

Hanging Portraits of 'Traitors': The Radicalization of the Polish Ethnolinguistic Nationalism

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Nation Above the Law

On 25 November 2017, in the city of Katowice, in front of the former Sejm (Regional Parliament) of interwar Poland's autonomous region of Silesia (Silesian Voivodeship), the far-right nationalist organization ONR (*Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny*, National Radical Camp) staged a political happening. The ONR is a latter-day reincarnation of the eponymous interwar organization, which due to its radicalism was banned in 1934 in the then openly authoritarian Poland. The current ONR's displeasure was brought about by the six Polish MEPs (members of the European Parliament). On 17 November 2017, they voted in favor of the European Parliament's resolution that urges the Polish Parliament and government (both led by the Law and Justice party, PiS, *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*) to observe and protect the rule of law in Poland.¹

Much of the pro-PiS and other nationalist mass media in Poland vilified the aforementioned MEPs as 'traitors [of the Polish nation].' ONR members in Katowice went one step further. They ritually hanged the portraits of 'traitors' Michał Boni, Danuta Huebner, Danuta Jazłowiecka, Barbara Kudrycka, Julia Pitera and Róża Thun; and subsequently threw them to the ground and trampled. Police stood by idly. Later the office of prosecutor public refused to investigate this clear-cut incident of hate speech, citing the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of speech and of expressing political opinions.² This tradition of 'execution *in effigie*' dates back to late Poland-Lithuania, when the country was being erased from the political map of Europe by the Habsburgs, Prussia and Russia in 1794-1795.³ No Polish citizen with a whiff of elementary school education has any doubts that the ONR members in Katowice intended to effect character assassination and public humiliation of the aforementioned MEPs.

The concerned MEPs appealed to public at large for defense and support in the name of European values, democracy and rule of law. This appeal fell flat on the ears of PiS and ONR sympathizers. When PiS began dismantling the rule of law in Poland in late 2015, a prominent PiS MP and anticommunist oppositionist, Kornel Morawiecki, opined, on 25 November 2015, that 'the interest of the nation is above the law.'⁴ In a nutshell, this is how PiS understands, or rather misinterprets, the democratic principle of rule of law. The party's electorate and 'real patriots' (that is, ethnonationalists) agree. Unsurprisingly, it is Kornel Morawiecki's son, the former investment banker, Mateusz

¹ http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-8-2017-0442_EN.html

² <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,22700704,narodowcy-powiesili-zdjecia-poslow-na-szubienicy-policja-nie.html>
<https://www.polsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2019-05-17/prokuratura-chce-przedluzenia-sledztwa-ws-zdjec-poslow-na-szubienicach/>

³ <https://www.rp.pl/Rzecz-o-historii/307059902-Wieszanie-zdrajcow-Na-pohybel-targowicy.html>

⁴ <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/273101-kornel-morawiecki-w-sejmie-nad-prawem-jest-dobro-narodu-prawo-ktore-nie-sluzyc-narodowi-to-bezprawie-reakcja-owacja-na-stojaco-wideo>

Morawiecki, who now forces through the actual implementation of this nation-*über-alles* principle as the incumbent Polish Prime Minister.

The Opole Beginnings

One of the MEPs whose portraits were hanged is Danuta Jazłowiecka. In 1999-2003 she headed the Department of European Integration in the Regional Authority (*Urząd Marszałkowski*) of Opole Region (*Województwa Opolskie*). I cooperated with her, sharing my experience in this field. In 1994 I graduated from Central European University (Prague) with an MA in European Integration. Between 1996 and 1999, I acted as the Opole Regional Governor's (*Wojewoda*) Plenipotentiary on European Integration (*Pełnomocnik Wojewody do Spraw Integracji Europejskiej*). Subsequently, from 1999-2002 I was the Opole Regional President's (*Marszałek*) Advisor on Foreign Cooperation (*Doradca do Spraw Współpracy z Zagranicą*).

