

White and Red Forever: Nobility and the Socialist State in Poland

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This paper traces the relationship between the dispossessed Polish gentry and the socialist regime in the immediate post-war period (1947-52).¹ It does so through following three scenarios, each of which illustrates a different strategy employed by the gentry to position themselves in radically altered political and economic conditions. Ultimately these strategies led to their transformation into a category of intelligentsia.

The gentry and the State

The gentry in Poland shared some features with other European nobilities but were also in numerous ways distinct. Like all nobilities in Europe, they originated in the medieval practice of granting landholdings by the sovereign in exchange for political support and military assistance. Unlike them, however, they were able to establish a monopoly on land ownership. The sole right to own land – from which other social groups were barred until the mid-19th century – enabled them to secure control over the political and judicial system. The economic and political hegemony that the gentry enjoyed in Poland and the corresponding deep divide that has developed between them and the rest of population encouraged the invention of a myth of a separate origin. The myth served as a social charter that explained, justified, and legitimated gentry's dominant position. The gentry were supposed to be of a different 'race', genetically separate and superior. The origin myth took on messianic overtones. The gentry asserted that nobility was bestowed upon them by God and were bound by a sacred covenant to defend the frontiers of Christianity. The canon of equality among them was an essential element of that union, so absolute that the gentry—in distinction to other European nobilities—resisted all attempts to introduce titles and orders.

¹ The research for this paper was conducted in the years 1994-2000 with the help of the Fulbright Foundation. While no statistical data exist, the number of gentry who claim gentry origins is estimated at 100,000. I have conducted 48 extended interviews with members of nobility whose age ranged between 90 and 25. I have also examined written sources, such as memoirs, diaries, journals, whether still in a manuscript form or published (17 unpublished, 32 published). Memory-works are aided by the state and the communist party (PPR) archival materials located in Archiwum Akt Nowych in Warsaw.

What gave noble ideology much of its potency was the demographic weight of the gentry, the feature that distinguished them most from their western counterparts. It is assumed that they constituted about 10% of the total population and were thus far more numerous than nobilities in any other part of Europe.² Foremost, all *szlachta*, whether rich or poor, shared the explicit understanding that the gentry constituted a nation, that the state had to be subservient to the gentry because it existed in order to serve them, and finally, that Poland was what the gentry embodied. Given that an indigenous bourgeoisie was hardly present and the peasantry excluded, they did indeed constitute a nation of equals. In fact, the state was divided into two clearly defined classes: the gentry, who were the nation and had all the rights, and the peasants, who were the serfs and had no rights. ‘The nation was Polish, the peasants were peasants’ (Narkiewicz 1976: 9).

The Second World War was a watershed in the history of nobility and the Polish state. The war damage was horrendous and the destruction of property and its infrastructure massive. Seven-and-a-half million people and 38% of national assets perished.³ Reconstruction of the country's economy and unrest among the population made political events move slowly. The Soviet-backed government installed in 1944 lacked popular legitimacy. In an effort to secure the support of the majority of the population, that is peasants, it introduced a radical land reform even before the war ended. The land reform targeted the nobles; their landed estates were nationalized and subsequently divided among landless and poor

² Frost (1995) cites the newly revised figures for the late 18th century as 6-6.5% of a population of approximately 14 million before the First Partition in 1772, and 7-7.5% of approximately 10 million thereafter. At 4.4%, the number of nobles in Hungary comes closest to their counterparts in the Poland. In Western Europe, there were on average 1-2 nobles per 100 in the population at large (Tilly 1993).

