

Memory, Politics and the “Populist” Moment

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Introduction

In 2015, Poland held legislative and executive elections. Both were won by the Law and Justice Party (PiS).¹ Its victories ended an almost decade-long reign of PiS's main adversary, the Civic Platform (PO),² and they obliterated from legislature the third major player, the Democratic Left Alliance³ - and they were surprising. They were surprising because they brought to power a party, which claimed that communism was *still* a clear and present danger in Poland.

Since the election, the PiS's maneuvers and policies, especially those relating to the media and the judiciary, have been characterized as populist and authoritarian: threatening democracy and the rule of law. They prompted demonstrations and protests from the concerned Poles, alarms from foreign commentators, and rebukes from the EU (Garton Ash 2016, Duval Smith 2015a, and 2015b, Rankin 2016).

In this paper I concentrate on PiS's electoral moves, and I take the party's charge of persisting communism seriously. I do this in an analytical, not a substantive, sense - that is, I do not give credence to the notion that communism rules Poland, but I track the political productivity of such a construction. In doing so I contribute to the understanding of the discursive mechanisms implicated in the contemporary iteration of the so-called populist moment.

Context and Argument in Brief

As I argued elsewhere, the main political parties in Poland do not differ greatly in terms of their programs: all dominant players are located on the right of the political spectrum when it comes to management of the economy; and they differ mildly in terms of civil rights (or the way they approach the Catholic Church), or their orientation toward EU (Korycki 2017, as well as PiS Program 2014, PO Program 2015, SLD Program 2011). As I proposed, the parties solve the problem of mildly differentiated *programmatic identities* by politicizing and weaponizing history. Rather than debating policies, they turn to the past, or more specifically to communism, and the various ways in which they narrate it as evil, and in doing so they fashion enduring *political identities* (Korycki 2017).

In more theoretical terms, I argued that political positions in Poland are given by the way the parties orient themselves temporally, and by the way they judge the past (Korycki 2017). *Temporal orientation* concerns the discursive outlook of the party: it may be past-, present- or future-oriented. In general terms, conservative parties invoke nostalgia for the past; single-issue parties, or brokerage parties, are concerned with the present; and radical, utopian parties are organized for the future (Judt and Snyder 2012, 91). In Poland all dominant parties use the past for political payoffs, but all do it differently. *Judgment* refers to the morally inflected language used when discussing the past and the present. In using the term, I rely on Mouffe's concept of a "moral register" in which political

¹ *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)*.

² *Platforma Obywatelska (PO)*.

³ *Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej (SLD)*.

identities are created not through debate of substantive issues, but through designation of moral worth (2005). In Poland, all main parties judge the 50 years of communism, but again, all do so differently. These differentiated deployments delimit the field of politics and they endow its participants with sticky political identities.

As I argue in this work, the constitution of the field of the political competition predicated on the turn to the past and on moral opprobrium is the particular achievement of Polish “mnemonic warrior” - the PiS (Kubik and Bernhard, 2014, Bernhard and Kubik, 2014). The party accomplished this turn in following steps: first, the PiS *ontologized* political difference. In PiS’ narration of the past, one does not simply hold communist convictions, which may be debated, modified, or rejected; one *is* a communist, as a matter of essence. Not only is communism a matter of essence, it is also an essence narrated as fundamentally hostile to Polishness. Second, the PiS claimed that communism and its followers were still ruling Poland. The political and economic systems may have changed in 1989, but the state had not been cleansed. On the contrary, it had been captured by the so-called post-communists and their dissident allies. Such presentation of the problem, gave the winning party access to powerful narrative of existential crisis, in which to cast political opponents as enemies of the nation and themselves as its saviour.⁴ I argue that it is the ontologizing move, or the transformation of political conversation from contestable positions to a fight of *kinds* of people, that constitutes the latest populist moment. The move consists in the appropriation of the language of grievance, developed in identity politics struggles, now harnessed to the protection of privilege.

In making this argument, I proceed as follows: to explain my conceptual framework I begin with PiS and its programs and I show how the party makes communism to be a persistent force in present day politics. I then move to the party’s foundational historical narrative and show how the party renders communism so dangerous and essentially hostile to Polishness. In the third section I turn to theory and using Polish example I specify the work of identitarian politics on the terms of democratic discourse and solidaristic imaginaries.

Memory-talk as Strategy of Politics

In this section I show how the winner of 2015 election defined and solved its electoral problem. I turn to PiS’s Program to show how the party challenged the purity of transition, how it argued the persistence of communism in political life, and how it named and personalized the guilty of such state of affairs. I supplement my analysis of the party platform with interviews of PiS’s politicians to show the pervasiveness of explanatory frames that I analyze in the Program.

⁴ The tropes of a captured state, or incomplete transition, and the resultant need to de-communize or to impose a 4th Republic have been with PiS since its beginning. All are predicated on repudiation (judgment) of communism and the contention that state needs extensive post-communist cleansing. For the exploration of the degree to which the party escalated and de-escalated the deployment of such calls, see Szczerbiak (2008 and 2013).

