Headlines of Nationalism, Subtexts of Class: Poland and Popular Paranoia, 1989-2009

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Abstract: Recent and diverse authors in anthropology such as Jonathan Friedman, Andre Gingrich, Marcus Banks and Arjun Appadurai have suggested that current globalization processes are associated with emergent nationalist sensibilities and majority mobilizations. They also imply—but do not yet empirically study—that such ideological effects are profoundly class structured. This paper takes their lead in studying the emergence of working-class nationalism in post-socialist Poland. It studies the critical junctions of Polish transition and its class configurations and power balances, and develops a relational and quintessentially anthropological understanding of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic fields under the path-dependent effects of globalization in Eastern Europe. It shows, in a critical dialogue with the recent work on Poland of political scientist David Ost on the Solidarnosc movement, that such nationalist sensibilities and mobilizations are not simply the creation of right wing political contenders who fill the void of what used to be the liberal left, but reflect the key experiences of skilled industrial workers in Poland.

Keywords: neo-nationalism, populism, post-socialism, class, hegemony, globalization, Europe

Résumé : Récemment, divers auteurs du domaine anthropologique comme Jonathan Friedman, Andre Gingrich, Marcus Banks et Arjun Appadurai ont suggéré que les processus actuels de mondialisation sont associés à l'émergence de sensibilités nationalistes et de mobilisations des majorités. Ils infèrent aussi – sans entreprendre d'en faire une étude empirique – que de tels effets idéologiques sont basés sur de profondes structures de classes. Le présent article poursuit sur leur lancée en étudiant l'émergence d'un nationalisme de classe ouvrière dans le contexte post-socialiste de la Pologne. Je m'y intéresse aux jonctions critiques de la transition polonaise, à ses configurations de classes et à ses équilibres de pouvoirs, et j'y développe une analyse relationnelle et essentiellement anthropologique des champs hégémoniques et contre-hégémoniques sous les effets associés aux cheminements de la mondialisation en Europe de l'Est. L'article montre, dans un dialogue critique avec les travaux récents sur la Pologne et le mouvement Solidarnosc du politologue David Ost, que ces sensibilités et mobilisations nationalistes ne sont pas une simple création des candidats politiques de droite qui remplissent le vide de ce qui était la niche de la gauche libérale, mais le reflet des expériences clés des ouvriers industriels qualifiés de Pologne.

Mots-clés : néo-nationalisme, populisme, post-socialisme, classes, hégémonie, mondialisation, Europe

Introduction

At first glance, it seems pointless to quarrel with Tony Judt's recent revisit of one of those memorable debates in the human sciences: that grumpy, funny, razor-sharp exchange between Edward Thompson and Leszek Kolakowski on the merits of Marxism; happening, as they must have sensed, on the blurred fold-lines—the mid-1970s—of two distinct eras in the European postwar period (Judt 2006). Thompson lost, declared Judt less than dispassionately. And that was, he argued, because of Kolakowski's merciless exposure of Marx's unholy trinity of analysis, politics and moral eschatology, dressed up as scientific certainty, which made its claims and methods so insufferable: both closed to as well as deeply vulnerable to empirical refutation—and not just under the conditions of "really existing socialism" that Kolakowski in the mid-1970s had just left behind. Judt's judgment of the Thompson-Kolakowski contest was surely not surprising. With the collapse of Marxism worldwide he was writing with the full weight of recent history ostensibly on his side, and minimally the full authority of the current pantheon of public intellectuals.

In spite of that, Judt ended his praise for Kolakowski on a surprisingly uneasy note. He observed that the post-Wall combination of accelerating globalized capitalism with deepening inequality, poverty and social uncertainty might now well be occasioning a resurgence of the conditions under which Marxism has historically flourished. If so, this was certainly not because of its academic persuasiveness, he implied: it was precisely because of this characteristic populist collusion of analysis, politics, hope and moral righteousness that Kolakowski had so forcefully rejected. Was Judt close to a disconcerting awareness that Kolakowski's mid-1970s victory might turn out to be phyrric after all? The future subalterns might be totally mistaken from the Kolakowskian viewpoint in analytical philosophy, but Marxism could well be just what they needed.

Three comments help me to further paint the intellectual canvass situating my topic. First, one should not miss the chance to point out to Judt that it was precisely the common man's and woman's needs that figured so prominently in Thompson's defense of, and his own take on, marxism as a life "tradition" rather than a fix and finished body of intellectual and political work (as represented in Kolakowski's three volume History of Marxism). Thompson was always much more interested in the ongoing people's marxisms than in Marxism as a big idea in intellectual history—his inspiration springing more from William Morris than from Capital or even the Manifesto. Judt's final unease, therefore, might well come from his realization that Thompson in the end could still be winning a respectable chunk of the academic debate too; if not the one within analytic philosophy then, in any case, the one on the actual methods of social and historical inquiry, which was what motivated Thompson throughout.

Secondly, Judt seems largely ignorant of the fact that the past 20 years have not only seen the marginalization of Marxism from the world of state and party politics—and from his own discipline of history still rather infatuated with methodological nationalism—but also, and not unlikely in response, a resurgence of various historical materialisms emphatically spatialized beyond the cage of the national state in disciplines such as geography, anthropology, international political economy and historical sociology, excelling in analyses of global conjunctures, and epitomized, among others, in the work of authors such as Arrighi, Brenner, Jessop and Harvey. This work surely takes marxism, like Thompson, more as a life tradition than as a closed body of work, and is very much open to neighbouring visions, from Arendt and Braudel to Polanyi and Zizek. The death of "Marxism-within-one-(state-based)-social-formation" has gone together, then, with the growth of marxist inspired analyses of global capitalism *across* (state-based) social formations, shedding much needed light on the turbulent self-reproduction of contemporary capital and its transformations from national capitalisms and national capitalist states to transnational valorization. While that work is often still painfully stretched to illuminate actual popular political struggles, and in that sense acts at a remove from Thompsonian method, it has demonstrably served to support analysis and bridge-building among the disparate parts of the global justice movement and its academic surroundings since the late 1990s.

