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Emotions Encoded in the Communist Party's Telexes about the Rise and Development of the "Solidarity" Movement in the People's Republic of Poland, 1980–1981. The Case of Southern Podlasie

This study investigates the emotional dimension of communist governance in the Polish People's Republic during the crisis of 1980–1981 through an analysis of internal telex correspondence produced by regional structures of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in Southern Podlasie. Drawing on archival materials from Siedlce and Biała Podlaska, it proposes an original approach that interprets bureaucratic documents as affective artefacts rather than solely informational records. The research integrates perspectives from the history of emotions, archival studies, and political anthropology. A qualitative, hermeneutic methodology is applied, based on semantic categorisation of key expressions, evaluative formulas, and "emotives," allowing for the reconstruction of emotional patterns embedded in official discourse. Particular emphasis is placed on identifying inconsistencies between declarative language (e.g., stability, control) and implicit indicators of anxiety, uncertainty, and institutional strain. The analysis demonstrates that the standardised language of party communication, shaped by newspeak, functioned as a mechanism of emotional regulation and concealment. Ritualised phrases and repetitive formulas were used to maintain an appearance of order, while simultaneously encoding fear, tension, and loss of confidence. The emergence of the "Solidarity" movement disrupted the established emotional regime of the party, confronting it with an alternative system of collective emotions grounded in dignity, solidarity, and social agency. Empirical findings reveal a dynamic process of affective transformation within the regional party apparatus. Initial reports emphasising discipline and stability gradually give way to expressions indicating growing tension, weakening control, and dependence on central authorities. By late 1980 and early 1981, the language of the documents reflects emotional exhaustion, fragmentation of internal cohesion, and a search for decisive intervention. These changes correspond with the erosion of the party's capacity to sustain its own emotional norms and institutional identity. The study concludes that internal party correspondence constitutes a valuable source for examining the emotional mechanisms of authoritarian power in crisis. The identified patterns of encoded anxiety, ritualised reassurance, and eventual disintegration provide insight into the broader process of systemic decline, demonstrating that the collapse of the communist order was accompanied by a profound breakdown of its emotional foundations.

Keywords: history of emotions, communism, Poland, Polish People's Republic, Polish United Workers' Party, Solidarity movement, newspeak

Introduction

In the historiography concerning the Polish People's Republic (PRL), documents produced by the party apparatus have most often been treated as carriers of information about facts, decisions, and mechanisms of governance. Less frequently have they been recognized as records of the system's emotional reactions to external events. Yet every political structure — especially one that aspires to control social reality — operates not only through institutions and ideology, but also through affects: fear, tension, hope, or a sense of threat. These emotions do not disappear in bureaucratic language; on the contrary, they are transformed, encoded, and ritualized, leaving traces that can be captured through source analysis. This phenomenon becomes particularly evident in moments of crisis, when the stability of the system is shaken and official discourse begins to reveal signs of tension and inconsistency. The years 1980–1981 in Poland, associated with the emergence and dynamic development of the "Solidarity" movement, constitute in this respect a critical turning point both in the history of the PRL and in the emotional condition of the ruling apparatus. It was precisely at that time that the language of party documents, despite its formal rigidity, began to reveal cracks that can be interpreted as symptoms of deeper affective processes taking place within the structures of the state.

The meticulous reports of regional structures of the communist party sent to their central headquarters in the state capital constitute one of the key types of documents describing social moods and the situation in the field during this period. In the 1970s, they were already transmitted via telex technology, which significantly increased the speed of their circulation and, consequently, allowed for a substantial rise in their num-

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ber. Documents produced in this way provide an excellent source base, among others, for research on a particularly significant period in Polish history — the emergence and development of independent trade unions that initiated a grassroots anti-communist social movement known as “Solidarity.” In the present study, the author adopts as a research model two voivodeships with capitals in Biała Podlaska and Siedlce, covering the region known as Southern Podlasie. The source material consists of telex reports prepared by the voivodeship-level structures of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR) in the period from August 1980 to the winter of 1981, that is, until the pacification of the movement through the imposition of martial law by the regime. These documents—forming part of the daily correspondence with the Party’s Central Committee in Warsaw—functioned simultaneously as instruments of control, means of self-presentation, and records of the emotional states of the ruling apparatus. The originals are preserved in the State Archive in Siedlce and in the State Archive in Lublin, Radzyń Podlaski Branch, and have been introduced into scholarly circulation by the author through the publication of their critical edition [1]; [2].

