

Poland's Transition: From Communism to Fundamentalist Hetero-Sex

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Jesusland reaches to Poland. US political culture is in play far beyond its national borders; the Bush Matrix includes the Pope's own Holy Land.

This is a country of hyper-discrimination against women and gays, of twenty percent unemployment, and of an ever-growing underclass. Its would-be national saviors, the ultra-conservative League of Polish Families, sit in parliament and throw stones, slurs and acid at queer parades. Together with fellow Americans, we invade Iraq, privatize social welfare, and swill down heavily-biased media. A fundamentalist-heterosexist matrix defines Poland today.

Poland went from communism to fundamentalism: it is anti-woman, anti-gay, anti-secular, and pro-Bush. Poland out-popes the pope: whereas Pope John Paul II protested against the Iraq invasion, the Polish president and prime minister sent a substantial army contingent off to war without consulting parliament. Polish troops go to Iraq, women to kitchens, media to patriotic kitsch, and gays to hell, while politicians and the media rally around Bush.

Within the EU, which Poland joined on May 1, 2004, Poland is the closest US ally. In the ideology of the extreme right, the nation is to grow through hetero-sexualization and 'Polonization' – the ideological intensification of a Polish national identity. In this essay we will present our experience of Poland's current counter-Enlightenment: sexual and economic degradation of women, discrimination against gay people, censorship against art and freedom of expression, and antagonism towards any progressive thought, even the mildly modern opinions of 1980 Nobel Prize winner for Literature, Czeslaw Milosz. Poland, we shall argue, is a red state, a Trojan horse of Bush's America within the European Union.

Heterosexual Passions of Polish Nationalism

It is telling that Mel Gibson's epic of the counter-Enlightenment, *The Passion of the Christ*, met rave reviews in Poland and rekindled phobic religious passions. The new, threatening tone of Polish nationalism appears in the form of the ultra-right, ultra-Catholic League of Polish Families, whose leader Roman Giertych follows in the tradition of his grandfather's and Poland's anti-semitism. The League came a frightening second in the June 2004 elections to the European Parliament.

Nationalist, heterosexist violence erupts to the surface given any public manifestation of difference. On May 8 in Cracow, All-Polish youth skinheads affiliated with the League of Polish Families, attacked a peaceful demonstration of gays, lesbians and their supporters with stones, catcalls, and caustic acid. On November 20 in Poznan, All-Polish Youth fired teargas at the feminist and anti-homophobic March of Equality. In December, the same youth began a campaign in Bialystok "Buy at Your Own."

Straight capitalist "Aryanism" has become the ideal of the Bush Matrix, both in the US and

Poland. This is a ghostly return of the cults of masculinist American, Teutonic and Slavic blood-bonding, a national triumphalism for which victory is immanent and manifest. The Washington-Warsaw axis is both strategic and erotic: it is a struggle for world domination and male bonding, a desire for the cocksure George W. Bush. The Bush Matrix self-reproduces sameness against the diversity of human subjectivity. In the Bush Matrix, self is self-obvious, predictable, set on reproduction, and clones its leadership globally. Hence Poland searches for its own cocksure leader. Poland is a cog in the Bush Machine, yet its middle position between the EU and Russia makes it valuable as an agent of the matrix. The self-reproduction of mini-Bushes and maxi-fundamentalism must go on in Poland. Bush leads the Bushes of Poland.

Behind this rise of political fundamentalism lies a sexual economy. In Poland's first study of homophobia, *Homofobia po polsku* (Warsaw 2004), Pawel Leszkowicz writes that we are all forced to play in a movie, *The Hetero-Matrix*. As in the Wachowski brothers' film, the agents of the hetero-matrix war to defend their values and eliminate their enemies. The hetero-matrix excludes uncanny sexuality as an external, unwanted element. The hetero-matrix teaches a language of forgetting about Others; it teaches violence. It wages a sexual war and promotes a human rights crisis.

