

The Social Construction of Historical Traumas: the Polish Experience of the Uses of History in an Intelligentsia-dominated Polity

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The article argues that Poland's mainstream national historical narrative, at least as far as the last two centuries of history of the country is concerned, is full of 'traumatic' motives which are regularly used and developed in diverse current political and intellectual contexts. Polish history is imagined to a large extent as an endless chain of 200 years of suffering, caused, among other things, by occupations, wars and exploitation, which are usually seen as not fully recognized in other countries, in particular in the West. The article attempts first of all to explain this specific nature of Poland's historical identity by the privileged role of the intelligentsia, understood as a specific type of elite based on possession and control of cultural capital. It reconstructs the historical rise of the intelligentsia and its impact on the mainstream narrative in question, pointing to a selective choice of potential 'traumas' which are assigned a national status. They may be seen as tools to build positions in what can be called the Polish 'field of power', to use the notion coined by Pierre Bourdieu. The particular configuration and recent history of the field of power in Poland is reconstructed in order to explain different strategies of what can be called the social and political construction of historical traumas in Poland.

Introduction

This paper will argue that dominant visions of what can be called historical traumas in contemporary Poland are not only socially constructed but also serve primarily one specific social group, which can be perceived as dominant or even hegemonic in Poland, namely the intelligentsia. To justify our argument, we will rely on

Jeffrey Alexander's model of the social construction of trauma, with its emphasis on the culturally narrated and constructed nature of traumatic discourses and their moral and political functions, in particular in maintaining social cohesion and sustaining moral order. In this view traumas refer to actual historical events but in their specific interpretations imply universal or at least nation-scale dramatic impact and long-term or even eternal moral relevance. Their construction involves a long process of emerging narration and signification, which usually only gains momentum with a considerable delay from the actual events themselves.

Poland's mainstream national historical narrative, at least as far as the last two centuries are concerned, is full of traumatic motifs that are used in diverse current political contexts. To a large extent, Polish history is imagined as a continuous chain of 200 years of suffering, caused, among other things, by occupations, wars and exploitation, which are seen as not fully recognized in other countries, in particular in the West. The nineteenth century is the key moment for the formation of this contemporary structure of Polish identity, with brutally suppressed Polish national risings against Russian, Prussian and Austrian rule. This is when Poland becomes imagined as the 'Christ of nations', supposedly suffering for the sins of other nations, as proposed by Poland's supreme poet Adam Mickiewicz (Eile 2000). There is, by the way, a clear element of competition with and inspiration taken from classical Jewish messianism, and later the Shoah experience, which is so central to modern Jewish identity. Polish identity appeals to a similar narrative of a stateless nation persecuted by empires, convincing itself of its moral superiority and of the idea that other nations owe the country a moral debt after decades or even ages of persecution.

We will first explain this specific nature of Poland's historical identity and the function played therein by traumatic narratives by the privileged role of the intelligentsia, understood as a specific type of elite based on the possession and control of cultural capital. We will also point to the biased nature of the mainstream narrative in question, even in its selection of potential traumas that are assigned a national status. Then we will show how different factions of the intelligentsia use the narratives of historical traumas to legitimize and consolidate their positions in – to use the notion proposed by Pierre Bourdieu – the Polish 'field of power' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993). We will reconstruct the particular configuration and recent history of the field of power in Poland to explain the different strategies of the social and political construction of historical traumas in Poland.

The Identity of the Polish Intelligentsia and its Narratives of Trauma

An elite of well-educated persons with high cultural and social capital occupies a dominant position in modern Polish society. Drawing on world-systems theory (Wallerstein 1974–1989), the dominant status of this group may be seen as the result of the 'underdevelopment' typical of most (semi)peripheral societies defined by the absence of an economic elite, the bourgeoisie, which constituted the dominant category in the global core countries. In Poland, as in Russia, this hegemonic group of

the well-educated is traditionally referred to as the ‘intelligentsia’. The members of the intelligentsia, derived largely from the impoverished gentry, are characterized by having a general education as well as by their significant involvement in social issues. In the past, they attempted to determine how the state would develop and fought, in various ways, for ‘modernization’, i.e. for ‘catching up’ with the West economically, culturally, and socially. It was, therefore, the intelligentsia that determined how society should look, and that proposed projects for its identity, many of these relying strongly on supposed traumas and utopian visions, thus indirectly creating key symbolic classifications and hierarchies (‘cultured’ and ‘uncultured’ persons, the ‘modern’ and the ‘backward’, etc.).

In 1989, after the fall of communism, the general opinion was that with the arrival of a market economy the intelligentsia was to be replaced by businessmen and narrowly focused professionals (Kurczewska 1992). This view was in accordance with the theory that the Polish social structure slowly converges towards what is the case in Western countries (Domański 2000). In this model, a structure in which an economic elite (the bourgeoisie) is dominant represents the ‘normal’ pattern. The demise of communism is then seen as a process of ‘normalization’ of the political and economic system that by means of a gradual recalibration following Western patterns will eventually lead to a Polish social structure that resembles a Western one. Viewed from this perspective, the intelligentsia is a peculiarity, a historical artefact characteristic of Polish society – a group or a tradition inevitably sinking into the past (Domański *et al.* 2005). This view of the intelligentsia’s supposed fall may be inscribed in what can be called the vision of constant crisis of the intelligentsia as one of the crucial elements of the latter’s identity. The title of Masha Gessen’s book on the Russian intelligentsia: ‘Dead again’ (Gessen 1997) captures this discursive strategy very well. The narrative of ‘dying’ may however also be seen as a mechanism of reproduction, relying strongly on myths of traumatic intelligentsia experiences, as the group likes to present itself as one of the most persecuted and long-suffering throughout history.