After 2002, due to the growing politicization of civil service in Poland, I decided to focus solely on research, having worked at Opole University since 1995. As a contribution to my civil service colleagues' efforts for Poland's accession to the European Union, I compiled the *Polsko-angielsko-niemiecki Glosariusz regionalny Województwa Opolskiego* (The Polish-English-German Glossary of the Regional Terminology of the Province of Opole). With a subsidy from the Opole Regional Authority,⁵ this glossary was published in May 2004 for the long-awaited occasion of the accession of Poland into the European Union. Among others, Danuta Jazłowiecka reviewed and recommended this glossary for publication.

This glossary is appended with a statistical-historical addendum. Apart from giving the Polish and Soviet view according to which the new German-Polish border was recognized in 1945 at the Potsdam Conference, this addendum also presents the official view on this matter as adopted by West Germany and the Western Allies, namely, Britain, France and the United States. All the four Western states *withheld* the final de jure recognition of this frontier in light of international law until when the German-Polish Border Treaty of 1990 was ratified in 1992.⁶

The latter view was vehemently denied and labelled as 'revanchist' in communist Poland. On cue of this well-remembered piece of communist propaganda, the radical nationalist and anti-German MP, Jerzy Czerwiński, convened a press conference on 8 May 2004. It was an immediate media opportunity prior to the 2005 parliamentary elections. During this conference Czerwiński lambasted me as an 'anti-Polish revanchist' for including in the glossary this Western view on Poland's western border, as held between 1945 and 1992. However, the matter was a mere tool of political expediency. Czerwiński wielded it deftly, first of all, to further his political career in order to make himself better known as a 'true patriot' in the nationalist circles. The other purpose was to criticize his political opponents – that is, the pro-democratic PO (*Platforma Obywatelska*, Civic Platform) and the German minority, as represented by the TSKN (*Towarzystwo Społeczno-Kulturalne*

⁵ <https://opole.wyborcza.pl/opole/1,35086,2066471.html>

⁶ Tomasz Kamusella. 2004. *Polsko-angielsko-niemiecki Glosariusz Województwa Opolskiego*. Opole: Oficyna Piastowska, p. 117.

Niemców na Śląsku Opolskim, Socio-Cultural Society of the Germans of Opole Silesia). At that time the PO government ruled Poland, while the PO-TSKN coalition ruled Opole Region.

Immediately after Czerwiński's conference, the TSKN leader and Opole Deputy Regional President, Ryszard Galla, publically called for burning the entire run of the glossary.⁷ Subsequently, Opole University issued a public declaration in which I was condemned as a scholar and a person.⁸ Not to be outdone, the Regional Authority, led by Galla, issued a similar declaration condemning me as a former civil servant and person. In addition, they referred my case to the prosecutor public, proposing that I breached a non-existent law on the 'Polish *raison d'état*' (*polska racja stanu*).⁹ In this context, President (*Rektor*) of Opole University expressed his regrets that he had no legal instruments to fire me or punish otherwise.¹⁰ What is more, the Regional Authority requested the Polish National Library in Warsaw (*Biblioteka Narodowa*) to withhold readers' access to the two copies of this glossary in this library's holdings.¹¹ Belatedly, the Silesian Institute (*Instytut Śląski*) joined the chorus.¹² Since 1957, this institute has been responsible for providing expertise that would facilitate the Polonization of Opole Region, which used to be part of Germany prior to 1945.

All these steps were taken behind my back, when I was on a research fellowship in the Library of Congress, Washington. Neither did the university and the Regional Authority, nor journalists seek to hear my opinion on the matter. The character assassination was conducted swiftly and with the unwavering support of all the political parties in Opole Region. Not a single leader or member of these parties did stand up in my defense, or at least in the defense of the constitutionally guaranteed freedoms of speech and research. Danuta Jazłowiecka, a prominent PO party official, kept silence, too. This paid off, in 2005 she became an MP, and between 2009 and 2019 served as an MEP. Now, after the 2019 parliamentary elections, she brushes sides with Jerzy Czerwiński as senators in the Polish Senate. Galla's principled stance also gave him a political boost, and since 2005 he has served as a sole German minority MP in the Polish Parliament.