A leading example of a Polish warrior for heterosexual absolutism is the above-mentioned Roman Giertych, who introduces himself as future prime minister and his father as future President. His party, the League of Polish Families, radicalizes the ideas of ultra-nationalist and anti-semitic Roman Dmowski (1864-1939). Dmowski championed chauvinistic ideas of "national egoism" and "racial bonds." As his ideological inheritor, the thirty-four year-old Giertych is still engaged in the project of assuring national purity. He wants to change the penal code: he introduced a parliamentary bill to fine or imprison those who publicly promote any change in the traditional definition of marriage as a union between man and woman. His father Maciej, a League activist, has left off his professional work as a dendrologist (tree biologist) for public appearances to support the religious conversion of gays from their homosexuality, and has translated the Homosexuality and Hope statement of the US Catholic Medical Association concerning "possibilities of change and the negative consequences associated with homosexual activity." The grandfather of the family, Jędrzej Giertych (1903 – 1992), was a politician and author of *O wyjście z kryzysu* ('Towards Ending the Crisis,' 1938), where he called for the expulsion of Jews from Poland. Because of their rabid chauvinism, the books of Jędrzej and Maciej Giertych were withdrawn from Poland's stand at the 2000 Frankfurt Book Fair.

If the Giertych trio represent a once-discredited ideology that not long ago appeared unacceptably extreme, there is no question that it is returning towards the political mainstream. Its return has been fostered by biases in the public sphere of Poland that are masculinist, heterosexist and pseudo-religious.

However, there are more and more leaks, spill-overs, and breakdowns in the hetero-matrix. Revolt is brewing: the Campaign Against Homophobia, politicized public art, activists and authors. We are beginning to break free of Poland's hetero-matrix. Good-bye Lenin. Good-bye Bush? Good-bye hetero-matrix?

Media Voices: Het, Het! Hep, Hep!

If it listens to its mainstream media, Poland will remain firmly within the hetero-matrix. The media have taken to ridiculing the bill for legalizing same-sex unions. Private channel TVN anchor Justyna Pochanke began the most popular news bulletin *Fakty* with a wry smile: "Can you imagine two gentlemen at the marriage registrar?" The hetero-matrix fabricates *fakty* of heterosexism as received TV-wisdom.

Heterocracy is strengthened by the collaboration of nouveaux riche television news anchors, ex-dissident editors-in-chief, and university instructors who serve as adjuncts at the dozen private universities that profit from students in impoverished areas of Poland. TVN private channel interviewed professor Boguslaw Wolniewicz, who defined gays as a deviant social margin and protested against their visibility in the public sphere. He stated further that Catholics are Poland's majority and it would be wrong if Jews were to celebrate the Sukkot festival in public.

For its part, state television interviewed professor Ryszard Bender, who condemned gays. Popular TV host Kamil Durczok interviewed Bender in his *Debata* program. State television made Bender an expert on social issues although this was the same ‘expert’ who stated on religious-conservative Radio Maryja that Auschwitz was not an extermination camp, but a labor camp. Bender is a long-time Catholic University professor and was a member of the compromised Communist parliament, even under martial law. The Stephen Roth Institute at Tel Aviv University writes about his record of Holocaust denial and his campaign against commemoration of the Jedwabne massacre.

Poland’s media hetero-matrix sparks moral panic. There is no debate, but it perpetuates dubious or invented fakty of the Bush Matrix. It rises to defend the established order, not question the establishing premises. For example, Poland’s largest daily, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, dubbed Michael Moore’s *Fahrenheit 9/11* as propaganda a la Leni Riefenstahl. *Gazeta Wyborcza*, flagship of a media conglomerate, mixes misogyny with homophobia with unwavering support for Bush.

Academic Abjection

While self-righteous ex-dissidents or ex-communists have turned the country into the England of Dickens’ *Hard Times*, we live and teach in Poland’s *Hard Times*. Authoritarianism rules Polish universities. The academy is peopled with holier-than-thou, mafia-connected male egos, including women who turn into symbolic men to gain power. They reproduce through cronyism that mans their power-machines.

