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Polish Discussions on the Nature of Communism and Mechanisms of its Collapse

A Review Article

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The author, against the background of Communist Studies developed in Poland since World War I, reconstructs theoretical orientations that explained the communist system in that country. In this paper, the division of theoretical approaches into political, economic, and cultural ones is proposed. Each of them seeks factors responsible for nature, evolution, and final decline of the communist system in a different sphere of social life.

An approach of the political type was Leszek Nowak’s theory of communism as a system of emancipated political power; of the economic type—Jadwiga Staniszkis’s theory of the communist system as incomplete capitalism; and of the cultural type—Michał Buchowski’s conceptualization of communism as a system of new religion. In the final part, the author considers complementary character of reconstructed approaches and analyzes reasons why some of reconstructed theories did not generate schools of thought in Polish social sciences after 1989.

**Keywords:** communism; non-Marxian historical materialism; Poland; socialism

I. Introduction

The phenomenon of communism in the second half of the previous century was a traumatic experience for East-Central European societies. However, the encounter with totalitarian communism created an unrepeatable opportunity for the social sciences of this region to test the various theories of totalitarianism against the still “live” empirical material. This testing may lead to the falsification and extension of some existing paradigms or even to the creation of new theoretical approaches. Here,
this attempt will be made with regard to Poland. Accordingly, this paper will aim to reconstruct the main theoretical approaches developed in Polish social sciences to explain the communist system. The adjective “Polish” will limit the scope of this study in two respects. Firstly, this article will confine itself to theories elaborated from the mid-1970s to the mid-1990s in Polish social sciences. Secondly, the discussion of the application of the theories mentioned above will be limited to the evolution of communism in Poland.

At the outset, a simple typology of theoretical approaches to the communist system is proposed. Let us begin with a triviality. There are three spheres of the social world — politics, economics, and culture—which are relatively autonomous in relation to each other. In accordance with this distinction, a rather simple typology of the theoretical approaches reconstructed here can be suggested, with the approaches belonging to a political, economic, and cultural type. Each orientation seeks factors responsible for the durability and evolution of the communist system in a different sphere of social life. An example of an approach of the political type may be Leszek Nowak’s theory of communism as a system of emancipated power; of the economic type—Jadwiga Staniszkis’s theory of the communist system as incomplete capitalism; and of the cultural type—Michał Buchowski’s conceptualization of communism as a system of new religion.

The reconstruction of the theoretical orientations mentioned above will proceed in accordance with the following criteria:

(i) The nature of the communist system;
(ii) The sources of its dynamic;
(iii) The mechanism of its collapse.

The proposed criteria are also crucial in selection of theories presented in this article because they must be comprehensive enough to capture all the analyzed aspects of communism, namely its nature, the mechanism of its development, and finally—collapse. That is why theories dealing only with some dimensions of the communist system will not be a subject of analysis and reconstruction here.

Despite these limitations, knowledge of the theoretical approaches to communism developed in Polish social sciences is important not only for Poles, but also for readers outside Poland. Firstly, social sciences in Poland are part of the social sciences of Central Europe. Therefore, the cognitive results obtained by this domain of knowledge in Poland can be compared with such results obtained by the social sciences in other Central European countries, especially the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Slovakia. This article may be seen, then, as a possible part of a wider whole—a contribution to the studies on the perception of communism by independent social sciences and political thought developed in this region of Europe.

Secondly, it would almost seem trivial to observe that the communist past has an impact on the present situation of Poland and other countries of East Central Europe.
A better understanding of the communist system can, therefore, contribute to a better understanding of the post-communist reality of those societies. As there is no one theory of communism, so there is no one theory of post-communist transformation.3

Last but not least, communist studies developed in Poland are part of a global history of Sovietology, which no sufficiently comprehensive textbook of this discipline should ignore. One may hope that this article in a modest way will contribute to a better knowledge of Polish Sovietology.

The structure of reconstruction, therefore, shapes the structure of this article. In Section II, Polish traditions of communist studies will be presented. In Sections III through V, the three theoretical approaches to the communist system, mentioned above, will be reconstructed. Accordingly, the approach of the political type will be presented in Section III, of the economic type—in Section IV, and of the cultural type—in Section V. The reconstruction of the respective approaches in each section will proceed according to the proposed criteria. The article will end with a conclusion (Section VI).

II. Traditions of Communist Studies in Poland

Communist studies developed in Poland were stimulated by the historical experience of this country.4 To gain independence in 1918, the newborn Polish State had to enter into combat with Soviet troops, which in 1920 almost reached Warsaw. In the inter-war period, the relationships of Poland with its eastern neighbor were one of the key problems of Polish diplomacy. As a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov agreement (23 August 1939), Poland became a victim of Soviet aggression on 17 September 1939, resulting in the eastern half of the Polish State becoming a part of the Soviet Empire in 1939–1941.

This historical experience, as early as in inter-war Poland, had stimulated reflection on the communist system in Russia.5 In this context one can mention such thinkers and scholars as Aleksander Hertz, Bogumił Jasinowski, Jan Kucharzewski, Marian Zdiechowski, and Florian Znaniecki. Aleksander Hertz, a sociologist, employing the Weberian concept of charisma in his description of the Soviet system, found similarities between Stalin’s Soviet Union and Hitler’s Germany.6 Bogumił Jasinowski, a philosopher of culture, saw Bolshevism as a result of Russian mentality shaped by Byzantine heritage and Orthodox faith.7 According to him, the fundamental features of Russian mentality were collectivism, maximalism, utopism, and dualistic style of thinking. Jan Kucharzewski, a historian, authored the seven-volume Od białego do czarnego czarstwa (From White to Red Tsarism), tracing links between the pre-Revolutionary Russian traditions of Tsarist despotism and the Soviet Union.8 Marian Zdiechowski, a philosopher and an adherent of historicosophical catastrophism, wrote numerous books and papers on the nature of Bolshevism.9 He perceived the social system that had emerged in Russia to be a result of the cultural decline of the Western civilization, which had begun in the
times of the Renaissance. Florian Znaniecki, the founding father of Polish sociology, saw Bolshevism as an extreme result of the emergence of mass society, which eliminated the influence of intellectual elites on social life. Therefore, this system would inevitably lead to economic and moral anarchization.

In Wilno (Vilnius) from 1930 to 1939, there operated the Research Institute of Eastern Europe (Instytut Naukowo-Badawczy Europy Wschodniej), which systematically investigated the totalitarian nature of Soviet society. Among numerous scholars collaborating with the Institute, two should be mentioned in particular: Wiktor Sukiennicki and Stanisław Swianiewicz. Sukiennicki specialized in the evolution of the Soviet legal system, and Swianiewicz investigated the functioning of the totalitarian economies of the Soviet Union and Hitler’s Germany. The Research Institute published Rocznik Instytutu Naukowo-Badawczego Europy Wschodniej (Yearbook of the Research Institute of Eastern Europe), Balticoslavica, and the book series Biblioteka Instytutu Naukowo-Badawczego w Wilnie (Library of the Research Institute of Eastern Europe in Vilnius).

Simplifying matters, and admittedly being partisan, one can say that Sovietology was born in inter-war Poland, not in the United States during the Cold War. On a more serious note, one may say that the studies of communism developed in Poland before 1939 belonged to the precursors of this science.

