

Brian Porter-Szűcs. *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom.* Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2014. 390 pp. \$99.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-4443-3218-6.



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Published on H-SAE (February, 2015)

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In this thoroughly researched and thought-provoking book, Brian Porter-Szűcs brings fresh questions and insights to debates on nationalism and national identity in a country that had long been a theater of conflict. Drawing on a wide range of sources, the book widens and deepens our understanding of the complexities of Poland's history from the late eighteenth century to the present. As the author states in the introductory section, many historians of Poland have produced a story of war and collective suffering, in other words, a "national martyrology," in which the Poles, the subjects of these accounts, are described as either heroes or victims (p. 4). By contrast, *Poland in the Modern World* sets out to deconstruct Poland's history of martyrdom, by focusing on the complex, nuanced lives of the people who have had to make sense of dramatic changes over the past two centuries.

The book consists of thirteen chapters bracketed by an introduction. Chapter 1 analyzes the 1795-1918 period, during which there was no Poland on the maps as a result of the three parti-

tions (1772, 1793, and 1795) between the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Prussia, and Russia. It examines the developments that led to the third partition and the political, economic, and social transformations that resulted in Poland's emergence as an independent country at the end of the First World War. Underlying this chapter is an endeavor to challenge widely shared views about Poland as a homogeneous nation that fought for independence; what emerges instead is a portrait of a society divided along ethnic, religious, class, and locality lines.

The following chapter discusses in more detail important transformations that Poland witnessed in the early twentieth century, namely, industrialization and the ensuing waves of migration from the countryside to urban areas. It then moves to an analysis of the emergence of the three ideological groups that played a key role in twentieth-century political life: socialists, nationalists, and the agrarian movement. The competing discourses of these groups provide a framework for much of the discussion in chapter 3, which

pursues the argument that, because of such divisions, it was difficult in the aftermath of the First World War for political activists to speak credibly of "the people."

Porter-Szűcs meticulously analyzes the ambivalence of democracy and authority in the interwar period in chapter 4, which focuses particularly on Marshal Józef Piłsudski, whose achievements are celebrated in official discourses. The author stresses the fact that although Piłsudski started his political career as a committed socialist, he became an advocate of the principle of the nation-state (as opposed to the principle of revolution) during the Polish-Bolshevik War (1919-21); he promised to bring improvements to the lives of the poor, but he eventually backed away and compromised with the conservatives. After leading the May 1926 coup, he pursued the agenda of the nationalist Right and established a military regime.

The economic situation and ethnic divisions in the interwar period are examined in the following two chapters. Chapter 5 highlights the complexities of Poland's economic map, most notably, the fact that while the regions that had been under Prussian rule during the partitions were relatively well off, those formerly controlled by the Russian and Austro-Hungarian empires remained poor. The author also shows that the economic crisis of the 1930s had a varied impact across the country: industrialized regions managed to keep afloat, but rural areas experienced growing poverty and unemployment. Chapter 6 examines ethnic divisions and highlights a paradox, proposing that one could be Polish (as a citizen of Poland) and non-Polish (in the ethno-national sense) at the same time. This was particularly the case of Jews, Ukrainians, and other minority groups (for example, Germans and gypsies). This complex social landscape posed several challenges to groups of different political leanings: whereas socialists wanted to build a multicultural state resembling the Polish-Lithuanian

state that predated the eighteenth-century partitions, the nationalists had in their agenda the formation of a homogeneous nation of Polish-speaking Catholics. Eventually, the latter vision prevailed.

Chapter 7 analyzes the Second World War and its disastrous consequences in Poland, most notably, the high percentage of human losses, the extermination of the Jewish population, the total destruction of major cities, the redrawing of national borders, and the subsequent population relocation. What emerges in the chapter is particularly the realization that there is no single memory of the war. In today's Poland, the 1944 Warsaw Uprising is referred to in official discourses as a moment of national sacrifice, but for many of those who participated in it, the uprising was a pointless suicidal gesture. Likewise, whereas many Poles associate the arrival of the Red Army with execution or deportation to Siberia, for many Jewish Poles it meant instead liberation from the Nazis.

The following three chapters discuss Communist rule from the late 1940s to the mid-1970s. Far from throwing into relief Communist brutality and Polish resistance, this part of the book examines different aspects of Polish Communism. More important, while the author traces the differences between Communism and capitalism and between Polish and Soviet Communism, he also stresses the fact that Communism and capitalism are not necessarily antithetical. For example, the surveillance and micromanagement that are usually associated with the Stalinist period have little to do with Communism; rather, they represent the measures used by factory managers to make production more efficient and are typical of countries in the early stages of industrialization. Similarly, chapter 10 discusses economic transformations in the 1970s to make the point that there is no automatic contradiction between Communism and a politics of consumption. Yet Porter-Szűcs also points out that the Communism upheld in the

1960s and 1970s by Polish political leaders, such as Władysław Gomułka and Edward Gierek, had very little to do with the socialist utopia but was grounded in the nationalist Right.

The last three chapters discuss the collapse of the socialist state, and the effects of Poland's adoption of a market economy. Of particular interest is chapter 11, which focuses on the consequences of the election of Pope John Paul II in 1978, the advent of the Solidarity movement in 1980, and the subsequent demise of Communism. Instead of producing an account of Solidarity's achievements, the author looks closely at the divisions that had characterized Solidarity itself since its formation (intellectuals, labor activists, and the Catholic Church). Such divisions came to the fore especially after Solidarity's victory in the first partially free elections, held in 1990, and led to its dissolution. In this sense, the author notes, the demise of socialism did not go hand in hand with the removal of a hated regime but was "the result of a negotiated settlement between a weak Communist party and an equally weak group of pro-democracy activists" (p. 285). The author also draws the reader's attention to a paradox: one of Solidarity's main goals in the 1980s was the protection of workers in the face of the economic crisis, but as soon as it came to power it focused on the formation of market economic classes, and the social costs of the economic reforms it introduced were very high. Porter-Szűcs concludes the book with a cautionary note: although Poland's adoption of a market economy and subsequent accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and the European Union resulted in a fast growing economy and increasing levels of consumption, economic inequalities keep growing, many young people leave the country, and political engagement is falling steadily.

Poland in the Modern World is a valuable contribution to central and eastern European historiography and the study of Communist and post-Communist societies. In presenting sophisti-

cated insights from a variety of disciplines and from a comparative perspective, the author characterizes Poland's history of the last two centuries as a history of neither winners nor losers. In doing so, he gets beyond stereotypes and clichés about the country, particularly the "national martyrology" that informs much of Polish historiography. Given the book's subtitle, readers might have expected a discussion of the Polish state's recent efforts to promote a vision of national history that moves away from martyrdom and collective suffering, especially in the concluding chapter. Nevertheless, the book provides a nuanced account of Poles' everyday lives and of the ways political, economic, and social changes affect people of different classes and ethnic groups living in different locales. Moreover, the clear and accessible language makes the book good for teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate levels. I strongly recommend it to scholars of nationalism, and to anyone working in European, Communist, and post-Communist studies.

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Citation: Jaro Stacul. Review of Porter-Szűcs, Brian. *Poland in the Modern World: Beyond Martyrdom*. H-SAE, H-Net Reviews. February, 2015.

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