But people cannot afford to study. Fewer and fewer students come from rural or working-class Poland. An odd job in London or prostitution at home helps meet financial exigencies. At school, when students can afford to attend, antagonism from instructors, sexual demands against young women, unwanted pregnancies, or sexist degradation mar students’ lives.

After graduating, students have little chance of finding a job. In Lublin, the largest employer is Marie Curie University, since the city’s historic light industries and textile factories have collapsed. Many graduates simply leave Poland. In particular, gay people left just after Poland joined the EU, seeking jobs in Great Britain and Ireland, the only EU countries to open their labor markets to Poles. That abandonment speaks to alienation from a culture of intolerance based on social purification, one that receives promotion in academia and public intellectual life.

Educational and research development will become even more difficult if current state under-investment and privatization efforts continue. Social scientists Jerzy Szacki and Andrzej Waskiewicz warn “we are faced with a withdrawal of the most talented and active graduates from science, and consequently with a generation gap which in a dozen or so years will present itself as a decrease of the number of academic instructors and researchers.” Poland’s per capita gross domestic expenditure on research and development (GERD) is eight times lower than the average GERD of OECD countries, three times lower than that of the Czech Republic, and only slightly higher than that of Latin American countries.

The majority of faculty seeks appointment at a number of positions at several academic institutions, or in the private and public sectors simultaneously. Elzbieta Wnuk-Lipinska demonstrates that “the majority of scholars hold an additional (outside of their academic appointment) paid job.” Fifty-eight percent of humanists, 72 percent of social scientists, 79 percent of lawyers, and 92 percent of economists have supplementary employment. Or as Kate Delaney calls Poland, it has become a “nation of adjuncts.”

Reporting on the state of sociology in Poland, Szacki and Waskiewicz argued, “in one respect the situation is catastrophic and one has to articulate this, although it is not typical of sociology alone. We mean the level of salaries for scholars, in particular the young ones, makes it impossible for them to concentrate on their scholarly tasks or in a number of cases compels to quit academic work altogether [...] The potential of [sociology] decreases drastically because a great number of young people are forced to devote their energy to struggling for a basic existence outside their strictly academic activity.”

Such denial of social resources to the pursuit of intellectual rationalism has left Polish universities in dire straits as sites of enlightenment. Moreover, since the hetero-matrix is a global phenomenon, there is no lack of homegrown Polish academic talent eager to join in creating a network of prejudiced iconography. Polish universities contribute unconscionably towards such bigotry and knowledge claims. On December 9, 2004, for instance, the All-Polish Youth held a conference entitled “Homosexual Revolution” at the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Professors of Poland’s oldest university, established in 1364, endorsed the anti-gay conference, as if they wished to return to moral medievalism. For fundamentalists, including academic instructors and skinheads, a “homosexual revolution” – that is, gays’ struggle for human and civil rights – is a well of fear and fascination.

There is a strong correlation between this cultural repugnance towards homosexuality and the intellectual culture that Polish universities and their intelligentsia have – and have not – cultivated. Tomasz Kitlinski and Joe Lockard previously have argued in *Bad Subjects* that the representation of women and Jews in Polish literature repeatedly returns to images of them as over-sensualized, offal-smearred dirt. The self-chosen role of fundamentalists is to cleanse their homelands and the globe from infectious filth. In the process, they abuse sexually their abject subjects. They pursue an intellectual agenda where ‘cleanliness’ equals entitlement to life, and where social ‘dirt’ deserves obliteration.