Although this intellectual tradition was broken in Poland when this country became part of the communist camp, it survived in exile. In this context, it is worth mentioning Józef Maria Bocheński, the founder of the Institute of Eastern Europe (established in 1957), the first editor of Studies in Soviet Thought, and co-editor of numerous books on communism. The past and the present day of communism in Poland, in other countries of Central Europe, and in the Soviet Union was the subject of articles that appeared in periodicals published in exile: Kultura and Zeszyty Historyczne (Paris), Niepodległość (London/New York), Aneks and Libertas (London), and The Polish Review (New York).

Post-war Poland was a country where social resistance against communism was the strongest in the whole communist camp. After 1956, the Communist Party had to approve the existence of the independent Catholic Church and private property in agriculture. Recurrent waves of workers’ strikes stimulated the rise of social and political opposition, which was organized from 1976 onwards. Independent political activity was based on regular circulation of free information, underground leaflets, periodicals, and books printed by independent publishing houses. This social infrastructure contributed to the revival of independent reflection on the communist system in Poland.

Roughly speaking, it is possible to distinguish two main orientations in independent social and political thought in Poland at that time. The first viewpoint emphasized the discrepancy between communist ideology and social reality under communism. This discrepancy was to be a result of a distortion (or betrayal) of communist ideas by post-revolutionary bureaucracy. This viewpoint postulated reforms of the communist system with a simultaneous acceptance of the geopolitical reality.
This point of view was characteristic of the left wing of the opposition. An extreme instance of this reasoning can be found in *List Otwarty do Członków PZPR i ZMS Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego* (An Open Letter to the Members of the Polish United Workers’ Party and the Youth Socialist Alliance of Warsaw University) written by Jacek Kuroń and Karol Modzelewski in 1965. Its authors, inspired by Trotskyism, accused the Communist Party of a betrayal of the working class and postulated reforms of the bureaucratized system. The turning point in the ideological evolution of this orientation was March 1968, when repressions of the Communist State caused that adherents of this style of thinking ceased to be an internal opposition and became an external one. These events accelerated the evolution of this social milieu towards standard Western social democracy. The reformist approach, devoid of Trotskyist elements, was present in the program of the KSS “KOR” (The Committee for Social Self-Defense “KOR”). In the 1980s, this kind of reasoning was dominant among the advisers of the Solidarność (Solidarity) movement coming from the KSS “KOR,” which was decisive (among other factors, including the influence of the Catholic Church) in establishing the long-running strategy of Solidarność, based on seeking agreement and compromise with the communist authorities.

The second orientation conceptualized communism as a continuation of Russian domination over Poland begun at the end of the eighteenth century. Its adherents claimed that the source of social crisis in the Polish People’s Republic (PRL), resulting in the lack of freedom and democracy and in economic shortages, was to be found in the dependency of Polish authorities on the Soviet Union. This viewpoint, popular among right-of-center thinkers and activists, postulated the liberation of Poland from foreign domination and the building of Western-style democracy. After 1956, the precursor of this kind of reasoning was the conspirational organization *Ruch* (Movement). In its political declaration *Mijają lata* (Years Are Passing), published on November 1968, its leadership emphasized the dependence of Poland on the Soviet Union and demanded restoration of basic civil liberties. In the 1970s, this style of reasoning was represented, among others, in the analyses and programs of *Polskie Porozumienie Niepodległościowe* (Polish Independence Alliance), *Ruch Obrony Praw Człowieka i Obywatela* (ROPCIO, Movement for the Defense of Civil and Human Rights), and *Konferederacja Polski Niepodległej* (Confederation of Independent Poland). In June 1979, Leszek Moczulski, founder of the KPN, presented his political vision in the brochure *Rewolucja bez rewolucji* (Revolution without Revolution), in which he planned to dispossess the PZPR (Polish United Workers’ Party) of power by mass and peaceful social mobilization. In the 1980s, the anti-communist and pro-independence political orientation was continued, among others, by the *Organizacja “Solidarność Walcza”* (Fighting Solidarity Organization) and the *Liberalno-Demokratyczna Partia Niepodległości* (Liberal Democratic Party “Independence”).

The social and political thought of both orientations was characterized by a predominance of pragmatic purposes over explanatory ones. This is why this reflection...
was shaped by immediate political goals, uncontrolled axiological assumptions, and an eclectic mixture of normative and descriptive levels of analysis. In this article, however, the subject of analysis will be those lines of thought in which explanatory purposes dominated over the pragmatic ones. Nevertheless, the independent social thought, discussed above, created a certain cultural background on which scientific reflection on communism could thrive. Leszek Nowak and Jadwiga Staniszkis, whose theories will be reconstructed in the next two sections, had been intellectually and socially active since the mid-1970s, contributing to the independent social and political thought in Poland.

III. Communism as an Emancipated Political Power

The Nature of the System

As was mentioned before, the conceptualization of the communist system in non-Marxian historical materialism—a theory elaborated by Leszek Nowak—belongs to the approach of the political type. According to Nowak, in each sphere of social life—culture, politics, and economy—class divisions spontaneously emerged. Their base is the material means of society, which developed in these domains of social life. The material level of political life encompasses the means of coercion. The relation to the material means of this type determines the division of society into two groups: the class of rulers, which decides about the use of coercion, and the class of citizens, who are deprived of such possibilities. Economic life is characterized by a similar internal structure. In addition, here the material level is made up of the means of production, which determines the division into the class of owners and the class of direct producers. Analogically, in the cultural domain, the material level consists of the means of spiritual production—for example, printing presses, radio, and television. The relation to the means of spiritual production determines the division into two social classes: the class of priests, who decide about the use of the means of spiritual production, and the class of the indoctrinated, which is deprived of such influence.

The above theoretical framework of social life makes it thus possible to distinguish three separate and autonomous types of class divisions and social antagonisms. In the political domain, the class that has at its disposal the means of coercion, increases the overall range of its influence by limiting the autonomy of the citizens. In the economic domain, the class which has at its disposal the means of production, increases their profits at the expense of the wages of the direct producers. In the cultural domain, the class which has at its disposal the means of spiritual production, enhances the spiritual domination over the indoctrinated and limits their autonomy. Social antagonisms resulting from unequal access to material means of society (means of coercion, production, and indoctrination) in each of these three domains of social life have thus an autonomous character. Class divisions from other domains of social life can only strengthen antagonisms in a
given domain or, conversely, weaken them. Class divisions can also become cumulative when, for example, one social class, keen on increasing the range of its social influence, may take over the control of both the means of coercion and production, or both the means of coercion and spiritual production.

The control of the material means is thus the basis of the division of societies. Using this criterion, one can distinguish class societies, where the existing classes are separated, and supra-class societies, where the class divisions are overlapped. One of the supra-class societies is society with the triple class of rulers-owners-priests. In this kind of society, class divisions have reached their extreme because, on the one hand, a triple-lords class monopolizes the control over three domains of social life: politics, economy, and culture and, on the other, the people’s class is devoid of access to the material means of society.

