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Imaging Polish Nation
Nonviolent Resistance in Poland under Partitions

Uncertain construction of the Polish nation and the role of nonviolent resistance

Poland's staggered partitions among its three powerful neighbors: Russia, Prussia and the Habsburg empire ended the existence of the Polish state in 1795. It would take more than 123 years for Poland to re-emerge in 1918 as an independent nation-state on the map of Europe.

When the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth ceased its independent existence only a very small segment of a large gentry stratum had developed a propensity to identify with Polish statehood above and beyond its own narrowly perceived class-based categorizations and interests.[1] Most gentry, including the Polish magnates, had little understanding of and appreciation for the public good.[2] Other Polish-speaking groups such as serfdom peasants or merchants had not developed strong affinity with the Commonwealth, having either been abused and exploited for centuries by gentry landowners or taxed and politically and economically marginalized by the gentry's monopoly on trade and politics. Class hatred, still prevalent and dominant more than 50 years into partition, was clearly on display in 1848 when the Polish-speaking peasants carried out a bloody pogrom of the Polish gentry by slaughtering more than one thousand noblemen. In 1870, it was estimated that only around 30-35% of the Polish speaking population considered themselves Polish.[3]

In such circumstances, the development of Polish identity and a Polish nation was by no means inevitable or predetermined.[4] No one could predict how the character of a class-segregated population with a common language to share but lacking a common identity and nationwide consciousness could have eventually evolved. More than a century of statelessness and living under the constant pull of centripetal forces of de-Polonization and national indoctrinations of the partitioning powers might have as easily sealed the fate of the Polish population through a voluntary or forceful assimilation by the partitioning empires.

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[1] The Polish gentry known as 'szlachta' was estimated in the 16th-17th centuries at 10% of the Polish-speaking population while the nobility in other European countries such as France, Spain or Britain accounted for only 1%-3% of their populations. With its large politically active class that had exercised its powerful liberum veto over state affairs and the election of the kings, Poland was seen as an island of democracy in the sea of absolutism. The Polish gentry, however, displayed a surprising degree of carelessness about the common good of their polity. Soon the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania was known more for its anarchic rather than democratic nature, where ever-changing private interests of the gentry and powerful magnates dictated the public affairs of the country.

[2] The clearest illustration of this attitude was the Polish magnate Stanisław Szczęsny Potocki, the Marshal of the infamous Targowica Confederation organized in 1792 with the help of Russia to halt the constitutional reforms in Poland. Three years later Poland fell, and Szczęsny Potocki declared: "I no longer speak of Polishness and the Poles. This state, this name, have vanished, as have many others in the history of the world. Poles should abandon all memories of the fatherland. I am already a Russian forever." Stanislaus A. Blejwas, *Realism in Polish Politics: Warsaw Positivism and National Survival in Nineteenth Century Poland*, (New Haven: Slavica Publishers, 1984), 5; Davies, 157.

[3] Tadeusz Lepkowski, a historian and the author of *Poland: the Birth of the Modern Nation, 1764-1870* quoted in Patrice M. Dabrowski, *Commemorations and the Shaping of Modern Poland*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 12.

[4] Historians Davies and Dabrowski make similar argument. See Norman Davies, *Heart of Europe. The Past in Poland's Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 222 and Dabrowski, 6-7.

The late-nineteenth century developments on the Polish lands such as industrialization, urbanization, demographic growth of the Polish-speaking population and migration of a large population from villages and the countryside to towns and cities after partitioning countries eliminated serfdom could not by themselves account for the emergence of and the evolution of the common Polish identity and a growing need for a statehood. The social and economic changes and often repressive policies of the occupying powers helped to create a propitious environment for mass-based mobilization but the nature of this mobilization, either subservient and passive or restive and nationalistic was determined largely by the shift in the way the struggle for independence was waged: a deliberate rejection, at least for a period of time, of armed resistance in favor of new nonviolent methods of defiance.

This essay argues that Poles developed some of the most philosophically and practically sophisticated forms of nonviolent resistance used in any number of struggles for national survival and independence. The nonviolent resistance took a fully-fledged form soon after a failed violent national uprising of 1863, and throughout more than five decades it became the main weapon of defiance and a remarkably effective means of building collective identity among the Polish-speaking population. Although Poles did not end the partition by their nonviolent disobedience and confrontation—the First World War did that—neither were they defeated or culturally annihilated as the partitioning powers intended. This cultural resilience and unyielding attitude of stubborn endurance and resistance in the face of sever oppression were present and effective precisely because they were carried out through ingenious mass nonviolent mobilizing, organizing and actions, all of which instilled a deep sense of collective identity in Poles.

Eulogized violence in Polish history and national remembrance

General neglect of the role and impact of nonviolent resistance is due not only to the prevalent historical and contemporary discourses on the role of political and intellectual elites and its individual leaders, political parties, geopolitical changes, social and economic transformations but is also the result of the focus on wars, armed conflicts and dominant narratives of glorified violent resistance. Polish historians, essayists, poets, film and opinion-makers and politicians, most of which have been men, have been attracted to mesmerizing stories of militant conspiracies, plotting, army mobilizations, military campaigns, victorious battles, and heroic violent resistance, particularly against more powerful enemies, leading to unavoidable but glorious defeats, cherished and apotheosized through collective remembrance.

In such re-written and re-told history recognition and valor are attached to knightly or soldierly-like virtues and unquestioned martyrology for the Polish fatherland and the country's freedom. It is not surprising then, as notes Adam Michnik, one of the intellectual leaders of the Solidarity movement and a conscientious student of 19th century Polish history, that Poles "identify most closely with the tradition of uprisings."[5] In the literary work of the 19th century, veiled in numinous romanticism, Poland was compared to the Christ among nations that had to endure injustice, suffer persecution, and sacrifice itself on the altar of the struggle for freedom so as to rise again, regain her independence and free other subjugated nations. In that sense, immense suffering, victimization by pernicious neighbors, immediate sacrifice, and heroic violent—often suicidal-like—acts (e.g. a famous charge of the Polish cavalry against the German tanks during the Second World War) have defined Polishness and Polish patriotism and are believed to have helped made the nation resilient in spirit and physically perseverant despite decades of oppression and statelessness.

The April 10, 2010 catastrophe renewed the discussion about the significance and meaning of national tragedies and sacrifices and their intimate and peculiar place within the Polish national narrative. In the

[5] Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison And Other Essays*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1987), 173.

morning on that day, Poles learnt about the Polish government plane that crashed in Smolensk, Russia, killing everyone on board, including the Polish president, his wife and dozens of top political and military leaders. The passengers were flying to commemorate yet another painful and tragic anniversary in Polish history—the killing of 20,000 Polish officers by the Soviet secret police in 1940 in Katyn. When hundreds of thousands of people went on the streets in an emotional outpouring of grief and solidarity, numerous political commentators talked about an overwhelming sensation of patriotism and the rise of a new Polish political community. As the popular daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* suggestively noted, Poles, brought together by violent death and destruction, could finally unite in pain.[6] This victimhood falls into an enduring belief that more defeats, sacrifice and martyrs are necessary to bring about greater awards—such as independence after 123 years of unceasing struggle, or a genuine community of Poles that would emerge out of the April 10 tragedy. Time and again, the Polish national identity is redefined and reformed by national catastrophes—partitions, wars and unfortunate events such as the tragic plane crash.

