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## POLISH NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE 16TH - 18TH CENTURIES

The period of the Renaissance and humanism, as evidenced in many publications on this subject, among which an article by Stanisław Kot written some forty years ago deserves special mention,<sup>1</sup> was not to bring any essential changes in the concept of national consciousness as compared with the close of the 14th century and particularly with the 15th century. This feeling of national identity was, no doubt, stronger during the Renaissance in the same way as the number of people regarding themselves as Poles was greater, but this fact did not mean that the concept itself was substantially altered. Up to the 16th century the Polish nation was still conceived as a community inhabiting the same territory, embracing groups of a population with the same customs, history and language. It was only late in the 16th century that substantial changes in the national consciousness among the gentry were introduced as a result of a new political situation and transformations in the social, economic and cultural as well as religious life. The consequences of the Union of Lublin and the supremacy gained by the gentry, followed by magnates, over other classes of the society and what is more important over the monarch himself, are of special significance. Then came the victorious Counter-Reformation which aimed at restoring a religious unity within the state.

All this was the reason why the main factors which accounted for shaping the national consciousness of the gentry were now quite different. In the first place, as regards the territorial range,

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<sup>1</sup> S. Kot, *Świadomość narodowa w Polsce w XV - XVII w.* [*National Consciousness in Poland in the 15th - 16th Centuries*], "Kwartalnik Historyczny," vol. LII, 1938.

up to the second half of the 16th century the Polish ethnic group inhabited a rather compact region where it made up if not the total then the majority of the population. The territorial acquisitions before the Union of Lublin also comprised an area with at least a certain number of Poles. These areas included not only the Duchy of Oświęcim incorporated into the Crown in 1456, the Duchy of Zator (1494) and Mazovia in 1526 but also Royal Prussia unified with the Crown after the Toruń Peace in 1466 and inhabited partially by a Polish population. No wonder, therefore, that appeals made at that time to defend the Polish state identified it with the territory with a population of Polish descent and language. Many publicists and historians, from Jan Długosz to Andrzej Ciesielski and Stanisław Łubieński called for a recovery of Silesia, Western Pomerania or the Lubusz region. It is equally interesting to note that among the arguments they used, the one that the lands in question were populated by the compatriots of the townsfolk from Kraków, Poznań or Lublin, was absent. On the other hand, this is the argument which can be encountered, almost to the exclusion of others, in the works by Silesian burghers, for instance Szymon Pistorius. The only exception here is Łubieński who in his postulates for regaining Silesia made vague mention of blood ties. It should be borne in mind that during the period of feudalism an ethnic union was rarely a decisive argument in support of rights to a given territory.

These rights were as a rule, and also in the case of Poland, claimed on the basis of certain legal commitments i.e., that the region was once under the rule of Polish kings or their fief. In the second part of the 16th century this attitude changed completely. The term "Poland" was used interchangeably with "Commonwealth" yet there was no doubt that one's country could no longer be identified solely with Mazovia, Great and Little Poland or Pomerania.

The new territorial unity which during the period of its greatest extension (1634) embraced an area of almost one million sq.km. had one feature in common, namely, an evenly although thinly distributed gentry which, in the 17th century belonged, on the whole, to one ethnic group. At the same time peasant

colonization made its mark. The Mazurian settlers in Ducal Prussia preserved up to the 20th century a language and customs distinct from those of the Germans, but Polish peasants who colonized the Ukraine were fairly soon Ruthenized, assimilating the religion and language of the local population. And yet the Mazurian people settled down on land outside the Polish state—the Ukraine had for years been its integral part. This may have been due to social reasons, i.e., an animosity against the German gentry in Ducal Prussia or against its Ukrainian counterpart which was becoming Polonized. One must not, however, neglect also other reasons which were responsible for the different course of events in the North and the East. The Mazurian, rather compact colonization took place in a sparsely populated area whereas Polish peasants in the Ukraine found themselves in a well-established community using a language that they could understand and that was much more similar to theirs than German. Both groups of Polish colonizers had, however, one trait in common: they renounced their original religion. The Mazurians accepted the Lutheran creed while Polish peasants settling in the Wild Plains became members of the Orthodox Church.

It was the gentry, scattered throughout the country which shared the same customs, language and religion during the 17th century. As a social group it traced its origins back to certain common historical traditions. The studies by T. Ulewicz show that Polish historiography from Jan Długosz in the 15th century and including such authors as Maciej Miechowita, Marcin Bielski, Aleksander Gwagnin, Marcin Kromer or Stanisław Sarnicki in the 16th century was of the opinion that originally some of the Sarmatians inhabiting the Black Sea plains between the Don and the lower Volga left their abodes to settle down in the region between the Dnieper and the Vistula, at the same time making the local population into serfs. This view gradually gained numerous followers in the 16th century, especially among the nobles, to become in the next century their leading ideology, known as Sarmatism.

As Ulewicz points out, the notion of “Sarmatia” originally played a clearly integrating function, since it comprised “*in se in un tutto unico gli elementi etnici così eterogenici e lin-*

*guisticamente diversi della Republica.*"<sup>2</sup> In this way, the historical tradition of the gentry was developed and simultaneously dissociated: memories of the heroic deeds of Poles, drawn from chronicles and alive only among ethnic Poles, were thus enriched with the legend of the conquests achieved by the Sarmatian sword in a period prior to the reign of the first Piasts. This genealogy played an important role predominantly in the consciousness of the Polish gentry. The Russian gentry of the time willingly traced back its origin to the period of the grandeur of Kiev Russia and sought to glorify their ancestors—the Rurykovic dynasty. The Lithuanian gentry also eagerly recalled its past achievements, and for its needs Maciej Strykowski revived and developed a medieval legend of the Roman descent of the Lithuanian nobles. This legend placed their origin in the great family of European nations and offered the Lithuanians, through their ancient lineage, a position as worthy as that secured by the Poles.