This latter kind of social system refers to the structure of communist society. The counterpart of the triple-lords class was the apparatus of the Communist Party, whose power in the Stalinist period (1944–1956) reached its peak. During this period, the party apparatus controlled political life as well as the economy and culture. The ensuing rise of the Communist Party to power resulted in the abolition of civil liberties through terror and wholesale suppression of dissenting views. Communist rule nationalized key industries and collectivized agriculture. In the cultural domain, the Communist Party imposed the spiritual monopoly of Marxism, which served as an official outlook on life and a tool in social rivalry with the Catholic Church. Communism, according to Nowak, can be thus interpreted as a system of triple power, in which the members of triple-lords class fulfilled at the same time the social role of the ruler, the owner, and the priest. However, the domination of the Communist Party over the economy and culture was instrumentally subordinated to the growth of power regulation.

The Sources of Dynamics

This view of communism assumed that the main source of dynamics lies in the political sphere of social life. Therefore, the theory of this system in non-Marxian historical materialism adopts the model of political society as its basic model. This model in its initial version leaves out the possible influence of the economy and culture upon social processes analyzed therein. Furthermore, the model disregards any possible influence of existing institutions and collective consciousness of the participants of political life upon these processes. Finally, the idealizing assumptions underlying the model also suggest that the society under analysis acts in isolation, which means that no social phenomena can be explained by external influence upon the analyzed society. In a society simplified in the way presented above, there exist only two classes: the class of those who have access to and exercise control over the means of coercion (the class of rulers), and the class of those deprived of this access and the control (the class of citizens). It is in the interest of the rulers gradually to
increase to a maximum the sphere of their regulation, and correspondingly, it is in
the interest of the citizens to increase their sphere of autonomy.

Moreover, this theory presupposes that every citizen has a set of preferences that
direct his or her actions. Among citizens’ actions, one can distinguish those that are
autonomous and those that are regulated. Regulated actions are undertaken because
of the threat of repression from the ruler, but autonomous action is not restricted by
similar sanctions from those behind the means of coercion. There are two basic
methods for subordination of social life—terror and bureaucratization. In terror,
rulers physically eliminate those from the citizens’ class who are centers of inde-
pendent social relationships. Bureaucratization replaces autonomous social relations
(citizen–citizen) with ones controlled by rulers (of citizen-ruler-citizen type). In this
way, power gradually permeates into the structure of social life, making impossible
any undertaking of social action without its permission. When the bureaucratization
of social life in society has reached a certain threshold, there seems to be a tendency
for the revitalization of autonomous social bonds. Gradually, controlled by power,
social relations shrink and social life is shifted to autonomous social relations.

The evolution of political society oscillates between the tendency towards the
bureaucratization of social life and the tendency towards the revitalization of
autonomous social bonds leading to reconstruction of civil society. In the first stage
of development, the tendency of bureaucratization is prevailed; in the second stage—
the tendency of reconstruction of civil society. Let us assume that at the starting
point of our analysis of social processes, a class peace prevails. The mechanism of
political competition between the disposers of the means of coercion forces an aver-
gage ruler to enlarge his/her sphere of regulation. Those who do not compete are
either removed from the political structure of power or, by the process of trial and
error, learn to enlarge their sphere of control. In consequence, social autonomy
shrinks and the sphere of power regulation enlarges. The growth of power regulation
intensifies the citizens’ resistance, which gradually transforms into civil revolution.

The revolution may be won or lost by citizens. Let us suppose that the citizens
have won. Then, from a purely materialist point of view, nothing of any consequence
changes because, according to Nowak, the revolutionaries “in terms of their ideals
are the avant-garde of the people. In terms of material facts they simply constitute a
new power elite in as much as they dispose of new means of coercion. After the vic-
tyory their true social nature become visible: they gain a monopoly of state coercion,
that is to say, they become the core of the new class of rulers.”23 The mechanism of
political competition among them leads again to the growth of power regulation.
This, in turn, leads to the growth of civil resistance and the political revolution resist-
ing this new class of rulers.

In case of the defeat of the citizens’ movement, the only means of stopping
authorities—what enables the rulers (the new or the old) to use post-revolutionary
terror—has disappeared. It affects those from the citizens’ class, who are centers of
independent social bonds. The atomization of the citizens’ class makes it possible to
control more and more social fields. When all domains of social life are subordinate, the system reaches a state of totalitarianism. In these social conditions, there are no social areas left to subordinate. However, in society there appear tendencies towards a gradual revitalization of independent social bonds, which increases the ability of citizens to resist. This leads to revolution, which initiates a stage of cyclical revolution and diminution of power regulation.

This revolution is crushed, but the rulers—to avoid a follow-on—reduce the scope of their control. Yet, the mechanism of political competition leads to the growth of power regulation provoking the outbreak of the next revolution of a greater scale. This forces the rulers to offer larger concessions and makes it more difficult for them to repress the rebels. Political society thus evolves according to the following scheme: civil revolution, repression, concessions, the growth of political regulation, and the next political revolution with a wider social base.

Due to the recovery of civil society, more and more citizens take part in revolution. Finally, a revolution erupts that is so widespread that the authorities, instead of starting off with repression, must allow sweeping concessions, which reduce the rulers’ control to the level acceptable by the citizens’ class. According to the model: “When such a state is reached, revolution ceases to be an indispensable means of regulating relations between the authority and the civil society. The commonness of revolutionary attitudes among the citizens (. . .) and the resulting tendency of the citizens to control the authority are sufficient to guarantee that the sphere of regulations does not reach beyond the range of administration and, thus, that the authority’s role as administrator of social life will be maintained.”

The Mechanism of Collapse

The decline of communism was a result of a series of lost civil revolutions. Each of these revolutions is indeed lost by the citizens, but the rulers, to avoid the outbreak of the next revolution, gradually liberalize the system. As a result of these changes, the triple-lord class diminishes its control over the two remaining spheres of social life—culture and economy—transforming into a single class of rulers, which reduces the scope of its control in the sphere of politics. In culture and economy, there appear new class divisions with a separate class of owners and priests. In the long perspective, these processes led to the dismantling of the communist system. It is worth emphasizing that such a prognosis was put forward by Leszek Nowak in Polish in the early 1980s and in English in the years 1985–1987.

The above-mentioned model tendencies were presented in the history of Poland. The communist system imposed in East-Central Europe encountered the strongest resistance in Poland. After the Poznań revolt in June 1956, the Communist Party had to come to terms with the spiritual influence of the Roman Catholic Church and to acknowledge the existence of private farms. After the strikes in Szczecin, Gdańsk, and Gdynia in December 1970, the communist authorities recognized the economic
aspirations of society: the program of constructing—as official propaganda called it—“The Second Poland,” was, in a way, an opaque attempt at satisfying the economic needs of the Polish society. After protests in Radom and Ursus in June 1976, the communist authorities had to acknowledge the activity of the political opposition in Poland. The foundations of the system were, however, undermined to the greatest extent by the Solidarity revolution of 1980. Mass circulation of information independent from the control of the authorities began, independent political life started to form, and attempts were made to liberalize the economy. The process of the construction of a democratic society was slowed down by the imposition of Martial Law in 1981. Eight years later, in 1989, the Round Table Talks, which were preceded by two waves of strikes in May and August 1988, initiated the transformation of the system, which was far more profound than all the previous concessions of the communist authorities, forced by independent social forces. As a result of these changes, democratic society of the Western type was built.

