

Państwo, naród i... polityka polska

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This monograph is one of a series of publications covering the Polish social (or, broader, humanist) thought in the 19th and 20th century, with particular emphasis on the reflection on concepts such as state, society, nation, and identity. It is salient to read and re-discover Zygmunt Balicki, taking into account his wide scope of interest and the significant impact he had on modern political thought in Poland. Balicki was one of the most influential ideologists of Polish nationalism at the turn of the 19th and the 20th century. Alongside Roman Dmowski or Ludwik Popławski, he was also an active politician leaving a remarkable footprint on the further development of nationalist ideas as well as of Polish inter-war politics (even though he died in 1916 – two years before Poland regained independence).

The very rich body of literature that Balicki left behind consists of both scientific studies and journalist writings. His observations cover not only nationalism and national egotism, but also related themes such as parliamentarianism or political culture. Consequentially, the selection of his works paints a very informative picture of ideas and ideologies present in Poland at that time. Also, it shows the complex web of connections between each of the different social roles he played, such as scholar (engaged in sociological, psychological, and philosophical studies), writer, ideologist, and – last but not least – politician. In its composition, the anthology follows his respective social roles: It deals with the broad scope of topics he was interested in throughout his life, while taking into account his engagement in various activities, his multi-faceted identity, as well as his ideological identifications evolving from socialism to pro-Russian nationalism.

However, Balicki's scholarly work was dominated by sociology and psychology. Even when researching purely political phenomena, he would – theoretically and methodologically – remain confined to his primary scientific disciplines. This, at the same time, allowed him to incorporate categories such as emotions into the study of nations and nationalism (as well as patriotism) not only in an innovative, but in a truly interdisciplinary way.

The anthology consists of five parts. The first one, "Naukowe ramy etyki narodowej i polityki narodowej" (Scientific Frames of National Ethics and Politics), contains Balicki's highly theoretical texts about social psychology. The second part, "Katechizm nacjonalisty wedle Zygmunta Balickiego: zasady, wzorce osobowe i konteksty" (The Catechism of a Nationalist: Principles, Personal Patterns, and Contexts), covers topics related to

the problem of ethics. The third part, "Podstawy naukowe i ideowe polityki" (Scientific and Ideological Bases of Politics), includes purely academic texts, written originally in Polish or French, some of which are presented to the Polish reader for the first time. The fourth part, "W kręgu psychospołecznych nastrojów społecznych i polityki" (Within Psycho-sociological Social Conditions and Politics), features Balicki's focus on emotions and their roles in political processes. Finally, the chapter "W kręgu kwestii tożsamościowych polskiego nacjonalizmu" (In the Circles of Identity Questions of the Polish Nationalism) consists of Balicki's lesser known journalistic writings. It includes, among others, the article "Apolityczny wpływ Żydów" (The Apolitical Influence of the Jews), in which Balicki portrays the first generation of Polish nationalists' cultural and ideological obsession with and fascination for anti-Semitism.

In light of today's developments in Polish politics, it is extraordinarily interesting to follow Balicki's deliberations on liberalism. He perceived liberalism as an evil, cosmopolitan doctrine, wrongly defining the relations between individual and society, alienating the individual from the broader social context, i.e., a historical community of fate, specific political culture or simply economic entity. By contrast, Balicki would favor national democracy, which promoted the collective instead of individualism and egoism. By this assumption, Balicki tried to build a model of positive politics, at the centre of which was the idea of the nation.

The above-stated concept of politics translated into his journalistic writing, in which he would propose specific political programmes in the particular Polish context. His articles in *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, *Przegląd Społeczny*, or *Głos* expressed Balicki's vision of Poland at the beginning of the 20th century. There, Balicki also manifested ideas that position themselves, at least from today's perspectives dangerously close to racist ideologies. For example, when formulating obligations for the members of a political nation, he would not only emphasize a linguistic or cultural, but also a biological distinctiveness. Such biological, instead of civic, concepts of nations were nothing new or unusual in Europe in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Suspiciously enough, they remain consistently present in Polish politics of the early 21st century.

In general, reading and interpreting Balicki's thoughts in the context of contemporary Poland and Polish politics is a challenging, but also intriguing exercise. Some socio-political cleavages in the Polish political scene after 1989 resemble his visions of the Poles as a political nation. The successors of the "evil" liberals and equally despised socialists seem to oppose the successors of various types of nationalism, for whom Balicki naturally shows much more empathy and understanding. Re-discovering Balicki's observations allow us to perceive continuities in some features and characteristics of the Polish society and nation despite the historical or geopolitical different context.

Balicki belonged to a tragic generation – he was born, lived and died in un-free Poland. In contrast to Dmowski, who had the opportunity to play an essential role in sovereign Poland's political life after 1918, Balicki's mark is predominantly his intellectual legacy. He is the author of one of the most scientifically sophisticated bodies of literature dedicated to the key topics of social sciences, i.e. state, society, and nation. This anthology edited by Joanna Kurczewska complements earlier works dedicated to the writings of Balicki, in that it introduces his less known or previously unpublished texts. By doing so, it contributes to a better and more enhanced understanding of the origins of the Polish national movement. Re-reading Balicki's works in the context of the new, 21st century, sheds some light on the wide spectrum of the party system and helps to explain the key

elements and drivers of recent political dynamics.



Sposób cytowania:

dr hab. Rafał Riedel: Recenzja: Zygmunt Balicki: Państwo, naród i... polityka polska, 2015, w: <https://www.pol-int.org/pl/publikacje/panstwo-narod-i-polityka-polska#r6891>.

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