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Clownocracy 2.0 and the painful end of patriarchy on the semi-peripheries

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1. New tendencies

The year 2016 brought three important social and political events. In June, the majority of citizens of the United Kingdom voted to leave the European Union, although in Scotland and Northern Ireland voters opposed this. In November, the presidential elections in the United States saw Donald Trump, a person who had never held any position in the state administration, win (although the majority of voters supported his opponent). In Poland, for the whole first year of being in government, the ruling party, which had been voted for by 18% of the citizens and which lacks a constitutional majority, has been disassembling the constitutional institutions and limiting civil rights.

All the three events or, rather, their underlying social processes, share two features in common. The first of these is an illustration of – often presented in the literature – the unintended consequences of social actions, while the other was their deep structural basis, which are the subject of further consideration.

The unintended consequences of social actions consisted in the fact that, as it turned out after some time, and it has long been known from the sociological and political literature, in all the three cases voters demonstrated a negative rather than a positive consensus, voting against rather than for. The British were in fact not massively 'xenophobically inspired severing painstakingly built-up relationships' (Gawrylewski 2016) within the common European economic and social space, Americans were not supporters of 'an unqualified, narcissistic, misogynistic' (ibidem) tax cheater as a president, and Poles did not dream of the violation of their civil rights by nepotic incompetent governmental officials, whose symptomatic ex-

ample was a twenty-six-year-old pharmacist lying about his alleged higher education, the figure entrusted with an important position in the Ministry of Defence.

From the point of view of the unintended consequences of actions it can be said that Vladimir Putin won the British referendum. The English voted for nostalgia for the British Empire. What it will result in is the end of the UK, reduced to the Disunited Kingdom of Slight Britain and Nothing More, plus re-united Ireland and independent Scotland within the EU. In this context, some authors – half jokingly, half seriously – predict a mass emigration of the English to New Zealand (Gawrylewski 2016) and Americans to Canada, while Poles are unlikely to come back from Western Europe, even from marginalised, but still well managed, (Great?) Britain. In any case, 'the distinction between the surreal and the awfulness of the real seems to merge' (Gawrylewski 2016). A hypothesis seems to be confirmed about the increasing role of the uneducated and anti-intellectual part of the electorate, which is very bad news for science (ibidem). A confirmation of this may be the fact that the president-elect of the United States expressed his disinterest of research, and even overt contempt towards it, and the vice president-elect his open hostility toward science (ibidem). In Poland, the current ruling party fits perfectly into clerical anti-intellectual sentiments, while in Britain the anti-intellectual trend is more covert than overt.

The common element of the national cases seems a frustration of the prevailing – explicitly class-oriented – neoliberal political system and its related political elites. The referendum in the UK, general election in Poland and presidential election in the US were chances to discharge the long accumulating 'rage at the establishment as a whole, the system notoriously not meeting made [...] promises' (Bauman 2016). In different degree in the core (USA and UK) than semi-peripheral countries (Poland), it applied to 'the victims of the deregulation of the labour market and the financial markets, unleashed and raging inequality, for the shrinking ranks' (ibidem) of the beneficiaries of Thatcherism 'and simultaneously growing masses of those who inherited only losses' (ibidem), as well as 'the middle class, sliding in the frightened, handicapped and uncertain of their fate as precariat' (Bauman 2016). In the core countries, voters may have expressed their 'censure not for this or that party, but the party system; express their disgust, indignation, rejection and distrust of the

whole establishment' (ibidem) and the promoted disorder. In Poland, voters had alternative parties perceived as anti-systemic.

2. A generational conflict or class contradictions?

The basic political conflict in contemporary Poland was described in terms of a clash of civilisations between neo-tribes (Rykiel 2016; cf. Bauman 2016). It is part of a broader social process, which can be observed in Western societies. The collapse of the existing social order (Bauman 2016) is referred to here. One of the most important aspects of the collapse is a growing intergenerational conflict. The generation born, or at least brought up, after the collapse of the world communist system sees the older generations as unauthorised beneficiaries of the change in the political system in the post-communist world, while older generations point to the unauthorised demanding attitude of the young generation (Grabowski 2016). The social and economic order is thus challenged both in civilisational and generational terms.

The collapse of the existing political consensus is most visible in Poland (Grabowski 2016). The opportunist policy of avoiding ideological issues by the state, conducted for years by the previous government, has been particularly questioned. Such a policy was in fact a compromise between the right and the right – the national-Catholic neo-tribe, on the one hand, and the liberal-promodernisation tribe, on the other, of which the first one – frustrated by their eight consecutive lost elections at different levels – took revenge not only on their real enemies but also on the state and nation in general. The institutionalisation of the destruction of the institutional mechanisms for the functioning of a pluralistic civil society was recognised as the most effective way to protect the winners against another defeat.

A new consensus between labour and capital in the social sphere seems urgent (Grabowski 2016). Under globalisation, however, a contradiction appears between the logic of semi-peripheral capitalism, aimed at the maximisation of competitiveness, and a quasi-leftist rhetoric of nationalist populism, which has denied itself the possibility of levelling social polarisation by ignoring the growing class divisions, including precarisation, and reducing them – according to the logic of the nineteenth-century capitalism – to the question of national solidarity.