Between Civic and Ethnic Polish Nationalism

⁷ <https://opole.wyborcza.pl/opole/1,35086,2062655.html>

⁸ <https://opole.wyborcza.pl/opole/1,35086,2072518.html>

https://www.academia.edu/33142458/May_13_2004_Faculty_of_Philology_Opole_University_Declaration_on_T_Kamusellas_The_Glossary

https://www.academia.edu/33142052/May_13_2004_Faculty_of_Philology_Opole_University_The_minutes_of_the_Faculty_Councils_discussion_on_the_Facultys_Declaration_on_T_Kamusellas_The_Glossary

⁹ <https://opole.wyborcza.pl/opole/1,35086,2066471.html>

¹⁰ <https://opole.wyborcza.pl/opole/1,35086,2067889.html>

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polsko-angielsko-niemiecki_Glosariusz_regionalny_Województwa_Opolskiego#/media/File:Polish_National_Library's_catalog_information_that_the_two_copies_of_the_first_book_censored_in_postcommunist_Poland_are_inaccessible_to_readers.jpg

¹² https://www.academia.edu/33193484/Stanisław_Senft_and_Wiesław_Drobek_2004_W_sprawie_wypowiedzi_prasowych_dr_Tomasz_Kamuselli_On_Tomasz_Kamusella_s_Press_Replies_pp_57-58_2004_Śląsk_Opolski_No_2_Opole_Poland_Instytut_Śląski

In line with the Polish Constitution, the Polish law and the rule of law, the Opole Office of Prosecutor Public rejected Galla's and the Opole Regional Authority's accusation that through my research I breached a hypothetical law on the 'Polish *raison d'état*.'¹³ But it took eight years longer – until 2012 – for the Polish National Library to notice that censoring books in democratic Poland was highly inappropriate. At this Regional Authority's explicit request,¹⁴ the Library removed the caveat on *not* making the glossary available to interested readers.¹⁵ Obviously, not a single person who commenced or joined this character assassination campaign (briefly, *nagonka* in Polish), did care to explain, let alone apologize, to me. This amply proves that Morawiecki Sr's pronouncement on the interest of the nation being above the law (including the Constitution) was as much valid in 2004 as it is nowadays.

This principle has invariably governed Polish politics since 1956, when stalinism (aka 'internationalism' or 'internationalist communism') was replaced with national communism. On this basis, in 1968, it was 'necessary' to ethnically cleanse communist Poland of whomever the national communist government considered to be a Jew.¹⁶ It was then when the authorities perfected the techniques of public shaming, and mobilizing colleagues and the mass media against a targeted person.¹⁷ Since that time, these methods of individual or collective character assassination have been deeply internalized – consciously or not – by the elite and public at large in Poland. It took no time to deploy them, as a knee-jerk reflex, against me as a person and scholar in 2004.

This 'defensive-cum-offensive' mechanism is nearly automatically deployed for protecting the 'Polish *raison d'état*.' The latter is invoked in a ritualistic, bonding and group-forming manner, without any attempt at defining this concept. When I ran an experiment asking scholars from Opole University and civil servants from the Regional Authority about what '*raison d'état*' (*racja stanu*) might mean, they invariably were taken aback. Those who attempted to define this concept ad hoc, confused it with 'estate' (*stan*), or the politically-defined stratum of population in a feudal polity, for instance, the estate of nobility or the estate of burghers (*stan szlachecki*, *stan mieszczański*).