That over-sensualization indicates the presence of necrophilic infatuation, a love of the death that can potentially or actually be inflicted on the Other. Erich Fromm, for example, detected necrophilia in fascism and quoted Miguel de Unamuno’s denunciation of a Francoist general’s expressions as necrophilic. In spite of its disguise as “culture of life,” fundamentalism is a death cult. This process involves what Polish-born psychoanalyst Hanna Segal calls “putting your shit into other people.” Thus the declaration of a state “crusade” to obtain freedom and democracy is as dangerous and illusory as other fundamentalist beliefs that we will attain paradise if we destroy the evil that we attribute to others. Polish universities, however, have failed to challenge such political neo-crusaders as forthrightly as did Unamuno in the halls of Salamanca. Perhaps fortunately for Unamuno, he died near-immediately after speaking and did not suffer the consequences of his public opposition. But public opposition to death culture at public universities, as demonstrated by events surrounding the anti-militaristic artwork of *Bad Subjects* contributor John Leañós (see “Public Intellectualism and Pat Tillman”), runs directly counter to the hetero-matrix that heroicizes state violence and its symbolic exhibition. The obedient intellectualism that denominates too much of university life in both Poland and the US, instead of querying and challenging masculinist violence and death culture, seeks to convert universities into their necrophilic intellectual fortresses.

The Corpse of Milosz and Intellectual Necrophilia

Civic necrophilia not only loves corpses, but contests their meaning as a mode of defining the public sphere. To receive public honor, it must be a righteous corpse whose meaning can be canonized within dominant proprieties. In exactly this mode, Poland’s national fundamentalists seized on the moment of Czeslaw Milosz’s burial as a defining moment of what constituted national life and its traditions. When Milosz died in Cracow on August 13, 2004, at age 93, the ultra-nationalist All-Polish Youth militia protested against the planned burial of the Nobel Prize-winning poet in the historic abbey of Skalka, where outstanding artists of Poland are laid to rest.

One of Milosz’s offenses had been that he signed a petition to defend the Festival of Gay and Lesbian Culture in Cracow after the city council threatened to ban it. One festival event, a demonstration, was assaulted by the All-Polish Youth skinheads on May 7, 2004. Jaroslaw Kazubowski, who had founded the Committee of Social Protest to oppose the festival, also attacked plans for the burial by sending a protest to the media about Milosz as supporter of the “march of sodomites.” Together with this, right-wing activists accused Milosz of “anti-patriotism.” According to All-Polish Youth, Milosz’s burial at the national shrine would be “profanation” as

the poet had “devalued Catholic teaching and faith by his life and work.” It is through such public rhetoric that intermixes claims of monolithic religious-national values and denunciations of non-heterosexual behavior that Poland’s far right enthusiastically embraces what Joe Lockard calls “the New Straight Order.”

Milosz’s poetry explored the evil of the twentieth century. In his poem “Campo di Fiori,” Milosz depicted Warsaw’s indifference to the suffering of the Jewish ghetto. The poet diagnosed the failure to admit Poland’s guilt; he wrote of his compatriots as “ill with their own innocence.” This verse from his poem “Moja wierna mowo” was quoted by All-Polish Youth secretary, Krzysztof Bosak, in the official statement of the organization, as “deeply offensive to us.”

In many of his texts, Milosz wrote with fondness of his friend Jozef Czechowicz (1903-1939), a gay poet of the inter-war avant-garde. They had worked together for Polish Radio in Warsaw. Both came from the provinces: Milosz from Vilna/Vilnius, Czechowicz from Lublin, multicultural cities where they learnt openness. Both wrote poetry of personal anguish and historical crisis on the eve of the Second World War.

Milosz also admired women’s poetry. He translated into English the poetry of his contemporary, Anna Swir (Swirszczynska), a very unconventional poet who fought in the Warsaw Uprising. After her death, he devoted a book to her work, entitled *What a Guest We Had*. At his readings, Milosz often read not only his own poems, but also those by Wislawa Szymborska. He was liberal on the question of national identity. He presented himself not as a Pole, but a Lithuanian, which enraged chauvinists.

