczor, op. cit., pp. 17–24.

<sup>53</sup> P. Lisicki, *Licealiści w wyjątkowy sposób upamiętnili wprowadzenie stanu wojennego*, [online:] <https://muzeum.superhistoria.pl/wystawa-wspomnien/88039/licealisci-w-wyjatkowy-sposob-upamietnili-wprowadzenie-stanu-wojennego.html>, 11.12.2018, [accessed: 26.09.2020].

*of the underground*<sup>54</sup>. It was instant political education, “since the children had to be explained somehow about their father’s absence and everything that was happening in the country then”<sup>55</sup>.

– as the children’s parents reported. Conversely, those parents who supported the then system, as J. Kaczor demonstrates, isolated their children from the latest events in that period<sup>56</sup>.

The research demonstrated that socialisation agents such as family and religion, in fact the degree of religious commitment, most often play a decisive role in shaping children’s future attitudes. It was followed by classmates, never school and the media as far as the results of the questionnaire surveys were concerned. *We learned everything from our parents*<sup>57</sup>. The surveys show that all of them chose the family as the most important agent of socialisation, and 12 out of 16 indicated the Catholic Church in the second place. Only one of them indicated that friends and schoolmates had a decisive influence on his political awareness (as the second most important socialisation agent after the Church).

*“We knew perfectly well whom to talk with and towards whom to keep silent. We spent half of our childhood in church. It was our asylum. The nuns, as well as the bishops in my community, were very involved in helping the families of oppositionists. The bishop’s company did not embarrass me at all, and it was so natural that I was surprised that other school children did not have such experiences. Every year during the summer holidays, I went to a camp in Szczecinek for the children of the opposition, co-organised by our Bishop. I made great friends there with, among others, Adam Słowik, the son of Andrzej Słowik. There were also other children, from all over Poland, whose parents I knew from stories about their anti-communist activities”*<sup>58</sup>.

This is also confirmed by other accounts independent of the interviews presented herewith.

Six out of 16 respondents, however, would not swap their childhood for another, finding it as enriching experience, although they admitted that it was equally burdensome for them. However, one person would prefer to have other memories of that period, while the others had no opinion on the matter<sup>59</sup>. Similar statements can be found, for instance, in the memoirs of the Prime Minister Mateusz Morawicki: *13 December was a traumatic memory for me*<sup>60</sup>. A number of the persons interviewed admitted that they hid many of their life experiences from their parents, not wanting to worry or upset them additionally (thus they had developed sensitivity and were perfectly aware of how much it would cost their closest

<sup>54</sup> J. Kaczor, op. cit., pp. 17–24.

<sup>55</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>56</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>57</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>58</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>59</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>60</sup> Morawiecki: op. cit.

family). The children were taught and accustomed to silence and secrecy, as they knew and understood the consequences of the information “leak”. Some of them suffered for a very long time or have been suffering from various disorders or phobias for this reason until now. *There were cases of genuine neuroses or merely neurotic symptoms and behaviours*<sup>61</sup>. These included, for instance, the constant need, mentioned in the survey, for counting everything around in order to organise the world, which was disturbed in their childhood; the anxiety (especially when it comes to social relations and speaking out in public), the feeling of being watched and constantly followed (closing windows to make sure that nobody is watching), looking behind to make sure that nobody is watching, not taking the initiative, thinking of oneself as an entity deprived of rights or having fewer rights than others, walking in circles like prisoners in the “yard” (a habit adopted from their parents who were interned or arrested), as well as neuroses and numerous related illnesses (bed-wetting, stomach ulcers, etc.)<sup>62</sup>. Maryla Hopfinger, for instance, recalled that her son was afraid of every doorbell, he used to sit for hours motionless, explaining that he was *a little daddy, locked up in Jaworzno just like him*<sup>63</sup>.

The experiences of minors at that time also reveal much about their later adult life problems. One respondent, for instance, admitted that his “childhood” political activity had a negative impact on his educational process, which has not been able to compensate until today<sup>64</sup>. In this context, it is also worth following the fates of other children, for example, the daughters of Jadwiga Chmielewska<sup>65</sup> or President Lech Wałęsa, as Danuta Wałęsa wrote in her memoirs<sup>66</sup>. In a similar way, Jadwiga Jankowska spoke about her daughter, whose *then 14-year-old Ania was doing great [...]* <sup>67</sup>. Over time, however, under the influence of difficult experiences, including loneliness (she was left alone without her parents), *she changed a lot and finally she ceased to be brave. [...] She was afraid that they would try to kidnap her [...]. She could not sleep at night, it seemed to her that someone was knocking on her door, walking under her windows*<sup>68</sup>.

