
Red Nationalism?

A Brief Overview of the Origins of Polish Stalinism

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Abstract: This article argues against the still-dominant idea that Polish Stalinism must be interpreted in “exteriority” and “rupture” due to the Soviet Union’s political grip over the country. The period of Stalinist rule constitutes a particularly dense and fecund time in Polish history, one that can only be understood within the framework of Poland’s past and present: the period’s origins and metahistory. The discursive gesture of depriving certain historical actors of their legitimate agency echoes the struggles over ethnicity and politics within Polish socialist circles at the turn of the twentieth century. There is, however, a disturbing paradox in the historical outcome of this distant debate: The ones who carried out the project of a Polish mono-ethnic state were the disciples of Polish revolutionary internationalists.

Keywords: Stalinism; mono-ethnicity; internationalism; Polish history; communism; metahistory; origins

Stalinism as the Other

The title of Andrzej Paczkowski’s contribution to *The Black Book of Communism* has a brief but telling history. The chapter the Polish historian was commissioned to write for this sweeping study focuses, as its title suggests, on the crimes committed in Poland by global communism – or, rather, on its crimes against Poles. The original French edition, published in 1997, bears the title “Pologne, la ‘nation-ennemi’ – Les répressions soviétiques envers les Polonais – Pologne 1944–1989: Le système de répression” [Poland, the ‘Enemy Nation’ – Soviet Repressions of Poles – Poland 1944–1989: The System of Repression (Paczkowski, 1997)]. The English-language edition published in 1999 contains the more concise title “Poland, the ‘Enemy Nation’” (Paczkowski, 1999b). Both versions were expressions of the made-for-export variety of Polish memory politics of the 1990s. Of the *Black Book’s* twenty-seven chapters, each of which addresses a selected subject or geographical area, only one title implies that the communist crimes discussed therein are exogenous: that they were committed by communists precisely against Poles, and that Poland is unique among the global victims of communism precisely because it was its staunch enemy.¹ A certainty is implied not only that Poland

1 Somewhat surprisingly, the Polish version of the title reads “Polacy pod obcą i własną przemocą” [Poles under Foreign and Domestic Oppression] (Paczkowski, 1999a), which might imply a departure from the principle of exterritorialization, but is in fact a technical distinction between the repressive apparatuses of the USSR and the Polish People’s Republic (PRL).

was such an enemy in an objective sense, but also that it were the communists themselves who identified it as an enemy.

Of course, such exterritorialization of communism can, albeit less frequently, take forms other than geographical attribution of Polish communists as “agents of Moscow.” A much more intellectually refined version of this argument exists, of a metaphysical variation. Expiation is only possible through universalization. It is epitomized in Czesław Miłosz’s formulas about the “Stalinist faith,” the “captive mind,” the “Hegelian sting,” and other opiates of the intellectuals. Alternatively, it can refer to the darkest traits of the human nature: opportunism, conformism, or barbarity hidden beneath a thin veneer of culture. As Miłosz wrote, “The habit of civilization is fragile” (Miłosz, 1955, p. 116). In any case, Stalinist rule in Poland was transcendental in nature, as it was imposed from outside. Because it was totalitarian, it entered into no dialectical relations with society, making its transcendence all the easier. Its could only be quantified by the scale of its expansion or the intensity of its dominance.

Interestingly, the chapter “Poland, the ‘Enemy Nation’” (titled “Poles under Foreign and Domestic Oppression” in the Polish edition), which contains several chronological sub-chapters, makes no mention at all of “Polish Stalinism.” It instead contains a separate section titled “The System of Repression, 1944–1989,” in which the reader finds two relevant sub-sections: “The Conquest of the State, or Mass Terror (1944–1947)” and “The Conquest of Society, or Generalized Terror (1948–1956).” The absence of Stalinism is telling; the term is rather unwieldy in the Polish narrative about the Polish People’s Republic (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa, PRL). One reason for this is its provenance: the concept of Stalinism was first popularized by Trotsky, and later became one of the main categories of Marxist revisionism, that is, the left-wing opposition in the PRL in the 1960s. To its members, Stalinism represented a betrayal, distortion, and degeneration of the socialist project. It was the antithesis, rather than the essence, of socialism. Later, when there were no Eastern European revisionists anymore, Stalinism became a term convenient for the democratic opposition of the 1970s. Once its members began referring to the concept of totalitarianism, Stalinism became a universal template for describing the nature of all forms of “real socialism,” including that of the Edward Gierek era of 1970–1980.²

