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Contrasts and Grayness: Looking at the First Decade of Postwar Poland

The protagonist of Andrzej Wajda’s film *Man of Marble* (Człowiek z marmuru 1976), the young reporter Agnieszka, finds a socialist-realist sculpture of the 1950s Stakhanovite worker Mateusz Birkut in a museum storeroom. Intrigued, she attempts to discover the fate of the hero of those times, which were to her already exotic and difficult to understand.

This image is significant. In the 1970s, a large number of young people simply had no idea of the realities of Stalinist Poland, which was already so distant and blurred by the stereotyped and propaganda-filled texts in school books. Knowledge of Stalinism as a repressive system remained in the memories of older generations but could not be expressed in public. At the same time, everyday life had markedly changed, thus rendering the immediate postwar decade unreal. It was a period defined not only by repression, but also by poverty, ruins, and of course the oft-described enthusiasm for rebuilding. After 1989, political strictures disappeared, and memoirs and histories were freely published, bringing Mateusz Birkut’s era into focus. Agnieszka and Birkut found themselves now in the same, closed world of the PRL (People’s Republic of Poland).¹

Some historians view the communist period as a homogenous entity and emphasize that the main characteristics lasted from the outset until the «springtime of the nations» in 1989, and that any changes were quantitative rather than qualitative. «Is it necessary to speak of one PRL, or were there in fact several?» – this is one of the major questions in discussions of the past.² The proponents of the theory of «several

¹ In the Land of the People’s Republic of Poland (W krainie PRL-u) is the title of a series that publishes works concerning Polish history before 1989. The name People’s Republic of Poland (Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa [PRL]) was given to the Polish state in 1952 under the new Polish constitution that had been corrected in Moscow by Stalin. The name «the Polish Republic» (Rzeczpospolita Polska [RP]) returned in 1989. The abbreviation PRL, however, is used to mean the entire period of postwar Polish history, from 1944/45 to the fall of communism. Although PRL is generally used in a pejorative context, it will be used in this text to refer to the period after 1945.

² See Piotr Wandycz’s introduction to the book *Spór o PRL* [The Dispute about the PRL] (Cracow, 1996), 11, which is a collection of responses of Polish intellectuals that had appeared in the pages of Cracow’s *Tygodnik Powszechny*. 
PRL’s» point to the importance of the years 1956, 1970 and 1980/81, which marked important political transformations as a result of violent societal conflicts, and produced changes in perception both in society and among the government officials.

The «dispute about the PRL» has lasted since 1989 and is not only an intellectual discussion about the past, but also a battle between new and old historiographies as well as a political controversy. The majority of disputants agrees that postwar Poland was not independent of the Soviet Union; however, the conclusions drawn from this statement are quite varied, from those who justify the actions of PRL governments limited by geopolitical demands to those who brand such actions as treasonous and not reconcilable with national interests. Were the leaders alienated from society, or did they fulfill the needs of a considerable segment thereof? Another problem relates to the level of this lack of independence: in the given structure of power, would it have been possible to attain a greater possibility of movement? Some observers heavily criticize the legacy of the postwar governments (moral damage, political and economic underdevelopment), while others make a more positive evaluation (overcoming interwar poverty, rebuilding from the ruins, industrial development). This rich discussion covers a wide spectrum and many styles of argumentation, and is much more complex than the standpoints sketched out here. It also has a journalistic character, and is often negligent with respect to hard facts, but this discussion has helped to create the atmosphere in which contemporary historians now work.

The text below refers to the historiography that has appeared after 1989 and deals with the first period of the existence of People’s Poland, which can be called the «first decade» (1944/45–1955, excepting the singular year of 1956). This decade also lends itself to periodization. The official historiography of the PRL assigned the period of the «civil war» (also known as the «fight against the armed underground») from 1944/45–47, followed by the «rebuilding» and «the building of the basis of socialism» from the years 1947 to 1955. The latter being periodized in reference to the economic plans: A Three-year Plan (1947–1949) and a Six-year Plan (1950–1955). Just before 1989, the official historiography began to emphasize the meaning of the caesura of 1948, which was meant to divide the positively assessed period of the leadership of Władysław Gomułka from the years of «mistakes and distortions» linked to Bolesław Bierut. In this move, the desire for a historical tradition by the regime of General

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3 Note the series of polemic articles that started with those published in the weekly Polityka in 1990 («Bilans Czterdziestolecia» [Balance of the 40-year period]) as well as those in Tygodnik Powszechny, Nova Respublika, and many others.


5 The significance of the year 1956 in the history of the Polish People’s Republic has been constantly emphasized by the historians although the scope of changes had given rise to controversies, cf. P. Machcewicz, «Zmiana czy kontynuacja? Polska przed i po październiku 1956», in PRL. Tuwienie i zmiana, eds. D. Stola and M. Zaremba, (Warsaw, 2003), 119–158.

6 See C. Kozłowski, Rok 1948 (Warsaw, 1988).
Jaruzelski became more pronounced, in that the first years of People’s Poland lent themselves to an effective contrast with the succeeding decade. It was however difficult to push into the shadows both the 1944–1946 terror, which accompanied the new government, and the destruction of the legal opposition through to the falsified 1947 elections. The independent, pre-1989 historiography had considerable success with the analysis of this period, to mention the name of Krystyna Kersten in this place.

Currently, the caesura year of 1948 is used largely to indicate the start of the most severe phase of communist rule. The years 1945–1947/48 are generally labeled a «transitional period», while «Stalinism» (or «the period of Stalinist terror») refers to the years 1949–1954/55, from the formation of the Polish United Workers Party (PZPR) to signs of the thaw like Adam Ważyk’s Poem for Adults. Economic transformations lost emphasis, while totalitarian aspects of the system were brought into greater relief, as they are especially visible from 1949 to 1955. This does not mean, however, that opinions became standardized or that scholars have lapsed into silence by viewing «Stalinism» as a black mark on an otherwise positively evaluated output of People’s Poland.

In Poland, while the year 1989 can be described as a turning-point, it is difficult to deny continuity. Institutions that were occupied with historical research did not experience a personnel turnover similar to that seen in the former East Germany, but were able in the early years to defend their autonomy and create valuable works. The Historical Institute of the Polish Academy of Sciences, founded in 1953 to supervise the development of a «socialist» historiography and under the direction of Tadeusz Manteuffel, resisted producing only works that were politically desirable. The journals Kwartalnik Historyczny and Acta Poloniae Historica, published by the Historical Institute, concentrated on distant eras (typical for those historians who «fled into the past»). On the other hand, the editors of the journal Dzieje Najnowsze, published since 1969, generally did not print works covering the post-war period, since they desired to avoid political constraints. For similar reasons, a series of works relating to the modern period stopped at 1918. Of course institutes that created an ideological historiography did exist, such as the Institute of the History of the Party or the Higher School of Social Sciences, linked to the Central Committee of the PZPR. These last were liquidated after 1989. Tomasz Schramm summarizes as follows: «People’s Poland presented a dual face: on one hand a serious and unimpeachable historiography aware of its limits, and on the other a «historical science» marked by propaganda.»