Although the conducted research is not representative and cannot be considered clinical, it may provide grounds for further, more comprehensive research, which is currently insufficient. In fact, there are known cases of children who witnessed physical violence against their parents (pacification actions e.g. in the Kwidzyn detention camp), taking their mother or father (or both) away from home in the middle of the night or from a family walk. The children experienced “łapanka” (round-ups) in the streets of cities, the so-called “pałowanie”<sup>69</sup> (truncheoning). They suffered illnesses (including mental illness), disability (permanent

<sup>61</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., p. 6.

<sup>62</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>63</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., p. 20.

<sup>64</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>65</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., p. 60.

<sup>66</sup> D. Wałęsa, *Marzenia i tajemnice*, Wydawnictwo Literackie 2011.

<sup>67</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., pp. 91–95.

<sup>68</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>69</sup> G. Walczak, op. cit.

disability and being immobilised in a wheelchair) or fought for their parents' lives after their return from internment and arrest<sup>70</sup>. They often experienced the death of their father or mother, who never came back home after leaving for work<sup>71</sup>.

The children felt alone, deprived of the people who loved them, removed from their natural environment, sent to reformatories<sup>72</sup>, their families were being destroyed, and in some cases, the children were being destroyed too<sup>73</sup>. They had to live in difficult political situations, thus they had to mature faster and they were more aware of the events that were happening than the majority of their peers. One of the persons interviewed in the survey admitted that at the age of 6–7 she was not interested in playing with peers, because *she found it boring and stupid*<sup>74</sup>. The same child admitted reading mainly philosophy and history books even in primary school. Moreover, she wrote poems and patriotic hymns as well. She also made herself a promise that she would always serve God and Poland with her learning and knowledge. In her own opinion, when assessing her own attitude over the years, she admitted that she still remembered that event, she has kept her word and continues it<sup>75</sup>.

The children suffered not only physical and psychological violence, but also simple poverty.

*"I remember that I had one pair of shoes shared with my older brother. We took turns going outside. We would wear shoes that were not our own size, and when our friends in the yard made funny remarks, we would reply that it was only because of a sick and bandaged leg. I remember that I had no regular shoes. I was walking in ski boots that we received in a parcel from Germany. My feet hurt terribly because the boots were rigid. I always wore clothes that someone had left behind. They were washed and felted. I was terribly ashamed, but I never showed it. It was an unpleasant feeling when you looked at other students who were wearing jeans, Hungarian hats, or just nice socks"*<sup>76</sup>.

A number of the interviewed people admitted that they dreamt of ordinary childish things, i.e. coloured pencils or toys. Eight out of 16 persons surveyed emphasised that they wanted normality, freedom and democracy. One of them imagined that *there was democracy and no queues in shops. You could go in whenever you wanted and buy as many sweets as you wanted. No ration cards. That was my greatest childhood wish: that there would be democracy*<sup>77</sup>.

<sup>70</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>71</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>72</sup> Katarzyna, *Gaz w autobusie, czyli nadgorliwość ZOMO*, [online:] <https://muzeum.superhistoria.pl/wystawa-wspomnien/72392/gaz-w-autobusie-czyli-nadgorliwosc-zomo.html>, 21.07.2018, [accessed: 26.09.2020].

<sup>73</sup> P. Chrzęszcz, *Esbecy zabili 16-latkę, bo ujawnił wstrząsającą prawdę*, [online:] <https://muzeum.superhistoria.pl/sekcja-zbrodni/84558/esbecy-zabili-16-latka-bo-ujawnil-wstrzasajaca-prawde.html>, 21.11.2018, [accessed: 26.09.2020].