The tradition of armed resistance is engrained in the Polish literature, history, paintings, artistic plays, and songs, including its national anthem. The text of the anthem, the origin of which dates back to the Polish military legions that fought alongside Napoleon Bonaparte, illustrates Poles' hopes in the necessity and effectiveness of military resistance to regain Poland's independence:

> Poland has not perished yet
> So long as we still live.
> That which foreign force has seized
> We at *swordpoint* shall retrieve (author's emphasis).

Another telling example of the eulogized history of armed resistance is the Polish capital itself. Warsaw, with its numerous monuments, many of which were erected after 1989, quintessentially represents the way Warsowians and Poles in general remember and retell their history. The monuments for fallen heroes during historical wars dominate Warsaw's commemorative landscape: the monument for the Polish soldiers who fought bravely and died in the Monte Cassino battle that opened the road to liberating Rome by the allies—a battle which is mandatory reading in high school history books; the monument for the 1944 Warsaw Rising, for the fallen and murdered in the East, most of them military officers killed by the Soviet security forces; the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier regularly visited by Polish notables. One of the most conspicuous symbols of the Polish armed resistance is a bronze figure of a boy-soldier known as Little Insurgent with an oversized adult helmet and clenches a retaken German sten gun. The monument was inspired by the story of the 13-year old boy Antek, an insurgent during the Warsaw rising who was killed in action near the place of the present memorial.

In 2005, a newly built Warsaw Rising Museum was opened with modern, multimedia historical exhibitions. One of its main aims is to "recreate the atmosphere of fighting Warsaw" as its website informs the viewers. In February 2010, it was reveled that the premises of the museum were used by officials from the Central Anticorruption Bureau, the Internal Security Agency, and the Border Guard to take their solemn oaths of office during secretly arranged celebrations. As the spokesperson for the Internal Security Agency explained, the Warsaw Rising Museum was selected for these events because "Poles associated this place with heroism and patriotism of all those who gave their lives for the fatherland."[7] The appropriateness of juxtaposing the work of these institutions with a violent and a destined-for-defeat insurrectionary act, where children as young as 12 and 13 were outgunned but fought the German army, has not been raised or questioned.

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[6] Polaków łaczy tylko ból (Poles unites only pain). Interview with the writer, literary critic, and historian Stefan Chwin, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, May 2, 2010.

[7] http://wyborcza.pl/1,75248,7533860,Konspiracyjne_przysiegi_w_muzeum.html Accessed on Feb. 6, 2010.

Through all these monuments, places and commemorative rituals, Poles immortalize their heroism in armed struggles. The ultimate sacrifice through violent uprisings and resistance that dominates the mental landscape of ordinary Poles helps perpetuate the remembrance of and glorification of violent aspects of Poland's history. Furthermore, the apotheosis of death in violent struggles for freedom suppresses other stories of no less courageous and patriotic acts that helped the nation survive. One of the participants in nowadays forgotten nonviolent resistance during the German occupation of Warsaw recalls:

> Underground teaching on all levels of schooling was the most admirable work accomplished by the Polish society [during the war]. Neither leaflets, nor violence, nor sabotage were as effective as this manifestation of the national consciousness. It saved our society from the catastrophe equal to the destruction of Warsaw: the loss of five graduating classes of engineers, architects, doctors, teachers, and students who managed to pass their baccalaureate exams [despite the German occupation and war][8]

While referring to the Polish secret education during the German occupation a British historian, Norman Davis, writes about "an amazing network of clandestine classes, which eventually undertook the education of a million children."[9] Needless to say no monument was ever erected in the Polish capital to commemorate those who led secret educational classes for which the death penalty was certain. Their activities were not visible or considered laudable enough; no blood was shed or shots fired. The memory of the heroic underground schooling is largely forgotten, overshadowed by the remembrance of the militant clandestine conspiracies and violent actions of the Polish underground that led to the 1944 Warsaw Rising.

Yet another example of the national story that privileges and glorifies injustice, martyrdom and violence over nonviolent change are the memories of the round table discussions that led to a peaceful, negotiated end to communism in Poland in 1989 and of the 1981 marshal law that was used to violently suppress the Solidarity movement. The latter and not the former has entered the pantheon of national commemorative events and became a major cause célèbre of the anti-communist struggle in post-communist Poland with annual anniversaries and remembrances led by political pundits and the mainstream media.[10]

In the same way that acts of nonviolent resistance during the Second World War or anticommunist struggle are underappreciated, or forgotten, the Polish historiography and the public at large ignore the tradition, role and legacy of nonviolent resistance during Poland's century-long partitions. Adam Michnik encapsulated well the extent to which the militaristic tradition eclipses the "less glamorous" achievements of nonviolent resistance:

> An attack from the battle of Samosierra[11] is more photogenic than the tedious organization of education or the modernization of agriculture, not to mention the construction of a network of sanitary facilities. But let us remember that we would not have been able to organize our statehood had it not been for the

[8] One of the leaders of the Polish underground teaching during the German occupation of Poland between 1939-1945 cited in Jacques Semelin, *Sans Armes Face a Hitler. La Resistance Civile en Europe 1939-1943*, (Paris: Biliotheque Historique Payot, 1989), 118.
[9] Norman Davis, God's Playground: 1795 to the Present. A History of Poland. Vol.II, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 345.
[10] *Polacy lubią smutne uroczystości* (Poles like sad celebrations). Interview with the sociologist Hanna Swida-Ziemba,
Gazeta Wyborcza, April 18, 2010.
[11] A suicide-like charge of the Polish light cavalry against Spanish batteries of cannons during Napoleon's victorious battle at Samosierra that subsequently led to the capture of Madrid is eulogized in Polish history books and immortalized in various paintings.

> work done in the spirit of "organicism" and "accommodation," (…). And let us remember that our grandfathers often had to pay a high price for their decision to undertake these tasks, risking moral reproach from their antagonists.[12]

Michnik talked also about Poles who see only in black and white: either one takes up arms and fights for his fatherland or one yields to the oppression and gives up the struggle entirely. In this purely binary choice of resistance there is little, if any, recognition of and appreciation for defiance through nonviolent organizing and nonviolent direct actions that can be a powerful weapon to fight for political freedom and rule of law.[13] Finally, to illustrate his argument about Poles who can rarely see past their zealousness for violent resistance, Michnik cites Pruszynski, the late 19th century writer of Polish teaching textbooks, who in frustration by his more revolutionary contemporaries observed that "for Poland, it is good to suffer and it is good to die for. But it is not good in Poland and for Poland—to think."[14]

Philosophical and historical foundations of nonviolent resistance: the birth of organic work

The major shift away from armed resistance toward the continuation of the struggle by nonviolent means occurred after 1863. For a long time Poles considered the armed solution as the most effective weapon to fight for their independence. They engaged in armed struggles regularly throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. They participated in Napoleon's wars against partitioning powers, conspired and led the violet November uprising of 1830, joined militarily the People's Spring of 1848 and rose again in January of 1863 only to face a crushing defeat by the Russian army.