A somewhat different vision of Stalinism was sketched out by so-called liberal reformers. The most prominent among those who espoused this understanding of Stalinism were the philosophers and cultural historians Andrzej Walicki and, later, Bronisław Łagowski. For them, as an emanation of global Stalinism, Polish Stalinism was a true child of the communist utopia described in the works of Marx and Engels; nevertheless, for these authors the political transformations of 1956 marked a turning point perhaps even more significant than the official collapse of communism in 1989. De-Stalinization

² Michał Siermiński presents an interesting discussion of the evolution of revisionism in the chapter titled “Zmierzch rewizjonizmu” [The Twilight of Revisionism]. See Siermiński, 2016.

was understood here, essentially, as the abandonment of the mission to ideologically transform society, a mission constituting the backbone of the communist system. From this point on, history returns to its main stream, and the “communists” who remained in power, it is argued, are to be judged by the same standards as other non-democratic but ideologically moderate politicians (Walicki, 2005). Opposite them stood the “anti-communists”: supporters of Alain Besançon’s view of the invariably ominous nature of communism, and of Gustaw Herling-Grudziński’s proclamations about the moral degeneracy of communists as the key to understanding communism as a system (Łatka, 2015). Because the revisionist position no longer exists today, two interpretations remain, both within the paradigm of external conquest: the model of a metaphysical conquest, and of a purely physical one. According to the first model, the conquest is followed by secondary legitimization, while in the view of the latter, it marks the beginning of occupation. There are considerable theoretical differences between these two approaches, and even greater political discrepancies. It is apparent that the liberal interpretation is more morally inclusive and historically nuanced. Nevertheless, both locate Stalinism “outside” Polish history as a breach in its natural continuity, as if that continuity were self-evident and obvious. What is at stake here, however, is not the adoption of any particular historiosophical ontology. The stakes are political and moral. They are political because they define the boundaries of legitimacy; they are moral because they establish the boundaries of the community. The goal of this approach is to deprive “communists” of the right of citizenship in Polish culture, of being treated as party to the political debate – and, in an extreme form of this perspective – to pathologize and criminalize them, as Piotr Gontarczyk did in his book about the Polish Workers’ Party (Gontarczyk, 2013). The most liberal measure for determining the communists’ affiliation with the Polish political and national community is still their approach to the de-Stalinization process of 1956.

The claim of the externality of Stalinism (horizontal or vertical) has also other, unexpected consequences: it disrupts the causal order shaping our contemporary reality. It is an essentially indisputable fact that the period of 1944–1956 was among the most intense and, in the long term, the most consequential in modern Polish history. If these consequences are to be considered desirable, then the narrative of their origins requires reworking. One way this can be done is by pointing out the Polish communists’ lack of actual agency in these processes (“the decisions were made elsewhere,” “there was no other choice,” or “people just went about their business”); another one is by downplaying their relevance by pointing to the Western “model development,” compared to which all the accomplishments of the communists were merely flawed substitutes for the natural process of modernization, which the communists squandered even though it was within their grasp. Consequently, this alternative history’s *a priori* assumption about the externality of communism continually prevents any appreciation

of the Polish modernity understood as accumulated history. Even to observe that misguided actions sometimes bring blessed results would constitute an excess of dialectic.