IV. Communism as Incomplete Capitalism

The Nature of the System

Jadwiga Staniszkiš’s conceptualization of communism can be classified as an economic type of approach. The point of departure for her considerations is the question of what in communism can be explained by the lack of capitalism. Or, put differently, what are the social and economic consequences of the liquidation of certain dimensions of property? In her analysis, she applies categories elaborated by the school of property rights. In this concept, the right of ownership in capitalist economy is complete and exclusive, consisting of three elements: the right to use the object of property, the right to appropriate returns from an asset, and the right to change the assets’ form and substance. This last element includes the right to relinquish the use of a given object and the right of transferring the object of property in the form of sale, inheritance, and donation. Furthermore, property rights are exclusive, which means that the right of ownership is assigned to individual persons who take full responsibility for it.

The seizure of industry by the state limited the scope of property rights in communist economy, which became incomplete and non-exclusive. Their incompleteness results from the lack of the right of inheritance, the right to relinquish their use, and the right of transfer of a given object. Moreover, property rights are non-exclusive because they are attributed to organizational roles that lead to the dispersion of property rights among the multi-level and multi-center system of state administration.

This structure of property rights had certain consequences for the functioning of communist economy. According to Staniszkiš, the most important were:
(i) Decapitalization, caused by the state ownership of the means of production and the lack of the market of capital, precluded proper estimation of the value of national property;

(ii) A tendency for over-investment was determined by state financing of investment, which was perceived by the management of communist enterprises as a form of subsidy;

(iii) A lack of economic responsibility was caused by the absence of connections between costs and profits at the level of the individual enterprise;

(iv) Low mobility of resources in conditions of shortage economy was caused by the tendency of the enterprises to amass commodities of different types; they served as a possible reserve in the production process and object of barter exchange between companies;

(v) Low level of innovation caused by the absence of the connection between the profit of the producer and supplies to the market with scarce goods.

However, the most important consequence was the specific location of the state in the process of production, because this institution supplemented the incomplete structure of ownership in communist economy and tried to replace absent economic mechanisms and interests with administrative procedures. Therefore, the state became a basic element of the relations of production, which maximized its control over the resources of the economy.

The Sources of Dynamics

The basis of the dynamics of the communist system was the contradictions in the sphere of economy resulting from the systemic absence of certain dimensions of ownership. Staniszkis called one type of contradictions “the mechanism of structural causality.” The second type of contradictions was located in the mechanism of reproduction.

According to Staniszkis, the mechanism of structural causality meant the influence of the social structure upon itself, which manifested itself in three ways in social life. Firstly, the state permanently performed the function of a regulator of economy, while simultaneously eliminating by administrative methods, the possibilities for the change of property. Secondly, the specific position of the state in the production process led to the totalitarianism of social life and the elimination of civil society. This phenomenon was accompanied by the Communist Party’s claim to be the “avant-garde of historical progress” and to represent the “objective laws of history,” which brought about the anarchization of social life resulting from the realization of such a claim. Ensuing political crises were attempts to form collective action by atomized society. Thirdly, within the state economy, there could not emerge material interests, which would cause a radical change of the system.

The second type of contradiction was situated in the mechanism of social reproduction. The communist system encountered three kinds of barriers here. The first was the threshold of biological reproduction of households, which was the only area...
of economy resisting political totalitarianism. Therefore, some disturbances in the biological reproduction of families disorganized the basis of the material reproduction of the whole system. The second threshold was the threat of ecological catastrophe, for example, problems with water, heating, pollution, etc. Finally, the third threshold was connected with the apparatus of state itself. Material reproduction had to provide resources necessary for maintaining control over society and rewards for members of the apparatus. These resources could be replaced by such factors as access to information, slower decline of standards of living, or protection. However, a certain level of resources was always necessary to satisfy these needs and keep control over social life. A permanent crisis of the communist economy began when the system could not provide resources at a satisfactory level.

Staniszkis distinguished three phases of development in communist economies. In the phase of extensive development, the Soviet-type command economy has been built based on: “central allocation of capital and on an “inner colonization” mode of accumulation. The techniques of the latter utilized, on the one hand, the repression of wages through political means (such as stripping workers of their right to strike and the capture of labor unions), and, on the other hand, a forced administrative decapitalization of agriculture in favor of heavy industry.”28 Accelerated industrialization resulted in mass migrations from the country to cities and “investment retardation” of the private agriculture, which caused a rapid decrease in productivity and marketability of that sector of economy. As a result, this economic transformation contributed to an unbalanced structure of the whole economy with in-built tendency to reproduce itself. In the phase of equable functioning, the system gained its own identity—ideology became ritualized and pragmatic political goals overcame the utopian ones—presented in the first phase of development. At this stage, a new phenomenon appeared—“the mechanism of regulation through crisis”—as a result of unbalanced structure of Soviet-type command economy. Staniszkis characterizes this mechanism in the following way: “The seemingly accidental fluctuations in the rate of growth of the Polish economy between the early 1940s and the late 1970s and the hasty, apparently unrelated measures taken by the ruling group were, in fact, processes with a clear internal structure and logic. On the one hand, there were the economical-political cycles and, on the other hand, two mutually contradictory tendencies that appeared simultaneously and, what is more, originated from the same source—the ruling group, totalization, and detotalization. Both of these interconnected processes shared endogenous and dialectical character. Thus the successive phases of the economic-political cycles were, to some extent, self-reproducing, and each contained the seeds of the subsequent phase. Parallel with the development of the constitutive tendency of a given phase of a cycle, the counteractive social forces and mechanisms also gained strength. This inevitably led to a turning point in the cycle, or a crisis, and to emergence of a phase with opposite tendencies (which, like its predecessor, forecast another reversal).”29

Let us clarify this somehow puzzling description. Each full cycle consisted of three stages. The first stage of each cycle was characterized by the high level of
accumulation and investments, and respectively, low level of consumption. However, the over-investment led to economic crisis. It was the turning point of each cycle, because it opened the way to the downward revision of accumulation and investment. These changes, however, did not automatically lead to the increase in the level of consumption because funds obtained from revisions of economic plans in the state-run economy were assigned for other purposes—usually financing the growth of the state and party apparatus. After the period of social expectations of the growth of consumption, social protests and labor strikes forced the rise in wages. These events initiated the stage of political crisis. The separation of economic and political crises blocked rationalization of the economy and deepened its disequilibrium. According to Staniszkis, economic crises occurred in Poland in the years 1953–1954, 1962–1963, 1968, and 1973–1974, but political crisis occurred in the years 1956 and 1970. They forced wage increases: 20% in 1956–1957 and 22% in 1971–1972. Because not every economical crisis was ended by an open political crisis, Staniszkis asked “why the Polish system was so stable (. . .) and existed and worked in relatively unchanged structural form” from the end of 1950s to 1970s. According to her, a mature communist system developed “informal mechanisms and structures that served as shock-absorbs” and prevented the emergence of open conflict on the public area. Political authorities used specific techniques of control and manipulation of society. One of them was the definition of social situation, which seemed to be non-alternative for society. Therefore, the people had to act in a given framework of institutions, and potential conflicts were kept below the threshold of articulation.

