

Civil society and the management through culture in a semi-periphery

Zbigniew Rykiel

gniew@poczta.onet.eu

In 1993, the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity (GOCC) was founded. Since then it has grown to be the biggest non-governmental, non-profit, charity organisation in Poland. The GOCC aims to support health care in Poland by purchasing medical equipment for Polish hospitals and by establishing and running a few medical and educational programmes. Since 2016, the GOCC ranks at the top of the list as the most trusted public entity. The GOCC foundation organises the biggest open-air free entry music festival in Europe (*Great Orchestra...*, n.d.). The most well-known form of the foundation's activity is, however, the Finale of the Great Orchestra of Christmas Charity as the annual, nationwide entertainment and media event of a charity nature. The basic element of the Finale is playing the 'Great Orchestra', i.e. a set of music concerts on the national, and recently even intercontinental, scale. During the Finale, there are many forms of fundraising, including public appeals in the streets conducted by numerous volunteers. The collected money is spent on pre-determined goals related to health protection (*Wielka Orkiestra...*, n.d.).

On Sunday, 13 January 2019, the 27th Finale of the GOCC took place in Gdańsk. At the climax of the television broadcast of the ceremony, the Mayor of the City of Gdańsk, Paweł Adamowicz, who was thanking the gathered citizens, was mortally wounded by a cutthroat. It is difficult not to recognise this as a political murder because the murderer publicly shouted his grudge against the largest opposition party. Nothing indicates that this was a commissioned murder, but the expected beneficiaries of this murder will be the ruling party, which is ideologically right-wing nationalist though economically extreme leftist. Politically, this murder

targeted at least two organisations that this party hates: the GOCC and local governments. This of course includes the mayors of the largest cities, who mainly oppose the ruling party. The mayor of Gdańsk enjoyed immense popularity amongst voters. These two organisations have remained as few independent of the ruling party – who have acquired, subjugated or destroyed other independent institutions.

For the past few years, both the GOCC and the independent mayors of the largest cities have been the subject of a campaign of institutionalised hatred and slander by the right-wing media and the nominally state, but in fact partisan, television broadcaster (REM 2019). The latter issued 1618 publications of this kind about the mayor of Gdańsk over the last year (Rzeczkowski 2019). The mayor ‘was slandered, but had no right to defend himself’ (REM 2019). The Media Ethics Council stated that ‘the authors of these publications manipulate facts, suggestions and presumptions in such a way as to present [the mayor] as a person unworthy of trust’ (ibidem). ‘In none of the analysed publications [...] was [the mayor] given a chance to counter the charges, presenting arguments denying accusations formulated directly, implicitly, or in titles distorting the actual course of the described events or bending facts so that they would speak against’ the mayor of Gdansk (REM 2019). The TV viewers ‘were to get the impression that [the mayor] was at least a suspicious person’ (ibid.). Adding to the fact of unjustified harassment by the state law enforcement and tax apparatuses, it is difficult not to get the impression of tormenting ‘by the state in the name of an absurd ideology in which no one believes’ (Lis 2019). Thus, the political murder of the mayor was a result of management by culture – here a culture of hatred – and in this sense it showed a great similarity to the murder of the President of the Republic on 16 December 1922 (cf. Stomma 2019). A spectacular manifestation of this culture of hatred was the unpunished issuing of political death certificates by a nationalist organisation to eleven mayors, including that of Gdańsk (Burdzy, Rubaj, b.d.).

The GOCC is envied because of the massive, apolitical social support of its mission of collecting money for equipping health care facilities throughout the country with specialist medical equipment. This undermines the ideology of the right-wing/church monopoly on the actual rather than declared love of neighbours and

the culture of solidarity. During the finale in 2019, 175 938 717.56 PLN (ca 40 916 000 EUR) was collected (Kosiorowski 2019). For this reason, the president of the GOCC foundation was also the object of the above-mentioned brutal campaign of institutionalised hatred.