<sup>74</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>75</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>76</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>77</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

An extensive source of personal experiences of the oppositionists' children of that period, which is confirmed both by the research from the 1990s and the current research of 2020 conducted on a group of 16 people, is the documentary film *The Children of Martial Law* directed by J. Afanasiev. The respondents answered the questions (similar in both projects) as to whether they felt fear: *I was very worried, I was terribly afraid, it was a shock, during martial law I was very often afraid, every time a patrol passed me on the street (...), there were some kinds of manifestations on the street, I was afraid when I saw tanks driving down the street, (...) I was most afraid of truncheons, a person who is (...) 13 years old sees dead bodies...*<sup>78</sup>. The children claimed that they lived in constant fear that their parents would be taken away from them, that their *parents would be killed*<sup>79</sup>. The consequences of traumatic experiences were also reflected in the children's psychosomatics. They very often had night terrors as well as sleep problems: *I was lying down and lying down, I couldn't fall asleep because I was afraid*<sup>80</sup>, they would bed-wet<sup>81</sup>, or get out of bed screaming. The account of one person from the group of 16 interviews, indicates that she often dreamt that a militia dog was chasing her and wanted to bite her; that there was a war and she was running away with her dad to the forest to take shelter and finally she was staying there alone. The dreams were repetitive, so she already knew the scenario. The child also admitted that after many years she had and still has difficulty in establishing bonds, with trust, she is reserved and withdrawn, and as a result of it she is often unable, especially in the professional sphere, to prove her abilities and skills<sup>82</sup>. Moreover, for a long time after the system change, she was unable to approach or talk to a policeman. The documentary also presents very similar statements: *what only remains me of that period is that I have lost confidence in the authorities*<sup>83</sup>.

The documentary also confirms the high political awareness of the children of those years, but also the immensity of their mental sufferings: *the children can sense what is going on, I knew they were in prison, I knew that it was bad for them*<sup>84</sup> [both parents in the detention camp – M.M.B.], *I could see that it was hard for them, [about dad – M.M.B.]: because his hands were shaking, and mummy was trying to make up for it with her face*<sup>85</sup>. They also mentioned that at home

*“there were a lot of talks about the 1970s, although the worst moment it was at school.... The school management behaved idiotically (...). They invited some military men to school (...), who tried to*

<sup>78</sup> J. Afanasjew jr. (dir.), op. cit.

<sup>79</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>80</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>81</sup> J. Siedlecka, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>82</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>83</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>84</sup> J. Afanasjew jr. (dir.), op. cit.

<sup>85</sup> Ibidem.



*explain to us what a great blessing martial law was. Moreover, some teachers pretended to be idiots in front of us or they hid their beliefs, they were indifferent (...), and we just simply watched”<sup>86</sup>.*

The children were bullied and humiliated both at school<sup>87</sup> and in the yard:

*“some kids were running after me and shouting your dad is in jail!”<sup>88</sup>; or something like that: “I’ll call the ‘Organs’ [armed forces – M.M.B.] and they’ll finish with you!; our teacher said that now the children of militiamen and military men are the poorest, because their daddies are away on duty for Poland, and I replied that my uncle’s children are also poor, because he is in prison. At that the teacher started shouting at me in a very ugly way that I should shut up, and unless I did, I would also go to prison”<sup>89</sup>.*

In the questionnaire surveys conducted in 2020, one of the children interviewed recalled that in the yard she was called a “whore” and thrown at with stones. At school (in 1995), when she was taught Civic Education by a former secret service officer, she had her marks lowered in answers and tests. The teacher would say that he was giving her an A, but at the same time he would write a lower mark in the school logbook. When handing out question papers for a test, he would arrange them in such a way so that she got the same group as a student on the side, and subsequently in front of the whole class he would accuse her of swapping the papers and would give a fail mark. There was no chance for a word of defence. The same person recalled that after her matriculation she intended to study social sciences, however, out of fear of having her mark lowered on the school-leaving certificate, she cheated that she had chosen biology. Nevertheless, her mark was lowered, which was also not in accordance with her partial marks. Moreover, she was frequently summoned to interviews by the class teacher and the school principal (which she perceived as rather friendly), during which she was discouraged from choosing the university course she originally dreamed about<sup>90</sup>.

The 15–16-year-olds were expelled from school for leafleting, written off, caught during demonstrations (but not only) on the streets, taken away in “bitches” (prison vehicles), so they feared for their own safety, anticipating that a “path to health” (hitting a detainee who was forced to run between two rows of militiamen using truncheons) awaited them. In the documentary we can find the account of a boy who was beaten on the face with a belt buckle for not wanting to kneel in front of a militia officer: *it was a horrifying scenery [...]. We all had to kneel. Our heads could not be higher than the militiaman’s eyes, and he had to look down on us*<sup>91</sup>.

<sup>86</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>87</sup> G. Walczak, op. cit.

<sup>88</sup> J. Afanasjew jr. (dir.), op. cit.

<sup>89</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>90</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>91</sup> J. Afanasjew jr. (dir.), op. cit.