PiS's Program begins with seven pages of Values. It invokes human dignity, personal and communal freedom (2014, 7), equality (which remains a value even though the concept is marred by a connection with communism; 2014, 8), justice, which is reformulated as equality of opportunity in pursuit of material and other goods. This pursuit has to be tempered by respect of morality, the best arbiter of which is a "universal" (Catholic) Church (2014, 8). Community is a value. Its collective structure - the nation - is understood as "a community of culture, language, historical experience, political tradition, civilizational values, and experienced fate" (2014, 9). It is not understood ethnically (2014, 9), but national belonging, is inseparable from Christianity (2014, 9). The Polish community has two historical enemies - the Nazis and the communists. After the dual occupations of WWII, the communists are said to have violated all basic values and repressed the nation, which continued to resist. Much of that resistance related to the defense of Catholic values (2014, 10). State is also a value and needs to be protected (2014, 11). It is in urgent need of reform. This is the party's top priority (2014, 13-4).

The Values' section establishes PiS's programmatic identity, but it also begins to signal its preoccupation with communism. More specifically PiS' values become articulated in a subtle conversation with communism. Thus human dignity is listed both as the primary value, and as a value especially abused under "totalitarian" communism. Communism is listed next to Nazism as national historical foe, but only communism is elaborated as especially aggressive to national values. Finally the time of communist Poland (PRL) is placed in a list of foreign occupations and partitions.⁵ This way of presenting values *suggests* communism as categorically egregious to Polishness and foreign.

The program becomes more explicitly concerned with communism in its Diagnosis section. In 29 pages of text the framers propose that the Polish state is weak - unable to reproduce the nation - because it has not cleansed itself of communism. In not-so-subtle way the program denies the thoroughness of transition, and it names the culprits.

The program explains that after the fall of communism, in 1989, it was generally assumed that changes had to concern two institutions: the market and democracy. The state as such was not renewed. The program asserts that the judiciary, bureaucracy, military, security and police forces, as well as bank managers remain unchanged from communist times. They captured the material spoils of the transition, and they, as well as their social and familial circles, continue to occupy key state positions (2014, 15). This was most visible in the process of privatization of industry, most of which is said to have been taken over by the old communist apparatchiks (the SLD and their clients). Crucially, this new elite co-opted former dissidents who are now PiS' main adversaries - PO (2014, 16). Having secured political and economic power, thus joined elites also monopolized the media. The theft of the economic, political and symbolic resources is constitutive of the post-communist moment in Poland (2014, 16). Its second characteristic - which the authors refer to as post-coloniality - concerns identity. The new/old elites are loyal to "external forces", which is evident in their denigration of Polish values and unquestioned adoption of European ones (2014, 17). It is also visible in their results: the demographic crisis of the nation and its economic underperformance (2014, 13-4, 73 & 107).

⁵ *Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (PRL)*.

The Diagnosis section provides a key to understanding PiS's political strategy and identity. If one were to analytically isolate the beginning of this mutually constitutive process, it lies in the assumption that (a) communism is evil and categorically hostile to Polishness (I will trace and decode this assumption in the next section, but such an understanding was already foreshadowed in the Values' section); (b) transition from communism has not happened, or it has been incomplete, because the communists - the SLD - captured economic, political and cultural levers of power. They have (c) co-opted some of the former dissidents - the PO - who protect SLD and perpetuate the weak state. What unites the communists and their new allies, apart from the grasping monopoly of power, is their (d) vassalage to foreign, non-Polish powers.

In this way of narrating the current political predicament, communism, anti-Polishness and foreign servility emerge as a self-reinforcing attitudinal package, one that combines, and through this combination taints, both political adversaries of PiS. It matters little that the hostile elites are now liberal or neo-liberal, as the SLD and PO are; the association with communist past stains, while it is reconfirmed as anti-Polish because it is servile to others. It is the assumed evil and foreignness of communism that does the majority of discursive heavy lifting in this construction. Not the totality - the charges would be damning if SLD/PO were said to be servile to British liberalism - but they would not so saturating. As such, the authors of the program do not spell out the similarity and affinity between the SLD and the PO: SLD derives from the former communist party and is automatically evil; PO does not purge communists, and therefore becomes an indistinguishable ally of evil. Both are now understandably servile to the EU, just as SLD's predecessor was to the USSR before. Linking them suffices to create a single enemy, against whom there is only one saviour, the PiS.

In more general terms, these discursive maneuvers turn the political field to the past, or more specifically, by denying transition, they make the past present. And relying on the discursively established evil of communism, they personalize the guilty, and make them into enemies - not only of PiS, but of Poland. This is an effective strategy, which puts adversaries in defensive positions even though no substantive charges have been laid. The language of essential enmity locks the game in place. To use an analogy, PiS's turn to memory-talk, may be compared to that of a competitive player entering a cooperative game. If the players of the cooperative game do not adapt and turn competitive, they simply lose. PiS locks the game in the similar fashion by claiming that its opponents are not truly Polish.

This mode of presenting (and solving) the problem was confirmed in my interviews with PiS's political elites and their allies.⁶ Wiesław Johann, former Justice of the Constitutional Tribunal, claimed that "some people who presided over courts during Martial Law are still on the bench. The same is true for the prosecutorial staff". He explained the danger in that the new cadres learn from the old and adopt the old ways of

⁶ It is also visible in the writing of conservative historian and essayists. For a sample, see Nowak (2005 and 2012), as well as the volume edited by Sosnkowski (2015).

