

1983/84 von einer Massenbewegung zu einer Elitenbewegung, die weit weniger auf Selbstorganisation und weit stärker auf politische Kompromisse zielte.<sup>3</sup> Wałęsa bleibt nicht zuletzt deshalb das unumstrittene Symbol dieser Bewegung, weil die Oppositionsbewegung dieses Symbol ebenso wie die Regierenden für ihre Zwecke nutzen konnte.<sup>4</sup> Etwas deutlicher analysiert V. das Zusammenspiel von Wahlakten, strukturellen Zwängen und kontingenten Entwicklungen im ohnehin stärkeren zweiten Teil, in dem er die Zeit nach 1989 beschreibt.

Dennoch oder gerade deshalb ist V.s Biografie wertvoll – als gute Einführung für diejenigen, die sich mit der polnischen Geschichte der 1970er bis 2000er Jahre vertraut machen wollen, und als ein erster Schritt hin zu einer auch vom Vf. selbst eingeforderten Fortsetzung der Forschung.

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<sup>3</sup> ADAM MICHNIK: *Takie czasy ... Rzecz o kompromisie* [Solche Zeiten ... Abhandlung über den Kompromiss], London 1985.

<sup>4</sup> HELLA DIETZ: „Nowi niepokorni“. Powstanie Komitetu Obrony Robotników jako wyzwanie dla teorii socjologicznej [Die „Neuen Aufbegehrenden“. Die Entstehung des Komitees zur Verteidigung der Arbeiter als Herausforderung für die soziologische Theorie], in: *Studia Socjologiczne* (2013), 3 (210), S. 97-121.

**Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk: *Evoking Polish Memory. State, Self and the Communist Past in Transition.*** (Warsaw Studies in Contemporary History, Bd. 3.) Lang-Ed. Frankfurt am Main 2014. 253 S. ISBN 978-3-631-64163-7. (€ 49,95.)

Using the case example of a small eastern Polish city (anonymized as Marianowice), this ethnographic study explores personal transitions to post-socialism by interviewing “two groups of people seized and almost paralyzed by their past” (p. 240). Whereas former anti-communist activist “victims” became heroes, state security worker “perpetrators” became villains. Exploring how each group envisioned its “belonging to the same nation/state”, Anna Witeska-Młynarczyk investigates how they tried “collectively and internally to negotiate a sense of justice and keep a coherent image of the communist past in the circumstances of the revival of memory politics and attempts to account for past crimes in contemporary Poland” (pp. 22-23). Through extensive personal interviews with a select cast of 1960s-era state security agents and about twenty-five elderly anti-communist “heroes” from the Association of the Former Prisoners of the Communist Period, she uncovers how both casts derive much of their identity from a once seemingly eternal regime.

Shifting post-socialist landscapes of commemoration provide the backdrop for this study. Amid increasing attempts to convict perpetrators and compensate victims, extensive Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) security files were released in 1998 on the model of German Stasi archives. Access to IPN files could become a means of reinforcing one’s identity as a hero/victim or indicting a villain/perpetrator. After the Law-and-Justice Party (PiS) took power in 2005, hero/victims gained full access to state resources, while former perpetrators were further pressured. In this context, the author observes, “the memory framework drew lines of inclusion and exclusion, generating a sense of belonging in the heroes/victims, and a sense of disorientation among the former security officers” (p. 235). Formerly at the center of state mission and power, security officers were excluded from society; meanwhile, former activists embraced vainglorious mythologies, in which their defense of the Nation had been constant and somehow devoid of compromises necessary with an irredeemable state, whose very existence must have been an aberration.

Selective memory is integral to the author’s observations, not least as subjects on both sides sought to undermine any possible grayness between past and present victim/perpetrator roles to portray themselves sympathetically. To find such “coherent” narratives, each

party often turned to official organs. Heroes/victims relied on the church and new regime. Twelve post-Socialist sermons illustrate how Catholic/nationalist symbolism evoked Poland as mother Mary, caring for the hero/victim as Christ her son. Such extreme iconography (even visually depicted as Mary-in-uniform) struggled, however, amid revelations that leading Catholic clerics had collaborated with the security apparatus; faced with such grayness, hero/victims either downplayed or excommunicated the fallen clerics from their hero/victim group. Official whitewashing is particularly poignant among ritualized spaces; without room for grayness, Communist monuments steadily decay or are removed, replaced by monuments to heroes/victims. Parallel selective memories emerged among interviewed villain/perpetrators, who felt they were “hunted like witches”, victims of a “collective phobia” (p. 173), and “a symbolic scapegoat in the process of judging the communist past” (p. 237). Falling back on Communist narratives, former state security officers decried contemporary heroes/victims as “murderers” and “bandits” (p. 181). Cherishing fond memories of chats with captured intellectuals, often over cups of coffee they resented sharing, villain/perpetrators applied Communist/Nationalist racism to grouse about how PiS “Jews” and “Volksdeutsche” were stealing their pensions (p. 185). Past abuses were either explained away or defended.

It is unfortunate that the author never mentions Teresa Torańska’s 1981-1984 interviews<sup>1</sup> of old Stalinists, even though the author’s book could almost have been a sequel. Although younger than Torańska, W.-M. likewise came from an anti-Communist family and posed as a naïve young girl, noting that “because of my age, I was treated by both groups of men, much older than myself, as a novice and a listener, who ought to learn about a past situated way beyond her life experience” (p. 53). Her tone understandably differs from Torańska’s sardonic wit and journalistic invasiveness amid the politically fraught 1980s context.

Tone is in fact the chief weakness of the book. First, although the author interrogates the selectiveness of her own family memories, admitting “the events and thoughts we choose to turn into icons are necessarily selective” (p. 52), lapses in scholarly distance recur. One cannot help but feel uncomfortable with her assertion that “during this fieldwork, I approached the middle-ranking security officers with no feelings of disgust or prejudice. I was simply curious to learn who they were and how they ended up doing all those things for which they are detested” (p. 238). While she uses empathetic language with the heroes/victims, praising their “sincerity and openness” (p. 151) or that “they were accessible and open” (p. 240), she insists that the security officers “lie both to their interlocutors and to themselves”; as she was “suffocating in their rooms full of stories”, she claims they were inwardly aware of “the evil aspects of their work” (p. 238). Whereas she pities her heroes “as victims not only of communism, but also of nationalism” (making them victims of their own mythologies), she paints perpetrator/villains as little Eichmanns whose very lives proved that “evil is banal and a part of our social world” (p. 239). Repetitive exegeses of theoretical works tend to further inhibit her subjects’ voices, and oft inscrutably turgid prose can render much of the work a challenge to read.

Nevertheless, this a useful analysis, based upon extensive interviews, which reveals a fascinating context of post-socialist soul-searching and myth-making applicable to many other cases. For instance, one is struck by the homogeneity of Polish mythologies, which erase Jews, Ukrainians, and other non-Polish-Catholic populations; could this bear comparison with memory construction in neighboring states? Indeed, might each subject group’s yearning for alternate mythic pasts parallel such cases as post-Soviet Russia? After all, plentiful apparently “aberrant states” populated the twentieth century.

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<sup>1</sup> TERESA TORAŃSKA: “Them”. Stalin’s Polish Puppets, New York 1987.