One exception, to a certain degree, is Andrzej Leder's book *Prześlona rewolucja* [Sleepwalking Through the Revolution] (Leder, 2014). What sets Leder apart is that he acknowledges that the Stalinist years were a period of social revolution in Poland, meaning that the era was of crucial significance to our present, and that – its other assessments notwithstanding – in historical terms it was a productive rather than destructive period. Leder also discusses the degree to which the denial of modern Poland's "illegitimate origins" organizes the historical awareness of contemporary Poles. At the same time he makes a few characteristic concessions to the anti-communist discourse with its totalitarian theory. First, in setting the boundaries of the "time of revolution" (1939–1956), he puts the war and the Holocaust into one temporal category with the period of Stalinist rule. While he stops short of identifying the former with the latter, he suggests that, from a certain point of view, they are part of the same "historical logic." Leder's point, however, isn't to ritually equate Nazism with communism, but to illustrate the "external" character of this revolution. It was a revolution that Poles didn't carry out themselves, he argues, but one that happened to them. Once again, we find references to a normative and slightly mythical Western model of revolution as an endogenous agency, against which Poland's "somnambulant" revolution is juxtaposed.

The paradigm of describing Stalinism in terms of externality and rupture, though hegemonic, did not monopolize the discourse. Inevitably, a certain appreciation of the agency of Polish communists and their rooting in the local context, manifested in the peculiar character of Polish Stalinism compared to other Eastern European countries and the Soviet Union, can be found in the work of post-communist apologists such as Andrzej Weblan and Ryszard Nazarewicz. The paradigm of externality is similarly absent from writings on the social history of the PRL, which, it should be noted, are frequently written by female historians, and often at foreign academic institutions (e.g. studies by Małgorzata Fidelis (cf. Fidelis, 2010), Małgorzata Mazurek, Natalia Jarska, Padraic Kenney, Marci Schore, Joanna Tokarska-Bakir (cf. Tokarska-Bakir, 2018)). Despite the differences in the subject and methodology of their research (from discourse analysis, through collective biographies, to ethnographic case studies), each of these authors depicts the communists as a multitude of different actors – albeit often brutal and ruthless ones – with limited insight and variable power, entangled in compromises and negotiations, and, significantly, ideologically heterogeneous. The problem is that in social history, self-restraint is a virtue, and that virtue is precisely the reason for its relatively weak influence. In such approaches, Stalinism becomes dissolved in a myriad of social relations, with all the attendant consequences. Social history and its highly developed aversion to all simplification and synthesis is often a helpless adversary of the mighty anti-communist myth. In fact, it has little interest in taking up the glove. In a departure from this rule, Małgorzata Fidelis appreciated the authenticity the "Stalinist" project of

women's social empowerment, its caveats and limitations notwithstanding. Its authenticity, she argues, was twofold: it was spontaneous and sincere, and (in a number of cases) demonstrably effective (Fidelis, 2010).

The recently published collaborative monograph *Komunizm: Idee i praktyki w Polsce 1944–1989* [Communism: Ideas and Practices in Poland, 1944–1989] (Chmielewska, Mroziak, & Wołowicz, 2018) appears thus far to be the most comprehensive and ambitious attempt to write a different history of communism in Poland, and this revision also encompasses the Stalinist period. Although the dominant perspective adopted in the book is that of literary studies (a fact that should also be regarded as significant), it by far exceeds the boundaries of metahistory. This is true above all because, as the editors announce in the introduction:

Our main goal was to provide a reconstruction and a critical description of the communist project as a revolutionary undertaking: an attempt to transform and/or intercept the political, social, and cultural field defined by Polish nationalism. [...] We discuss the communist project as revolutionary (particularly in its initial postwar and Stalinist period), a project pursuing a radical transformation of cultural and social relations, with its inherent violence (factual and symbolic), aporias, and limitations, all of which we elucidate and subject to critical analysis (Chmielewska, Mroziak, & Wołowicz, 2018, p. 7).