“keeping the government happy” (2014).⁷ This makes the then PO government *like* the communist one in two ways: it protects the old personnel, and it allows the new cadres to be shaped in the image of the old. They are to keep the government happy, rather than maintain judicial independence. PiS Deputy Krzysztof Szczerski made a similar point more directly: “There was no rupture in the continuity (...); there was no definitive rejection of the moral foundation of the old [regime]” (May 28/ 2013). Rafał Ziemkiewicz, prolific author and contributor to many conservative publications, said that there was no repair of communist legacies. “[There was] a return to the wheel-ruts, or tracks of the PRL.” He waxed poetic, calling it “materiality of memory.” The best example he gave was of the then ruling “mono-party” (24/01/2013). He was referring to PO as he was invoking the communists.

Antoni Macierewicz, Defense Minister in the current government, and the deputy chief of PiS in 2013 - when we talked - relied on all of the discursive moves I identify above. Just as under partitions and during communism, Poland - he felt - was divided. It was inhabited by two communities. One was numerically small but powerful; the other was a “mentally occupied society.” He said: “groups that implemented this got their claim to legitimacy in the 90s from belonging in opposition. From the fact that during communism, for a period of time, they were in opposition. Hence they spoke of opposition in positive terms - then. Now, their base is no longer oppositional, on the contrary, they are rooted in the structure of power, including administrative power, and in finance and economic situation. So now they have to legalize [protect] what they own, what they have. So if in the early 90s Jaruzelski competed with Michnik,⁸ in the second half of 90s he became a ‘man of honour’; and since the day before yesterday, he became a model Polish patriot.”⁹ He continued: “the past changes in the direction of approval of communism.” He explained: “If somebody sees the top of the Palace of Culture and Science daily,¹⁰ then Stalin appears approved. If not approved, then at least normalized. Especially as it is allowed in free Poland: since free Poland does not remove it, it must be okay. The greatest criminal retains his monument and the heroes of independence do not.”

Minister Macierewicz moved to discuss the past in general and communist evil in particular, unprompted. He considered the end of communism in Poland a fiction. He charged that this fiction was perpetrated and allowed by former dissidents, now evil’s accomplices who have captured the state. He wove a powerful narrative in which *again* - just as under communism - the minority occupied the majority, and the majority entered the catacombs to survive. On his telling, there was no transition, only a change of

⁷ Super Express, February 20, 2014. He repeated these concerns in our interview on July 9, 2013. I rely on Justice Johann as he has a significant media presence. He self-identifies as closely connected to the PiS.

⁸ In this narration, Adam Michnik, the chief editor of Electoral Gazette (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, GW) and General Wojciech Jaruzelski represent the post-Solidarity and post-communist sides in the immediate post-transition.

⁹ He refers to Kublik’s and Olejnik’s (2001) GW interview with Michnik and Kiszczak [former high ranking communist soldier and politician] in which Michnik called Kiszczak and General Jaruzelski “the men of honour.” See also Michnik’s (2013) article in which he calls general Jaruzelski a Polish patriot.

¹⁰ The Palace was Stalin’s gift to Warsaw.

occupier. His narration was made from the position of the only party that could deliver society from such a dual evil.

The examples above demonstrate PiS's attempts at using memory-talk to create a 'constitutive outside' among current power holders. The method at its most basic involves branding enemies as communists or their direct ideational descendants. This designation does not need explaining - it carries an automatic, transparent and deadly moral load. In the next section I explain how communism becomes so productive, in other words, I explain how it becomes so particularly evil.

Past as a Substance of Politics

In the previous section I showed how PiS presented itself to the electorate and how it polarized the field of democratic competition by assigning roles (identities) to itself and its adversaries. I also showed how it relied on anti-communism, or the assumption that communism was evil and still ruled Poland, to cast itself as the only party worthy of rule. In this section I explain PiS's assumption. I trace how the milieu of cultural entrepreneurs (Kubik 2003) surrounding the party, narrated communism and how, through this narration, it made communism essentially anti-Polish. This section explains why calling someone a communist has such offensive potency in Poland.

The process that I describe resembles the Foucault-traced creation of the criminal or a homosexual, in which actions or positions became signs of an ontological - and hostile or threatening - alterity (1990, 1994, 1995). Foucault explained that in pre-modernity, people who felt and acted on homosexual desire were seen to engage in deviant *acts*. He identified the moment and the process, in which they began to be seen as deviant *persons*. To be sure nothing changed in their behaviours, but the site of offending difference moved from action to being. In the context of present day Poland, ontologizing performs a similar feat in that it moves the site of political difference from positions to essences.

More specifically, I argue that PiS assumes that communism is evil, by making it equal to, or worse than Nazism. It then makes it foreign and imposed. Lastly it makes it coincidental with Jewishness. The three-step process ensures that communism emerges as inherently (existentially) anti-Polish.¹¹ The procedures employed by PiS's cultural entrepreneurs to accomplish this, involve creating a symmetry of suffering between Poles and Jews (Zawadzka 31/05/2013), and by balancing (Janicka, using a sports analogy, called this process checking - 27/05/2013) of one story with another, so that the latter relativizes and de-emphasizes the former. I trace each step below and emphasize the deployment of such discursive procedures.