³ Figures of Bureau of War Reparations (quoted in Zamoyski 1994). Compared to the 1.5% and 0.8% lost by France and Britain respectively, Poland had the highest rate per inhabitant in the world (Roszkowski 1994). Statistics pertaining to war casualties compiled by the communist government did not specify gentry as a separate social category. Gentry's losses were most likely submerged in the general figures or were perhaps classified under the category of “intelligentsia”. A study specifically concerned with the war losses among the gentry estimates that 4% of all gentry died during the war. Although numbers are difficult to verify, it is believed that in total 7.5 million inhabitants of Poland perished between 1939 and 1956 (20% of the population). By far the largest group to suffer were the Polish Jews, three million of whom died. The death count among peasants perpetrated by Germans alone is estimated at 21% of the total (Roszkowski, *ibid*; Inglot 1995:277).

peasants, or formed state agricultural farms.⁴ At this moment the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) was small and yet not powerful enough to take power. As the result of a compromise reached between the camp supported by the Soviets and the group associated with the leader of the government in exile, between 1945 and 1947 the country was governed by the Provisional Government of National Unity after which the communist-socialist alliance took over the power. The various governments were inconsistent with their approach to the gentry. Depending on the time period and the constellation of the parties forming the government, they were either tolerated (1944-1949) or repressed (1950-1956). Nonetheless the structural transformation of politics drove nobles to the margins of public life.

As we will see, their life trajectories were patterned by the simple principle that in a Poland of low literacy and of profoundly peasant culture, any group that had managed to get education found itself in a powerful position, and hence of use to the new regime.⁵ Literate and educated in what was then a largely illiterate country, they swiftly converted their skills into professions. Education set them apart as intellectual elite, just as before their incomes from landed property set them apart from those obliged to earn their living in wages. Bloodshed was a poor option in a society with a historically weak middle class that had already suffered a tremendous loss of its elite at the hands of the Nazi and the Soviet forces during the Second World War. Hence at no time did the regime attempt to eliminate the gentry physically in the manner of other revolutionary takeovers. Instead, they were accommodated, co-opted, or coerced into compliance and thereby found a new niche in the society. Contrary to aggressive revolutionary rhetoric, the dynamics and the reality of socialist transformation in Poland demanded incorporation and collaboration of the gentry in the process of gradual replacement of elites.⁶

⁴ The reform nationalized all privately owned land larger than 50 hectares, a total of 9,707 estates (three-and-a half million hectares), one-third of which was divided among mostly landless and poor peasants. (Rocznik Statystyczny 1949).

⁵ Literacy rates in Poland were low. In the interwar period, 38% of peasant population was completely illiterate and only 12% of peasant youth attended secondary education (Ingłot 1992).

⁶ The severely altered conditions of existence demanded a radical departure from the established norms and behaviors. Paradoxically, the most common endeavor was petty trade, an association with which they had historically avoided. In a radical deviation from their pre-war life style, also women began working. Although paid employment was certainly new, their first jobs capitalized on the skills and resources transplanted from the domestic economy. Teaching and tutoring as

Strategy #1 Laboring for the Fatherland

For one, the gentry possessed the highly desirable agricultural expertise and skills in estate management. Having suffered great losses among the educated classes, the country faced an acute shortage of qualified cadres.⁷ And so the gentry found a new way to convert their capital: they lost land, but possessed skills that the government needed to reconstruct and run the economy; in other words, they became indispensable to the regime.⁸ While some gentry joined the underground opposition or emigrated, most were willing to offer their skills and services to the new government and participate in the rebuilding of Poland. Although few entertained hopes for a truly democratic Poland, working for the good of the country was consistent with the gentry's patriotic ethos and hence hardly compromising.

Annexed to Poland as the result of the Yalta-Potsdam agreements, the western territories became collectively known as the 'Recovered Lands', a term coined in reference to the former territorial possessions of the medieval Piast dynasty.⁹ Devoid of German nationals, the vast areas stood empty in a dire need of people. The main task of the emerging administration was to settle the land and integrate it with the rest of the country. The institutions of the nation-state did not have yet uniform influence throughout Poland, and the degrees of efficacy of state policies themselves varied widely. The new areas were relatively isolated and the communist influence appeared rather sedated, at least in the beginning.

In 1946, the nationalized non-parceled lands came under the management of the State Agricultural Fund, henceforth the PNZ (Państwowe Nieruchomości

well as hospitality management (running pensions and boarding houses) and food processing appears quite often in women's narratives.