These two comments serve—third—to establish a paradox of history and academia; a paradox that is ultimately the topic of this paper. There is the suspicion—shared among the radical left as well as, apparently, among champagne-social democrats such as Tony Judt—that somehow it may well be the logic of capital that is, according to Zizek, "the real that lurks in the background" of current political process (Smith 2006:621). But on the other hand, there is the actual record of popular politics in the 21st century, which appears largely unresponsive to that background lurking. Indeed, outside the celebrated Southern cases of the global Left—Zapatista, Brazilian SMT, urban South African and peasant Indian mobilizations, and recent Bolivarian or Colombian indigenous translations—there is little popular politics, certainly not in the North, that actually breathes the breath of Thompson's Spittalfield weavers. The language of class is not widely and popularly spoken—nor even whispered clearly—that much must be conceded.

On the contrary, both current affairs and recent anthropological studies and fashions suggest that we are still, and perhaps more than ever, stuck in the post-1980s phase of "culture talk," the identity politics of region, place, race, ethnicity, ethnic nation and religion (Stolke 1995). My focus in this paper is on the spasmodic spread of neo-nationalism in Europe (and beyond). But, perhaps counterintuitively, my case will serve an alliance with Thompson rather than with the discourse analysts of identity and difference. Indeed, Thompson had no problem analyzing "class struggle without class." The explicit use of the language of class was never a necessary condition for him to analyze the workings, relationships and mechanisms of class, which for him could be expressed in thoroughly non-class idioms as well. I am driven to explore this because of the simultaneous omnipresence as a subtext, as well as silence in the headlines, of class in recent studies of ethnic and religious nationalism.

Anthropologies of Fear, Crisis and the Nation

In recent anthropology, both Gingrich and Banks (2005) and Appadurai (2006) highlight the importance of social insecurity and fear in generating popular receptiveness for ideologies of ethnic or religious neo-nationalism. Both also invoke the association of such receptiveness with the general conditions generated by neoliberal globalizations. Their work resonates with Friedman's (2003) general notion of double polarizations associated with globalization: polarizations that pair widening social divides to spreading idioms of deep cultural difference in an era in which ruling elites and their allies are structurally invited to transform themselves into cosmopolitan classes and forsake the project of the nation as a community of fate. In the process, the erstwhile "fordist" working classes are unmade, in representation as well as fact, into a new "ethnic folk," while the lower tiers are turned, in representation and fact, into *classes dangereuses.* The work of these very different authors colludes, then, in suggesting that any explanation of the surge of neo-nationalism (in Europe and beyond) must be placed against the combined background of what I would call the dual crisis of popular sovereignty on the one hand, and of labour on the other; a dual crisis that certainly characterizes the millennium. They also suggest, though do not work out, that spirals of nationalist paranoia, while structurally derived from the dual crisis, receive their precise historical dynamics from demonstrable configurations—confrontations, alliances, divisions—of class.

There seems substantial support outside anthropology proper for this general thesis. Comparativist historical sociologists such as Moore (1978), Mann (1999), Katznelson (1998) and Tilly (2003) have suggested that the class cleavage under democratic capitalism must be faced, articulated and organized rather than repressed if liberalism wants to remain a vital force in the centre of the democratic process. Now, the dual crisis signals, if anything, that over the last three decades it has become ever harder for liberals to do precisely that sort of balancing. On the European scale, this is of course far harder in the post-socialist East, with dependent states, thoroughly comprador capitalisms, and at best some 30% of the wealth of Western Europe, than in the West of the continent. Nor is the story limited to Europe. For the Middle East and West Asia it has been argued that the repression of the nationalist Left has ultimately become the harbinger of religious fundamentalism (Ali 2002). Various studies have made plausible that neoliberal globalization, by fragmenting labour and exerting downward pressure on social wages, by reducing popular sovereignty on behalf of the sovereignty of capital, and by circumscribing what Bourdieu (2000) has called "the left hand of the state" (social inclusion) while strengthening "the right hand" (finance, law and order), might well be systematically associated with producing a climate of deep popular uncertainty. This climate feeds into a politics of fear and results in defensive and more often than not "illiberal" popular responses in areas as diverse as Central and Western Africa, the US, Western Europe, Eastern Europe, the Kaukasus and East Asia (Frank 2004; Friedman 2003; Gingrich and Banks 2005; Derlugian 2005; Turner 2003; Nonini 2003; Wievorka 2003; Ost 2005; see my overview article Kalb 2005).

These popular politics of fear should not be seen as being immediately oriented on, or caused directly by, global actors or accelerating flows of people, trade and information as such. This is the always slightly opaque level of abstraction moved by what Eric Wolf would have called "strategic power" (Wolf 1990). Rather, actual outcomes on local grounds are intermediated by various path dependent "critical junctions" that link global process via particular national arenas and histories to emergent local outcomes (Kalb 1997, 2000, 2005; Kalb and Tak 2005). Critical junctions link the level of structural power with the institutional fields of "tactical power" (Wolf 1991) and it is there that the politics of fear gets incubated.