To tease out this narrative I rely on a large and richly illustrated publication, called "It All Began in Poland" (2009). The publication was funded by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), the Ministry of Culture and Heritage, the European Centre of

¹¹ Tying communism to Jewishness establishes a biological and pure vision of true-Poles and biological vision of Polish enemies. For more on the ethnicization of ideological difference see Zubrzycki (2006a, 2006b, 2016).

Solidarity, and the National Centre of Culture - all state, or state funded, institutions. The book was distributed free of charge. It commemorated the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of WWII.¹² IPN - the main institutional force behind the publication - was *not* coterminous with PiS and it was not PiS's ideological outpost. For one, its director is selected through a parliamentary procedure involving all parties. But the organization has a broad past-oriented mandate, with scholarly, educational, prosecutorial and political-vetting arms, all of which are judgment-oriented. I treat IPN as a reflexive milieu weaving the historical narrative undergirding PiS's vision.¹³

The narration of communism began in 1939. On this account, the Polish nation lost independence through German invasion on September 1, followed by the 'knife in a back' offensive by the Soviets on September 17 (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 22). The author called what happened that September the loss of national independence, the occupation, the "fourth partition" (2009, 31-2). He called what happened in 1944 the beginning of a second occupation (2009, 59 and Żaryn 2009, 67). These characterizations historicized the War and subsequent PRL, by harking back to the 1772-1918 loss of statehood. The two events, or moments, became the newest iterations in a long chain of national victimization by foreign treachery and conquest.¹⁴ The placement of communists in the line-up of existential foes, a line-up that includes the Nazis, was a first step in making communists emerge as detrimental to Polish national existence.

The placement of WWII in the chain of *like* events de-exceptionalized the War. Contrary to all evidence of its uniqueness in world and Polish history, the seminal event now blended into the other occupation, so much so that the period of 1939-1945 and 1944-1956 became as if one. Indeed, they were presented as such. Zbigniew Gluza, a chief of Memory NGO, *Karta*, claimed: "the end of the war altered nothing: one occupation changed into another" (quoted in Zawadzka 2009, 222).¹⁵ Jan Żaryn, professor of history working in IPN, one of the authors of "It All Began in Poland" elaborated and specified "... the key period of the recent Polish history falls between 1939-1956. In that time two totalitarianisms destroyed our national elite. The collective murder, the genocide, created a space into which a new intellectually and morally homogenous generation entered. This generation was socialized to forget national history, to eschew its cultural and institutional continuity, and to reject God, Honour, and Fatherland... Instead it was brought up godless and adoring communism, as it was its principal beneficiary" (07/02/2013; also Żaryn 2009, 71 & 75).¹⁶ The quotes combined the periods, but as I

¹² It has been released in Polish and English. I rely on an English edition, the translator is unspecified.

¹³ For an exploration of the importance of the institutional mnemonic champion see Kubik and Bernhard (2014).

¹⁴ See Porter Szücs, on the 'us-them' and 'occupation-liberation' themes, (2014, 187-8).

¹⁵ Zbigniew Gluza is not part of the PiS intellectual circle. He would most likely self-identify as being close to PO. It is all the more important to have him in this line-up to direct the spotlight on attitudes/packages, rather than individual speakers. It demonstrates the contagion of categorically patriotic speech into the general parlance.

¹⁶ Note the similarities between this account and Deputy Macierewicz's above when he talked of two divided communities.

show next, the genocidal appetites were explicitly blamed on only one of the two foes - communism.¹⁷

The establishment of the hierarchy of moral guilt, which casts communism as worse than Nazism, emerged in the narration. Paweł Wieczorkiewicz, one of the authors of “It All Began in Poland,” then a professor of history at Warsaw University and a frequent contributor to media debates, who in 2005, on national television, proposed that Poland should have allied itself with Hitler against Stalin (quoted in Zawadzka 2009, 221), describes the two occupations as follows: he blamed the Nazis for loss of territory, germanization which often included mass deportations and expropriations, terror and executions, especially of the intelligentsia (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 63), as well as economic exploitation and the concentration camps (2009, 32-3). He did not describe the camps, except to say that Auschwitz was originally designed for Poles (2009, 33). At the end of the war the Germans became responsible for planning to exterminate Poles (2009, 43) and for actually destroying Polish cities (2009, 59). All in all, the Germans were presented as enemies, but also as a disciplined (civilized even) occupying army, even though they are reported as having killed over 5 million of Poles (this figure is said to include Jews - 2009, 63). Comparing the occupying armies, Wieczorkiewicz wrote: “the Red Army, in contrast to Wehrmacht, did not observe any rules and procedures” (2009, 24).

The Soviet forces were also blamed for territorial losses (2009, 32, 49, 62) - but these losses were seen as larger, more enduring, and involving historically Polish lands (2009, 49 & Żaryn 2009, 67) - mass deportations to gulags, terror and killings (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 35). We were told that the aim of Soviet policy was to so alter the occupied lands so that no return of Poles would be possible.¹⁸ Similarly to Żaryn, Wieczorkiewicz used the word genocide and biological extermination only when referring to the Soviets.¹⁹ thus, camps to which the Poles were sent in Russia were characterized as genocidal (2009, 35), and the Katyń massacre of the Polish officers was named a genocide (2009, 41), and Stalin was said to envision a biological solution for Poles when he refused to aid Polish forces in the Warsaw uprising (2009, 56). Wieczorkiewicz claimed that “in the final analysis the result of the campaign [defense of Poland in September 1939] was decided by the Soviet invasion” (2009, 25).