Polish acts of nonviolent resistance date back to the early years following partition in 1795 but only from the mid-nineteenth century onward did they find proper contextualization and expression in the newly emerging social philosophy known as positivism. Positivism in Poland came from Western Europe and was popularized in the partitioned country, exhausted by a number of failed armed uprisings and prosecutions that followed. Polish speaking writers, essayist, poets, journalists, social workers used popular literary magazines, periodicals, monographs, newspapers, and poetry to adopt positivism to Polish needs and situation. Polish positivism offered a rational explanation for the new type of nonviolent resistance and its strategic, long-term use and eventually succeeded a romantic vision of armed struggle for Poland's independence.

Influenced by their Western European counterparts, Polish positivists saw the nation as a social organism. Only healthy and well-nourished organisms could survive and grow. National subsistence, particularly within the borders of foreign states, could hardly be possible with continuous militant conspiracies and failed violent actions. For positivists the new strategy for reasserting national existence, vigor, and hope for its eventual liberation was the accumulation of intellectual, cultural, social and economic strength rather than military power.

A romanticized insurrectionary maxim—"I fight therefore I am"—was replaced with a popular Cartesian saying "I think therefore I am." In that sense, the best educated and most intelligent, not the mightiest, would eventually survive and be victorious. Aleksander Świętochowski, one of the main thinkers of Polish positivism, emphasized the superiority of mind over strength in this vivid comparison: "No Krupp could make such armaments as would kill Copernicus and no Moltke could vanquish Mickiewicz or Matejko."[15] In this pointed remark the German arms manufacturer and the chief of staff of the Prussian

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[12] Michnik, 174.
[13] Adam Michnik, Polskie Pytania, Cahiers Litteraires, Paris 1987, 183
[14] Ibid., 202.
[15] Świętochowski quoted in Brian Potter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 72.

army were juxtaposed inferiorly with a great Polish scientist, poet, and painter. [16] Knowledge and work became a new strategy for unity, perseverance, and resistance that were to help garner national strength and weave various Polish speaking groups, most importantly peasants, into a national fabric.

The popularity of positivism with its emphasis on the internal, organic development of the nation paralleled the emergence of a new historical thought that re-considered the reasons for Poland's demise from the map of Europe. In contrast to earlier views that the country's geopolitical configuration and its neighbors' self-interests together with their political and military prowess brought about the fall of the Polish state, the new Cracow historical school saw internal developments as the most important reasons for Poland's loss of independence. Domestic anarchy, weak and ineffectual government and a general economic and social malaise made the country extremely vulnerable to outside powers. Consequently, the neighbors chose the rational option they knew best: conquest and territorial expansion in light of the weakness of their potential adversary.

Once the causes for Poland's downfall were placed squarely on the domestic front the remedy could also be found in the internal changes and reforms. As Jozef Szujki, one of the leaders of the Cracow group of intellectuals, explained: "if the nation as a state fell, it was from its own guilt [and] if it raises, it will be from its own work, its own reason, its own spirit."[17] The Cracow historical school also believed that unlikely as it might be a victorious armed insurrection would be short-lived and its immediate military gains could not be sustained in the long-term without the proper political, social and economic basis needed for further consolidation.

Although often criticized for its religious, social and political conservatism and loyalism toward the Habsburgs, the members of the Cracow historical school helped lay down the ideational foundations for moving away from the destructive violence of armed risings towards constructive nonviolent strategies. This, in turn, reinforced a general shift from the romantic tradition of glorified armed struggles to a new type of positivist defiance via work: social and economic development, cultural learning, and preservation of language, tradition and historical memory.

The positivist thoughts and the ideas of the Cracow historical school were operationalized through a rapid development and implementation of a new form of nonviolent resistance known as "organic work" or "work at foundations." The shift from violent to nonviolent methods and the choice of organic work were strategic and pragmatic. Nonviolent methods began to look more feasible than armed struggle. Many saw regaining Poland's independence in the given geopolitical situation as unrealistic. The last major act of violent resistance—the January 1863 rising—led to the death of several thousands, followed by another thousand executed, and more than ten thousand immigrants and forty thousand Poles sent on penal servitude to remote uninhabited areas of Far East Russia (Siberia). In this situation many began calling for "turning swords into ploughshares."[18]

The organic work from self-discipline and intellectual self-improvement, to national education of masses and social, economic and political self-organization was a long-term project whose outcomes were not immediately discernable. A general lack of spectacularity and the immediacy of the threat of repression made the organic work not only less conspicuous but, at least on the surface, more benign and thus generally more amicable and tolerable to the partitioners than any insurrectionary conspiracies, not to mention armed uprisings, would have ever been.

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid., 54
[18] Michnik, 225.

Organic work encompassed the endeavors of economic improvement, social transformation, cultural construction and national engineering that were undertaken openly and secretly, legally and illegally, in all three parts of divided Poland. Although organic work took different forms, their two common elements were its nonviolent character and its constructive nature of engaging in resistance. The latter aimed at generating solely "Polish" economic, social and intellectual capital and sustaining, protecting and promoting "Polishness": language, culture, tradition, and history. Nonviolent agitation and organization substituted open revolt and insurrection. Polish dreams of independence were now channeled through nonviolent practical tools of generative rather than destructive resistance that would preserve, solidify and eventually expand cultural, ethnic, linguistic and historical boundaries of being a Pole.

Organic work in Austrian, German and Russian Polands after 1863

A number of initiatives in the spirit of organic work took place soon after Poland lost its independence but they were neither particularly popular in the romantic period of a physical struggle, nor was their scale and eventual impact comparable to the developments in the 1870s and later. The failed January rising in 1863 was a watershed event. Polish society, exhausted with the armed struggles and their continuous defeats but committed to defending the core of its identity, was now determined to harness its strengths internally in direct defiance of de-Polonization policies led by the partitioning empires. Through the creation of parallel economic, social, and educational institutions and protection and expansion of cultural and national practices and traditions Poles carried on their defiance in three parts of the partitioned country while actively seeking to awaken a unified national identity and patriotism among all Polish-speaking groups.

Organic work in Austrian Poland

Austrian Poland (or Galicia) was the most tranquil region not only in terms of insurrectionary militancy but any form of resistance generally. Galicia was the least economically developed part of divided Poland, the most conservative in terms of social hierarchies, with a strong loyalism toward the Habsburg empire and a relatively low level of national consciousness, particularly in rural areas. Although the least conspirational and nationalistic among all partitioned parts, Austrian Poland was nevertheless the place where the important part of organic work was undertaken specifically in the rural areas and in a cultural sphere. A major shift toward embracing nonviolent forms of defiance occurred at the end of 1870s, veiled in legal education activities and non-confrontational and open forms of cultural and national festivities, which—though not evident immediately—played a tremendous important role in developing a new kind of community that became aware of its common Polish roots and identity.

In Austrian Poland, national history and culture was absent from formal public education. Educational curricula were tightly control by Vienna and teachers were forbidden from using their own materials to teach topics related to national history. For example, no map of Poland pre-dating partition was permitted in the Polish schools of the Austro-Hungarian empire. In order to augment the space for alternative education offered specifically to peasants that had not identified themselves with a Polish community, a group of social activists launched the Agricultural Circle Society in 1882 that spawned the agriculture circle movement. The Society created a number of institutions such as reading rooms, Christian stores, and credit associations responsible for civic education, cultural activities and self-organization of economic life in the villages among the Polish-speaking peasants.[19] Between 1882 and 1887, 149 Christian stores were set up to advance commercial relations in rural areas. Four years later, an additional 376 stores were open and by 1898, 911 stores were in operation. Before the outbreak of the First World War, the agriculture circle movement had almost 2,000 village reading rooms.[20] Between

[19] Keely Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village. The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland 1848-1914*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 117.
[20] Ibid.

