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Polish identity in the soviet period: peculiarities and factors of transformation

Abstract. *The article is devoted to Poland's historical events and how they were affecting their national self-consciousness during that time. The article was written based on our research questions "How much did Poland suffer during its attachment to the USSR? How did this affect their national identity? How historical events affect national identity in the example of Poland?" The method of the search is quantitative and was used to find information for the article.*

The article runs about some facts taken from the history of Poland like the Soviet invasion of Poland, World War II and its consequences for the country, and Poland's life after World War II. The importance of the topic is that the question of identity has always been at the forefront for Europeans, including Poland, which has experienced some difficulties and changes in self-identification, while some nations have not recognized them as Poles. Critical junctures in the life of every country, be it invader or victim, have always brought about changes not only externally but also subconsciously, shaping or conversely deforming the thinking and perceptions of people and the world. It is important to look soberly into the past and study the history of a country that has experienced not the best events in life, so as to have a clear picture before your eyes for a better understanding of what is happening.

Keywords: *Critical junctures, Poland, national identity, Soviet Invasion, politics, historical fate, the USSR, World War II.*

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Introduction

National and cultural identity is a subjective phenomenon. Determining the main factors that shape identity is a difficult task that requires the combined efforts of researchers in history, political science, sociology, psychology, and other social sciences. National identity should be considered in the context of a set of circumstances: individual, collective, and historical. When analyzing identity, it is worth considering not only the formation of national, cultural, religious boundaries, but also emotional factors: a sense of belonging and rootedness.

So, our research question is "How much did Poland suffer during its attachment to the USSR? How did this affect their national

identity? How historical events affected national identity in the example of Poland?"

These questions arise not only from the fact that Polish identity has undergone metamorphosis related to history, but also for the European Union as a whole the question of identity is still relevant. In general, we reject that Poles are exactly like Russians or Ukrainians. We can agree that they have some cultural, lingual similarities, but that does not actually say they are totally the same.

In our article we will answer these questions by searching for information in various articles and books, Internet resources, etc.

Identification process itself takes a big part in every country's life. As we can see from the history, Poland has been through lots of

different events in history, that touched their national identity as well as their state. Since, it all mentioned in the history, we are going to revise it once more to clearly identify their national identity.

In this article we will consider the issue of Poland state during their attachment to the USSR, how did it affect on their national identity and how some historical events shaped national identity of Polish people.

Polish identity changed and transformed in many ways during the Soviet Union, during the war and disintegration, and therefore national identity depended on external circumstances, which in turn did not well affect the perception of Polish people as a Polish identity.

Nevertheless, we totally agree with the work of Oleg Nemensiki where he mentions historical events in his article that affected on Poland and their identity in the period of USSR invasion to Poland and Polish identity in general [1]. The class limitations of Polishness prevented the organization of Polish resistance even in the twentieth century. The most important problem was that the «common people» the Poles were counting on were ethnically very different: quantitatively, most of them were Russian peasants, who (unlike the Polish, by the way) had quite definite notions of who they were and how they differed from the Poles (with their «Russian faith»). Even T. Kosciuszko wrote about how «rusinow naszym» could and should be made Poles by self-consciousness and he already noted that only the Catholic religion, the spread of the Catholic faith could be the main tool for this.

As history shows, it was never understood, and after the Second World War Poland moved back to its Piast borders. And in this you can see a certain fracture in the modern Polish self-consciousness: the borders do not correspond to the Poland for which it is nostalgic: Poland is now a body in Central Europe, but it's soul is still in Eastern Europe, which determines the entire Polish Eastern policy. And in Poland, by the way, almost all politics, and not only foreign ones, are in one way or another reduced to the East.

From all of this, we can understand that the Polish identity was attacked by ordinary people who, in turn, had a clear understanding of who they were as opposed to Poles.

Thus, we will acknowledge three main topics with three sections of our article with this road map:

First, Identity Change: Critical Juncture and their relationship.

Second, How did World War II and Soviet invasion turn out for Poland?

Third, Poland after World War II

Personally, these topics are vital in understanding Poland's history and identity because they were affecting self-consciousness of Polish people.