The BBC’s Polish section reported the scene surrounding the funeral: “When family of the Nobel Prize winner and a representative of the city council came to the Skalka [abbey] to discuss the details of the [funeral] ceremony, they passed a table with people who founded the Committee of Social Protest and collect signatures against the burial at Skalka. ‘We believe that Milosz had no links with Poland, and this is the place for her best sons,’ explained one of the protesters. A representative of All-Polish Youth handed out copies of a statement that condemned Milosz’s support for a gay and lesbian march as ‘defilement to the city.’” Despite such vehement protests, ten thousand people attended the Milosz funeral: ‘ordinary’ readers of Milosz’s poetry, women poets (Wislawa Szymborska, Urszula Koziol), Lithuanian diplomats, and the Polish prime minister.

Barbara Skarga, an eminent philosopher born like Milosz in Vilnius, wrote in *Gazeta Wyborcza* that inasmuch as Milosz “has always been an open man who criticized Polish parochialism and all narrow nationalisms, he became the object of attacks of the right, the narrow right that is afraid of otherness.” After the funeral, on September 4, 2004, the fundamentalist *Nasz Dziennik* (affiliated with the popular right-wing religious *Radio Maryja*) ran a feature by Father Professor Jerzy Bajda entitled “The Burial of the Skalka” equating the Milosz funeral with the loss of a national shrine. “With the funeral of Milosz at Skalka, we have lost a place which was a clear compass for the Polish spirit,” he wrote. On September 28, 2004, *Nasz Dziennik* cited the support Milosz and Szymborska provided for the Cracow queer festival as a paragon of moral decline in Poland. *Nasz Dziennik* editorialized: “Nobel-Prize winners, W. Szymborska and the late C. Milosz, praised the deviation [zboczenie] of homosexuality and they were not universally condemned for it.” For Catholic fundamentalists, the open visions of Polish culture that Szymborska and Milosz have represented constitute a national spiritual betrayal.

To their great credit, Jagiellonian University students circulated an open protest letter against the All-Polish Youth statement. The students wrote: “We protest against the denigration of the work of the Nobel Prize winner and against the hate campaign in *Nasz Dziennik*. We oppose the promotion of ethno-nationalism.”

Richard von Krafft-Ebing argued in *Psychopathia Sexualis* that the necrophiliac overcomes “repugnance which man has for a corpse, and permit[s] a feeling of pleasure to be experienced in sexual congress with a cadaver.” The morbid fascination-cum-defilement of otherness is typical of the extreme right, or any politics that embraces death as an ultimate mode of political pleasure and fulfillment. Theirs is a *delectatio morosa*, officially pro-life, but in reality infatuated with the name of death. Fundamentalists spin fantasies of race and national glory and drill *destrudo*. In the United States today, Joe Lockard writes of necrophilic speech as a distinctive feature of

contemporary Iraq War culture. To interrogate this rhetoric is to repeat the question Erich Fromm once asked: “What are we, the people of the United States today, in respect to necrophilia and biophilia?”

The All-Polish Youth rejection of the legacy of Czeslaw Milosz was an extraordinary public display of abjection. Abjection is about ambivalence, and the ambiguous, in-between status of women, gays and unburied corpses unsettles fundamentalist insistence on status singularity. They both desire and dread femininity, queerness, and death. The abject is beyond singular identities, which are a requirement of the hetero-matrix. As Julia Kristeva writes, an unburied corpse is “death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object. Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us. It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection, but what disturbs identity, system, order.”

Abject subjects – women, gays, corpses – haunt fundamentalists. This is the ghostly return of their guilty pasts, guilty secrets. Poland’s unacknowledged crimes are skeletons in the cupboard of today’s crisis. It is the refusal to acknowledge these crimes that figures the ultra-right as death cultists, or as Kristeva again writes in *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, “The traitor, the liar, the criminal with a good conscience, the shameless rapist, the killer who claims he is a savior.”

