

Cursed with patriotism. The educational potential of enslavement (Polish society in the Russian Partition of Poland in the first half of the 19th century)

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The paper presents the educational space of Polish homes and schools during the Partitions of Poland, with emphasis on its crucial role in the process of integration of the young generation, the birth of solidarity among them, and shaping their national and civic identity. Especially the Enlightenment ideas of the Commission of National Education (Komisja Edukacji Narodowej – KEN) that were to be found in the course books of the Wilno Educational District from 1803 to 1832 made it possible to perpetuate the model of patriotic education originated in family homes.

Key words: *Russian Partition of Poland, patriotism, Polish school, family, Russian press*

The title of the paper appears provocative, although it is consistent with the trendy assumptions of postmodernism, namely:

- rejection of ideals and authority,
- dissemination of relativism,
- undermining of values.

In this case, the times of the Partitions of Poland, which are typically associated with enslavement and martyrdom treated as “untouchable good” and “sacredness” of the nation, seem to be easy to be appropriated by this type of culture (civilisation).

However, in the context of history of education, I am reluctant to negate the importance of the events of that period and I do not want to undermine the hitherto findings of historians or the ideals and values that were crucial for the contemporary society. I do not wish to find any advantages of the Partitions, I do not wish see them as causes of “progress and modernisation”¹. This would be a misunderstanding,

¹ The interview of Dorota Wodecka with J. Sowa titled “Imaginary Poland”, published in “Magazyn Świąteczny” of “Gazeta Wyborcza”, which contains a number of controversial

because removing the unnecessary cult of martyrs or myths from history is one thing, and a complete deconstruction of everything that pertains to the human condition and the condition of the society is another.

That is why I would like to address the problems of the educational space in families and schools which, in the context of the Partitions, are typically discussed from the perspective of repressions and the fight for Polish identity. I would like to emphasise the importance of this space in the integration of the young generation and the formation of their national and civic identity.

One needs to bear in mind that some of the most important Polish political and educational reforms (Commission of National Education: Komisja Edukacji Narodowej, KEN, Constitution of May 3, 1791) were carried out in the times of the enslavement. Also the outstanding works of Polish messianic Romantic poets: Mickiewicz, Słowacki, Krasiński, Norwid were created then. These facts had a substantial influence on the political and social condition of many generations of Poles. Especially the ideas of the Commission of National Education reminded people of their responsibility for the country and the nation, care for the well-being of citizens, and observance of law. The schools that functioned in the Taken Lands, occupied and incorporated into the Russian Empire at the end of the 17th century, would continue to teach students these values almost until the end of the 1820s. They were the last generation educated with the use of the course books and curricula developed by KEN. Although the Wilno Educational District used to declare its loyalty to Russia, the tradition of the Commission instilled the ideas of freedom and the fatherland in young people. They were taught how to fight and die for Poland, and heroic ancient Romans were their role models. The boys attending the schools in the Wilno district would often introduce the attitudes and views shaped by their families into the new environment. The parents, and especially grandparents, remembered independent Poland. During the last years of the free state some of them were engaged in creating the new model of enlightened nobility, consisting of citizens aware of their duties towards the community and the country. It was from their influence that the children acquired their first visions and notions connected with the fatherland and freedom, and learned unambiguous attitudes towards the occupiers.

The secondary schools of the Wilno district faced no major obstacles in implementing the KEN curriculum, and they promoted enlightened

statements, among others: "The Partitions meant progress and modernisation for Poland, in many aspects" [Retrieved on: 08. 11. 2013]

ideas that could never be accepted by Petersburg and an education model that was in many cases compatible with what the children were taught in their families. In 1803 the list of subjects for poviats schools included, among others, Russian, Polish, geography, history, and “instructions on the duties of a man and a citizen”, and in grammar schools also history of the world, introduction to political economics, and advice “to study and to translate works that shape hearts, that instil a proper understanding [...] of the duties of a citizen”².

Since the University of Wilno was as a unit superior to the schooling system of the district, it was possible for the university to avoid introducing major changes to the curricula and the course books. It was only in 1817 that the decision to remove certain subjects was made, including political economics, and a special Committee formed to control education in Russia was to secure “the unity of knowledge, faith, and government”³.