After the fall of communism in 1989, the democratization of Poland removed 'communism' from the postcommunist country's leading ideology of national communism, leaving nationalism alone in this elevated role. One of the main political quarrels about the postcommunist Constitution of 1997 was about the definition of the Polish nation. Finally, the camp advocating broad church-style inclusiveness won. This Constitution's Preamble defines the Polish nation as 'all citizens of the Republic,' irrespective of confession, economic status, ethnicity, gender or language (Articles 32,

¹³ <https://opole.wyborcza.pl/opole/1,35086,2498609.html>

¹⁴

https://www.academia.edu/33141847/Apr_5_2012_Opole_Regional_Presidents_Letter_to_the_Director_of_the_Polish_National_Library_Requesting_to_Lift_the_Censorship_Imposed_in_2004_on_the_Glossary

¹⁵

https://www.academia.edu/33141601/NTO_2012_Jan_19_Glosariusz_jest_juz_na_wolnosc_i_The_Glossary_Has_Just_Been_Released_from_Prison

¹⁶ <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/spoleczenstwo/wystawa-obcy-w-domu-w-polin-polska-ich-odrzucila-wywiad/gxscsr0>

¹⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1968_Polish_political_crisis#Anti-Jewish_mobilization_and_purges_party_politics

33, 35, 53).¹⁸ From the official perspective, today's Poland, unlike the United States or Chile, is a *civic* nation-state.

But in reality, the vast majority of politicians and the population defines the Polish nation in the traditional ethnolinguistic terms, as explicitly championed during the interwar period and now by the ONR, and otherwise by the post-1956 national communist regime of the Polish People's Republic. In this view the Polish nation is composed of straightforwardly heterosexual Polish-speaking Catholics. Protestants and culturally Catholic atheists are half-heatedly welcomed, too. However, Polish-speakers of the Jewish religion or origin are excluded, alongside non-Polish-speakers, those who profess Orthodox Christianity or Greek Catholicism, and LGBT minorities.

As a result, a considerable group of Polish citizens, who in light of the Constitution are full-fledged members of the Polish nation, *de facto* are excluded from this national commonality. On the other hand, the latter approach allows for speaking about the Polish diaspora (*Polonia*), as encompassing citizens of other countries, who happen to be Catholic heritage Polish-speakers, or Catholics of this ethnolinguistic origin. Obviously, this definition does exclude such actual or heritage Polish-speakers of the Jewish religion or origin. According to the Polish authorities, in Israel there is *no* Polish diaspora, despite 400,000 people of such a background living in this country. The anti-Semitism of 1968 continues in Poland to this day in the hardly-concealed *de facto ethnic* (linguistic and confessional) definition of the Polish nation and its diaspora.¹⁹

Since its electoral victory in 2015, the PiS ruling party has attempted to destroy the rule of law in Poland and change the country's Constitution. One of the main goals of this policy is to bring the Constitution's civic definition of the Polish nation in line with the *de facto ethnic* ('patriotic, true') definition of this nation. The current tension between the Constitution's civic nationalism and the widely espoused *de facto ethnic* nationalism is to be ameliorated by replacing the former with the latter.

Opole Revisited: A European or Ethno-Polish Future?

The majority of the country's population supports PiS's attempts to this end. Critics of this trend, grouped in the PO-led pro-democratic opposition, cry foul. In their short-sightedness it is the entailed endangering of the rule of law that irks them most. They fail to see, that the PiS-led and enabled Polish ethnic nationalists aspire to replace the Constitution's inclusive civic definition of the Polish nation with the exclusivist ethnic one. Senator Danuta Jazłowiecka and the German minority leader, MP Ryszard Galla, valiantly oppose PiS's program of hardening authoritarianism that liquidates the tripartite division of power, and subjects the judiciary and the legislative to the executive. In turn, the latter is informally but *de facto* fully controlled by the PiS party's president (*prezes*). What is more, without any mandate to this end, the as yet undeclared dictator gives orders to the incumbent Polish President and Prime Minister.

¹⁸ https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Poland

¹⁹ <http://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/08/23/polonia-in-israel/>

The opposition fears – and rightly so – of the gradual dismantling of democracy in Poland. But they are unable to see that the PiS party's overarching project is to formally exclude from the Polish body politic (nation) those, who are already informally excluded from it and customarily denigrated. The opposition, including, Jazłowiecka and Galla, are accessories to this 'great patriotic' end (so much desired by the ONR), and they do not seem to realize their role in this plan.

