

## **Rok 1966. PRL na zakręcie**

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As many popular and scholarly accounts tell us, the Long Sixties (a phrase coined by British historian Arthur Marwick) were a time of dynamic social, cultural, technological, political, and economic change in Europe. Many authors have pointed to the unprecedented cultural liberalization and transnational exchange that defined the era, but also to political radicalism, and the rise of the new left and the new right. What were the Sixties like in Poland? The authors of the excellent collection of essays edited by Katarzyna Chmielewska, Grzegorz Wołowicz, and Tomasz Żukowski titled *Rok 1966. PRL na zakręcie (The Year 1966. People's Poland at the Crossroads)* tackle this question and offer compelling answers. The authors see the era, which coincided with the rule of First Secretary Władysław Gomułka (1956-1970), as a pivotal time when political and ideological upheavals necessitated a search for a new Polish identity. This search was made all the more important by mass migration and the social emancipation of traditionally disadvantaged groups such as women and peasants. The authors focus on a range of topics such as official state discourses, leftist opposition, Church politics, films, and family histories to highlight the late 1960s as a critical juncture in the cementing of a distinct ethno-religious and exclusionary vision of the Polish nation. Surprisingly, two powerful institutions that have often been seen as operating in opposition to each other – the communist state and the Catholic Church – worked in tandem to promote this vision. In the context of political turmoil in present-day Poland and the swift authoritarian turn of the current government, which has been building its electoral support on such exclusionary concepts of the nation, the book is particularly instructive.

Two years, 1966 and 1968, serve as reference points for the analyses presented in the volume. 1966 was the year in which Poland and the Catholic Church celebrated the Millennium of the Polish state dating back to 966, when Duke Mieszko I was baptized. 1968 was a year of global unrest among young people, including student demonstrations in Poland in March 1968. The protest prompted the Party to launch a powerful anti-Semitic campaign that culminated in the forced emigration of about 15,000 Polish Jews. The authors argue that these two years were marked by powerful political and ideological campaigns that nationalized the collective memory of war and postwar "social revolution," and undermined any alternative leftist visions of the social and political order.

The authors present the nationalist turn as a complex process in which many actors participated. This point is exemplified, in particular, in the first segment of the book on "Political Languages," which features essays by Tomasz Żukowski, Grzegorz Wołowiec, Krzysztof Gajewski, Bartłomiej Starnawski, and Anna Sobieska. As Żukowski and Wołowiec demonstrate, both the Party and the Church promoted a similar understanding of the nation as "exclusionary and closed" (17) despite grounding their visions in two distinct ideologies: communism and Catholicism. To this effect, Żukowski offers a refreshing interpretation of the famous Letter of Polish Bishops to German Bishops written in 1965, commonly interpreted as a sign of the Church's openness, and an important step towards Polish-German reconciliation. Żukowski turns our attention to other parts of the Letter, where Polish bishops repeatedly assert the unity of Church and nation, and contend that "every departure from Catholicism means betrayal of the national identity established at the moment of baptism" (25). This paralleled the state logic that claimed the unquestionable unity of the Polish nation with socialism. In other words, in both cases national and ideological identities overlapped.

Important connections between Church and state narratives are highlighted by Wołowiec and Starnawski, who show how Catholic nationalism merged with communist ideology to become a driving force behind the anti-Semitic campaign in 1968. According to the authors, the campaign was not solely a product of party leaders, as many historians have suggested, but rather a broader movement shaped, to a large extent, from below. In the process popular culture emerged as an important tool to promote nationalist narratives while underplaying ideological and political divisions within Polish society. To this effect, Gajewski shows how images of the Millennium celebrations as depicted in contemporary Polish newsreels suggest the merger of Catholic and secular symbols. In a similar way, Wołowiec and Sobieska discuss popular historical writings centered on military patriotism as critical to building a new "imagined community" of People's Poland.