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7 Poemat dla dorosłych. This poem described in negative language the transformations of the early 1950s, which were linked to migration and swift industrialization, and especially the pathologies of the working youths. The publication of this work in a Nowa Kultura weekly in August 1955 became a symbol for serious political transformations.


9 Ibid., 30–35.

10 Ibid., 36–37.
These limits related primarily to contemporary history, and thus from this perspective the caesura of 1989 takes on a particular meaning. The freedom of speech, followed by open access to the archives constituted fundamental changes. However one cannot forget about researchers capable of presenting independent brave visions of the post-war Poland history in the seventies and eighties. Jakub Karpiński, the author of an analysis of the social and political crisis in PRL, was one of the researchers who was not prevented from reeling off his considerations by lack of access to the archival records.\(^\text{11}\) Wojciech Roszkowski discussed the contemporary history of Poland.\(^\text{12}\) Works on Stalinism appeared in several underground journals like Krytyka.\(^\text{13}\) On the other hand, the closer 1989 approached, the more official historiography gained in flexibility and ability to write more boldly about Stalinism. Both official and underground currents influenced historical research leading into the era of democratic Poland, thereby giving historians completely new possibilities.

The possibilities of freedom of speech, access to archives, and new sources of funding bore fruit already in the early 1990s, as bookstore shelves filled with publications dealing with contemporary history. One should not be surprised that only a few of these can be considered legitimate works of history. Hundreds of works, both less and more journalistic, largely dealing with personal recollections, memoirs and document collections, helped to form not only the opinions of consumers but also of the atmosphere that influenced professional historians. Linked to the transformation and political needs were the desires to «come to terms» with the past, «reveal» unknown facts, and fill in the «blank spots», and these were apparent in historical works as well. These trends had considerable influence on methods of revealing the past, as the dominant currents were histories of events and histories of political facts.\(^\text{14}\) Opposed to such trends were historians who desired to hold on to previous visions of the past and protect the achievements of People’s Poland, its historiography – or indeed their own. Strange hybrids also appeared, which were the product of hasty adaptation of prior texts to new conditions.

It is possible to compare the discussions about the PRL to the nineteenth-century evaluations of the reasons for the fall of the Polish state in the eighteenth century, as well as to the polemics surrounding the topic of the so-called Congress Kingdom of 1815–1830. Were the partitions primarily a result of the weakness of

\(^{11}\) Works on the events of October 1956 (Porcja wolności, 1979), March 1968 (Krótkie spięcie, 1977), December 1970 and June 1976 (Płonie komitet, 1982), which were published many times both outside and inside («underground») the country.

\(^{12}\) Najnowsza historia Polski 1918–1986. This work appeared under the pseudonym Andrzej Albert in the «underground» in 1982 and in several foreign and Polish editions.

\(^{13}\) From 1978–1982, Krytyka published articles by Maria Turlejska that described those people, especially Home Army soldiers, condemned to death in the years 1944 to 1946 by military tribunals. These texts were published as Te pokolenia żałobami czarne... Skazani na śmierć i ich sędziewie (Warsaw, 1986) in «underground» and then in London in 1989 and Warsaw in 1990.

the Nobles’ Republic, based on anachronistic structures, or the fall of a noble nation that fell prey to aggressive countries and ruthless neighbors? Was it necessary to protect the relative freedom provided by a Congress Kingdom subordinate to Russia, or was it necessary to fight for an imponderable (the November Uprising), which resulted in revenge and worsened the fate of the Poles in the Russian Partition? All of these questions are connected to a national self-evaluation (who is responsible for the failures of the past: incompetent fellow countrymen or foreign enemies?) as well as to the question of higher values (relative peace and prosperity or national honor?).

Raised in various ways and on various occasions, these problems have pervaded Polish public discourse throughout the last two centuries. Similar dilemmas echo in the discussions of contemporary history. Was People’s Poland a form of oppression, forced upon the nation by a foreign power (some researchers speak of an «occupation» which lasted until 1990), or also an entity that arose from international conditions, though also containing native content? Is it necessary to value that which was attained in the PRL, or instead reject its entirety as something shameful? Both the nineteenth- and twentieth-century discussions grapple with similar dilemmas defined by binary opposites: slavery-freedom, collaboration-independence, submission-honor. They make much more difficult an analysis of intermediate states, half-tones, and grayness.

1. The History of Victims

Stalinism continues to be a living history. Some of the first who desired to talk about this period after 1989 were those who remembered, and even suffered. Newly-forming associations of combatants and those repressed began to agitate for the commemoration of crimes and wrongs not only in the form of memorial plaques and monuments, but also through the publication of memoirs, biographical writings, articles and prison writings. A significant portion of these texts touched on the fate of Poles imprisoned or murdered on the territory of the Soviet Union, while the problems of commemoration, compensation and access to archives became a theme in Polish diplomatic relations with the post-Soviet countries.

The rest of these texts concerned evidence about crimes not committed in the USSR but rather in the PRL in the name of the Polish state. These issues proved to be quite thorny, since it was obviously difficult to blame «others» who tormented the country, since both victims and perpetrators in the 1990s lived in the same country and often in the same place. (The lack of punishment of the latter often left a bitter taste in the mouths of those formerly imprisoned.) As an example, the regional branch of the Union of Political Prisoners of the Stalinist Period publis-
hed from 1993 to 2000 a three-part work entitled *The Victims of the Stalinist Terror Speak*, including the memoirs of those persecuted, and a *Prison Biography* with notes about them, as well as a chapter «Who Judged Us» with the names of judges and legal authorities of Stalinist courtrooms.\(^{16}\) The detailed, painful descriptions of the proceedings and prison conditions in this literature make it quite significant. «Evidence» and «commemoration» are the goals to which these authors have devoted their efforts, and are often accompanied by personal and emotional ties to this history, which so branded their lives not only during the Stalinist period, but also through the following decades of enforced silence.

Repression in the PRL was one of the «blank spots» of the historiography and thus it is not surprising that researchers have applied themselves to this area with both particular interest and even missionary zeal. At the same time, the administration of justice got underway, and in the 1990s a number of investigations and trials of security and judicial personnel from half a century ago began. State institutions like the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation and since 2000 the Institute of National Memory (IPN)\(^{17}\) have conducted investigations. IPN has been committed to education and research beside its investigating activity. The volume of the research carried out by IPN as well as the number of publications have contributed to the impact IPN has exerted upon modern historiography.