The mayor of the city of Gdańsk was the object of this hatred for several reasons. Firstly, after twenty years in office, he was elected in November 2018 for his sixth term. Secondly, he was a man of undoubted success, who managed to transform Gdańsk from a provincial city into a European metropolis. Thirdly, he was an open critic of the centralised and authoritarian actions of the ruling party, including its – at least rhetorical – xenophobia. Fourthly, despite being a committed and practicing Catholic, he introduced the custom of the ecumenical celebration of All Saints' Day together with the clergy of ten denominations, including Judaism and Islam. Fifthly, even though he came from a conservative milieu, he embraced various ideological movements of citizens, including the pride parades of sexual minorities, which was both hated and contested by the nationalist-right wing. Sixthly, he undertook – in spite of the politics and, especially, rhetoric of the government – the reception and settlement of refugees in Gdańsk. Seventhly, he led a policy of cultivating a multicultural, i.e. anti-xenophobic, identity for the city. Eighthly, Gdańsk performs a special symbolic role in post-transformation Poland as the cradle of Solidarity, and thus as the 'City of Freedom and Solidarity'. Ninthly, the mayor announced – contrary to the apparent reluctance of the ruling supposed Solidarity party – the organisation by Polish local governments of a solemn celebration of the 30th anniversary of the partially free contract parliamentary elections of 4 June 1989. These were the beginning of the political transformation in the eastern half of Europe.

Interestingly, when, at the next session, the Polish Sejm honoured the murdered mayor of Gdańsk with silence, this ceremony was ignored by the leader of the ruling party and two deputy speakers of the Sejm from this party. Two deputy women were dressed in red and the third one in bright yellow. During the debate in the Senate about the draft resolution commemorating the mayor of Gdańsk, senators of the ruling party opposed the statement that the mayor died as a result of cruel murder, that he, along with his family, was harassed by the prosecutor, that he was

a perfect example of the local governmental leader (which could of course be questioned), and that his Gdańsk is the city of freedom and solidarity. They opposed condemning the 'act of terror and hatred'. The records were sanitised. The sentence about the murder committed on the day of sharing good deeds was replaced by the statement that 'he died as a result of severe wounds', the finale concert of the GOCC was called 'a public gathering', and the final 'honour his memory' was removed (cf. Tym 2019).

The political interest of the ruling party in the assassination of the mayor of Gdańsk consisted in: (1) getting rid of the hated, and popular, political opponent, (2) the murder was blamed on the organisers of the GOCC finale and the leadership of this organisation (Pytlakowski 2019), who they said failed to provide adequate protection for the mass event, and they suggested the embezzlement of funds allocated for this purpose, (3) it was suggested that social peace and 'order' can only be led by the oppressive state, misidentified with a strong one. The Prime Minister, ignorant of the expert witnesses' opinion, decided that the killer was mentally ill. In this context, it is difficult to disregard the political mechanisms that led to the murder of Sergei Kirov on 1 December 1934, although, in the case of Paweł Adamowicz, there is no evidence of a murder on commission. After the murder of S. Kirov, the official announcement - announced before the killer was captured - claimed that the crime was committed by an 'enemy of the people' and his search is underway (Rybakow 1989). It can, of course, be said that in Poland the ruling party brought less benefits than expected from Mayor P. Adamowicz's death, but the question remains open whether it was because they did not want to or, rather, because they were not able to.

The death of the mayor of Gdańsk 'was not only a murder, but [also] an assassination of democracy, dignity and honour of the Commonwealth. In such a situation the deceased becomes a symbol, and his death becomes a sacrifice' (Stomma 2019). The funeral of the mayor of Gdańsk was therefore a great manifestation of the culture of freedom and solidarity, and above all disagreement with violence, not - as suggested by one reviewer of this text - collective hysteria. On the eve of the funeral, 45 000 people stood in a queue for five hours in the cold to have a chance to bow to their mayor for ten to twenty seconds. The funeral that took place the next day was

not officially a state funeral, but, as *Le Monde* wrote, it looked like a royal funeral (*Ogłuszona...*, 2019). Six mayors of large cities brought a coffin on their shoulders to Europe's largest brick basilica, where formally Catholic celebrations were accompanied by the prayers of representatives – the already mentioned – ten denominations. In Gdańsk, the official mourning after the death of the mayor lasted a month, and the mourning of the people was genuine, which completely undermines the hypothesis of collective hysteria. Other cities declared official mourning, and in many of them 'hundreds of people were going to squares to compose hearts of candles' (Bunda 2019: 27). 'Well-established hierarchical structures in society had disintegrated for a while, giving way to *communitas* [...,] an anti-structure drowned in the need to be together, in a community' (*ibidem*).