Adopting such a descriptive category of the project requires the authors to move beyond, but not to reject, both the nominalist approach to events and the field of social history. It also enables, to a certain extent, a Whiteian rehabilitation of a question that belongs to the regime of the narrative rather than the factual: a question about Polish communists as a historical collective subject. In keeping with the principle of the owl of Minerva spreading its wings at dusk, this question is all the more legitimate considering that the communist project in Poland is now completely exhausted, and Polish communists no longer exist as a collective subject (setting aside the entirely fantastic visions promulgated by extreme anti-communists). It is apparent that the reconstruction of such a subject does not require assuming any spontaneous unity or natural continuity. The point, rather, is that for several decades a particular group of people themselves constructed this continuity and ideo-political identity irrespective of the fact that the way in which they did so changed in form and in content.

Where Did Polish Communists Come From?

Let's start with a banal observation: from the perspective of today's Poland, its ideological landscape, and its social makeup, it can be quite a difficult to understand who Polish communists were. Stalinism undoubtedly marks the culminating point in the political history of the communist movement – its final chapter or epilogue. After 1944, former members of the Communist Party of Poland (Komunistyczna Partia Polski, KPP)

assumed all of the country's key positions. It was no secret that they owed their unique fortune to the Soviet Union's victory in World War II and its military dominance over Eastern Europe. And yet, just a few years earlier, their ascent to power under Stalin's protection would have been completely unthinkable. At the first congress of the Polish Workers' Party (Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR) in 1945, a majority of the delegates (659 of them, cf. Walenciak, 2017, p. 54) were former members of the KPP. When Comintern dissolved the KPP on Stalin's orders just seven years earlier, most of its leadership had already been murdered. Of the 3,817 KPP members residing in the USSR, no more than one hundred remained alive. Many of the members of this new political elite survived only because they had spent the late 1930s imprisoned by the Polish government. And there were quite a few of them. Communists made up nearly half of the three thousand inmates at the Bereza Kartuska detention camp (Szumiło, 2014, p. 118). The irony was clearly not lost on them. They were likewise aware of the very specific reasons why Stalin had treated the KPP with much greater ruthlessness than any other Comintern party. Polish communists were eliminated because they were a species of "first Bolsheviks," one of the main targets of the Great Purge in the USSR. Unlike the dozens of twentieth-century communist movements, Poland's was not inspired by the October Revolution or the Soviet Union. The Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland, the founding organization of the Polish communist movement, was effectively the older sister of the Russian Social Democratic Labor Party, from which later emerged the Bolsheviks (the two parties were established in 1893 and 1898, respectively).

The Social Democracy of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy, SDKPiL) was the home party of two figures who were emblematic of twentieth-century politics and yet were each other's opposites in nearly every way: Rosa Luxemburg and Felix Dzerzhinsky. At a minimum, both shared the conviction that it was just as natural for them to be involved in a Russian or German parties as it was for Germans and Russians to belong to a Polish party. The SDKPiL became one of the key actors in the 1905 revolution. It was ideologically independent from, and co-equal to, its Russian counterpart, with which it was associated. In the Polish historical memory (including that of the left), the SDKPiL is best known for its reluctance to support the cause of Polish independence; at best, it is seen as underestimating the significance of the national aspirations of the masses and, at worse, it is viewed as an altogether foreign entity. In fact, its conflict with the mainstream of Polish pro-independence socialism runs deeper. Like the Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna, PPS), the SDKPiL was a party of the radical intelligentsia, but unlike the PPS, it did not aspire to be a Polish party in the ethnic sense. Its opposition to nationalism included rejecting the paternalistic attitude with which Polish socialists approached the national minorities of the future Polish state. In a multicultural and factional society, the SDKPiL strived to create a political party with no ethnic basis, and was largely successful. By the party's own estimates, in 1906 the SDKPiL's members

numbered 40 thousand people, 70% of whom were of Polish, 25% of German, and 5% of Jewish national identity (Blobaum, 1984, p. 148). This radically internationalist feature persisted in the KPP throughout the interwar period. Ethnic Poles made up 40% of the members, a ratio that was almost inversely proportional to the ethnic makeup of the prewar Polish Republic.³ For decades, the Polish communist movement remained likely the most ethnically diverse political movement in all of Europe. And as such, it was also a completely local movement. It was one of several Central-European responses to the capitalist modernization of a multi-ethnic, peripheral society.