The German occupation did emerge as worse than the Soviet one, but only in reference to Jews. They were mentioned early in the narration, when they began being moved to the ghettos in 1939. The conditions within the ghettos were declared horrific and the cause of skyrocketing mortality rates (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 33). A fuller exploration of Jewish plight began with a reference to the General East Plan, which assumed germanization, and (unfulfilled) extermination of 80% of Poles (2009, 43). It then proceeded to the

¹⁷ Żaryn is also drawing present day continuity between SLD and PO.

¹⁸ This is undoubtedly the goal of germanization, which Wieczorkiewicz lists on the German side of the ledger. Here, on the communist side, to drive the point home, he makes this goal explicit.

¹⁹ He talked of German *plans* of exterminations and Soviet *acts* of extermination. His judgment was not altered by his own figures of over 5 million killed by Germans and over 1.25 million killed by Soviets (2009, 63).

description of Jedwabne, in which in 1941 all Jewish neighbours were murdered by the Poles.²⁰ The murder was said to have been provoked by a) a gruesome story of torture and murder of a pregnant woman and a priest perpetrated by the Soviets (the details were recounted), and b) a popular beliefs that Jews were communist-sympathizers (2009, 44). Third, the narrative moved to the actual extermination of the Jews in the death camps (2009, 45), accompanied by a short reflection that the Jews “accepted their fate with resignation” (2009, 45). The story then switched to the Poles, whose already weak bonds to the Jews were strained considerably by the draconian penalties for aiding them, but who offered help nonetheless. But there were also opportunists who prayed on Jewish victims - they were condemned by all Polish authority figures (except far right nationalists). Overall, we were told, Poland conducted itself better than most other occupied countries (2009, 46). The narration then moved to describe the “weak and ineffectual” 1943 Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and tallied Jewish losses (2009, 46 and 63).

I recount this narrative paying attention to its structure for two reasons - the narration signals (and buries for now) the connection between communism and Jewishness (in the Jedwabne reference); it is also representative of the ways in which Polish Jewish issues are narrated more generally: they are segregated from the collective story, and they proceed in an episodic and stepladder fashion. Every event seems to be coded as a one or a zero, and they have to balance themselves out. Thus, Poles were intended to be exterminated, Jews actually were: balance. Poles murdered Jews, but Jews liked Soviets who killed Poles: balance. Poles betrayed and robbed Jews, but all authorities condemned it: balance.²¹ The discursively established equilibrium hides the inequality of positions and fates.

Once the war with the Nazis ended, the communists consolidated power by skillful manipulation and ruthless pacification. They also fought, captured, and killed armed military units who continued to fight them into the 1950s. These units, the unquestioned heroes here, were referred to as Condemned Soldiers, condemned because killed and vilified in Soviet propaganda (Żaryn 2009, 67-81). It is here where the term totalitarian appeared and affixed to communism - the Party was said to have monopolized all political, economic and social institutions and subordinated them to Marxist atheist ideology (2009, 78). The party was said to have done so by manipulation and force. Żaryn explained: the “Soviet people” occupied all upper positions of security forces, while Poles were recruited as spies only (2009, 79, quotations in the original). There were 85,000 of those agents and collaborators and they kept files on close to 5 million Poles (2009, 79). By 1956 300,000 political victims passed through prisons and dungeons of the security forces, and close to 20,500 of them die (2009, 81).²² I recreate these details to impart the sense of richness of description of postwar terror, a richness that was not

²⁰ See Gross 2000, Machcewicz and Persak, 2002. Jedwabne is the small town in which the murder occurred.

²¹ For another example, see Wiczorkiewicz’s short note on Auschwitz, which was originally built for Poles (2009, 33).

²² For illuminating, cross time and space, comparisons, see Porter Szücs 2014. For a recent exploration of the so-called Jewish-Bolshevism see Śpiewak (2012) and for its critique see Zawadzka (2013). For more on the myth on Jewish-Bolshevism see Gross (2007), and Zawadzka (2009).

present in chapters relating to WWII.²³ I also want to bring attention to the Soviet people (a political category) contrasted with Poles (a national or ethnic category). This pairing of confused categories is a second instance, which foreshadows the process of making communism coincide with Jewishness.

The similarities between the foreign occupations - and the fact that they were occupations - was reinforced in the Polish nation's response to them: on the one hand, heroic, uninterrupted, widespread, organized, and armed struggle for independence lasting from 1939 to 1956 (Wieczorkiewicz 2009, 19-67, Żaryn 2009, 71-75);²⁴ on the other, uninterrupted, widespread organized and peaceful (violent only at the behest of the state) struggle for independence, which erupted in 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980 (Kamiński 2009, 97-129). The national struggles against the foreign occupiers were consistently and steadfastly supported by the Catholic Church - after the elimination of Cursed Soldiers - the only legitimate carrier of the national spirit and moral authority (Żaryn 2009, 82-5, Kamiński 2009, 97-127). The authors spent considerably more attention narrating the war, followed by the first 10 postwar years. This narration established communist rule as occupation, and an occupation by a foe worse than Nazis. Both characterizations pointed to the fact that the foe was foreign and regime imposed. Such casting removed the need for detailed narrating of the state of the economy, societal changes, responses, etc. On the authors' telling, the nation was the hero. The nation was attacked, the nation resisted, and the nation maintained its innocence and purity from hostile foreignness.