However, these methods of solving internal crisis did not change the position of state in the process of production. Therefore, the unsteerability of the communist economy was its stable feature. Due to it, in the phase of exhaustion of developmental reserves, a new phenomenon appeared—the de-articulation of the communist system of production, which was to strengthen the stability of the whole system. It was based on the separation of group property from state property in the form of joint venture enterprises and trade companies taken over by the members of the communist nomenclature. As a consequence, these processes initiated the final decline of the communist system.

The Mechanism of Collapse

The collapse of communism in Poland was the result of three particular moments in time: described above systemic contradictions within communism, unique historical circumstances, and chance phenomena. The first stage of breakthrough from 1987 to early 1988 was preceded by the de-articulation of the communist mode of production, leading to the changes in the structure of ownership and political domination. The reform-oriented leaders in the Communist Party understood that economic transformation should be followed by political reforms, which promoted and strengthened changes in the structure of ownership. At that time, members of the
nomenclature class transformed into private owners utilizing the resources of the state sector of economy. These changes were to solve the internal contradictions of communism caused by the lack of private property.

It should be noted that the whole transformation of the system was accompanied by chance phenomena:

(i) In the years 1988–1989, a new model of the conflict in the economy appeared. Earlier, the state was rejected in moral terms and at the same time, perceived as an administrative distributor of money. Now the state withdrew from setting prices and subsidizing state enterprises, causing a new configuration of social conflict;

(ii) The appearance of a unique formula of communication between those in power and society. The so-called Round Table talks imitated in other countries of Eastern Europe negotiated the resignation of communists from power. Due to this, the whole process was controlled and ritualized.

(iii) The third group of change factors was connected with the international situation. Such factors as the attitude of the Moscow elite allowing for changes in Eastern Europe, the unification of Germany, and the anarchization of the Soviet Union should be mentioned in this context.

These changes led to the formation of a new political center consisting of reformers from the Communist Party and of that part of the former opposition that was identified as being “constructive.” This new center promoted and legitimized an economic reform, which led to the reconstruction of full property rights in economy. Thus, the transition to capitalist economy ended the first stage of transformation.

V. Communism as a New Religion

The Nature of the System

The belief that communism was a direct result of an application of Marxism was the most popular opinion on the nature of this system in opposition circles as well as in Polish independent social sciences.33

However, this view was not transformed into any systematic theory of social reality able to capture the dynamics of the communist regime. One of the few authors who tried to sketch such a conceptualization was Michał Buchowski.34 In his view, cultural factors are “people’s attitudes and patterns of behavior—in other words, the mentality and habits shaped by the historical experience of a given social group.”35 These cultural factors constituted “the deeper level” of social structure conditioning political and economic events.36 Therefore, in Buchowski’s view, “cultural factors influenced the way communism was received, depreciated, and finally dismantled. Culture also defined the way in which communists tried to redefine social notions and cultural space, and to destroy the Catholic Church. It also determined the way
communism was opposed by the Church. In other words, culture defined the battlefield and weapons employed.”

The religious nature of communism allows for an investigation of this system with regard to doctrine, cult, and organization. The Founding Fathers—that is, K. Marx, F. Engels, and V. Lenin—established the systematized doctrine. They revealed the Objective Truth of History and the Laws of Social Evolution. This Holy Trinity was followed by the next generation of disciples and ideologists. The communist faith had its local variants established by Mao Tse-Tung, Kim Ir Sen, Fidel Castro, and Nicolae Ceaușescu. The Communist Party controlled the interpretation of classical texts; therefore, an unlicensed interpretation, possibly leading to heresy, was threatened with political persecutions. The doctrine assumed a set of organizational principles such as the leading role of the Communist Party, democratic centralism, hegemony of the proletariat, and social progress manifested in a revolutionary transition from capitalism to communism.

The cult included collective ceremonies and holidays such as Women’s Day (8 March), May Day (1 May), Victory Day (9 May), Children’s Day (1 June), or October Revolution Holiday (7 November). The Communist Party developed a set of symbols: red flag, red star, hammer and sickle, raised fist, the Internationale. Party ideologists tried to implement in lay rituals in people’s daily lives: name giving (to replace Christian baptism), the civil marriage ceremony, and the civil funeral. Simultaneously, the rank and file party members were forbidden to participate in the respective church rituals. Communist authorities created a new pantheon of “saints”—heroes of the world communist movement. For this purpose, the communists changed the topography: for instance, the name Königsberg (East Prussia) was changed into Kaliningrad, St. Petersburg (Russia) into Leningrad, Zlin (Czechoslovakia) into Gottvaldow, Chemnitz (East Germany) into Karl-Marx-Stadt, and Katowice (Poland) into Stalinogród.

The Communist Party was an organization that embodied the communist doctrine into real life. Party functionaries were the priests of a new state faith. To describe the reality of communism characterized by the merging of the political and cultural role of the party, Buchowski employs Frazer’s category of King-Priests. The party leadership united by common ideology, symbols, language, lifestyle, and customs created a new class (nomenklatura), separated from the rest of the society. This new social class was internally hierarchized. The ultimate authority belonged to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. A similar hierarchy existed within the other countries of the Soviet camp, in which the first secretaries of the Communist Parties held spiritual authority.

Inspired by Clifford Geertz’s definition of religion, Buchowski sees communist ideology as a quasi-religious system of symbols allowing for the establishment of pervasive and long lasting attitudes and motivations for the whole society. Communist ideology not only generated a sense of harmony, but also became a tool of spiritual oppression. Buchowski employs the definition of spiritual domination put forward by Piotr Buczkowski, Andrzej Klawiter, and Leszek Nowak.
to these authors, “A person believing in a certain worldview—religious, lay or any other—is a person who has abandoned any attempt independently to solve worldview problems, and trusts totally in the message inherent in the dogma. This kind of person cannot evaluate his/her own deed on the basis of his/her own moral intuition, and can only repeat dogmatic judgment; this person is unable to reject any dogma in any situation.” In Buchowski’s opinion, this definition includes the useful intuition that a structure of any belief—lay or religious—is in its basic dimension the same, and implies competition between priests of different worldviews.

The religious nature of communism explains the long-lasting struggle with the Catholic Church, which was perceived by the communists as the main rival for the rule over the minds (or souls) of the Poles. In communist ideology, religion was treated as the opiate for the people. This belief justified the cultural war with Catholicism, from terror (1950s) through administrative restrictions (1960s and 1970s), to ideological means (for instance, with the authorities in the 1980s attempting to introduce religious education in school curricula as a tool of spiritual rivalry with Catholicism).

The spiritual monopoly of the Communist Party allowed also for a redefinition of some key concepts used in social life. Buchowski exemplifies this thesis by analyzing the notions of freedom and democracy, whose core meanings are acquired during life experience. This process proceeds according to the following rule: the earlier one acquires the meaning of some notion, the harder it is to redefine it; the later this happens, the manipulation of its meaning is easier. This was the case with the notion of “freedom,” whose core sense was rooted in childhood experience. Therefore, the efforts to redefine its meaning by the communist authorities had to fail.