It should be kept in mind that 16th-century Poland, along with Austria and Turkey was a country of great ethnic and religious differences. After the Union of Lublin (1569), the inhabitants of this enormous territory did not speak the same language nor did they have the same religious beliefs or customs. Thus, calls for integration were so important and so much appreciated. One of these integrating elements was the concept of Sarmatia which was to include all lands belonging to the Polish Commonwealth, while Sarmatians were considered to be Poles above all.<sup>3</sup>

At the same time, Eastern Europe was being sometimes referred to as Sarmatia and the term Sarmatians was applied to all Slavs. The idea that the Polish gentry was composed of descendants and heirs of the owners of the lands in the region between the Oka, Volga and Don rivers, provided an historical argument for the Eastward expansion to the Wild Plains and further, beyond the frontiers of the Polish state. Muscovy, holding the title of a third

<sup>2</sup> T. Ulewicz, *Il problema del sarmatismo nell cultura e nella letteratura polacca (Problematica generale e profilo storico)*, "Ricerche Slavistiche," vol. VIII, 1960 (Roma 1961), p. 137.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. S. Cynarski, *The Shape of Sarmatian Ideology in Poland*, "Acta Poloniae Historica," vol. XIX, 1968.

Rome, tried to justify her Westward expansion and wars with Turkey in a similar manner. In this sense, Sarmatism created a historical basis to support the existence of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth which in the mid-17th century failed to include a third member, i.e., the Ukrainians, since attempts in this direction were made too late. To trace a nation's origin back to certain tribes which once inhabited the territory occupied at the moment by that nation, was, at the time, not at all original undertaking; Francogallism, of great popularity in 16th-century France and Nordism in Scandinavia are similar examples, while the Dutch looked upon themselves as ancient Batavians, etc. It seems, however, that only in Poland this outwardly historical argumentation helped to form the concept of a nation of the gentry. This was evidently a subjective category of thinking which could hardly comply with reality. It was based on the conviction that only the ruling class constituted the Polish nation, while other estates, although necessary for the proper functioning of society, had, in fact, no other reason for their existence. Tadeusz Ulewicz, an expert as regards these problems, observes that "it could occur sometimes that a burgher was occasionally and hesitatingly ranked among the Sarmatians, although this could never take place in the case of a peasant unless he managed to abandon his class (for example, by becoming a member of the clergy)."<sup>4</sup>

During the Renaissance, the main distinctive feature of a nation was its language. Nobody could deny, from Jan Długosz to Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski, that the peasants were an integral part of the Polish nation, using one language. A distinguished lexicographer, Jan Mączyński explained in his Polish-Latin dictionary the word *natio* as "a nation using the same language."<sup>5</sup> The significance of the national language for the development of national culture was also stressed by the Cracow printer, Hieronim Wieter, as well as by such writers as Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski and Szymon

<sup>4</sup> T. Ulewicz, *Sarmacja. Studium z problematyki słowiańskiej XV i XVI w.* [*Sarmatia. A Study of Slav Problems in the 15th and 16th Centuries*], Kraków 1950, p. 107.

<sup>5</sup> J. Mączyński, *Lexicon Latino-Polonicum (Regiomonti 1564)*, Köln, Wien 1973, p. 482.

Budny, who wrote that everyone is attached to his country's customs and detests a speech which he is unable to understand. Those supporting the election of a Piast to the Polish throne also emphasized the necessity of protecting the national language which, in the case of an election of a member of the Habsburg dynasty, could become threatened by an invasion of the German language, as was the case in Bohemia.

This triumph of the Polish language during the Renaissance period deserves slightly more detailed mention. In the first place, Polish at that time was already a literary language, i.e., used by educated people throughout the country. Secondly, in legal and social documents words associated with everyday life, for example the names of objects, tools, etc., were also put down in the vernacular. Yet at the same time, Latin terminology was preserved in the fields of science where bigger precision was required. In other words, the first geometry and measurement textbook by Stanisław Grzebski appeared in Polish as early as the 16th century, while up to the 18th century theological treatises were written in Latin, which later was replaced by French. A certain reluctance to use Polish in theological disputes stemmed not only from the hermetic tendencies among the clergy but also sprang from a belief that Polish terminology, which was not approved by Rome, might give rise to various heresies, which could become dangerous to the Church.

The fact that remarks on economy and measurement were from the very nature of things designated for people of a lower level of education than those dealing with philosophical or theological treatises, seems to be of significance. Besides, in the 18th century Latin already played a different role. In the Renaissance, when Polish terminology was very limited, Latin was in some cases indispensable, but in the Baroque period Latin expressions, like subsequently French ones, became a linguistic ornamentation. This macaronic trend emphasized to a great extent the detachment of the intellectual élite, i.e., the gentry. In the language sphere this was tantamount to the concept of a nation limited to the class of nobles.

The exclusion of peasants from the national community was undoubtedly the consequence of their deplorable economic and

legal situation; the predominance which the gentry won at the expense of the burghers and peasants accounted for the formation of the very concept of a nation of the gentry. It would be worth-while to note at this point how the various social and national conflicts were reflected in attempts made by particular estates to establish for themselves a different genealogy. It is a well-known fact that the gentry pretended to have ancestors other than those of the peasants, but it is not as well known that the magnates, during the period of their greatest importance, tried to separate themselves in this respect from the gentry. Certain magnate families maintained that they were the descendants not of Sarmatians but of Roman patricians. This tendency of proving one's ancient origin was expressed in some examples of palace architecture (e.g., the Krasiński Palace in Warsaw), interior decoration of residences, sculpture, etc., that was evidently modelled after classical patterns.<sup>6</sup>

The concept of a nation of the gentry contributed greatly to the process of an integration of that class throughout the entire country. After a few decades, privileges brought about a community of language and customs which can be illustrated by the rapid Polonization of the Lithuanian, Russian and Ukrainian gentry. This process was accompanied by the propagation of Oriental vogues among the gentry in Great and Little Poland, especially as regards clothing, decoration of residences, etc.

