

Conversations with a Polish populist:

Tracing hidden histories of globalization, class, and dispossession in postsocialism (and beyond)

ABSTRACT

Building on the work of Jonathan Friedman and of Andre Gingrich and Marcus Banks, I explain the rise of populist, neonationalist sensibilities in Poland as a set of defensive responses by working-class people to the silences imposed by liberal rule. I trace in detail a sequence of all-around dispossessions experienced by Polish working-class sodalities since 1989, when activists with substantial legitimacy among organized workers had claimed *de facto* and *de jure* control over assets crucial for working-class reproduction. "Democratization" and "markets" were shrewd legal ways by which the new liberal capitalist state reappropriated and recentralized those assets from local constituencies. Meanwhile, the reputation of workers, whose fights with the party-state had been essential for regaining national sovereignty and establishing parliamentary democracy, was systematically annihilated in the public sphere by discourses of "internal orientalism." [*postsocialism, dispossession, class, neonationalism, populism, neoliberalism, globalization, privatization, Europe*]

Working people have proved most inspired when what was at stake was not just a living wage, but the defence of a way of life. The political demand our rulers find hardest to beat is one that is cultural and material.

—Terry Eagleton, commemorating Raymond Williams

Many of the parameters of globalization that have been around for some three decades are now shifting and turning dramatically. This renders core concepts such as "neoliberalism" and the "Washington Consensus" less stable and illuminating than they were, for policy as well as analysis.¹ Nevertheless, few analysts would disagree that worker-citizens in contemporary transnationalizing states will inevitably continue to feel the competitive heat of the one billion new workers that have been added to the capitalist system since 1989, as well as the two billion that might be added in the next two decades. This growth will remain one of the basic determinants of the current epoch, *n'importe* the exact paradigms under which it gets signified. The consequences of the tripling of the global proletariat, now more fragmented than ever before and spread over a wider array of all-but-converging and differentially inserted national states, will persist for a while, pace Immanuel Wallerstein's often repeated prognosis that the end of capitalism-as-we-know-it is in sight.

States and state elites, as Jonathan Friedman (2003; see also Ekholm-Friedman and Friedman 2008) has argued, will find their popular legitimacy under sustained pressure as they remain locked in a global regime that necessarily sets them up as "competition states" that compete for mobile capital by offering their populations and territories up as readily exploitable factors for global capital. Different locations, histories, and the proximity or distance of state elites to the sources of capital will make a difference for outcomes. But the general rule will be downward pressure on the legitimacy of state elites and political classes and continued exhaustion of the liberal and modernist narratives of nation-state building and social engineering that have flanked the making of the modern state.²

As a consequence, as Paul Piccone (1993) was among the first to foresee, Europe is undergoing the spread, generation, and regeneration of new

hybrid and volatile populisms that reject some of the foundations of liberal rule and that are composed of ethnonational or religious symbolic sources eclectically combined with items of the classical Left. As Piccone wrote in 1993 on the example of France, “The French New Right seems to be onto something when it counterposes a universalizing New Class seeking to impose an abstract liberal agenda on everyone, and populists wanting to live their lives in their communities, with their particular cultures, institutions, religions etc.” (1993:21). He failed to note that the abstract liberalism of the new class had by his time of writing become firmly wedded to the globalizing agenda of the capitalist competition state, a shift that certainly contributed to its accelerating loss of legitimacy and to the rapidly proliferating “culture talk” that anthropologists described at the time (Kalb 2005; Stolcke 1995). But his pointing at the dialectics of local communal cultural particularity versus abstract liberal cosmopolitanism that would increasingly characterize the intrastate conditions in the new era of the one world turned out to be very right: A new political divide emerged as a little-noted close (“Northern”) kin to the oft-noted spread of intrastate conflict in the global South in the post-1989 period. Both were characteristically overlooked by the lofty philosophers of “the end of history” and the clash of civilizations, who monopolized prime time in those days.

The spreading populisms are not just interruptions of the daily business of politics but also, and ultimately more importantly, the vehicles by which wider disenfranchised populations try to make sense of their discontents with globalizing modernisms. Those who do not speak out loudly for the radical Right often blame incumbent political classes *sotto voce* for their complicity with the perceived conspiracies against “the people” and articulate their bricolages of critique from combined bits of direct experience and mediated right-wing protest frames. Unlocking the dialectics between popular anger and resentment and the organized radical Right seems an urgent project that ethnographic methods might well help forward.³ I am advocating the need to uncover the hidden histories of subalternity that feed the particular alienations of the resenting classes in their volatile dialectic with the histories of neoliberal transnationalization by which they are shaped.

I first discuss recent general work in anthropology supporting this argument and then consider the complexities of the emergent populisms by looking in detail at a group of Polish workers that I have followed from the late nineties until today.

Anthropologies of fear, crisis, and the nation

In recent anthropology, Andre Gingrich and Marcus Banks (2005) and Arjun Appadurai (2006) highlight the importance of social insecurity, fear, and anger in generating

the popular receptiveness for ideologies of ethnic or religious neonationalism. They also invoke the association of such receptiveness with the general conditions generated by neoliberal globalizations. Their work resonates with Jonathan Friedman’s (2003) general notion of “double polarizations” associated with globalization: polarizations that pair widening social divides with spreading idioms of deep cultural difference in an era in which ruling elites and their allies are structurally invited to transform themselves into cosmopolitan classes and forsake the project of the nation as a community of fate. In the process, the erstwhile “Fordist” working classes are unmade, in representation as well as fact, into a new “ethnic folk,” and the lower tiers are turned, in representation and fact, into racialized *classes dangereuses*. These very different works collude, then, in suggesting that any explanation of the surge of neonationalism in Europe and beyond must be placed against the combined background of what I would call the “dual crisis” of popular sovereignty, on the one hand, and of labor, on the other hand, a dual crisis that certainly characterizes the new millennium. They also suggest, but do not always work out, that spirals of nationalist paranoia, although structurally derived from the dual crisis, receive their precise historical dynamics, meanings, and symbolisms from demonstrable configurations—confrontations, alliances, and divisions—of class, within specific (but often “hidden”) local histories.

This general thesis seems to have substantial support outside anthropology. Comparativist historical sociologists such as Barrington Moore Jr. (1978), Michael Mann (1999), Ira Katznelson (1998), and Charles Tilly (2004) have suggested that the class cleavage under democratic capitalism must be faced, articulated, and organized rather than repressed if liberalism is to keep a hold on the center of the democratic process. The dual crisis signals, if anything, that over the last three decades it has become ever harder for liberals to do precisely that. In Europe they have had, of course, far more trouble doing so in the postsocialist east than in the west. The dependent states of eastern Europe, with their thoroughly comprador capitalisms, have at best some 30 percent of the wealth of western Europe (see, in general, Drahokoupil 2008), but Western state elites are deeply affected too, as recent events in Italy, Switzerland, Austria, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and Denmark show. Nor is the story limited to Europe. For the Middle East and west Asia it has been argued that the repression of the enlightened nationalist Left has ultimately become the harbinger of religious fundamentalism (Ali 2002). Various studies have made plausible that neoliberal globalization, by fragmenting labor and exerting downward pressure on social wages, by reducing popular sovereignty on behalf of the sovereignty of capital, and by circumscribing what Pierre Bourdieu (2000) has called “the left hand of the state” (social inclusion) while strengthening “the right hand” (finance, law and order), might well be systematically

associated with a climate of deep popular uncertainty, feeding into a politics of fear exploited by new political brokers and resulting in defensive nonliberal popular responses in areas as diverse as central and western Africa, the United States, western Europe, eastern Europe, the Caucasus, and east Asia (see, among others, Derluguian 2005; Frank 2004; Friedman 2003; Gingrich and Banks 2005; Nonini 2003; Ost 2005; Turner 2003; Wieviorka 2003; for an overview, see Kalb 2005).