In this context, our thesis may seem somewhat subversive. We claim that the intelligentsia’s values were so deeply ingrained in Polish society (particularly the elites) that they had been internalized for a long time and become rooted in the Poles’ cultural unconscious. This also includes the vision of the intelligentsia as the most persecuted group of Polish society, one that is constantly suffering and fighting for survival while at the same time coping with its numerous past traumas. This view of the Polish intelligentsia transformed into what Bourdieu refers to as *doxa*, or ‘common sense’, defined as ‘[. . .] a stock of self-evidences shared by all [. . .]’ (Bourdieu 2000, 98). To put it differently: those ‘self-evidences’ are mental categories that determine, in an imperceptible way, the view of social reality with its most important divisions and hierarchies. We will prove that, in Poland, the ethos of the intelligentsia, including its image as the suffering and traumatized segment of the Polish society, was universalized, creating the foundation for the aforementioned hegemony of the intelligentsia. In our attempt to investigate both the *doxa* and the hegemony of the intelligentsia we will refer to the concept of the ‘field of power’ introduced by

Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1996, 2012; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1993). Bourdieu suggested that the notion of the field of power should replace the term ‘ruling class’. His *rationale* is that this makes us more aware of the fact that factions that are dominant in a given society rarely form a coherent social group. Social elites form the ‘field’ – a space of social interactions defined by the relations among players that constitute it. The members of the field of power are connected by participation in a common game, partly determined by common interests, but also divided by many issues, which can be viewed as differences in members’ positions in the field of power – positions that represent their diverse types of capital. At the same time, in every society, the field of power is a key area for agreeing on fundamental issues related to social relations, including common cultural codes that cover symbolic hierarchies and cultural canons. The consensus arrived at in the field of power becomes a common *doxa* for the whole society, which can be related to the notion of ‘dominant ideology’ which, in turn, according to Bourdieu and Boltanski (2008), may be identified in each society.

At the same time, within each field of power there are constant unresolvable conflicts between the main factions of the elite. These conflicts assume characteristic configurations for a given time and place and may be defined in various categories. Depending on the balance of strength between the main sides, the dominant side may be described, following Bourdieu, as orthodox, while the dominated, partly subverting the dominant worldview, will be the heretic side. This division and other axes of conflict dividing the field of power are sometimes transferred to individual social fields in a given society (i.e. a political or cultural production field). Bourdieu calls this reflection of the structure of the entire field of power in individual fields a ‘homology’, which is described by him as ‘similarity in difference’; the more autonomous the field (relatively independent of economic-political forces), the weaker the homology. According to Bourdieu (1996, 2012), a characteristic division found in the field of power and, consequently, in the entire social structure, is an opposition between ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’ power – in other words – between the economic-political elite and the cultural elite. Their relations may differ depending on particular societies and times. They can be stated in categories of significance of different types of capital. Gil Eyal *et al.* (1998) suggested that, after the fall of communism, Central European societies such as Poland and Hungary can be characterized by the rare quality of domination of cultural capital over political (social) and economic capital.

While accepting Eyal *et al.*’s thesis, we would like to make it more precise in an important way. Specifically, we consider the nature of the main forms of cultural capital in Poland to be key – something that the aforementioned authors did not discuss. In this approach, as well as in many other applications of the concept of cultural capital in analyses of Central and Eastern European societies, it is usually associated with formal education, and occasionally with professional status. We claim that, in our reality, the dimension of formal education, while important, is not key for the definition of cultural capital. In Poland, this fundamental dimension belongs to the intelligentsia and the ability to fulfil its defined status criteria (Zarycki 2009). These may refer to lifestyle and disposition (the so-called embodied cultural capital), as well as values, capital resources one possesses (materialized cultural capital), and

connections or networks allowing for the accumulation and activation of other forms of capital (social capital). In the game being described here, all forms of capital that are hereditary in nature and as such legitimized by intelligentsia lineage are of crucial importance. This is connected to the nature of the cultural capital of the intelligentsia and its role as a key resource in the social reproduction process in Poland. One does not become a member of the intelligentsia simply by taking up a position as a university lecturer, but by being from the 'right' family, or by an unofficial acceptance by specific intelligentsia circles of this new status of an individual.

We thus claim that the elite defined by the possession of intelligentsia cultural capital is the dominant player in the Polish field of power. It managed to impose on the field its hierarchies, strongly defined by intelligentsia values and patterns. The history of the intelligentsia, its ethos, its heroes, their sufferings and traumas as well as their grand works were all effectively incorporated into the canon of 'Polishness' by universalization, and they provided the intelligentsia elite with hegemony over the field of power. Actors outside of this field who refer to intelligentsia resources enjoy a relative advantage over those not in possession of such. In contrast to Bourdieu's classic model, where representatives of the cultural elite in the field of power are a dominated sector, in the Polish field of power it is these elites that dominate over the economic sector which, in turn, is relatively subordinate. It needs to be stressed that we are discussing relative differences. Actors in the field of power, as elite actors, are characterized by substantial resources of all type of capital. What differentiates them is usually just being oriented towards one particular type of capital, treating it as defining their social position. Representatives of the intelligentsia elites, broadly understood, often have substantial economic resources, obtained specifically from their enterprises or, more often, from occupying privileged positions in the economic field where they act as representatives of foreign capital, or from lucrative positions in public and private institutions. Still, it is the cultural capital that is the key resource defining their status and giving them access to those lucrative offices just mentioned. At the same time, actors possessing a significant amount of economic capital (and not just performing fiduciary duties) are in a relatively dominated position if they do not also possess significant cultural capital resources. This domination is caused, to a substantial degree, by Poland's peripheral position and the domination of foreign capital in key industries, the owners of which usually are not actors themselves in the Polish field of power – more commonly they use representatives recruited from local elites (Jasiecki 2013). In this context, the local representatives of economic capital who are not members of the intelligentsia are no match for the cultural elites, and particularly members thereof that also represent foreign capital. This relative dominance of the cultural elites, extending into intelligentsia patterns, is homologically transferred into an appreciation of cultural capital in other social fields.