While headlines in the Western press tend to paint an orientalizing picture of the post-socialist East as a cauldron of majority ethnic nationalisms, there has, in fact, been little anthropological work on the class driven dynamics of neo-nationalisms in the East.[1] This stands in contrast to political scientists or political sociologists, who have consistently discussed East European neo-nationalisms, often in an alarmist mode, since the early 1990s (for example, Tismaneanu 1998). The newest wave of such work is less alarmist and much more class-analytical and has started to experiment with, and advocate, ethnographic methods (Ost 2005; Derlugian 2005), which does represent a great advance even though their actual ethnographic exercises will not greatly impress anthropologists.

Western media, of course, tend to treat majority nationalisms in the West differently. They see the recent conflicts within which nationalisms in the West are expressed as conflicts about immigration or multiculturalism, spurred on by local far-right movements. In so doing they mystify the sources of nationalism in the West by shifting them onto actors deemed ultimately external to the core of the West itself, that is migrants and the fringe of the extreme right. Such events and movements are figured as an aberration from a supposedly well-established norm of liberalism in the West, which appears to stand in contrast to the East, which *is* nationalist.

Against such popular occidentalizing imagery, it is my contention that recent Western and Eastern European popular nationalisms have broadly similar social roots and not-widely-divergent spreads, and are occasioned by related processes of neoliberal globalization and class restructuring, which indeed separate them from older elite-driven nationalisms. Their actual event-based dynamics, though, derive of course from differently ordered and sequentialized political fields and get their symbolism from significantly different national histories, memories, fears and amnesias.

Recent anthropological work on neo-nationalism in the West (Gingrich and Banks 2005) has somewhat echoed the media emphasis on migrants and far right movements. Thus, it does little to expel orientalizing and occidentalizing mystifications. Alternatively, it has focused (Holmes 2000) on conservative West European elites and their revived Catholic organicist ideologies. This does help to reestablish cultural essentialism in its rightful place within the Right flank of Western European and continental corporatism (even though liberalism has started to serve as an essentialism too in countries such as Holland and Denmark), but does little to explain its populist dynamics outside elite circles.

Lustration, Purification and Class Anger in Post-socialist Poland

The recent work by political sociologist David Ost, *The Defeat of Solidarity* (2005), is the first long-run study of East European post-socialist political culture that looks systematically and in a grounded way at the politics of skilled industrial workers, arguably the largest population segment in post-socialist societies. His study is based on a firm grasp of the development of the *Solidarnosc* movement in Poland, both before 1989 and after, and combines political history with local as well as national social surveys and ethnographic vignettes of workers in distressed areas and industries. He develops a complex picture of the making of an increasingly "illiberal" working class culture over the period 1980-2005; a culture, he shows, that became ever more indulged in fantasies of mass lustration, national purification, anti-communist witch-hunts and anti-capitalist and anti-liberal fears over corruption and social breakdown. It was also a fertile ground for popular support for the anti-gay, anti-feminist, anti-multicultural and anti-Jewish rhetoric of conservative and clerical organizations such as *Radio Marya* and the League of Polish Families.

He explains the emergence of this illiberal working class culture in post-socialist Poland in three steps, all based in the failure of the liberal intelligentsia to keep up their alliance with industrial workers. First, he shows that from the mid-1980s onward Solidarnosc's political elites—the former dissidents minus the workerist clique around Lech Walesa—increasingly embraced liberal cosmopolitan discourses that expressly sought to disqualify workers' interests as a threat to liberal democracy and the transition to market capitalism. Secondly, he shows that workers, in response, brought the ex-communists back into power immediately after parliamentary democracy was secured, and then started to recapture the Solidarnosc movement for their own ends (1992-93). Thirdly, after the established cohort of liberal dissidents around Adam Michnik and Bronislaw Geremek had left the movement in 1994 and had formed a thoroughly neoliberal political party, the Freedom Union, second rank labour organizers took control of Solidarnosc (unions and affiliated parties) and pushed it decisively into an illiberal and religiously nationalist direction. This allowed them to capture the labour vote while channelling it away from conflict-oriented industrial unionism.

Ost was right to call for more systematic social science attention to the paradoxical outcomes of transition in Poland. Here was a nation that deliberately shook off communism by mass participation in a broad-based social movement. But the vision that was increasingly articulated in Solidarnosc circles and media in the course of the 1990s was one of a comprehensive national and cultural crisis. That vision held that the popular choice for democracy and the market of 1989 might perhaps still turn out to be salutary as long as communists would be kept from power or purged from the bureaucracy (lustration fantasies and organized fights against former communists within enterprises), the influence of liberals in public life would be contained (celebrations of law and order and obsessions with morality), and cosmopolitans would be prevented from selling out the nation to foreign interests (nationalist moral and economic visions, among others, against the EU and against foreign capitalists, although American capital was more trusted). The first nation that proudly and concertedly threw off the stifling yoke of Soviet-led communism found itself ten years later indulging in increasingly self-victimizing and paranoid discourse. Ost's ethnographic vignettes showed that workers participated actively in these discourses.

Ost was "re-confirmed" by history itself through the outcome of the 2005 Polish elections shortly after his book came out: the Kaczsinsky brothers (key informants for Ost over the years) brought a resurgent right to power with precisely these election themes. Their policy visions culminated in 2006-7 in an assertive anti-German stance within the EU, anti-liberal diatribes against gays and the proclaimed multiculturalism of the European Union, a stress on law and order, and finally the creation of a very well endowed anti-corruption watch dog that would, among other things, work on a register of some 700 000 Polish individuals that were suspected of collaboration with the communist secret services.

Ost emphasized that while he analyzed just the Polish path to what we might call popular illiberalism, his argument had a validity for post-socialism in general. Beyond the specifically Polish contingencies, the general rule was, he claimed, correctly to my mind, that if liberal intellectuals turned their backs on workers' interests and did not help to organize the anger that is inevitably produced by capitalism (let alone the deep workers' anger surrounding the transition to capitalism) "in class ways," the anger would get framed by ethnic nationalists, religious activists or other non-liberal actors, blocking the path to the desired "open society."

