



Review of the publication: Marcin Zaremba, *Im nationalen Gewande. Strategien kommunistischer Herrschaftslegitimation in Polen 1944-1980*, Osnabrück: fibre 2011, ISBN 3938400676

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With its ongoing *Klio in Polen* series, the German Historical Institute in Warsaw has made available a fine German translation of Marcin Zaremba's *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm: Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (2001), a book that stands the test of time as one of the best recent analyses of post-World War II systems of power in Eastern Europe.

In Zaremba's joint treatment of communism and Polish nationalism, he turns to historical and political sociology in order to examine the structuring of institutional power mainly by party elites. He scrupulously avoids the pitfall of treating identity in a cultural vacuum or outside the historical context of statecraft – and in 1942-44 he begins with Stalin – in which a select group of elites relied on a repertoire of tropes to form and modernize the nation. Zaremba argues that Polish communist elites and the leading figures of the dominant Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), who made the country a one-party state after 1948, consistently employed three principal legitimizing strategies – of universalization, rationalization, and narrativization – to master Polish historical codes and forge a stable communist Polish republic.

Zaremba's book in 2001 frames the history of communism and the Polish Stalinist left's intersections with the modern political right starting with Roman Dmowski on Polish historiographical terms. This is no easy scholarly feat. Zaremba deals in equal measure with the reification of Marxism-Leninism in terms of ideology and propaganda, and Polish racial/ethnic legacies of intolerance in modern politics. Back in 1912, it was Stalin who envisioned the nation in deterministic form on a Marxist-Leninist path toward a communist future, "A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of people, formed on the basis of a common language, territory, economic life, and psychological makeup manifested in a common culture." (65) Taking apart Stalin's propaganda motto of "socialist in form, national in content" (228), Zaremba shows what difficulties and insecurities the post-Stalinist leadership faced in Poland to overcome its legitimation deficit by constructing an official state ideology. Internal contradictions in the monocentric party-state's spokespersonship for the people were present in the PRL after it was formed in 1952, in communist elites' mythic efforts to exalt folk-national commemorations of Polishness.

In the first three chapters, which deal with issues of legitimation, ideology, political power, and national roads to communism, Zaremba judiciously analyzes Polish nationalism as a strategic discourse of elite and popular power. He is aware of the points where ideal types and old dichotomies break down: Piast versus Jagiellonian, ethnonational versus federalist, idealist and realist, systemic party orthodoxy and high-grounded dissident resistance, and the crooked paths from Marx to Engels, and Lenin to Stalin and his acolytes. He brings together classical works by Róża Luksemburg (Rosa Luxemburg), Max Weber, Karl Mannheim, Isaiah Berlin, Ernest Gellner, Leszek Kołakowski, and Andrzej Walicki, and applies the work on legitimation by Joseph Rothschild, John B. Thompson, and Thomas H. Rigby. He is in open dialogue with other postwar historians such as Andrzej Paczkowski and Krystyna Kersten. He is at his best in treating the will-to-power of party elites vis-à-vis Stalin and in the PRL. He does not neglect to show how nationalism functioned as a tool of civilizing aspirations for the elites of a modernizing, homogenizing nation-state. Zaremba's blending of Szackian sociology, intellectual and political history, and Polish historiography is impressive.

The next six chapters are broken down separately into 1942-1944, 1945-1947, 1948-1955, 1956, 1957-1970 (the longest chapter, at eighty-eight pages), 1970-1980, and an epilogue for the 1980-1989 period. His research on late Stalinism and the Gomułka era is superb. He shows how in the late 1940s the party leadership relied dubiously on anniversaries of births and deaths (Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Chopin) for the purpose of propaganda and of communist national mobilization. He treats the party's "them" after 1944 as a kind of genuinely hybrid "us" in Soviet and Polish Cold War contexts, looking at party plenums and the writings of Bierut, Gomułka, and Gierek. He shows that Gomułka did not hesitate to adapt the legacy of Dmowski's "Poland for Poles" to modernizing purposes, well before and after the Polish October of 1956. Party leaders in the 1960s froze relations with West Germany and favored sloganeering and the selective use of symbols to construct a new Polish ethno-pantheon of heroes. The flip side of banal invocations in the 1970s

and 1980s of freedom, progress, and universal brotherhood, especially after the anti-Zionist campaigns of 1967-8 and martial law in 1981, were an exclusionary ethnopolitics characterized again by anti-Germanism, anti-Americanism, and anti-Semitism, the prewar Polish attitudes shaped by World War II and which lay behind the leadership's older Stalinism of the late 1940s and early 1950s.

Reread (now in German) more than a decade on, Zaremba's research and narrative from the late 1990s is maybe too Gibbonesque. One might conjecture, for instance, how the work by Jan Gross and the vast research on genocide and ethnic cleansing affects his declinist thesis; this reviewer was left longing for an author's preface in the German version, as opposed to what seemed to be an undeveloped epilogue for the Solidarity period. The fact that party elites looked toward Moscow tried to manufacture ethnocommunist Poles in the PRL should come as no surprise. Zaremba describes Gomułka as "purely instrumental" (177); regardless, vague invocations of special ideological-national missions are the staple of mass political mobilizations. And yet, he rightly sees the danger inherent to such modern East European national politics, and with it, a ubiquitous and cynical instrumentalization for (ab)uses of national codes, symbols, practices, and rituals.

Rare indeed is such a combination of sociology, the history of ideas, and skilled archival research, and Zaremba clearly is deeply knowledgeable about nationalism as praxis. He shows finally that in the PRL, officialdom and the anticommunist opposition, and even the Catholic Church, had in common a set of codes and contexts. Communist elites in Poland built the nation using political instruments of the left and right, around fantasies of national unity and in particular against imagined "others" such as Germans and Jews. Leaders deployed the old symbols and rituals, generated new myths of uniqueness and new heroes, and feared decline, instability, and the dissolution of a social contract that never entirely existed. Ruling elites encountered deficits in moments of crisis, above all in 1956, 1968, and 1980-1. As a result, the communists' Polishness by the Gierek era in the 1970s was deeply embedded in society and remained entangled in an adversarial way. Stereotypes by elites of the PRL-era were "stupid and crude, xenophobic, anti-German and anti-Semitic, and at the same time highly traditional, pre-enlightened stereotypes and therefore crudely instrumental." Zaremba ends not with a whimper but with a smart warning, "It was only a small step from red to brown policy."

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