It seems that in no other country in Europe at that time could privileges, forming a legal and political institution, exert such a strong influence upon the shape of the national consciousness among members of the ruling class as they did in Poland. The gentry had a vivid sense of the distinctness of language and customs as well as an awareness of the unique character of the Polish political system. The share they enjoyed in this political community, which comprised a state of enormous size and of which they saw themselves as owners, created a certain

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. recent studies by M. Karpowicz, *Sztuka oświeconego sarmatyzmu. Antykizacja i klasycyzacja w środowisku warszawskim czasów Jana III* [*The Art of the Enlightened Sarmatism. Ancient and Classic Elements in the Warsaw Milieu in the Times of John III*], Warszawa 1970, p. 174.

bond between all the noblemen throughout the country. This led in turn to the conviction that it is necessary to defend the Commonwealth against external enemies as well as the internal opponents of "golden liberty."

The feudal principle of loyalty to the dynasty remained, in other European countries, the main integrating factor. In Poland, the extinction of the Jagiellonians weakened this feeling. Kings chosen through election were nominated for life and could be deprived of their office i.e., the throne, if they transgressed their competence. In the difficult period of the Swedish invasion (1655 - 1660), a conflict between the loyalty towards a superior (e.g., an officer) or a magnate, who frequently was also a protector, and the loyalty towards the state and its political institutions (not the dynasty) made itself visible. Even then, those negotiating with the Swedes, Brandenburgians or the enemy from Transylvania were treated as traitors. At first, supporters of foreign intervention interpreted their policy as an intention to change only the person of the monarch (Charles Gustav instead of John Casimir). In 1655, the majority of the gentry approved of this argumentation and did not consider appropriate conduct as high treason. As a result, the inhabitants of Royal Prussia did not support the elector of Brandenburg just as the Lithuanian gentry opposed the policy of Janusz and Bogusław Radziwiłł. The fact that the achievements of the Toruń Peace and the Union of Lublin were retained was presumably due to the force of attraction of the political freedom secured during the reign of the elective kings of the Commonwealth of the gentry which was stronger than the prospective rule of the semi-absolute monarchs from Sweden. These freedoms also accounted for the fact that in the mid-17th century, when the Counter-Reformation in Poland gained ground, the Polish state was supported by the gentry from Ducal Prussia, Lutherans by religion and Germans by birth. However, their postulates calling for subjection to the rule of Polish monarchs contained also admiration for certain symptoms of political anarchy in the Crown which should have been rather disapproved of. No wonder, therefore, that the Prussian gentry involved in the mechanism of a modern state which was at the time organizing a strong army by sacrificing the privileges of the



citizens, filling its treasury and establishing a body of efficient administrators, looked with envy upon their neighbour where a nobleman on his manorial farm was a lord to himself and even a potential candidate for the throne. In addition, economic ties and subsequently economic profits, could have also been the reason for the loyalty towards the Polish Commonwealth shown by the towns of Royal Prussia (especially Gdańsk) during the period of the Swedish invasion. Already at the end of the 16th century, W. Bruce, an Englishman who travelled around Poland pointed out this power of the "Polish liberty, immunities, privileges, honours and security against forreyne power, by the union which they (the provinces) should never enjoy under another government."

The reluctance to grant the Cossack upper circles those privileges which were enjoyed by the Polish gentry was the cause of the Cossack uprisings. If the compact of Hadziacz had been concluded some twenty years earlier (i.e., in 1638 and not in 1658), then there would have been the possibility that another generation of a local social élite might have been Polonized.

The question arises: what kind of national integrity was characteristic of the Lithuanian, Ukrainian or Byelorussian gentry who were becoming assimilated, or of the German and Armenian burghers who also found themselves under the influence of similar forces. As far as the nobles were concerned, the bond linking them with Poland was, as has been already mentioned, composed of privileges. In this way there emerged a "political Pole," i.e., a citizen who considered himself to be, above all, a member of a certain political and social community and, only in the second place, a member of a language community. S. Kot correctly notes that in this was the 16th-century Ruthenian gentry regarded themselves as belonging to the Polish nation, as is shown by the example of Stanisław Orzechowski who identified himself as "*gente Ruthenus, natione Polonus.*"

The paths leading towards Polonization were diverse and not always straight. Lithuanian nobles, for instance, rarely spoke their

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<sup>7</sup> *Relation of the State of Polonia and the United Provinces of that Crown Anno 1598*, ed. C.H. Talbot, in: *Elementa ad fontium editiones*, vol. XIII, Romae 1965, p. 135.

own language and they replaced Russian with Polish. At the beginning of the 17th century Janusz Radziwiłł wrote to his brother, Krzysztof that although he was a Lithuanian and would die as such "it is necessary to use Polish idioms in our country."<sup>8</sup> In a similar way, Polish was employed in Lithuanian official life at the end of the 17th century. The problem of religion, closely associated with the question of national identity, was also rather complicated. The Orthodox Ruthenian or Byelorussian gentry, who during the Reformation adopted Calvinism, Lutheranism or even joined the Polish Bretheren, were gradually, in the course of their assimilation, renouncing their faith to be ultimately converted to Catholicism. This phenomenon may be explained by the fact that during the 16th century these were groups rather distrustful of the Latin creed so closely connected with Polish culture and customs that the civilisation chasm dividing noblemen of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and those in the Crown was even wider. Whatever its form or affiliation, the Reformation introduced Western culture.<sup>9</sup> Certain contacts with other aspects of Polish culture, on the other hand, paved the way for Catholicism in this region.

In 17th-century Royal Prussia, according to S. Herbst, a new Prussian nationality, analogous to the Belgian or Dutch, was being shaped. This development, however, was checked by neighbouring Ducal Prussia and the expansion of the concept of a nation of the gentry which rejected the town people from Toruń, Gdańsk or Elbląg.<sup>10</sup> Prussian Lutheranism was gravitating rather towards Königsberg (Królewiec) and it is not surprising that the most ardent adversaries of the Union of Sandomierz (1570) came from the towns of Royal Prussia. These urban centres, however, did not seek any contacts with other towns of the same creed or with the Lutheran gentry. This absence of solidarity might have stemmed from the different ethnic origins of the

<sup>8</sup> S. Kot, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Attention is drawn to this fact by S. Kot in his study: *La Réforme dans le Grand Duché de Lithuanie. Facteur d'occidentalisation culturelle*, Bruxelles 1953.