⁷ For example, the losses of Polish intelligentsia included 58% lawyers, 38% medical doctors, 28% of university staff (Roszkowski, 1994:157).

⁸ One such example is the nobles' sustained employment in the management of the horse breeding industry, a realm of a recognized gentry expertise, and a source of considerable profit and prestige for the state.

⁹ The Western Territories accounts for 1/3 territory of Poland. Most land was parceled but not all; 1.2 million hectares stayed in possession of the state giving the beginnings to the collective farm system. Most such estates were indeed created in the western territories: 3, 536 out of 4,802 in the whole of Poland in 1947 (Rocznik Statystyczny 1948:43). In 1950, the number of state collectives grew to 5,679 (8.9% of agricultural land) with the highest number reached in 1956. Of all countries of the eastern block, Poland had the lowest percentage of nationalized land.

Ziemskie). Witold Marengę was appointed its director.¹⁰ Marengę was a gentry who held a degree in agriculture from Gembloux (Belgium) and before the war served 20 years as the director of the Economic Office in the Chamber of Agriculture. Like him, many gentry possessed the highly desirable agricultural expertise and skills in estate management. The state inserted the gentry into the reform process by employing them in various managerial capacities, at least in the initial stages of the recovering agricultural and industrial economy. This had a patterned effect on the gentry. First, the Recovered Territories allowed them to closet their identities, and secondly, they facilitated the re-invention of the gentry as agricultural specialists in the service of the state collective farming system. Ironically, many became managers of state agricultural farms that were formed from expropriated gentry estates. Whether actually working on nationalized estates or not, many succeeded in staying close to the field of agriculture. The reasoning was simple; in the words of Antoni Arkuszewski: "all we knew was agriculture, nothing else. Since our privately owned estates ceased to exist, we went to work on state farms."¹¹ Or, as another gentry put it, "I couldn't anymore ride in a coach through my own fields; instead, I drove a car through all of Poland".¹²

Past nationalization of their property and eviction from their estates, the first years after the war were not particularly discriminatory against the gentry. The problems they suffered were mainly economic in nature, such as finding a means of livelihood. The country, which had to start anew, had plenty of vacant positions. Appointments to top positions were controlled by politics, not merits, but lower management posts were opened to and filled by educated people with some work experience. Those gentry who were capable of working rather easily found employment in agriculture and related fields, whether in industries, cooperatives, or in scientific institutions. Witold Marengę and his PNZ network was a safe haven for employment in the state farming system and a brokerage for other jobs, such as in the shipping industry. The coastal area of the Baltic, and most significantly the developing port center of the Gdańsk-Gdynia-Sopot triangle, became another population magnet, and members of the gentry were also among the newcomers.

¹⁰ AAN, zespoł akt KC PZPR; sygn. 295/XII, p.8

¹¹ Arkuszewski, Antoni; interview.

¹² Leopold, Antoni; interview

Here again, just like in the western territories, opportunities existed. Their skills were needed, and gentry origins were tolerated. No one inquired about social background, and if they were, the lack of a centralized bureaucratic record keeping system made any mis/information practically impossible to verify. Having no other ready-made models and no directives to act otherwise, institutions followed the old practices and rules established before the war. Primarily, they focused their efforts on re-building, re-opening, and simply beginning to function again. Although jobs in agriculture were easy to find, the best career opportunities in the long run existed in independent professions. A domain that converted easily into marketable skills was general cultural and literary knowledge. Editorial work, or work at editorial offices of publishing houses, scientific journals, or newspapers became a frequent field of employment. Translation, teaching languages, and academic tutoring were a set of activities that the gentry commonly relied on. For some, especially women, gainful employment provided liberation from the constraints of gentry habitus. One of them, who later became an accomplished academic, said on the condition of anonymity: “I joke that it was the sunshine Stalin who saved me. But please, do not repeat this in the (gentry) circles because they would crucify me”. Expertise in more obscure disciplines was particularly valuable. Perhaps because his family had owned a well-known resort in Rymanów-Zdrój, Ignacy Potocki had received training in balneology. After the war, he headed for Lower Silesia, an area rich in hot water springs, hoping to find a job in one of them. Through an accident of fortune, the Ministry of the Recovered Territories appointed him the chief supervisor of the Lower Silesian health resorts, 24 in all. He quickly made them operational, an accomplishment for which he received the Cross of Merit in 1948.¹³