Identity change: critical juncture

In this section, we will analyze the relationship between critical juncture and national identity. Crises and critical junctures have always been happening in the history of different states. They should be made and perceived in such a way that they actually change or transform social identities. For example, a military defeat, invasion, obliteration and etc. is always a traumatic event for any country and its citizens. But it has to be interpreted in a particular way in order to lead to identity change. Example of Germany shows us how their identity changed during their invading companies to European states during World War II, which resulted in a strengthening of nationalist and even militarist identities among the elites and in a public opinion, which Adolf Hitler was successfully able to use in his own interests. The example of the catastrophe of the World War II can clearly show the transformation of German identity to Nazi self-consciousness. Critical junctures are one of the most triggering events for quick and powerful identity change. Wars and military defeats often become such tipping points for national identity, leading to profound implications [2]. Although the causal mechanisms discussed so far emphasize incremental processes of identity change, sociologists and psychologists point to traumatic experiences and massive inconsistencies between cognitive schemas and beliefs, on the one hand, and novel information or experiences of failure, on the other, which then trigger identity change. Wars, revolutions, sudden regime change, and other crisis events should lead to profound

changes in the way in which people make sense of the world including their collective identities.

Even though the causal mechanisms discussed thus far have focused on accumulative processes of identity change, sociologists and psychologists have pointed to traumatic experiences and massive inconsistencies between cognitive schemas and beliefs, on the one hand, and novel information or failure experiences, on the other, as triggers for identity change [2]. Wars, revolutions, sudden regime changes, and many other crisis events should result in significant shifts in people's perceptions of the world, including their collective identities. Critical junctures are always a bad idea when mentioning identity change in terms of living in society.

In subsequent eras, when all peoples began to create a single world history, the role of people's self-consciousness grows even more. It's important to remember that while every nation has its own distinct culture, not every nation contributes equally to a single global culture. Because they have more economic, political, cultural, and other opportunities, historically, more numerous nations have played a greater role in world history. And their self-awareness shapes not only their attitudes toward social values, but also their attitudes toward smaller countries. They should be more generous and supportive of their cultural and other traditions' development and preservation. Small nations, on the other hand, must recognize that, due to similar historical circumstances, they are unable to claim the historical role assigned to large nations; it must be remembered, however, that ambition hinders not only the individual but also the nation. As a result, instead of enviously chasing after the big nations, one should make a modest contribution to the treasury of world culture as much as possible. And their level of self-awareness plays a big role in this. A group of people without a distinct identity is referred to as a crowd. A nation with a high sense of self-awareness strives to preserve traditions, culture, material, and spiritual values, to maintain humane relations with all peoples, and to contribute new achievements to world civilization.

Soviet Invasion and World War II

On September 17, 1939, Soviet troops entered Poland. At the very beginning of World War II, Poland was divided by two totalitarian states. It was six o'clock in the morning when the Red Army entered Poland on September 17, which had been negotiated in August in a secret protocol of the so-called Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact between the USSR and Nazi Germany. It was just over two weeks after Hitler attacked Poland and World War II began. More than 4,000 Soviet tanks and over 600,000 men participated in the invasion. Moreover, the Soviet Union began the invasion without a declaration of war [3]. There was little resistance because a significant portion of the Polish soldiers were engaged in combat with the Wehrmacht at that time. We think that all these actions from USSR played a big role in perception of national identity of Polish people.

Before the invasion of the Red Army there was still hope that the war would not at least turn out to be a total disaster for Poland, says Polish historian Zbigniew Woznicka. He recalls that although the invading troops were already in Warsaw, such major cities as Lublin, Vilna (now Vilnius) and Lemberg (now L'viv) had not yet been captured [4].

Despite suffering heavy losses, the Polish army continued to fight to maintain their own country's sovereignty. The fact that Poland was unprepared for the war, the clear strategic mistakes made by the Polish government, and the army's low combat capability may all be discussed for a long time. But the fact of the matter remains that Poland fought on two fronts, that the combat was uneven, and that Poland lost its sovereignty in this battle.

The Polish leadership managed to carry out a partial evacuation to Romania and the Baltic states, and from there moved to London. Less than a year later, in 1940, Romanian Bessarabia and all the Baltic states would also come under attack by the USSR. The additional protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact clearly enough formulated the spheres of influence between the USSR and Germany [5]. After a short negotiation, the mutual border was defined by the two states, the masters of human destinies. The state of Poland ceased to exist.