<sup>10</sup> S. Herbst, *Świadomość narodowa na ziemiach pruskich w XV - XVII w.* [*National Consciousness in the Prussian Provinces in the 15th - 16th Centuries*], "Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie," 1962, No. 1, p. 10.

burghers. We should remember, however, that such an ethnic diversity did not hinder the gentry, who, regardless of place of birth or language, shared the same ideology and as a result achieved a final Polonization. The assimilation processes which were taking place in the towns of Royal Prussia and Great Poland were impeded, it seems, by a lack of solidarity within the burgher groups on the one hand, and by ever stronger social barriers which limited the number of marriages between Polish noblemen and women of German origin and which ultimately retarded the process of the Polonization of the patriciate, on the other hand. One ought however to mention the example of G. Lengnich who wrote in German and manifested his loyalty to the Polish kings upon many occasions. The anniversaries (1654, 1754) connected with the Pomeranian incorporation into Poland (1454) as well as elections of the Polish Kings were commemorated in a number of works, Latin and German, which praised the Commonwealth and emphasized the great affection which the authors felt towards Poland.

Hence, the "political Pole" existed also in Royal Prussia, and the language he spoke was of no significance. Also in the multi-national Habsburg Empire, a large proportion of Germans, Bohemians and Hungarians regarded themselves as Austrians having in mind the union with the country of their birth and residence and a solidarity with a common political organism. There can be no doubt that in the 16th and 17th centuries language itself was a factor of minor importance for the concept for national identity, as compared, for example, with the significance ascribed to it in the 19th century. Even today we are able to observe examples of the same phenomenon : the population of the GDR, Austria and some parts of Switzerland speaks the same German language but does not consider itself all members of the same family. It is easier to understand why the German-speaking burghers from Royal Prussia did not feel any bonds with the Saxonians, Bavarians or Ducal Prussians simply as a result of a language affinity. Moreover, Germany itself was not identified at that time with any territorial and national entity;<sup>11</sup> antagonism between

<sup>11</sup> This problem is emphasized by J. B. Neveux in: *Vie spirituelle et vie sociale entre Rhin et Baltique au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, Paris 1967.

particular provinces were to make the task of state unification difficult as late as the 19th century.

In Eastern parts of the Commonwealth symptoms of Estonian and Latvian national identity made also themselves conspicuous. In the Baltic countries this was to a great extent due to the Counter-Reformation which propagated Catholicism in the vernacular, while in the Ukraine a similar function was fulfilled by the Orthodox Church. However, these problems as well as the emergence of a Ukrainian and Lithuanian national awareness are beyond the scope of study.

A special attention should be drawn to the way in which religion affected the development of the concept of national identity. At the beginning of the 16th century, just before the coming of the Reformation, all ethnic communities in Poland adhered to a definite Church, specific of each of the groups. Thus, Poles were Catholics, Jews professed Judaism, Ruthenians belonged to the Orthodox Church, Tartars cultivated Islam, Armenians were Monophysites and a large number of Lithuanian peasants worshipped, although secretly, pagan gods. There was, however, one exception to this rule, i.e., the Germans who became assimilated in the Crown but retained their own national status in Royal Prussia. Only Lutheranism brought a confirmation of their ethnic separateness which uptill then they lacked, remaining within the same religious community with Poles and Lithuanians. This might have been one of the reasons for the wide-spread access to the Lutherans on the part of the German town dwellers from Silesia, Royal Prussia and Great Poland.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, the Orthodox Bretherens in the 17th century were not only defenders of Orthodox convictions but also formed centres propagating Russian culture. For the Poles, the division in religion was the result of the Reformation.

It is not surprising then that while engaged in a struggle against the Reformation, the Church appealed to a sense of national unity and accused the Reformation movement of foreign provenance. Actually, the adversaries of the Reformation could

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<sup>12</sup> For more details see J. Tazbir, *Spoleczeństwo wobec reformacji* [*Society and Reformation*], in: *Polska w epoce Odrodzenia. Państwo—spoleczeństwo—kultura*, ed. A. Wyczański, Warszawa 1970, pp. 199 - 200.

have been just as easily charged with alien origin and the Italian sources of Papal ideology were often indicated. The term "Catholic" was to become gradually replaced by "Roman" (pope, bishop, faith, etc.), obviously in a pejorative meaning. A new Counter-Reformation model of relations between various religious denominations was treated as contradictory to the national Polish character (who were to be mild by nature and unwilling to bloodshed) as well as to their historical past.

In fervent disputes such contrasts as : national *versus* foreign, Pole *versus* an Italian or German, Polish character and traditions *versus* the "practices" of other nations, may be encountered quite frequently. Obviously, the terms used are indicative of various symptoms of national identity. In the 16th century, however, despite all efforts made by the Counter-Reformation, religion, at least as regards Poles, and nationhood remained as a separate problem. Similarly as in the case of the dissidents who did not create a political party of their own, nor did they form a group isolated from the society, the Calvinists and Arians, together with the Catholics constituted, beyond any doubt, one nation. The situation of the Menonites, the Unity of Czech Brotheren or the Anabaptists of German origin who settled in the Żuławy region of Pomerania was quite different.

With the advance of the Counter-Reformation the number of dissidents among Poles decreased. This aided the propagation of the thesis that Catholicism was the only true faith. As was shown during the Swedish invasion, a "Lutheran" also signified someone speaking a foreign, incomprehensible language. In such a situation, a dissident, in the opinion of the majority of Catholics, excluded himself from the national community. The Counter-Reformation attempted to place the dissidents outside the boundaries of the community, as an element alien to the Polish historical tradition. This occurred in the Western border regions of the Commonwealth. Lutheran clergy and the Czech Brotheren, settled in Great Poland, then started to seek the protection of the Brandenburg Elector. Ducal Prussia became host to a great number of migrant Lutheran gentry. They were accompanied by Protestant ministers and young people who made their way there to pursue further studies. It resulted in the Germanization of many of the

dissident groups ; the concept of the "Catholic-Pole" was to loosen their ties with the Polish nation.<sup>13</sup> A gradual decline of religious tolerance, both in theory and practice, accounts for the fact that dissidents often sought the support of Poland's political enemies, and this made their national status still more questionable.