Paradoxically, it was the landless gentry—who for economical or political reasons fell out of agriculture in an earlier historical period and was forced to find a source of income elsewhere, that had greater possibilities of success in the Peoples' Poland. For instance, the Żaryn family lost their landed property as the consequence of the 1863 uprising. Henceforth, they joined the urban intelligentsia. When Aleksandra Jankowska, a daughter of a landowning family married Żaryn, she married an architect, the son of an engineer. Since professional architects were rare and hence cherished, he had no trouble in finding work. Employed already in

¹³ Polityka, nr 17, 1973

February 1945 by the Bureau of the Reconstruction of the Capital, Żaryn was able to develop a distinguished career. He kept the job until his death in 1964. His wife, Aleksandra noted: "since the Żaryn family was not landed gentry at the time, we quickly transformed ourselves: I lost my own status as a landed gentry through marriage and moved over to the intelligentsia."¹⁴ The blurred distinction between 'landed gentry' and 'intelligentsia' facilitated the disappearance of the gentry from the communist taxonomic practices and, likewise, its prejudices. Re-classification into intelligentsia grew in importance after the gentry were forced out of employment in the national agricultural sector starting in 1950.

Strategy #2 The collaborative road

Most gentry were reluctant to take a political stand. Avoiding a direct alliance with the communist regime, they accepted appointments without making political commitments. But a few did join in, reasoning that the only possibility for survival would be to accept the new power structure; any other alternative would spell disaster for the country, a possible loss of autonomy and the incorporation of the Polish state into the Soviet Union.

Perhaps the most striking (and still intensely controversial) example of gentry's patriotic rhetoric is the position taken by the so-called "Red Duke", Krzysztof Radziwiłł. Krzysztof Radziwiłł shocked his family and scandalized the entire gentry community when in 1945 he became the Chief of Protocol at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. His collaboration with the government did then, as it still does, generate a view of him as an opportunist, a cynic, or an eccentric. His own position was one of a patriot who, after having realized the futility and injustice of the feudal system, decided to join the victors. As he states in his memoirs: "in order to exist as an independent state, Poland must ally itself with the victors. Hence it has to become red, otherwise it will not exist at all" (Radziwiłł 2000:60). The "Red Duke" saw his duties to be that of an intermediary between the new and the old Poland. Dealing with foreign correspondents and diplomats, he spoke of the historic continuity of the Polish Republic, whether it was the Gentry Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Interbellum, or the Peoples' Republic.

¹⁴ Aleksandra Żaryn; interview

The Radziwiłłs, an aristocratic family that for centuries commanded an immense power and fortune, captivated public imagination the way royal families do elsewhere in the world. They were, in fact, the makers of the state and the kings who ruled it. Well connected to other European noble houses, they also retained their enigmatic appeal after the war. Cultural capital accumulated throughout the centuries of advantage, prestige inherent in the name, the title, descent from personages of historical significance, endowed them with an agency which could not be denied even by the communist regime. Krzysztof Radziwiłł was immensely useful to the government not only in his capacity as a guide and interpreter to foreign dignitaries, but also as its emissary to the emigrant community in London. Capitalizing on his well-known name and his substantial network of personal acquaintances, he was sent to promote the new Poland and to convince expatriates to return to the country, which desperately needed educated people. As he remarked himself, "the call to come back to the Fatherland made by the expropriated aristocrat convinced many doubtful Poles to return to Peoples' Poland" (Radziwiłł 2000:60).