And yet, in its clashes with nationalism, the party suffered one defeat after another. The first, shared with the PPS, takes place in 1905. For Poland, the failure of the revolution spells the restoration of tsarist rule as well as an increasingly powerful National Democratic movement, accompanied by the stoking of antisemitism. Later, radical socialists perceived the First World War not as an opportunity for national independence, but as the mutual slaughter of the working classes. In contrast to many of the countries of postwar Europe, this stance earned them few supporters. Next came the Polish–Soviet war of 1920, which left the communists outside the realm of legal politics and significantly weakened their base.

The radical left's unwillingness to accept the rebuilding of the Polish nation-state as a political priority would become the very reason for their symbolic exclusion from the national community. It is worth noting, however, that this approach was not a programmatic aversion to Polish independence. As stated in the resolution adopted by the third party congress in 1901:

Recognizing the principle of national independence, but accepting that the achievement of such independence depends on the economic relations prevailing in a given country and historical period, the Congress [...] acknowledges the impossibility of achieving Poland's and Lithuania's independence in the near future [...]. And since a socialist revolution eliminates in and of itself all oppression, and thus all national subjugation [...], the success of the revolution will inevitably be accompanied by the abolition of this oppression. The struggle for socialism is therefore in and of itself a struggle for independence (Borucki, 1978, p. 45).

The statement hinges on a thinly disguised redefinition of “independence.” It is neither a condition for socialism nor its parallel goal; it is merely a consequence of socialism, which by its nature pursues all of the demands articulated by the call for independence. In fact, the SDKPiL raised two arguments against Polish independence. The first took a pragmatic form while concealing internationalist axiological assumptions. The second seemed dogmatic, even though it contained a sizable dose of realism. The pragmatic argument not only held that the pursuit of independence was politically unrealistic, it also claimed that independence would inevitably have a negative effect

³ According to the 1931 census, minorities made up 31 percent of the population; however, these data are very likely to be underreported.

on the economy of Polish lands and, by extension, the vital interests of their residents, particularly industrial workers (Luksemburg, 1905, p. 5). This prediction turned out to be easily verifiable. Industrial output plummeted in independent Poland, bringing workers' wages down with it. In fact, Poland was the only European country that, by the time of the Second World War, had not yet rebuilt its industrial potential (Kaliński & Landau, 1998, pp. 55–79). The dogmatic argument concerned the nature of political organization: workers' parties, it was claimed, should not organize on ethnic grounds, as this was dangerous and counterproductive to the struggle for the interests of the working class. What may have sounded like abstract doctrinal deliberation in Western Europe was, in the multi-ethnic setting of Eastern Europe, a matter of fundamental practical relevance: social emancipation was only possible in conditions of actual cooperation among members of different ethnic groups, independently of their national identities (it is noteworthy that, according to numerous testimonies, Rosa Luxemburg strongly identified herself as Polish). In this case, again, history became the judge: 100 years after Luxemburg's death, no non-ethnic political entities remained in Eastern Europe.

The conflict between the SDKPiL and the social-patriots in the PPS was particularly intense from the very start. At the 1896 International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress, the PPS leader Ignacy Daszyński refused to be seated next to Rosa Luxemburg, who, like him, was representing Poland (Fördős, 2019, p. 27). The public debate, whose central protagonists were Luxemburg and Józef Piłsudski, was concerned with what was essentially the most universal issue in twentieth-century politics: the relation between the ethnic and the political. However, this dispute did not form a lasting axis of political division. The position held by one side was ultimately *de facto* eliminated. But this did not happen right away.