The history of the forties and fifties is thus scattered about in memoirs, scientific works and in courtrooms. It would be difficult to deny that these three areas have influenced each other; such a topic would surely be interesting to future historians of historiography.

One could perhaps describe our picture of the first decade predominating in these various forms as that of a patch of sky glimpsed through the bars of a prison cell window. It is an image of slavery and division of «them» and «us», «state» and «society», with the tendency to ascribe to the former all of the bad of People’s Poland such as repression and the defective economic system, while «society» is given the role of dismantling the system. In the most exaggerated of these interpretations, the history of Poland in the communist period becomes a list of persecutions, to which «religion and the nation» were subjected by foreign powers.\(^{18}\)

A second group of historians, but above all journalists and combatants defend a vision of history propagated before 1989. Their contributions often have a polemi-


22 Andrzej Paczkowski maintains that from 1949–1954 more than 15,000 people were direct victims of terror (killed, shot, died in prison), and at least 200,000–250,000 spent time in prison. A. Paczkowski, «Nazisme et communisme dans l’expérience et la mémoire polonaises», in *Stalinisme et nazisme. Histoire et mémoire comparées*, ed. H. Russo (Bruxelles, 1999), 325.

2. Political History

The majority of those writing on Poland in the first half of the 1950s share the view that it was a country tending towards totalitarianism and using terror against its own citizens. The periods before 1948 and after 1956 are more complicated, as the authorities employed selective repression and their ideological program was less precise, and provoke greater controversy; especially the later years of the PRL.
are the object of sustained consideration, and turn on the concept of totalitarianism and whether it fits the Polish case.\textsuperscript{23}

Research on the political history of the first decade of postwar Poland has concentrated on two main problems: the gradual conquest of total power by the communists from 1944–1948, and the characteristics of the political system that existed from 1949 to 1955/56 (these time limits are of course fluid). Did the communists plan from the very beginning to take over the entirety of the public space and establish a totalitarian order? This question suggests other problems, such as the clarity of Stalin’s political intentions in the first years after the war and the extent to which Polish communists (with the memory of Stalin’s destruction of the Communist Party of Poland in the 1930s and the extermination of the majority of almost its entire leadership) had the intention of uncritically emulating Moscow’s example. It is true that before 1948, the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR) officially renounced both the idea of the collectivization of agriculture and the desire to do away with the private economic sector. Irrespective of the fact that this was a tactic agreed upon with Moscow, many leaders certainly envisioned a «People’s Poland» significantly different from the Soviet Union. It is possible to find evidence of their search for the possibility of maneuver, for instance in the attempt to maintain good contacts with western countries. It is worth noting that the essential book on Poland’s diplomatic relations with the West in the first postwar years was written before 1989 and published in London.\textsuperscript{24} This book clearly describes how freedom of movement became increasingly limited in the years from 1945–1947.

The basic text covering internal relations at this time also appeared before 1989. Krystyna Kersten wrote \textit{Narodziny systemu władzy} (published in English as \textit{The Establishment of Communist Rule in Poland, 1943–1948}). The book based on archival documents and could not be published officially in the PRL but was at once published «underground» and then in France.\textsuperscript{25} The falsification of the referendum of 1946 and the elections a year later, the brutal fight against the Polish Peasants’ Party (PSL), the use of torture on imprisoned opponents: these facts were documented in the works of Kersten and Roszkowski (and based to a great extent on evidence published in preceding decades in the West, most notably in the Parisian \textit{Zeszyty Historyczne}). Access to these books in the 1980s was not easy, but nonetheless possible, and they broadened the sphere of intellectual freedom.

\textsuperscript{23} The concept of totalitarianism for the sake of description of Poland was first rejected in the independent historiography by A. Walicki in his book \textit{Polskie zmagania z wolnością} (Cracow, 2000), and the discussion carried out in the \textit{Res Publica Nowa} 1993; see \textit{Spór o PRL}; also A. Friszke, «Jakim państwem była Polska po 1956 roku? Spór historyków», (Więź, 1996), 2, 131–146; idem, «Spór o PRL», 9–27.

\textsuperscript{24} W. Borodziej, \textit{Od Poczdamu do Szkarskiej Poręby}.

broke the monopoly of the state, and largely shattered the efforts of official historiography.

A strong basis thus already existed in 1989, and the 1990s permitted the dissemination and deepening of the knowledge of events already known, as well as the confirmation of other suppositions and details. It is worth mentioning the published series Archiwum Sejmu PRL, which addresses works and source texts related to the parliamentary opposition of 1945–1947, the referendum of 1946, the elections to the Sejm in 1947 and 1957, as well as the activities of the parliamentary group «Znak» from 1957. The gradual liquidation of the relative political pluralism in the early postwar years and the takeover of full control of the «coalition» parties by 1948 has been described in detail. Research on the PSL has flowered, and numerous, well-documented works on regional history have been produced. The study of the first postwar years nevertheless still suffers from archival problems, since the ruined governmental authorities often made hasty and improvised decisions, and the related political decisions were thus often undertaken without relevant paperwork. This problem is especially evident with respect to relations with Moscow. The conflict within the ranks of the PPR, which led to the fall of Władysław Gomułka and his replacement by leadership more palatable to the Kremlin under Bolesław Bierut, began to come under research attention already in the 1980s, as attempts were made to popularize the figure of Gomułka. This figure, who could have become the Polish Slánsky or Rajk, never appeared in the courtroom lights, never met his doom, and the prepared show trial of other imprisoned members of his leadership never took place. This is one of the Polish singularities with respect to the other countries of the Soviet bloc. Even today, however, there are more suppositions than facts.

The stenographic reports of the meetings of the Political Bureau reveal information about the decisions, methods of argumentation, and range of knowledge of the leadership of the PZPR, but offer less information about the differing opinions, battles among the fractions, and mentalities of those in charge. Another problem is the level of their independence; without a doubt, of supreme importance were their personal contacts with Moscow and the confidence they received from those quarters. Documentation from Russian archives have added much interesting material, such as thought-provoking notes taken by Bolesław Bierut. Even so, one of the fundamental published sources are interviews with the aged former leaders conducted by Teresa Torańska at the beginning of the 1980s. An odd
paradox here lies in the fact that, although politics is one of the topics most interesting to journalists and historians, there is a dearth of new, complete biographies of Polish politicians. At the start of the 1990s, a concise political biography of Bolesław Bierut based on materials from party archives appeared, the best portrait of the politician, however, has still been the historical report written by a journalist of a Polish newspaper. Jerzy Eisler published a short, synthetic group portrait of the leaders of the communist party. A biography of Mieczysław Moczar, who played a particularly important role in the 1960s, was also published. A work on Bolesław Piasecki, the leader of the group PAX used by the authorities to establish control over Polish Catholicism, also appeared. Also produced was a double biography comparing brothers: Jerzy Borejsza, one of the creators of official cultural life in the first postwar years, and Stanisław Różański, at the same time a high officer of the security services who supervised many of the «investigations» of the time. Biographies are nonetheless still lacking, perhaps because those figures who ruled the country for 40 years are denied distinction, and therefore historical relevance. On the other hand, those public figures who were included in the pre-1989 official historiography, propaganda or government try to present their own visions, in which the creation of a biography and the life experiences of the author play the main role.