In this study, they are treated as affective texts, requiring interpretive methods from the history of emotions, archival studies, source criticism, and political anthropology. To this end, a method of semantic categorisation was used, allowing for the identification within the language of the documents of elements that reflect the presence, suppression, or channelling of emotions. Key words, ritualised expressions, and evaluative formulas were examined as “emotives” in the sense proposed by Reddy [3; 105, 111]. Particular attention was paid to the phenomenon of emotional dissonance in language —situations in which the declared message (e.g. assurances of stability) conflicted with the underlying semantic background (e.g. expressions of anxiety or appeals for intervention). Barbara Rosenwein’s model of “emotional communities” [4; 2-5] was employed to reconstruct the emotional codes that shaped the ideological and institutional community of the local PZPR apparatus. Elements of the sociology of emotions — especially the concepts of Arlie Hochschild [5] and Theodore Kemper [6] —were also considered, allowing emotional states to be linked to power relations and hierarchy within the organisation.

This research adopts a qualitative, hermeneutic approach, aiming to uncover the emotional subtext of official documents by situating them within their institutional, ritual, and political contexts. This approach allows these documents to be read not only as historical sources but also as anthropological testimonies — revealing what those in power may have felt as their socio-political monopoly began to erode. Especially in times of threat, these actors communicated with themselves and with society through emotional signals — though often expressed in bureaucratic language seemingly devoid of affect. What lies hidden in the telexes is a kind of affective map — one of fear, frustration, hope, anger, and resignation.

Analysing the emotional dynamics of the communist bureaucracy also requires reference to the anthropology of power, which posits that all governing structures create around themselves a framework of rituals, myths, and symbols that serve to stabilise and emotionally bind the ruling elite [7; 128-129]; [8; 9-19]. The Polish People’s Republic was no exception; here too, one can identify an emotional system that shaped decision-making processes, narrative construction, and the delineation of boundaries between “us” and “them”.

Finally, the article also positions itself within the framework of affective archival studies. It seeks to interpret the emotional structure of archival documents as reflections of the state’s mindset and the local emotional landscape of communist rule. This approach conceptualises the archive as a sphere saturated with affective registers [9]. The documents under analysis can thus be treated as archival traces of feelings—collected, recorded, controlled, and edited by individuals operating within the system and within a specific environment.

In light of these assumptions, this article offers an interpretation of the emotional states of regional representatives of the communist dictatorship at the end of the Gierek era and during the rise of the “Solidarity” trade union as a powerful mass movement. It also serves as a kind of mirror through which the regime could confront its own anxieties. The study seeks to identify the dominant emotional patterns among provincial party officials and to reconstruct how these emotions shaped political discourse and influenced decision-making at the time.

In the period under study, communist rule in Southern Podlasie — a region comprising the Siedlce and Biała Podlaska provinces in east-central Poland — functioned within a rigidly hierarchical and ritualised political structure. At its core was the PZPR, whose extensive network spanned the entire country—from the Central Committee in Warsaw down to basic party units in workplaces and small villages. Within this structure, provincial party committees played a crucial role. They acted both as intermediaries between the central leadership and local communities and as the primary decision-making hubs for nearly all aspects of provincial life. They were not only executive bodies, but also emotional conduits of power. The primary sources for

this study are the telex reports sent by the provincial PZPR committees in Siedlce and Biała Podlaska. The way these reports are written—the language, topic selection, and framing of events — offers insight into the thinking and emotional responses of political decision-makers at the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.

Following the administrative reform of 1 June 1975, new provinces—including Siedlce and Biała Podlaska — were established to improve the effectiveness of central management and reinforce control over local communities [10; 22-23]. From a political perspective, it also meant establishing a new provincial party apparatus from the ground up. These provincial committees were seen by the PZPR leadership as instruments of control — ideological, social, and, as this analysis argues, emotional.

Southern Podlasie had a unique sociocultural profile. It was largely rural, deeply rooted in traditional and Catholic values, and often sceptical of the imposed communist ideology. Party reports often mention frustration over the “low level of political awareness” among the local population and the limited success of so-called “community work”, which aimed to counter religious influence and “social apathy” [2; 37-42]. For local activists, this meant continually justifying their lack of success —an emotionally taxing process in itself.

Although the provincial telexes seem unemotional at first glance — terse, formulaic, steeped in bureaucratic language — this very form may function as what William Reddy calls an “emotive mask” [3; 121], a way not just of expressing but also of managing emotions. Each of the analysed documents is also a snapshot of the emotional self-presentation of the party under mounting crisis, increasingly revealing its own anxieties, doubts, and occasional paralysis. The reports also had a ritual function. They served as daily acts of loyalty to the central leadership and forms of psychological reassurance [11; 13-15]. Phrases like “the situation is stable”, “no disturbances”, “a committed atmosphere”, or “plan implementation is proceeding smoothly” function as ritualised mechanisms of emotional regulation—designed to contain affect within predictable and controlled linguistic formulas [7; 176-177]. Far from being mere bureaucratic records, these documents represent emotional self-portraits of the regime, preserved for internal control and future bureaucratic use. They functioned as a kind of bureaucratic liturgy, repeated daily like a ritual that reaffirmed the meaning of power in times of uncertainty [12; 75-83].