This popular politics of fear should not be seen as being immediately oriented on, or caused directly by, global actors or accelerating flows of people, trade, and information as such. This is the always slightly opaque level of aggregation and abstraction moved by what Eric Wolf (1990) called “structural power.” Rather, actual outcomes on local grounds are intermediated by various path-dependent “critical junctions” that link global process via particular national arenas and local histories, often hidden, to emergent and situated events and narratives (Kalb 1997, 2000, 2002, 2005; Kalb and Tak 2005). Critical junctions link the global levels of structural power with the respective institutional fields of “tactical power” on the scale of the national state and with the spaces of agential power in situated everyday circumstances (Wolf 1990). It is in these dynamic linkages that the politics of fear and anger gets incubated. Examining how this occurs is an agenda that requires an obsession with local historical discovery and a critical reading of large-scale process from the vantage point of the particular and situated livelihoods of subaltern classes.

Specifically, I would suggest, it is the contradictions and disjunctures between everyday agential power fields, tactical state-based political environments (including political and media opportunity structures), and global structural power relationships—including the significations that are generated within and between these disjointed frames—that move the popular anxiety and paranoia.⁴ Such anxieties, in their turn, energize the nationalist populisms that are taking the place of the liberal modernisms gone awry. In a more narrowly political sense, populism, in the current conjuncture, is the rejection of liberal elites and ideologies that fail to use the resources of the democratic national state to harness global process to local needs and desires, that celebrate an elite cosmopolitanism, or that use state power and cosmopolitan ideologies for outright local dispossession. More broadly conceived, populism refers to the moods and sensibilities of the disenfranchised as they face the disjunctures between everyday lives that seem to become increasingly chaotic and uncontrollable and the wider public power projects that are out of their reach and suspected of serving their ongoing disenfranchisement. In Tilly’s (2004) definition of democracy, this implies dedemocratization and a consequent return to particularized trust networks crucial for working-class reproduction.

Although the headlines in the Western press tend to paint an orientaling picture of the postsocialist European east as a cauldron of majority-ethnic nationalisms,⁵ there has, in fact, been very little anthropological work on the dynamics of neonationalisms in the east. This stands in contrast to work by political scientists and political sociologists, who have consistently discussed east European nationalisms, often in alarmist mode, since the early nineties (e.g., Tismaneanu 1998). The newest wave of such work is less alarmist and much more analytical and has started to experiment with, and advocate, ethnographic methods (Derluguian 2005; Ost 2005).

Western media, of course, tend to treat majority nationalisms in the West differently. They see the recent conflicts within which nationalisms in the West are expressed as conflicts about immigration, spurred on by local far-right movements and sharpened by “the war on terror.” In so doing, they mystify the sources of nationalism in the West by shifting them onto actors deemed ultimately external to the core of the West itself, that is, migrants and the fringe of the extreme Right.⁶ Such events and movements are figured as aberrations from a supposedly well-established norm of liberalism in the West, which appears to stand in contrast to the east, which is nationalist.

Against such self-gratifying occidentalizing imagery, it is my contention that western and eastern European popular nationalisms have broadly similar social roots and comparable constituencies and are occasioned by related processes of neoliberal globalization and class restructuring, whereas their actual event-based dynamics, of course, derive from differently ordered and sequentialized political fields and get their symbolism from profoundly different national histories, memories, and amnesias.⁷

Recent anthropological work on neonationalism in western Europe (Gingrich and Banks 2005) has somewhat echoed the media emphasis on migrants and far-right movements, thus doing little to expel the orientaling and occidentalizing mystifications. Alternatively, it has focused (Holmes 2000) on conservative west European elites and their revived Catholic organicist ideologies. This does help to reestablish cultural essentialism in its rightful place within the right flank of western European and continental state making but fails to explain its populist dynamics and contents outside the elite circles.

Current populisms, then, represent a systemic, structural, locally contingent, and meaningful phenomenon, and scholars should therefore try to grasp them in these interlocking dimensions. Peter Worsley wrote long ago that populism is “the eternal attempt of people to claim politics as something of theirs” while they grope for “substantive justice” and appeal “to the involvement of people in the running of their own societies” (1969:248, 244, 245). An anthropological agenda par excellence.

In what follows, I plunge at once into the stories of a group of workers in the Polish city of Wrocław to try to dig up the narrated realities that pushed skilled and semiskilled industrial workers, arguably the largest population segment in postsocialist Europe, to articulate an increasingly biting populist rejection of liberalizing elites. This is meant to be a microarchaeology of workers' resentment in response to misrecognized and misrecognizing processes of dispossession initiated at state and global levels, liberal disenfranchisements that are not merely related to their work but to their whole habitat.⁸

Between 1997 and 2007, I followed a group of workers organized around Solidarnosc unions in Polar, a white-goods factory (producing refrigerators and washing machines), and other local factories in Wrocław, southwest Poland.⁹ These workers had built the local Solidarnosc units against communist repression in the late seventies–early eighties, sustained their underground self-organization throughout the period of military rule and into the creeping transition processes from 1985 onward, laid strong *de facto* as well as *de jure* claims to “their” factories, and actively tried to secure these claims as well as their factories throughout the crises of shock therapy. I argue that these crises served, paradoxically, to facilitate outright dispossession of assets into state hands—legitimized and misrecognized by regained sovereignty and parliamentary democratization. My aim is to probe the lived inside of processes largely understood and fetishized from the comfortable outside as a “successful democratic transition.”¹⁰

“History repeats itself,” conversations with a Polish populist

The best lead into working-class experience and its contentious signification that I can give is to share conversations my colleagues and I had with Krzysztof Zadrozny, a vocational teacher born in Wrocław in 1953, a worker activist who, in the end, never exchanged his job on the assembly lines of the local Polar factory for a paid career in unionism, politics, or a foreman position. He had been the leader of the anti–martial law strike and factory occupation in December 1981, was interned by General Jaruzelski in 1982, edited and published an underground factory journal from 1983 to 1988 called “Our Home,” was interned again and then dismissed from further industrial work in Wrocław for resurrecting Solidarnosc in 1988, temporarily became a high-altitude chimney sweeper, and later became a youth basketball coach and an organizer of “home-church” holiday camps with other lay Catholics. He is the older brother of a Solidarnosc forewoman of both local and national importance. Above all, he is a persistent fighter for “living in truth” and for demanding “normality” in Poland. He is the father of three children, the oldest born while he was interned, who are all studying pedagogy-related subjects. Like

many workers we interviewed, he now still lives in the small apartment he got in the late seventies not far from the factory complex. In the Polar factory environment, in which more than 50 percent of employees had no more than a primary education, he stood out for the trust he had gained among hundreds, even thousands, of workers and inhabitants. As a vocational teacher and production-line worker, he was the intermediator between working-class sensibilities and politics, on the one hand, and the more highly educated actors in the institutional fields, including his sister, on the other hand.

When we first met him in the small and sober union office in the Polar administration building in 1998, some of the Polar shares were just about to be sold to a French industrial group. The European Union, which had insisted on the full liberalization of imports into Poland while still maintaining specific tariffs against Polish exports until the early 2000s, loomed large in his internal conversations and exchanges with friends. Fifteen hundred redundancies (in a labor force of 4,500 in 1997) had recently been announced. An investigation by McKinsey and Company consultants, commissioned by the State Treasury, had, predictably, shown that Polar employed more workers than comparable white-goods firms in the West. “The EU is a huge Soviet Union,” Zadrozny stated with self-conscious cynicism. “There has been so much talk about self-governments, locality, etc., and what they finally do is create a huge monopoly.”

Monopoly, in the language of the anticommunist resistance, stood for social and material waste, unaccountability, misinformation, and corruption. Self-government, in contrast, meant “normality” and “living in truth.” These were the ultimate symbols for which Polish workers had sustained their fight with the party-state, arguably more important than the idea of “civil society” or even “pluralism,” which remained rather tactical and intellectual concepts. Normality and living in truth were the complex popular symbols that had ultimately energized the people’s mobilization (see, e.g., Kubik 1994; Ost 1990). They remained magnets of signification and desire all through the 1990s and into the 2000s and were increasingly targeted against the liberal state and its transnational allies.

We met Zadrozny again in the same small office ten years later, in April 2007. He was still working on the conveyor belt of what is now Polar-Whirlpool. “History repeats itself,” he exclaimed.