1901 and 1913 agricultural circles almost doubled to 2,000 while their membership grew from 41,000 to 85,000 Polish speaking peasants.[21] The agricultural circle movement organized festivities to commemorate national events, celebrated important historical anniversaries and promoted social behavior that aimed at reinforcing social and national fabric. The Agricultural Circle Society set up strict anti-alcohol rules in their village circle rooms that, for the first time, challenged the dominant role of taverns in village life. Through abstinence from alcohol, as well as peasants' exposure to patriotic literature, Polish historical books and Polish language rural newspapers, which were actively engaged in successful information campaigns on how to set up and run reading circles, the agriculture circle movement managed to promote among the peasants the idea of self-improvement and was credited with a growing identification of the Galician peasants with the Polish nation.[22]

Another mass education organization—People's School Society—was established in 1891 during the centennial of the Polish constitution. It grew rapidly with a couple of branch offices in the first year of its operation to more than 300 with 42,000 members by 1913. Through its patriotic education efforts, which incorporated, among others, the work of well-known Polish nationalist novelists and poets into the village school curricula, the Society reached out to approximately 5 million illiterate Polish-speaking peasants in Galicia. It built libraries and set up primary and high schools in rural areas, organized seminaries for teachers, and prepared a number of national celebrations. In 1903, it arranged 145 celebrations, and more 1,000 by 1913, all having borne some sort of national symbols and subtexts.

On the surface, apolitical self-help organizations such as the Agricultural Circle Society or the People's School Society that were established in Austrian Poland and specifically in villages were in fact a harbinger of long-term powerful nationalization forces.[23]

Paradoxically Austrian Poland, the most conciliatory of all partitions, was actually the hallmark of massive participatory nonviolent actions imbued with a high degree of nationalistic indoctrination that served the long-term purpose of nation building. These actions were associated with what can be viewed as "the commemoration movement" that started at the end of the 1860s and brought together Poles from different social strata: intellectuals, peasants, and laborers from all parts of the divided country. The mass celebrations of national traditions, famous Polish historical and contemporary figures, mass remembrances of glorious historical events and military victories, and people's mourning during anniversaries such as partitions of the Polish state or failed armed uprisings, were often followed by numerous educational activities such as lectures, theatrical performances, the release and distribution of relevant books and historical monographs, exhibits of memorabilia, church services, or sermons. All these events were seen as an alternative form of patriotic activism to defy de-nationalization and de-Polonization policies of the partitioning powers. These activities created a feeling of one community united by shared history, language, traditions and culture. In the words of the contemporary scholar of these events the mass commemorations were "constructive, creative, yet intensely national variant of organic work—an attempt at national modernization, Polish style."[24]

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[21] Stanisław Kieniewicz, *Historia Polski 1795-1918*, (Warszawa: PWN, 1983), 404; Stauter-Halsted, 117 and Andrzej Zakrzewski, *Od Stojałowskiego do Witosa*, (Warszawa: KAW, 1988), 49.
[22] Dabrowski, 109.
[23] To illustrate the national awaking of the Polish peasants in Austrian Poland the historian Norman Davies refers to the memories of the Galician peasant, Jan Słomka, who was born as self and during his lifetime moved to engage in the Polish self-government. While referring to Słomka's writing Davies observes "only the gentlemen were regarded as Poles. On learning to read, however, and by participating in the work of the Peasant Movement in Galicia, Słomka became enthusiastically aware of his own Polish identity. He became a pioneer of rural education, and ended his life as the respected mayor of his village … When he was born (in 1842), only a small minority of the population of the Polish lands would have consciously belonged to the Polish nation; when he died (in 1929), the great majority would have done so." See Davies, 220-221.
[24] Dabrowski, 15.

It is beyond the scope of this chapter to document the myriad of commemorative events that took place from 1863 forward, but two exemplary events are highlighted below. The first commemoration took place in 1883 and was the bicentennial of the Relief of Vienna—the victorious battle of the Polish, Austrian and German forces commanded by the King of Poland Jan III Sobieski over 150,000 strong Ottoman troops that laid siege to the Austrian capital. The choice of this particular anniversary shows shrewd strategic thinking on the part of organizers, since the selection of such celebrations had a significant impact on the Polish-speaking population but did not risk censorship or outright banning by the authorities. On one hand, the event recognized an important national military victory and taught Poles of their glorious past when their country was not only independent but also powerful enough to influence world (European) affairs. On the other hand, it was difficult for Austria as well as Germany to object to the festivities that although of a national, Polish, character were also celebrating the rescue of the German-speaking countries, the Austrian capital, and the Habsburg throne from Ottoman conquest. More than 12,000 peasants are known to have come to celebrate the bicentennial of the Relief of Vienna in 1883. Many of those who came to Cracow left their village for the first time. The visitors went to see the Polish royal castle, attended various speeches and lectures about the history of Poland, and heard vivid descriptions of the Polish King Jan III Sobieski's victory. The event was equally a national as well as a religious celebration. It brought together Polish-speaking Catholic peasants who paid homage to the Polish monarch and his military genius that saved Christianity. The commemoration of the Relief of Vienna was a galvanizing event for the Catholic-Pole identity's construction among the peasants.[25]

The second and one of the most memorable and prominent national celebrations that played an important role in harnessing nationalism and Polish national identity among peasants was the centennial of Kosciuszko's uprising of 1794. Tadeusz Kosciuszko was a national hero and a leader of the failed 1794 uprising against Prussia and Russia to prevent partition. His republicanism and the belief in the equality and freedom of all men transpired through his insurrectionary army that included peasant volunteer regiments. After the victorious battle of Raclawice, where the peasant battalion of scythemen heroically overran the Russian artillery positions Kosciuszko conferred nobility on a number of them and promoted a peasant Bartosz Glowacki to the officer rank, making him a symbol of the armed rising. Peasants who celebrated the centennial of Kosciuszko's uprising saw Glowacki (killed soon in another battle) as well as the scythemen as a symbol of peasants' readiness to sacrifice for the Polish nation. The celebration of Kosciuszko's uprising included numerous plays, sketches, painting exhibitions and reenactment of the battle at Raclawice. Thousands of Polish-speaking peasants visited Cracow to celebrate the anniversary. In Lviv, under the cover of an exposition that showcased economic and social developments and the technological advancements in agriculture in Austrian Poland, the organizers displayed a national trope: an enormous painting of the Raclawice Panorama by Wojciech Kossak and Jan Styka that showed the battlefield with the Polish peasants-scythemen leading the charge against the Russians. During a four-month period between June and October 1894, more than a million people visited the exposition and an estimated 200,000 people viewed the Raclawice Panorama.[26] The People's School Society helped with organizing the peasant group visits to the exposition, including funding the trips of more than 6,000 school children. Teachers and organicists who brought groups of peasants to see the Raclawice Panorama lectured them about the history of the Polish constitutional reforms, partitions, Kosciuszko's insurrection, the battle itself and what followed. During one of many pilgrimages to see the Raclawice Panorama, 3,000 peasants gathered and passed a resolution demanding universal and direct voting rights. A year later after the Kosciuszko centennials the Polish peasant party was established.