For the hymn of mourning, 'The sound of silence' was spontaneously chosen, and the moving performance in Gdańsk is available on the web (*Gdańsk...*, 2019):

*And in the naked light I saw
Ten thousand people, maybe more
People talking without speaking
People hearing without listening
People writing songs that voices never share
And no one dared
Disturb the sound of silence*
(Simon 1965).

On the eve of his death, the mayor of Gdańsk, as in every other year, was collecting small donations for the GOCC in the city streets. He collected 5613,11 PLN (ca 1305 EUR). After his death, a seamstress from a village near Gdańsk initiated on Facebook an action named *Mister Mayor's Last Can*, consisting in supplementing this can for an additional 1000 PLN (ca 233 EUR). This action was met with a massive social response, especially on the last day; during the eight-day collection, over a quarter of a million (264 507) donors paid small amounts, as a result of which 15 990 562 PLN (ca 3 718 735 EUR) was collected instead of the planned 1000 PLN (*Już ponad...*, 2019). After the official closure, the volunteers paid the additional amount missing up to a 16 million zlotys. The spectacular success of this initiative can be seen as yet

another indicator of the effectiveness of civil society in the semi-periphery – the periphery of culture of hate and in the core and of culture of solidarity and love of one's neighbour.

The last words of the murdered president were: 'This is a wonderful time to share good. You are beloved. Gdańsk is the most wonderful city in the world. Thank you!' (*Ostatnie słowa ...*, 2019). How current, then, are the words of Czesław Niemen's best-known song from half a century ago, which can be listened to online in the original version (Niemen 2013):

*Strange is this world,
where still
there is a lot of evil.
And it is strange
that for so many years
man despises man.*

*Strange is this world,
world of human affairs,
sometimes it's a shame to admit it.
And yet it is often
that someone with a bad word
kills like with a knife.*

*But there are more people of good will
and I do believe
that this world
will never die thanks to them.*

[...]

*The time has come,
the highest time,
to destroy hate in oneself.*

Two weeks after the death of the mayor of Gdańsk, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage decided to reduce the subsidy for the activities of the European Solidarity Centre (ESC) by more than 40%. The ESC was created by the murdered mayor. It was intended to be the central place for the commemoration of the thirty years of political transformation in Central and Eastern Europe, which began in Poland. The minister declared the ESC a defiant institution (*Sukces zbiórki...*, 2019). As such, he would only be willing to maintain the previously granted subsidy if the current political team could actually control the institution. The latter would then promote 'the true history of Solidarity', i.e. in line with the political vision of the current ruling team. This would in fact mean an institutionalised falsification of history.

Because negotiations between Gdańsk's local government and the ESC authorities with the Ministry ended in a fiasco, the seamstress, who 'sewed up Polish hearts' (Olejarczyk 2019) by *Mister Mayor's Last Can* campaign, announced on Facebook a public collection of money for the ongoing running of ESC, which had been jeopardised by the Ministry's cuts. The collection of 3 000 000 PLN (ca 697 674 EUR), announced for 30 days, ended in total success after 30 hours (*Wspieram ...*, 2019), and after ten days the amount was doubled. According to Deputy Speaker of the Senate and one of the main organisers of the strike in the Gdańsk Shipyard in August 1980, it indicated that, 'We do not need the government. This government' (*ECS odrzuca...*, 2019). This shows the effectiveness of civil society when it has values to focus on. Even if these are positive values, the condition of their success is a negative consensus – against something; here: against management by a culture of symbolic violence.

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