The Historical Roots of the Intelligentsia Hegemony

The dominance of cultural over economic capital in the Polish field of power did not appear together with the fall of communism and the strong dependence of the Polish

economy on foreign capital. The issue should be viewed from a ‘longue durée’ perspective. We claim that the key moment for the shaping of this structure of the modern Polish field of power was the period of the formation of Polish statehood after the First World War. The so-called Second Republic of Poland established in 1918 may be described as a republic of the intelligentsia by virtue of the dominance of the intelligentsia elite in it and the universalization of the intelligentsia ethos in the definition of citizenship. This was the result of a long period of formation and growth of the intelligentsia throughout the second half of the nineteenth century and up to the end of the Great War (Jedlicki 2008). The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was a crucial moment for this process, as it irreversibly changed the state of ownership enjoyed by the Polish economic elites – especially the landowners and the budding bourgeoisie. Landowners were already losing power due to the crisis of the *folwark* (manor) economy. The devastations of the war and the German occupation dealt a further critical blow to the Polish economy. The Polish economic elites were dealt yet another blow by the Peace treaty of Riga in 1921, in which Poland relinquished the Eastern Borderlands both politically and economically, losing any claim on estates, goods and capital located there. These capitals and lands were key resources for Polish landowners. The next stage of the downfall of the economic elites was the severing of Polish ties with its Eastern markets, leading to a relative crash of production in many commercial areas (as compared with the pre-1914 period). Subsequently, the already weakened Polish bourgeoisie succumbed to the Great Depression, with the Second Republic of Poland proving to be economically weak and severely dependent on foreign capital. The final blow to the Polish landowners and the bourgeoisie as economic classes was the Second World War and the nationalization conducted during the first years of the Polish People’s Republic (PRL). These events mark key traumatic moments in the history of the groups concerned. In particular the landowner’s trauma slowly took shape in the inter-war period. Its backbone is formed by several memoirs published in this period, referring first of all to the dramatic years 1917 and 1918 when there occurred the cruellest cases of the murder, eviction and dispossession of the landowning classes. One of these books, ‘The conflagration’ (*Pożoga*) by Zofia Kossak-Szczucka (Kossak 1923) became a bestseller and remains to today in the wider canon of classical Polish books. However, it never managed to change the dominant vision of that period, which was and remains painted in very positive colours as it was the moment not only of Poland’s final path to independence but also a turning point in the contest between the landowners and the intelligentsia, with the latter victorious. Thus, the landowners’ trauma of lost property and its members perishing in the revolutionary turmoil which started in 1917 and lasted for several years thereafter has never become a national trauma. Instead, the Polish–Bolshevik War of 1919–1921 was constituted as a common trauma, while the victorious outcome came to be imagined as a moment of national unity under the wise guidance of the intelligentsia embodied in the emblematic figure of Józef Piłsudski.

Hitherto, our focus was on the elite narratives of trauma as having the greatest chances of attaining a dominant status, but we can also mention several other dramatic events that have the potential of becoming a solid basis for large-scale

traumatic narratives. The most obvious case is the First World War, in which a large number of Poles fighting in the three imperial armies – German, Russian, Austrian – perished. Their tragic fate is, however, not considered part of a national trauma but rather as a collection of individual family histories. Numerous military cemeteries from the period of the First World War are regarded as Austrian, Prussian or Russian, and thus as not belonging to the Polish imaginary. Of course, Poles who died in the Russian Revolution of 1917, as soldiers or victims, are also largely excluded from the dominant national memory. The absence of the trauma of the First World War in the Polish national imaginary seems particularly telling, as it involves the meaningless nature of the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Poles suffering as soldiers in many cruel battles while the same period is rather imagined as a conflict between evil empires leading to the positive outcome of Poland regaining independence in 1918. Another interesting case is the 1915 massive evacuation of the population, in particular civil servants, ordered by the Russian administration because of the advance of the German armies. It attained an especially large scale in the regions dominated by the Orthodox population, such as for example the Eastern Podlasie. It is known as ‘bieżeństwo’ (*biezhenstvo*), ‘flight’ or ‘escape’, and despite its massive scale and the often several years of exile that thousands of families spent in Russia, it has only recently gained some public attention, largely after the publication of a book on the topic (Prymaka 2016). In both cases, although the events under discussion could be seen as traumatic, their silencing can be linked to the fact that they were not well inscribed in the Polish national historical narrative and even more importantly to the fact that the majority of their victims were members of the lower classes rather than of the intelligentsia elite.

The gradual advancement of the intelligentsia during the early twentieth century was accompanied by a shift in the relations between the pole of economic capital and the pole of cultural capital in the Polish proto-field of power and, subsequently, in the newly emerging field of power. The initial advantage of the economic elites, represented mostly by wealthy landowners and budding bourgeois, gradually shifted in favour of the slowly growing intelligentsia. National uprisings were important moments in this process, from the November uprising of 1831 up to that of Warsaw in 1944, and particularly so the 1863 January uprising. The economic faction suffered significant losses in these struggles, losing its key material resources while being ‘patriotically blackmailed’ into participating (Mażewski 2004). At the same time, the intelligentsia, while also paying a high price, in particular in terms of its members killed or exiled to Siberia, was building up its symbolic capital, thereby weakening the competing economic elites who were still heavily entrenched in the traditional networks of social capital (landowner–noble dynasties with their aristocratic splendour). In those days, the reproduction of the intelligentsia through the emerging school system was an important element of its legitimization. It should be added that this type of reproduction is, in particular, more effective than the noble, direct reproduction (hereditary titles and wealth), in the second part of the nineteenth century because it refers to (seemingly) ‘universal’ values (meritocracy). In any case, one can argue that all the risings mentioned became crucial elements of the national

identity narrative and may be seen as the ‘founding traumas’ of the Second and also the Third Republic; that is, current post-1989 Poland. They are presented as existential turning points in which the nation lost the major part of its best sons but defended its dignity. They are also important in historically defining Russia as an existential threat to Poland (Zarycki 2004). What is highlighted in the mainstream narrative of these uprisings is the sacrifice and suffering of members of the intelligentsia or their petty gentry ancestors. Images of their martyrdom, including executions and exile, dominate the textbook accounts of Polish history. They justify the unity of the nation under the leadership of the intelligentsia while at the same time defining Russia as the most significant negative point of reference. Russia not only cruelly suppressed the uprisings, it also censored their memory, in the nineteenth century as well as after 1945, when the Soviet-imposed communist regime did not allow to fully account for their central and traumatic role in the nation’s identity. We may however note that the memory of the members of the economic, capital-oriented factions of the field of power, which as we have mentioned were either reluctant to join the risings, or simply opposed them, could be seen as equally traumatic, but this has never become an element of the mainstream narrative of national history. In particular, the loss of material assets by members of the Polish elite, which often assumed dramatic dimensions after these bloody confrontations, is usually marginalized or simply ignored.