«A different Poland was not possible» – authors repeat these words of Antoni Czubiński in order to highlight the favorable sides of postwar history. This type of determinism permits some to stress that the political actors of the PRL, like Władysław Gomułka, took on «an overwhelming responsibility for the existing state as it was and as it could have been given the contemporary arrangement of power on an international level». It should not be surprising that people close to the politicians of the PRL would attempt to refute the dominant, very critical description of their actions. When the son of Boleslaw Bierut picks up his pen, it

31 C. Kozłowski, Namiestnik Stalina (Warsaw, 1993).
36 B. Fijałkowska, Borejsza i Różański. Przyczynek do dziejów stalinizmu w Polsce (Olsztyn, 1995).
37 An interesting tendency can be seen in some historical dictionaries of the 1990s, from which Bolesław Bierut or Edward Gierek are left out, while only Władysław Gomułka is worth mentioning. B. Bankowicz, M. Bankowicz and A. Dudek, Słownik historii XX wieku (Cracow, 1996); B. Korzel and S. Żerko, Słownik polityków XX wieku (Poznań, 1996).
38 A positive example is Andrzej Werblan’s book Stalinizm w Polsce (Warsaw, 1991). The author makes use of his own experiences as a PZPR official who met with the most important authorities and who had access to a large number of archival documents and studies.
39 A. Czubiński, Dzieje najnowsze Polski. Polska Ludowa (1944–1989) (Poznań, 1992). This work can be considered the standard attempt to defend the PRL in the historiography of the 1990s.
40 E. and B. Syzdek, Cena władzy zależnej. Szkice do portretów znanych i mniej znanych polityków Polski Ludowej (Warsaw, 2001), 15.
would indeed be difficult to imagine that an objective image would result.\textsuperscript{41} The authors of the citation on Gomułka similarly sketch out a sympathetic portrait of the longstanding prime minister Józef Cyrankiewicz.\textsuperscript{42} A leftist journalist drew a positive biography of Edward Gierek, who was beside honoured by a monument, and a school and a street of his name.\textsuperscript{43} This reveals yet another scene of the PRL as a living history, while simultaneously showing it as a continuation of former discussions over controversial figures from the nineteenth century, as for example Aleksander Wielopolski.\textsuperscript{44} Such questions touch on unchanging possibilities for maneuver in the context of foreign subjection and patriotic feeling.

The history of the twentieth century has brought new phenomena demanding new questions, most especially that of the dictatorship of one party. Research on the PZPR has focused on persons and structure. The formal structure has already been examined fully, especially that in the center. People’s Poland was ruled in centralized fashion, and basic decisions were taken in Warsaw. The research program of the Institute of Political Studies of the Polish Academy of Sciences, «The Center of Political Authority in Poland from 1948 to 1970» («Centrum władzy politycznej w Polsce 1948–1970») has offered in limited editions an analysis of the activities of the Central Committee of the party, its departments and especially its nomenklatura, this most important (it would seem) instrument of power.\textsuperscript{45} The actions of the party as an institution for the administration of people is particularly interesting here. Personal questionnaires collected in the files of the PZPR offer glimpses into the societal origins of those who were the creators of this system. They were not, after all, always devoted to their tasks, did not always properly fulfill orders, and were not always highly privileged, since they were at times humiliated by their bosses.\textsuperscript{46} The provinces seem to be especially worth looking into, as they most clearly show the differences between the vision of the central authorities and the reality on the lower rungs.

A group of student researchers organized by Marcin Kula at the Historical Institute of Warsaw University has undertaken a study of documents from regional and industrial committees of the PZPR in the late 1940s and early 1950s.\textsuperscript{47} The

\textsuperscript{41} J. Chyliński, Jaki był Bolesław Bierut. Wspomnienia syna (Warsaw, 1999).
\textsuperscript{42} E. and B. Syzdek, Cyrankiewicz. Zanim zostanie zapomniany (Warsaw, 1996).
\textsuperscript{43} J. Rolicki, Edward Gierek. Życie i narodziny legendy (Warsaw, 2002).
\textsuperscript{44} This head of the civil administration in the Polish Kingdom, ruling through the Russian czar, fought with the conspiratorial Polish independence movement because he feared Russian retaliation and the consequent destruction of all Polish institutions. The result of his actions was the opposite of his intentions: in reaction to his efforts, a national uprising was called, which was bloodily suppressed by the czarist army in 1863/64.
\textsuperscript{47} H. Andresen et al., Komitet Wojewódzki organem władzy ludowej. Studium postaw aktywu partyjnego opracowane pod kierunkiem Marcina Kuli na przykładzie zapisów posiedzeń KW PZPR w Gdańsku w latach 1949–1953 (Warsaw, 1997); D. Jagodzińska.
picture that has emerged shows a surprisingly weak local party structure that lacked true signs of the mobilization of its members, was devoid of ideals and sunk in torpor. Similar conclusions are evident in a work on the regional workers of the Union of Polish Youth (ZMP), which was supposed to shape the ideological makeup of the younger generations. This problem would thus seem to be the essence of the party’s authority in the provinces. What do we make of such a picture of Stalinism? Does it indicate an artificially imposed order necessitated by an active societal resistance (seen also in the ranks of the party)? Were the provincial authorities only able to maintain themselves in power only thanks to the security apparatus? Indications suggest that their conduct took place in the sphere of informal and unregistered actions and contacts. A reconstruction of such mechanisms is particularly difficult and would rely on oral history and research into collective local memory, which is unfortunately a marginal current for which less and less time exists. This could lead to the writing of a social history of the PZPR, of which an interesting element might be the examination of the change in the mentalities of local elites.