Over the last ten years I have followed Polish workers in the southwestern city of Wroclaw in their visions of and responses to the post-socialist transition.[2] My material does, on the whole, seem to support the popular illiberalism thesis, but not without substantial modifications. Skilled or semi-skilled workers throughout the later 1990s did indeed often subscribe to deeply conservative family-oriented attitudes, mixed with nationalist, Catholic and sometimes openly anti-Semitic discourses. While barely saving themselves from the collapse of socialist industry in the wake of privatization, liberalization and economic restructuring, they sought to shield themselves from a public life that was felt to be alienating, un-solidary, non-supportive of their interests and dignity and overly materialist and acquisitive. Many such people also saw the U.S. as a reliable conservative ally (pre 9/11), and Europe as well as Russia as modernist moguls that could not be trusted and would only further corrupt the Polish nation (attitudes to Europe changed substantially after accession to the EU).

At the same time, however, the attitudes of the very same people toward capital and capitalism could be much less favourable and were often much less of one piece than Ost would have us believe. Most significantly, quite a few informants combined discourses of hard work, self-education, social care and family responsibility with hopeful visions of piecemeal societal progress. They expected modest income gains over time as a reward for hard work and schooling, and expressed hope and support for the next generation under a mildly beneficial EU accession. While mostly voting for right wing Catholic nationalists, if they voted at all, there was, thus, also a Polish Catholic nationalism that could hardly be called by definition illiberal and which left lots of openings for alliances with a considerate liberalism. It is a close kin to West European Christian democratic visions, derived from late 19th-century social Catholicism and solidarism. Liberal intellectuals everywhere have found it difficult to discover the difference between that and illiberalism, but the difference is vital (see also Kalb 1997). My material, in short, partly underwrites the evidence for Ost's thesis, but also indicates that popular reality was much more complex, dynamic, diversified and open to alliances than he painted it.

The greatest problem in Ost's work, however, remains his chain of causation. Are these illiberal views largely imposed by willful right wing political elites or have they somehow organically emerged from Polish popular classes? Can we perhaps arrive at a combination of both visions in which we can specify who did what? My material unfortunately does not permit strong conclusions about process in time through the early to mid-1990s. David Ost's elite manipulation thesis is superficially vindicated by the almost universally shared picture among my informants from the late 1990s onwards of the people's arch enemy: former communists now dressed up as capitalists, perverting naturally wholesome capitalism into a self-serving fake capitalism that is actually a masked communism; a notion that I admittedly found far-fetched when I started interviewing. This may ultimately be the strongest part of his account. But let me try to unwrap these surprising viewpoints a bit further.

Is this idea of the enemy of the people an effect of the imposition of a rhetoric by conservative Solidarnosc elites *à la* the Kaczynskis, or should we rather interpret it as an outlook based in a popular history and experience of actually fighting communist control over factories for over a decade (1980-94) as well as of fencing off the consequent shock therapy dispossessions of the 1990s administered by the liberals? Should we not see it as an effort at explaining their own dispossession while symbolically leaving the social goal of a democratic market society—inscribed in the national narrative by the very recent popular victory over the communists and subsequently superimposed by Poland's vital Western alliances—undisputed?

My material suggests that there is much to be said for the latter explanation. Workers in the late 1990s could still vividly narrate the nerve-wracking fight against communist control and dirty tricks in their own factories up to about 1994. The durability of that theme throughout the 1990s and 2000s in public life, politics and the media may well be attributed to willful reproduction in conservative election campaigns, as Ost in fact claimed, but the origins of the vision are much more historical, organic and structural than that. I argue that it must be understood in light of the ferocious but as yet understudied fight over "people's property" between workers and the communist nomenklatura in the 1980s and early 1990s. In this fight the party state lost much of its control over national assets to worker collectivities. The liberal state (run by an alliance of former nomenklatura and ex-dissident liberals), after 1989, sought to wrestle actual control over the shopfloor, the factory budgets, and productive property as a whole, from often well-organized local worker collectivities who exercised strong claims to de-facto control and semi-legal ownership and often pressed for a program of worker co-operatives in national markets rather than full speed global integration and (foreign) capitalist ownership (for a more extensive account see Kalb in press). In this important sense the Polish proletariat of

1990 was a full heir to the great popular rebellions against really existing socialism in Budapest 1956, Prague 1968 and Poland 1980-81; rebellions that understood themselves less in terms of a claim for capitalism and parliamentary democracy than in terms of claims for worker self-management.

In the end, my argument with Ost crystallizes into a different vision of what hegemony is, how it works and what it can do. My take on it relies more on a relational approach to hegemony that stands in contrast to the "ideas based" one employed by Ost, which is directly derived from Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Relational approaches have a strong pedigree in anthropology (Roseberry 1994; Gledhill 2000) and have been excellently spelled out again in Smith (2004). In the case of Polish right wing populism, a relational approach points at a field of shifting class power that generates a history of clashes, victories and defeats, including memories and amnesias, which then form the background for broad-based populist sensibilities to emerge that open the path for right-wing elites to capitalize on them. This is what has happened in Poland (as in many other places).