Radziwiłł was recalled from London in 1947 to serve as a candidate in the elections to the Parliament. He appeared on the list of the Democratic Party (SD) and was elected to represent the same district he had represented before the war as a senator, the very region his former property was located. Having an idiosyncratic penchant for self-irony, he remarked that since the beginning of times there was never a Senate without a Radziwiłł.¹⁵ An anecdote about the swearing in ceremony of the newly elected Parliament offers a humorous yet accurate depiction of his kaleidoscopic fortune. Stanisław Radkiewicz (a committed and influential communist in charge of the security apparatus), next to whom Radziwiłł stood waiting in alphabetical order to swear the oath, asked him bitterly: "And what is your contribution to Peoples' Poland?" "Ten thousand hectares prime quality land", answered the duke.

Aristocratic circles took it for 'vagary of a prince', a tolerated whim of an eccentric, perhaps odd and misguided, yet not unacceptable. Without a doubt, the "Red Duke" was a helpful intermediary with the new regime but it was not for instrumental reasons that he never ceased to be received by his peers. One simply

¹⁵ His daughter, Anna Radziwiłł, became the Deputy Minister of Education in 1989-91. Another Radziwiłł, Dominik, is currently the Deputy Minister of Finance.

cannot fall out of the aristocratic circle. Even the very ill reputed Ignacy Krasicki, who was at one time suspected of working for the Security Office, married into a respected family and carried on his aristocratic connections and lifestyle. As Krzysztof Radziwiłł remarked, "being always at the fore, the aristocracy is not capable of experiencing social promotion; this is very reassuring."¹⁶ Another words, aristocrats believed themselves to be beyond praise or judgment because they possessed an intrinsic power to define.

The increasing domination of the communist party left no illusions about parliamentary democracy. The "Red Duke" stayed at his post and continued to work for the system he did not believe in so as to prevent a worse evil. According to his daughter, Anna, he considered Marxism utter nonsense, but was convinced that might is right. Although he never joined the communist party, he agreed with the communists on one thing: land reform was a historical necessity, which was long overdue and when it finally came, it was just. His own progeny was as 'red' as he was. Barbara, the eldest of the 'red princesses', took to organizing village libraries and community centers immediately after parcelation.¹⁷

Recruitment to the Party from among the gentry ranks was, however, extremely rare.¹⁸ The drive was most successful among the lower social strata, ethnic minorities, village and small town communities, that is for people for whom a new avenue of social advancement suddenly opened up. Convinced that their rise in social rank was ultimately linked to the new system, and conversely, that the return of old elites would bring about their demise, they became the Party's most ardent supporters. The gentry — if they joined any organization at all — tended to support the few democratic parties that still existed, or the numerous Catholic sodalities, groups, and associations.

¹⁶ Anna Radziwiłł; interview

¹⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸ Wojciech Jaruzelski is perhaps an exception to the rule. Born in 1923 in a landed gentry family, he was educated in an elite school of the Marian priests in Warsaw. In 1939, his family escaped to Lithuania from where they were deported to Siberia. Jaruzelski attempted to join the Anders' army but failed and in 1943 enlisted in the Berling's Peoples' Army. After returning to Poland, he became member of the communist party in 1947.

Strategy #3 Shelters

An inextricable part of the gentry culture, and of Polish culture in general, was the Catholic church. Perfectly aware of its strength, the communist government approached the issue cautiously. Initially, Church lands were, for example, not subject to the land reform decree. In public, government representatives appeared at Catholic celebrations. Succumbing to the pressure exerted by the PPR, the Parliament approved the concluding words of President Bierut's oath to read 'so help me God' (Tymowski 1990:311). Reactivation of *Caritas Christiana*, a pre-war Catholic charitable organization, was accepted; it functioned in almost every parish (Zaryn 1996). So was the Catholic University in Lublin. However, a subtle maneuvering to drive a wedge between the various segments of the Catholic block went on behind the scenes.