In this very context, an intergenerational split appears, which was clearly reflected in the anti-system electoral behaviours of the younger generation in the general elections of 2015 (Grabowski 2016). Behind the generational diversity of the electoral behaviours, and – more broadly – political attitudes, differences of interest are hidden (ibidem). The result of the information revolution of the last two decades, being made in the context of globalisation, is the acceleration of change in generational identification, which now seems to be marked every 10 rather than 20 years (Grabowski 2016). Ten years is now enough for differences in the perception of reality and different ways of interacting with the environment to emerge.

The analysis of intergenerational conflict can begin with demographic reasons. Over recent centuries – until the 1960s – continuous population growth was observed in the developed world (Grabowski 2016). Each generation was therefore more numerous than the previous one. Since the 1970s, however, this trend has collapsed in the western world, which means that these societies are aging. This means a reduction of the working-age population, i.e. the labour force, resulting in an inevitable slowdown in economic growth (ibidem), and – more importantly – a change in the proportion of national income divided between generations. This implies not only an uneven, but also a different share of economic and social benefits and burdens between generations (Grabowski 2016).

Traditionally, the working generation transferred about 10% of their generated income to maintain the older generation. Now this percentage ranges between 14 to 18, and will reach 20 in several years (Grabowski 2016). Because the intergenerational mechanism for the transfer of income is often public debt, current and future generations will be forced to repay the liabilities incurred by their parents and, especially, grandparents (ibidem). These commitments will increase as a result of the need to take costly and long-delayed actions to protect nature, including climate, as a result of the environmental limit to economic growth, reached 40 years ago. The younger generations will therefore be victims of the unsustainable economy of environmental resources. They will bear the brunt of decisions made by previous generations for decades, if not centuries (Grabowski 2016).

Neo-liberal globalisation is superimposed upon this demographic trend, which results in a polarisation of income as a symptom of the broader social polarisation. In this context, while denied or trivialised throughout the twentieth century, Karl Marx's forecast is being fulfilled, according to which the inevitable result of the capitalist system is social polarisation leading to the atrophy of the middle class. This phenomenon is felt most acutely in the core countries of the global capitalist system because the concentration of capital in large transnational corporations contributes to the growth in income of the members of their boards, as well as workers in the peripheral countries, where production is transferred in order to minimise the costs. At the same time, middle class incomes in the core countries, and also in the semi-peripheries, decrease due to the reduction of jobs, and because of automatisation and robotisation (Klęski 2016). The middle class, defined in income terms, accounted for 62% of the population of the United States in 2008. This percentage dropped to 45 after eight years (Grabowski 2016).

The situation in Poland is, on the one hand, a function of the semi-peripheral economy and dependent development and, on the other hand, the legacy of the communist system and the process of political transformation. The generation that personally experienced the communist system – with its economy of shortage, material scarcity, restrictions on freedom and the social hierarchy reversed in relation to classical norms – sees the political transformation as major civilisational progress, and themselves, generally, as the beneficiaries of these changes, the more so that post-transformation social policy recognised the protection of the interests of the older generation, who had extensive experience of the previous regime, as an important objective (Grabowski 2016). The young generation, on the contrary, has no such comparative base simply because they treat the market economy, personal and political freedom, as well as free movement not only within the European Union as obvious. The reference point of young Poles is therefore not their parents' and grandparents' quality of life during their youth but the modern quality of life in core countries. From this perspective, the younger generation, of not only Poles, has had much less development opportunities than their parents had (Grabowski 2016; Klęski 2016), and, above all, they perceive the gap between the aspirations, stimulated by

the advertisement industry, and the actual, or at least formal, education level, on the one hand, and the de facto opportunities in the labour market (Klęski 2016), on the other. The result is frustration and relative deprivation. For the first time in history, the next generation has worse development conditions than the previous one. It is a structural problem not only in the case of the semi-peripheries.

In Poland, very slowly and reluctantly, the fact that this is a matter of class is being noticed. The reluctance to acknowledge it as such has ideological causes. Firstly, it is a legacy of socialism, in which the public was persuaded that class divisions were the vanquished heritage of the capitalist system. The fact that socialist societies had classes was annulled, opposite to literature, beginning from Leon Trotsky (1937), even though – as was indicated – the basis of social classes appeared the actual disposal of the means of production rather than their formal ownership (Domański 1997). Secondly, based on the fact of a substantial reduction in income disparities under socialism, the post-Solidarity right wing proclaimed the ideology of social solidarism, based on the belief that social differentiations are not antagonistic. Thirdly, in reference to the above, it was assumed – contrary to K. Marx – that the size of the middle class would constantly grow. Further, de-industrialisation, was also thought to lead to the actual levelling of antagonistic class divisions. Spreading precarisation, resulting from neoliberal globalisation, has however undermined these expectations.

Now one can find that class divisions are manifested not only in the access to financial capital but rather to all forms of capital, including social and cultural. Groups with higher cultural capital are able to impose their cultural codes on the rest of society (Gramsci 1999), and thus their way of understanding the world. An important element of the narration of the 1990s was the assumption that economic growth would be constant, and that higher education and hard work would be the key to success (Klęski 2016). The considerable demand for higher education caused, however, the massive emergence of higher schools offering mass education, forming the basis of mass culture. The mass production of higher-education diplomas made higher education at best a necessary rather than sufficient condition for success on the semi-peripheral labour market. At the beginning of the twenty-first century pre-

carisation reached the universities, also affecting academics (Rykiel 2014). In the polarising society, the social position of the young generation is difficult because of relative deprivation rather than absolute poverty. The class conflict becomes visible (Syska 2016), even though it is still very poorly verbalised. It is a – perhaps inevitable – paradox that while in the 1970s and 1980s youth dreamed of socialism with a human face, the contemporary youth dreams of capitalism with a human face (Klęski 2016), even though they do not refer to such conceptual categories. Meanwhile, the precariat is increasing as a redundant group of people in the capitalist economy or, at best, they are working below their aspirations.