I would claim that nationalist outlooks among urban workers in the course of the 1990s in Poland were—while of course in all generality suggested by old and recent Polish history itself (independence from the Soviet occupation after the genocidal Nazi occupation)—ever more articulated as an attempt of self-ascribed "deserving," disciplined and efficient skilled workers to morally distinguish themselves from, on the one hand, "undeserving" workers in industry and, on the other, from the ostensible public winners of the transition, the liberal intelligentsia and their clients. It was a banner meant to confront cosmopolitan liberals as well as the undeserved clients of the former communists. I see current workers' nationalism in Poland as a symbolic claim to be rightful members of the restricted circle of beneficiaries of democratic capitalism in the face of lots of evidence to the contrary. Importantly, workers' nationalism gained this particular meaning only after the fight of local worker collectivities for co-operatives and popular control over productive property and associated social programs was lost, somewhere between 1990 and 1995 (see for more extensive evidence and discussion Kalb in press)

The symbol of the market is a good opening for making this case. Ost suggests that the pro-market attitude of rank and file Solidarnosc members was ultimately an indoctrination by their leaders eager to avoid conflict with capital. My material, however, shows that skilled workers around 2000 understood their self-interest in markets much better than that. Workers often eloquently explained that thorough marketization was perfectly good for them because it would finally make an end to the protection that uncompetitive and less disciplined workers—a key symbol of which was the abuse of alcohol—had enjoyed under socialism, a clientelism, many complained, that had been dragging down their whole enterprise as well as the wider society for years. Markets were seen as helping to reward good workers and punish the bad. There is nothing surprising in this: capitalist social differentiation and popular languages of moral elevation and hierarchy have a deep elective affinity. Popular languages of elevation and deservingness have the habit of turning necessity into virtue, as Bourdieu observed, and in this particular case helped to legitimize claims of self-proclaimed deserving workers to continued access to a shrinking pool of resources. Privatization and marketization meant that the city of Wroclaw, for example, would lose almost all its large and nationally reputed firms in electrical engineering—a destruction of tens of thousands of jobs in a few years time. None of my interviewees complained about people hit in the first waves of redundancies. They were often peasant workers with little education or women commuters with perceived loyalties to the farm and the family rather than to the organized worker collectivities that practically controlled some of the bigger firms in Wroclaw around 1990. The core worker groups of these firms, however, were saved or bailed out by severance pay and early retirement schemes. Solidarnosc activism, after the defeat over factory control in the early 1990s, became instrumental in allowing unskilled, older and more peripheral workers to be shed with benefits, while trying to protect the core production processes and their workers.

Polish political elites drew from this popular moral discourse and fed it with new themes. In earlier work (Kalb 2002) I noted how shock therapy advocate and Polish finance minister Leszek Balcerowicz saw his task in thoroughly moralist terms, echoing skilled workers' visions of moral distinction. Under socialism, he observed, "conscience was crowded out"—note the interesting overlap of monetarist and moralist language. Markets, Balcerowicz as well as many workers believed, served to "lock in conscience" by rewarding the conscientious. The "defeat of solidarity," in a sense, was something that skilled workers had been eagerly awaiting, rather than an ideological imposition by right wing political elites.[3]

Several additional relational processes reinforced this turn to languages of self-dignification. The core workers of enterprises had often been risk-taking Solidarnosc activists, and had struggled hard against communist control over their enterprises. They could thus legitimately claim to co-own the transition to democracy. The really high-risk fights had indisputably been theirs, certainly after the declaration of martial law in December 1981 and continuing into the early 1990s, fights that often led to imprisonment and potentially permanent disruption of the livelihoods of whole families. But their rewards had remained very insignificant compared to those of the (public) intelligentsia. Activist workers in the later 1990s were acutely aware of this discrepancy. Their claim was made urgent by the absence of any rise in real incomes in manufacturing over the 1990s and early 2000s. Average wages at the assembly lines of the Whirlpool factory in Wroclaw (formerly the Polar factory), for example, in 2007 were very much the same as in 1997 (about €300) even though productivity per worker at some of the plants had increased by more than 700% and price levels had steadily risen. This basically meant that economic stagnation (1977-2007) had become a life-long verdict for them. As workers with often enterprise-specific skills, they were locked in their struggling and declining former state enterprises and could rarely benefit from the new public and private economies. These were largely controlled by the "pacting classes" and their clients, represented at the 1988-89 Polish Roundtable—communists and liberal intellectuals—whose cultural capital and political connections reserved for them by far the greatest chunk of the spoils of post-recession economic growth after 1995. The skilled worker families we interviewed, meanwhile, more often than not still inhabited the same 25 or 35m^2 apartments that they had first occupied in the late 1970s or early 1980s, before the terminal crisis of socialism set in. From their insufficient salaries they saved penny by penny for a new secondhand car replacing the one they had owned over the last 20 years or, often, to help out their grown children.

Although it always needed some prompting, workers in each and every interview showed themselves rather keen to help re-live, re-member and re-inscribe the earlier fight against communists in their current post-socialist public life. Communists now masked as capitalists were discovered everywhere and denounced as corrupting the integrity of Polish public life. This typical keenness-after-prompting was a response to the hegemony of what is known in Poland as the "thick line" that Michnik and other dissidents had officially drawn behind recent contentious Polish history as part of the negotiations at the Roundtable. As in Spain and Latin America, the Polish Roundtable Pact had determined that the past would be buried "peacefully" and that with democratization no one would be purged and punished for their actions under the "authoritarian" old regime. This imposed policy of amnesia was deeply unpopular with Polish workers, as were similar policies among Spanish, Chilean and Argentine labour (for Spain see Narotzky and Smith 2006). This nation of Catholic workers felt deeply betrayed by the liberals whose ascendancy in post-socialist Poland seemed based on a "peaceful transition" negotiated by themselves for themselves, while bestowing very little in the way of material benefits, security or honour on the groups that had waged the actual fights *en masse*. On the contrary, they were consistently reminded by the media of their populism, "lack of class" and uncertain democratic credentials. None of the liberals had the guts to actually propose cancelling the state debt as the debt of an illegitimate regime (as Naomi Klein (2007) importantly points out), but while shock therapy was shaking out the nation's economy, intellectuals and media people began to picture themselves desperately as potentially "middle class," while depicting workers and peasants as gross liabilities for a Poland openly exposed to world capitalist competition. Workers and peasants were systematically associated in the media with alcoholism and laziness, and labour unions were openly decried as dysfunctional for the new civil Poland.[4] In fact, the whole concept of "civil society" was regularly turned against them.