The Second Republic of Poland, then, was determined by a field of power where landowners and bourgeois still play an important part, but their significance for and influence on the national identity canons become limited. Aristocratic titles still have an important symbolic meaning, with many of them still supported by substantial wealth after 1918, but they are abolished by the 1921 Constitution. The New Republic takes the patterns of a post-aristocratic intelligentsia ethos as key citizen values. Members of the intelligentsia and proto-intelligentsia become key national heroes, and national uprisings as symbols of intelligentsia sacrifice for the nation become celebrated historical events. The new country is weak, but maintains well-developed public institutions, employing a relatively well-paid intelligentsia. Universities and elite schools play a key part in this system. Many have survived the war and are still present, often maintaining their privileged status. It is worth noting that no Polish company from those days has survived, meaning that the entrepreneurial families did not manage to maintain their social position. Those that did survive the communist period were, on average, transferred after 1945 to intelligentsia positions. Landowners were forced to adopt a similar strategy, taking niche positions by accepting intelligentsia roles and lifestyles, which allowed a part of these well-known families to maintain a close network of social connections and historical identity, regardless of being deprived of economic resources (Smoczyński and Zarycki 2012). Nevertheless, these groups have been effectively eliminated as real competition to the intelligentsia in the field of power and their traumatic accounts of social history are marginalized or simply unknown. This is particularly true for the historical Polish bourgeoisie, which in contrast to the elite of landowners which maintained its social reproduction mechanism, practically disappeared as a social group after 1945.

The Communist Period and its Intelligentsia-dominated Interpretations

In the communist Polish People's Republic (PRL), the new field of power created within the newly-imposed system was revolutionary at the political-economic level, if compared with the pre-war field. However, its *doxic* intelligentsia frame did not change, and neither did its deep structure. At the one pole, determined by political capital (a version of social capital), were gathered those who later were referred to as 'party concrete' (with visible cultural capital deficit). At the other pole were entities equipped with historically developed cultural capital – i.e. a purely intelligentsia capital (Zarycki 2009). It was a local version of the universal structure of power, as argued by Pierre Bourdieu (2000), divided into (as was already mentioned) 'mundane power' (political, economic) and 'spiritual power' (cultural).

Although formerly marginalized intelligentsia factions did enter the field of power of early Communist Poland, they did not undermine the fundamental intelligentsia values and categories, including the founding traumas, that remained a reference point for the construction of new citizenship patterns, regardless of the strong influence of the communist ideology. In effect, in the early years of Communist Poland, large numbers of socially advancing individuals assumed intelligentsia identities and value models *en masse*. These models were drastically different from their pre-war counterparts, particularly the conservative ones (Palska 1994). The 'new intelligentsia' of the PRL was in many ways truly new, but it was still an 'intelligentsia', bestowed with the privileged role of the intelligentsia of previous generations, specifically its left-wing factions. In other words, the fundamental and dominant mental categories (intelligentsia categories), ordering the perception of social reality and its hierarchy, did not change much. This is because the dominant mental structures are always a reflection of the structure of the field of power (Bourdieu 1996), and this field (as was already mentioned) reproduced itself after the Second World War in its basic bipolar division – with the key cultural role of the intelligentsia located at the 'spiritual' pole. Thus, the basic canon of historical traumas of Polish history remained unchanged, with key roles assigned to the 1831 and 1863 uprisings. Even if their national-conservative, and in particular anti-Russian aspects had been marginalized, they were still presented as national and first of all social-emancipation movements against the autocracy and the feudal capitalism of the Russian Empire, and the key role of the intelligentsia heroes in their narratives remained unchallenged. What was silenced in the communist period were the narratives of the Polish-Bolshevik war of 1918–1921 and the 1944 Warsaw Uprisings, which since have come to occupy a central place in the intelligentsia-dominated pantheon of national traumas.

Thus, we argue that, contrary to what many commentators claim (e.g. Leder 2013 or Gella 2001), the revolutionary reconstruction of the political and institutional structures after the Second World War did not impinge on the intelligentsia's symbolic hegemony, which had been formally established in 1918. After all, in Communist Poland the intelligentsia member remained a 'model citizen', and the intelligentsia's narrative of history, which highlighted the traumas and ethos of the intelligentsia as the core of Polishness, underwent no changes that would undermine its position.

After 1944 we see a substantial shift in focus, with conservative heroes and narratives being marginalized (though not all of them) and the left-wing intelligentsia being appreciated. A comparison between Poland and Soviet Russia shows just how small these changes really were. During the Great Purge, but also at other times under Stalinism, and during the Second World War, a significant part of the Russian intelligentsia elite was murdered. Despite more than two decades of liberal intelligentsia efforts these events could not be transformed into narratives of all-national trauma in Russia. One of the aspects of the problem is that an atmosphere of terror heavily interfered with the intelligentsia's tradition of family transmission, due to an ever-present fear for survival (Duprat-Kushtanina 2013). In Poland, this tradition was a parallel source of identity and historical knowledge transmission. It is commonly accepted that the Russian intelligentsia was reconstructed in the 1950s and 1960s by a new generation that, while accessing old intelligentsia texts, formed its identity in reference to formal positions and roles defined for it by state institutions, and not in reference to family values and identity transfer, as was the case in Poland (Zubok 2009).