Before 1939 Poland was a developing state with a market economy. Small, medium and large businesses functioned well, banks worked, commodity-money relations were established. Regardless of nationality, there were people in society, whose physical and intellectual work, ingenuity and intelligence were able to earn good money [3]. There was an institution of private property in the country: people owned real estate, bought and sold apartments, cars, private houses. They built homesteads, cultivated and improved the land they owned.

Society functioned in a way that is familiar and understandable to all of us today. People sought to arrange a decent life for themselves and their children. They worked to improve the current well-being and to give a prosperous life to the next generations, who were to inherit good real estate, family businesses, fertile land, and were to continue the history of the family, multiplying its wealth in each generation. When the hand of the USSR reached for it, everything collapsed. Life was short, misery and grief came. The inhabitants felt all the «charms» of the formation of the Soviet system and the «class struggle against the bourgeoisie». Arrests began, mass confiscations of land, houses, apartments, and any property [5]. All the most active, active and educated people turned out to be personal enemies of the Soviet power, subject to either physical extermination or arrest and exile for labor exploitation in the camps in the distant republics of the USSR.

Later, supporters of the Soviet regime would say that in fact the policy of the USSR was merely to get rid of those who could become potential saboteurs and collaborate with Hitler's German intelligence [5]. This is no excuse at all. The first target was the «capitalists and bourgeois». Moreover, history has shown that it is impossible to quench the demand for «potential» enemies and spies in an atmosphere of spy mania. They will be «discovered» again and again.

In the eastern part of the Polish Republic there were many inhabitants who were called «siegemen». These were Poles who had been given land by the state for special merit, or who had bought the land for their own money. Many of them were veterans of the Soviet-Polish war of 1919-1921, who had retired and

had a family and their own household. Once again, it is not surprising that they, too, became priority enemies of the Soviet government, which decided to recall all the «old grudges».

Poland after World War II

The Soviet occupation from the east was wiped off the political map in 27 days after Nazi Germany launched a treacherous attack on September 1, 1939. With its defeat, the countdown to the Second World War, which resulted in massive casualties, began. The military operations wreaked havoc on the Polish state's lands, resulting in a slew of significant destructions and losses. The USSR was finally able to secure the territories of Western Ukraine and Belorussia. Overall, 20 percent of industrial objects were destroyed, 60 percent of medical institutions were destroyed, and more than 63 percent of educational and scientific institutions were destroyed, and Warsaw was leveled. The most important aspect, however, is the irreversible human losses [6].

Hundreds of thousands of inhabitants were tortured by hard forced labor in Nazi concentration camps. Particularly brutal were the Polish Jews who were first herded into ghettos and then, following the Reich's decision on the Jewish question in 1942, deported to the death camps. One of the bloodiest death camps was near the city of Auschwitz, where over 4 million people were tortured and murdered.

Undoubtedly, Hitler's regime resulted in the deaths of a large number of Poles, but the Soviet leadership also played a role in the extermination of the Polish elite and intellectuals, which is also a big psychological impact on Pole's identity. The economic exploitation of the Polish people was skillfully targeted by Soviet repression.

After World War II, Poland's territorial losses and new borders are a hotly debated topic. Although the state was declared a victor, only the coastal region and the southern territories remain from the pre-war period. The German territories joined Poland as compensation for the lost eastern regions, which propagandists dubbed «the Returned Lands.» On April 21, 1945, the Soviet Union signed a treaty of friendship with Poland, ceding to Poland

parts of West Prussia, East Pomerania, Silesia, the Free City of Danzig, East Brandenburg, and the district of Szczecin [6]. Thus, Poland's territory was 312 thousand square kilometers after WWII, compared to 388 thousand square kilometers prior to 1939. The loss of the eastern areas was never fully compensated. As a result of the German-Soviet agreement of 1939 on division of borders of Poland, more than 12 million Polish citizens (among them about 5 million ethnic Poles) found themselves in the territories passed to the Soviet Union. The new territorial boundaries of the states caused a mass relocation of peoples.