[25] Ibid., 61.
[26] Ibid., 118.

The commemoration of the Relief of Vienna and Kosciuszko's uprising are just two of the many historical commemorations and festivities in Austrian Poland between the 1880s and 1910s that strategically used nonviolent defiance to resist and counter de-Polonization policies. The tactic of engaging in historical commemorations relied on the adroit use of nationally significant anniversaries to amplify the desired impact of turning peasants and other social groups into full-fledged Polish citizens cognizant of their national identity, duties and political rights, while doing so in a low-risk, nonviolent way that decreased the chances of possible repression. The constructive dimension of the commemoration movement is illustrated by the creation of a real historic Polish community filled with the narratives of Polish heroes and personas whose patriotic actions suddenly gained a common meaning to all literate and illiterate, intelligentsia, peasants, merchants, and the rich and poor. Commemorations were a pedagogical tool to nationalize Polish speakers and harness nationalism among those who had little if any national identification before. The strength of the newly acquired national identity came into clear display during the First World War when peasants constituted the majority of volunteers in different Polish battalions.[27]

Organic work in German Poland

In German Poland, the nonviolent resistance was similarly advanced through building a number of civic institutions set up independently from the authorities to counter germanization policies known as *Kulturkampf* ("the struggle for land and minds") and strengthen national awareness among the Polish population.

In 1872, the organicists founded the Society for Peasant Education with the goal of offering alternative education and increasing national awareness of Polish language, history, and culture. The Society that received financial support from its founders – intellectuals and social workers that came from wealthier and now gradually disappearing landowning classes - established a number of libraries, distributed books, and set up daily nurseries. Within a couple of years it created almost 120 new libraries all over German Poland and supplied it in total with several thousands of pre-selected books, and reading materials including history of Poland and Polish language textbooks as well as historical paintings. After the German authorities dissolved the organization at the end of the 1870s, Polish activists established the Society for Folk Reading Rooms in 1880. The founders managed to preserve the organization despite the authorities' harassment by presenting their activities as being within the boundaries of the German law. Under the cover of legality, the Society managed to set up almost 400 rural and 85 urban libraries and supplied them with 79,000 Polish language cultural, literary and religious books within three years after its establishment. By 1890, almost a 1,000 libraries were established with the Society's help. In addition to the Society's work, the Polish organicists set up more than 100 reading circles, 6,000 diary cooperatives and 6,000 credit banks to support the cultural, social and economic development of the Polish village within the German partition.[28]

As part of German Chancellor Otto von Bismarck's struggle for Polish lands, the German Royal Settlement Commission for Poznania and West Prussia (the territory of German Poland) was established in 1886 with a budget of 100 million marks to buy out indebted Polish landowners and their estates and replace them with Germans. To countervail the German economic expansion, Polish organicists established the Polish Land Bank in 1888 followed by the Association of Parcelation Farmers in 1894 and the Parcelation Bank in 1897. These institutions, which by 1914 reached 24, were tasked with buying lands from German junkers and reselling it to the Polish peasants to consolidate and expand land ownership among the Polish farmers. With the help of these parcelation institutions Poles were acquiring more lands than Germans by the end of the 1890s.

[27] Andrzej Zakrzewski, *Od Stojałowskiego do Witosa*, (Warszawa: KAW, 1988), 61.
[28] Stauter-Halsted, footnote 3, 117.

A famous story of civil disobedience against the German law that prevented Poles from constructing a permanent residence on purchased land in German Poland was the case of a Polish peasant, Michał Drzymała, and his caravan wagon. In 1904, Drzymała received land from his German landlord but German authorities refused to allow him to build a house on his new property. In order to circumvent the law Drzymała decided to turn a caravan wagon into his home. Because the German law considered any construction that stayed in one place for more than one day a permanent residence (and thus unlawful to be owned and inhabited by a Pole) Drzymała moved his wagon a couple of centimeters each day and claimed that his portable wagon was not covered by the existing law and required no residence permit. The legal battle lasted for more than four years and ended when Drzymała sold the land and purchased another one with an already-built house that did not require a building permission. The whole affair became widely known in partitioned Poland and abroad (it was covered in British, French and US newspapers) and made a mockery of the German institutionalized and legalized land discrimination policy against Poles, while further inspiring Polish creative nonviolent resistance against the German land grab.

As a counteraction to German economic expansion, Polish credit cooperatives were set up. Their number rose quickly from 25 in 1868 to 76 in 1891. By 1913, there were 204 credit cooperatives with close to 126,000 members—almost half of them peasants.[29] They offered higher interest rates on deposits and lower rates on credit for their Polish customers than did German companies. The cooperatives were credited with modernizing and expanding both the rural and urban economy in German Poland.[30] Organicists also pushed for the establishment of Polish industrial societies with both political and national objectives to strengthen the middle class economic basis to compete effectively with German entrepreneurs. The industrial societies proliferated and by 1914 there were almost 170 societies in the region of Poznan alone with almost 11,000 members.[31]

Various Polish economic and financial institutions were created in rural areas. A number of peasant agricultural circles increased from 45 in 1875, to 60 organizations with 10,000 members in 1900 and 310 with 17,000 members by 1910 that included 40% of all Polish-speaking rural owners—the new social cadre of peasant activists.[32] In addition to facilitating information exchange about crop-growing and agricultural trade, including selling agricultural products, and delivering fertilizers, coal and seeds to the Polish farmers, the circles also advanced knowledge about legal, credit, tax and inheritance issues that aimed at countervailing German administrative, juridical and economic efforts to uproot Polish-speaking peasants from their land.

Concurrent with the growth of Polish economic, social, and educational institutions, the Polish-language press also grew. The average annual newspapers' print of 200,000 copies in 1902 doubled to 400,000 within a decade.[33] Evidence of the press' impact could be clearly seen in the school strikes in 1901-1907 (addressed below).

By the beginning of the First World War it is estimated that every fourth adult and at least every second men belonged to a Polish economic, social, cultural or political institution in Wielkopolska (one of largest regions in German Poland).[34] Overall, by 1913, Polish organic institutions reached 140,000 members of the adult population of Wielkopolska—although the total number of Poles influenced by such institutions is higher, since young Poles and children that were exposed to organic education but not

[29] Zakrzewski, 47.
[30] Blejwas, 49.
[31] Kieniewicz, 406 and Blejwas, 48-49.
[32] Stefan Kieniewicz, *Dramat Trzeźwych Entuzjastów. O Ludziach Pracy Organicznej*, (Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna, 1964), 163 and Kieniewicz (1983), 406.
[33] Ibid., 407.
[34] Ibid., 406.

necessarily counted as members of organic institutions.[35] Through these activities, the organizers and their beneficiaries "learned that they could attain specific economic, cultural, and social goals through a group effort that relied on legal, practical actions rather than (….) revolutionary violence."[36]

School strikes in German Poland

The school strikes that broke out in German Poland at the beginning of the 1900s were the largest form of coercive nonviolent defiance that took place in the partitioned lands before the outbreak of the First World War.