The list of course books that were theoretically to be altered certainly included *Grammar* by Onufry Kopczyński, a Piarist. The 1807 and 1815 editions of the book, published in Wilno, were practically reprints of the KEN editions⁴. The author used many examples to teach children the notion of the fatherland: for instance, to illustrate the lesson on parts of speech he quoted Horatio’s “it is sweet and honourable to die for the fatherland”, and in the lesson on syntax a reference is made to the legendary Roman leader Coriolanus, who “having accomplished much for the fatherland [...] went into exile”⁵. When discussing “proper names”, nomenclature from the geography of Poland was used: “Warszawa – a city”, “Poland – a country”, “Wisła – a river”⁶.

The selection of texts presenting the types of speeches: from political ones and Sejm addresses to courtroom speeches and sermons, prepared by Paweł Chrzanowski, a Piarist and a professor of Polish and Latin literature⁷, must have been a cause of great excitement among

² Kornilov, I. (1879): *Sbornik materialov dlja istorii prosveščenijsa v Rossiji*, Vol. 2. Sankt Petěrburg, pp. 189–247.

³ Beauvois, D. (1991): *Szkołnictwo polskie na ziemiach litewsko-ruskich 1803–1832* [Polish Schooling System in Belarussian and Lithuanian Lands 1803–1832], Vol. 2: *Szkoły podstawowe i średnie* [Elementary and Secondary Schools], Rome–Lublin, pp. 307–308, 328–329.

⁴ Kopczyński, O. (1778–1783): *Gramatyka dla szkół narodowych* [Grammar for National Schools], Vols. 1–3, Warszawa.

⁵ Kopczyński, O. (1807): *Gramatyka dla szkół narodowych na klasę I* [Grammar for the 1st Grade of National Schools], Wilno, pp. 9, 11, 84.

⁶ The same, pp. 21–22.

⁷ Chrzanowski, P. (1816): *Wybór różnych gatunków mowy wolnej ze stosownymi uwagami* [Selection of Various Genres of Rhetoric with Necessary Notes], Warszawa.

young students in the Russian Partition. The choice was aimed at shaping patriotic and civic attitudes of the young generation and at integrating them around the idea of freedom related to the best of traditions of KEN. When studying the principles of Sejm addresses boys read the best speeches of the MPs in the sessions of the Great Sejm. One can only imagine the students' reactions to the address of Aleksander Linowski of Krakow Voivodeship, quoted by pr. Chrzanowski: "The people who, in their desire of liberty, begin by throwing off the foulest of yokes, I shall call people close to happiness [...]"⁸. And so must have been the young people moved by a sermon of Piotr Skarga in which he predicted the fall of Poland: "You shall be [...] without your Fatherland, without your Kingdom, you shall be miserable, despised, indigent exiles [...]. You shall serve you enemies [...] and they shall place a yoke of iron around your necks"⁹.

The notions of fatherland, nation, freedom, constitution, and exile, employed in the texts of Kopczyński and Chrzanowski, must have had a powerful influence on students. It is certain that history played a leading role; however, in the contemporary secondary schools great importance was placed on Antiquity, which is why the opportunities to fulfil this role were limited. History of Poland was typically taught in the last grade, which limited the boys' knowledge of the chronicles of their country, especially taking into account that not all of them completed their education. That is why teachers used the history of Antiquity to lecture on the problems of patriotism and citizenship, as was the case with other subjects. *Historia książąt i królów polskich* [History of Princes and Kings of Poland] by Tadeusz Waga, a Piarist, was used for a long time to teach the history of Poland in the Wilno Educational District. The course book was used in the schools of KEN¹⁰, however, it was not valued highly. Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz's *Śpiewy historyczne* [Historical Songs], published in 1816, offered a much more compelling form¹¹. The book presented leaders, kings, and some events from the history of Poland. The series of poems, preceded by the *Bogurodzica* hymn, was a hornbook of patriotism, especially because their author was a legend, a hero of the past era as a graduate of the Knights' School (Szkoła

⁸ The same, pp. 120–121.

⁹ The same, p. 246.

¹⁰ *Historia książąt i królów polskich krótko zebrana przez X. Tadeusza Wagę...* (1806) [History of Princes and Kings of Poland Briefly Narrated by pr. Tadeusz Waga...]. Warszawa.

¹¹ *Śpiewy historyczne z muzyką i rycinami Juliana Ursyna Niemcewicza* (1816) [Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz's Historical Songs with Music and Drawings]. Warszawa.