In terms of methods, the children were often treated very similarly to adults. During one interrogation, a girl who had entered the room with long hair came out bald. For instance, a young man speaking in the documentary admitted that the worst part of being locked up in a cell was not the physical suffering, but the mental one, as children in detention were extremely humiliated. *We experienced as kids some kind of disappointment with our teachers. They were comedians, it was one big farce, while I was aware that their views were different, I knew that they represented formally opposite views. They heard one truth at home, another truth at school<sup>92</sup>, and another truth from the mass media<sup>93</sup>*, recalled a priest dealing with young people at the time. *The children themselves had to decide in their conscience – said one of the people who was interviewed in the documentary – whether there was a war, cinema and discos, whether I worried about the fate of my parents and homeland – so they chose to fight<sup>94</sup>*. All of that leaves an indelible mark over the years. It was emphasised by one of the former educators of the youth: *they certainly experienced their childhood that they will remember [...] with a certain mutilation for sure, with a certain smell of smoke, with firecrackers, with a certain fear of uniforms, with a certain distortion of their relation to all authorities<sup>95</sup>*. The statements presented in the documentary also corresponded with the results of the survey. The statements made during the film also corresponded with the results of the survey. In fact, one of the research participants stated that until today she cannot talk freely about martial law, because her hands shake, tears flow and her voice breaks. She is unable to talk about her experiences but she keeps them private. On every anniversary of the 13th of December, she does not turn on the radio or television, because she cannot mentally listen to broadcasts concerning that issue, although, as she admits, she puts a lit candle in the window as the symbol of remembrance<sup>96</sup>. Such emotions appear to be, at least in part, confirmed by the answers of those people who decided not to respond to the questionnaire surveys, indicating precisely that their emotions in this regard are still too high.

The above conditions overlapped and determined the political attitudes of the analysed persons, proving in this particular case that although as children they remained active, in their adult lives they tended to be politically disengaged (8 out of 16 cases surveyed). This may have resulted from the fact that they simply followed their parents' orders, which they usually did very willingly (but their own initiative was low), trusting them and considering that everything they said and were involved in was right. Joanna Kaczor reported on the above in her independent research:

<sup>92</sup> Ibidem. These words are also confirmed in other documents, including, for instance, the report by G. Walczak, op. cit.

<sup>93</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>94</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>95</sup> J. Afanasjew jr. (dir.), op. cit.

<sup>96</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.



*“The memoirs of children of parents involved in opposition work, are the example of how clever observers minors can be, and how deeply falls into the heart that what is believed in childhood. The ideas passed on by parents do not lose their value with the passage of time; the strong urge to act that has been inherited remains with us in later life”<sup>97</sup>, “and the historical turmoil becomes [...] a forge for virtuous characters. The time of quickened social education”<sup>98</sup>.*

The children of martial law thus often were an active but also “invisible” link in the opposition struggle against the communist system. Their young age was frequently used as an advantage, although no one then thought of the price that they had to or would have to pay for it...

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<sup>97</sup> J. Kaczor, op. cit.

<sup>98</sup> Ibidem.



## Conclusion

The rare biographies and memoirs described by their parents, as well as the research conducted among children during martial law, provide irrefutable evidence of the contribution they made, with their own childish strength, to the defence of freedom and independence. Their political awareness, social maturity and courage were many times significantly above the then average attitude not only of young people, but above all of adults. It was natural and obvious both for those children and their parents to be engaged in the opposition. The children knew perfectly well, as confirmed by the research conducted, the accounts shown in J. Afanasjew's documentary, as well as the memoirs presented, about the negative consequences of their actions, which they could anticipate and which often reached them. However, the later confrontation with the reality of already independent Poland, especially in the historical aspect and the policy of historical memory, indicates that the children were generally forgotten. Those children, who are grown up nowadays, are often neglected in research and reflections on martial law, as well as in the official policy of historical memory, both state and local. The relatively small number of studies, analyses or reportages concerning this issue proves it. The children of that period, in the great majority, neither appear in such historical descriptions nor in the historical policy. They are seldom, although some exceptions are to be admitted, awarded with state honours or otherwise commemorated. Though one might mention here postcards issued by e.g. the Polish Post Office in Siedlce in order to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the imposition of martial law in Poland (prepared for the exhibition *Scenes from Life in the People's Republic of Poland*). However, it is an exceptional event, initiated solely by the group of internees' families, not by representatives of state authorities.