Of great assistance would be comparative works dealing with Poland and other countries of the Soviet bloc. Given that the dependence of Poland on the USSR has been of considerable interest to historians, a comparative history with the other «people’s democracies» has been strikingly neglected after 1989. This has surely been influenced by an insufficient amount of research cooperation, a lack of funding and interest, and inadequate language ability with respect to neighboring countries. The eyes of central Europeans are turned towards the West, while historians look at their own country; thus works that have comparative elements should be highly praised. The lack of such comparisons has made difficult the determination of the proper proportions of various phenomena, such as the level of the uniformity in the countries under the control of the USSR and the scope of Poland’s dissimilarity, as it differentiated itself from the other countries behind the iron curtain even during the Stalinist period. Repression with respect to the


Andreasen et al., *Komitet Wojewódzki*, 252.

50 See the forthcoming work by Z. Wójcicka, *Od Weepers do Wieprza. Dzieje jednej wioski bydgoskiego powiatu* (Warsaw, 2001) or that of the Inżynieria Instytutu Etnologii Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego in Cracow (*PRL z pamięci, ed. Cz. Robotycki* (Cracow, 2001)). The collaboration between historians and ethnologists and sociologists in this area has proven to be quite valuable.


church was less brutal in Poland, and collectivization was never a great success. What were the societal mechanisms that influenced certain, but not other aspects of the «revolutionary changes» (also relevant here is the mentality of the leadership)? Which structures were retained thanks to the relative «softness» of the system? All of these issues relate to the changes in societal structures and what Fernand Braudel termed the «longue durée».

3. Research on Society

The following remarks by the sociologist Jerzy Szacki, writing in the mid-1990s, point to a significantly deeper basis for the postwar order than simply the pressure of the authorities on the people: «The revolutionary effects of war and occupation are notoriously not taken into account, and these to a certain extent helped to prepare the PRL as they shattered the basis of the former order.» Such an observation leads to the sphere of inquiry that makes up social history. At the same time, it seems that the historiography does not tend to properly treat postwar Poland as an entity cut off from its past, something unique to itself. Two research trends have appeared on the scene and are particularly important: social history (including microhistory and the history of everyday life), as well as the history of social and mental structures.

Dariusz Jarosz has written against the idea that assigns society a secondary and derivative role of reacting and protesting against the advances of the authorities: «It is often the case that the otherwise natural desire to ‹be the first› in the discovery of the next unknown archival collection or the description of certain fragments of the recent past has had a negative influence on the manner of analysis. In this type of work, society [...] is often analyzed in the conventions of an object of oppression.» Jarosz’s views link up to the discussion begun in the 1980s in the West between the «totalitarian school» and the «revisionists». The former, based on traditional concepts of political science and the output of sovietologists, have been inclined to grant the authorities the decisive role in creating the history of the communist countries. The latter point to the role of society in the creation of reality and use the tools of sociologists. It seems that Polish history of the 1990s has been largely dominated by the analytical tools of the «totalitarians».

Meanwhile, research has continued on the great building projects of socialism, life in the workers’ hotels, student life in short, on what is not very clearly called «everyday life». A postulate to investigate the case of the Polish People’s Republic

54 See L. Dzięgieł, Paradise in a Concrete Cage. Daily Life in Communist Poland (Cracow, 1998), and that author’s memoirs of Cracow in the 1950s and its student environment Swoboda na smyczy (Cracow, 1996).
55 Jarosz, Polacy a stalinizm, 5.
was stipulated by Tomasz Szarota who together with Krystyna Kersten edited a volume of articles concerning the organization of mass rest in the period of Stalinism, political jokes, life of prisoners and popular religiousness. This work has uncovered the attitudes of diverse social groups and how they were formed at school, at work or at leisure. Particularly interesting here would be the problem of socialization and contact points between different social groups (for example, between workers and intellectuals), and the penetration of cultural models.

The problem of social attitudes touches on one of the most interesting discussions that has taken place among Polish historians and sociologists, and relates to the idea of «social resistance». Non-institutionalized and spontaneous negative reactions by groups and individuals to various manifestations of official postwar policy – such as strikes, rumors, gossip, graffiti, fliers, resistance in the countryside against collectivization – took place on a significant scale during the first decade of postwar Poland, and can be seen quite clearly in the files of the party and police. After 1947/48, space for any institutionalized opposition disappeared, and the activities noted above should be considered as the only means for the expression of public opinion. The concept of «social resistance» is nevertheless a controversial delicate one. One of the dangers relates to the fact that everything which was believed to be a manifestation of resistance by the authorities (especially the police) might be recognized as an act of resistance, and was recorded in party and security service documents. These files contain information on sabotage, strikes, and «enemy statements». In reality, was each of these phenomena a conscious act of resistance against the ruling system? It often seems in most cases that the answer lies more in the preconception already held by the historian before beginning the archival search. If for example the history of the PRL is considered an «occupation», then of course any social conflict would be attributed to the idea of resistance by Poles against the state.

Another problem is the role of the church and religion in social life; including this area in the concept of resistance would be a serious oversimplification. There

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61 Z. Zblewski, Między wolną Polską a «siedemnastą republiką»: z dziejów oporu społecznego na terenie woje-

62 In one of the collections of source documents intended to describe the activities of the anticomunist opposition, includes church documents (next to for example documents concerning conspiratorial military groups). Z. Hemmerling and M. Nadolski, Opozycja antykomunistyczna w Polsce 1944–1936. Wybór dokumentów (Warsaw, 1990).
is however a consensus among historians that the church, during the 45 years after the war, was a strong and effective counterweight to the state, and attempts to subordinate it (including from within, as with the movement of «priest-patriots» of the first half of the 1950s or the group PAX, which was loyal to the party) were unsuccessful, as was the attempt to eradicate religious holidays from the people’s consciousness.63 The charismatic Stefan Wyszyński and his inflexible attitude during the time of most intense persecution64 are not sufficient explanations for this phenomenon. Unfortunately, church archives offer only limited access, which complicates research on, for example, the societal role of the parishes at the contact point with pressure directed from the state apparatus. A young generation French historian managed to present a very interesting vision of the relationships between the Church, the faithful and the Stalinist authorities in the centre of the Polish religiousness – Częstochowa.65 The publication of two comprehensive monographies of the post-war history of the Catholic Church and the communists’ relation towards it proved to be the event of the year 2003.66

It seems that anti-church repression and propaganda against religious «superstition» had less impact on Polish religiosity than demographic changes and modernization processes like the development of cities and industry and changing family structures. On the other hand, religion and the church were considered an enclave of freedom and a haven from the world of propaganda, while also being a bastion of tradition, in which party members and lesser activists participated, including church weddings (condemned in the 1950s), infant baptisms, and participation in processions. While not exaggerating the scale of such occurrences, it is difficult to deny that the realities of Stalinist society, generally considered clear-cut, were in fact quite fluid.