Banking on its moral authority and age long experience of survival under hostile powers, the Catholic Church was preparing itself for an onslaught. But Catholics were neither sure nor united on the issue of how to respond to communism. Pragmatic considerations had to be weighed against ideological beliefs. Judging the chances of competing with the communist power structure skeptically, the circle of Catholic hierarchy and lay intelligentsia gathered around Cardinal Archbishop of Cracow, Duke Adam Sapieha and distanced itself from the political contest. Instead, it concentrated on keeping Christian values and Catholic culture alive. This minimalist program made it possible to publish a weekly newspaper that subsequently developed into the main hub of independent thought. In 1953, the newspaper was closed. When it opened again, it appeared under the auspices of the PAX Organization led by another gentry member, Bolesław Piasecki (Friszke 1994).

PAX—the organization of 'progressive Catholics', and its leader—became the means through which the communists tackled the church from within. The choice was clever: Piasecki was the charismatic leader of 'Falanga', the extreme right wing of the National-Radical Party (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny) before the war, and of the Confederation of the Nation, an ultra nationalist underground organization during the war. His fascist and anti-semitic reputation could be used to weaken the moral power of the Catholic Church. Arrested by the NKWD in 1944, he was released after a meeting with General Ivan Sierow, the chief Soviet executive in Poland, and shortly afterwards received permission to publish a weekly

newspaper 'Today & Tomorrow'. Advocating co-existence between the communists and the Catholics, he drew support and cooperation of some church officials and many Catholic intellectuals, at least initially. Historians are not in agreement about his motivations: on the one hand he is depicted as an ambitious politician who expected to be so instrumental in driving Catholics to a totalitarian system that he would force the communists to share power in return (Roszkowski, 1994). In other accounts, he is portrayed as a collaborator driven to complete capitulation (Friszke, 1994). Most historians agree, however, that PAX— which grew into a large organization with its own financial resource base¹⁹—provided protection and shelter to many people in danger of imprisonment, unemployment, or in need of an intellectual and social core in their lives. The gentry were among them; some became active members and employees of the organization while many more participated in the services that it provided. In 1949, PAX opened a high school (St. Augustine's school for boys in Warsaw) and a publishing house. It effectively shielded a substantial number of people from the watchful eye of the communist party. This was, in effect, just what the government intended: establishing PAX was a successful shot at preventive cooptation. It neutralized people who could have potentially joined political opposition.

PAX proved to be of real service to the gentry community but it was not alone in taking a pragmatic approach toward the new political reality. Once it became clear that Soviet domination was permanent rather than transitory, and the liberation by the Allies just an illusion, there were few options left. People, who were so severely bloodied, were not eager to take up an armed resistance. Most of them longed for the return of normality, stability, and predictability in everyday life. Life itself required engagement in constructive activity, regardless of a particular political order. To work for, rather than fight for the country permanently which after all did exist— became an ultimate patriotic duty.

¹⁹ The organization did not receive subsidies from the state but was granted a number of concessions: in 1945, licenses to operate a private bus line and a restaurant, and, in 1947, business firms. The more substantial economic base was built in 1950s with the opening of distribution centers and firms "Veritas" and "Inco". Their undisputable success is attributed to a tax waiver they had obtained.

The discourse of patriotism

Patriotism and impoverishment are the two dominant themes emerging in the gentry's life history narratives of the post-war years. They are distinct and yet related; patriotism is experienced through poverty and, conversely, poverty becomes a medium through which patriotism is demonstrated. The trope of patriotic sacrifice of property is not, however, developed as a response to land expropriation. Historically, the gentry paid with their property for acts of insubordination and insurgency against the occupying powers. Penalties exacted on the participants of the 1863 uprising by the Russian legislature included confiscation of estates, and forced many gentry permanently to abandon their rural lifestyle; after moving to towns, they merged with the urban intelligentsia and bourgeoisie. There is another side to the patriotism/property theme. It was through property laws that the occupying powers were able to manipulate, control, and ultimately limit peasant participation in the Uprising. The emancipation of peasants, together with a limited land reform proclaimed by the Tsar in 1864, drove a wedge between the predominantly gentry insurgents and their subjects. Not aided by peasant volunteers, the insurrection was crushed. It is clear then that the theme "we lost land and the peasants got theirs at our expense", which is repeated in the land reform discourse at the end of World War II, originated much earlier in a different era and yet in structurally similar circumstances when peasants were rewarded with land for supporting a political system that constrained the ambitions and the status of the gentry. Their factual loss of material resources and power gave rise to the notion of a patriotic sacrifice of property.