In this sense, the provincial committees in Siedlce and Biała Podlaska functioned as institutional emotional communities [4], governed by a clearly defined “emotional regime” [5] — emotions such as vigilance, mobilization, and determination were acceptable, while fear, confusion, or mistrust of central directives were not permitted. And yet, as the reports from late 1980 reveal, unsanctioned emotions began to surface — among them concerns about “maintaining discipline”, “disturbing signals from workplaces”, and the “intensification of contacts with the clergy”. These cracks suggest that the emotional order of the regime — perhaps for the first time in decades — was beginning to falter.

This political environment can thus be described as a space of performative affects—a site where emotions were not only reported but also produced, shaped, and encoded. The party apparatus in Southern Podlasie did not only report on the emotions of others, but—often unintentionally — recorded its own. It is these encoded emotions of the “dictator”— an institutional figure, but one composed of many individuals — that will be the subject of further analysis.

Materials and Methods

This study is based on qualitative analysis of archival materials produced by the regional structures of PZPR in Siedlce and Biała Podlaska between August 1980 and early 1981. The corpus consists of internal telex correspondence preserved in the State Archive in Siedlce and the State Archive in Lublin (Radzyń Podlaski branch). These documents were selected due to their regularity, internal character, and role as daily reports sent to the Central Committee in Warsaw, which makes them a coherent and comparable dataset.

The research applies a qualitative, hermeneutic methodology combining approaches from the history of emotions, archival studies, and political anthropology. The central analytical tool is the semantic categorisation of language used in the documents. Particular attention is given to recurring expressions, evaluative formulas, and keywords functioning as “emotives” in the sense proposed by William Reddy, i.e., speech acts that both express and shape emotional states.

The procedure consists of three stages. First, lexical elements suggesting emotional states or their regulation (e.g., “stability”, “tension”, “discipline”, “disturbing signals”) were identified and coded. Second, these expressions were interpreted within their institutional and communicative context. Third, the distribution

and transformation of these expressions over time were analysed in order to reconstruct the emotional dynamics of the party apparatus.

The study also uses the concept of “emotional communities” (Barbara Rosenwein) and “feeling rules” (Arlie Hochschild) to interpret norms governing emotional expression within the party. Contradictions between declarative statements and implicit meanings were treated as indicators of emotional dissonance.

Although limited to a specific region and source type, this focused approach enables an in-depth reconstruction of affective mechanisms of communist governance during a crisis.

Results

While emotions are often considered fleeting and personal, they are also socially constructed, culturally shaped, and linguistically expressed — making them a legitimate object of scholarly inquiry. This perspective has become the foundation of a new research paradigm in historical studies, known as the history of emotions, which has been successfully developed across the humanities. In this study, that approach is extended by introducing an archival dimension, examining emotions embedded in records that hold historical value and have been subject to archival processing. The analysis begins from the premise that documents produced by the communist party — especially the telexes sent to the Central Committee of PZPR — are far from emotionally neutral. On the contrary, they represent specific affective artefacts, encoded and revealed in a restrained yet discernible manner to the attentive reader.

Following Ann Laura Stoler’s suggestion to read official records “against the grain”, this study explores not only what these documents say, but also what they suppress, conceal, or ritualise emotionally [13; 19-22]. The starting point of the theoretical considerations is William Reddy’s concept of emotives — performative utterances that shape and regulate emotions, rather than merely reflect them [3; 105]. In this framework, the document becomes a space for the narrative of emotional self-regulation within the power apparatus. Barbara Rosenwein, on the other hand, proposes the concept of emotional communities — social groups that share specific norms about which emotions should be felt, when, and how they should be expressed [4; 2-5].

The provincial leadership of the PZPR functioned as such a community, governed by a strict emotional regime: vigilance, commitment, and trust in the party were encouraged, while fear, resignation, and disappointment in the central leadership were repressed. Every party report in this context was an act of emotional loyalty, conveyed through a specific vocabulary. This approach is complemented by Arlie Russell Hochschild’s work on emotional labour and feeling rules—the institutional norms that dictate which emotions are permissible within specific contexts [5; 56-57, 229-230]. The communist party in PRL operated according to clearly defined affective constraints. Documents consistently emphasised readiness, unity, discipline, and enthusiasm — even when the reality was marked by stress, conflict, or instability. Using the language of emotional mobilisation was both a requirement and a coping mechanism for managing cognitive dissonance.

From a methodological perspective, the analysis of the telexes is based on semantic categorisation to identify key words and ritualised expressions that conveyed emotional states. Phrases such as “deepening tensions”, “mixed moods among the workers”, “heightened interest from the clergy”, or “workers demonstrating commitment” offer a window into the emotional responses of the party’s bureaucratic machinery. By tracing these expressions across time and context, it is possible to map a spectrum of emotional responses — from anxiety and frustration to withdrawal, and apathy.