No analysis of the Sixties can afford to ignore the eruption of leftist movements, including Marxist "revisionism" in Poland. This is the main subject of chapters by Kajetan Mojsak, Michał Czaja, and Bartłomiej Starnawski in the section titled "Oppositions and the Margins." By the late 1960s, as the authors argue, the leftist opposition in Poland increasingly turned to nationalist language and symbols. Mojsak traces the intellectual evolution of Polish dissident philosopher Leszek Kołakowski from Marxism and humanism to Catholicism and nationalism. A similar shift from concerns about broader social justice to preoccupation with the nation, as Czaja suggests, took place in the intellectual trajectories of Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski, the authors of *Open Letter to the Party*, a seminal document that influenced student demonstrations in 1968. Starnawski's essay builds on Czaja's arguments by pointing out the lost potential of the *Open Letter*. The Marxist critique put forward by Kuroń and Modzelewski effectively delegitimized Soviet-style regimes as "a political-discursive formation of a right-wing and reactionary-conservative character" (188) and offered a constructive vision of an alternative "workers' democracy." Yet these themes were not taken up by the Polish leftist opposition. Rather, Marxist "revisionists" eventually adopted a nation-centered language, and tended to excise Marxism from later memories of their own activity.

If popular culture provided a space to enact the dominant vision of the nation, it also opened opportunities for debate and contestation. Essays in the next two sections, "Visions of History" and "Morals at the Crossroads" look at novels, memoirs, and films as important sites for collective self-identification, but also for providing

counter-narratives to the dominant nationalist vision. Essays by Chmielewska, Calderón Aránzazu Puerta, and Tomasz Żukowski suggest films as a complex site for contesting historical memory. Examining memoirs of female communists written for the popular audience, Agnieszka Mroziak traces how and why leftist women committed to internationalism before the war began to tell their stories in the 1960s largely through the prism of national activism and sacrifice. This nationalization of revolutionary memory in "post-revolutionary times" went hand in hand with the marginalization of female communists after 1956.

Popular culture often engaged with the postwar social revolution. According to Aleksandra Sekuła, historical dramatic films, often based on 19th-century Polish novels, helped peasants adapt to the modern nationalist environment. Eliza Szybowicz and Anna Zawadzka focus on changing gender roles. Szybowicz examines the fascinating genre of popular novels addressed to teenage girls that was remarkably resistant to "new socialist conservatism and the old Catholic one" (326). These fictional stories tended to be filled with defiant daughters and independent mothers, and offered "liberal didacticism" (313) rather than a rigid vision of gender roles subordinated to the nationalist narrative. Likewise, Zawadzka discusses two popular television series that featured strong female characters: Ewa in *Doctor Ewa*, a young physician who went to work in the countryside to provide medical help to peasants; and Ania in *Far from the Highway*, who was a young wife and mother, but also an ambitious student, and later a scientist. For Zawadzka, both characters present possibilities for women's emancipation, but also the unfulfilled promises of socialism. While women were allowed to pursue careers, the sphere of intimate lives remained hostage to restrictive tradition and misogyny. When female characters were confronted with reproductive choices, as Zawadzka notes, they tended to sacrifice their independence to marriage and family.

The two closing articles by Anna Artwińska, and Chmielewska and Żukowski offer new and intriguing interpretations of the anti-Semitic campaign. Artwińska discusses the myth of "proper" family lineage as tantamount to national commitments. Chmielewska and Żukowski's essay on "The March Trauma" illustrates the anti-Semitic campaign as being crucial to establishing nationalism as the most effective framework for any political activism. In the end, as the authors claim, 1968 was most significant for the demise of the left, which afterwards increasingly framed its oppositional arguments within a nationalist and Christian-democratic discourse rather than a Marxist and secular one.

The collection provides an original and intriguing perspective on the time that has too often been associated with the oversimplified tropes of "small stabilization" or the state-driven nationalist agenda. The Sixties in Polish history emerge as a defining moment for multiple debates and struggles over the meaning of such vital categories as the nation, socialism, equality, politics, and religion. These debates persist and continue to shape Polish society today. Indeed, the authors convincingly demonstrate that one cannot understand the communist era without exploring the agency of society. But was Polish society a uniform actor? How deeply did the exclusionary national narrative penetrate different social groups or cultural and intellectual circles? Given the strong transnational trends of the era, were the domestic context and nationalism the only factors shaping social behavior? These questions and many others this book puts forth warrant further research. In short, the collection is a breakthrough scholarly achievement that showcases how interdisciplinary approaches and methodologies can lead to a productive re-thinking of postwar Polish history.

Malgorzata Fidelis

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