Our naïveté and kind-heartedness have been exploited. In all these years after 1989 we were told that we are nothing; that the West has come to take it all over; that the Poles happen to have their national vices. And in this way the ground was prepared for people to accept the status quo. But in my opinion, what was missing in 1989 was a spirit of resistance against abnormality. Also

in Solidarity and the church. See, for example, this recent issue of women working in supermarkets not being allowed to go to the toilet and therefore wearing Pampers! Where was Solidarity? Where was the church? They should have reacted sharply. Then other things could not have taken place either. And here, I think, quite intentionally, the enterprises and Polar too, were broken into pieces. They were left to fight for themselves. And in that way solidarity was broken.

We were told that this is how it has to be, that there is this transition going on, and that we should just be happy that we have work at all. Well, labor is a great value but our dignity and our incomes are important too. I think we should at least revisit the process of privatization, even in Polar, whether it was real privatization or, as people say, mere theft.

My sister, when the privatization was pending in 1998, had to travel to a dinner with Prime Minister Buzek, talk at night, lots of alcohol, to convince him to get the social package done. Absurd! He was meant to be our own Solidarnosc prime minister! But in the ministry he let an undersecretary deal with our case, and this guy was of the Proszkow mafia [secret services]. Such things must be investigated, show the truth! It would be odd that those who bought the enterprises for almost nothing would be doing it for the people?

We cannot undo what was done. Still it would be psychologically important to find out whether this company was sold for less than its real value. Then it could become easier to enforce something now, like better wages. It is a question of honor. I myself never believed that this was how it had to be, that Poles are such that they cannot do this or that . . . it was a big mistake to say that Poles were worthless.

Some words are immediately in order to help contextualize and disentangle these superficially straightforward but, in fact, thickly layered narratives. Privatization, counterintuitively, was something that workers in Poland had fiercely believed in, from the moment that the term was first circulated in public in 1989 to about 1992 (see also Kalb in press; Ost 2005). In their view, though, it had a totally different connotation than it did in the West or when used by the Polish liberal elite. It was not about selling a public asset to a private investor but, rather, the other way around. For Polish workers in the late eighties, it initially signified a transfer of firms—which, under communism, were the anchor of total community life, including health care, holidays, housing, kindergartens, loans, and so on—out off the hands of the communist state, seen as a private and external force encroaching on the nation, scheming to appropriate its properties, and into those of the workers, seen as the factual national public.¹¹

The period of the late eighties and early nineties in Poland, indeed, probably everywhere in central and eastern Europe, was one in which the early 20th-century idea of workers' self-management, indeed, workers' self-government, was very much in the air; more precisely, it was materially real and very close to being a daily lived experience, in Raymond Williams's sense of a structure of feeling, in many sites and locations, including Wroclaw. Few analysts of postsocialism have focused on this reality sufficiently, so it requires a further excursion. It is the starting point for understanding local popular experience.¹²

Remarkably enough, under martial law, one of the first civil acts of the military regime was to implement a crucial demand of the program that had been accepted by the Solidarnosc General Assembly in September 1981—workers' self-management (Poznanski 1996). It is often assumed that this demand had figured as one of the radicalizations of the Polish rebellion that convinced Moscow and the Polish generals of the increasing inevitability of armed intervention to defend the position of the nomenklatura. But with Solidarnosc outlawed and dismantled, the military regime felt that new institutions for self-management at the factory level would help to pacify the population, sever the links between local workers and national intelligentsia, and create some legitimacy for the regime. On top of that, self-management could help to solve, at one stroke, some systemic problems of socialist accumulation.

First, by making them responsible for their own finances, the regime hoped that firms would be forced to become more financially responsible and entrepreneurial. Second, lawmakers hoped to prevent, or at least deflect to plant and local level, eventual new waves of collective wage claims by workers. In this way, they hoped to take away one of the structural impediments to socialist accumulation: the inability of the state to control wages, profits, and investment and, indeed, the inability to forestall state-focused working-class collective action. Workers would now preside over their own wage funds as part of limited budgets with "hard constraints," in Janos Kornai's (1980) sense. And because workers had considerable control over the overall budget, they would have to weigh their own wages in relation to productive investments and the extensive social funds. They were expected to become responsible caretakers of and investors in their own social reproduction. This was meant to be the end of the socialist patriarchal state and its uncontainable contradictions (see Ekiert and Kubik 1999; Poznanski 1996). And, in retrospect, this is indeed what happened, although not in the form anticipated by Jaruzelski or Moscow. It became the end not of patriarchy but of the socialist state *tout court*: The state would ultimately lose its control over "people's property" and crumble—after which, the new neoliberal state would emerge to take it all back under the paradoxical sign of democratic market reform.

Communist technocrats in Poland had launched new regime-friendly unions (confederated in the Ogolnopolskie Porozumienie Związkow Zawodowych [All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions], or OPZZ) in 1982, which were expected to take control of the self-management institutions now that Solidarnosc had been outlawed. But at those sites where Solidarnosc had been strong and had gone underground, as, for example, at Polar and several other factories in Wrocław, OPZZ proved only capable of organizing some sections of the white-collar workers. The new worker councils got very rapidly colonized by cohesive and democratic worker collectives that now used formally legal ways to wrestle *de facto* control over productive property from the state. Zadrozny and his colleagues had been deeply involved in this fight for working-class and national repossession *vis-à-vis* the Moscow-backed military communists; in fact, Zadrozny had been the key actor and, in the process, had gained the trust of hundreds, even thousands, of workers at Polar.¹³ In the course of the late eighties, workers had succeeded in pushing back the power of the *nomenklatura* over the Polar factory and its social assets; they had subsequently prevented *nomenklatura* privatization and asset stripping; and, by 1989, they were starting to actually choose and nominate their own directors. In other core factories in Wrocław, such as the computer maker Elwro and the train-maker Pafawag, the same thing was happening. Tens of thousands of workers in this city alone felt substantially in control of factory and community assets. The personnel director of Polar in 1998, in explaining the moral and factual difficulty of firing hundreds of workers, stressed repeatedly to us that there was still an overwhelming sense of factory ownership among workers at Polar.

The notion of “privatization,” of course, came from a totally different corner. It was introduced in public speech by liberal economists from Gdansk, in particular, Leszek Balcerowicz, in 1988–89. They had been invited into the core team of political liberals organized around Bronislaw Geremek and Adam Michnik to help educate them in economic matters to which they had given less than serious thought, even though they had begun to reject ideas of workers’ self-management after 1985 (Ost 1990). But in the context of an economy that was *de facto* managed, legally co-owned, and morally claimed by victorious worker collectives while the other formal co-owner, the illegitimate and Soviet-backed communist state, was believed to be finally collapsing, the idea of privatization was perceived by workers to signify something like the endgame of their struggles over people’s property. Privatization was, first and foremost, popularly understood as the final realization of the original 1981 Solidarnosc demands that had triggered military rule. It was something like the crowning ritual of the workers’ rebellion.

Let me emphasize that worker self-management was not only a blue-collar affair and not exclusively a blue-collar

connotation of the idea of privatization. Self-management was embraced by many university-educated people as well, particularly in more high-end factories such as the computer-maker Elwro in Wrocław. In the first two parliaments after 1989, a faction sprang from self-management institutions that defended the idea of the worker cooperative as one of the desirable paths of privatizing the economy. From the self-managed factories, a nationwide movement of well-trained cadres had already emerged in 1988 that pushed for reforms from the Round Table talks between the communist government and the opposition, and for subsequent financial and economic regulations, that were conducive to worker-managed democratic cooperatives.¹⁴ But these “organic” actors quickly discovered that the liberal intellectuals at the Round Table, who by now had very weak ties with constituencies on the ground, as correctly anticipated by the generals, had very little patience with the idea of letting workers consolidate power (Ost 1990). The only broadly respected initial sympathizer among the liberal opposition was the former Trotskyist Jacek Kuron (Kuron was also the initiator, in 1976, of KOR, the committee that gave legal support to interned workers and that was the vehicle by which the Polish intelligentsia finally linked up with workers after several unsynchronized and failed waves of action in 1956, 1968, 1971, and 1976; see Ekiert and Kubik 1999 and Kubik 1994), but he rapidly became isolated. Meanwhile, the crucial economic and fiscal chunks of liberal state making were delegated to Balcerowicz and his Washington Consensus interlocutors in the West, who were working in silence on their shock-therapy program (see also Wedel 2001). One of our informants from Wrocław, Andrzej Piszczel, a computer scientist, was a member of the self-management group in parliament after 1989. He is now a successful entrepreneur with few political illusions and recalls vividly how the core group around Geremek, whom he admired, would regularly silence him with whistling and other less-than-polite methods when he made the case for policies that would help consolidate the worker-managed sector of the economy. He is still convinced that a great and feasible socioeconomic option was thus intentionally killed off for political reasons that he does not like to think about.

