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### Polish insecurity

There are a lot of reasons for our insecurity as a nation, so it is hard to pinpoint what makes us this way exactly. It is a combination of things. It is our extreme Catholicism that is one with the state, it is our history of being occupied by neighbouring countries and with it the fact that we have forgotten how to govern ourselves. This collective insecurity invades our personal lives, and we don't even notice how strongly it affects us. I always thought I could separate myself from whatever I heard from Polish politicians, priests, and nationalists, but bit by bit it seeped into my mind and now I have to deconstruct it.

I was never a religious person, and I don't come from a religious family. But I and most of my primary school class attended religion lessons at school. Before my first communion, when I was 8, I would pray regularly. Not because I wanted to, because I felt like I had to. Nobody pressured me to do it at home, but I was afraid I would get in trouble if I didn't do what I was told at church and at religion lessons.

Catholicism instils this feeling of guilt in us from when we are children. And even after we have grown up and realised that we don't have to do all of this, that we will not get punished if we don't pray every night, the guilt and fear come into other areas of our lives. We punish ourselves for things beyond our control. We put modesty on a pedestal, so as a result we don't feel confident in anything we do. And this modesty just turns into self-hatred. *Moja wina, moja wina, moja bardzo wielka wina.*

We hate ourselves, but we also like to forget how unorganised and easy to manipulate we are as a country. Nobody ever tells us that we lost. Instead, they tell us we fought with passion and heart, which actually means that we made a rash decision, without any preparation and it blew up in our faces later.

An excellent example of that is the Warsaw uprising of 1944. Our politicians love to use it as a divisive tool. They feed the nationalist agenda and get the rise out of the rest of us. But it is nothing more than propaganda.

“Let us remember what the Warsaw uprising was: it was the biggest battle [of World War 2] that decided the fate of Europe, because only thanks to that the front was stopped, only thanks to that the soviet armies didn’t go further west.”

- Antoni Macierewicz, minister obrony narodowej, wiceprezes PiS

“The “Burza” plan, that the fighting in the capital became a part of, caused a delay of the Soviet offensive. Because of that, USSR didn’t take over all of central Europe and you could say that the uprising saved Germany, maybe even France, from communism.”

- Marek Kuchciński, member of PiS

I probably don’t need to analyse these quotes for you to understand that they are complete and utter bullshit. The decision to start fighting the German army came from the highest ranking general of the Polish army, Tadeusz Komorowski. It was finalised after the news of the Soviet army slowly taking over land on the eastern side of Warsaw. It was an act of desperation, as Warsaw was surrounded by much stronger enemy armies. Despite the lack of resources and the fact that civilians were prepared to join the fight, the order to start the uprising went out on July 31 at 7 p.m.

The Warsaw uprising started on August 1st 5 p.m. and lasted 63 days. The actual losses on both the Polish side and the German side are not known exactly. Some sources say that the German army lost 1,5 thousand soldiers, some say it was as much as 17 thousand. The Polish army lost about 10-12 thousand soldiers and civilian losses go from 150 thousand to 200 thousand, depending on what article you decide to read. I can agree that the losses were severe, but it was definitely not the biggest battle of World War 2 if we are going by casualties.

The bloodiest battle by far was the battle of Stalingrad, that lasted from August 23, 1942, to February 2, 1943. It is estimated that between 1 and 2 million soldiers died on the Russian side and around 250 thousand from the armies of the Axis (Germany, Romania, Hungary, Italy).

The outcome of the Warsaw uprising was tragic. It didn’t change the course of World War 2, it didn’t change Poland’s position in relation to Germany or USSR, it caused the loss of many lives that could have been spared and destroyed a city that was already in ruins. It was the last cry for help before being thrown from one regime into another.

Every country covers up their shortcomings and exaggerates history to some extent, but you can see that what they are trying to feed us in Poland is beyond ridiculous. I think it is happening

because we don't have a lot of wins that we can celebrate and be proud of. So, we blow things out of proportion.

That insecurity is so present in us because Poland has a long history of being taken over by neighbouring countries.

Poland is under three partitions – Prussian, Austrian and Russian – the country doesn't exist

1795 – 1918

Poland is independent

1918 – 1939

Poland is under German occupation

1939 – 1944

Poland is under Soviet influence

1944 – 1989

From 1772 to 1795, three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth took place, and the country was divided between Prussia (modern Germany), Austria and Russia.