During the 17th century, a coexistence of various religious denominations was accepted within the same state, but not within the same nation. At the time when the Socinian Academy at Raków was closed and Polish Calvinists in towns were being persecuted, the Polish gentry was free to invite Lutheran settlers from Germany and Silesia to Great Poland and the Lublin region and to offer them their protection. These newcomers, however, were looked upon by Polish town dwellers and peasants with a great amount of hostility. Yet the ethnically alien followers of a faith other than Catholic were treated by the ruling class with more tolerance than dissidents among their own compatriots. The concessions granted to the German population of the Royal Prussian towns gave rise to suspicion and discontent on the part of the Polish dissident patricians in Cracow or Lublin. Analogously, in Royal Prussia, Poles, whether Catholics or Arians, were tolerated, while Calvinists which spread among the Germans, were persecuted.

This observation at first glance seems to be contradicted by the Union of Brześć (1596) which joined the Orthodox Church with the Roman Catholics. The Union was inspired by Rome and met with little enthusiasm in the Commonwealth. Moreover, the entire act was undertaken for the purpose of gaining the support of the gentry who, by virtue of their status, was regarded in the 17th century as a member of the same national community. Compatriots, however, were blamed for propagating an alien faith. In 1613 Jakub Zawisza noted that "neither Jewish nor Tatar sects bring no harm to the true faith" since for centuries no one had been converted to those creeds, while the "heretics" deprive the Church of its faithful.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, a dissident-compatriot could

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<sup>13</sup> Cf. J. Dworzaczkowa, *Sprawa dysydencka w drugiej połowie XVII w.* [*The Dissident Question in the Second Half of the 17th Century*], in: *Dzieje Wielkopolski*, vol. I, ed. J. Topolski, Poznań 1969, p. 734.

<sup>14</sup> J. Tazbir, *Il problema dell'intolleranza religiosa in Polonia nel*

be a rival in a political or professional career and thus be easily removed upon the pretext of combating "heresy." We can assume at this point that if Arians were a religious minority of foreign origin, they presumably would not have been expelled from Poland. As a result of their banishment, not only in theory but virtually they found themselves cast outside the national community. This sort of mechanism was operating in the 16th and 17th centuries, although it differed in particular cases. A growing sense of national identity during the Renaissance anticipated the Reformation movement, whereas in the century to follow the same concept of national consciousness was to favour such tendencies which helped to eliminate all elements alien to the Polish state, in the social and religious meaning.

In this way, in the 17th century a nobleman's understanding of the nation was enriched by two criteria: a community of privileges (or a lack of such privileges) and the problem of religion which at that time, as never before or after, was a decisive factor in shaping the concept of national identity. If the first of these criteria was clearly associated with Poland's political system, the other one was in a certain degree dependent on the international situation. Wars with Muslim Turkey, Protestant Sweden or Orthodox Russia strengthened a feeling of national identification which also relied heavily on the conviction of religious separateness. In the Middle Ages, a sense of nationhood was developed, for example, by the cult of national patron saints and now this consciousness led to a glorification of countrymen. The understanding of the Polish ethnical community as one limited exclusively to the gentry, i.e. to its Catholic part, provoked strong objections on the part of the dissidents. The latter frequently emphasized their loyalty towards Poland, as did the Lutherans in Silesia and Pomerania, or the exiled Arians who praised Polish victories over the Turks or commemorated the elections of Michael Korybut Wiśniowiecki or John III Sobieski. On the other hand, representatives of the privileged classes, such as the poet Jan Jurkowski, professor of the Academy of Vilna,

Aaron Aleksander Olizarowski, or the founder of the Marist Fathers, Stanisław Papczyński maintained that the peasant is a member of the same ethnic community and should be protected by law against excessive social exploitation since he is as good a Pole as his lord.

A severe criticism of the entire situation was presented by Andrzej Frycz Modrzewski and later by an outstanding Calvinist writer at the end of the 16th century, Andrzej Wolan who condemned Polish law which treated people belonging to the same nation worse than Roman slaves.<sup>15</sup> In a similar vein, Piotr Skarga reminded that the peasants were "Poles of the same nation."<sup>16</sup> When in the 16th century appeals were made at Arian synods to relinquish serf labour, they referred mainly to the Holy Scripture. The peasant, in the arguments presented by the Polish Bretheren, was a member of the same religious but not ethnic, community.

None of the writers from the town circles had any doubts as to the participation of their own class in the Polish national community. It was, as before, the king, and not class privileges which were bestowed almost entirely upon the gentry, who personified unity ; many burghers were ardent supporters of strong royal authority. The most enlightened representatives of the Polish third estate regarded themselves as Poles in the same sense as that term is understood today, and confirmed their attitude in the years of the Swedish invasion. One can even try to perceive in the contents of national consciousness differences other than social, i.e., a consciousness of the enlightened part of the society and that of the common people. This did not change the fact that a simple, uneducated squire regarded himself a member of the same nation as the highest ranking magnate, and did not hesitate to exclude from this nation masters of the Cracow Academy because of their social origin. At the same time, the burgher authors called for the expulsion of all dissidents, whatever their social

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<sup>15</sup> A. Wolan, *O wolności Rzeczypospolitej albo szlacheckiej* [On the Freedom of the Commonwealth or the Republic of the Gentry], ed. K. J. Turowski, Kraków 1859, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> P. Skarga, *Kazania sejmowe* [Seym Sermons], ed. J. Tazbir, M. Korka, Wrocław 1972, p. 196. Biblioteka Narodowa, ser. I, No. 70.



position. It must be also remembered that Protestant nobles, like their Catholic counterparts, rejected peasants and the town population from the realm of the Polish nation. Both groups are thus not without blame: one appears as selfish and the other as fanatics. This state of affairs resulted in a deplorable situation when during the Swedish invasion, peasants attacked manors belonging to the Calvinist and Arian gentry.