I now turn to how that hostile foreignness is established.

The difference between the two foreign regimes lies in Polish-Jewish relations. Here is Jan Żaryn:

“Meanwhile Polish Jewish relations deteriorated after the war: “the NKVD with the assistance of remaining Jews, is preparing a bloody orgy” - read the AK reports, and later the reports of national underground. In total, up to July 1946, about 250,000 Jews lived in Poland, either having previously concealed themselves in Polish families, or else having arrived from the USSR. Across Poland banditry was spreading; Jews were also among its victims. The tension was aggravated by the complex questions of ownership. At the same time, both the official Jewish organization (the Central Committee of Jews in Poland - “CKZP”) and a significant proportion of Jewish individuals either supported the communist authorities or else simply joined their ranks. Many worked in the UB (where about 40% of management posts were held by communists of Jewish descent) and also in censorship and propaganda, slandering the memory of the PPP, the AK, and deceitfully remaining silent about Soviet massacres (the Katyn massacre was officially ascribed to the Germans). This intensified anti-Semitic

²³ If the imbalance is owing to the assumption that Nazi terror is better known, then the different ways of describing make the regimes and the occupations equal. If the is assumption does not hold, then communism emerges as worse.

²⁴ 1956 marks the official end of Stalinism in Poland, coinciding with the installation of the new ruling fraction of the Party bent on pursuing “Polish Road to Socialism.”

attitudes which - with clear support of the UB - could have led to the uncontrolled impulses toward the pogroms. Such was the case, especially in Kielce. On 4 July, 1946, after rumours had spread through the town of a Polish child being kidnapped, riots occurred in which over 40 people died (2009, 81-2).²⁵

I reproduce this lengthy quote because it unwittingly²⁶ recycles many Polish anti-Semitic tropes and in so doing, ties Jewishness to communism, making both doubly foreign and odious.

First, the report claimed the authority to name a Jew. Until now, Jews were made into the collectivity by the Nazi Nuremberg laws, and they were narrated as packed in ghettos, described as passive, murdered. They here became named and counted by representatives of Polish titular majority, regardless of their self-identification. Second, the report established the authority to pronounce the truth: AK, or present-day historians, were authorized to speak, and what they claimed was presented as facts; Jews made into communists were not authorized, and what they claimed was propaganda and slander. Thus, Jews are named, or unmasked, and then they are reported to have survived by *passing* for Poles, by supporting and/or becoming communists, or by arriving as occupiers. They lose their voice - which is to say, their personhood - as they become coincidental with NKVD readying "bloody orgies."²⁷ Third, Katyń forest is mentioned and used in two ways: it invokes Polish suffering (see Janicka's checking, or Zawadzka's symmetry) and it reinforces the Jew as communist enemy myth: if Jews were communists, and they (self-) evidently were, and if the communists killed the officers, then Jews killed the officers.²⁸ Thus a description of the post-war pogrom in Kielce, perpetrated on Jews by Poles, becomes an opportunity to blame the Jews.²⁹

It bears repeating that the quote is taken from a publication released for the benefit of Poles and foreigners. Its exclusionary load is entirely invisible to the people who wrote

²⁵ People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs - Soviet secret political police (NKVD), Home Army - *Armia Krajowa* (AK), *Centralny Komitet Żydów w Polsce* (CKZP), Polish Underground State - *Polskie Państwo Podziemne* (PPP), Polish Security police - *Urząd Bezpieczeństwa* (UB). For more on the Kielce pogrom, see Gross (2007), Kersten (1992), Szaynok (1992). The event was significant enough to merit a mention on Judt's history of the postwar (2005, 43).

²⁶ I say 'unwittingly' as Poles do not think of themselves as anti-Semitic and, more importantly, do not want to appear that way. My point is that anti-Semitic myths are foundational to this narration, and yet they are not seen as such.

²⁷ For more on this see Gross 2007, 192-243; Kersten 1992, 83-4; Porter Szücs 2014. Kersten's account (in Polish) is explicitly attentive to the issue of self-identification.

²⁸ When I speak of the 'use of Katyń' I do not mean to diminish or denigrate the suffering inherent in that murder. On the contrary, I mean to identify how those very deaths are being instrumentalized now. And they are instrumentalized ubiquitously, always accompanied by unmasking of Jews and justifying their deaths. Here is Primate of Poland cardinal Glemp commenting on the forthcoming "Neighbours" by Jan Gross in 2001. Primate Glemp reassured the faithful that all that Gross wrote had been known before and that the publication was unnecessarily sensationalized. He then compared the situation that Gross described (the Jedwabne massacre) to that of Katyń: "everybody knew, but officially they could not speak." The placing of those two events next to each other - murder in Katyń (by Communists) and murder in Jedwabne (by Poles) - creates symmetry of suffering, and ever so slightly suggests that Jews were themselves to blame for their deaths (Pastoral Letter of 3/03/2001).