The strikes are typically interpreted as a reaction against the oppressive policies of German authorities. The causes however should not be mistaken with the symptoms. Much deeper changes seem to have played an important role in the outbreak, character, scope, intensity and duration of the strikes. These changes were initiated by forty years of subtle nonviolent defiance in the form organic work, including extensive and overt socio-economic work that took place in German Poland in both rural and urban areas. This work preserved and expanded knowledge of Polish language, Polish history and, in turn, raised the desire of the younger generation and their parents to defend all that was associated with their Polish identity, including the right to study and use Polish language in public schools. In that sense, strikes served as a yardstick of the economic, social and cultural assertiveness of the Polish-speaking population that stemmed from the organic work.

The school strikes in German Poland broke out with a different degree of intensity but quite regularly between 1901 and 1907. The years of 1906-1907 were the culmination of the strike, with more than 93,000 children participating in the school boycott. The events of 1901 and 1906-1907 were preceded by acts of citizen mobilization through the process of petition-writing and signature collection. As far back as 1871, 110,000 people had signed a petition against the government's plans to reinforce its control over schools and school curricula, while a petition in support of Polish language in elementary schools garnered the support of 160,000 signatories. In 1885, the same year when the government ordered all subjects in schools, including Polish language class and religion, to be taught in German, a petition that demanded church (rather than state) inspections of religion classes and teaching of the Polish language was signed by more than 60,000 people. These petition exercises, together with open public meetings to discuss education policies, were the lessons in citizens' self-organization to defend the rights to their own language. The activities generated greater awareness among the Polish-speaking population about the necessity to defend Polish education and the use of Polish language at school and constituted an important prelude to the school strikes. The conflict was further intensified because it involved using Polish language in religious instructions and drew the Polish Catholic Church into the dispute. Polish-speaking Catholics, even if not yet nationally awakened, were galvanized. Poles became ready to substitute legal methods of petition with more disruptive, illegal nonviolent resistance through school strikes.

The first major strike in 1901 in the town of Wrzesnia quickly became a symbol of national peaceful resistance. Parents first refused to buy the German-language religious texts so school officials had to buy them. Children, however, refused to use the books or answer questions in German during their religion classes. In a further act of defiance, children prayed in Polish instead of German and "refused to attend the ceremonies commemorating the German victory over France at Sedan… or refused to sing I am Prussian."[37] At the height of the protest more than 120 pupils between 12 and 14 years old were involved in refusing to use German in the religious class. German teachers and those Polish educators

[35] Witold Jakóbczyk, *Przetrwać nad Wartą*, (Warszawa: KAW, 1989), 74.
[36] John Kulczycki, *School Strikes in Prussian Poland, 1901-1907: The Struggle Over Bilingual Education*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1981), 23.
[37] Ibid., 52.

who were loyal to the German authorities punished the children either by requiring them to stay after school or by "caning" them—a form of corporal punishment that included strokes of a switch or rod. During a mass caning of students, local town people heard children's screams and cries that came from the school. Around 1,000 people gathered and entered the schoolyard, protesting and shouting against the schoolmaster and teachers. The German police were called and forced the crowd—dominated by women—to leave the building premises. As punishment, the government taxed protesting parents and initiated legal proceeding against some of the protesters. Twenty-one people were found guilty of unlawful gathering, including three teenagers and seven women, and all were sentenced to prison terms and financial penalties.

Severe court verdicts did not pacify the public mood. On the contrary, the court ruling raised opposition among many Poles toward the German government. Harsh sentences backfired and changed the Wrzesnia affair into a national symbol of the Polish resistance and sacrifice in defence of the Polish language. The immediate result of Wrzesnia was further mobilization of the Polish population domestically and even abroad. Donations came from Poland, Europe and the United States and were used to cover legal fees and offer financial support to the families of those imprisoned as well as gifts for the children who had been caned at the school during the main event. Some of the money was also used to smuggle three convicted people out of German Poland to Austria-Hungary.[38] Wrzesnia and its aftermath symbolized the power of solidarity among the Polish population across partitioned borders. It galvanized the pro-Wrzesnia protests in other parts of Poland, including demonstrations in front of the German consulates in Warsaw and Lviv. The international public also noticed the brutality of the German oppression. The press in France, Great Britain, Holland, Denmark, Belgium, Italy, Argentine and the Vatican wrote about the Wrzesnia affair, depicting negatively the handling of the situation by the German authorities. This peaceful resistance by Poles became known to a wider European audience, and contributed to an increase in international sympathy and solidarity for the Polish cause and Poles' right to self-determination.

Despite the backlash against the German authorities, they continued to refuse the limited Polish demands and did not change the classroom language requirements. This inflexibility paved the way to a much larger wave of school strikes between 1906 and 1907. When the first of strikes began in October 1906, it was estimated that 70,000 pupils from 950 state schools participated in it, including around 20,000 in Pomerania and 47,000 in the Wielkopolska region that constituted more than half of all children who studied religion class in German language.[39] Between 1906 and 1907 a total of 93,000 children from over 1,600 schools in German Poland joined the school strikes.[40] The fruits of more than half-a-century of organic work among the peasant population were reflected in the strikers' class background. Close to 90% of the striking children came from the families of peasants and agrarian workers while around 10% from the families of craft and industrial workers.[41]

The Polish-language press in German Poland played an important role in preparing the ground for general school strikes and sustaining mobilization after the strike broke out. In 1906, various members of the Polish-language press printed samples of petitions for parents to use to protest the German religion classes. They then printed a call for a general organizational meeting of all provinces in German Poland—a meeting that was ultimately attended by more than 2,000 people after many participants were stopped by the police before reaching the meeting—to discuss the new forms of resistance. This was the harbinger for a strike movement. By the end of 1906 the press had created public consensus for more radical and illegal means of resistance in the form of strikes as the best available weapon against

[38] Ibid., 62-63.
[39] Ibid.
[40] Historia Polski, vol. 3, issue. 2, 1900-1914, eds. Ż. Kormanowej and W. Najdus, (Warszawa: PAN, 1972), 555.
[41] Ibid., 557; Jakóbczyk, 67.

Germanization of education. Once the strikes broke out, the Polish press monitored developments and published regular reports on the ongoing protests in different parts of German Poland. Because headmasters and instructors often demanded proof of parents' acquiescence to their children's strike, newspapers printed examples of notes of consent for parents to give to their children to pass them onto the teachers. The press praised the pupils involved in the strike and encouraged others to follow the examples of striking children. Newspapers also urged nonviolent discipline and calmness in executing the strikes and stressed the need for unity and resolve recognizing that the strike can only be successful if it enjoys broad participation.

The strikes covered more than 50% of all Polish-speaking pupils and schools, which was a magnitude unlike anything that had been seen earlier. However, even this size and scope of participation was not enough to break German opposition. A number of Polish politicians were skeptical about the success of the school strikes, neither recognizing their value nor power. While strikes continued, German repression was also taking its toll. Some parents of striking children had their custodial rights removed. Students were expelled and many were denied school leaving certificates. Newspapers faced huge fines and by 1907 their financial standings had been significantly undermined. By late-spring 1907 the strikes were dying out.