Poland lost 17 percent of its population after WWII. In the following years, the government's migration policy emphasized the state's mono-ethnicity and the return of Poles to their homeland. In 1945, a treaty on the mutual exchange of population was signed with the Soviet government, and over 1.8 million people were repatriated to Poland [7]. There were Jews among the repatriates, but anti-Semitic sentiments in the postwar years prompted their mass exodus from the country. Around 200,000 more people were able to return from the Soviet Union in 1956-1958. It's also worth noting that after the war, some 500,000 Poles who fought on the Allies' side refused to return to their Communist-ruled homeland [7].

The presence of Red Army units in Poland was instrumental in the successful transfer of power to the Polish Communists. At the end of the war, representatives from the Polish Workers' Party, the Polish Socialist Party, and the Polish Peasant Party formed a government of national unity, but communists broke up the coalition in 1947 and established a state of national democracy, which was reflected in the 1952 constitution.

The first postwar elections to the Polish Parliament (Sejm) were held in January 1947, with the Communists winning 382 of the 444 seats and the Peasant Party 28. Boleslaw Bierut, a communist who followed a strict Stalinist line, was confirmed as head of state by the newly elected Sejm. Persecution forced opposition movement activists and some leaders of the Polish Peasant Party to flee to the West in October 1947 [7]. These events resulted in Poland's «Stalinization.» In December 1948

the merger of the Polish Workers' Party and the Polish Socialist Party resulted in the formation of the Polish United Workers' Party (PWP), which subsequently retained the monopoly of political power in the country.

Despite the imposition of harsh policies following WWII, there were repeated waves of protests in Poland against the current regime. The low standard of living, infringement of personal freedom and civil rights, and the impossibility of political participation were the main causes of citizens' discontent.

Poland was stripped of its right to make decisions in its external political relations after becoming a Soviet-controlled state. Its desire to be a part of the North Atlantic structures and to have a meaningful role among the states of Western civilization was only realized when the socialist bloc fell apart [6]. Poland joined the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance in 1949, which aided the country's development of close ties with the New Democracies. The Warsaw Treaty of Friendship, which included eight member states and was in fact a response to Germany's NATO membership, was signed by Polish representatives in 1955. The Warsaw Pact was a military-political alliance led by the Soviet Union that stood in opposition to NATO.

One of Poland's difficult tasks after World War II was to ensure the security of its western borders. It was not until the 1970s that the FRG was able to accept the inviolability of the Polish state's western border. In 1975, in Helsinki, the Conference on Security and Cooperation of European States recognized the following: all borders constructed after the war are inviolable.

The postwar economy

The first steps in Poland's development after World War II began with a three-year economic recovery plan approved by Warsaw and Moscow in 1947. In the same year an agreement was made with the USSR for the supply of industrial equipment to Poland worth about \$500 million. As a consequence, by 1949 the output of industrial goods per capita increased 2.5 times, and in comparison with the pre-war time the economic return on their sale was significantly improved. There

was also a reform in agriculture: 814 thousand farms were established, about 6070 thousand hectares of land were given to peasants, the existing allotments were increased [7]. In 1950-1955, with the scientific and financial help of the USSR, the stage of industrialization in Poland was launched, with the emphasis on the heavy industry and mechanical engineering. As a result, by 1955 the volume of production multiplied by 2.5 times compared with the data of 1950, and the number of agrarian cooperatives increased by 14.3 times [7].

At the end of the WWII, Poland was a completely different country after WWII than it had been during the interwar period (1918-1939). The formation of a new balance of power in the international arena, as well as the policy of leading states that recognized the division of Europe into zones of influence, where the Soviet Union left its Eastern part, resulted in significant changes in Poland. Changes in the political system, foreign policy orientation, socio-economic orientation, and territorial and demographic situation occurred following the establishment of the communist regime in the country.

Conclusion

The most important factor in the formation of every national identity is common culture. Such unifying elements as the Polish language, rituals and customs, national heroes and symbols, Polish art, literature, painting, music,

cuisine, etc. play a key role in the process of identification [8]. Political and historical events such as Soviet Invasion and aftermath effects have left their mark on the self-consciousness of Poles. It is culture that was and still is the basis and core for the attraction of the Polish nation. Culture makes it possible to feel the permanence of a nation's existence, to connect its past, present and future up together. In today's world, a Polish citizen needs to identify in several roles: as a member of the global community, as a citizen of the European Union, as part of the Polish nation. At the same time, if we talk about the correlation of Polish and European identity, many factors are at work in both cases (civilizational identity, common culture). Defining identity has become a matter of individual choice for each identity out of the variety of propositions and worldviews offered to it by modernity. It's easy to see why Poles interpret their history through the lenses of betrayal and victimhood: Poles have a national martyrdom narrative, and the events of World War II fit into that narrative. Poles define their allies' actions in terms of historical themes of victimhood and betrayal; as a result, Poles look to the self-interested acts of the West as evidence for the fulfillment of Poland's destiny as a martyred nation, rather than the geopolitical realities of their situation. Poles prefer to see themselves as glorious victims rather than failures; they prefer to see themselves as martyred rather than unlucky.