At the same time, shock therapy, with its full liberalization of the market at one stroke and its mythic focus on consolidating the state budget amidst economic collapse, was punishing all productive enterprises so heavily that sheer survival of factories, and of their community functions, became a more crucial concern for activists than the skewed discussion about the legal form. While the new regime gently silenced the public debate about the particular legal paths of privatization by leaving it to groups of sheltered experts and by slowing down the public decision-making processes (even by the late nineties, a majority of Polish enterprises were not yet formally privatized, in contrast to the country’s postsocialist neighbors), it engineered a rough

beating of the national economy that, by 1991, had left most firms begging for loans and help from the state and the state-run banking sector. In this way, the new liberal state gradually wrestled *de facto* ownership claims away from worker collectives. It channeled the property titles into the state-led banks and the State Treasury, while popularly advertising this move as the definitive blow against the communists. In the same process, it destroyed worker solidarity and fragmented the movements for self-management and cooperatives. By 1993, with Poland again witnessing massive worker protests against shock therapy and poverty (Ekiert and Kubik 1999), the cooperative option had all but vanished from the political debates, and privatization came more and more to connote bringing a firm under the wing of the State Treasury and onto the Warsaw stock exchange to find desperately needed new sources of capital abroad.

If 1985–89 had thus seen the repossession of productive assets by worker-citizens from the militarized party-state, 1989–95 saw the dispossession of worker collectives by a liberal state that was shrewdly recentralizing the nation's assets under a now-independent treasury in globalizing mode. One of the crucial legal details was that a firm whose ownership had been transferred to the treasury was immediately lifted out of the self-management legal regime and lost the right to a workers' council and its nomination of the director. State appropriation had thus become legally secured against still-prevailing popular structures of feeling that workers were actual owner-occupiers of their factories. By the time we started our interviews, in 1997, workers in Poland and elsewhere had begun to see their legal defeat, as their property claims had been annulled while they were shocked into sheer survival mode, as Klein (2007) analyzed so well and more generally.¹⁵

"Real privatization," in Zadrozny's words, signifies, in its purest form, a worker cooperative and, in a diluted and compromised form, at least a privatization that is beneficial for the plant and its workers, in which a measure of control from below is exchanged for growth, investment, and better wages.¹⁶ The opposite he calls "theft." Theft, of course, is a motive in populist narratives *par excellence*. But it does rather realistically connote the dispossession of assets from worker constituencies and their subsequent transfer into the hands of the state and the global market by purely legal and financial procedures beyond the control of the assets' moral proprietors. It also describes the consequent deprivation of communities of workers—not just communities but actual sodalities with known fighting histories in a national rebellion—as the proceeds of privatization disappeared into the hands of state bureaucrats and international bidders.

Recall that in the interview excerpt above, Zadrozny moves from the issue of "theft" into a little tirade about Poles being told that they had their vices and, hence, should not want to trust their own sources of agency. Here he

immediately connects material dispossession to the wider public culture of neoliberalism in Poland after 1989. He is referring to the nasty public rhetorics spawned by the liberal elite and its following of media and academic pundits after the discovery of the yawning state debt. None of the liberals had the guts to even discuss canceling the debt as that of an illegitimate regime (as Klein 2007 importantly points out).¹⁷ But with shock therapy shaking the nation and the specter of economic failure becoming a realistic possibility, intellectuals and media people began desperately picturing themselves as "middle class" while increasingly depicting workers and peasants as gross liabilities for a Poland now openly exposed to world capitalist competition. Workers and peasants were systematically associated in the media with alcoholism and laziness, and labor unions were openly decried as dysfunctional for the new civil Poland.¹⁸ In fact, the whole concept of "civil society" was regularly turned against them. Even such an honorable person as Michnik, at a 1999 commemoration of the events of 1989, which was held in the Kaiserliche Hofburg in Vienna and which I attended,¹⁹ openly devalued Polish industry by talking about "ex-socialist workers who were merely producing busts of Lenin." In the same elite ceremonial event, Balcerowicz showed himself still almost religiously satisfied at having finally unleashed "healthy" market forces and creative destruction and at punishing Polish workers for "the crowding out of conscience" that he thought had been their willing fate under the state-led economy (Kalb 2002; for further examples, see Buchowski 2006). Inevitability was mentioned regularly, but speakers were keen to turn such perceived necessity into (their own) virtue. While they celebrated their peaceful victory over communism and the Evil Empire in lusty Vienna, there was no audible dissent to the silencing of the workers' fight and plight among the ex-dissident new Polish elite at this particular banquet, as there surely would have been at other banquets.²⁰

This was the context that Michal Buchowski has recently described with the notion of "internal orientalization" (also Kideckel 2002, 2007), which "blames workers and peasants for their own degraded circumstances and for society's difficulties" (2006:467). It refers to a public climate in which workers "have proven to be 'civilizationally incompetent' (Sztompka 1993), show a 'general lack of discipline and diligence' (Sztompka 1996:119) and obstruct the efforts of those who are accomplished and the progress of whole societies in the region" (Buchowski 1996:469). By regularly invoking the *Homo sovieticus* syndrome, liberal intellectuals displaced workers out of the bounds of Europe and into a timeless Asia. At the same moment, they passionately claimed a place for themselves in the new European pantheon, invoking their conscientious and peaceful advocacy of liberal civil society against the communist Goliath and their successful liberalization and privatization of "the economy." More than that, they prided themselves on their

successful imposition of Western-type civil society and individualism on backward, populist eastern nations.

Zadrozny is basically speechless in response to this inflicted symbolic violence. As a tenacious fighter for justice, he keeps uttering that he has always refused to believe that “Poles were worthless.” But he clearly recognizes how important this public attack, the withdrawal of recognition, has been in breaking resistance and disqualifying collective action in working-class communities. Internal orientalizing served as one of the style figures of a process of cultural dispossession that accompanied, deepened, and smoothed the material process of dispossession simultaneously taking place. It was one of the cultural mechanisms that helped produce a Polish ethnic folk figure against a cosmopolitanizing elite, as Friedman would have anticipated.

Zadrozny makes another important observation that merits further decoding: “Enterprises were broken into pieces and left to fight for themselves,” and he blames, among others, *Solidarnosc* and the church for this. He also mentions, in the same breath, “Poles having their vices” and the related “absence of a spirit of resistance.” In fact, he addresses the whole liberal complex of dispossession at once. Again, when he talks of “enterprises,” he, in fact, is talking about whole living communities with all the necessary supportive social services. In a more narrow sense, he refers to the self-management movement and its failure to protect the firms against the attacks by the neoliberal state. He correctly registers the fragmentation of working-class power around 1990 and its failures in the face of the emerging liberal state-making project.

But for all his experientially based insights into the liberal complex of dispossession in Poland, he all but ignores the way in which this outcome was to some extent intentionally inscribed by the communist generals when they introduced worker self-management and cut the links between local worker sodalities and national dissidents. The growing control by worker constituencies over factories was clearly not anticipated by the regime, which underestimated the cohesiveness of working-class communities and overestimated its own legitimacy. But the displacement of the point of struggle from the national center down to the single local firm, and the erasure of the dangerous liaisons between them, was shrewdly intended and subsequently guaranteed by military rule and repression. Thus, the conditions that allowed worker groups to repossess assets from the communist state were the same conditions that subsequently prevented them from fighting in concerted ways against dispossession by the liberal state. Remember that it had been precisely the worker–dissident alliance that had made the 1980 national rebellion possible in the first place (see Kubik 1994; Ost 1990; among others). Cut off from its civil base in working-class communities, the intelligentsia, now nurtured by the generals and their technocrats and selectively put in control of the state

by a dying regime in 1988–89, did exactly what the communist generals had scripted for it: It turned against the local working-class owner-occupiers, destroyed their cohesion, power, and emergent alliances, and secured their assets for the state, becoming the main beneficiary or owner-occupier of those assets. Zadrozny will understandably not picture this. It would be a devastating insight for him. That is why he must sense conspiracy or at least perverse complicity. Before picking up Zadrozny’s narrative, I discuss one last aspect of how resistance had been undermined by the institutionalization of self-management itself, an aspect that helps embed his disappointments.