Rycerska), a political activist during the Great Sejm, Kościuszko's aide-de-camp in the 1794 uprising, and Kościuszko's fellow prisoner in the Peter and Paul Fortress. His words from the last chapter titled "Comments on the fall and the character of Polish Nation" were a lesson of patriotism: "in our times [...] we saw our youth take up their arms with utmost enthusiasm [...] to repel the aggressors. [...] Our ancestors always loved her, for she was magnificent, she was the land where they received so much freedom and so many benefactions [...]. The love of the fatherland is a common trait and virtue of our nation"¹².

A new history course book written by Józef Miklaszewski also contained patriotic and civic messages. Its third edition was published in Wilno in 1832, that is, in the period when the position of history as a school subject was threatened. The very date printed before the introduction: May 3 (1820) had a clear overtone, and the content left no doubts as to the character of the book: "From among the subjects of national education, a precise knowledge of the history of one's own country is important and necessary for every Polish citizen"¹³.

At the same time, *Pielgrzym w Dobromilu* [A Pilgrim in Dobromil] by Izabella Czartoryska, published in 1818 in Warsaw as a history course book for common people, enjoyed great popularity. The book contains stories about Polish kings, princes, and saints, told by a narrator who might be a former soldier in the 1794 uprising, now residing in a village near Kraków. He emphasises "Poles' bravery and devotion to the fatherland"¹⁴. One of the stories taught children a prayer for the fatherland, and the text was concluded with an address to priests to always "finish the Mass with a patriotic call to the gathered people"¹⁵.

Lessons of natural and political law, political economics, and rights of nations, contained in the course book written by pr. Hieronim Strojnowski and published for KEN in 1785, were of crucial importance in development of civic and patriotic attitudes of secondary school students. The questions of freedom, nation, independence, justice, and constitution that students could not mention openly were addressed in the course book, discussed in class, and described in students' notebooks.

¹² The same, pp. 433–434.

¹³ Miklaszewski, J. (1823): *Rys historii polskiej od wzniesienia się monarchii aż do ostatniego upadku i rozbioru kraju* [Outline of the History of Poland from the Rise of the Monarchy to the Final Fall and the Partitions of the Country]. 3rd edition. Wilno, p. III.

¹⁴ *Pielgrzym w Dobromilu, czyli nauki wiejskie z dodatkiem powieści z 40 obrazkami* (1919) [A Pilgrim in Dobromil, or, Village Teachings with Stories and 40 Pictures]. Warszawa, Przedmowa [Introduction].

¹⁵ The same, pp. 174–175.

During the lecture on the rights of nations they would learn that “all nations are sovereign and independent of all other nations [...]. In this regard [...] all nations are equal [...]”¹⁶, and that “every nation has the right to use its strength to defend itself against the aggression of other nations”¹⁷. In the last paragraph the last question was addressed, as well, and clear reference to the contemporary state of affairs was made: “A nation in a state of war [...] has every right to use its strength and weapons to defeat the armed and fighting enemies! [...] The law of war [...] allows not an individual nor an eternal enslavement [...] of the people taken prisoner in war, nor the dependency or enslavement of the entire defeated nation, nor a part of it”¹⁸.

The information that was officially accepted for the Wilno Educational District would reach the students without any obstacles until July 1823, when the Novosiltsev committee arrived in Wilno to conduct an investigation in relation to the events that had taken place on May 3 in a gymnasium. They would concentrate on the curricula and the course books. Political law raised their highest objections. Initial calculations showed that in the previous 20 years in all the gymnasiums in the districts there had been 2,500 students taking classes in this subject in the 5th grade¹⁹. The explanations of the headmaster of the Wilno Gymnasium that “not all the students of the 5th grade put much effort into the subject”²⁰ did not persuade Novosiltsev to change his decision: political studies were removed from the curriculum. The decision was justified as follows: “[...] the studies, taught in all the schools, form an army of unlawful individuals [...] and since they are obligatory, the ideas that they propose are instilled in everyone”²¹.

Beginning with September 1, 1824 history of the Antiquity and the world as well as geography were substituted for the lessons in law²². A few months later, the course books of Strojnowski, Kopczyński, and Chrzanowski were removed from the list of books allowed to be used in schools. In October of the same year lectures in history of Poland were banned, along with the course book of Miklaszewski²³. That is how

¹⁶ [H. Strojnowski], *Nauka prawa przyrodzonego...* (1785) [Lessons in Natural Law...]. Wilno, §3, pp. 240–241.

¹⁷ The same, §5, p. 244.