One of the few who recognized the historical and universal significance of SDKPiL's position was the reactionary antisemite Stanisław Mackiewicz. "The history of the world has taken a completely different path to the one predicted by Rosa Luxemburg; all her prophecies have failed completely, and yet even today, we sense her intelligence and talent as we read her polemics" (Mackiewicz, 2014, p. 147) By 1943 Mackiewicz had the historical privilege of ruling on the triumph of ethnocentric nationalism, but he was also cognizant that this had not been a foregone conclusion from the start:

Rosa Luxemburg's social democracy was useful in that, like a sponge, it soaked up a bit of the Jewish intelligentsia away from the PPS, or rather it prevented a certain number of Jewish intellectuals from joining the PPS. And yet, in its role as a sponge, it was not very successful, considering that in the twentieth century Jewish anti-independence elements rose to power in the PPS and expelled Piłsudski himself from the party (Mackiewicz, 2014, p. 147).

This last passage in particular touches upon the limits of the Polish historical imagination. That Polish socialists, siding with Luxemburg, would remove Piłsudski from the PPS was unthinkable not only to Mackiewicz. It was also unthinkable that Polish social-

ists wouldn't pride themselves on their own patriotism. "[Victor] Adler, the leader of the Austrian socialists, present at the conference, comes to Daszyński's defense. He states that Daszyński is no patriot, but a proper internationalist like everyone else gathered there," Mackiewicz writes, recounting with horror the socialist congress of 1900 (Mackiewicz, 2014, pp. 147–149). Daszyński did not protest, naturally. The SDKPiL contested the issue of independence not just with Piłsudski, but with Lenin as well. The latter saw the right to national sovereignty as a means of resistance against Russian imperialism. Luxemburg perceived it primarily as a concession to the political principles of nationalism, which called for the ethnicization of political institutions (cf. Walicki, 1983). Such was the understanding of "Luxemburgism" in Poland after the First World War, which differed from that in Germany. The Luxemburgism of the Communist Party of Poland became a stigma not only in the perspectives of other Polish political forces: it would also serve as one of the accusations leveled by Stalin against the party and a pretext for its bloody dissolution.

In the minds of the surviving KPP members, the fact that they had become the ruling elite practically overnight must have seemed like a historical *qui pro quo*. But their return was not a triumphant one. The PPR had no official connection to its predecessor. For Comintern, the KPP remained a renegade party. And yet the new authorities had no other political identity. This situation is aptly illustrated in a testimony by Roman Werfel, a member of the narrow government elite, from a key PPR plenum held shortly after the war:

I must tell you that his [Wiesław Gomułka's] speech at the June 1948 plenum was a tactical mistake on his part, and had he mentioned the "injustice" suffered by the KPP, we would have all gone with him and they would have destroyed us all. Just destroyed us. Luckily, he made no mention of it, but I still believe that, under the circumstances, it was impossible to oppose the Soviet party (Torańska, 1985, p. 85).

In an even greater historical irony, it was the KPP who were given the task of building a mono-ethnic Polish nation-state. Poland as we know it was founded on several waves of genocide and ethnic cleansing. Antisemitic collaboration wasn't the only offshoot of the Nazi Holocaust: the Second Polish Republic's eastern provinces (Volhynia, Podlachia, and the Vilnius region) were the sites of an ethnic civil war that bore the hallmarks of genocide. The communist partisans were the only Polish force to maintain a limited degree of ethnic inclusivity towards Ukrainians and Jews during the war (Nazarewicz, 2008, pp. 139–140), but the project of supra-ethnic politics was already dead. Ethnic pluralism would be replaced by "internationalist" segregationism, which involved adopting, in its full breadth, the nationalist principle defined by Ernest Gellner, which holds that "the political and the national unit should be congruent" (Gellner, 2009, p. 1); this was an exact reversal of the principle once promoted by Luxemburg. The postwar abandonment of "internationalism" may have been a symptom of political realism, but the internationalism itself did not constitute an abstract ideological principle. Under