It was them, who enabled and encouraged Jerzy Czerwiński and other ONR-style political forces, when Jazłowiecka and Galla kept mum or actively joined the 2004 nationalist campaign of character assassination against me as a scholar and person. Despite any program or ideological differences, all the mainstream parties in postcommunist Poland, including the German minority's TSKN, have been right-wing and (at least culturally) Catholic in their character. All of them have been slavishly loyal to the Polish ethnolinguistic nationalism and preached the curious kind of conservatism that provides for large-scale welfare measures, typical of social democracy and socialism. But there is a logic to this paradox, the Polish conservatism 'conserves' none other, but the ethnonational-cum-Catholic-cum-socialist realities as worked out in national communist Poland after 1956.

Many members of Poland's German minority may take offense, when they hear I propose that the TSKN is a typical Polish ethnonationalist grouping. In defense of this thesis, I can cite the afore-described Ryszard Galla's full support for the 2004 ethnonationalist campaign of character assassination aimed against my person. But it is an anecdotal piece of evidence. More significantly, during the almost three decades since Warsaw recognized the German minority in 1990, the TSKN has not managed to create a single German-medium school, let alone a minority educational system with German as the language of instruction. Financial and other aid flowing to the German minority from Germany and Warsaw was used for developing sewage, water, electrical, road and other infrastructure in the minority villages and towns across Opole Region. The rest of the monies have supported a good standard of living for the TSKN leadership. On the contrary, Lithuania's Polish minority of a similar demographic size is much less subsidized by Poland or Vilnius. Yet, Lithuania's Poles have at their disposal a full Polish-language educational system of over 100 schools from kindergartens and elementary schools, to secondary and vocational school, including the Polish-language university in Vilnius.

Neither the self-avowedly democratic PO when it was in power before 2015, nor PiS now do support the Silesians' heart-felt desire that Silesian should be recognized as a language. It does not matter that the 2011 census registered almost 1 million people who declare that they are members of the ethnolinguistic Silesian nation. For half of them, Silesian is the primary language of their everyday communication. The Polish authorities choose to disregard the census's results when it comes to the Silesians and their language. In this case there is no difference between the PO and PiS, which indicates that both parties are ethnonationalist in their basic character.

The Polish ethnonationalist principle of the primacy of the nation over the law was rarely explicitly evoked before Kornel Morawiecki uttered it in full view of television cameras in

the Polish Parliament in 2015. However, having been thoroughly conditioned as such during the period of national communism, Poland's elites and population at large have taken utmost care to respect this thin red line after 1989. Hence, it is not surprising that in 2004 *none* of my friends or colleagues either in Opole or elsewhere in Poland dared to stand in my defense, or at least in the defense of common sense, democracy, European values and the truth. They had too much to lose by the way of gainful employment, academic or political career. Or maybe, most did not see a point, having internalized the Polish ethnolinguistic nationalism as their preferred worldview.

Whatever the root cause, the ongoing quarrel over the rule of law in Poland is of secondary importance. What truly is at stake is the civic inclusiveness or ethnic exclusion of the Polish body politic. Whoever calls themselves a liberal but espouses the latter, is a 'liberal' in name only. Should PiS's program of making ethnolinguistic nationalism into the explicit ideological basis of the changed or new Constitution win, postcommunist Poland's aspirations to the European values of equality, liberty, fraternity and solidarity will be over. The obtaining Constitution's definition of the Polish nation as composed of all Polish citizens will become a distant dream. In order to remind the readers what a treasure may be lost, I allow myself to quote the Constitution's aspirational declaration of such an inclusive civic nation and its values:

We, the Polish Nation - all citizens of the Republic,
Both those who believe in God as the source of truth, justice,
good and beauty,
As well as those not sharing such faith but drawing those
universal values from other sources,
Equal in rights and obligations towards the common good -
Poland,
Beholden to our ancestors for their labors, their struggle for
independence achieved at great sacrifice, for our culture rooted
in the Christian heritage of the Nation and in universal human
values....²⁰

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²⁰ https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Constitution_of_the_Republic_of_Poland