Regimes of Gender Fear

Poland has transitioned into fundamentalism, a condition where traditionalist verities constitute the body of knowledge worth knowing. Part of that tradition lies in national participation in the humiliation and intimidation of Others. Polish politicians and journalists love to hate feminists and gays; they posture as the last keepers of the family flame. There is a hate-fest, dreaded desire, and pet aversion – “the fascination of the abomination.” This term, coined by that Polish-born writer of colonialism, Joseph Conrad, diagnoses his country today.

This current human rights crisis has registered internationally. On November 5, 2004, the United Nations Human Rights Committee, for the second time, urged Poland to liberalize abortion laws, and implement sex education, contraception and gay rights programs. The Committee expressed deep concern about restrictive abortion laws in Poland, which cause women to seek unsafe, illegal abortions, with attendant risks to their life and health.

Addressing the issue of sexual orientation, the panel stated “The Committee is concerned that the right of sexual minorities not to be discriminated against is not fully recognized, and the discriminatory acts and attitudes against persons on the ground of sexual orientation are not adequately investigated and punished. Discrimination on the ground of sexual orientation should be specifically prohibited in Polish law.”

Heterocracy is the biased hegemony in Poland’s politics, education, media that engages in continual derision and angry denunciations of women and gay rights. Disgust with “other” sexuality is exteriorized in the public sphere and interiorized by women and gays. Nationalist, racist and heterosexist chauvinism thrives on political and social grievances. Assaults on women and minorities have risen since Poland joined the European Union: does the hetero-matrix fear cosmopolitan infections?

On the right, the League of Polish Families viewed Poland’s entry into the European Union as a national humiliation. The League’s support is growing in this, the poorest and slowest developing country of the European Union. Poland has the highest unemployment rate – 19.3 percent in July 2004 – in the EU. Together with its All-Polish Youth street gangs, the League spreads hate and national and sexual resentments. The far right gains support from a decrepit economy and its unemployment, poverty, and underclasses. Social research continues to emphasize the instrumentality of capitalism in producing these conditions. Jadwiga Staniszkis of the Polish Academy of Sciences points to a “commercialization of the state,” with its privatization of industry, agriculture, forestry, and infrastructure, as well as in health, social welfare, and education.

It is crucial to understand the gender specificity of the effects of resurgent capitalism in Poland and throughout eastern Europe. The work of another researcher, Zofia Lapniewska of NEWW

(Network of East-West Women)-Polska, extends this analytic direction by emphasizing the vulnerability of eastern European women to poverty. Lapniewska specifically links the increased vulnerability of women to post-communist economic developments, an analysis worth quoting at length:

“The transition process had significant social impacts including destabilising the labour market and creating a class of so-called ‘new poor.’ In one decade (1988-1998) the poverty rate in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) and the NIS region increased by 19% and now the percentage of the population living below the poverty line is 27% in Ukraine and 54% in Georgia. [...] The shadow economy, corruption and smuggling form critical obstacles to democratisation in the region. In spite of the economic and political differences, one common feature of all the countries in the region - supported by a wide range of research and data - is the worsening position of women and the reduction of their economic, social and political rights. The reasons for this deteriorating situation include: Women shifting from the public sphere to the private sphere, to traditional gender roles within the family and the household. A revival of patriarchal values and prejudices against women have led to this shift. [...] The adverse economic and social conditions in the countries have particularly affected women, who today constitute the largest number of the poor, powerless and disenfranchised. The region has experienced the rising feminisation of poverty and unemployment, as well as increased prostitution and trafficking in women and children within and across borders. Women are more vulnerable to poverty as their reproductive and family responsibilities increase (the result of reductions in social services and cuts in social budgets) and as they lack opportunities to participate in formal economic activities.”