The question of a national consciousness among the poor urban population and peasants is a separate problem which so far has not been examined sufficiently. It appears that the situation in this respect was by far more favourable during the 16th century when numerous peasant children could attend not only parochial schools but also universities. It is interesting to note that in the 17th century the role of the peasant in literature restricted itself virtually to complaints concerning the difficult social situation, while in the previous century the peasant felt free to participate in disputes on various general issues. Both the Calvinist author, Mikołaj Rej in his *Short Discourse between Three Persons: a Nobleman, Bailiff and Parish Priest* [Krótka rozprawa między Panem, wójtem i plebanem] and the Catholic writer, Wit Korczewski in his *Polish Colloquies intermingled with Latin* [Rozmowy polskie...] did not hesitate to make a peasant their spokesman in a discussion for and against religious reforms. In Korczewski's work, a young peasant studying in Wittenberg, tries to convert his father to the Lutheran faith.<sup>17</sup>

The situation declined during the following century. Poverty, together with much more difficult access to universities as well as contempt expressed freely by the gentry, all this inevitably induced the peasant to believe that he and his lord must be of an ethnically different origin. Up to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, the term "Pole" used among the rural population was applied to the gentry and this also influenced the memories of anti-Russian uprisings as seen and retained in the consciousness of the peasants. In 1846, a part of the Galician peasants maintained that they were obliged to defend the Austrian Emperor against the

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<sup>17</sup> W. Korczewski, *Rozmowy polskie łacińskim językiem przeplatane, 1535* [Polish Colloquies Intermingled with Latin 1535], Kraków 1883, p. 31.

Poles. This was doubtlessly the result of a limited comprehension of the nation as a nation made up of the nobility.

The 17th-century rural population identified itself above all with a given place of birth and residence, neighbourhood or parish. This union with one's region was to replace ethnic bonds. It seems worthwhile to note that the peasants usually decided to show resistance towards the enemy when their own nearby farmsteads had been invaded ; such was the situation in the case of the peasant struggle against the German army marching through the Kaszuby region in 1520 to support Albrecht Hohenzollern, the anti-Swedish uprising of the mountaineers and the population of Kurpie region in the 17th century. The need to defend one's house, village or district became even more pressing when the invaders differed as regards language and religion, as was shown during the Swedish invasion. The way in which this difficult period affected the sense of national identity is still rather unknown as a result of the scarcity of material available. The so-called loose people, often of a higher cultural level, who travelled around the country and had a clearer understanding of the general situation, were another case.

The concept of ethnic separateness was shaping through a confrontation with the customs, language and historical traditions of other nations. This refers predominantly to the Germans ; a strong antagonism became apparent at the close of the Middle Ages. No wonder that a well-known verse *Póki świat światem // Nigdy Niemiec nie będzie Polakowi bratem* [For the duration of the world, // a German will never be a brother to a Pole], dates back to the mid 16th century.<sup>18</sup> This conflict increased during the Reformation and national status became by then an argument used by both sides.<sup>19</sup>

The period which is the subject of the present study is

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<sup>18</sup> *Pisma polityczne z czasów pierwszego bezkrólewia* [Political Writings from the Period of the First Interregnum], ed. J. Czubek, Kraków 1906, p. 33. Cf. also G. Labuda, *Geneza przysłowia "Jak świat światem, nie będzie Niemiec Polakowi bratem"* [The Origin of the proverb: "For the Duration of the World, a German will never be a Brother to a Pole,"] "Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu im. Adama Mickiewicza," *Historia*, vol. VIII, 1968, p. 18.

<sup>19</sup> Cf. recent studies by M. Koch-Hillebrecht, *Das Deutschenbild. Gegenwart. Geschichte. Psychologie*, München 1977, p. 282.

characterized nonetheless by a cessation of military conflicts between Poles and Germans. The act of homage in Cracow in 1525 whereby Albrecht Hohenzollern recognized the suzerainty of the Polish king put an end to a long period of wars with Ducal Prussia. The hostilities were renewed only in the years 1655 - 1657 when the Brandenburg Elector, and at the same time, the Duke of Prussia, voiced his support for the Swedes. In the Western frontier regions of Poland, however, no struggles were being conducted at the time. In this situation, the Polish-German antagonism became an internal conflict which resembled, *toutes proportions gardées*, the attitudes towards such population groups as the Jews, Armenians or Tatars of the Commonwealth.

The anti-German feeling was soon to be substituted by a growing sense of the national separateness of Poles confronted by attacks on the part of the Turks from the South and the Tatars from the South-East. Military conflicts, so frequent in the 17th century, incited a feeling of solidarity in a nation surrounded by aliens. Furthermore, this conviction was accompanied by a feeling of the strangeness toward the West European nations with whose culture and customs Poles got acquainted either during voyages abroad or in Poland itself, because of the appearance of foreign courtiers (Italians or Frenchmen) of the newly-elected monarchs, immigrant craftsmen, tradesmen and proachers (Scots, English or the Dutch). Polish customs, specific clothing and tastes, were also willingly demonstrated. This feature should not, however, be overestimated. On the one hand, foreign modes were readily imitated by the Polish upper classes while, on the other hand, there existed considerable differences as regards customs in the country itself. One could mention the Mazovians or Lithuanians, a laughing-stock of the other population groups. Customs could not have become an integrating factor of the community also because they differed in each social groups, depending upon the level of culture, wealth or foreign contacts.