Thus, there is a gap between history and the policy of historical memory. However, up until now, there has been no political will to change it. The issue is obviously not of raising any broadly conceived claims, but to claim a place in history which those children have undoubtedly deserved. According to the surveyed people, the most painful issue for them

remains not so much the fact of the suffering they experienced or the hardships it entailed, as a certain social ostracism prevailing after 1989. Those children were often confronted with the following attitudes: *well, what do you know! They ordered you to do it, so you did it. You were too young to understand anything, not to even mention to fight communism*<sup>99</sup>. They were also often severely affected by statements denying the moral and axiological nature of their involvement: *your parents did you a disservice by involving you in the opposition*<sup>100</sup>, or undermining the authority of role models: *How can one be such a bad parent?*<sup>101</sup>.

Therefore, the effect of erasing children from history or forgetting them is rooted in the negation of their degree of intellectual and moral maturity. Moreover, there is lack of historical memory carriers. This deficiency is apparent both at the level of small (local) communities, as well as state institutions, which is probably due to a number of reasons. At least three of them should be mentioned. Firstly, there is no comprehensive documentation related to the opposition activities of children. The most common sources of information are closed and difficult to access family archives or only verbal accounts of adult witnesses of those events. The silence of the oppositionist groups and the gap in communication regarding this issue in the public domain, including actors responsible for the development of historical memory policy, significantly complicate the matter. Moreover, it is difficult to find such data either in the documents of the security services or the militia of that time. Although children often accompanied their parents during demonstrations, marches, round-ups and even interrogations at the militia stations, their presence there was not (often for image reasons) recorded in the reports and protocols. Additional difficulty is also the lack of division of available documentation into age groups, which would facilitate their selection, e.g. from the abundant archives of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN)<sup>102</sup>.

Another issue is the commonly held belief that children are incapable of taking difficult moral decisions, assessing political situations in a realistic way and participating in them consciously. However, the research, as it has already been proven, contradicts such claims, indicating that in specific, usually crisis situations, having appropriate role models (agents of socialisation) around them, children are capable of becoming active and displaying above-average maturity<sup>103</sup>. Finally, it is also worth noting that the youngest heroes of martial law events

<sup>99</sup> M.M. Brzezińska, op. cit.

<sup>100</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>101</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>102</sup> The list of persons honoured with the Cross of Freedom and Solidarity (established by the act, Dz.U. 2010 nr 155 poz. 1041 of 5.08.2010 for activities in opposition to the communist dictatorship), including children, can be found on the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) website: <https://odznaczeni-kwis.ipn.gov.pl/search/A>, but without age grouping.

<sup>103</sup> It is worth mentioning here, for instance, the young defenders of Warsaw or Lvov, whose attitude is still alive in memory and historical policy. Interesting, although concerning different matter and of different importance, is also the research conducted by the Author in the field of beatification and canonization processes of children, among whom there are six-, twelve- or fourteen-year-olds, whose attitude, on the basis of the conducted processes and careful analysis of collected documents, was confirmed by their official inclusion into the circle of Catholic saints.

are very reluctant to recall past times. Since, from their point of view, it is associated with repeating unpleasant events and emotions and re-experiencing trauma. This phenomenon is not surprising, although it definitely hinders the search for historical truth.

It may be assumed that one of the reasons for the erasure of the martial law children from the memory are also potential concerns of the authorities about their claims, and especially about their financial aspect. Those children are still alive and they may claim certain forms of compensation, although the conducted research has by no means confirmed such demands.

Therefore, it is extremely difficult to find those children in the *genos*: they are not invoked as models of courage and sacrifice. They are not included in the *ethos* either, since history remains silent about them. Similarly, the *topos* does not reflect their involvement: there are neither streets honouring the martial law children (though there are streets of e.g. Ludwik Waryński), nor their memorials in Polish cities. Instead, there is a gap between the fact and memory, between history and the policy of memory.

Therefore, stimulating historical memory and reducing the deficits within its policy is not only a challenge but also an urgent task for historians and all the actors of the policy of memory. Thus, it is worth appealing especially to the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) or the Office for War Veterans and Victims of Repression (UdSKIOR), but also to many other regional and local entities responsible for shaping and maintaining historical memory: research centres, educational organisations, or schools, since deficiencies in that issue are a silent cry for historical justice and the appropriate place of those children in the Polish policy of historical memory (remembrance).