By contrast, the meaning of the word “democracy” was acquired relatively late in the context of other words (elections, party system, etc.), which opened it to manipulation. According to Buchowski, communist authorities attempted to change the content of the term “democracy” by pointing out that bourgeois democracy is artificial because it serves the interests of capitalists. Western democracy is socially expensive because it realizes the capitalist class’s interests through social competition (free market, multi-candidate parliamentary elections, etc.), which leads to social chaos. By contrast, socialist democracy is authentic because it is designed to fulfill people’s interests. Their social interests are not realized through competition, but through central authorities settling them (with the instruments of planned economy, and the monopoly of one party).

The Sources of Dynamics

The main factor influencing the evolution of communism was the process of the routinization of charisma. The party, designed as a political and ideological organization, inevitably changed into an inept bureaucratic structure that took over state functions. This phenomenon led to cyclical crises in the history of post-war Poland. Each such crisis stimulated a kind of a religious revival inside the Communist Party.
During internal discussions, it was emphasized that “the leaders had lost touch with the masses” and a return to the Leninist norms of party life was proclaimed. After the crisis had been surmounted, the promises were forgotten and bureaucratic tendencies prevailed—until the time of the next crisis.

Buchowski distinguishes three types of believers and practitioners of the communist faith in the short history of this system in Central Europe:

(i) **Devoted believers**—genuinely convinced that what they implemented was based on absolute truth;

(ii) **Enlightened believers**—who still believed in the communist doctrine, but were conscious of the rhetorical nature of a large part of its contents;

(iii) **Cynical disbelievers**—who utilized communist propaganda to maintain their power, but did not believe in the communist doctrine any longer.

The first two groups formed a larger group of *true believers*, who were convinced about the truth of the doctrine. In the first stage, called by the author the stage of *magical communism*, true believers dominated in the communist movement. They were convinced that they were building a classless society. This was accompanied by the physical elimination of the enemies, who resisted “the Objective Laws of History.” The Events of 1956 brought about the first “disenchantment” with communism. Then, the *enlightened believers* appeared on the political scene. Conflict between the two fractions of the Communist Party characterized Władysław Gomułka’s reign in the years 1956–1970. In the 1970s, during Edward Gierek’s rule, the purity of the communist movement was softened by the focus on consumerism. In addition, the *enlightened believers* supported the coexistence and toleration of other points of view. The Solidarity revolution in 1980–1981 brought about the second “disenchantment” with communism among the rank and file Communist Party members. They resigned their party membership or treated it instrumentally as a tool to advance their careers. During martial law in Poland, the *cynical disbelievers* dominated the Communist Party and openly utilized membership of it as a means of self-enrichment. An indicator of these changes was the size of party membership: “the number of believers in Communism was relatively low and since 1980 dramatically decreased. The communist states’ standard proportion of Party members to the whole population, i.e., one tenth was almost gained in the late 1970s but it was a mostly formal membership that quickly reduced when people ‘opened their eyes’ in 1980.”

Buchowski is conscious of the model status of his considerations: “The outline I have given is an interpretation, which demands more detailed studies. Each country has its own history and the Polish road is not common, even in neighboring countries. For example, East Germans and Bulgarians remained orthodox up to the end of the system; Romanians chose schismatic nationalist idolatry; Hungarians adopted an internal reformist path; Czech and Slovaks, broken by the Counter-Reformation, were
obedient to the point of sometimes being holier than thou in the context of Kremlin’s orthodoxy.45

The Mechanism of Collapse

In the case of Poland, the downfall of communism was accelerated, apart from the universal mechanism of the routinization of charisma, by particular features of Polish culture, such as patriotism, Catholicism, and predominance of family links over political ones.

Polish national sentiments, shaped during the nineteenth century in confrontation with Russia, helped in the rejection of communist ideology and the political system imported from the Soviet Union, the successor of Tsarist Russia. The strength of Polish nationalism had to be recognized by communist authorities, which exploited it for their own purposes. This was the case of Władysław Gomułka, who in October 1956 defended “the Polish road to socialism” against the threat of Soviet intervention. Owing to this policy, he was at that moment at the zenith of his popularity. Another leader of the Communist Party, Edward Gierek, proclaimed the “ideological and moral unity of the Polish nation” and renovated historical buildings. Finally, during martial law, Wojciech Jaruzelski restored some pre-war traditions in the army and preached loyalty towards the state, not the party.

Communism strengthened the stereotypical view that being Pole meant being a Catholic. As a result of the Yalta agreement, Poland became an almost homogeneous country with regard to nationality and religious denomination. In this way, the Catholic Church became the most important independent institution in Poland. Participation in Catholic rituals was perceived as a way of opposing the system.

The third factor was the centrality of family links in the social life of Poles, manifesting itself in attempting to ensure economic well-being for one’s family members. This factor weakened the loyalty of rank and file party members towards their leadership and rationalized oppositional attitudes of society in the conditions of permanently insufficient economy.

The loss of faith was universal and common all over the communist world in East-Central Europe. In Poland, specific features of Polish culture accelerated the vanishing of communist faith. The party leadership stopped believing in its own ideology, losing historical legitimization for rule. Also, rank and file party members, losing their faith, became less loyal towards their leadership and identified more with society than with party authorities. Finally, the rest of society perceived the communist authorities as a usurper imposed by the Soviet Union, and first silently, and later openly, contested communist rule. As a result, Buchowski concludes, “devoid of their spirit, communists were unable to defend the Faith they pretended to represent. With similar symbols and slogans as the 1980 opposition, representatives of all those politically underprivileged were able to take power peacefully in the country. The Domino Effect, started in Poland, roused events that today are
described as the Nations’ Fall. The upsurge of the Nations’ Fall meant at the same time the fall of communism as a quasi-religious system. In Central Europe its doctrine/ideology, organization, cult and rituals vanished.”46 Some elements of the old faith, such as nostalgia for the PRL and claims for equality, survived in the new reality, but their followers are devoid of their ideological representatives and are dominated by the liberal discourse.

VI. Conclusion

In conclusion, five points will be raised. Firstly, both the theoretical approaches and the reconstruction presented above have a model status. The theories of communism were interpreted here to obtain answers to the three questions posed at the beginning of the paper. Therefore, this study focuses on the core of each approach, omitting the remaining aspects present in the writings of their authors, but not relevant in this particular context. In addition, even if the authors presented here start to conceptualize the nature of communism from one aspect of social reality—respectively, the political, economic, and ideological one, it does not mean that they totally ignore the existence of the remaining dimensions of social life. Those dimensions, neglected in the initial versions of the frameworks, are incorporated into them at later stages of analysis.47

Secondly, the application of the modeling method determines the abstractness of the analysis. This can be the cause, at least in the case of Polish social sciences, of the gap in the field of contemporary history between theoretical analysis and empirical studies. There is a lack of works written in the genre of theoretical history synthesizing consciously chosen theoretical categories and models with deep empirical studies.