the conditions of Central Europe, its abandonment meant rejecting the possibility of multi-ethnic coexistence, leading (and inevitably so) to the logic of ethnic cleansing. The new borders were drawn in a way allowing for them to be filled with nationally uniform content. Millions of Germans and hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians were resettled, while millions of ethnic Poles were repatriated, often at the cost of significant effort. The fact that – to put it Spinoza’s terms – by proceeding with these population movements the Polish communists did not realize their own desires cannot obscure the fact that they were in fact realizing the desires of everyone else. In postwar Poland, and outside its borders, there was no longer anyone who would reject the nationalist consensus. This ominous moment echoes an event which is universal and constitutive for modernity, but which has nevertheless been almost completely repressed in the collective memory with the use of the powerful specters of Nazism and communism, upon which the entire blame for the miseries of Eastern Europe is supposed to rest.

Unlike the Nazis’ death camps and the Bolsheviks’ gulags, ethnic cleansing was not invented by a totalitarian dictatorship and did not signify a breach of civilization. Ethnic cleansing is a product of the nation-state and hence one of the basic components of modern Europe (Ther, 2014, p. 1).

The strip of Europe stretching from Tallinn in the north to Thessaloniki in the south, from the Pińsk pogrom of 1918 to Srebrenica in 1995, is indelibly marked by the logic of ethnic cleansing. Modern Poland is a textbook product of that logic.

After 1944, Polish communists undertook the effort to carry on at least one strand of the internationalist tradition. As August Grabski writes:

People’s Poland was historically the first Polish state that removed from Polish Jews and Poles of Jewish ancestry the stigma of second-class citizens. All barriers were lifted for Jews to enter professions such as the civil service, teaching, and law, and all limits on university enrollment were abolished. Poles of Jewish ancestry participated in government to an extent unthinkable in the prewar Polish Republic or in the form of statehood that drew from it (the government-in-exile in London) (Grabski, 2008).

The PPR even published government-level Yiddish-language press, but it was all too little, too late, and too ineffective at that. Holocaust survivors were rarely able to reclaim their property, and often faced the threat of violence, including at the hands of the state apparatus.⁴ In their vast majority they left the country. The triumph of nationalism as a state-building doctrine was all the greater considering that it was carried out by heirs of nationalism’s historical foes. One could hardly hope for a better guarantee of a doctrine’s solidity. At the same time, shifting the blame to the communists makes it possible to sidestep certain uncomfortable questions. Even if mistakes were

4 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir discusses the extraordinarily peculiar biographical and ideological makeup of the UB (internal security agency) and MO (police) officer staff in Kielce at the time of the 1946 pogrom (Tokarska-Bakir, 2018, pp. 175–181).

indeed made, the grievances should be directed to the Comintern. But there are no grievances. The disaster of persecution and displacement is today depicted as a fortunate end.