At the same time, in Poland a converse phenomenon took place in the second part of the post-war communist period: a marked autonomization of the intelligentsia from state institutions. The clearest example of this was the increased activity of the opposition after 1968. The alliance of liberal and conservative intelligentsia, described in the famous book *The Church and the Left* (Michnik 1993), led to the creation of a huge block of elites in the field of power – elites that consequently have managed to ground, as Bourdieu (1996, 388) puts it, the 'dominant principle of domination', ultimately legitimizing intelligentsia's cultural capital, to the detriment of a narrow political capital. The party elites themselves remained, more or less, under the influence of intelligentsia cognitive categories, traumas and values, and had to take the intelligentsia into account, particularly the artists and scientists. A part of them, those that remained in the field of power after 1989 (Eyal *et al.* 1998), entered the logic of the intelligentsia game, enriching their political capital with elements of the intelligentsia's cultural capital. Thus, after the fall of communism, most of the historical narratives of the anti-communist intelligentsia were included in the universalized national historical narrative. No event better incarnates this account than the 1944 Warsaw uprising which, after 1989, slowly moved towards the centre of the modern Polish historical discourse and functions as a quintessential traumatic narrative that assumed a universalized status. Among other functions it currently plays, it symbolizes the fate of Poland as the victim of both Nazi Germany, which brutally suppressed the uprising, and Soviet Russia. The large-scale massacres committed by Germans during the uprising, and the systematic destruction of the remnants of Polish capital after the fighting was over, was observed by the Soviet army without allowing American and British planes, which were dropping supplies to the resistance fighters, to land on the eastern bank of the Vistula river for refuelling. Besides being one of the numerous symbols of the German and Russian oppression of Poland, the narrative of the 1944 Warsaw Rising is an archetypal narrative of the intelligentsia's sacrifice for the nation, its self-immolation intended as a traumatic voice calling for help to the entire international community.

The tragic fate of the hundreds of thousands of ordinary inhabitants of the city is also always mentioned, but the most visible faces of the risings are those of the intelligentsia. They are also among those who are able to draw the largest symbolic profit from any relation to the event – from being its direct participants, their relatives, or friends and assistants. This centrality of the 1944 Warsaw uprising and the universalization of its trauma as a key element of modern Polish identity is best illustrated in the history of the construction of the Warsaw Rising Museum, which opened in 2004 (Żychlińska 2016; Żychlińska and Fontana 2016). The museum remains the focus of an intense public debate, the terms of which could easily illustrate our key arguments. Here we want to invoke only one of these, namely a recent discussion over an acclaimed study of the memory of the 1944 rising by Marcin Napiórkowski, entitled *Rising of the Dead. A History of Memory 1944–2014* (Napiórkowski 2016). Napiórkowski argues in particular that the trauma of the rising has been producing different types of emotions in the public sphere after 1989 because during the communist period its healing was impossible given the difficulty of open debate, and so the mourning process after the uprising still remains incomplete. However, Monika Żychlińska in her review (Żychlińska 2016) of the book convincingly points to the flaws of this argument, first of all comparing it to several other similar traumatic narratives, which persist despite the fact that their discussion has not been restricted at all. We would argue that the inexhaustible potential for emotion production of the 1944 Warsaw Rising lies rather in its role maintaining the hegemony of the intelligentsia and thus as an object of contention between its different factions.

The strength of the Polish intelligentsia elites is well illustrated by a comparison with Soviet Russia, where the intelligentsia elite, reborn on the wave of Khrushchev's thaw, remained subordinate to the political elite within the wider field of power. It is worth mentioning here that with the slow weakening of the communist system in Poland, the key elements of intelligentsia martyrology of war and Stalinism presented as previously silenced traumas were being increasingly introduced into the canon of national culture. Among these are, as was mentioned, the Warsaw 1944 uprising, the Katyń massacre of 1940,¹ and the executions of the anti-communist elite members in Warsaw prisons and other Stalinist torture sites. After the fall of communism, the status of these symbolic intelligentsia trauma narratives reached a level of complete universalization, turning them into a part of the national historic canon. A good example is that of the film *Katyń* by what is arguably Poland's most celebrated post-war film director – Andrzej Wajda. Released in 2007 it gained universal acclaim in Poland as it is perceived as a crucial element of coming to terms with this key trauma of the Polish intelligentsia elite during the Second World War and the entire communist period when references to the Katyń massacre were forbidden and thus risky. The Katyń massacre is central to post-communist Poland's identity given that virtually all its victims were members of the Polish intelligentsia elite, including

1. The Katyń massacre refers to a series of mass executions conducted by the Soviet secret police (NKVD) in 1940. About 22,000 Poles were killed, including 6000 officers (doctors, scholars, engineers and other members of the intelligentsia). See for example Paul (1991).

the father of Andrzej Wajda himself. If with its twenty-thousand-plus victims it may seem as restricted when compared with other mass killings committed by Soviet Communists or Nazi Germans, it has assumed a universalized status in the Polish historical narrative and may be perceived as a classical 'intelligentsia' sacrifice for the nation.

In Russia, on the contrary, the memory of the Great Purge, the Gulag, and other traumatic experiences, in particular of the intelligentsia elite during the communist period, remain heavily marginalized in the main current of historic narration, being seen as inalienable elements of national culture only by anti-communist-oriented intelligentsia. What instead is considered a central national trauma in Russia is the Second World War, or rather the part from 1941 to 1945, known as 'The Great Patriotic War'. This narrative has as sacrosanct traumatic events, the Siege of Leningrad and the Battle of Stalingrad. The emphasis in the Great Patriotic War narrative is on the common suffering of the entire Soviet nation, with a special role for the Russians of course, but with no clear class accents, although it may be argued that the role of the strong state and its leaders, in particular Josef Stalin, is reinforced in this way. This observation may be referred to the field of power in Russia, where one might say that a strong state became the ground for the dominance of a bureaucratic elite commonly referred to as *nomenklatura*. Their descendants, controlling key Russian institutions, are still the dominant faction in the Russian field of power.