The analysis also covers elements of newspeak — the ideological language of the communist bureaucracy [12; 79-80]. In PRL, newspeak was both a tool of repression and a means of emotional standardisation. It offered a way for the party to speak about itself and the world that suppressed personal investment while concealing collective unease. Phrases such as “activation of the working masses”, “model conduct of meetings”, or “just condemnation of anti-socialist elements” were not merely propaganda clichés but also parts of the regime’s emotional self-portrait — an effort to convince itself of its own stability and rationality. In this context, the telexes were not just reports — they were ritual documents, designed to manage chaos through language. Signs of unease, implied threats, and institutional anxiety often hid behind formulaic expressions and a neutral bureaucratic tone.

In conclusion, this study treats PZPR provincial committee reports not as static administrative records presenting facts but as affective texts that communicate and construct emotion, serving either to legitimise power or ritually contain instability. These documents helped shape the institutional reality. Faced with the

crisis of 1980, the regime spoke in a language saturated with unspoken emotions, encoded within the seemingly neutral tone of routine bureaucratic formulas.

The summer of 1980 marked a pivotal moment in both the history of the Polish People's Republic and the emotional climate of the communist state apparatus. The wave of strikes that began on the Baltic Coast and swept across the country triggered palpable anxiety within the party's structures—an anxiety that even the most ritualised language of official newspeak struggled to conceal. Reports sent by the PZPR committees in Siedlce and Biała Podlaska to the central leadership show a distinct shift in tone. Instead of the familiar formulas about the “engagement of the masses”, “progress in plan implementation”, or “disciplined atmosphere”, there were increasing mentions of a “deteriorating situation”, “rising tensions”, and “activities of anti-socialist elements” [2; 87-93]. The rise of Solidarity — a mass, grassroots movement operating outside the party framework—was a traumatic event for local PZPR officials. The reports noted successive waves of strikes, growing opposition, and emotional reactions such as confusion, anxiety, and a sense of losing control. The language of the documents becomes tense and urgent, filled with calls for “counteraction”, “increased vigilance”, and “preserving public order” [2; 350-351].

The regime reacted like a threatened organism, generating affective defences: fear of chaos, hostility toward opposition, and efforts to reassert control over social space. Even the decision of what to report to the central leadership and what to commit to record was a form of emotional filtering. Archived reports reflect choices about which emotions and narratives should be preserved [14; 175-176]. Labelling a situation as “stable” rather than “unsettled” created an affective illusion of control, contradicting the actual experience of crisis. These reactions functioned as emotives—regulatory speech acts. A report from 24 August 1980, noting that a poster calling for a milk delivery strike was “discovered” in the town of Hruszew, is not merely informative [1; 56]. It is a linguistic act intended to draw a boundary between “order” and “chaos”, between “us” and “them” [3; 105]. The regime spoke of rebellion through the ritualised language of power. It described reality, but also reordered and pacified it — as if trying to cast a spell over it.

By September 1980, the reports were increasingly saturated with emotionally charged language: “lack of discipline”, “union demagoguery”, “attacks on workplace leadership”, “deepening demoralisation”. The regime was no longer capable of maintaining a triumphant, coherent narrative. Viewed through the lens of political anthropology — especially Victor Turner's concept of rites of passage — these documents reflect efforts to sustain a fading symbolic order in a society already undergoing transformation [7; 176-177]. The telexes became ritual invocations of order in a world already in decline.

For local PZPR activists, the experience of social rebellion was profoundly destabilising. Their emotional repertoire narrowed, with decision-making paralysis on one hand, and aggressive defence of the status quo on the other. A report from 16 September 1981 calls for “vigorous action” against emerging threats [2; 370] — a line that reads like a ritual expulsion of emotional doubt within the community. Anyone who was not “sufficiently vigilant” aroused suspicion. The emotional community of communists began to disintegrate — partly because society no longer recognised it, and partly because its own members were losing their emotional points of reference.

At the same time, one can observe bureaucratic coping mechanisms. Even in the most difficult moments, the reports contain elements of hopeful rhetoric: “the majority of workers understand the need to maintain production”, “party activists demonstrate a high level of responsibility”, “young people are engaging in public activities”. This was not a reflection of facts, but a language of reassurance — a narrative camouflage of fear in an effort to restore emotional control. In this context, it is worth recalling Theodore Kemper's theory, which links specific emotions to one's position within the social hierarchy. According to Kemper, the loss of control and perceived status threat generates fear, frustration, and anger [6; 92-95]. The same emotional pattern is evident in the party reports from the summer and autumn of 1980. To many local PZPR secretaries and officials, Solidarity was not only an alien force — but also a mirror, reflecting their own emotional cracks.

Solidarity brought not only new political demands, but also a form of collective emotionality rooted in native traditions — distinct from communist culture — based on hope, a sense of community, and solidarity. For a regime that had relied for decades on emotions of fear and discipline, this was a completely foreign language. Hence the verbal aggression, the obsessive repetition of rituals, the desperate attempts to reclaim symbolic space through routines: ceremonies, rallies, and official gatherings. These, however, were merely echoes of an emotional world coming to an end.