In Poland, this antagonistic gendering of the political economy has its roots in a profound cultural conflict. In his *History of the Present: Essays, Sketches and Dispatches from Europe in the 1990s*, Timothy Garton Ash included a chapter on Poland entitled ‘Abnormal Normality’. Ash presents post-communist Poland as a country riddled with paradoxes. One of them is that Poland A.D. 1990 was the land both of an omni-triumphant Catholic Church and of rampant pornography. Nineteen-ninety was the virgin year of the new Republic; however, it created an abnormal normality of unbridled sex rubbing shoulders with buttoned-up religion. What seems an entire contradiction is in fact a calculable derivative of the contemporary history of Poland. Under communism two antagonistic forces, the Catholic Church and sexual freedom, were repressed. Communism was not only secular, but also prudish. The Church re-surfaced through peaceful anti-communist resistance, whereas porn, banished from the totalitarian state, emerged riding the crest of a capitalist wave. Thus the decade of the ‘90s witnessed two concurrent yet contradictory phenomena, sex and religion, enter a reformulated public sphere.

This is a cultural conflict that, as Ash suggests, has now ossified. An anti-sex, anti-gay Polish Pope is the omnipotent role model for the moral majority in a country – and region – now notorious for selling sex. The radical expansion of the sex business in Poland reflects not sexual freedom but rampant heterosexism and exploitation of women in a country where, as mentioned above, they stroke the EU’s highest rate of unemployment.

As two of this essay’s authors have argued elsewhere (“Sex Slavery and Queer Resistance in Eastern Europe”), one means by which contemporary eastern European neo-capitalism resolves such contradictions lies in the emergence of new gender and sexual hierarchies characterized by proliferating sadomasochistic subordinations and representational degradations. The far-right militia, which are becoming more violent and visible, are the cutting edge of that degradation process. The militant misogyny and fear of homo-monsters in the All-Polish Youth and its religious-nationalist international counterparts derives from ideological inscription within a global hetero-matrix. That global context is one of militarization that incites anti-woman and anti-gay ideology in the Jesuslands of the US and Poland. Militarism, which together with capitalism provides a central means of subordination and degradation, vomits out non-men who are superfluous as cannon fodder. Military, political, class, racial/ethnic, and sexual subordinations are at root parallel and inter-reflexive power formations that thrive from the production of human inequality.

James Baldwin Spoke Polish

In his 1949 essay “Preservation of Innocence: Studies for the New Morality” James Baldwin wrote that “our present debasement of and our obsession with him [homosexual] corresponds to the debasement of the relations between the sexes.” US critic Byrne Fone comments that “Women and homosexuals are inferior because they are not ‘men’; they are threatening because their sexuality is not male. For Baldwin, homophobia, or the ‘ambiguous and terrible position’ assigned to homosexuals in our society, derived not just from hatred of homosexuality, but from sexism.” Better than queer theory, Baldwin’s diagnosis of homophobia-cum-misogyny explains today’s Jesuslands. Feminine and homosexual impurity revolts and delights the Jesuslands, excites fundamentalists to their brutality.

To examine that political brutality, we follow here the path suggested by art critic Craig Houser in his essay “I, Abject” where he concludes: “If normative heterosexuality must assert its power through censorship, then we can be sure that its hegemonic position is itself unstable and available for subversion.” As Baldwin, Houser, and others have noticed, absolutist heterosexuality seeks to create serial abjections of gender and sexuality based on unchallenged and unchallengeable superiority of heterosexual males. Legal bans, eliminationist campaigns, and censorship are the means of subordinating effeminacy that refuses to know its place, whether that effeminacy is gendered female or male.

Because this gender absolutism has immediate social consequences for women, it is little surprise that in Poland today women are at the forefront of the struggle for gay rights. Feminism and the gay movement jointly jeopardize Poland’s forced invisibility of gays. Even if homosexuality is legal, its public acceptance would threaten the sanitized national body. The male-absolutist and heterosexist body politic thus finds itself in homophobia’s grip, a situation where the political goal becomes to banish sexual subordinates – women and gays – from the public sphere through legal and cultural exclusions. It was no accident that much of the most vehement anti-EU political sentiment arose from the Polish right-wing, since EU accession placed an effective obstacle to heterosexist politics and legislative enactments through its human rights laws and institutions. That anti-gay and anti-women legislative practice is no longer possible lends a special fury to the frustration of hetero-supremacist politics.