The Post-Communist Period and the Endurance of the Intelligentsia

In Poland, the fall of communism, although introducing radical political changes, did not constitute a drastic break, as the Polish field of power remains intelligentsia-centric. The weakened bureaucratic function of the old *nomenklatura* as the main opponent of the intelligentsia was replaced, in a way, by foreign business elites taking over the Polish economy. What is important is the fact that this takeover occurred without direct interference in the sphere of politics and, most of all, culture. The key role of the middleman was given to a part of the intelligentsia elite, and the framework of the intelligentsia ethos remained the foundation of its dominance. The alliance of a part of the intelligentsia elite with foreign capital thwarted the plans of the post-communist elites attempting a consolidation of national economic capital under the umbrella of state institutions, reminiscent of the Russian system (Staniszkiś 2001). Under the guise of fighting the 'enfranchisement of the *nomenklatura*', that is a takeover of key state economic assets by the former communist elite, the aforementioned liberal intelligentsia caused the control of a major part of the Polish economy to be transferred to Western investors. As a consequence, of the 500 biggest enterprises operating in Poland, over half (50.7%) is controlled by foreign capital (Jasiecki 2013, 224). This disparity increases when one looks at the 100 biggest enterprises – only 17 companies in this group are Polish (Kieżun 2012, 152). Foreign capital investment comprised 63.2% of the banking sector in 2010 (now probably some

20% less), which is strategic for any economy.² In effect, the holders of top capital incomes tend to be foreigners rather than domestic residents, which by the way has the side-effect of lowering domestic income inequalities (Novokmet *et al.* 2017).

This setting substantially strengthens the intelligentsia's dominance, as it allows the intelligentsia elites³ to acquire significant material income through performing supervisory and legitimizing functions. These elites, performing managerial (senior management) and expert roles (legal services, consulting, practically oriented scientific research) for foreign capital not only achieve higher income than domestic entrepreneurs (Domański 2008), but have also turned out to be a far more stable category than local businesses. The latter faced unfair competition from large Western corporations that often enjoyed privileged business conditions and negotiation channels inaccessible to local entities (Drahokoupil 2008). This resulted in numerous bankruptcies and inhibited the development of a national bourgeoisie and its consolidation into a powerful actor in the field of power.

The alliance of the intelligentsia with Western capital also reinforces the former's symbolic capital, thus increasing the intelligentsia's ability to position itself as a fully legitimate representative and interpreter of 'Western standards' and values (evident in the 'modernization' and 'catching up to the West' discourse reproduced in Polish media and the social sciences). This ability to influence global media, gained through this alliance, constitutes an important tool in support of symbolic dominance in the country. At the same time, the intelligentsia presents itself as a guardian of the Polish people, and the most effective representative of its interests abroad. Noticing the usefulness of this mechanism for themselves, Western political and capital circles approach key intelligentsia myths, including the traumas of uprisings and communism with connivance, accepting the 'moral superiority' of Polish heroes of the intelligentsia. These foreign entities do not attempt to directly influence Polish political and cultural life, because the legitimacy of their actions as 'foreign' actors, who find it difficult to appeal to the 'national interest', would be limited.

The hypothesis can thus be advanced that the return of capitalist relations and a full integration of Poland in the world system strengthened the position of the intelligentsia in Poland. This was made possible first because, after the fall of communism, it proved impossible to develop strong state institutions that would lay the basis for the formation of a stable bureaucratic elite capable of confronting the intelligentsia (as in Russia, for example), and second because of the lack of a strong class of domestic entrepreneurs, such as is present in most Western countries. There are 1.8 million enterprises in Poland, but 99.8% of them are small- and medium-sized businesses (Polska Agencja Rozwoju Przedsiębiorczości 2013) often working as

2. This is a good indicator of economic dependence, and thus, of the semi-peripheral position of the country. Similar (in some cases higher) measures were recorded in other post-socialist European countries. Russia, where foreign interest in the banking sector is just 12%, is an exception. This indicator is approximately 15% for all OECD countries (Jasiecki 2013, 225; Urząd Komisji Nadzoru Finansowego 2013, 21).

3. As well as a part of the *nomenclatura* which, at the moment of transformation, possessed cultural capital; see Eyal *et al.* (1998).

subcontractors for Western companies. The sector is dominated by micro-enterprises (employing up to 10 persons), of which – as shown by a national survey (Microfinance Centre 2009) – one-person companies run by well-educated individuals performing consulting and other specialist services are the most effective. Rafał Woś (2014) argues that it is difficult to refer to these persons as businessmen – they are rather ‘[...] the most entrepreneurial part of the intelligentsia.’

The acceptance by a part of the intelligentsia of positions that may be called comprador, and particularly their participation in the ‘comprador services sector’ as the basis of their income (Drahokoupil 2008), working mainly for foreign capital, may be seen as structurally similar to the historical role played by the nobility and wealthy aristocrats during the First Republic of Poland (particularly in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries). These classes were the ones that, during the period of formation of the world system, accepted the role of middlemen in the process of economic exploitation of the European periphery – the status that the Polish lands have to this day (Babones 2012). Key here seems to be the inability of peripheral societies to commence the process of large-scale economic capital accumulation. Local economic elites, mainly the bourgeoisie (or rather proto-bourgeoisie), systematically lose every confrontation with cultural elites, which are legitimized by their cultural middleman status and the role of guardian of the national identity, maintaining a constant capital dependence of the periphery on the Western centre and simultaneously leading to the aforementioned ‘anomaly’ where cultural elites (mainly the intelligentsia) have an advantage over economic ones in the local field of power.