The quasi-class conflict is pretty well visible on the labour market. It gives 'downright indecent advantage to the employer over the employee' (Klęski 2016). In small and medium-sized enterprises, backed by the traditionalist-nationalist government, vertical social structures inherited from feudalism are common, where the patron exercised paternalistic care of the farmhands, whom he disregards (ibidem) and despises. The belief that such a structure of the labour market is a post-transformation pathology (ibidem) does seem to underestimate the fact that it is an inevitable, if not intended, consequence of neo-liberalism. It was stated that Polish micro-firms are controlled by the services responsible for respecting the employees' rights on average once every 35 years, so practically never, because most of these firms do not exist that long (Klęski 2016). On the other side of the labour market, transnational corporations are located in which exploitation is manifested differently, because these companies offer 'civilised' conditions of employment (ibidem), dehumanising, however, and alienating employees. A spatial differentiation of the labour market should be added to this picture. In large cities, with their diverse employment opportunities, mobility between employers is possible while outside the cities, especially in the rust archipelago (Springer 2016), which is the equivalent of the US Rust Belt, there is no such possibility. The generations entering the labour market, i.e. young, are the most affected.

3. The end of patriarchy

Another aspect of the social conflict observed in Poland, although not restricted to the semi-peripheries of the world capitalist system, is the inter-gender cultural conflict or rather one between the models of culture. This conflict indicates the progressive collapse of the patriarchal system, recognised in many countries, or at least in many social circles, as the traditional model of culture and social relations. In post-communist Poland, this model was based on three pillars. The first was a narrow-minded nationalism, promoting the cult of 'a strong man, respectful of tradition and heritage, a supreme ruler of his family and fighting with weapons in hand for honour, dignity, etc.' (Pacewicz 2016). The second pillar was 'the idiotic Hollywood machismo' (ibidem), i.e. 'the lone cowboy culture [...] who, through brute force, alone confronts evil' (ibidem). The third pillar was neo-liberal individualism (cf. Adekoya 2016), according to which 'everyone has to take care of himself and his family alone, and the measure of success and attractiveness of men is financial success' (ibidem). Two successive generations of boys were socialised into such a model in post-transformation Poland. The institutional tools of such socialisation were: (1) poorly educated families, (2) the hierarchical school, (3) the Catholic Church, hungry for both ideological power and economic privilege, ignoring not only the teaching of Pope Francis, but also the reforms of the Second Vatican Synod, and (4) the inconsiderate and boorish media. The result of such socialisation was an anti-intellectual, manorial model of the 'nationalist-cowboy-businessman' (Pacewicz 2016), promoting, if not producing, 'mans' rather than men (ibidem). The former term appeared on one of the banners of the right-wing opponents at the Gay Pride Parade of 2013, which read 'We want mans, not fags' (Pacewicz 2016).

The above-described model of the social role of man turned out to be very frustrating for its hosts. The boys frustrated by this model turned out to be its victims, not having a chance to become men in the real social world. The result is that boys do not perform the social roles of men in society but rather play these roles in the sense of Goffman's theatre of social life (Goffman 1959). The most frequent performances in this theatre are 'grotesque stagings of masculinity' (Pacewicz 2016), e.g. Marches of Independence on 11 November, street brawls and xenophobic acts of aggression.

The above-mentioned frustration stemmed from the inability to perform the masculine role in real social life in the twenty-first century, as there is no longer room for 'real men' in the semi-peripheral precarised labour market (Pacewicz 2016). While the boys 'grew up without questioning the children's ideal' (ibidem) of the man, girls from the same generation learned foreign languages, 'went to universities, passed the late moral revolution and generally came closer to the European standards' (ibidem). In mid-2016, the female unemployment rate in Poland fell below that of men for the first time albeit only by 0.3% (Pacewicz 2016), but this slight quantitative difference is of a great symbolic significance as an indicator of the structural changes in the modern labour market marked by the end of the masculine industrial economy. Work requiring strength, endurance and courage, typed culturally as masculine, is declining, while the most desirable skills in the labour market are now 'communication skills, empathy, the ability to work in a team' (Pacewicz 2016) and protectiveness, i.e. the characteristics typed culturally as feminine because, with the increasing automatisation of manufacturing, jobs are mainly to be found in education and health care. Higher education is growing in importance, even though – as already mentioned – it is a necessary rather than sufficient condition for success in the labour market. While, however, among working women more than 42% are in higher education, among men this percentage does not exceed 27 (Pacewicz 2016). In the labour market of the twenty-first century 'masculine' jobs are thus lacking. This means the end of the era of male domination, especially by bullies, because the contemporary labour market offers at most 'non-masculine' jobs, which moreover are low-paid, thus making family maintenance by a single traditional 'breadwinner' impossible. 'Real men' are replaced by machines that are 'more accurate, cheaper-to-use' (ibid) and do not drink during working hours.