Thirdly, the reconstruction presented above allows for a comparison of the explanations of the same phenomena in the light of different theoretical orientations. Each of them sees the nature of the system, the sources of its dynamics, and the roots of its decline—in a distinct sphere of social life. For example, a characteristic feature of post-war Polish history was recurring social crises. According to Nowak, this cyclical development was a result of the recurring processes of the bureaucratization and revitalization of autonomous social bonds among citizens; according to Staniszki—a result of the development of the communist economy being devoid of certain dimensions of property rights; according to Buchowski—a result of recurring processes of the routinization of charisma and revitalization of faith. Explanations of others aspects of communism in the light of the discussed theoretical approaches are presented in Table 1.

Fourthly, this table allows treating the approaches reconstructed above as competing ones. However, it is also possible to perceive them as ones complementing one another. If the history of communism in Poland is divided into three periods: its rise (from 1944 to 1956), maturity (from 1956 to 1986), and decline (from 1986 to 1991), paradoxically it appears that each approach explains best only one phase in the historical development of communism. The cultural approach seems to be the
Table 1

Explanations of Others Aspects of Communism

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Approaches</th>
<th>The Nature of the System</th>
<th>The Sources of Dynamics</th>
<th>The Mechanism of Collapse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Political (L. Nowak)</td>
<td>The emancipated authority controls all spheres of social life</td>
<td>Contradictions between the authority and civil society</td>
<td>Withdrawal of the authority from regulation of the economy and culture under the pressure of cyclical civil revolutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic (J. Staniszkis)</td>
<td>The lack of property rights in the economy forces the state to regulate the process of production</td>
<td>Internal contradictions regulated by the state economy leading to the “mechanism of regulation through crisis”</td>
<td>Exhaustion of resources stimulates the reconstruction of a complete structure of property</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural (M. Buchowski)</td>
<td>A system of beliefs creating a new man in a new type of society</td>
<td>Contradictions between utopian vision and social reality, which led to the loss of faith</td>
<td>Understood in the Weberian sense, the mechanism of the routinization of charisma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
most useful for the explanation of the first, Stalinist phase of development. At that
time, the communist faith was a moving force in the maximization of power regu-
lation and the restructuring of the whole economy. It is difficult to explain the evolu-
tion of the communist economy by a lack of certain dimensions of property rights
when this very lack should be explained first. Similarly, the political approach can-
not explain the communist reality by the growth of power regulation, tending to cre-
ate a new man living in an ideal classless society, without employing certain
“idealistic” categories such as “the communist vision of man and society” in its ini-
tial version. An explanation of this period in purely political terms, it would seem,
remains unconvincing.

However, when the system has reached its maturity in which ideological motiva-
tions have lost their significance and economic interests have not yet risen, the polit-
ical approach proves its advantage over the other theoretical orientations. It can be
seen, therefore, to be the best tool for the analysis of social life evolving according
to recurring waves of bureaucratization and revitalization of social autonomy.

In turn, the economic perspective became useful for explanations of the decline
of this system. The rapidly globalizing economy was a decisive factor in the deep-
ening of the crisis of the communist system, and the logic of the economic interests
of the nomenclature class determined the occurrence of communism’s downfall.

Finally, it is worth considering why works of the above-mentioned authors (espe-
cially Nowak and Staniszkis), widely known and discussed under communism, after
1989, did not stimulate such vivid debate and the scholars did not manage to rally a
wider circle of disciples and collaborators to create their own schools of thought.48
Answering this question, it is possible to differentiate four types of factors: structural
(i); cultural (ii); political (iii); scientific (iv); and methodological (v).

(i) The division into the center and periphery existed not only in economics and poli-
tics, but also, and maybe first of all, in culture. As a result, theoretical concepts
devised in the cultural center (the United States, France, Germany) have a bigger
chance of promotion than such concepts originating from (culturally) peripheral
countries. What is more, the cultural strength of the center does not cause creation
and promotion of their own ideas in the science and the humanities of peripheral
societies; rather, it leans toward receiving, popularizing, and possibly commenting
ideas coming from the center. Each original theory at the very beginning has diffi-
culty with promotion, not only in the countries of the center, but also at home, where
it has to compete with ideas coming from the center. This general framework of any
cultural activity, in an obvious way, hampered the promotion of original orientations
worked out in Polish social sciences, because in Poland, it was easier to find
adherents of Western paradigms than scholars who would like to develop the
domestic ones.

(ii) Cultural trends dominant in the Poland of the 1990s—postmodernism and liberalism—did
not provide the breeding ground to devise and popularize grand theories.
Postmodernism declared “the end of meta-narratives” (Lyotard), suspecting in them
the threat of totalitarianism. Also liberalism suspiciously looked upon all theories of historical development, with the exception of its own. According to the liberal philosophy of history, proclaimed by Fukuyama, the collapse of communism was caused by the lack of private property and free competition. Therefore, all that should be done in the course of transformation is only to imitate the development of the more advanced countries of the West. The faster this is done, the faster we will reach the end of history, at least in this region of Europe. All theories questioning the liberal conceptualization of communism (Nowak), or systemic transformation (Staniszkis), or both, were naturally pushed onto the margins of the main discourse.

(iii) Two of the analyzed authors—Nowak and Staniszkis—elaborated their theories under communism, and both were persecuted by the communist authorities. Jadwiga Staniszkis was dismissed from Warsaw University in 1968; she returned in 1981. Leszek Nowak was imprisoned from 1981 to 1982, and from 1984 to 1989 was dismissed from Adam Mickiewicz University (Poznań). They could publish their works in the underground or in the West. Political troubles made it difficult for them to build schools, promote officially their ideas, and educate disciples by supervising MA theses or PhD dissertations. The downfall of communism in 1989, on the one hand, facilitated the publication of their major works, but on the other hand, paradoxically weakened interest in them, because the subject of their study (communism) ceased to exist.

(iv) The debate on communism in Poland in the 1990s focused on such questions as the totalitarian status of the PRL, the level of the PRL’s autonomy inside the Soviet camp, social results of the communist modernization of the country, and the usefulness of the antagonistic division into the authorities and society for the description of post-war history of Poland. This left little room for debate on the theoretical aspects of communism, which required a certain distance from political and axiological matters. Paradoxically, these research interests were strengthened by establishment of the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej). In the 2000s, the archives of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and other related institutions of the Communist State were handed over to this newly created institution, which renders them accessible for research. The Institute regularly publishes collections of sources, books, and post-conference materials devoted to contemporary history of Poland. It issues Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (Bulletin of the Institute of National Remembrance, since 2000) and Pamięci Sprawiedliwość (Remembrance and Justice, since 2002). The widening of the source base resulted in a series of empirical studies requiring a revision of the standard views on the recent history of Poland. In a natural way, this research situation weakened interest in the more abstract theoretical discussion on communism and stimulated studies based on primary sources. One can predict that after some time, when empirical research based on primary sources reaches the state of appeasement and loses its impetus, there will be a return to theoretical discussions in Polish historiography and historically-oriented social sciences.