The disorganized nature of «social resistance» is accompanied by the idea of a self-aware and structured opposition.67 From 1948, there existed no space for it in the political structure of Poland. Only after 1957, a substitute parliamentary opposition was organized in the form of the «Znak» circle68 composed of several persons, but meaningful social movements could only appear two decades later. One phenomenon of the 1940s and 1950s were however groups that can be classified as a self-consciously ideological opposition. These were diverse and had differing


status. The *Tygodnik Powszechny* newspaper in Cracow appeared legally to 1953 and after 1956 (in controlled and veiled form) and represented the positions of Catholic intellectuals who tried to maintain their separateness.\(^69\) Another pole was made up of numerous secret organizations, especially youth-related ones, which were formed to fight against communism. Members of these groups, which were smashed by the security apparatus and brutally suppressed, have in some cases published their experiences after 1989.\(^70\) It would nonetheless be difficult to describe these groups as part of a broader tendency, even if the security apparatus archives seem to suggest that Poles did nothing but rebel and spy during the 1950s. It is more important to consider other attitudes, like «accommodation», «engagement», or «internal emigration».

Perhaps the clearest differences in attitudes can be seen in the example of intellectual and artistic circles. *Paranoia: A Record of a Sickness* was the title of one of the collections of socialist-realist texts and images that appeared in the 1990s, and offers the most simple formulation of Stalinist literary and artistic creation. Such an interpretation leads to an emphasis on abnormality and hypocrisy, and this issue is also particularly intriguing because socialist-realist works were created by people recognized before and after as the greatest figures of Polish literature. The well-known book published by Jacek Trznadel in the 1980s, which also appeared in translated versions, contains interviews with writers, whether those who supported the regime during the Stalinist period (like Jerzy Andrzejewski or Wiktor Woroszylski) but then increasingly moved into opposition, or those who consistently refused to recognize the legitimacy of the communist state (like Zbigniew Herbert).\(^71\) The use of the word «shame» in the title already attests to the character of the interviews as one of settling accounts, and led to numerous discussions, fed also by the intimate journals of some intellectuals whose public attitude during Stalinism was positive (Zofia Nałkowska) or unclear (Maria Dąbrowska). It should be pointed out that this problem is hardly new, since one of the first to comment on this topic was Czesław Miłosz in *The Captive Mind*, and the entire question cannot be separated from the long discussion that took place in the West (especially in France) about the seduction of intellectuals by Soviet ideology and propaganda.

In Poland, the focal point of this type of discussion has begun to shift in recent years. Scholars are moving away from moral judgments in favor of an attempt to

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\(^69\) One of the collaborators of this publication, Leopold Tymand, after its closure in 1953 (and his cooption into the regime-friendly association PAX) wrote *Dziennik 1954* (the original version appeared in Warsaw in 1996), which is an unusually valuable document of nonconformism that also describes daily life in Warsaw during the Stalinist years.

\(^70\) See J. Horodniczy, *Młodzi od swoich wyroków* (Warsaw, 1997). As an adolescent, the author belonged to several anticommunist organizations and was sentenced to 15 years in prison in 1952.

understand the mechanisms of engagement or acceptance. Such socialist-realist works demand thoughtful analysis devoid of the desire to unmask.\textsuperscript{72} A leftist tradition that was quite widespread among the prewar intelligentsia had a significant influence on their actions during the communist period; this is particularly evident in the journals of Dąbrowska. Other factors that led to adaptation or acceptance have been discussed by Hanna Świda-Ziemba.\textsuperscript{73} She approaches the subject as an eyewitness of the era and simultaneously a social scientist, and attempts to grasp the factors that encouraged conformism during the Stalinist period such as the weight of wartime memories, the restoration of the country to normal life (reconstruction), and the feeling that the system would last «forever». However, not only conformism, but also acceptance and participation, are phenomena that occupy this researcher, as she examines the leaders of the youngest generation who were engaged in building a better world. The existence of enthusiasm for the new system has been described in interesting autobiographical pieces, both Polish and foreign, and would provide the basis for further analyses. These might shed light on the implantation of the system in countries with strong anti-Russian traditions and weak prewar communist movements like Poland and Romania.\textsuperscript{74}

The processes of social mobility that took place after the war were heavily exploited by propaganda in the years before 1989, but continued research in this area has become \textit{démodé} in recent years. It is, however, difficult to imagine a more important area of inquiry for understanding the persistence of the system. One writer of a work on the «new intelligentsia» from peasant and worker origins, which formed in the years from 1948 to 1956, considers the consciousness of this group (reconstructed on the basis of memoirs) as «proof of success of the educational experiment by the communists» even in the religious sphere, generally the most difficult to change.\textsuperscript{75} A similar phenomenon, which took place primarily among workers recently from the countryside, was the subject of reliable sociological research already in the second half of the 1950s. In recent years, several works have borrowed information from that earlier study in order to understand societal acceptance of the new regime.\textsuperscript{76} In this place one cannot say anything about the propaganda «world of representations»\textsuperscript{77} which for sure affected the minds. There

\textsuperscript{72} See Z. Jarosiński, Nadwiślański socrealizm (Warsaw, 1999); W. Tomasik, Inżynieria dusz. Literatura realizmu socjalistycznego w planie «propagandy monumentalnej» (Wrocław, 1999).

\textsuperscript{73} H. Świda-Ziemba, Człowiek wewnętrznie zniewolony. Problemy psychosocjologiczne minionej formacji (Warsaw, 1998).

\textsuperscript{74} See J. Kuroń, Wiara i wina. Do i od komunizmu (Warsaw, 1990); L. Marcou, Une enfance staliniennne (Paris, 1982).

\textsuperscript{75} H. Palska, Nowa inteligencja w Polsce Ludowej. Świat przedstawień i elementy rzeczywistości (Warsaw, 1994).


\textsuperscript{77} P. Sowiński, Komunistyczne święto. Obchody 1 Maja w latach 1938–1954 (Warsaw, 2000).
are interesting analyses of the form of the Stalin cult prevailing until 1956 and the creation of the public image of subsequent party bosses – inclusive of characteristic changes reflecting the evolution of the system. The roots of this acceptance can be found in the prewar situation and the tensions (economic crisis, poverty) of that time; this theme was constantly used by the pre-1989 historiography, but does that make it worth discarding?

Certainly insufficient are the attempts to portray the material possibilities and limits of the Stalinist system. These exerted an influence on the activities of the state and its agenda, and thus in practical terms its ability to control individuals. Evidence on repression can be created from a deceptive picture of an all-powerful security apparatus, and similarly the experiences of intellectuals do not always represent the problems of other social groups. It so happens that the written historiography is largely based on these two types of sources.

