The Continuity of the Image of 1989

In a political environment of national reconciliation and community, prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s first address to the Sejm declared that his government would not assume responsibility for the heritage of communism and would draw a thick line under the past. He wanted to limit the responsibility of his government to its own actions.¹ The thick line (gruba kreska) soon came to stand for a policy of prosecuting the former authorities only for crimes that could be fully documented and were legally prosecuted at the time they were committed. Although such a meaning diverged from Mazowiecki’s original intention, Poland was a semi-democratic island among communist countries at that time, and the participation of communist ministers in his government made the sacking of civil servants impossible. Thus, the thick-line policy envisaged an abstention from purges in ministerial bureaucracy as well as in the secret services (Kozłowski, 1991:18–20).

The suggestion to refrain from prosecution of former communist authorities in the government and in the administration was not made for pragmatic reasons alone. In particular, Adam Michnik’s writings and actions have supported a conciliatory stance towards the former communist regime (Michnik, 1990; Michnik and Cimoszewicz, 1995). The thick line amounted to an unprecedented move to create distance, to install a radical rupture with the past. Let bygones be bygones, no trials, no recrimination was the motto (Ash, 1998). This distancing from the polluting past by the thick line aimed to back up the post-1989 normalization in Polish politics. Thus, in the early 1990s it was alleged that de-communization had come to an end as a result of public disinterest in purges, induced by a rational quiescence and inaction. The driving force...
behind the tendency was ‘not only an abysmal breakdown of historical memory, but partly a reasonable assessment of the unprecedented moral and practical dilemmas of the present’.\(^2\) Thus, by the declaration of the thick line and its implementation, ‘the past was – as an act of political will – isolated from the present’.\(^3\)

The positive effects of the round-table community should be stressed in this connection. The absence of revenge in 1989 in a spirit of *communitas* assured the non-violent demise of communism. At the same time, the communist past exerted a steady influence on post-1989 politics, not only epitomized in the return of post-communists to power but also in the division of the political landscape and heated political debates on themes such as the constitution, economic transformation, abortion, or decentralization. Although the institutional framework of communist Poland was dismantled, the 1989 community has not brought about a rupture with the communist past. ‘Many more Poles (…) still find that the lack of a dramatic break between old and new, the legal continuity, delegitimizes the new regime.’\(^4\)

Several authors have thematized the necessary return to normality in post-1989 Poland. In this vein it was argued that Poland’s way to normality requires the deconstruction of three myths that had been crucial for pre-1989 (Frybes and Michel, 1996a, 1996b). In such a reading, the myth of Solidarity and the myth of enchanted politics became deconstructed in the first half of the 1990s. During the emergence of political democracy the disappearance of these two myths could help to weaken the romantic myth of the Polish nation (Frybes and Michel, 1996b:79–82). Constant changes in Polish politics have confronted analysts with new scenarios. As I argued in Chapter 6, post-1989 Solidarity did not simply disintegrate in the wake of the wars at the top. The mimetic engagement of Solidarity leading circles with its image played a crucial role in the reconstitution of a political force under the heading of Solidarity. Since 1996 Solidarity Electoral Action has assembled 40 political parties of the conservative type and has achieved something like a new community of a third Solidarity.\(^5\) Moreover, the arrival of the post-communist coalition to power in 1993 induced commentators to assume that Polish society was subject anew to a meta-reality (*nadrzeczywistość*) (Ekes, 1994:142–6).

This chapter examines some of the most pervasive themes in post-1989 politics and society under the aspect of the continuity of second realities. I will argue that the anti-structure of the round-table com-