Discussion

One of the most striking aspects of the documents sent by the communist party from Southern Podlasie to its central headquarters in Warsaw in the years 1980–1981 is their language. Even in the face of growing social unrest — strikes, the rise of the Solidarity opposition movement, and the clear erosion of party legitimacy — the style of communication remained remarkably ritualised, uniform, and standardised. This was no coincidence, but the result of a powerful instrument of control: newspeak. Newspeak in the Polish People's Republic was not just a style but an entire system of political communication — rigid, self-referential, and closed [2; 26–27]. These telexes, structured according to fixed templates, were filled with key ideological terms such as “vigilance”, “mobilisation”, “anti-socialist elements”, “healthy part of the workforce”, “reaction”, or “class solidarity.” Their aim was not only to label, but also to act — to reinforce loyalty, to mark the line between “us” and “them”, and to suppress emotions considered undesirable.

Newspeak also served as an emotional pressure-release valve. In moments of heightened tension, these documents avoided the use of words like “panic” or “fear”; instead, they relied on phrases such as “the need to calm public mood”, “the necessity of strengthening preventive measures”, or “increased activity of opposition elements” [1; 68–71]. These ostensibly bureaucratic terms served a rhetorical de-escalation function — a kind of linguistic dressing over emotional wounds. Such expressions acted as negative emotives [3; 105] — not articulating fear, but transforming it into an institutionally acceptable form. That is why newspeak endured for so long. It served as a kind of emotional camouflage, shielding the party not only from external threats but from its own internal affective disintegration.

The language of the reports also served a psychological compensatory function. Even in moments of open crisis, documents included elements of ritual praise, optimistic summaries, and assurances of full control. For example, a December 1980 report reads: “Despite attempts at destabilisation by anti-socialist forces, the determined stance of party activists and the high social awareness of the workforce have allowed us to maintain organisational order and a steady rhythm of work across most workplaces” [2; 112]. This was not a reflection of reality, but an affective reconstruction of it — a kind of bureaucratic self-therapy aimed at preserving narrative coherence in the face of emotional collapse. From an anthropological perspective on ritual, one might say that party language created a ritual boundary — separating what could be narratively controlled from what was dangerously real [7; 15]. Maintaining the narrative of order amid chaos was a ritual act, like a secular prayer offered at the altar of power, in the hope that ritual might produce tangible effects.

It is worth noting, however, that the language of the reports was not monolithic. Though newspeak continued to dominate, the deepening crisis revealed fractures — signs of linguistic fatigue, uncertainty, and at times outright breakdowns in rhetorical coherence. These were simulation errors, replicated mechanically according to a fixed template. It was not uncommon for the same reports to contain statements about “model behaviour” alongside references to “uncertain moods”. Such contradictions offer rich analytical ground: they expose the emotional incoherence of the regime, its gradual affective drift. Even the most highly formalised administrative documents can contain the seeds of affect—traces of fear, ambiguity, and speculation that challenge the appearance of bureaucratic rationality [13; 23]. Viewed through this lens, the reports from Siedlce and Biała Podlaska can be read as texts with a double register: on the surface, official and stripped of emotion; beneath, charged with undercurrents of tension. From the perspective of contemporary archival theory, such contradictions are not flaws in the source but its most valuable layers—for it is in these fissures that we find evidence of emotional rupture in the text, which may be interpreted as a sign of inner instability — what Stoler refers to as the “registration of systemic uncertainty in the archival record” [13; 19].

The language of the reports was more than just a means of communication — it was a tool for emotionally shaping reality. The party described not the world as it was, but as it ought to be — and, more crucially, as it needed it to be in emotional terms. This is precisely why such language functioned to sustain the universe of the dictatorship — a world on the verge of collapse, yet still intact, clinging to its continuity at all costs.

All systems of power rely on drawing boundaries — between “us” and “them”, order and chaos, legitimacy and threat. In the case of the Polish People's Republic, and especially during the political crisis of 1980–1981, these boundaries became starkly visible. Party reports drafted during the pivotal months of Solidarity's rise — when disparate strands of opposition united under one name — mapped the emotional landscape of a world in which the movement born of social rebellion was cast as the “other”, and the party remained firmly in the role of the familiar, the legitimate, the “us.” The regime avoided calling Solidarity a political adversary. Instead, it was framed as an “anti-socialist element”, a “destabilising factor”, an “external influence”, and eventually, a “counter-revolution” [2]. This language was not accidental. One of the central

functions of social movements—and of regimes—is the creation of emotional frames: interpretive structures that infuse events with meaning and generate emotions like fear, outrage, and alertness [15; 285-303]. The PZPR telexes reveal this framing at work in terms of shaping the emotional image of the opponent. Solidarity was cast not as a legitimate social actor, but as an unpredictable, dangerous, and destructive force.