The example of social mobility proves to be one of the keys to understanding the reality of Stalinist Poland. From the point of view of controlling citizens, what were the consequences of these massive migrations, tied not only to organized resettlement but even more to industrial development? The violation of individuals in the industrial civilization of 1950s communism awaits further analysis. Świda-Ziembą, in her aforementioned book, published her research on workers in Łódź during the Stalinist period. (The author had the unique opportunity as one of the last sociology students in a banned discipline; yet another example of the inconsistency of a system regarded as anything but inconsistent.) Jędrzej Chumiński presented the history of the union movement in the first period of the PRL in a richly documented work that detailed the hindering and incapacitation of this movement. A British historian has described the process of establishing control over industry by the PPR. Polish Socialist Party committees existed in factories in the first postwar years and thereby limited the influence of the Communist Party, but the latter was quickly able to take over the strategic «personnel» positions in charge of staffing, and through the use of diverse methods of pressure, quickly augmented its ranks. Due to the movement of many workers from the countryside to the city, this process was made all the easier. After 1948, the party fully controlled the union movement.

But is it really possible to speak exclusively of control and violations? Thousands of young people left the countryside and began an independent life in the cities (largely in workers’ hotels), and freed themselves from the control of their communities in the countryside. The policies of full employment often made the process of quitting work easier and made it possible to set oneself up indepen-

dently of local administrators and «contacts» in the area. Of course, it was the unqualified workers who were generally able to enjoy this particular freedom. Frequent changes of work were also a sign of dissatisfaction with conditions and replaced, it would seem, strikes, which were condemned by the authorities, and became both increasingly short. No lists of demand appeared, no strike committees were organized.\textsuperscript{81} On the other hand, following Dariusz Jarosz, it should be noted that not uncommonly relations of solidarity existed between management and personnel, both of which were similarly uninterested in fulfilling the excessive goals set by higher-ups\textsuperscript{82}. These many different forms of informal agreement are an important area of research.

A particularly important phenomenon for understanding the realities of communist Poland was the informal circulation of information based on rumors and gossip. The archives of the PZPR and the security services supply excellent material in this area and have been extensively used.\textsuperscript{83} They permit the development of research on the mentalities of Poles in the 1940s and 1950s and include for example letters sent to various government offices and newspapers. They most often include appeals for assistance and descriptions of the diverse mishaps and misfortunes that befell the average person. The authors of such letters usually felt themselves the unjust victims of some «clique» that controlled the life of a small town or workplace, and did not believe that the problem could be solved without the help of «Warsaw» (that is, party leaders, ministers, or a central magazine).\textsuperscript{84} A characteristic quality of these letters is the language, which is saturated with the «newspeak» of official propaganda as well as an interesting mixture of traditional values combined with those encouraged by the new regime like egalitarianism and the cult of industry. It would surely be worthwhile to compare these letters to those directed to the governments of the USSR and other communist countries.


\textsuperscript{82} B. Brzostek, Robotnicy Warszawy. Konflikty codzienné 1950–1954 (Warsaw, 2002).

\textsuperscript{83} D. Jarosz and M. Pasztor, W krzywym zwierciadle. Polityka władz komunistycznych w Polsce w świetle plotek i pogłosek z lat 1949–1956 (Warsaw, 1995).

4. «Victims or Accomplices?»

This title of a collective publication dealing with both Soviet and Nazi totalitarianism can be used to describe the serious dilemma facing Polish historiography in the 1990s. The focus by journalists and historians on the wrongs suffered by Poles because of the war and during post-war Communist repression has for a long time concealed the history of repression inflicted on other national groups on Polish territory, often with the participation of Poles or the institutions of the Polish state. As a result of the war and the border changes, Poland became almost completely homogenous, a fact that helped maintain silence during the PRL; furthermore, the cultural organizations of the various national groups were small and controlled by the authorities. In the last twenty years of the twentieth century, and especially after 1989, historians have undertaken these sensitive subjects.

Such subjects have included most importantly the postwar pogroms of Jews, the «Wisła» action (the forced resettlement of over 140,000 Ukrainians who were Polish citizens in 1947), the «expulsion» of Germans from the Western territories and the fate of German prisoners in Polish camps, and the attempts of compulsory polonization of the Warmians and Mazurians (which effectively destroyed their pro-Polish sentiments and caused a mass emigration).

The martyrdom of the Polish Jews in the occupied ghettos and Nazi concentration camps has been immortalized in thousands of testimonials and numerous works. Until the start of the 1980s, however, a complete silence reigned over post-war events like the Kielce pogrom. The opportunity for public discussion of this topic came about during the sixteen months of the legal existence of «Solidarity» in 1980–1981, when Krystyna Kersten examined the events of July 4, 1946 in Kielce. She avoided an evaluation that would have placed her in a certain ideological «camp». Unsurprisingly her texts, beginning with a first that appeared in the Tygodnik Solidarność in the fall of 1981, provoked many polemics and accusations, as many taboos were broached. Historians clash on the subject to this day, and
many pseudo-historical texts base themselves on prejudices and stereotypes. On one side, there is the stereotype of the «Polish-patriot» simultaneous with «victim», while opposed is the enemy, Communist and even «Jewish-Communist». The persistence of this vision was helped by the pre-1989 official historiography that emphasized wartime contributions and the martyrdom of Poles and was mostly silent on shameful episodes. At the basis of this lies nationalism, which was used by the authorities to legitimate their rule in a tentative manner in the 1950s, and then with full force in the following decade, as Marcin Zaremba has described in detail.

The turn of the century has fortunately brought more and more studies on this topic, including valuable detailed and regional works. Researchers have begun to examine the Cracow program in August of 1945. Similarly to the events in Kielce, questions focus on potential Soviet or security service provocation, yet the most essential problem continues to be the roots of anti-Semitism, which has unquestionably manifested itself in the most violent ways. In Cracow, five people were killed and many were injured as apartments were looted. The rumor of a murder of a Christian child, which apparently caused this outrage, is linked to the medieval superstition of ritual murders committed by Jews. The author of this work on the Cracow pogrom notes yet another circumstance: the most active participants were poor, and thus the motivation may have been compensation for their own suffering and humiliation at the price of humiliating even more those who were miraculously saved from the Holocaust. This tangle of themes would seem to demand research into phenomena reaching far back beyond the twentieth century, while not neglecting mentalities and the influence of the war. The topic of Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation has not been adequately researched, and future study will touch on exactly those issues least palatable to Poles. The work of Tomasz Szarota on anti-semitic incidents in the cities of occupied Europe, including Warsaw, has focused on episodes previously ignored, including the existence of anti-semitic organizations and street incidents, which were used by the occupier to justify the creation of the ghettos. Jan Tomasz Gross’ book on the 1941 pogrom in Jedwabne provoked a heated debate. In 2002 a perfectly documented book by

Association in 2000 which produced Z kronikiutraconego siedztwa, ed. M. Pawlina-Mieducka (Kielce, 2000).
95 A. Cichoń, Pogrom Żydów w Krakowie 11 sierpnia 1945 (Warsaw, 2000).
Natalia Aleksiun was published, which concerned the Zionist movement in Poland in the first years after the war also discussing very sensitive the anti-Semitism of the time.\textsuperscript{98} It is difficult to imagine research on Polish-Jewish relations in the PRL without further examination more deeply into the past.