Even an honorable person such as Adam Michnik (the ex-dissident writer and publisher) at a commemoration in 1999 of the epoch-making events of 1989 in Vienna,[5] kept openly devaluing Polish industry by talking about "ex-socialist workers who were merely producing busts of Lenin." At the same elite ceremonial event, Leszek Balcerowicz, architect of shock therapy in Poland and finance minister at the time, was still almost religiously proud to have unleashed market-enforced creative destruction on Polish workers in order to punish them for "the crowding out of conscience" that had supposedly happened to them under the state-led economy (Kalb 2002; for further examples see Buchowski 2006). While they celebrated their peaceful victory over communism and the Evil Empire in lusty Vienna, there were no audible dissidents to this orchestrated silencing of the workers' fight—and plight—among the new Polish elite at this particular banquet, as there surely would have been at other banquets.

This was the context that Michal Buchowski recently described with the notion of "internal orientalization" in post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe (2006; see also Kideckel 2002, 2007), a public discursive practice which "blames workers and peasants for their own degraded circumstances and for society's difficulties" (Buchowski 2006:467). It refers to a public climate in which "workers have proven to be 'civilizationally incompetent' (Sztompka 1993), show a 'general lack of discipline and diligence' (Sztompka 1996) and obstruct the efforts of those who are accomplished and the progress of whole societies in the region" (Buchowski 2006:469).[6] By regularly invoking the "*Homo sovieticus* syndrome" liberal intellectuals displaced workers out of the bounds of Europe and into a timeless Asia. At the same moment, they passionately claimed a place for themselves in the new European pantheon, invoking their conscientious and peaceful advocacy for liberal civil society against the communist Goliath and their successful liberalization and privatization of "the economy."

The symbolic politics of the Kaczynski regime were primarily meant to be the end of the "thick line" that liberals like Michnik and Geremek had defended throughout the 1990s. None of my working-class informants in Wroclaw ever said a good word about the policy of the thick line. Without exception they favoured lustration and punishment in the later 1990s possibly even more so than during the later Kaczynski government. The Kaczynski government translated these popular and populist feelings subsequently into the creation of a very well endowed anti-corruption watchdog that would, among other things, work on a register of some 700,000 Polish individuals who were suspected of collaboration with communist secret services. Very tellingly, the most prominent potential traitor in the eyes of the Kaczynski government was Bronislaw Geremek himself, the core dissident–liberal actor at the Roundtable and by now a widely respected former minister of foreign affairs, a professor of history, a member of the European Parliament and an active participant in liberal-conservative European think tanks. Geremek was accompanied by hundreds of thousands of academics, judges, administrators, engineers and business people. All were summoned to submit declarations that they were not guilty, an intentional inversion of the liberal procedures for establishing innocence and guilt. Suspicion was sufficient for an accusation and proof had to be shown to refute a suspicion. The entire Western press joined *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Adam Michnik's liberal daily, in a sustained public outcry against the demeaning picture of Geremek—for some *the* icon of dissident incorruptibility—pushed into submission by a populist government in Warsaw chosen by uneducated workers and peasants and desperately pleading his innocence before a hardly friendly committee of populists who judged him under the gaze of a less than civil public media.

But of course, as Buchowski (2006) would appreciate, it was the material as well as the public symbolic history of working-class dispossession throughout the neoliberal transition that was at work behind Geremek's top position on the corruption list. In fact, the post-1989 Polish elite finally faced the return of the repressed[7]: it would be punished for its own willing and nationally imposed amnesia of the workers' fight as well as the workers' plight, and for that to happen its "pacted" and therefore quasi-constitutionally imposed amnesia had to be inverted by a lustration that was not just about communists but perhaps, even more, about them. This was all posed as the Polish ethnic nation taking revenge on those of its members who were seen to have sold it out. There was an ominous underlying message to the Polish liberal elite in this: it said, not yet fully explicitly but certainly audibly, that it might not be you but we who actually are "the people" of 1989. Few workers we talked to felt any commiseration with Geremek.

The nation is a very complex symbol, open to articulations for every new goal and conjuncture. The nationalism that post-socialist industrial workers articulated was very often a "nationalism of common care," a claim to an inclusive nation that posed the nation as a huge hierarchical family with strong mutual obligations and responsibilities. It was the nationalism that could have been expected in an age of neoliberal post-socialist transition and, indeed, neoliberal globalization. This was a vision that sought explicit antagonism with the individualist rights-based ethos of the liberals. And it sprang above all from the practical and daily dependence of worker families with thoroughly insufficient incomes on mutual reciprocity and support through the generations. While liberal politics and media imageries of consumption paid little homage to these daily efforts and realities, the Solidarnosc leadership articulated them with the old notion of Catholic solidarism. Catholicism as a religious belief, finally, though much less prevalent among industrial workers than the idea of Poland as a Catholic nation suggests, helped to articulate, explain and dignify the self-restraint that members of households on permanently insufficient incomes had to instil in each other in the face of booming consumer fascinations and market fetishisms in the mediatized public sphere. Again, this classic function of religion for working class people seemingly permanently condemned to the "limited good" was eagerly appropriated and ritualized by the radical right.