Thus we find ourselves in the midst of a new rebellion: it is conjoined sexual and gender dissent. Lesbians and gays stand up to the body politic with invisible non-heteronormativity; women stand up to male supremacy and its religio-political absolutism. This is a rebellion that expresses an urgent need to found an ethics of openness and gender-sex diversity in the visual public sphere. A queer visual culture is emerging: art and visibility campaigns like “Let Us Be Seen” create a violent opposition that includes bans by authorities, trials, street violence, threats, protests from the mainstream media and traditional intellectuals. The visibility of this conflict testifies to an explosion of a new type of dissident in Eastern Europe: the sexual dissident.

In Poland this rebellion has become a reaction to the fundamentalism that has seeped into the public sphere since the beginning of the 1989 fall of communism, a transition that turned into anti-womanism and intolerant majoritarianism. Since 1989 the question of abortion has sparked social conflict involving political parties, the Catholic Church, the mass media and emerging NGOs. The 1989-1993 national debate over abortion was part of a political struggle for shaping a new state – a democratic secular versus a theocratic state. The latter vision won. In 1990, a Ministry of Education decision introduced religious instruction into schools, the same schools that still lack sex education. Further, in 1992 parliament passed the hideously-named Respect for Christian Values in Mass Media Act.

Such laws encapsulate a political struggle for power disguised as ‘Christian values,’ the rhetoric of which is effective in a society deeply rooted in Catholicism. The introduction of an anti-abortion law was eased by the return of traditional values, argued to be beneficial after communism. However, the canon of sexual identity inherited from communism always was supported by official Catholicism: it is closed, repressive and based on intolerance. There is no deviating from the ‘norm,’ as doing so equates with illegality and social ostracism. This sexual authoritarianism is justified by a biological perception of sexual differences: nature determines gender and sexuality, and thus they are not subject to public deliberation.

Homo Scare and the New Polish Questions

A Homo Scare has replaced the Red Scare. Poland's new fundamentalists play on both polis and psyche. The social enslavements they advocate as 'traditional values' emerge from powerful psychological forces in the unconscious, and constitute part of the unconscious that re-emerges as political expression. Fundamentalists call for a return to women's domesticity and a traditional family economy, one that would preserve the unemployment and poverty patterns that support right-wing politics. The hetero-matrix supports the economic gender gap and its male supremacy. Today the Polish far right uses the unconscious urges of gender-sex abomination and abjection toward Others. Disgust, disrespect and destruction are rekindled in the mentality of the faithful. Women and gays in Poland are neither subjects, nor objects, but abjects – without humanity, without dignity, without rights.

In 1898 Polish-born Rosa Luxemburg wrote: "It was not long ago that Poland's name echoed throughout the whole civilized world, that its fate stirred every soul and provoked excitement in every heart. Lately one no longer hears very much about Poland – since Poland is a capitalist country. Do we now want to know what became of the old rebel, where historic destiny steered it? – the answer can only be given through investigation of its economic history during the last decades. The so-called Polish question can be observed and discussed from several standpoints, but for those who recognize that the material development of a society is the key to its political development, the Polish question can only be solved on the basis of Poland's economic life and its tendencies."

The Polish Question never disappeared. Now the Polish Question as re-phrased by Luxemburg is a global question. In 2005 Poland is a major-league capitalist and minor-league imperialist, a follow-on participant in the US-led war in Iraq. The new Polish Question is equally a Gender Question, since gender inequalities are rising together with the ever-rising social inequality.

Poland is in urgent need of an inclusive oppositional democracy movement, one that recognizes its location within an international network of social alliances. We need more dissent from the abjection and death culture of the global Bush Matrix. We need to stop the oppressive sex-economy and culture wars that are being waged in the Jesuslands of the US, Poland and globally. In Luxemburg's words, the 'old rebel' is being called.

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