An eventual end of strikes was described by the Polish press not as a defeat but as the moment when the Polish public had fulfilled its patriotic obligation. Indeed, for many strikers the struggle was no longer about the means to reach a specific objective but an end in itself with great symbolic value. In that sense, strikers achieved a moral victory with serious tangible consequences. It took Germans more than a year with the deployment of a various set of extraordinary measures to tame the wave of strikes. Polish language as never before became a unifying force and enhanced communal and national bonding among those who spoke it. No single armed insurrection had managed to galvanize and encourage participation among such a diverse group of people: young and old, girls and boys, women and men, who came from villages and towns across the region. The protest against the German religion classes became a movement for preserving Polish identity and politicized a swath of the Polish-speaking population.[42]

Even though the German government had not changed its education policies, teachers kept complaining about pupils making little progress with assigned material in the religion class. Further efforts to displace Polish language through Germanization of schools and their curricula were stopped, which meant that a considerable number of pupils in lower grades could still receive religious instruction in their native language.[43] The consciousness behind the school strike penetrated the masses and mobilized the population to engage in a number of social and cultural activities that surged after the strike. Polish sport, religious and clandestine education associations that constituted an important backbone of the reborn Polish society after the First World War saw a spike in the number of young people from different walks of life joining their institutions.

Organic work in Russian Poland

The policies of Tsarist Russian after the failed January rising of 1864 were directed at either preventing the emergence of Polish national identity or uprooting it altogether. In order to win over Polish-speaking peasants and weaken the Polish landowning class (the most nationally aware group), Russia abolished serfdom in Russian Poland in 1864. In order to press with Russification of its western lands, in 1866 the government made the Russian language a mandatory language of instruction in state and private schools for a selected number of subjects. A year later, the education law was extended to all subjects

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[42] According to Kulczycki, the school resistance "proved a hothouse for the growth of Polish nationalism [and gave] the emotional warmth of concreteness to abstract membership in the Polish nation." Kulczycki, XVI and 82.
[43] Ibid., 218.

with the exception of the Polish language class and religion. Finally, in 1885 the Russian government opted for almost complete Russification of Polish education by requiring that all subjects except religion be taught in Russian in all types of schools and levels of education. The use of Polish language in school corridors and yards was banned. Polish language could not be used in any public places, Polish shop signs had to be removed, and Polish newspapers and libraries were closed down.[44]

In Russian Poland, the underground, illegal education that offered secret Polish language, Polish history and Polish literature classes became the hallmark of the organic work and nonviolent resistance against the Russian authorities in the second half of the 19th century. In 1894, a woman activist set up the Association of the Secret Teaching (AST). In ten years, 2000 children were taking secret classes in Warsaw that constituted a half of all children who attended government-controlled primary schools in the city that time.[45] By 1901, according to Russian government sources, 33% of the Polish population in Russian Poland had gone at one point in their life through secret teaching and thanks to it could read and write in Polish.[46] The government statistics likely underreport this phenomenon as the Tsarist officials were often bribed to close their eyes to these illegal activities. In reality, secret self-education circles existed in most state schools in Russian Poland.[47]

One of the most prominent forms of the secret higher education was the “flying university” that developed in the mid of the 1870s. The flying university consisted of secretly arranged classes led by academics in private locations that offered students lessons in both science and humanities with emphasis on Polish history, culture, and language. More than 5,000 men and women went through the flying university in Russian Poland in the 1880s, including a future scientist and a Nobel prize winner Marie-Curie Sklodowska.[48]

The tradition of resistance in Russian Poland through clandestine organizing and teaching, self-education circles, and mutual assistance organizations created powerful fundaments for the emergence of the national movement to boycott the public school system in Russian Poland in 1905. More than 20,000 students, mostly young women and girls, actively joined the boycott.[49] The protesters pushed for Polonization and democratization of education. They demanded the introduction of Polish as a language of instruction in the schools and a representative, democratic and participatory system of education with societal rather than government control. Urban civil resistance spilled over to rural areas where thousands of new village-level schools were created by the initiative of the Polish-dominated local and communal municipalities. Groups of literate peasants began to offer secret instruction in Polish grammar and religion. Faced with growing social unrest in Poland, the Tsarist government in October 1905 permitted the establishment of private schools with Polish as the language of instruction for all subjects with the exception of Russian language, history and geography. Unable to win more government concessions, and faced with severe anti-strike measures - martial law and curfews that closed down higher education institutions, dismissal of 142 teachers, mass expulsion of students and severe movement restrictions imposed on students who remained enrolled under the threat of large financial penalties or prison sentences[50]- the Polish efforts began to concentrate on using the existing legal system to create a network of Polish private schools as an alternative to the Russified state school system.

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[44] Potter, 81.
[45] Edmund Staszyński, *Polityka Oświatowa Caratu w Królestwie Polskim. Od Powstania Styczniowego do I Wojny Światowej*, (Warszawa: PZWS, 1968), 197.
[46] Henryk Wereszycki, *Historia Polityczna Polski 1864-1918*, Ossolineum, Warszawa 1990, 91
[47] Ibid.
[48] Ibid., 85.
[49] Robert E. Blobaum, *Rewolucja. Russian Poland, 1904-1907*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), 169.
[50] Ibid., 177.

On the basis of both the experience and tradition of the flying university, the Polish Motherland Schools (PMS) was created in 1906 to facilitate and coordinate the establishment and management of Polish private education schools in Russian Poland. During the opening of the new school year in 1906 the PMS boasted 680 registered schools, which enrolled 70,000 students. [51] Within a couple of months these numbers increased to almost 800 schools with close to 120,000 members. Before the start of the new 1907-8 school year, requests for registration of additional 450 private Polish schools were sent to the ministry of education. When the Russian government reasserted its control over the Polish schools after 1907 and initiated a crackdown on schools, which included closing PMS, the Polish education organicists called for the establishment of parallel underground schools and training of teachers in clandestine education. Despite the arrest of hundreds of teachers involved in secret schools the, oppressive policies of the Tsarist government failed to crush the independent education movement. Public opinion remained negative toward the state school system, which was seen as the tool for Russification. Parents often continued their boycott of the state schools by sending their children to private elementary and middle schools and commerce schools. By the start of the First World War, 18% or 70,000 of all elementary school pupils were enrolled in more than 800 private schools.[52] A the same time, the private middle schools enrolled 38,000 pupils, more than 60% of all middle school students in Russian Poland.[53]

Although on a much more limited scale due to the severity of the Tsarist government's repressions that aimed, particularly after 1863, at complete Russification of the lands (e.g. banning the use of Polish language in any public places, including the school corridors and yards, removing Polish shop signs or closing down Polish newspapers and libraries all enforced by drastic penal measures such as lengthy imprisonment or exile to Siberia[54]), Russian Poland nevertheless experienced its own limited commemoration movement similar to the one present in Austrian Poland. One of its more notable events was the 1898 celebration of the centenary of Adam Mickiewicz's birth and the idea of erecting a monument to honor the national bard that met with public enthusiasm. Within two months after the initiative became known more than 100,000 people donated 200,000 rubles to cover the cost of creating a bronze statue. More than 80% of the donations came from private individuals, mainly from middle class and peasants.[55] The unveiling of the monument was seen as a great success of Polish society in mobilizing collective efforts to honor not merely the literary work of the famous Polish poet but also to celebrate a national symbol of freedom and resistance. The event itself with the plays and speeches to commemorate the bard was credited with raising national consciousness particularly among peasants and workers.[56] The Tsarist government had attempted to limit the preparations for and scope of the celebration by imposing censorship, limiting the availability of tickets, and cordoning off the celebration area with the police and military, but the celebrations proceeded with more than 12,000 people attending the official ceremony and many more coming thereafter. Self-organization of the citizens' committee to build the monument, the fundraising drive and the actual ceremony were seen by one of the contemporaries as