By contrast, the communists presented themselves as defenders of order, guardians of society, and protectors of social peace. This rhetoric follows a well-established pattern of authoritarian self-affirmation, in which regimes construct identity through rituals, symbols, and a highly codified language—tools used to justify authority and suppress any emotions that might disrupt internal cohesion [16; 94-101]. Reports from autumn 1980 are filled with repeated assurances about “the determination of the working class”, “the workforce’s understanding of the need to maintain order”, and “society’s rejection of destructive actions”. These phrases created an emotional reality: a world in which the party was rational and benevolent, and the opposition irrational and cold.

The concept of emotional communities provides a useful framework here. The regime and Solidarity embodied two distinct emotional styles. The PZPR operated through the language of control, vigilance, and duty; the Solidarity community invoked dignity, hope, and belonging [4; 25]. The clash between these emotional worlds was inevitable — and in party official documents, it triggered an affective defensiveness. The regime responded to this emerging emotional vocabulary with rejection and dehumanisation: those who failed to feel “as they should” were cast outside the realm of order. This dynamic reflects the operation of feeling rules, as described by Arlie Hochschild. The communist party maintained a strict emotional code — one was permitted to express “concern”, but not “fear”; “outrage”, but not “hatred”; “resolve”, but not “despair” [5; 75]. When unsanctioned emotions surfaced — fatigue, apathy, anxiety — they were interpreted through euphemism: as “disintegration” or a “threat to unity” [2; 375]. These were not descriptions of feeling, but diagnoses of emotional malfunction.

Against this backdrop, another emotional mechanism becomes visible, which may be described as party messianism. Despite its growing collapse, the regime continued to speak of itself in the language of a chosen community: “Our party is the only force capable of defending the interests of the state”; “Only socialism guarantees peace and social stability” [2; 408, 420]. Such statements no longer wielded persuasive force but functioned as acts of symbolic self-suggestion — an emotional community trying to convince itself of its continued purpose, despite mounting evidence to the contrary.

At the same time, the emotional construction of the adversary became a psychological defence against systemic change. A regime that had operated for decades in a stable, predictable world — governed by top-down rituals and controlled language — was unprepared to encounter spontaneous, civic, unregulated emotional expression. In this light, Solidarity represented an emotional alien—one that disrupted the regime’s established codes of communication.

By the winter of 1980–1981, the emotional fabric of the communist party apparatus had begun to fracture visibly. Although official reports from the provincial PZPR committees in Siedlce and Biała Podlaska still bore the hallmarks of bureaucratic newspeak, they increasingly betrayed signs of fatigue, helplessness, and anxious anticipation. Archival records from December 1980 and January 1981 reflect a marked shift in tone—from rhetoric asserting control to a chronicling of stress, diminishing authority, and affective exhaustion. Reports from this period include expressions such as: “growing disappointment with the stance of some workforces”, “difficulty in maintaining discipline”, and “party activists reporting a need for moral support” [2; 151, 187, 336-337]. These are no longer simply propagandistic phrases, but signs of emotional burnout within the party community — so-called split emotives, or statements which attempt to remain within the official register while inadvertently revealing suppressed emotions [3; 109]. A regime that had long projected itself as rational, efficient, and unshakable now found itself speaking the language of dependence — awaiting intervention from above. The reports are dominated by expectations of “concrete solutions from the central authorities”, “clear political guidance”, and “confirmation of the correctness of the existing course” [2; 122-125]. It is a language of emotional dependency, showing that the local party apparatus had already lost its sense of agency. Much like organisms under prolonged stress, the system begins to exhibit emotional withdrawal, edging into states akin to apathy. The prevailing emotions — expectation, exhaustion, resignation — align with Theodore Kemper’s theory of subordinate emotions: when individuals or groups lose their capacity to influence reality, they respond with emotional disengagement, loss of direction, and a transfer of responsibility [6; 94-97]. The reports from late 1980 and early 1981 offer just such a record of emotional drift, a loss of faith in the effectiveness of local action, and a conviction that only top-down interventions could restore balance.

This period also sees rhetorical outbursts that function as psychological release: accusations against the opposition become more frequent, and the tone towards “Solidarity”, the clergy, and even hesitant party members grows increasingly aggressive. A report from 10 February 1981 states that the “problem of evaluating the motives for leaving the Party” is being addressed — a phrase that reveals not just external pressure, but a fracture within the emotional community of the communist apparatus. At the same time, traces of ritual persist: reports often end with familiar affirmations of the loyalty of most members [1; 86-94]. Yet such formulations, inserted into bureaucratic documents, may signal epistemic uncertainty: ritualised language becomes a prosthesis where real control is lacking [13; 23-25].