²⁹ For more see Zawadzka (2009, 212-23).

and edited it. My point in reproducing and decoding it is not to impute anti-Semitic views to particular authors, but to elucidate the process, by which elites discursively establish moral guilt and worth and how those judgments become hidden and presented as truth. This process is all the more visible, as it was unintended. This matters methodologically. If widely distributed publication presents the past in ways just described and it produces no reaction, then this absence of reaction suggests that we are observing a taken-for-granted script (or a Bourdeusian *doxa*).³⁰ Absence of surprise, or rejection, suggests that what the publication presents is seen as uncontroversial and as true. In this sense, the publication is not anecdotal or exceptional, but emblematic of political formation that produces it.

The most salient point of the narration is to make communism *essentially* anti-Polish. This source of evilness - the existential enmity to the Polish nation - is the party's foundational belief and a source of its enduring political identity. PiS cultural entrepreneurs establish their foundational belief as truth, by narrating the past so that communism appears equal, and indeed worse, than Nazism. They then make it coincidental with Jewishness, rendering it doubly foreign and hostile. The party then launches this moral weapon against present day political adversaries, who, on this telling, become unworthy of being members of national community, not to mention worthy of rule.

“Populist” Moment

Until now, I demonstrated how PiS's turned itself and the field of politics to the past and to judgment. I showed that its moves involved the denial of transition and the personalization (I called this process ontologizing) of communist affiliation. The moves ensured that electoral contest became a crisis in which political adversaries emerged as enemies, not only of PiS, but also of the nation. In this concluding section I want to use the insights gleaned in the latest Polish election to theorize the constitutive features of the populist moment writ large. Although nostalgic longing for bucolic greatness seems to be present in all populist narratives, the moves need not relate to the past as thoroughly as they do in Poland. Because the moment, in this iteration, presents unique features, my remarks will be necessarily tentative.

The procedure of ontologizing turns democratic competition into the field of identitarian politics as it narrows the conception and the shape of the nation. As I explained above, in the post-communist setting it worked by inventing enemies in the past, and making them not simply different politically, but different categorically. Those past-derived and essentially hostile enemies were then unleashed on the present, in that communism was declared not to be over. The enemies from the past were, in other words, given a new life, in the now. This resurrection was used to create a sense of crisis, and an existential crisis at that. The crisis mobilized and gave voice to the disaffected party-base, as it rendered the opposition parties morally repugnant enemy-collaborators.

³⁰ For more on doxa see Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992).

It seems that the same ontologizing move is performed in other settings. It too involves an invention of local threats, or enemies, who are rendered in the language of kinds of people. Minorities and immigrants are perhaps the oldest and most versatile tropes:³¹ they can be narrated as damaging to the livelihood of the so-called locals, or they can be said to dilute the wholesomeness of local cultures; always, they are rendered the ones who prevent the return of the lost folk nirvana, or greatness, or purity. In the context of the US, and to some extent the West as a whole, the discursive trope of a terrorist, especially when combined with the qualifier Islamic, seems to be as capacious and potent as the communist-Jew is in Poland. Both create and externalize a minority in one move, and both locate the source of evil in the essence of a person.³² They too may be used to create a sense of crisis - both strategic and substantive.

Strategically, ontologizing shifts the field of political competition into identitarian politics in which political opponents become existential enemies. This is done by rendering the present day adversaries coincidental with whoever is made into an enemy, or an ally, or protector, of the enemy (for the most telling recent examples, see President Trump tweets about judges putting the nation in danger by placing a stay on his Muslim Ban, Yuhas 2017; or his use of the phrase “Enemy of the People” when referring to the press or other opponents, Higgins, 2017. The most potent invention concerns the existence of the so-called “deep state,” that is bureaucracy beholden to expansionary state agenda). The paradoxical construction, which sees essential identity be invented, is key here. It reflects a notion that even though identities are a matter of social and political labour (Bourdieu 2001, 2011; Jung 2000, 2009, 2014; Marx 1998), they only do the political work they do when they appear natural and fixed (Bhaba 1994, Bourdieu 2001, 2011). Ontologizing, in other words, ensures that to oppose anti-immigrant or anti-minorities measures makes one existentially inimical to the polity. It makes one into a political enemy as well.

It is precisely this move that shifts political language to what Mouffe called a “moral register.” In such a register politics no longer consists in a debate over substantive issues, but it concerns a debate of moral worth between kinds (2005). Mouffe explains that in such a space, politics “still consists in a we/they discrimination, but the we/they... is now established in moral terms. In place of a struggle of ‘right and left’ we are faced with a struggle between ‘right and wrong’” (2005, 5).³³ What matters here is that such

³¹ I call immigrants tropes, because this is the invention I study. Not for a moment do I lose sight of the stakes of this game in which some lives are rendered less valid than others.

³² Muslims are, of course, not a threat to America. People who employ terrorist tactics are a threat to American and other people - wherever they come from and whatever god they follow. Some are of course Christian and homegrown. For an exploration of the conflation of terrorist and Muslim, in which violent attacker is assumed a terrorist when he is Muslim, and not so, when he is white, see Butler 2015, and Greenwald 2013. For an exploration of themes of “restoration” and “battle” and the use of religion in right-wing populist belonging, see Marzouki, McDonnell and Roy, 2016.