Consider, in this context, the symbolism of the "Equality Parade," which used to be called "the Gay Parade." This international parade was intentionally scheduled to happen in post-socialist Warsaw in order to challenge Lech Kaczynski's "anti-multiculturalism." Mayor Kaczynski had forbidden the parade in 2004 and 2005, spiced up with some politically incorrect anti-gay rhetoric. A youth organization associated with the League of Polish Families and founded by Jaroslaw Kaczynski's ideologue-cum-education-minister Giertich had beaten up some local parade participants in prior years. West European political classes from the multiculturalist left had intervened and had officially warned Warsaw about spreading "intolerance." That pressure helped to secure the event for 2006 and 2007, which then included the participation of high-level Western politicians, mostly from the German Greens, under the banner of promoting human rights in Poland. The League of Polish Families, however, was allowed to schedule a counter demonstration at the same time. One of my interviewees participated in it. He was annoyed by the multicultural and human rights imagery sponsored by the EU: "Why is the EU making so much fuss about that parade?," he asked. "Nobody in Brussels says a word if Polish workers starve on low wages, have to work like dogs and get exploited."

For him, the Equality Parade was a travesty, which served, again, another important imposed amnesia. He wished to recall, as the quote shows, that the equality in the title of this parade used to include a concern with social rights, and not just multicultural gay rights. He therefore hinted at Western Europe's forgetfulness about its own history of dealing with issues of social equality. Many of my informants in Wroclaw would have concurred. Of course there is a clash of class going on around multicultural events such as gay parades. From the point of view of post-socialist industrial workers who had first lost control over their factories and communities, had barely saved their skins in the collapse of their industries, and had subsequently been confined to a life of hard work and material stagnation in a wider public environment that openly fetishized consumption, these events appeared to extol the pleasure of licentious free-choice consumerism. It was a feast that symbolized the pleasures of never ending free circulation, as it were, not just a circulation of objects but of objectified intimate relations. Their lives taught other lessons. One of those lessons was the importance of solidarity within intimate relationships of families and among workers, a lesson that was about the strict limits of free circulation.[8] Another was that the liberal promise of mass consumption had simply been false and that the opportunities of a world of endless circulation and unlimited pleasure had been very unfairly distributed. The Equality Parade for them was not just an indecent public act, as it was for the Polish Catholic church, it was, rather, an indecent public myth that served to silence the Polish popular reality of scarcity, toil and confinement for many—a reality that received much less public attention and respect, including by the EU, they felt, than that futile parade. Hence it was again an issue of public amnesia: a festival used as a signifier to hide an uncomfortable reality. And the Polish ethnic nation again got positioned against the promiscuous cosmopolitans who were pictured as literally willing to sell themselves out to everybody.

Conclusion

Against David Ost's idea of a willful hegemony by right wing ideologues cunningly imposed on post-socialist industrial workers I have tried to propose an alternative explanation of their largely "illiberal" outlook. My alternative explanation is less "ideas based" (Ost's own words) and more relational in that it looks at the relational trajectory of skilled workers in post-socialist Poland, characterized by what now emerges as an intricate double bind. This double bind leads skilled workers to confront both unskilled labour and the leading liberal classes. It also leads them to accept the market as the tool to do the first, and to ally with a politics of paranoia, unmasking liberals as communists and communists as liberals, to do the second. This double bind is entirely embedded in the critical junctions that have shaped their biographies. Ost was very right in putting his finger on the politics of the Polish liberal intelligentsia after 1989 as a major factor, but he was largely wrong in suggesting that the upcoming right-wing elite of the Kaczynskis and their circles has manipulated industrial workers into a fearful illiberal politics. Against reductive notions of class and interest, I am making an anthropological case for analyzing the complex critical junctions that describe the global and local historical configurations of structural power and personal becoming "in class ways." I point to the displacement through time of material confrontations onto public symbolic, but not less real, fights after the former have been lost and the resources needed to take them up again in a different liberal and globalized context have dissipated.

The Kaczynski interlude, however, has suggested something else. Post-1989 politics in East Central Europe has always been more a politics of resentment than a politics of endorsement. Electoral participation has consistently been low, hovering mostly around the 50% mark and few governments anywhere in Central and Eastern Europe have won two elections in a row. Post-communist transition under conditions of neoliberal globalization and the dual crisis of labour and sovereignty was never truly popularly approved. The extrication from the Soviet embrace and the farewell to local communist party machines was unanimously celebrated, but not the substance of what came after. The Kaczynskis got into power because their voters, at best some 15% of the electorate, were the only ones motivated to go to the polls at all in 2005, the others stayed home. And even though many of my informants in Wroclaw's electrical industries felt a certain discursive proximity to them, only a minority was actually willing to give them votes. My informants always whispered and sometimes screamed political cynicism of all sorts, rather than a positive belief in the virtues of any Warsaw government, including that of the Kaczynskis. Only a few really embraced the Kaczynski campaign of virtue, fear and suspicion. In October 2007, the right wing government was voted out again and the remnants of the liberal Freedom Union were voted in. Participation at the polls was the highest since 1989, an enormous 51%. While the Kaczynskis had a bigger following in absolute numbers than in 2005, electoral mobilization among educated youth in the bigger cities had changed the whole fragile equation.