From the perspective of the history of emotions, this moment can be described as an affective turning point: the established emotional narrative — based on vigilance, mobilisation and optimism — collapses under the weight of overwhelming stimuli and the loss of symbolic authority. Like any system under strain, the PZPR ceases to function within its established emotional framework. By late 1981, the reports begin to resemble an internal monologue — not addressed to society, but to the system itself, striving to preserve a sense of emotional unity through ritualised language. This marks the emergence of a new dynamic: the erosion of existing emotional codes creates the need for their reconstruction or — as is more typical of authoritarian regimes — for their replacement through external intervention. By the summer of 1981, the reports begin to include suggestions that “extraordinary measures” may be necessary [2; 325-326]. The authorities had lost their ability to wield affect and instead reached for instruments that heralded the imminent imposition of martial law. Emotion gave way to force.

Conclusions

The documents produced by the Provincial Committee of the PZPR in Southern Podlasie between 1980 and 1981—particularly the telex reports from Siedlce and Biała Podlaska—are not merely historical records of political developments during the rise of “Solidarity”. They point to something deeper—the emotional unravelling of the communist community, no longer able to respond meaningfully to a shifting political and social reality. These documents, bureaucratic and seemingly emotionless, take on a new meaning when read as affective archival material. They record information but also preserve ways of experiencing the crisis, strategies for representing it, and attempts to sustain institutional identity through language and ritual. In this sense, even the party archive becomes a space that traces the passage from certainty to doubt, from alertness to resignation.

The communist authorities, accustomed to operating within a stable affective order grounded in vigilance, ritual, and language (newspeak), were confronted with a movement that introduced a new emotional regime [3; 124-125]: a language of dignity, hope, and collective empowerment. In this confrontation, the communist narrative proved incapable of affective adaptation. The documents ceased to serve their ritual function of sustaining order and began instead to record cracks, tensions, and ultimately the emotional disintegration of the apparatus and party activists. Seen through the lens of the history of emotions, this marks the disintegration of the PZPR community — where vigilance gave way to fear, engagement to apathy, and the rhetoric of control to passivity and resignation. The authorities could no longer “feel collectively”, which undermined not only their social legitimacy but also their inner belief in the meaning of their existence. For emotional communities endure only as long as their members share core emotional norms. By the winter of 1980/1981, the PRL’s communist leadership had lost that shared language [4; 2].

Analysing the party’s telexes not merely as factual records but as affective sources offers deeper insight into the system’s collapse — emotionally and symbolically. It opens a window into the internal emotional landscape of the communists — their anxieties, frustrations, hopes, and ultimately, their helplessness in the face of a world they could no longer master. It is in these very states that we encounter the “emotions of the dictator”, invoked in the title — the collective experience of an institution that had lost control over its own fate, a process that culminated less than a decade later in its total collapse. The application of methods from the history of emotions, archival anthropology, and affective source studies to documents from the Polish People’s Republic opens up new interpretative pathways. Party telexes, reports, and instructions — often dismissed as dry bureaucratic paperwork — reveal themselves to be living records of institutional anxiety, of attempts to preserve identity in the midst of crisis, of emotionality encoded in official language.

This conclusion does not close the discussion — quite the opposite. It invites further exploration of the emotional codes that underpin systems of authority. As the Southern Podlasie case illustrates, even the most rigid and formal documents may become keys to understanding the human underside of a regime that ultimately collapsed not only from political pressure, but also under the burden of its own unspoken emotional turmoil.

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Д. Магєр

1980–1981 жж. Польша Халық Республикасындағы «Солидарность» қозғалысының пайда болуы мен дамуы туралы Коммунистік партияның телекстеріндегі кодталған эмоциялар: Оңтүстік Подлясьедегі жағдай

Мақала 1980-81 жылдардағы дағдарыс кезеңінде Польша Халық Республикасындағы коммунистік басқарудың эмоциялық өлшемін Оңтүстік Подлясьеде Польша Біріккен жұмысшы партиясының (ПБЖП) аймақтық құрылымдары дайындаған ішкі телекс хат алмасуын талдау арқылы зерттейді. Седльце мен Бяла-Подляска қалаларындағы мұрағат материалдарына сүйене отырып, автор бюрократиялық құжаттарды тек ақпараттық жазбалар ретінде емес, аффективтік артефактілер ретінде қарастыратын өзіндік интерпретациялық тәсілді ұсынады. Зерттеу эмоциялар тарихы, мұрағаттану және саяси антропология бағыттарының ұстанымдарын біріктіреді. Жұмыста ресми дискурста енгізілген эмоционалды заңдылықтарды қалпына келтіруге мүмкіндік беретін негізгі өрнектерді, бағалау формулаларын және «эмоцияларды» семантикалық категориялауға негізделген сапалы герменевтикалық әдістеме қолданылған. Тұрақтылық пен бақылауды баса көрсететін декларативті тіл мен дабыл, белгісіздік және институционалдық шиеленістің жасырын көрсеткіштері арасындағы сәйкессіздіктерге ерекше назар аударылған. Талдау көрсеткендей, жаңа сөзбен қалыптасқан партиялық коммуникацияның стандартталған тілі эмоцияларды реттеу мен жасыру механизмі ретінде қызмет атқарған. Ритуалданған сөз тіркестері мен қайталанатын формулалар бір уақытта қорқынышты, шиеленісті және сенімділікті төмендететін тәртіптің көрінісін сақтап қалды.