> … the most wonderful, sublime and invigorating signs of collective existence, … one of the great victories in the unceasing … battle for the existence of the Polish nation. Under the oppression of the strictest police surveillance …, under the oppression of censorship …, this miraculous plebiscite took place with lighting speed, in the face of which the mighty state stood amazed, helpless, and lacking courage to prevent and suppress.[57]

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[51] Edmund Staszyński, *Polityka Oświatowa Caratu w Królestwie Polskim. Od Powstania Styczniowego do I Wojny Światowej*, (Warszawa: PZWS, 1968), 202.
[52] Ibid., 207.
[53] Ibid., 209 and Blobaum, 169.
[54] Potter, 81.
[55] Kieniewicz, 394 and Edward Strzelecki, "Sprawa Pomnika Adama Mickiewicza w Warszawie," in Stanisław Tazbir, eds., *Z Dziejów Ksiażki i Bibliotek w Warszawie,* (Warszawa: PIW, 1961), 436
[56] Potter, 100.
[57] Witkiewicz, Polish artist and art critic, quoted in Dąbrowski, 149.

Women and organic work

Nonviolent resistance in the form of organic work and particularly in overt and secret education activities gave women a much more prominent presence in the Polish resistance during the nonviolent period than during the romanticized period of armed insurrections. Positivism and its emphasis on constructive nonviolent resistance through economic, social and intellectual development of the society highlighted a role for women that went beyond purely biological functions of child bearing and beyond the romantic and tragic archetype of the Mother-Pole ("Matka Polka"). Similar to the virgin Mary, the archetypal Mother-Pole had to suffer as her son sacrificed his life in the fight against oppression. Amidst nonviolent resistance, however, the Mother-Pole or Mother-Hero archetype was an equally heroic figure and a symbol of female patriotism though less as a child soldier-bearing housewife and more a civic educator charged with preserving Polishness of her children.

Women and girls played a leading role in Polish underground education in Russian Poland and during the school strikes under the German and Russian partitions. It was estimated that women led almost 40% of all activities associated with the education movement in Russian Poland at the end of the 19th century. Because in the household women were largely responsible for educating children, they were also active in generating, distributing and using elementary education materials and leading parent self-help organizations. The positivist Mother-Pole was an educator of her own children as well as a social activist, teacher, organizer, and writer who educated others, particularly illiterate peasants—a role that placed women in direct confrontation with the partitioning empires and their depolonization policies.[58]

Conclusion

Vast parts of the Polish-speaking population with little or no Polish national identity might have been assimilated within the societal, economic and political structures of the three empires that divided their country. That it did not happen was largely due to a mass nonviolent constructive program that became the main strategy of defense and resistance when the failed armed uprisings proved futile against militarily superior enemies.

The nonviolent strategy of organic work ensured national and cultural survival and successfully politicized masses in all three parts of Poland despite a widely different scale and intensity of states' oppression. Under the harshest conditions in Russian Poland where the onslaught of Russification covered all spheres of public life, the organicists carried out their work mainly through underground, secretive and illegal institutions and activities. In German Poland, the constitutional and economic parameters of the system allowed organicists to build legally permitted social and economic institutions to face German depolonization policies. Germans often harassed Polish institutions by imposing various administrative and legal obstacles to force their closure. While providing an economically permissive environment for the Polish entrepreneurship, Germans waged a total cultural war against Polishness and banned all Polish initiatives in the educational sphere. Nonetheless, Germanization of education failed to diminish the raising wave of Polish national indoctrination or stop open resistance in Polish schools. Finally, in Austrian Poland—the most liberal of the partitions, in which Poles seemingly had some loyalty to their occupier—Polish conservatives used nonviolent organic work to prevent open violent confrontation. Despite their instrumental and often particularistic motives behind the support for nationwide commemorative activities (e.g. as a way to preserve their political influence and avoid social revolution) the organic work in Austrian Poland did more to turn Poles, particularly peasants, into a nation than all of the previous armed risings combined.

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[58] Stauter-Halsted, 43.

However, in more recent interpretation, eulogized violence in Polish tradition and history have reinforced the perception of organic work as a form of "less assertive patriotism"[59] and as a tool of loyalist accommodation with the foreign power, equal to the betrayal of the generations of Poles who joined armed resistance and gave their lives in national risings. A critical attitude toward organic work is particularly paradoxical given the extent to which the 19th century nonviolent resistance and its constructive program of creating and running parallel institutions served as an inspiration for future generations of Poles faced with oppression. [60]

The conspiratorial experience of organizing and running secret education became ingrained in the collective memory of the national resistance. It was recalled during traumatic events such as the German occupation of 1939-45 and during communist rule, particularly the 1970s and 1980s when widespread illegal education, including the re-establishment of the flying university, ensured the truthful reading of national history, culture and tradition. In fact, working at the base of society became the imperative nonviolent strategy of the anti-communist opposition. Solidarity leaders drew parallels between their nonviolent efforts to liberate the society from the control of the communist government and the 19th century organicists and their nonviolent strategies to undermine the authority of the partitioning powers.[61]

One of the most influential exegeses of Polish history and past resistance during the communist period was undertaken by the historian Bohdan Cywinski who published his 1971 book under the revealing title, "Genealogy of the Defiant." The book studied the social-ethical attitudes of Polish intellectuals—the "defiant ones"—on the eve of the 19th and 20th century and made parallels between their nonviolent defiant attitude and practice against the Tsarist government and the then-contemporary resistance against the communist regime.[62] No other book of that time inspired thousands of Poles and showed so clearly the extent to which a century-old tradition of nonviolent resistance—although generally underappreciated in the annals of Polish history—could play such an important role in shaping the thinking, and determining strategies and actions, of a new generation of unarmed resisters struggling with no less oppressive autocratic rulers than their indomitable predecessors who lived under partitions.

Without nonviolent resistance, Poles would have been unlikely to take charge of their national destiny or use the changing geopolitical situation following the First World War or during the 1980s in their favor. It would have been equally implausible to integrate partitioned lands after the First World War and form effective statehood so swiftly without having had vast experience in nonviolent resistance and its tangible social, economic and cultural effects upon which to build. Although nonviolent resistance has been widely used by different generations of Poles against both external occupation and domestic dictatorship, this form of struggle is still awaiting much-deserved recognition of its role in not only defending, but essentially re-imagining, the Polish nation.

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[59] Potter, 53

[60] Adam Michnik, Polskie Pytania, Cahiers Litteraires, Paris 1987, 126

[61] Adam Michnik, *Letters from Prison. And Other Essays*, (Berkley: University of California Press, 1987). Adam Michnik, Polskie Pytania, Cahiers Litteraires, Paris 1987, 83-84. See also Adam Bromke, *The Meaning and Uses of Polish History*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 54, footnote * where he recalls the conversation in 1978 with one of the leaders of the opposition movement who linked their choice of nonviolent defiance against the communist government with the nonviolent, organic strategies of the 19th century positivists in Russian Poland.

[62] Bohdan Cywinski, *Rodowody Niepokornych*, (Warszawa: Biblioteka Wiezi, 1971).