This configuration of the Polish field of power may also be seen as an effective adaptation to peripheral or semi-peripheral conditions. According to the fundamental tenets of world-system theory (Wallerstein 1974–1989), the periphery is an area to which the costs of maintaining the stability of the centre’s development are transferred. Thus, it is at the peripheries, and partly at the semi-peripheries, that periodic economic crises, revolutions, local wars, and other events leading to regular discontinuities in economic and political systems occur. In such a setting, the cultural system becomes an alternative dimension of social order, where maintaining relative continuity is possible. Moreover, one can note that these revolutionary events, besides having the structural effect of weakening the economic elites, serve as an important source of symbolic capital for the cultural elites, and in particular the intelligentsia. The case of the 1944 Warsaw Rising briefly discussed above seems to be one of the best illustrations of this argument.

As the case of Russia shows, it is not universally so, but in the case of Poland it is cultural capital, and especially its intelligentsia variety, that turns out to have been the most important dimension of stability of the social position of Polish elites over the last 100 years; in addition, it is a warrant for maintaining a certain structural continuity of the Polish field of power. It should be noted that the multi-generational reproduction of privileged social position in Poland is only possible through the intelligentsia universe. In spite of many dramatic periods in Polish history, many intelligentsia families that enjoy the transfer of high social positions from generation to generation have survived (Bajer 2013). Today, they return, often resolutely to the

economic field, but their permanence (particularly the ability to survive the communist period) and elite position were maintained mostly thanks to stabilizing intelligentsia resources, specifically the achievement of high positions in science and culture. The role of family transmission of social positions seems particularly worth mentioning – part of the transmitting tradition involves the transmission of both cultural and social capital, particularly by having roots in specific intelligentsia environments. Both these types of capital give one access, at various times, to other resources, including economic capital. Let us also mention that the sphere traditionally associated with the intelligentsia (i.e. legal occupations, medicine, and science) is, even today, much more stable than the strictly economic sphere (elites determined exclusively by possession of economic capital). The fact that the Polish doctor, lawyer, or scientist, is not subjected to intense global competition (contrary to the Polish entrepreneur) shows well the autonomy and, consequently, the high position of the intelligentsia in the local, semi-peripheral field of power. At the same time, the performance of these professions in Poland is still strongly tied to the social pressure of taking responsibility for broader social interests (even fulfilling a mission), much more so than in Western countries (i.e. the US).

It is worth mentioning how these stable, multi-generational ‘aristocratic intelligentsia’ families differ from elites in other countries. As shown by Bourdieu (1996), in France the field of power is dominated by the economic elite, and the so-called ‘state nobility’ (bureaucratic elites) is an important mediator between the poles of economic and cultural capital (cultural elite). In Russia, one finds a similar ‘state nobility’, but its institutionalization is significantly different, less clear, and its position is to a greater degree based on access to political capital (particularly secret services and other law enforcement agencies), rather than economic capital, which, while still important, is of secondary importance. In Germany, on the other hand, the dominant role in the field of power is played by families of entrepreneurs, lasting for generations, who control key elements of the massive German economy. Despite the defeat suffered by the Third Reich, a large number of German companies maintained their economic position, and the families controlling them their social status. In Poland, after the war and the communist period, the economic elite was dispersed, and the majority of Polish pre-war enterprises disappeared without leaving a trace in the collective memory. What is interesting is that the wealthiest contemporary Polish companies are ranked lower globally than the best Polish universities in similar rankings. In Germany, the situation is reversed. The once-famous German universities, leading in the global rankings until NSDAP came to power, nowadays occupy relatively low positions on the lists of the world’s best universities. The best German companies on the other hand, including several enjoying a long history, still stand at the top of global rankings. In any case, it is worth pointing out that the dispossession of the Polish bourgeoisie, a process lasting from 1914 until the late 1940s, is not considered a major national tragedy, and in fact is generally ignored. One of the main reasons is of course the lack of continuity of the economic upper classes in Poland, which stands in contrast to the impressive continuity of the intelligentsia and some of the aristocratic families. This state of affairs is well reflected in the main

Polish cemeteries, such as Powązki in Warsaw. Large graves, often in the form of mausoleums, of the bourgeoisie built before 1914 still impress with their grandeur, but they are usually ignored by contemporary visitors of the cemetery. At the same time, graves of famous intelligentsia members, in particular writers and poets, and those who died in uprisings and wars, or were killed by the Nazis or Communists, are treated with great respect.

The Naturalized Intelligentsia Hegemony and its New Visions of Trauma

Much like every social phenomenon, the intelligentsia meta-universe is both a social structure (defined by the configuration of capital) and a symbolic structure, expressed in dominant forms of thinking – cognitive categories determining the perception of reality (Bourdieu 1996). Mental categories, or – as Durkheim (1915) puts it – ‘forms of classification’ usually take on a dichotomous structure (like the sacrum–profane opposition), while remaining a reflection of the social structure. Classifications of the intelligentsia discourse were initially created as the result of a struggle with competing landowners, which led to the intelligentsia situating itself on the side of the ‘spiritual’ pole of power, temporarily subordinated to the ‘mundane’ power of landowners and the administrations of occupying forces. Later, in addition to assuming a dominant position, the intelligentsia took over a significant portion of the gentry discourse, thus drawing a clear symbolic border separating it from categories that stood lower in the hierarchy. In this way, a naturalized dichotomy of ‘Lord’ versus ‘boor’ (‘Gent/brute’) was established (and is still in force), serving as a basic code for the innumerable symbolic representations evoked in subsequent social struggles. Even though its form changes, the fundamental classification remains the same. One speaks of members of the intelligentsia as ‘cultured people’ or as ‘well mannered’, ‘decent’ or ‘lawful’, which obviously implies the existence of an illegitimate, and even condemned, category of ‘uncultured’ and ‘boorish’ individuals. Importantly, the intelligentsia inherited from the gentry a strong sense of anti-economy, an openly stated distance from everything economic, of narrow-interest, and thus mundane. Therefore, the intelligentsia favours the gentry’s ‘selflessness’, treated as a resource that may be juxtaposed against the ‘selfishness’ of the economic pole. Depending on the historical period and the configuration of the field of power, a similar discourse and intelligentsia practices take on the form of altruism and sacrifice for those who are socially disadvantaged (casus of the Workers’ Defence Committee in the 1970s), or of the development of ‘civil society’ as a space of selfless actions directed towards the common good.⁴ Through these actions and within the newly developed classification forms, the intelligentsia built its own symbolic capital, transforming its own resources into a ‘denied capital’ – and, therefore, a legitimized capital (Bourdieu 1990, 118). Stressing ‘selflessness’ is thus selfish, as it allows the