Under the reigns of those three European powers, Polish people were forced to assimilate. In terms of censorship and preservation of Polish culture, the Austrian and Prussian partitions were not as limiting as the Russian partition. It was forbidden to speak Polish and own Polish books there. People would self-organise and meet to study history and literature.

Poland wasn't independent until November 11, 1918. The interwar period started as a hopeful time. We began to build our democracy back, women got their right to vote, Poland was finally independent after 123 years of not even existing on the map. But that only lasted until 1939, when World War 2 began, and Germany occupied Poland.

Until 1944, Poland was under Nazi Germany. The way we are taught the history of World War 2 in Poland leaves a lot of room for improvement. While the story is more accurate than that of the Warsaw Uprising, there are a lot of integral parts to it that are just left out. The antisemitism that was present in Poland before World War 2, especially its rise in the 1930s. The Jewish massacres of the 1950s, done all by Polish hands. The ethnic cleansing, primarily

aimed at the Jewish community, of the Bieszczady mountains after World War 2. And the antisemitism present in Poland today, which is not discussed nearly enough.

This November, on the day of independence, there was an antisemitic gathering in the town of Kalisz. A statute signed in 1264 that granted the Jewish community rights in Poland was burned. The attorney general ordered the police not to stop the demonstration. We paint Germany as the villain and Poland as the victim, but we are far from innocent.

And as the second World War was nearing to an end, Poland went from being occupied by Germany to being one of USSR's many satellite states. We were officially under the Soviet influence in 1944. The first seeds of communism in Poland were planted by Stalin in 1941. Polish communists were sent to Poland from USSR to revive the Polish Workers' Party, which grew exponentially in the 1940s. It went from having 20 thousand members in 1944 to 1 million members in 1948. As the Polish political scene was corrupted and infiltrated, and the country was still hurting from the aftermath of World War 2, it was not hard to take control and create the Polish People's Republic in USSR's image.

In theory, it was an independent state, but assimilation and repression tactics were key to this whole operation. As all media became national, PZPR (Polish United Workers' Party) had full control of the flow of information and entertainment. There was a list of forbidden literature and libraries were raided in 1945 to make sure that no book with anti-communist ideals was available to the public. It was not possible to emigrate, only to flee and seek refuge. Food and other products were rationed. As most of these decisions and reforms were motivated by political control, Polish People's Republic never functioned properly. Everything was stifled by the regime.

There was no freedom of speech, no freedom of movement, no options. But as we have done since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, we worked in secret. It took some time for the underground movement to form, as the bigger opposition groups started forming in the late 1970s and the 1980s were one big fight for freedom. The 80s were the height of protest music, comedies with cleverly hidden anti-establishment content and they brought the biggest protests the country had seen to date.

This underdog mentality is still very much present in us. Poland has been free of the Soviet influence only since 1989. We have been governing ourselves only for 32 years, after over 200 years of oppression, with a brief moment of independence in the interwar period. We don't trust any government or system that is put in place, even if it is our own now. We have been

scheming and working in the shadows for so long, that we don't know how to live any other way.

Now we are doing it to ourselves, and I can't stand to see it. Even with the worldwide rise of right-wing politics, it is heart breaking to see the Polish government stoop so low to control its citizens. It has been a little over a year since the protests against the abortion ban have started. And every day brings more bad news.

The corruption of our government is at an all-time high, along with the national news channel. The laws regarding reproductive rights are still getting stricter. The protests have been getting suppressed by police brutality and repression tactics. There are refugees dying on our border with Belarus. A legislative initiative called "Stop LGBT" was discussed in the parliament on October 28 this year and it has not been shut down.

Looking at everything that has happened in the past few years, it seems like history is only repeating itself. Of course, our insecurity as a nation is not the only reason for what is happening in Poland right now. The rise of the conservative agenda is a worldwide phenomenon. That unapologetic thirst for power and control, however, is blatantly the product of that insecurity. I don't know if we will ever be able to let go of it, maybe if enough time has passed without us getting invaded again and the opposition finally takes over. But it doesn't seem like that is going to happen anytime soon.

We need to find our confidence. And we need to find it fast.

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