Similar processes can be observed in the core of the global capitalist system. In the United States, the main victims of the transformation made possible by technological progress are the white working class, but also the quantitatively shrinking white middle class. Since the 1970s, the opportunities for social advancement, sometimes significant, have gone to African-Americans, Latinos and women (Wężyk 2016). 'The working class as a whole suffered but minorities and women, in compari-

son to them, lost less' (ibidem). Two and, especially, three generations ago the economically active were mainly men, while white women did not constitute competition for them. Currently the role of men as 'breadwinners of families' is much desired, along with the dignity which accompanies this social role (Wężyk 2016). The need to compete with women in the labour market is painfully felt. Resentment results, i.e. 'anger against those who were allegedly upgraded too high and thus do not know their place' (ibidem), and dare usurp someone else's position. 'This is why white men may think they not so long ago had their status and dignity […] and now have been degraded' (ibidem). 'And, moreover, [...] if the state helps, it does mainly to those who do not deserve assistance' (ibidem).

Even worse, the dominant position of 'real men' is not only undermined in the labour market, but also in their personal lives. The traditionally socialised young man was waiting in hope of becoming a 'real man' and receiving the woman who will meet his needs, 'meet the commands and generally behave like a respectable wife and a private porn star at the same time' (Pacewicz 2016; Sorkin 2016). In the meantime, however, the potential partners of these 'real men' significantly developed aspirations of their own, the uneducated 'simpleton [...] ceased to be [...] the ideal of male attractiveness, and cleaning, cooking, caring for children and spanking by her husband – the peak of erotic ambitions' (ibidem). The gap between the expectations of both genders therefore increased with regard to marriage and family. While 'most women expect partnership and the equal sharing of responsibilities, the majority of men' (Pacewicz 2016) still favour a model in which the woman is a housewife. If, however, the young man could 'find a housewife with conservative expectations, he will still not be able to maintain her with his wage' (ibid).

Differences in education between genders are both the result and the cause of ideological differences. The primitive conservatism of boys contrasts with the more tolerant and liberal attitude of girls. Educated, cultural and liberal, seeking partnership, the latter are not interested in 'playing the role of dolls for boys' (Pacewicz 2016) and do not want to 'sleep with troglodytes' (ibidem). The result is that the 'real men' are not only frustrated economically, but also sexually.

Poland's 'real men' have not been able to discharge their frustration in the traditional way since 2009 when compulsory military service was abandoned and the Polish Army professionalised. 'Rejected by the labour market and the opposite gender, they seek support among the like-minded frustrates. In the vacuum caused after the end of patriarchy boys are supporting each other' (Pacewicz 2016), organising different kinds of masquerades and 'inventing their own creations, based on the most primitive cultural and historical associations' (ibidem). Their common feature is the worship of collective violence (ibidem). 'Nationalism, neo-fascism and football hooliganism' (ibidem) have great appeal within this category.

This phenomenon is by no means only cultural, but also class-based, because it results, among other things, from the marginalisation of the rust archipelago (Springer 2016) and the social exclusion of its youngest male generation. The workers' districts of the towns of this archipelago, which a century ago were bastions of those conscious of their class position supporters of the Polish Socialist Party, are now lairs of nationalism and the worship of violence, marked by nationalist, aggressive inscriptions (Syska 2016) and murals authored by the precarised generation identifying with the worship of violence and scanning slogans of 'national pride' during mass marches (ibidem). Paradoxically, although by no means surprisingly, what counts among the 'real men' is 'the sense of masculinity, which is achieved in a group of aggressive fellows' (Pacewicz 2016), despite the fact that 'most of the boys do not care [...] about aggression [because] the very sense of masculinity is sufficient. Faced themselves against a hungry refugee[,] they probably would share a sandwich with him'(ibidem), while in a group of fellows they demand 'to sink pontoons in the Mediterranean' (ibidem).

The reason for the 'turning of young boys towards the extreme right' (Pacewicz 2016) has very much in common with the 'incompatibility of the patterns of masculinity with socio-economic reality in the twenty-first century' (ibidem). The frustration of boys who dream to be 'real men' was used by the current government through the institutionalisation of the boys' parades of 'real men', even disguising them as soldiers in the framework of the newly organised Territorial Defence Forces. 'Thanks to this patriotic Disneyland, the boys' dream of becoming a real [man] are

protected against the collision with reality for at least a few years' (Pacewicz 2016). If this is an attempt to channel boyhood frustration, the attempt should be evaluated positively. It may not, however, be used to dissipate youthful frustration, rather its target may be the already quite big boys who have finally got the opportunity to govern after the eight consecutive failures. Viewed thus, it may be seen as advantageous for then to have those in the thrall of collective violence available for use for their own ends. The risk, however, is that – when unleashed – the collective violence may not be so controllable. Hope therefore remains that the government will not risk 'the actual admission of the frustrated boys to power and will confine them to the organisation indulgent games of valour' (Pacewicz 2016).

Meanwhile, as a part of its demographic programme, the government pays families for having many children and it lowers the retirement age. Women availing themselves of this offer are pushed out of the labour market. If they are poorly educated and lack professional experience, in a decade, when the children get older, they may have considerable difficulty re-entering the labour market. In this way, the conservative-minded men who rule in Poland send women home, burdening them with children (Mikołejko 2016); this policy can be considered an attempt to prop up waning patriarchy.