Patriotism was the one common organizational denominator in the depository of historical imagery with which all sides of the political spectrum could identify. The government appealed to patriotism and sense of patriotic duty as well. Since communism was perceived as a foreign implant in Poland, the concepts of nationalism and patriotism were instrumental to the regime to forge its own legitimization. Since dramatic discontinuities threatened the integrity of the state, potent symbolic means had to be used to legitimate both the changes and the power holders responsible for them (Kertzer 1988). In the years 1944-47, the new regime borrowed legitimacy from the old one by nurturing the old ritual forms, which it redirected to new purposes. The discourse of the nation was so firmly entrenched in

Polish culture and politics that it subverted the discourse of Marxism itself.²⁰ Not surprisingly the early post-war years observed proliferation in the use of the adjectives 'Polish', 'national', and 'patriotic', as well as in the frequent invocation of the Nation (with a capital N), as in 'by the will of the Nation', 'for the good of the Nation', 'on behalf of the Nation' in proclamations, speeches, and press releases. Officials of the new regime surrounded themselves with national symbols and figures. The flag, the emblem, the anthem, the heroes of resurrections and wars of independence were meant to demonstrate continuity of the sovereign Polish state. Poland was the only state in the Eastern block, which did not include communist elements in its official symbols. During its formative years, the communist regime used a variety of pre-existing ritual elements in order to lend legitimacy to its organizations as well as to create loyalties. It kept intact the entire calendar of commemorations and national holidays celebrated in the interbellum period. Gradually, it sought to build its own system of rituals and to undermine competing rites and with time the nationalist discourse was substituted by revolutionary rhetoric. But at least in the beginning, appealing to the national conscience was placed at the top of the communist program.

Discourses that configure the post-war history of Poland fall between two competing strategies of communist party rhetoric. On the one hand, the nation and patriotism were problematic as they were historically linked to and led by the gentry. On the other hand, considering international power relations in the aftermath of World War II, the future of Poland as an independent state was dependent on a successful manipulation of historical images that made the past appear continuous with the present. The density and yet vagueness of the concept of 'patriotism' allowed for diverse interpretations of what patriotic behavior should look like. Paraphrased as 'socialist patriotism', it could simultaneously serve as a mechanism of inclusion and of exclusion, capable of embracing all dutiful citizens, and yet guarding against any undesirable expression of it.

The gentry stayed largely apolitical, that is, they did not take a stand for or against any particular party or regime; rather, they stood firmly on the side of tradition, the Church, and Polishness. They also found a way to convert their capital: they lost land, but possessed skills that the new government needed to

²⁰ Katherine Verdery (1991) argued the same for Romania.

reconstruct the economy and to colonize the German areas and as such they were indispensable to the regime. Occupying key positions in the administration enabled them to help one another. Knowing how to preserve privilege, they also stayed cosmopolitan; those who emigrated facilitated the cosmopolitan outlook for those who stayed. The public erasure of the gentry in the early 1950's did not mean their elimination from the social discourse. To secure a potential credible enemy, the regime had to keep the idea of the gentry alive.

Postscriptum

After leaving political career, Krzysztof Radziwill became a translator of German literature. Witold Maringe and his PNZ associates were arrested in 1948 on charges of sabotage, and tried and sentenced in 1951 (Maringe for life, others for 10 to 15 years). After being released in 1956, Maringe became an employee of the Ministry of Agriculture. The campaign waged against the Church continued. It led to the signing of the Concordat between the Church and the government that established rules for their mutual coexistence; the Church was to retain autonomy in matters of religion, morality, and internal jurisdiction, while conceding other domains to the government. The 1950 decree nationalized Church owned property. PAX survived and continued as a shelter for the gentry.

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