4. It is worth remembering that the idea of civil society was born in Central Europe on the basis of the anti-policy of the democratic opposition; see Eyal *et al.* (1998).

presentation of a particular group's interest as a 'public interest' that serves all (which does not need to have anything in common with cynical manipulation). Of special importance in this context is, of course, the universalization of the intelligentsia ethos. Let us recall that one of its key elements is the duty of feeling 'responsibility' for the entire nation, and in particular for its disadvantaged groups. This calling for disinterested care for the entire nation can of course be seen as naturalized upper-class identity and as an aspect of the highly universalized dominant social position of the intelligentsia. As we demonstrated in several places of this article, the narratives of nation traumas are among the key mechanisms of the construction of privileged roles for the intelligentsia, in particular as healers of such traumas, and also of those defending those traumas' victims and representing their interests internationally. Jeffrey Alexander argued that 'it is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilizations not only cognitively identify the existence and source of human suffering but may also take on board some significant responsibility for it' (Alexander 2012, 6).

In the Polish context, it is the intelligentsia, both as a major victim of traumas and the major guardian and healer of traumatized representatives of other groups that is supposed to assume the key responsibilities for the entire nation. Interestingly, soon after the fall of communism, the motif of trauma and of the intelligentsia's 'responsibility' for its victims was introduced by one of the most prominent of Polish sociologists – Piotr Sztompka (Sztompka 2004). What was particularly striking was that Sztompka was referring directly to Jeffrey Alexander's theory of social trauma. However, Sztompka's notion of social trauma was markedly different from Alexander's model. While Alexander saw traumas as social constructs, related to some real events, but promoted with a considerable delay as subjective but gradually universalized interpretations of the dramatic past, for Sztompka trauma was an objective historical development and he saw its particularly clear example in the effects of the fall of communism and the so-called transformation or transition process which required considerable adaptation efforts from a major part of the Polish population. In the given context Sztompka coined the notion of 'the trauma of the great change' which consisted of several phases. First was 'the initial trauma' that supposedly effected a split of society in 'two Polands', with on one side a competent and well-adapted elite along with other self-reliant citizens, and on the other side the helpless and 'disoriented' Poland of the *Homo Sovieticus* type victims of the transformation.⁵ Sztompka then turned to what he called the 'secondary trauma' or 'the aftershocks of the reforms.' His model was clearly based on an opposition between the traumatized lower classes on the one hand, and the intelligentsia elites largely resistant to traumatic shocks on the other hand. This is how Sztompka explains this mechanism in another text:

5. Sztompka's concept of 'two Polands' seems a quite characteristic construct for liberal intellectuals of Central Europe who like to project visions of cleavages allowing them to legitimize their special role of healers of broken societies (see Éber 2011).

For example, the collapse of communism in East and Central Europe, followed by the opening to the West and the emergence of a competitive market and democratic politics, is obviously less traumatizing for educated than uneducated people. Those who command foreign languages, professional skills, and cosmopolitan attitudes have much less trouble in coping with transition than do unskilled manual workers or simple peasants. (Sztompka 2000a, 460)

This opposition between ‘competent’ intelligentsia elites and incompetent lower classes, seen as lacking cultural and social capital, may be seen as part of a wider narrative of ‘winners versus losers’ of the transformation that was very popular in social sciences discourse in the entire post-communist region (Warczok and Zarycki 2014). But Sztompka’s model also includes a critique of some factions of the intelligentsia. He refers to the ‘trauma of elites’ which was supposedly best manifested in the incompetence of the politicians of the transition period. And he discussed ‘the delayed echoes of the revolution’ in ‘the trauma of backlash’ (Sztompka 2000b, 111), which could probably be read as a critique of all those sceptical of radical market reforms after 1989 and, in particular, conservatives, who supposedly suffer from a post-traumatic stress that explains their ‘irrational’ behaviour.

A similar theory, although not directly referring to social trauma, was recently presented by the Polish philosopher Andrzej Leder in his widely discussed *Sleepwalking through a Revolution* (Leder 2014). Leder argues that the period between 1939 and 1956 can be seen as an ‘unconscious revolution’ that involved accelerated upward mobility of the peasantry and working classes, parts of which replaced the old, pre-war bourgeoisie. Leder argues about a specific type of trauma that was caused by the extermination of the Jewish population in Polish territory and the expulsion of Germans from territories acquired from Germany in 1945. Both processes involved massive appropriations of property, and the trauma is here paradoxically understood not as resulting from physical suffering but from the stress of sudden assumption of higher social status and an unconscious feeling of moral guilt because of being a beneficiary of the extermination of the Polish Jewry and the expulsion of Germans. The central argument of Leder is that these peasants and workers and their descendants, who moved to the towns between 1939 and 1956, become a substitute of the Polish middle class. However, they were very unprepared for assuming this role, in contrast to the old intelligentsia. The key effect of this ‘unconscious revolution’ was the trauma of the groups under discussion, who are still unable to take responsibility for the wider society, as the old intelligentsia did. This inability is behind most of the crucial problems of contemporary Poland, and, as Leder indirectly suggests, it can be overcome only by learning the social responsibility skills and other competencies from the old intelligentsia.

These are just two selected examples of the social construction of historical trauma in contemporary Poland. They all point to the central role of the intelligentsia who, through their universalization, legitimize their hegemony by projecting themselves both as a group that has passed through the most extreme traumatic experiences of the last two centuries and simultaneously as the group that is most resistant to the destructive effects of such experiences, and that in this way is able to heal society and justify its leading role.

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