4. Frustrations, mythology and a cult

The association of frustration with a cult is not unequivocal, one can assume, however, that in peripheral and semi-peripheral collectivities the latter is a results from the former. What connects frustration with the cult is mythology. Collective frustrations are cured by outstanding figures of mass culture, who are by definition rare, they must be, however, 'ours', i.e. recognised as 'ours'. The excellence of the figures in the peripheries and semi-peripheries is achieved by their recognition in the core.

In the final period of communist Poland, the 'complex, desirous of successes nation attached [...] all its dreams about the magnitude, historical importance and global prestige' (Kalukin 2016) of the country to the Polish Pope, Karol Wojtyła – John Paul II. When after this pontificate Joseph Ratzinger – Benedict XVI became

a pope, Germans did not fall in euphoria at all, which was clear evidence that they were much closer to the core of the world system than the Poles had been. The latter built during the pontificate of John Paul II the myth of his omnifarious eminence and a cult developed, growing over time. The fundamentals of the eminence were real, especially given the background worship of mediocrity in communist Poland; John Paul II was, at the beginning of his pontificate, in fact young, athletic, open to the world, a polyglot, he easily made contacts with people, including the crowd, and had an undoubted charisma.

The cult of John Paul II made him 'the Pope of the millennium, slayer of communism, the most outstanding philosopher of our times, greatest of living writers, most comprehensive polyglot, most eminent mountain hiker, the author of the funniest anecdotes' (Kalukin 2016), etc. Impressive altars were erected to him, and his images were present all over the country: in 'terrible monuments and even more horrible daubs' (ibidem), which till today are available on local bazaars all over the country, and even in history textbooks. The Pope did not have the strength to fight this kitsch cult, but sometimes he 'gently taunted it' (ibidem) or faintly distanced himself from it. He moved the hearts of Poles rather than their minds, and it was sufficient for them (ibid). The people listened humbly when the Pope spoke about truths whether legitimate or banal (Kalukin 2016).

In post-communist Poland the cult of the Pope turned in mythology. The truths – right though trivial – were superseded by the 'temptations of freedom' (Kalukin 2016). The obviousness was easier to accept than internalise and, especially, automatically externalise in everyday life. The Pope expected his countrymen to implement utopia, which he had predicted, and even inspired, at the beginning of his pontificate (ibidem). This utopia was called solidarity, even Solidarity. In 1980, the utopia was based on the fact that people were equal, the intelligentsia thus went 'hand in hand [...] with the people' (Kalukin 2016). It was a – well-known for centuries – socialist utopia, which, however, neither in 1980 nor – even less – now no one would dare call it such. It was a utopian ideal of democracy and non-violent struggle. The utopia of a self-fulfilling – wonderful, but short-lived – forecast of Solidarity and the overcoming of the evil by good. Destroyed during martial law, it never revived in

this form, creating its legend (ibidem), a myth, which otherwise would be broken by the routines of everyday life.

Thanks to this legend, Solidarity rather than solidarity revived. The former, reduced from a ten-million social movement to fifty-thousand trade unionists, aims now for the role of a militant outlet of the traditionalist-nationalist ruling party. The Poles willingly accepted that it was Solidarity that overthrew communism rather than Ronald Reagan who armoured the Soviet Union to death (Rykiel 2006); they began to mentally part with Solidarity after 1989, no longer understanding the essence of their former raptures (Kalukin 2016). To solidarity – understood as the overcoming of divisions and a continued search for agreement – only John Paul II was faithful. The other participants of Polish collective life preserved it at most in the sphere of values rather than norms. The divergence of norms and values is, as known, anomie in the meaning of Robert Merton (1949).

After the fall of communism in Poland the old social divisions revived and new ones appeared. The division of traditionalists and modernisers seems especially interesting here. The Catholic Church appeared in the centre of the conflicts, and as a 'powerful institution it played a significant part' (Kalukin 2016). Moreover, both the above-mentioned trends emerged within the Church; on the one hand, 'post-synodal open Catholicism, [and, on the] other, the orthodox Catholicism of the tradition, protecting itself against modernity' (ibidem). The Pope stood formally above these divisions, being, however, the leader rather than an arbitrator, importantly, of both sides simultaneously (ibidem). 'He was the greatest advocate of the Second Vatican Synod in the Polish Church' (Kalukin 2016). As a practitioner, however, he perfectly knew that the mainstay of the faith were not intellectuals, but the 'pious people' (ibidem), attached to traditional values and, especially, practice. From this perspective one should see the conservatism of John Paul II who, not quickly yet efficiently, restored to their functions the French Lefebvrists, while severely admonishing the active supporters of liberation theology in Latin America. To progressivists he offered 'the crossing of successive borders of ecumenism, confession of the Church, [as well as] openness to liberal democracy and human rights' (Kalukin 2016). To traditionalists he pointed to the 'right to life of the unborn', the 'civilisation of death' (referred by

no means to the disgusting practices of the Inquisition, but to the right to abortion), 'democracy without values' and Catholicism as the only way to salvation (*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*).