³³ I agree with Mouffe that contemporary politics implicates a moral register to an ever-increasing degree. I disagree with her causal direction. She claims that moral register became activated in neoliberal victory over the left. I place the causal factor elsewhere - I see it in the latest iteration of politics of recognition, to use Nancy Fraser’s term (1997). This latest iteration, which I tracked in Poland, involves the appropriation, or the usurpation, of the language of identity and grievance and harnessing both to the protection of privileged majorities. On this telling, it is the Catholic Poles who are the victims, or white men who are left

assignment of roles and such manufactured crisis focus attention and mobilize the electoral (or support) base for a moral and existential encounter.³⁴

Substantively, ontologizing elevates the nation - under threat of the now invented and externalized enemies - into a penultimate, indeed the only relevant, category of groupness. But, and this is crucial, it also narrows its scope and organizes it in a hierarchical relationship to others. The invented threatening enemies - whether they are marked by birth in a wrong place, belief in a wrong religion, or by wrong skin colour - are rendered external and/or not worthy of equal consideration and rights. The narrowing and vertical ordering moves seem to represent a departure from the existing practice that discriminates based on citizenship (Brubaker 2015) but does not elevate that discrimination into a normative ideal. In other words, the recent moves seem to deny that we ought to take care of our own (whatever the boundary of 'us' is), but that we do not claim that our own are owed more, based on some superior worth. On the contrary, it seems that 'our' superiority increases in proportion to the hallowing out of our communal care. Thus, the moralized language of essential enemies changes the conception toward stratified and narrow nations.

Furthermore, ontologizing and the elevation of narrow nationhood have their own strategic effect. Ontologizing appropriates the languages of identity politics and grievance, and it harnesses it to the protection of privilege. In so doing, it mobilizes (as it distracts) those who perceive and bemoan a loss of status (Woodley 2016). To be sure, people who lose jobs due to shifts of global capitalism, are victims... of global capitalism. Ontologizing allows for the shift of the blame away from the culprits and focuses it on those who were its victims all along. Describing the process in present day America, Jelani Cobb says, "Few figures in American history have better weaponized the imaginary grievances of entitled people who consider themselves oppressed than Trump has." (2017).³⁵ I consider the usurpation of the language of identity to the camp of the privilege one of the defining features of the populist moment, and a direct result of

behind, and not the excluded and/or racially-marked poor. The process is not divorced from neo-liberal assault, which is explored, although in different terms in Jung 2014, but the causal story is more complicated than simple death of the left.

³⁴ This move does not belong to the populists only. It is matched by their opponents as well. The opposition to Donald Trump often paints him as dangerous, inept, or lying - he may do or be all of those things, but to assume stupidity because somebody acts in ways that do not conform with current norm, may blind us to the actual game being played and actual goals being accomplished. One of these goals may concern this exact shift in language, away from analysis, and toward judgment. For preliminary but fruitful analysis of populists' camp discursive productivity, see Christensen 2017, Cobb 2017, Gopnik 2017 Nagle 2017.

³⁵ The issue of the disaffected requires further unpacking - in Poland it may have easily mobilized those who have not benefited from the transition and the subsequent retrenchment of the state (those derisively called the "frustrates"). It also mobilized those who were supposedly loosing ground to "political correctness" or feminism or any other challenge to the superiority of religiously and ethnically inflected nationhood. In this setting, the first group represents real material disaffection; the second represents privilege cloaking itself in victimhood (for more on how this works, see Ahmed, 2015). The situation may indeed be less complicated in the US: white people who lost their jobs have a right to complain about those losses. But their sense of entitlement to jobs comes from a space that in US has been racially coded for a very long time. That is to say, the absence of meaningful jobs, along with other plights, has long been a feature of black life in America. This does not make the loss of white jobs any less real, but it makes it less universal, or all-of-a-sudden significant.

ontologizing.

The constitutive elements of ontologizing - invoking a bucolic past, creating essential enemies who prevent the return of that past, and manufacturing a sense of existential crisis that mobilizes the privileged - are rendered eloquently and accurately in an imaginary cartoon depicting Melania Trump delivering her presidential campaign address: "A beautiful cyborg with deathless eyes addresses a crowd of scared white people crammed into a windowless echo chamber lined with misremembered Norman Rockwell paintings and bogus crime statistics sourced from white supremacists. The crowd isn't afraid of the cyborg, even though she speaks with an intimidating accent that turns "fairness" into "fearness." (Which, incidentally, is the perfect phonetic summation of today's Republican party). Instead, the crowd is afraid of everyone and everything lurking outside their echo chamber (represented in this cartoon by Chinese people wearing sombreros and shouting "We love Sharia law!" while cashing welfare checks and shooting police officers" (Reiss 2016 np).

Ontologizing affects democracy and narrows the vision of common belonging. The two effects are interconnected, mutually constitutive even, although they are also analytically distinct. The invention of enemies and locating the source of their offending difference in essence closes the conception of the nation. It creates a majority and it grants it power over a thus named- and constructed - minority. This narrows the vision of belonging and shifts it towards horizontality. This process is of course not new. It harkens to the republic-old race rhetoric in the US (Kendzior 2017, Long 2016), or to the race-inflected nationalism of mid last century Europe (and Poland). What is perhaps new, is the extension of the identitarian language into politics proper, so much so that the contemporary protectors of the excluded and threatened become coterminous with the enemies themselves and they become accomplices in placing the nation in danger.

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