On the whole, the 17th century which signified for Poland a vivid and uniquely Sarmatian culture, of an overwhelming gentry nature, contributed to a greater extent than the previous centuries to a growing sense of separateness among members of that class. This was closely associated with the fact that the

Baroque culture, as compared to that of the Renaissance period, was mainly a native product. The 17th century also witnessed stronger tendencies to emphasize the contrast between Poland and Western Europe, and towards a more intense xenophobia which was to develop into a truly dangerous disease—long endured by the Polish gentry. It was a common belief that anything foreign might present a threat to the Polish language, tradition and, more important, to the liberties, enjoyed by the gentry.<sup>20</sup>

As a result of the growing sense of separateness, from the 16th century on there began to appear a number of works which aimed at presenting a self-portrait of the Poles as a whole nation or of its particular groups. This was closely connected with attempts made at the time, at describing the national character, or rather the virtues which were as a rule perceived therein. In addition, there also appeared images of the inhabitants of other Polish provinces, often malicious as those presenting the Mazovians. An interest in the national past was awakened and Renaissance historiography became a school of patriotism. This was vividly expressed by Joachim Bielski who claimed that historiography should treat our ancestors respectfully considering that they sacrificed their lives in order to expand the boundaries of the Polish state. Love for one's country is, in the eyes of this historian, the main pivot for writing history. Such a statement was of great significance for the national consciousness of the time, and as a Polish scientist Dobrowolski wrote some years ago: "[...] memories of the lives and works of past generations were a link between the past and the present history of our country."<sup>21</sup>

A similar role was played by 17th-century historical works, for example those by Paweł Piasecki, Wespazjan Kochowski or Szymon Rudawski. Historical events were seen here from the pragmatic angle. Efforts made by the gentry to preserve and enlarge their class privileges and the struggle waged by them against foreign monarchs on the Polish throne, who tried to

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. J. Tazbir, *L'attitude envers les étrangers dans la Pologne au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle*, "Il Pensiero Politico," vol. VI, 1973, No. 2.

<sup>21</sup> K. Dobrowolski, *Studia nad kulturą naukową w Polsce do schyłku XVI stulecia [Studies on the Scientific Culture in Poland up to the End of the 16th Century]*, Kraków 1933, p. 72.

curtail these privileges, were given great consideration. In this way, the nation of the gentry was engaged in creating a historical genealogy of its own. We should mention that it contained two distinct levels: a sense of a shared historical past dating back to the mythical Sarmatians, experienced by the entire Polish gentry, and memories of a relatively recent history, which differed among the inhabitants of Great Poland, Mazovia or Little Poland. In the last case, oral tradition, together with literature, fulfilled an important function. Poetry was a specific school of patriotism. Such authors as Waclaw Potocki, Samuel Twardowski or Zbigniew Morsztyn, praised the military successes of the Polish army. The values which were created at that time become an intrinsic part of Polish culture and remained as such up to the 19th century, or even later.<sup>22</sup> Some of the heroes (Stefan Czarniecki, Stanisław Żółkiewski) have remained valid as personality ideals even today. Those, on the other hand, who were proclaimed as traitors by their contemporaries (Janusz Radziwiłł or Hieronim Radziejowski) wear that label in the history textbooks of our times.

At this stage it seems useful to consider the ways in which these basic concepts concerning the growth of national consciousness were actually understood. The term "Pole" meant a member of a certain ethnic community as well as an inhabitant of a certain given territory, as a rule Little or Great Poland, the two lands which composed one state organism as early as the 14th century. At the same time, this notion was soon to signify any citizen of the Commonwealth regardless of language. It sufficed that Poland was the place of his residence and that he was a subject of the Polish king. This is the reason why Hieronim Wieter, a printer of German origin, described himself as "a resident Pole," and why Sigismund Augustus admonished Albrecht of Prussia to become "a good Pole". A hundred years later, Maciej Sarbiewski applied the term "Pole" not only to Polish-speaking people but also to those "who, with time, were admitted to or joined the organism of this great state."<sup>23</sup> A distant echo of such an un-

<sup>22</sup> Cf. J. Tazbir, *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce. Rozkwit—Upadek—Relikty* [Culture of the Polish Gentry. Zenith—Decline—Traces], Warszawa 1976, p. 179.

<sup>23</sup> M. K. Sarbiewski, *De perfecta poesii, sive Vergilius et Homerus*, Wrocław 1954, p. 203.

derstanding of the concept is to be heard in the words of the national anthem: "we shall be Poles" as soon as the country's independence is regained. An inhabitant of Prussia was called a "Prussian," of Lithuania—a "Lithuanian." Both Kościuszko and Mickiewicz regarded themselves as Lithuanians in this meaning of the word. The "Prussians," as they called themselves, strongly opposed the influx of "foreigners" and "strangers" into their territory, i.e., people from other parts of the Commonwealth.

During the 15th century and the first part of the 16th, when Latin terminology was still in use, such notions as *gens*, *populus* and *natio* had no strictly definite connotations; originally, for example, in the *Floriański Psalterbook* [*Psalterz Floriański*] or the *Bible of Queen Zofia* the word "nation" mean "generatio," tribe. The ambiguity of this term survived well into the 16th century when, as has been already shown, the word "nation" denoted an entity using one common language, as well as, on the other hand, origin and social status. In this way, the juxtaposition: people of the "common nation" versus Poles of the "noble nation" can be encountered in constitutions or seym diaries. The word lacks a clear explanation in the already mentioned *Dictionary* by Mączyński, where the Latin "*natio*" is translated as "*genus, generatio*." Moreover, there also occurred a "nation" which denoted the population of a certain state territory, regardless of ethnic differences. According to this last criterion (and this particularly refers to decrees), two nations were distinguished, Poles and Lithuanians, the Crown itself being identified with Poland as can be seen in Rotundus' *Dispute between a Pole and a Lithuanian* [*Rozmowa Polaka z Litwinem*]. Furthermore, the "Prussian nation" was generally understood to include inhabitants of Royal Prussia, both Poles and Germans.

In the 17th century a certain dissociation in the average nobleman's understanding of the term "Pole" and his definition of the Polish nation took place. It is interesting to note that resolutions of the land diets and particularly the various manifestoes issued during the Swedish invasion used the word "fatherland" rather than "nation of the gentry," and emphasized the need to defend one's country.

For many years the term "fatherland" was conceived as the

land inherited from one's ancestors. Jan Kochanowski used the word in the 16th century in two meanings: as it is understood today and as a patrimony. Łukasz Górnicki or Stanisław Orzechowski were rather inclined to write *patria* when they meant a certain territory in the political sense. It was with Piotr Skarga that "fatherland" ultimately received its present meaning.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, up to the end of the 18th century, one's native country was identified with the state. This ambiguity in the basic terms concerning national consciousness may have sprung from three reasons. Firstly, it reflected an ambiguous way of thinking in the 16th and 17th centuries, when no clear distinctions between certain problems were made and not all the consequences perceived. Secondly, the language itself, and this holds especially true for Polish, was, at the time, incapable of expressing certain terms in a precise manner. Even today, there exists a controversy regarding the differences in the meaning of "nation" and "nationality." It is not by accident that terminological misunderstandings occurred only rarely during the Enlightenment period, when the concept of national identification was more mature and language—more accurate. The third reason for misinterpretation lay in the varying attitudes of those who comprehended the nation as a concept limited to the gentry, and those who included the whole population.