«Солидарность» қозғалысының пайда болуы партияның қалыптасқан эмоциялық режимін бұзып, оған қадір-қасиетке, ынтымаққа және әлеуметтік белсенділікке негізделген ұжымдық эмоциялардың балама жүйесін қарсы қойды. Эмпирикалық нәтижелер аймақтық партиялық аппарат ішіндегі аффективті трансформацияның динамикалық процесін анықтайды. Бастапқы есептерде тәртіп пен тұрақтылыққа басымдық берілсе, уақыт өте келе олардың орнына шиеленістің күшеюін, бақылаудың әлсіреуін және орталық билікке тәуелділіктің артуын білдіретін тұжырымдар берілген. 1980 жылдың соңы мен 1981 жылдың басындағы құжаттардың тілі эмоционалдық шаршауды, ішкі келісімнің бөлшектенуін және шешуші араласуды іздеуді көрсетеді. Бұл өзгерістер партияның өз эмоциялық нормалары мен институционалдық бірегейлігін сақтау қабілетінің әлсіреуінің кең ауқымды үдерісімен сәйкес келеді. Мақалада ішкі партиялық хат-хабарлар дағдарыс жағдайында авторитарлық биліктің эмоционалды механизмдерін талдаудың құнды көзі деген тұжырымдама жасалады. Кодталған мазасыздықтың, ритуалды тыныштандырудың және одан кейінгі ыдыраудың анықталған үлгілері коммунистік тәртіптің күйреуі оның эмоционалды негіздерінің терең жойылуымен қатар жүретіндігін көрсете отырып, жүйелік құлдыраудың процесін көрсетеді.

Кілт сөздер: эмоциялар тарихы, коммунизм, Польша, Польша Халық Республикасы, Польша Біріккен жұмысшы партиясы, «Солидарность» қозғалысы, жаңасөз.

Д. Магер

Эмоции, закодированные в телексах Коммунистической партии о возникновении и развитии движения «Солидарность» в Польской Народной Республике в 1980–1981 гг.: случай в Южном Подлясье

Данная статья исследует эмоциональное измерение коммунистического управления в Польской Народной Республике в период кризиса 1980–1981 гг. посредством анализа внутренней телексной переписки, создававшейся региональными структурами Польской объединённой рабочей партии (ПОРП) в Южном Подлясье. Опираясь на архивные материалы из Седльце и Бяла-Подляски, автор предлагает оригинальный интерпретативный подход, рассматривающий бюрократические документы как аффективные артефакты, а не только как информационные записи. Исследование объединяет подходы истории эмоций, архивоведения и политической антропологии. В работе используется качественная герменевтическая методология, основанная на семантической категоризации ключевых выражений, оценочных формул и «эмотивов», что позволяет реконструировать эмоциональные паттерны, встроенные в официальный дискурс. Особое внимание уделяется расхождениям между декларативным языком, подчеркивающим стабильность и контроль, и имплицитными индикаторами тревоги, неопределённости и институционального напряжения. Анализ показывает, что стандартизированный язык партийной коммуникации, сформированный новоязом, функционировал как механизм эмоциональной регуляции и сокрытия. Ритуализированные фразы и повторяющиеся формулы поддерживали видимость порядка, одновременно кодируя страх, напряжение и снижение уверенности. Возникновение движения «Солидарность» нарушило устоявшийся эмоциональный режим партии, противопоставив ему альтернативную систему коллективных эмоций, основанную на достоинстве, солидарности и социальной субъектности. Эмпирические результаты выявляют динамический процесс аффективной трансформации внутри регионального партийного аппарата. Ранние отчёты, акцентировавшие дисциплину и стабильность, постепенно сменяются выражениями, сигнализирующими о нарастающем напряжении, ослаблении контроля и возрастающей зависимости от центральных властей. К концу 1980 г. и началу 1981 г. язык документов отражает эмоциональное истощение, фрагментацию внутренней сплочённости и поиск решительного вмешательства. Эти изменения соответствуют более широкому размыванию способности партии поддерживать собственные эмоциональные нормы и институциональную идентичность. В статье делается вывод о том, что внутренняя партийная переписка представляет собой ценный источник для анализа эмоциональных механизмов авторитарной власти в условиях кризиса. Выявленные паттерны закодированной тревоги, ритуализированного успокоения и последующей дезинтеграции проливают свет на более широкий процесс системного упадка, показывая, что крах коммунистического порядка сопровождался глубоким разрушением его эмоциональных оснований.

Ключевые слова: история эмоций, коммунизм, Польша, Польская Народная Республика, Польская объединённая рабочая партия, движение «Солидарность», новояз.

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