While politically the dualism of John Paul II was effective, as it muted the dispute of fundamentalists and progressivists, spiritually it resulted in painful failure. 'In Poland, the charismatic Pope feeding the two competing identities became the only commonly approved authority' (Kalukin 2016), who not only settled any doubts, but also released people from independent thinking. The Pope assumed the possibility and the need to rebuild solidarity, which, however, did not exist in Poland any longer – beyond the political phraseology, reflecting 'the relic of the past – beautiful, but not to be translated into the experience of the era of triumphant individualism and selfishness. The more sublime in the sphere of values [it was], the more it aroused pity in a collision with the real world' (Kalukin 2016).

After the Pope's death, a generation of Pope JPII revealed or, rather, its myth did. This generation, whose entire life was during the pontificate of John Paul II, and even in its shadow, was to realise the Pope's testament: to 'take over the lost generation of Solidarity, which lost itself in hopeless disputes' (Kalukin 2016). It was, however, 'a great illusion' (ibidem), since for 'the young Poles the idea of solidarity did not mean anything any longer. It was alien and incomprehensible for them. Egalitarianism and the community experience of the growth times vanished forever' (ibidem). Individualistic societies are based on associations rather than communities. The latter take at most the form of ad hoc and short-term dummies – flash mobs – built 'around violent emotions, strong feelings [or] a memorable experience' (ibidem). A symptomatic example of this social phenomenon was a spectacular reconciliation of two long-feuding supporters' clubs of football teams, ended after two weeks with a usual fight.

The potential generation of JPII, understood as a community of experiences rather than lives, consolidated itself around the experience of the personal charisma of the Pope and the profound experience of his death (Kalukin 2016). When the experiences faded, the alleged community began to disintegrate. Clearly in a pluralistic society divisions could only have been alleviated by the Pope himself, who com-

manded to 'faithfully guard the great idea of solidarity that unites rather than divides' (ibidem). When the Pope died, there was no one who could and wished to do that. Six months after his death 'a split into two Polands – solidary and liberal' (Kalukin 2016) – was announced in the electoral campaign.

Paradoxically therefore, it turned out that 'the idea of solidarity is very easy to divide the community' (Kalukin 2016), besides with the prominent participation of the Church. 'Polish traditionalists eagerly accepted, after Benedict XVI, his vision of Catholicism as a fortified stronghold' (ibidem), recognising the 'confession of the Church [...] as a capitulation' (ibidem). Progressivists, on the contrary, admitted reluctantly that they had been fooled by the charisma of the Pope, accepting his sexual ethics, acknowledging unreasonably the firm stance on abortion as a compromise, unwisely tolerating the proliferation of religious symbols (Kalukin 2016), not only in public places, but even institutions, and even blithely signing unfavourable for the state concordat between Poland and the Holy See, not understanding that this act is not simply a recognition of the authority of John Paul II, but an interstate agreement with a party that disposes an efficient bureaucratic apparatus and holds centuries-long diplomatic experience. In this context and with these institutional and mental burdens, the progressivists began to 'forcefully make up for backwardness [to] the secularised West' (Kalukin 2016).

In such circumstances, the solidarity utopia descended from the stage of history, the parties to the ideological dispute 'diverged in opposite directions, with no chance of reunion' (Kalukin 2016), and the traditionalist party, because of the obvious institutional conditions, indicated above, is much more on the offensive, and in the Church and, especially, in his episcopate, dominant. The Polish pope lost the battle for the Polish soul (ibidem), because he did not see that while the liberal party is fighting for its future, the traditionalist party is fighting for its survival, and so is not going to commit mass suicide in the name of lofty slogans. What remained after the Polish Pope in Poland is therefore the 'unfulfilled utopia and a holy picture' (Kalukin 2016).

5. Clownocracy

The phenomena mentioned in the first section of this text are interpreted by some observers (Beniuszys 2016) as an emerging dictatorship of clowns. In this context, the clown is a form of 'new manager of human minds' (ibidem) during the fall of liberal democracy in the on-line world in the twenty-first century, part of the culture of Web 2.0. In the age of entertainment, 'the comic becomes a powerful political weapon' (ibiden). The clown in question differs substantially from the intelligent king's jester and his ideological heirs of artistic bohemia. The contemporary clown 2.0 is 'painfully dull' (Beniuszys 2016) and allergic to irony, because the capacity for subtle irony bypasses him he reacts to it with aggression or hate speech.

The crisis of the political system, described naively rather than optimistically as 'the end of history' (Fukuyama 1992), became both 'evident and indisputable' (Beniuszys 2016). 'The inadequacy of the model of making public decisions by voting' (ibidem) appeared with all its sharpness, not for the first time, during the build-up of crises lowering the standard of living of the average citizen, and therefore voter, but especially threatening the sense of his security (ibidem). The basic needs of citizens cease to be met by the existing political system, which results in their relative deprivation. The essence of this system is a permission for easy manifestation of – reasonable and unreasonable – frustration, and on the other hand, the institutional limit to the 'simple distribution of funds' (Beniuszys 2016); in this way a contradiction is revealed in the system of liberal democracy, leading to its self-destruction (ibidem) or 'a folk autoliquidation' (ibidem).

Simple repetitions of history hardly happen, however. Now therefore the 'shaved bald bullies with bands on their hands [...] do not meet [...] with widespread enthusiasm and the rapidly growing support of the masses, despite [...] the growth of nationalisms, dramatically increased demand for populism, pervasive […] political hatred, a deep contempt for the intellectual elite and the rejection of the free market' (Beniuszys 2016). 'Too similar [...] to the demons of the past, openly aping them, they deprive themselves the possibility of going beyond a more serious role than street cannon fodder of the new guard of populists' (ibidem). New demons 2.0 now have a different form, aims and methods of depriving people of freedom (ibidem).