As self-management got consolidated, a predictable shift occurred in leading personalities. And this shift contributed significantly to the lack of mobilization and popular energy after 1989. Zadrozny, the vocational teacher, was recognized as an honorable fighter for living in truth and had the trust of his coworkers, but the technicalities of self-managing a midtech firm with around ten thousand workers (in the mid-eighties) inevitably brought people to the fore with a different habitus. In that shift, Zadrozny rightly felt that some other people were better qualified to lead than he was. His sister, Malgorzata Calinska, a strong woman and a bookkeeper in the accounting department, was brought in and successfully used the symbol of kinship to ask for a transfer of trust from her brother to her, which she received and retained until at least 2008. She is still a democratically chosen paid union representative in Polar (and a national political backbench figure in the right-wing coalition). Zbigniew Kostecki, working at the department of quality control and with an M.A. in economics in hand, was asked to lead the workers’ council; later he became the chairman of Polar’s supervisory board and a director of a large local firm. The Wrocław-wide club of leaders in self-management, which had emerged in the later eighties to answer the need for more coordination among self-management activists, was chaired by Andrzej Pizsel. He had a managerial position in the computer firm Elwro and a university degree in computer science and later became a member of the national parliament and a successful entrepreneur. In short, leadership was transferred from a deeply political vocational teacher aspiring to live in truth, someone with great credit among his fellow workers on the assembly line, to more technically and highly schooled personnel, who then turned their experiences into significant, sometimes nonlocal, careers on the basis of their expertise. But these were not the people who could or would mobilize working-class communities to fight with a regime still ostensibly seen as their own democratic achievement and hailed by the wider world as an example of successful peaceful political transition. Certainly Kostecki and Pizsel tended to retrospectively view worker self-management as an intermediate technical solution to the problems of a centrally led economy on its way to full marketization rather

than as a popular claim for justice, as it was for Zadrozny and his coworkers.

I continue with Zadrozny's narrative at the precise point at which it broke off above:

Now it is all coming out, that it was prepared by the Secret Services [see also Los and Zybertowicz 2000]. But this knowledge should have been there before. I was saying this but nobody listened. When people raised critical voices they were set apart as lunatics. I still work in production and I was always chided, first for [Lech] Walesa's betrayal, then for the corruption of AWS [the political party coalition Akcja Wyborcza Solidarnosc (Solidarity Electoral Action)]. And it was me who had to excuse their failures while those high up did not have to excuse themselves at all. They were uninterested. I am surprised that all these smart people find lustration unimportant.

He explains that, because crucial things were never investigated, including the choice of who would be at the Round Table and all that came after, accusations can always come up and the press will immediately turn them into a spectacle, which destroys reputations and politics but never leads to more insight. In this vision, widely shared among my informants, the secret services become the actual agencies behind the scene that control all sorts of private knowledge. When groups organize politically and become an obstacle for inside networks, Zadrozny argues, the secret services can always break them apart by releasing bits of information about their members or concocting falsehoods. "And then finally all the scandals are supposed to discredit lustration itself because, as you can see, everyone has done it."

Many people were compromised under communism because they were concerned about their career, Zadrozny explains. "But you do not necessarily need to have a career. Just live in truth!" And he continues with a story about his own illegal company journal, "Our Home," in the eighties:

We actually cleared things up. We investigated. But now there is a lot of lies. And the press has been given away while we are passive onlookers. This is just outrageous, giving away the press and the banks [90 percent of which are foreign owned]. There is a good chance that the banks started steering privatization for their own ends when they at once shortened the payback periods of loans in the early nineties. For us at Polar it became at once impossible to pay. I was not against Solidarnosc entering politics. But Solidarnosc entered politics without doing politics. I have always thought that politics should be everywhere. Different people, not just liberals, should have been at the Round Table, people less eager to strike a deal.

Since 1998, Zadrozny has identified with the far-right party of the League of Polish Families, which he sees as not yet morally compromised, and he has become a big supporter of President Lech Kaczynski and his brother Jaroslaw, the former prime minister. He was utterly disappointed by the weakness of Solidarnosc and its right-wing parliamentary branch, the AWS party, in 1997–98. He was, first of all, disappointed about the actual paths and outcomes of privatization. Neither Solidarnosc nor AWS was willing to do politics and take privatization out of its neoliberal orbit. Polar was first "X-rayed" against Western standards by MacKinsey. Then, after 30 percent of its jobs were axed, it was pushed into the hands of a French investor that was reluctant to commit investments or even sign a "social package." It was the refusal to do the latter, in particular, that hurt the old unionists at Polar. It at once made clear to them that they had lost all institutional clout and were at the full mercy of market forces. The French owner went bankrupt in the early 2000s, and Polar could be cherry-picked, without much negotiation, by Whirlpool.

But, ultimately, Zadrozny's disappointment was about far more than Polar's acquisition by foreign corporations, just as factories and self-management used to be about far more than mere production for the market. It was about community, "Our Home," and about value at large. Zadrozny narrates a long story of decline of neighborhoods, of safety, of sports, of youth, and of the rise of criminality. He strongly believes that the ex-communist security forces benefited from street crime, hooliganism, and fear and happily let them thrive. In his neighborhood, homeowners' associations are asked to pay extra contributions to the police if they want to have better security. And they all pay. Fear makes people weak and makes them long for the beautiful past of communism, he claims, a nostalgia that he is contemptuous of. He sometimes serves as a court juror and remarks that the courts are heavily underfunded, not able to deal with the pressures on society at all. Zadrozny, the vocational teacher and basketball trainer, deplores the demoralization of working-class youth, and he slips finally into a glorification of Jozef Pilsudski, the interwar Polish populist dictator with socialist leanings, and compares him favorably with the current regime. He then jumps to excess: "If we were to put the middle-ranking communists in prison (as supposedly Pilsudski would have done), then the margin of error would have been negligible. The vast majority was corrupted. They are simply unfit for patriots."

Fighting amnesia with the Kaczynskis

Zadrozny therefore cheered up during the creation of the Kaczynskis' right-wing populist government in 2005. The Kaczynski brothers, dubbed by the *Economist* magazine Europe's "Terrible Twins," brought a resurgent Right to power with precisely the election themes that were close to

Zadrozny's heart. In fact, the Kaczynskis finally lifted the anger and concerns of Zadrozny's class and generation out of the local communities and onto the level of the nation-state. They combined nationalist and protective economic policies, conservative family and gender policies, and zero-tolerance and anticrime positions with vitriolic anti-European Union reflexes and authoritarian lustration fantasies. Their policy visions culminated in an assertive anti-German stance within the European Union, mobilizations against the emergent European Constitutional Treaty, which supposedly would corrupt Polish sovereignty, and antiliberal diatribes focused on the planned Equality Parade in Warsaw, which was supported by European multiculturalists. Most spectacularly, their law-and-order vision was not conveniently restricted to the petty street crime of neighborhood youth but extended to exposing the middle- and top-level corruption that people like Zadrozny had been singling out for years.

Populists are fighting official and imposed amnesia, by definition. That is because the historical and cultural narratives of the new liberal regimes inevitably obscure the actual cultural and material dispossession that has been going on. The Kaczynski government adopted this stance, and it therefore invited the contempt of liberals in Poland and elsewhere. The Kaczynskis engineered two excellent occasions for fighting amnesia. The first was based in the attack on the secret services and their collaborators and was aimed at the imposed historical amnesia of the "thick line"; the second concerned the amnesia about poverty and social rights and was instantiated in struggles around the Equality Parade in Warsaw. Both had strong working-class connotations and resonance.