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# Annexes

Photos



**Photo 1:**  
*Our parents gave us all the knowledge and taught us courage. Grażyna and Janusz Olewiński with their children: Monika and Robert, Jasna Góra, August 1985. Author's own materials.*

**Photo 2:**

*Children participated in patriotic events. Jasna Góra Embankment, August 1985. Author's own materials.*



**Photo 3:**

*Lessons of patriotism at home. Monika, Magdalena and Robert Olewinski (from the left), Siedlce, winter 1986. Author's own materials.*







**Photo 4:**  
*Printing the underground press was routine for the children. They did the same by typing texts on a typewriter or helping to paint banners. Monika Olewińska, Siedlce, winter 1986. Author's own materials.*



**Photo 5:**  
*The children were also very familiar with the language of non-verbal communication. Monika, Magdalena and Robert Olewiński, Siedlce (from the left), Christmas 1983. Author's own materials.*



**Photo 6:**

*Children were sometimes braver than adults. Podlasie walking pilgrimage to Jasna Góra. Monika Olewińska, August 1984. Author's own materials.*



**Photo 7:**

*Underground press and prison correspondence. Memorabilia from martial law, including a letter to my dad (bottom left corner). Author's own materials.*



Wystawa pt. "Sceny z życia w PRL"  
w Muzeum Regionalnym  
w dniach 2-30 grudnia 2011 r.  
z okazji 30-tej rocznicy nielegalnie  
wprowadzonego stanu wojennego w Polsce.

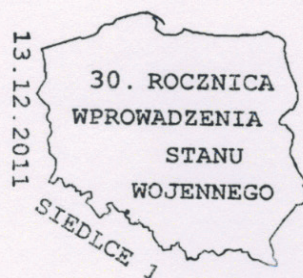


śp. Magdalena, Monika  
i Robert Olewińscy  
przy druku literatury II obiegu.

Poczta Polska S.A. CP ORJ w Siedlcach, XII 2011, 4/2011, nakład 500 szt., proj. J. Olewiński

KARTKA POCZTOWA

Poczta Polska



#### Photo 8:

A rare example of commemorating the children of martial law. The postcard issued by the Polish Post to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the imposition of martial law in Poland. An exhibit from the exhibition "Scenes from Life in People's Republic of Poland", Regional Museum in Siedlce, 2-30.12.2011.



### Information note

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# **Martial Law Children – Forgotten Heroes, the gap between history and politics**

dr Monika Maria Brzezińska

## **Abstract**

Political activity of children raises doubts and it still remains a field that requires special attention. The fact that minors are capable of understanding the political situation they live in is frequently negated by denying them the ability to assess political reality. However, numerous examples contradict this thesis. The purpose of the present analysis is to present the role of children during the martial law period in the fight against the communist system, who actively engaged in the oppositional movement, consciously developing their pro-social attitudes. Moreover, the children, who often emerged from that period internally mutilated and burdened with the trauma that they have experienced, did not meet with understanding and gratitude in present, already independent Poland. The martial law period also had a very negative impact on their personalities and future careers. Although the contribution of the martial law children to history is undeniable, they have been forgotten in the policy of historical memory (remembrance). However, they are not only real witnesses but also, according to their capabilities, important participants in the events of the 1980s.

## **Keywords**

children, martial law, politics, history, memory





## **Main conclusions of the paper**

The presence and socio-political activity of martial law children is an undeniable historical fact, which has its confirmation in diversified source materials (statements of witnesses of the events, few publications, recordings and interviews, as well as conducted surveys). However, the current policy of historical memory almost does not take into account (i.e. omits or erases) the contribution that those children made by their attitude and commitment to the fight for independent Poland. Furthermore, also researchers of the contemporary history of Poland appear not to be interested in recreating the fate of children of the 1980s. The apparent deficiency regarding the issue is conditioned by a number of various factors (such as lack of documentation, difficulty in the children's own narratives or denial of children's maturity as socio-political actors), which ultimately results in white spots within the history as such, distorts it and significantly alters the nature of the policy of historical memory.

Our ambition is to support Polish scientists and promote their achievements. The main tasks of the Institute include unlocking the potential of Polish science by promoting and popularising Polish research thought in the field of the humanities and social sciences, as well as creating mechanisms and social capital to organise around the idea of statehood.

The Institute De Republica is a modern expert, promotional and publishing centre for fields of science which are undervalued in the country and abroad, although being of great importance for proper understanding of history and social phenomena. Another equally important aspect in this respect is the cooperation with universities, research and analysis institutes from Poland and all over the world.