Something else had changed too in the conditions of working-class reproduction in larger Polish cities, including Wroclaw. The accession of Poland to the EU in 2004 had finally delivered two things that Poles since 1989 had been intensely longing for: the possibility of large-scale labour emigration to the West and an accelerating flow of industrial investments by transnational enterprises to the East. Poland was the biggest recipient and originator of these flows. And Central and Eastern Europe as a whole was being turned into the premier mass production base for West European corporations. After 2004, the two processes together began to dent Polish unemployment, the highest in Europe, significantly (official unemployment in 2003 was still close to 20%, in 2007 it was around 13%). But they also seem to have led to increasingly despotic regimes of labour in manufacturing. Because of mass emigration, labour shortages emerged for the first time. And Western capital, now finally pouring in substantial investments in fixed capital, began to demand unprecedented levels of productivity from workers in the face of surging East Asian competition. While my interviewees in the late 1990s would complain about scheming communists and a public life corrupted by liberals, in this new European and global context they began to tell stories of increasing old style exploitation by (Western) capital. Significantly, a wider shift in political identifications seemed underway. "We are workers, after all," said an only slightly embarrassed informant, who had in the late 1990s insisted that he had always been a sort of entrepreneur. It was the first time since I started research in 1997 that this word, with old style socialist connotations, was used as self-ascription in an interview. While uttering this sentence, the man, in his fifties, kept a searching eye on my interviewer, deeply unsure of, but somehow also eager for, his approval.

In this article I have discussed the particular Polish path to popular nationalist paranoia. I have argued that in order to analyze contemporary, often screaming headlines of nation and nationalism we should not just study nationalist parties and elites but rather bring a relational approach to trajectories and configurations of class in order to penetrate the lived subtexts of social and existential insecurity and its attendant fear and anger. Against Tony Judt, I have shown how Edward Thompson's methods of analyzing "class struggle without class," in particular when wedded to Eric Wolf's multi-level strategies of analyzing power, are more than apposite for the current post-socialist conjuncture of a double global crisis of labour and popular sovereignty, a crisis that forms the necessary background for understanding local popular paranoia anywhere. I have argued, too, that David Ost's recent and excellent analysis of "the defeat of Solidarity" in Poland, places undue emphasis on elite discourses and their supposed imposition on misled workers. On the contrary, these right-wing elites capitalized on organic working class sensibilities reflecting an authentic politics of anger, distrust and disenchantment with the liberal state in globalizing mode after de facto workers' control over significant chunks of the national pie had unravelled in the wake of shock therapy and liberal dispossession. Polish workers, in short, did not really need political elites to teach them the populist neo-nationalist narrative. What they would have needed new political elites for was the reappropriation for their own ends of the notion of democracy and liberty from the neoliberal state-class that dispossessed its working classes after 1989 in the name of liberty, democracy and civil society. The dual crisis of labour and popular sovereignty, internalized in the global neoliberal consensus and linked with globalization, made the emergence of precisely such a politics highly unlikely, in Eastern Europe even more so than in many other places. It was a question of structural power, not of ideas. The outcome of that skewed power balance in many places is the discursive antagonism of cosmopolitans versus ethnic nationals, as Jonathan Friedman (2003) has argued. And so it was in Poland.

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Notes

1 As Charles Tilly (2001) has rightly noted there is little anthropological attention in general for issues of categorical inequality such as class. While anthropological research on post-socialist Central and Eastern Europe has flourished over the last decade, I can only think of the work of David Kideckel (2002, 2007) and Jack Friedman (2007), both working in particular on miners in Romania, that systematically addresses questions of class. In sociology, there has been more interest in ethnographies of class in Central and Eastern Europe lately; see the overview article by Stenning (2005), and the ethnography of women and class in the Czech Republic by Weiner (2007).

2 I thank the Dutch Organization for Scientific Research (N.W.O.) and the Central European University Research Board for making this research possible in respectively 1997-2000 and 2007. This is the first paper in what is intended to be a series of research articles based on approximately 60 long ethnographic interviews with workers in Wroclaw, in particular in the Polar/Whirlpool factory. For a more elaborate ethnographic and historical analysis of populist narratives and popular experiences of dispossession see Kalb in press.

3 Eastern Europe, enjoying a late, disparate and peripheral industrialization in comparison to most Western and Central parts of the continent had not developed the strong inclusive working-class cultures, uniting workers over the skills divide, that had been the classical harbingers of socialist visions and politics in Western and Central Europe. In her recent dissertation at Central European University, "Alienating Labor: Workers on the Road from Socialism to Capitalism in East Germany and Hungary, 1968-1989," Eszther Bartha (in press) shows that in the late 1960s workers in Gyor, Hungary, in comparison to workers in the GDR, were deeply segmented along lines of education, urbanity and skill and that the more skilled families were keen to let their own self-interests in markets, higher wages, and private consumption prevail over socialist politics of collective consumption and state-led accumulation. The same interests lay behind Gierek's private consumption oriented policies in 1970s Poland. In this sense, skilled workers had abandoned solidarity long before 1989. Thanks to Kacper Poblocki and Istvan Adorjan for reminding me of this crucial divide in the logics of solidarity between skilled-educated and unskilled labour among the more and less developed parts of the European economic landscape.

4 Jerzy Scacki, a respected grandfather of Polish sociology, gave a talk at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna in 1997 which I attended. There, several discussants tried to convince him that labour unions are a crucial part of civil society but he refused to accept that because unions demonstrated "communist style claiming behaviour."

5 I served as program director of the SOCO program at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna, and as such was part of the celebration "Ten Years After." SOCO was a support program for social policy research in mainly the Visegrad countries paid for by the Ford Foundation and the Austrian Federal Chancellery. SOCO was one of the Western reponses to the surprise election of the post-communists in 1993 in Poland.

6 These quotations refer to internationally known sociologists.

7 The return of the repressed was in fact anticipated by John Borneman (1997). However, he failed to explicitly include liberals in his vision of the need to name and blame "wrongdoers" in the nation and restricted himself to the communists and their collaborators. He also generalized too much from the experience of the Yugoslav tragedy and expected that in the absence of an institutionalized and public naming and blaming process the powers that be would shift popular aggression to external enemies.

8 Malgorzata Calinska, leader of the Solidarnosc local at Polar-Whirlpool, regularly referred to the factory, the workers and Solidarnośc as "my family."

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