The Kaczynski regime was, above all, meant to be the end of the "thick line" that liberals like Michnik and Geremek had defended all through the nineties. The thick line, in Polish parlance, refers to the no-blame, no-punishment policy in relation to past behavior, agreed to in the Round Table pact between the "chosen" democrats and the communist generals. None of my working-class informants in Wrocław ever said a good word about the policy of the thick line.²¹ Without exception, they favored lustration and punishment. The Kaczynski government channeled these popular and populist feelings into the creation of a very well endowed anticorruption watchdog that, among other tasks, compiled a register of some 700,000 Polish individuals suspected of collaboration with the communist secret services. Very tellingly, the most prominent potential traitor in the eyes of the Kaczynski government was Geremek, by now a widely respected former minister of foreign affairs, a professor of history, a member of the European Parliament, and an active participant in liberal-conservative European think tanks. Geremek was among hundreds of thousands of academics, judges, administrators, engineers, and businesspeople who were summoned

to submit declarations that they were not guilty of collaboration, an intentional inversion of the liberal procedures for establishing innocence and guilt: Suspicion was sufficient for an accusation, and proof had to be shown to refute a suspicion. The full Western press joined *Gazeta Wyborcza*, Michnik's liberal daily, in a sustained public outcry against the demeaning picture of Geremek, for some, the icon of dissident incorruptibility, pushed into submission by a populist government in Warsaw and desperately pleading his innocence before a hardly friendly committee of populists, judging him under the eyes of a less than civil public media.

But, of course, as Buchowski (2006) would appreciate, it was both the material history as well as the public culture of working-class dispossession that worked to place Geremek in the top position on the corruption list. In fact, the post-1989 Polish elite finally faced the return of the repressed: It would be punished for its own willing and nationally imposed amnesia of the workers' fight as well as their plight, and for that to happen, its "pacted" and therefore quasi-constitutionally imposed amnesia had to be inverted by a lustration that was not just about communists but about the new liberal elite as well. And this was all posed as the Polish ethnic nation taking revenge on those of its members who had sold it out. There was an ominous underlying, if not explicit, message to the Polish liberal elite in this: that it might not have been you who were "the people" in 1989, but we. Zadrozny agreed wholeheartedly.

Consider in this context the symbolism of the Equality Parade, which used to be called the "Gay Parade."²² This international parade was intentionally scheduled to take place in postsocialist Warsaw to challenge then mayor Lech Kaczynski's "antimulticulturalism." Mayor Kaczynski had forbidden the parade in 2004 and 2005, his refusal spiced up with politically incorrect antiliberal and antigay rhetoric. A youth organization associated with the League of Polish Families and founded by Jaroslaw Kaczynski's ideologue-cum-education minister Roman Giertych had beaten up local parade participants in the years before. West European political classes from the multiculti Left had intervened and had officially warned Warsaw about spreading "intolerance." That pressure helped to secure the event for 2006 and 2007, which now included the participation of high-level Western politicians, mostly from the German Greens, under the banner of promoting human rights in Poland. The League of Polish Families, however, was allowed to schedule a countermanifestation at the same time. Zadrozny participated in it. He was annoyed by the multicultural and human rights imagery sponsored by the European Union. "Why is the EU making so much fuss about that parade," he asked? "Nobody in Brussels says a word if Polish workers starve on low wages, have to work like dogs, and get exploited."

For him, apparently, the Equality Parade was a travesty that served another important amnesia. He recalled that the *equality* in the title of this parade once meant a concern

with social rights, and not just multicultural gay rights. And he therefore hinted at western Europe's forgetfulness of its own history. Many of my informants in Wrocław would have concurred. Of course, a clash of class surrounds multicultural events such as gay parades. From the point of view of post-socialist industrial workers, who had lost control over their factories and communities, had barely saved their skins in the collapse of their industries, and had been confined to a life of hard work and material stagnation in a hostile public environment that openly fetishized consumption, they appeared as rituals extolling the pleasure of licentious, free-choice consumerism. They were part of a festival of never-ending free circulation, as it were. Not just a circulation of objects, however, but of objectified intimate relations. The workers' own lives taught other lessons. One of those lessons was the importance of solidarity within families and among trusted friends rather than of free circulation.²³ Free circulation had turned out to be precisely a threat to solidarity, trust, and intimacy. Another lesson was that the liberal promise of mass consumption had simply been false and that the opportunities of a world of endless circulation and unlimited pleasure had been very unfairly distributed. The Equality Parade, for the workers, was not just an indecent public act, as it was for the Polish Catholic church. It was, rather, an indecent public myth that served to silence the Polish popular reality of scarcity, of toil, and of confinement for many; a reality that received much less attention and respect from the European Union and others, they felt, than that frivolous parade. Hence, it was again a case of public amnesia. A festival used as a signifier to obscure an uncomfortable reality. And the Polish ethnic nation was again positioned against the promiscuous cosmopolitans who were pictured as literally willing to sell themselves out to everybody.

History is still repeating itself

Throughout our conversations, Zadrozny pointed out several times that "history repeats itself." Polish people have lost their sovereignty and dignity repeatedly throughout history, and he firmly doubts whether an end to national victimization will be found in this era of liberal capitalist globalization. "The power is still the same," he argues. "There is big disillusionment. Also I am disillusioned. We thought that if some Western companies come in, there will be good order and justice and that all these things so typical of socialism would be over; like petty fighting for pay rises, all that petty bargaining. We thought it would be wisely and humanely ordered."

In 2005, Polar was taken over by Whirlpool. Wrocław will become the main European production and development location of this U.S. oligopolist in the white-goods sector. Substantial investments are finally being made in new production lines, machinery, and buildings. Neverthe-

less, Zadrozny is often addressed by fellow workers about the stepped-up productivity norms and the petty despotism on the shop floor. "It is just abnormal," he says, invoking the symbolic heritage of the workers' fight for "normality."

Certain things from communism, such as the singular focus on productivity, on work, and not on the human being, are persisting. This is an American firm but it is a beggars' firm. The West should imply quality. They all complain about socialism, but these masters nowadays seem just hell-bent to churn out these 500 items—everything has become so tense and tight. Compared with socialism, our current piecework norms are much tougher. And the style of being a master derives directly from socialism. The worst aspects of communism are retained and are combined with the worst things from the West.

Real wages on the shop floor have hardly risen since 1997, when we started research. They are still just over 300 euros (roughly \$400) per month. Average wages in Poland (and eastern Europe, in general), of course, do rise, but median wages rise much more slowly, and all the personal information that we got from interviews with workers, including union representatives, from personnel directors, and from local researchers indicate that production-line wages had completely stagnated at least until early 2007 (see below). In fact Zadrozny's generation has experienced generalized and lifelong stagnation in earnings. Against that, there has been a 700 percent rise [*sic!*] in productivity per worker in the Polar-Whirlpool factory as a whole since Whirlpool took over. New investments in machines, supplies, and logistics have certainly played a role in this. But, very tellingly, a notable hierarchization of relations has occurred on the shop floor. The number of masters and overseers, who impose capitalist work discipline on the shop floor, has roughly doubled. These individuals now earn wages that are 50–100 percent higher than those of line workers, something unheard of in the past. Workers with long experience cannot remember that work has ever been so stressful. They note that young people find the work very hard to bear and often leave the factory after a few weeks. Zadrozny, the teacher and sports trainer, often helps them to control their bodies, energy, and concentration, but even the best of them need three full weeks to learn to cope with the pressure, and they need months to get used to it.

He is genuinely concerned:

Young people have been cheated. They studied hard but still can't get decent jobs here. It is a rat race. Young people and their potentials have been exploited. I think there is gross disappointment. On the one hand there were great promises, but in fact very little has been delivered. There is this shallowness of life and the old role models are falling apart. There is less patriotism. It is easy for people just to leave, to migrate. They are not

held back by anything. They even make kids abroad, but not here. And they do not appreciate the unions that we've built. But we could have gone so much further! If only we didn't have to bother about certain things [I suspect this is a superior understatement referring to the still threatening presence of the Soviet Union in 1988–89], we could have turned it all upside down, formed a government of our own, a parliament earlier. All these anti-labor regulations would not have been so advanced and the employers that were coming in would have been coming on different terms. And that, ultimately, is the great loss. People were willing. There was zest. We could have been building a new society. And I think that this is what the Poles expected to happen. It was just like after the war. There was this rebuilding atmosphere and people had the will to switch to another system and to other habits too. But I guess it didn't work out too well. Wild capitalism emerged. It was all great on the surface but on the inside it was not the human relations that we craved.