A fundamental form of social ties was composed of a feeling of identity with one's place of birth and residence. In the 17th and 18th centuries there appeared first descriptions of various Polish towns, especially Cracow, which proved the existence of those bonds. Publications concerning Warsaw by Adam Jarzębski, on Cracow by Piotr Pruszczyński or Zygmunt Zalewski, on Żywiec by Andrzej Komoniewski confirm this local patriotism.<sup>25</sup>

Ethnic community, and its awareness, was of much greater territorial range than that of national identity. However, the latter was shared by nearly all the members of a given national community, while ethnic consciousness was characteristic only

<sup>24</sup> K. Górski, *Zagadnienia słownictwa reformacji polskiej* [Problems of the Terminology of the Polish Reformation], in: *Odrodzenie w Polsce*, vol. III: *Historia języka*, part II, 1962, p. 235.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. J. Bieniarzówna, *Mieszczanstwo krakowskie w XVII wieku* [The Cracow Burghers in the 17th Century], Kraków 1969, p. 95.

of a part of this community. The number of people with a strong sense of national identity was constantly increasing. Despite that, ca. 1870 there were, according to T. Łepkowski, not more than "30 - 35 per cent Polish speaking people."<sup>26</sup>

A much smaller proportion identified themselves with a larger ethnic and religious community, i.e., the Slavs, understood in two ways: as a group of countries inhabited by the Slavs and as a human entity sharing a similar language. The Slav consciousness made itself especially felt during the Renaissance period and during the religious conflicts associated with the Reformation movement. Many Polish historians believed in a historical unity of all Slav nations. In Polish 15th - 17th century literature there occurred "so many allusions and so many problems, which may be encountered nowhere else, in no other Slav literature of the period... no Slav wrote so much about things Slavic and other Slav nations, as did the Poles."<sup>27</sup> Emphasis was placed on Slav solidarity in struggles against German invaders, while during the reign of Ladislas IV appeals were made for liberation of the Slav Balkan states from the Turkish yoke. Moreover, it was common belief, supported by the example of Jan Hus, that Providence revealed the true faith to the Slav peoples, earlier than to the Germans. The ethnic community was also a weighty argument for supporting the candidature of Muscovite tsars to the Polish throne. During the 16th century, the words "Slav" and "Sarmatian" were used alternatively and thus, as regards territory, the Poles were ascribed to the vast region in north-western Europe, known as Sarmatia.

In the second half of the 18th century the term "Polish nation" was to include again all social classes, also peasants. This transformation was, however, slow and gradual; as late as the disputes held during the Great Diet [Sejm Wielki] or even in the Constitution of May 3rd, 1791, the notion was still limited to

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<sup>26</sup> T. Łepkowski, *Narodziny nowożytnego narodu* [The Birth of the Modern Nation], Warszawa 1968, p. 508.

<sup>27</sup> T. Ulewicz, *Sarmatia...*, pp. 145-146 and B. Kürbisówna, *Kształtowanie się pojęć geograficznych o Słowiańszczyźnie w polskich kronikach przeddlugoszowych* [The Emergence of Geographic Notions Concerning Slav Countries in Polish Chronicles Before Jan Długosz], "Slavia Antiqua," vol. IV, 1953.



the *ordo equestris*, and citizens were as a rule identified with the gentry. Nevertheless, the last chapter of the Constitution, which refers to the national army, mentions that all citizens are obliged to defend their country and the word "nation" was used by the legislators in its modern meaning. Also to the more radical representatives of the patriotic party (e.g. Franciszek Salezy Jezierski), "nation" signified also burghers and peasants.

"In my opinion," Jezierski wrote in *Some Words Arranged in Alphabetical Order* [*Niektóre wyrazy porządkiem abecadła zebra- ne*], "common people should be called the first estate of this nation, or, to be more precise, the nation itself." Also Hugo Kołłątaj maintained that a nation is composed "of many millions of Polish-speaking people." For both of these authors, peasants were the core of the nation; this estate, Jezierski believed, "keeps up the maternal tongue, observes customs and follows an unchanged way of life."<sup>28</sup> The age of the Enlightenment, like the period of the Renaissance to which it referred, witnessed a revival of the significance of Polish speech for the growth of national culture and the strengthening of state unity. Rights for the Polish language were claimed by Stanisław Konarski and Franciszek Bohomolec.

These examples were followed by Kołłątaj who maintained that "a native language, in its perfect form, adopted for education and employed in all governmental undertakings, determines the nation's character to a much greater extent than modes of dress, and is a binding agent for all the country's provinces."<sup>29</sup> A campaign was conducted against Latin which was gradually removed from national literature, as well as against French, which was readily accepted by the court circles. Writers of the period used the spoken language, derived from popular vocabulary, and went back to the traditions of the reign of Sigismund the

<sup>28</sup> J. Koweccki, *U początku nowoczesnego narodu* [*The Origins of the Modern Nation*], in: *Polska w epoce Oświecenia. Państwo—społeczeństwo—kultura*, ed. B. Leśnodorski, Warszawa 1971, pp. 161 - 162.

<sup>29</sup> H. Kołłątaj, *Listy anonimowe i prawo polityczne narodu polskiego* [*Anonymous Letters and the Political Rights of the Polish Nation*], vol. I, Warszawa 1954, p. 370.

Old.<sup>80</sup> This linguistic campaign was accompanied by efforts to organize a national school system, adapted to national needs and guided by the Committee for National Education.

(Translated by Aleksandra Rodzińska)

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<sup>80</sup> Copious material on this topic is included in the collection: *Ludzie Oświecenia o języku i stylu* [Men of the Enlightenment on the Subject of Language and Style], vol. I - III, Warszawa 1958.