The educational role of historiography in this case cannot be overestimated. The Institute of National Remembrance and other organizations will fulfill this role. Historians are increasingly taking on the task of the «verification of stereotypes».\textsuperscript{99} Perhaps the greatest breakthrough of 1989 is precisely in this area, as the freedom of broad discussion, both historical and otherwise, has resulted.

5. The Strange «Land of the PRL»

As Michał Gowinński has written, «in the collective consciousness, People’s Poland is more and more clearly receding into the sphere of myth».\textsuperscript{100} In public opinion polls from 1996, 42 percent expressed a positive opinion about the PRL. Of the 49 percent with a negative opinion, the most critical were those who remembered the first period, as well as the youngest generation.\textsuperscript{101} Undoubtedly, the latter links to the fact that the world of free markets and democracy is seen by those who came of age in the 1990s as a natural reference point.\textsuperscript{102} The communist past and its material and spiritual legacy can thus reveal itself as an absurd and strange object, but also as something of worthwhile interest. The youngest generation is not familiar with the everyday life of the PRL and has a difficult time even imagining what it must have been like; publishers have responded with well-illustrated books that are designed to give a sense of a bygone and strange era.\textsuperscript{103} This slowly receding history gains a sort of nobility, especially with respect to its material side, as it represents a non-existent and disappeared world – and even become attractive. Proof can be seen in numerous exhibitions, such as «gray in color» (Szare w kolorze) at the Zachęta gallery in Warsaw in 2000, which presented the props of everyday life from the PRL. A reviewer from the émigré Polish journal Kultura described it as follows: «The interior of a 1960s apartment, a milk-bar offering realistic meals [...] and deeply nostalgic crowds going through the rooms with tears in their eyes. We were transported to the world of our youths, and the young people, caught up by a certain sentiment, walked through the rooms of their parents’ youth [...]. And this nostalgia idealizes those times, since the lies have evaporated».\textsuperscript{104}

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{98} N. Aleksiun, Dokąd dalej? Ruch syjonistyczny w Polsce (1944–1950) (Warsaw, 2002).
\bibitem{100} Spór o PRL, 37.
\bibitem{101} T. Żukowski, «Świadomość historyczna Polaków w połowie lat dziewięćdziesiątych», in Ofiary, 74.
\end{thebibliography}
The Stalinist period, described in the many shocking memoirs discussed above, has a different connotation, and its cheerless side is projected on the perception of its entirety. A significant part of the artistic legacy of socialist realism has nonetheless proved attractive thanks to its «inner logic» and expressive nature. Interest in the evidence of this first decade, largely viewed as products of mass culture, can be seen in the shelves in second-hand bookstores devoted to this period, postcards with reproductions of socialist-realist posters, and the exhibition of such posters at the Poster Museum in the summer of 2001. This kind of interest is devoid of the desire to unmask the evils of the period, which are of course will described elsewhere (as in the chapter of The Black Book of Communism by Andrzej Paczkowski). This has nonetheless produced a funhouse mirror image that transforms the 1950s into a grotesque world where everyday life, and the people in it, seem abnormal, while simultaneously allowing people to gain distance from the period and increase interest in it. From this flows the need for a historiography written without harsh initial judgments and neither «for» nor «against».

New publications are starting to appear, written by researchers of the youngest generation who were born in the mid-1970s and have no personal memories of Stalinism or even the era of «Solidarity». Already over 20 volumes of the series W krainie PRL (In the Land of the PRL) mentioned above,105 offer works by Warsaw historians that represent a shift in focus, as they look at social history and the lives of ordinary people who neither created the system nor were its victims. From them we have a picture of the concerns of those living in the provinces (seen through letters written to newspapers in the capitol); the daily work of the Union of Polish Youth, which worked to mobilize young people; anthropological observations of spectacles like that on the May 1 holiday; and the everyday life in schools in Warsaw. These studies, and others like those produced by the student researchers under Marcin Kula, represent the growing current of research on social life and «everyday» aspects of existence in communist Poland.

Like Agnieszka of Wajda’s film, younger researchers look into the stores where strange things are deposited. During discussions the witnesses of the epoch tend to hold that it was terrible («history of the victims») or quite ordinary («history of the ordinary people»). For sure the debate assumes some flavour due to the confrontation of these viewpoints. Since Agnieszka’s times the context has changed. What had an tremendous meaning in the seventies – an attempt at critical look at the first ten years of the PRL, has now become only one motif among innumerable disputes over the past. Different theses may be freely demonstrated and thanks to the open access to the archives many of them may be confirmed by numerous documents. This embarrass de richesse more and more frequently drives the scholars

105 The editorial committee is made up of Włodzimierz Borodziej, Marcin Kula, Paweł Machcewicz, Tomasz Szarota and Wojciech Wrzesiński.
to look for new subjects – to examine small social groups, microscopic phenomena. No doubt this is a positive occurrence. The history of the «strange» epoch assumes a human dimension.

Kontraste und Grautöne: das erste Nachkriegsjahrzehnt in Polen

Contrastes et grisaille: un regard sur la première décennie de la Pologne d’après-guerre
Cet article traite de l’historiographie récente portant sur «la première décennie» (1944/45–1955) de la République populaire de Pologne (RPP). Le débat qui a lieu depuis 1989 sur ce sujet n’est pas seulement un débat intellectuel à propos du passé, mais également un débat politique et historique. La plupart des participants tombent d’accord pour constater la dépendance de la Pologne envers l’Union soviétique, mais ils tirent de ce constat des conclusions différentes. Tandis que les uns considèrent que les mesures adoptées par les gouvernements de la RPP étaient justifiées par la contrainte géopolitique, les autres les condamment comme une trahison des intérêts nationaux. L’article décrit les deux principales tendances de la recherche, l’une relevant de l’histoire sociale, l’autre de l’histoire des mentalités. Il attire l’attention sur la difficulté que rencontre la première tendance à cerner de manière univoque le concept de «résistance». Aussi bien la recherche tend-elle, dans les dernières années, à substituer à des jugements moraux l’analyse des mécanismes de l’engagement, de l’acceptation et de la résistance.

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