Conclusion

In a stimulating recent study, the political scientist David Ost (2005) has argued that right-wing ideologues such as the Kaczynskis cunningly imposed a willful "illiberal" hegemony over postsocialist workers in Poland (and, he implies, elsewhere). They did so to catch the worker vote while trying to avoid confrontations with capital about wage issues. Reactionary culture and the politics of symbols, he implies, was substituted for anticapital mobilization and organized bargaining. I propose an alternative explanation of Polish outcomes (and those elsewhere). My explanation is less focused on wage issues and is less "ideas based" (Ost's words) in the mode of Laclau and Mouffe 1985, less focused on the discursive machinations of political elites. It is more relational in the Gramscian sense (Smith 2004), in that it looks at a particular hidden history of worker sodalities and their dramatically declining power, prestige, and opportunities in postsocialist Poland, including the volatile articulations of their emergent "common sense" and sense of injustice with public political process and its discursive signifiers.

Ost is correct in putting his finger on the politics of the Polish liberal intelligentsia after 1989 as a major factor behind the production of right-wing populism, but he has been less than persuasive in suggesting that, in their rise, the Kaczynskis and their circles manipulated industrial workers into a paranoid illiberal politics that distracted from their "real" class interests, which is apparently equated with wage bargaining. Against such reductive and prescriptive notions of class and interest from the liberal cookbook, I make an anthropological case for analyzing the much more complex and comprehensive critical junctions that describe both the global and local historical configurations of power that structure workers' worlds, as well as their personal be-

coming "in class ways" in Poland (and elsewhere). I point, first, to the displacement over time of material struggles onto public symbolic confrontations that are supposed to make up, a bit, for terrain lost after the fights over communal property had ended in irreversible defeat; second, to the flanking cultural dispossession and vibrant internal orientalism that was being unleashed; and, third, to dissipation of the resources and cohesion needed to take up new fights in a now liberal and globalized context of a subordinate and dependent east European capitalism.

The Kaczynskis are an organic product of popular Polish resentment and not its originator, nor do they dominate it. Currently, Poland is, indeed, far from unique in pitting figures of ethnic folk against liberal cosmopolitans and in substituting conflict in those terms for old-style modernist languages of class conflict. Ost might have noted the structural decline of the legitimacy of liberal state elites under globalization in Poland, as elsewhere, including western Europe. In fact, by emphasizing the intentionally political framing work of right-wing ideologues as the prime driver of right-wing resurgence, this sort of analysis overestimates the resources for popular legitimacy on the part of the political classes of contemporary competition states and the capitalist globalizations of which they are a part. Ultimately, such left-liberal analyses misrecognize the structural processes of popular disenfranchisement by ignoring them as structural and painting them as contingent because erasable by unionism. As Zadrozny's history shows, the class *tristesse* is about much more than the lack of wage bargaining, nor is such wage bargaining a mere matter of voluntarism and finding the right political representation. The weakness of bargaining is just an expression of the overall loss of power and prestige.

The Kaczynski interlude, however, has also suggested something else. Post-1989 politics in east-central Europe has always been more a politics of resentment than a politics of endorsement. Electoral participation has consistently hovered around a dismaying 50 percent, and few governments anywhere in central and eastern Europe have won two elections in a row except under special conditions. Postcommunist transition under conditions of neoliberal globalization and the dual crisis of labor and sovereignty was never truly electorally approved. The extrication from the iron Soviet embrace and the farewell to the local communist party machines were unanimously celebrated but not the substance of what came after. The Kaczynskis got into power because their voters, at best some 15 percent of the electorate, were the only ones motivated to go to the polls in 2005. And even though many of my informants in the Wrocław electrical industries felt a certain discursive proximity to the Kaczynskis, only a minority were actually willing to give them their votes. My informants whispered, and sometimes screamed, political cynicism of all sorts, rather than a positive belief in the virtues of any Warsaw

government, including that of the Kaczynskis. Only a few, such as Zadrozny, really embraced the Kaczynski campaign of virtue, fear, and suspicion. In October 2007, the right-wing government was voted out again, and the remnants of the liberal Freedom Union—now with a more social face—were voted in. Participation at the polls was higher than it had been since 1989, an enormous 51 percent. Although the Kaczynskis gained a higher numerical following than in 2005, mobilization among educated youth in the bigger cities changed the fragile electoral equation.

Something else had changed too in the conditions of working-class reproduction in bigger Polish cities, including Wrocław. EU accession in 2004 had finally delivered three things that Poles had been intensely longing for since 1989: (1) the possibility of large-scale labor emigration to the West; (2) a massively accelerating flow of industrial investments by transnational enterprises to the east; and (3) big transfers from the EU regional and agricultural funds. Poland was the biggest regional recipient as well as originator of these flows, and central and eastern Europe as a whole was turned into the premier mass production base for Western and Asian corporations operating in the European Union. After 2004, these three processes together finally began to make a dent in Polish unemployment, the highest in Europe (official unemployment in 2003 was still close to 20 percent; in 2008 it was about 11 percent, although participation rates in the formal labor market remained low compared to west European standards).

The declining labor reserve and the accelerated incorporation into global capitalism were leading to tighter labor markets and increasingly despotic regimes of labor in manufacturing. Although my interviewees in the late nineties would complain about scheming communists and a public life corrupted by liberals, in this new European and global context they began to tell stories of increasing old-style exploitation by (Western) capital. Significantly, a wider shift in political identifications seemed underway that might help to reframe Polish resentment in the years to come. “We are workers, after all,” said an only slightly embarrassed informant in April 2007; he had, in the late nineties, insisted that he had always been a sort of entrepreneur. It was the first time since I started research in Poland in 1997 that we had heard the word *worker*, with old-style socialist connotations, used as self-ascription in an interview. While uttering this sentence, the man, in his fifties, kept a searching eye on my interviewer, deeply unsure of, but somehow also eager for, his approval.

The politics of resentment in postsocialist central and eastern Europe will probably remain blurred between nationalist rejections of liberal cosmopolitan elites that keep selling out the nation and bouts of workerist emphasis on the class struggle, as Polish manufacturing locations will feel the heat of Asian labor reserves with even fewer social, economic, and political rights.

In this article, I have studied the particular Polish path to populist paranoia. I have argued that, to analyze the current, often screaming, headlines of nation and nationalism, scholars should not just study nationalist parties and elites but, rather, bring a relational approach to trajectories and configurations of class to penetrate the lived subtexts of social and existential insecurity and its attendant fears and angers. I have shown how analyzing critical junctions among Wolf's levels of structural, tactical, and agential power through time and space can help unlock the hidden and entangled histories of subalternity that feed the anger and resentment articulated in current European right-wing populisms. Such a procedure forces one to recognize in the Polish case that celebratory discourses of successful democratization, economic growth, transition, and EU accession obscure deep local histories of dispossession, disenfranchisement, and dedemocratization that force themselves onstage via volatile and biting populisms that rock the political process in unexpected ways. Similar, though different (and contextually specific), critical junctions of class and disenfranchisement create similar, though different (again, context-specific), bouts of havoc in western Europe and elsewhere.

Notes

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1. I am not saying that discussions about these concepts have lost all meaning. On the contrary, scholars are still in the phase of tracking where we actually are analytically and historically and where we have been heading. We need continued debate on neoliberalism, its nature, limits, and permutations. See, for example, the enlightening debate between John Clarke (2008a, 2008b), Peter Little (2008), Don Nonini (2008), and Neil Smith (2008).

2. Although the recent reappearance of welfare states and national protective economies in the wake of the current financial crisis suggests otherwise, I would argue that what is occurring now is not much more than the capitalist state doing its fire-extinguishing tasks on behalf of capital; indeed, it is actually doing these tasks in ways that might turn out to be, in the absence of concerted civic mobilization, even more inequitable than under the conditions of neoliberalism-as-we-have-known-it. For an analytically similar perspective, see Panitch and Gindin 2008.