¹⁸ The same, §20, pp. 335–337.

¹⁹ Lithuanian State Historical Archives [LVIA], f. 567, ap. 2, b. 1327, k. 162.

²⁰ The same, k. 110.

²¹ Beauvois, D., op. cit. p. 356.

²² LVIA, f. 567, ap. 2, b. 1374, k. 431.

²³ LVIA, f. 567, ap. 2, b. 1469, k. 22.

Novosiltsev made an attack on the problems of nation and patriotism included in course books and disseminated through the didactic and educational process.

The trial of the Philomates and Philarets initiated because of the events in the Wilno Gymnasium became the cause of “subversive” demonstrations of the district’s youth, among others in the towns of Kiejdany, Kowno, Poniewież, Świśtocz, and Kroże. The “harmful spirit” that manifested itself among the students was a proof that not only there were “harmful and dangerous” curricula implemented in schools, but also that there was a student solidarity born because of them.

The sentences that were pronounced in 1825 in the trial of university and secondary school students in Wilno predicted further repressions, and the changes in the curricula initiated the Russification in the schooling system. After more than 50 years since the first Partitions of Poland, Russia needed additional 30 years to acknowledge the successfulness of their actions. However, the society became an impediment, as its members were brought up in the ideas of freedom as well as responsibility for the state and the nation. Inspired by Horatio’s verse: “it is sweet to die for the fatherland”, they would engage in conspiracies, rebellions, secret societies, and uprisings. Young people also used to take up the responsibility of educating further generations of young Poles by teaching patriotism and sacrifice for the fatherland on the basis of their own example.

Russian 19th century press contains substantial information about how the generations that were educated in the Russian Partition of Poland before 1830 passed the values that they had learned at home or at school down to their children and grandchildren. In the contemporary Empire the image of a Pole as a “false patriot” was thus promoted. Since their early childhood Poles were to have been instilled with contempt towards everything that was Russian, and they would reinforce their attitudes by reading banned works of literature.

During the January Uprising, “Vilenskij vestnik” published an article in which it was claimed that the source of the hostility and anti-Russian sentiments lay in the atmosphere of the multigenerational Polish homes and the specific methods of education used there. The author explained that in every Polish home “there is a drawing of some Russian officer in epaulettes and next to it there is one of Kościuszko or some other leader in plain clothes, so that it is very simple for a child to tell the two apart. When a child starts making its first steps, its mother, sister, or brother, or any other family member, starts to repeat the following game every day, as a lesson. They raise the child in their arms to the level of the first

portrait and they say: 'Bad! Bad!' and they make the child spit on it. Then they move on to the next picture and they say: 'Good! Good!' and make the child kiss it. Once the child is well-trained, it crawls to the portraits by itself and repeats the lesson [...]". As the author claims, the next step of teaching Poles hostility towards Russia is school education. It is then that, with the assent of the family, "the youth learn by reading patriotic texts, particularly those written by Mickiewicz, a nobleman from Nowogródek, who is filled with hatred of Russia, and who is talented, which makes the subversive character of his works all the more powerful"²⁴.

After many years such image of Poles was still being perpetuated by Russian press, which makes one convinced that the patriotic education during the times of Partitions that was realised in family homes and schools, and after the uprisings at home only, was always of crucial importance to Poles. Vasilij Kunin's account of the demonstrations that took place in Wilno before the January Uprising, published in "Ruskaja Starina" monthly in 1893, may serve as an example. 30 years after the described events, the author attempts to find the cause of the anti-Russian demonstrations of the youth and he finds them in the "irresponsible" Polish families, which are proud that their sons "throw themselves into every demonstration"²⁵.

In the discussed articles published in Russian press, as well as many earlier ones, Russian readers are presented with the image of a "Polish rebel", a disloyal subject, whose liberation demands are pathetic and contemptible. Simultaneously, contemporary Poles saw the same texts as the result of the patriotic and civic attitudes of their parents and grandparents which had been shaped at the turn of the 18th and the 19th century by the ideas in the KEN curriculum, which were subsequently to be found in the curricula and the course books in the Wilno Educational District.

²⁴ Volgin, A.: Pisma na rodinu, „*Vilenskij vestnik*” 1866, Issue 19.

²⁵ Kulin, W. P. (1893): Iz zapisok vilenskogo starožila. Dva epizoda iz žizni Vilenskoj gimnaziji v 1861 godu, „*Ruskaja starina*” Vol. 79.