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Польская идентичность в советский период: особенности и факторы трансформации Критический момент и изменение идентичности: польская идентичность после советского вторжения

Аннотация. Статья посвящена историческим событиям Польши и тому, как они влияли на ее национальное самосознание в тот период. Согласно нашим исследовательским вопросам ««Насколько сильно пострадала Польша во время присоединения к СССР? Как это повлияло на их национальное самосознание? Как исторические события повлияли на национальное самосознание на примере Польши?»» была написана статья. Метод поиска является количественным и был использован для поиска информации для статьи. Статья рассказывает о некоторых фактах из истории Польши, таких, как советское вторжение в Польшу, Вторая мировая война и ее последствия для страны, а также жизнь Польши после Второй мировой войны. Важность темы заключается в том, что вопрос идентичности всегда стоял на первом месте для европейцев, в том числе и для Польши, которая пережила некоторые трудности и изменения в самоидентификации, а некоторые народы не признали их поляками. Критические моменты в жизни каждой страны, будь то захватчик или жертва, всегда приводили к изменениям не только внешним, но и подсознательным, формируя или, наоборот, деформируя мышление и восприятие людей и мира. Важно трезво смотреть в прошлое, изучая историю страны, пережившей не самые лучшие события в жизни, чтобы иметь перед глазами ясную картину для лучшего понимания происходящего.

Ключевые слова: Критические узлы, Польша, национальная идентичность, советское вторжение, политика, историческая судьба, СССР, Вторая мировая война.

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Кеңестік кезеңіндегі поляктық бірегейлік: трансформациялану ерекшеліктері мен факторлары Сыни сәт және сәйкестіктің өзгеруі: кеңес шапқыншылығынан кейінгі поляк сәйкестігі

Аңдатпа. Мақалада Польшаның тарихи оқиғалары және олардың сол кезеңдегі ұлттық санасына қалай әсер еткені туралы айтылады. Менің зерттеу сұрағыма сәйкес «« Польша КСРО-ға қосылу кезінде қаншалықты зардап шекті? Бұл олардың ұлттық санасына қалай әсер етті? Тарихи оқиғалар Польша мысалында ұлттық санаға қалай әсер етті?»» осы сұрақтар негізінде мақала жазылды. Іздеу әдісі сандық болып табылады және мақаланың ақпаратын іздеу үшін қолданылған. Мақалада Польша тарихындағы кейбір фактілер, мысалы, кеңестік Польшаға басып кіру, Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс және оның елге әсері, сондай-ақ Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыстан кейінгі Польша өмірі туралы айтылады. Тақырыптың маңыздылығы мынада: сәйкестік мәселесі еуропалықтар үшін, соның ішінде өзін-өзі анықтаудағы кейбір қиындықтар мен өзгерістерді бастан өткерген Польша үшін әрқашан бірінші орында болды, ал кейбір халықтар оларды поляк деп мойындамады. Әр елдің өміріндегі маңызды сәттер, мейлі ол басқыншы болсын, жәбірленуші болсын, әрқашан сыртқы ғана емес, сонымен қатар бейсаналық өзгерістерге әкеліп соқтырды, адамдар мен әлемді ойлау мен қабылдауды қалыптастырды немесе керісінше деформациялады. Не болып жатқанын

жақсы түсіну үшін көз алдыңызда айқын көрініс болу үшін өмірдегі ең жақсы оқиғаларды бастан өткермеген елдің тарихын зерттей отырып, өткенге байсалды қарау маңызды.

Түйін сөздер: сыни түйіндер, Польша, ұлттық бірегейлік, кеңестік шапқыншылық, саясат, тарихи тағдыр, КСРО, Екінші дүниежүзілік соғыс.

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