3. Is a partial shift toward a dynamized ethnography going on in such a rational choice–based field as political science? See the important examples of Ost 2005 and Derluguian 2005 on the present subject of neonationalism and class and the stimulating arguments for contextualized approaches in political analysis in Goodin and Tilly 2005 and Tilly 2006, among others.

4. Note the close affinity of this Wolfian analytic agenda with Tilly's approach to political analysis (Goodin and Tilly 2005; Tilly 2006): echoes of an earlier phase of anthropological interdisciplinarity that remains utterly relevant these days.

5. Michal Buchowski (2006) has demonstrated that east European elites have similar, and perhaps even more unrestrained, orienting ideas about their "lesser" compatriots.

6. Peter Van der Veer (2006) should be mentioned as an exception. He sees Dutch populist mobilization against Islam as a consequence of the incapacity of the Dutch to deal with religion. Note, however, that the wider political-economic background to the Dutch mobilizations disappears in his analysis and that he does not treat the Dutch anti-Muslim response as a form of reactive nationalism, as I am suggesting.

7. I am explicitly siding here with Michael Burawoy (2001) in his world-system and class-based critique of Eyal et al. 1998 and Stark and Bruszt 1998, but I remain slightly more methodologically sympathetic to the path-dependency approaches advocated in those works than Burawoy seems to be. I emphasize the critical junctions of global–spatial process and local histories (see Kalb 2005). They are part of the same parcel of world-systemic processes. See also Drahokoupil 2008 in relation to the emergence of the competition state in central and eastern Europe, which uses a related critical-junctions approach.

8. I am well aware that my study could be presented as a case study in what David Harvey (2003) has called "accumulation by dispossession" or as another case of Naomi Klein's (2007) "disaster capitalism" and "shock complex" (Klein 2007 has a good chapter on Poland). Although recognizing the importance of these theorizations, in general as well as for my Polish material, I decided in this instance to protect my case against theoretical overstretch. Nevertheless, I would not refrain from claiming a very close general elective affinity between accumulation by dispossession and populism.

9. From 1997 to 2000, I worked with small teams of interviewers, following a snowball method set in train by two local key informants involved in Solidarnosc labor unions. We interviewed some sixty local workers at length, often two or more times, sometimes at their homes, sometimes at the factory premises or in Solidarnosc offices. We also interviewed labor union leaders at the Polar factory, personnel managers, specialists on the local economy, and locally acknowledged self-management leaders. In 2007, Kacper Poblocki and I did extensive follow-up interviews with 25 of our informants and with some of their children. Other sources we consulted were private archives of activists and (unsystematically) the local and national press.

10. There are, of course, also excellent general studies "from a distance," such as Shields 2007.

11. I am grateful to Johanna Bockman and Dora Vetta for pointing out to me that similar meanings of the symbol of privatization were current among Yugoslav workers at the time; see also Uvalic 1997. Professor Tamas Krausz (personal communication) confirms that, in Hungary, workers' management was, for a short while around 1988–89, popularly felt to be an option. Bill Lomax (1980), Paul Lendvai (2008), and others, of course, have shown that the Hungarian revolution in 1956 was not just about sovereignty and democracy but also very much about worker councils oppos-

ing the Stalinist command economy and the new Soviet-imposed Kadar regime.

12. Surprisingly little research has been done on workers' self-management–self-government, either in Poland (although I cannot claim to know all sources) or in international publications. The best international reference is probably Poznanski 1996. I have never seen thick local research into the actual dynamics of it. In general, local historical research on the last decades of socialism and early postsocialism is just reaching the publishing phase; see, for example, Eszter Bartha's (2007) insightful dissertation. I claim that in the Polish case these local dynamics often ultimately led to a form of legitimate control and effective claims over property by worker collectivities.

13. In fact, one other person had similar influence at Polar–Wroclaw. His name is Andrzej Kowalski. He is mentioned by Padraic Kenney (2003) and was also one of our informants. The differences between Zdrozny and Kowalski are interesting. Zdrozny's parents came from villages in the east and remained religious throughout their lives. Zdrozny had a teacher's diploma. He represented revolutionary Polish nationalist Catholicism. Kowalski's parents came from Gdansk and were largely secular. He only had a primary-school education and represented more left-wing views. Workers' Catholicism as an ethical source of rebellion has probably been underestimated in the "labor conflicts" in socialist Poland.

14. This history is based on interviews with Andrzej Piszal and Zbigniew Kostecki, two key actors, as well as on Kostecki's private archive of newspaper clippings and other writings on worker self-management from the early eighties to early nineties. I am very grateful to Kostecki for allowing us to see these materials.

15. How seriously worker collectives identified with their role of owners can be sensed from the fact that workers in Polar made significant savings on their wage fund to modernize its production lines and launch a new dishwasher plant, the kind of behavior well known from studies of worker cooperatives such as Mondragon in Spain.

16. My oral research generated extensive insight into the politics of privatization of Polar workers, who basically tried to keep a branch investor from taking over the firm after transnational corporations such as Siemens had killed off the large local Pafawag firm and after Elwro, the computer maker, had been destroyed too. They also tried to secure as many shares in Polar as possible for themselves as a group (not individualized shares), which ultimately left them with 15 percent. The state got the rest after it floated Polar on the Warsaw stock exchange and sold 35 percent to Brandt, the French investor that went bankrupt in the early 2000s. I have no space here to go into this. But the intensity of workers' sustained mobilization and consultation about the particular choices in the privatization of "their" plant must be emphasized.

17. The debt, in the end, got substantially reduced in two waves in the early and mid-nineties. Western creditors, mostly sovereign creditors coming together in the Paris Club of Creditor Nations, had kept up the pressure on the debt from 1989 to 1992 and had waited to alter its terms until the new regime had fully implemented the emerging Washington Consensus agenda of liberalization, political stabilization had been achieved, and crucial choices in the direction of wholesale privatization had been made. When the communists were voted back into power in 1993, the West panicked and decided it had to cut the debt to keep Poland, and, with it, perhaps the whole of eastern Europe, in the Western camp and to prevent it from slipping out of control. Poland was the first nation to be so kindly served by the "international community." Significantly, Yugoslavia was denied similar treatment, which contributed in multiple ways to its violent implosion (see Woodward

1994). After 2000, as a consequence of the successful Jubilee Debt Campaign, some African nations received “debt forgiveness,” followed up under strict guidance by the World Bank.

18. This was the view expressed, for example, by Jerzy Scacki, a respected “grandfather” of Polish sociology, in a talk at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna in 1997, which I attended. Several discussants, including myself, tried to convince him that labor unions are a crucial part of civil society, but he refused to accept that position because unions demonstrated “communist style claiming behavior” and were not “self-responsible.”

19. I served as director of the Soco program at the Institute for Human Sciences in Vienna and, as such, was part of the “Ten Years After” celebration. Soco was a support program for social policy research mainly in the Visegrad countries and was funded by the Ford Foundation and the Austrian Federal Chancellery. Soco was one of the Western responses to the surprise election of the postcommunists in 1993 in Poland.

20. The exception was the Catholic ex-prime minister of Poland, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, whose duty it was to announce the shock-therapy program in the parliament in September 1989 and who still suffered visibly from the recollection. See also Klein 2007:180–181.

21. John Borneman (1997) argued correctly that postsocialist regimes would suffer from legitimacy problems generated by the impunity conferred by the “thick line.” He also partly foresaw that such problems would be deflected onto “cultural others,” including other nations and minorities. However, he did not foresee that “liberals” would be turned into “cultural aliens” and “traitors” by populist nationalists. See also Narotsky and Smith 2006 on working-class dissatisfaction with impunity and how, combined with neoliberal restructuring, it creates problems for regime legitimacy in postfascist Spain.

22. See Renkin in press for a longer discussion of homophobia and gay parades in postsocialist Europe as well as an excellent analysis of events around gay activism in Budapest.

23. Malgorzata Calinska, Zadrozny’s sister and leader of the Solidarnosc local at Polar, regularly referred to the factory, the workers, and Solidarnosc as “my family.”

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