The liquidation process of liberal democracy is diversified geographically and hierarchically; in the core it is in its infancy, in the semi-peripheries it is advanced, in the periphery liberal democracy was destroyed immediately after it had been incubated, while in the external arena it has never existed. The historical role of the semi-peripheries, including Poland, consists in the fact that they are a laboratory of this process, they can thus play either the role of the avant-garde, or a reminder – as the experiment with the outbreak of the proletarian revolution in the semi-peripheries in 1917.

In a non-liberal democracy political differences are no longer clear and interesting, but unacceptable and disqualifying. They are excluded from the circle of people who deserve 'respect, dignity, or even the status of a thinking man, with the right to speak' (Beniuszys 2016). The political opponent becomes an enemy, expected to give up his 'erroneous' views and undoubtedly evil plans, and at best to make public expiation. 'The nuances of anything only heightens aggression' (ibidem). The Internet has become a 'tool of total inclusion' (ibid), but also easy exclusion, objectifying everybody. Because its every user can easily be both a recipient and a sender of messages, 'to reach the masses has become [...] simple' (Beniuszys 2016), the ease to present on the virtual agora of all possible 'opinions, ideas and suggestions' (ibidem) has increased immeasurably. 'Also those whose denunciation in earlier eras would involve the removal of the delinquent' (ibidem) from the agora 'before he could sow confusion' (ibidem) today remains present. Now such barriers and filters in communication do not exist any longer (ibidem). The number 'gives the power, deprives of guilt, generates alibi and the demand' (Beniuszys 2016) to be reckoned with the views of the mass. 'Shame disappears due to the universality of the phenomenon' (ibidem). Everything becomes a mainstream view (ibidem). The number gives a sense of normalcy, right, legitimacy and moral superiority.

The new model of political communication creates a 'new, extremely anti-elite formula for political action' (Beniuszys 2016) – paradoxically so derided by supporters of 'people's democracy'. What once was a 'phenomenon of rebellion, which appeared regularly on the edge' (ibidem) and 'compromised itself by drowning in the mainstream' (ibidem), grows out to the elite level. Everything is in fact the elite now,

or – in the traditional sense – the elite is gone. The prevailing 'political, social and intellectual elites have been stripped of authority, respect and consideration' (Beniuszys 2016), and 'their opinions ceased to be regarded as particularly important' (ibidem), and ignored. Then the 'elites have been stripped of their leading role, which previously knowledge gave them' (ibidem). This advantage was abolished by a 'discreditation and a spread of the belief that knowledge is not needed to make policy and govern' (ibidem) the state. Finally, the old 'elites lose even the position equal to others' (Beniuszys 2016). No longer purely a matter of dislike, but overt hostility to the tendency to nuance, 'shunning the attitudes of xenophobia and hate, makes the elites the subhumans of public debate' (ibidem). Membership of these groups and possession of knowledge stigmatises and thus weakens one's position in the discussion. In this way, the rhetoric of Bolshevik populism returns. The 'eggheads' 'become the object of derision [and] contempt' (ibidem).

Given this background, a dictatorship of clowns grows (Beniuszys 2016). 'Comedy [...] no longer disqualifies populist politicians' (ibidem). The clown highlights the dullness of his political clientele and 'mercilessly exploits' it (ibidem). In many cases the clown is authentic. He is himself, but also 'a man of the people', a representative of his supporters and voters. Like them, he is 'blunt, relentless, hateful, foolish [...], cheeky and extremely effective' (Beniuszys 2016). Sometimes, however, it is 'a cunning pose of the intelligent man behind the scenes, who decided to come to power' (ibidem). The clown 'is the ideal leader for the new times' (ibidem), when the 'far-sighted leaders and brilliant politicians [...] are to be [...] sent back to the past by the people released by the internet from the barriers of decency, when the contempt towards knowledge, excellence, hard work and talent is omnipresent' (ibidem). The clown 'must be inventive and paralyse [...] every time with words that the month [before] seemed inconceivable to express publicly' (Beniuszys 2016). 'Everything can be destroyed, everybody [...] hurt [...] until the audience likes the performances' (ibidem). The clown 'is a politician [...] despising the opponent, [...] fooling around and [...] making a fool of himself, yet gathering applause and support from those he impresses' (ibidem).

In the era of clowns real public debate ends, because it loses its sense as a mechanism for the exchange of views (Beniuszys 2016). No argument is accurate. What is effective is the 'incessantly repeated nonsense discredited long ago [...] that insult human intelligence' (ibidem), because 'the audience loves it' (ibidem). Exposing the lies of clowns is ineffective because it causes verbal aggression from the mob. 'Clowns in history are always dangerous because they turn into executioners unexpectedly' (Mystkowski 2016). The only cure seems to be the 'vitality and resourcefulness of liberal democracy' (ibidem) to unfold a vision of the shortest, simplest and credible path 'to return to safety and satiety' (Beniuszys 2016), because if 'the middle class is too focused on itself, it soon gets a slap on the wrist' (Leder 2016), which in Poland is happening as a reaction to its display of 'unprecedented self-aggrandising' (Matyja 2016) to celebrate the quarter-century of the collapse of communism. The implementation of the above-mentioned vision may be impossible, even though necessary. Had it succeeded, the clown would have remained a clown, he would be still willingly listened to, but would have lost the chance of such levels of voter' support to give him authority (ibidem).