(v) It seems certain that the role played by theoretical and methodological content of theories analyzed here were theoretically too eclectic (Staniszkis) and methodologically too rigorous (Nowak). Staniszkis’ approach was too eclectic because she employed theoretical categories of Hegel, Property Rights School, and theory
of dependency and of modernization. Lately, she added Saint Thomas and Taoism to her sources of inspirations. In effect, very often in her writings, Staniszkis carried out only scrupulous systematization of factors acting in social reality without attempting to coherently connect or establish hierarchy. For example, Staniszkis singled out reasons of cyclical crises in post-war history of Poland, both in structure of communist economy and vulgar interpretation of Marx, without any attempt of assessing which one of these factors exerted more influence, and which one less. To put into Lakatosian terms, one can say that undue theoretical eclecticism hindered identification of the “hard core” of theory. Theory, which is too eclectic, can be expanded in all directions, but in consequence, it is expanded in no one direction. Nowak’s theory, in turn, can be blamed for excessive methodological rigorism. Non-Marxian historical materialism adopts, as its methodology, idealization theory of science. This approach accepts as a pattern of research practice the methods used in natural sciences (especially physics)—what determines the way of theory building. It is presupposed in idealization theory of science that a number of factors, which can be divided in main and secondary, influences the phenomenon under investigation. By virtue of idealizing assumptions, the influence of secondary factors is omitted. The idealization statement takes a form of conditional form: in its antecedent, there are counterfactual assumptions eliminating influence of secondary factors; in its consequent, the dependency of the phenomenon under investigation on its main factors is shown. In this way, the communist society model of development was built. Later on, these idealizing assumptions are waived, and appropriate modifications are introduced to the initial formula of idealizational statement. However, the order and, to some extent, the way of these modifications is strictly determined by hierarchization of factors presupposed by theoretical and ontological assumptions. Although the identification of “hard core” theory does not raise difficulties, they are appearing in moment of extension of the principal model because it requires qualifications of theoreticians, methodologists, and empirics (e.g., political scientists, sociologists, or historians). It has too much focus in the conditions of the growing specialization in science. In consequence, the theory, which is methodologically too rigorous, owing its own language and limiting ways of potential developments, discourages potential adherents from its extension. This was the case of non-Marxian historical materialism after 1989.

Joint influence of these factors worked against the creation of research schools, which would be able to continue studies on communism in Poland. Nevertheless, this overview demonstrates that the Polish social sciences were pluralist, which resulted in the development of comprehensive approaches to the communist system. Some of these approaches can find their counterparts in Western Sovietology (for instance, the cultural approach corresponds to Besançon’s theory of logocracy), while some others (e.g., Staniszkis’s or Nowak’s) are, at least in some respects, original conceptualizations of the phenomenon of communism. The richness of the Polish reflection on this social system resulted from the long intellectual tradition of Soviet studies in Poland and the resistance of Polish society against the communist
system, which created a demand for independent studies on the nature of this system. For better or worse, the social sciences in this country responded to this demand.

Notes


4. Consequently, throughout the article, the term “communism” will be used to designate the social reality in Poland between 1944 and 1989, even if the authors discussed in this study different periods and different works and employed different terms: bolshevism, communism, socialism (respectively postsocialism and postcommunism), real socialism, “real existing socialism,” Realsoc, etc.


14. Among these two political orientations, there existed political and social thought disseminated by legal Catholic lay organizations (Stowarzyszenie “PAX,” Znac, Kluby Inteligencji Katolickiej). Their political vision, never fully articulated, was separate in the left as well as the right wing of the opposition. On the one hand, leaders of the Catholic organizations accepted geopolitical conditions, but on the other hand, they proclaimed the idea of coexistence between the Communist Party and the Catholic majority. The acceptance of geopolitical conditions made them similar to the wing of the opposition and differentiated from the leftist wing of it because of the acceptance of private property, free market in the economy, and the role of the Catholic Church in social life.


21. Jadwiga Staniszki was an adviser of the Inter-Factory Strike Committee during the strike held at the Lenin Shipyard in Gdańsk in August 1980, and Leszek Nowak was an expert of the NSZZ “Solidarność.” During its first Congress in September-October 1981, he worked in the thematic group “The Trade Union in relation to the Communist Party and State authorities,” authoring the so-called “fundamentalist program” based on his non-Marxian historical materialism. Michał Buchowski, in years 1980–1981 and during the Martial Law, was Solidarność activist at the grass root level.


24. Nowak, Power, 63.

25. For example: Nowak, O konieczności socjalizmu i konieczności jego upadku (Kwidzyn: Internowa, 1982).


28. Staniszki, Poland’s, 232-33.

29. Staniszki, Poland’s, 248.

30. Staniszki, Poland’s, 255.

31. Staniszki, Poland’s, 270-71.

32. Staniszki, Poland’s, 271.

33. In this respect, primacy should be given to philosophers. For example, L. Kołakowski admits that Stalinism could be interpreted as an application of Marxism with despotic elements; see Leszek Kołakowski, “The Marxist Roots of Stalinism,” In R. C. Tucker, ed., Stalinism: Articles in Historical Interpretations (New York: Norton, 1977). A similar opinion was held by A. Walicki, who maintained that this social system was a result of internal contradictions (for example, unclear relations between the freedom at the individual level and the freedom at the social level) embedded in the Marxian liberation project. These contradictions transformed Marxism into a legitimization of the totalitarian system. However, it is most important that both thinkers, while maintaining that communism was a more or less an intentional application of Karl Marx’s social philosophy, were more interested in Marx’s writing than in the evolution of social reality under the actually existing communist system; see Andrzej Walicki, Marxism and the Leap to the Kingdom of Freedom. The Rise and the Fall of the Communist Utopia (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995).

34. This interpretation is based on articles written in the first half of the 1990s and published in the collection: Michał Buchowski, Rethinking Transformation, An Anthropological Perspective on Postsocialism (Poznań: Humaniora, 2001).

35. Buchowski, “From Anti-Communist to Post-Communist Ethos,” In Buchowski, Rethinking Transformation, 76.


37. Buchowski, “Communism and Religion: One Cultural Code of the Two Worldview Systems,” In Buchowski, Rethinking Transformation, 23; see also Buchowski, “Communism and Religion: A War of

38. See also Michał Buchowski, “The Magic of the King-Priests of Communism,” East European Quarterly 25 (1991): 425-36. Buchowski compares primitive and communist societies in a more systematized way. Similarities between these two types of societies are based on the unity of three domains of social life: culture, politics, and economy. In primitive societies, these domains of social life, understood as separate types of social praxis, have not yet emerged. In communist societies, these domains of social life have already emerged, but they are under a total control of the party, which has at its disposal means of coercion, production, and mass communication. The differences between both types of societies are in a sphere of social consciousness, because primitive societies were not conscious of the separation of these domains of social life. Such consciousness existed in modernity contributing, among other factors, to the indurability of communism in modern European civilization founded on the separation of, and balance between, different sectors of society; see: Michał Buchowski, “Społeczeństwo premomentowe: próba uzupełnienia nie-Marksowskiego materializmu historycznego,” In Krzysztof Brzechczyn, ed., Ścieżki transformacji. Ujęcia teoretyczne i opisy empiryczne (Poznań: Zysk i S-ka, 2003), 295-317.


44. Buchowski, “Communism,” 42.


46. Buchowski, “Communism,” 41. Also M. Kula explains the ease of communism’s downfall and the absence of any military resistance (with the exception of Romania) by simple loss of faith; see Kula, Religiopodobny, 133-35.

47. It concerns especially Nowak and Staniszkis, as Buchowski’s approach has a more sketchy character.


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52. Staniszkis, Poland’s, 257.