Daszyński's Gesture

Published in 1971, Bohdan Cywiński's book *Rodowody niepokornych* [Indomitable Pedigrees] (Cywiński, 1971) played a fundamental role in reviving the nonconformist ethic and leftist involvement in the PRL's budding democratic opposition. The book is a study of the experiences, views, and motivations that guided the moral choices of late-nineteenth-century left radicals: Ludwik Krzywicki, Helena Radlińska, Edward Abramowski, Stanisław Brzozowski, Waław Kajetan Sieroszewski. The book reconstructs and attempts to reach the sources of meaning; it is a work in hermeneutical history. As Michał Siermiński observes (Siermiński, 2016, p. 69), Cywiński's choice of subjects follows the criteria of nonconformism and emancipation, but also reveals a shared patriotic theme. A prerequisite for the title of the "indomitable" is the moral-political prioritization of Polish independence, that is, acting for the cause of a Polish nation-state within the boundaries of a multi-national Second Polish Republic. Only such activists' dilemmas and quandaries could achieve the status of national concerns and shed light on alternative versions of the Polish national fate. Rosa Luxemburg, defender of the persecuted Polish schoolchildren in Września, and Julian Marchlewski, publisher of Stefan Żeromski's activist literature, naturally have no place in this constellation, and even less so Felix Dzerzhinsky. Their exclusion could be explained by the political context of the 1970s: Cywiński wanted to rule out anyone with perceived ties to the roots of the ruling dictatorship. This motivation is unlikely, however, since exposing the political pedigrees of the ruling party's protoplasts would in fact have been very inconvenient for the party officials. Yet something else was at stake. The concept relied on establishing an unqualified connection between the Polish intelligentsia's ethic of social involvement and patriotism, where patriotism is understood as prioritizing the national liberation. Effectively, Cywiński reprises the gesture that Daszyński directed against Luxemburg at the end of the previous century. The same gesture is unwittingly repeated to this day: Cywiński's criterion persists steadfastly in the choice of the historical patrons adopted by the contemporary Polish left. Chief among them is Jacek Kuroń, but other, much more temporarily distant figures can also be found in their ranks: Stanisław Brzozowski, Kazimierz Kelles-Kraus, Ignacy Daszyński, Edward Abramowski, and even Michał Kalecki. They do not include a single Polish internationalist. At the Berlin commemorations of the centennial of the death of Rosa Luxemburg, the world's most recognizable Polish leftist, the most prominent delegation from Poland was that of the Warsaw branch of the Germany-based Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (Ciszewski, 2019).

The central argument of this essay is the proposal of comprehensive integration of the so-called Stalinist period into the history of Poland, and, by extension, of allowing the Polish communists to assume their rightful place within that history. The very cursory narrative proposed above only deals with an isolated dimension. However, it also contains a suggestion that all narratives of this kind, whether they place Polish Stalinism in the particularistic diachrony of Polish history or in the synchrony of world history, would encounter similar paradoxes and difficulties. This is due to a number of assumptions and inclusions. Among them is the assumption that a good historical narrative should never have much direct political applicability and that its goal should not be to seek historical role models for the youth of today. One of the other challenges posed by Polish Stalinism is that whatever approach one takes to reckoning with it, it will inevitably be inconvenient to one of the key discourses around which our collective memory is organized. This is true of any dichotomous division that organizes the collective imagination. Incorporating Stalinism into Polish history would require blurring the boundaries between the internal and external, the progressive and the reactionary, the civic and the feudal, the sovereign and the subordinate, the modern and the archaic. As Michel Foucault put it:

Where the soul pretends unification or the self fabricates a coherent identity, the genealogist sets out to study the beginning – numberless beginnings, whose faint traces and hints of color are readily seen by a historical eye. The analysis of descent permits the dissociation of the self, its recognition and displacement as an empty synthesis, in liberating a profusion of lost events (Foucault, 1984, p. 81).

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Czerwony nacjonalizm? Przyczynek do genealogii polskiego stalinizmu

Abstrakt: Artykuł stanowi polemikę z wciąż jeszcze dominującym poglądem, jakoby ze względu na polityczną dominację Związku Radzieckiego nad ówczesną Polską polski stalinizm należało rozpatrywać w kategoriach „zewnątrzności” i „zerwania”. Stalinizm był szczególnie doniosłym i intensywnym okresem polskiej historii, okresem, który można zrozumieć jedynie w odniesieniu do przeszłości i teraźniejszości Polski, w kontekście jego początków i metahistorii. Dyskursywny gest przemilczenia rzeczywistego wpływu pewnych aktorów na historię przywodzi na myśl konflikt, jaki na przełomie XIX i XX wieku toczył się w obrębie ruchu socjalistycznego wokół roli etniczności w polityce. Te dawne spory miały jednak paradoksalny rezultat: realizacja projektu monoetnicznego polskiego państwa narodowego przypadła w udziale epigonom polskich rewolucjonistów-internacjonalistów.

Wyrażenia kluczowe: stalinizm; monoetniczność; internacjonalizm; historia Polski; komunizm; metahistoria; genealogia



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