If it did not succeed, three theoretical ways of overcoming the clown would remain (Beniuszys 2016). The first is an opportunistic adaptation to the circumstances by the acquisition of the clown buffoonery as a form of communication with the electorate, while smuggling rational political views under this mask. This method seems to be rather ineffective, because a decade ago 'there was a great mobilisation of the majority of the opinion-forming elites against the then power' (Matyja 2016), although without the clown buffoonery, which resulted in 'consent for mediocrity of government in the next two terms' (ibidem) and the emergence of strong influential opponents of government, equally uncritical against their own ruling elites (ibidem).

The second way is to forcefully block the people's self-destruction of liberal democracy by maintaining the content 'of the constitutional rule of law and civil liberties' (Beniuszys 2016) while questioning its form, understood as the 'preservation of procedural democracy in the sense of conducting elections of authorities in the current voting formula' (ibidem), i.e. a de facto form of coup, which might, however, result in not only the political, but also moral resistance of the losers.

The third way is a tactical withdrawal from resistance, with the hope that the clownocratic government will collapse under the weight of its own incompetence and result in the transformation of civic consciousness towards a return to liberal democracy, or that such a change will be generated by a generational change (Matyja 2016). A hope for the latter is, however, forlorn, because successive vintages of youth acquire their political and polemic skills 'in the heat of the infantile war of soap bubbles' (ibidem) and learn that 'there are no other – beyond rhetorical – qualifications and other, outside coteries, promotion criteria' (ibidem). This way threatens therefore the danger of the failure of these expectations, which will result in the actual 'end of history' (Beniuszys 2016), different from that predicted by Francis Fukuyama. This end would be a result of blocking the mechanism for the exchange of elites, which would lead to the aforementioned institutionalisation of dysfunction and chaos (Matyja 2016).

6. Conclusions

The paradox, if not tragedy, of the situation is that nation-states are involved in global processes, including global class conflicts, which seem to be just the beginning of a new disorder of the world, a disorder that 'none of the voluntary or involved actors yet understands' (Bauman 2016). Embedding in cosmopolitan conditions, we did not begin to assimilate 'cosmopolitan consciousness[,] not to mention [...] building institutions capable of deal effectively with cosmopolitan circumstances' (ibidem). The reaction to this is the return to known structures, behaviours and norms, which turn out, however, to be tragically maladjusted to the new conditions.

At the national level, this leads to the construction of neo-tribal structures, in which the 'warring parties shun mutual contacts and beware of persuasion, conversion [and they tend] to evangelise their opponents' (Bauman 2016). They prefer to 'resort to insults than to arguments, since defects of aliens must remain forever the indelible and incurable flaw. Defects and vices of another tribe must be unrepairable, remain [...] an unerasable stigma, because is resistant to all attempts at rehabilitation' (ibidem). Meetings of antagonists cannot serve to mitigate the conflict, since 'the mitigation effort is senseless and in advance doomed to failure' (ibidem). While such

behaviours have little impact on the 'distant and the remaining-beyond-location global powers' (ibidem), they give a sense of relief, and perhaps satisfaction, with the possibility to give a vent to the accumulated frustration directed at the available symptoms rather than mechanisms for relative deprivation. The neo-tribal behaviours allow for a moment to alleviate 'the suffering caused by a sense of humiliation, powerlessness and helplessness that result from an incurable uncertainty of our place in the world' (Bauman 2016), to which the neo-liberal programme, espousing 'a "sink or swim" attitude towards citizens' (Adekoya 2016) can find no remedy. And 'capitalising politically on the fear caused by the influx of aliens [...] is a lure which few politicians [...] will resist' (ibidem).

Politics can thus be reduced to delivering bread and circuses to the masses (Michalski 2016). 'In the circuses, one juggles the slogans of "superpower" and "renationalisation", while bread is bought with money taken from the middle class' (ibidem). Then it is possible to abandon attempts to mitigate the results of globalisation which are 'deadly for the middle class' (ibidem). It is enough to replace the existing professional and business elites with one's own – mediocre, passive, but faithful, which result can be reduced – *nolens volens* – to the Bolshevik programme of the reconstruction of the social structure (Michalski 2016). 'The people are bought with redistribution at the junk level, and the new [...] business oligarchy' (ibidem) consists completely of the nominees of the ruling party (ibidem). In this programme, there is no place for the Polish liberal bourgeoisie (ibidem).

Before our eyes 'liberal values are largely rejected. A growing number of people are becoming increasingly willing to tolerate authoritarian and xenophobic tendencies from parties that offer them a sense of community and security' (Adekoya 2016). 'The liberal intellectuals are always in the minority. The people who see that open societies, being nice to other people, not being racist, not fighting wars, is a better way to live, they generally end up losing these fights. […] They are less violent, so end up in prisons, camps, and graves' (Stone 2016). 'And the walls grow, grow, grow, / chain swings at the feet...' (Kaczmarski 1978). It is because – to remind ourselves of an old point – existence shapes consciousness; *primum vivere, deinde philosophari*.

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