

Society against the ‘dictatorship of dunces’- movements for the defense of cultural rights in Poland

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Ewelina Tylec

The aim of the research was to analyze the idea of cultural rights and social struggle for their enjoyment in Poland of the 80s. This period, under the communist rule, has already been investigated by historians in quite a detailed way towards the sphere of political and civil rights when it comes to their influence on the collapse of communist regime. At the same time, the analyses held left aside the problem of cultural rights struggle as shaping the political system of the country. Yet the strife for the enjoyment of cultural rights constitutes an important motive for overturning governments. The demand for cultural rights, often been stifled and controlled by the powers-that-be reflects social and legal progress of civil society. In order to address the aforementioned problems, the research was aimed at presenting the mutual relation between power and culture. The aim of the research was to map the conceptual variety of the notion of cultural rights proliferating among the anti-communist opposition and to explain in what sense the social need for these rights could have contributed to the overturning of communism.

To meet my scientific interests (legal and literary ones) but also to address the problem in the most appropriate manner providing comprehensive answers to the research questions, the analysis had to be of an interdisciplinary character. Thereafter, the methodology of the research comprised a number of the OSA resources which could have been ordered accordingly:

1. The first part analyzed the reports of the Polish Helsinki Committee;
2. The second part dealt with the general frameworks of the cultural rights breaches as referred to in the Polish underground magazine *‘Kultura Niezależna’*;
3. Finally, the last part elaborated on the idea of cultural rights as stemming from underground press ‘law’ profiled *i.e.* *‘Praworzędność’* and *‘Prawo i Bezprawie’*.

In regards to the first part of the analysis, I researched two of the OSA collections (collection 300-55-10-1 and 300-55-13-1) where I encountered a number of the Polish Helsinki Committee reports, briefs and articles. Yet I decided to focus on the documents released by the Committee in the period between 1980 and 1989, what gave me ground for well-structured analysis of the country situation in the last decade of communist rule. This enabled me to track the developments and influences within the cultural rights sphere and their interaction with government. The Committee documents draw a picture of a state where, for many years, the government held 'ownership' over almost the whole system of culture distribution. Still there were two information 'streams'- the official and unofficial ones. The latter developed significantly during the years of 1983- 1986 becoming an interesting alternative for the official one. The OSA materials provided me with information on subjective and objective censorship interfering with the freedom of speech and freedom of thought. The Helsinki Committee materials draw a background for further research related to specific spheres and understandings of culture and cultural rights stemming from culture, as well as from law-profiled Polish press of the time.

The second part of the research was focused on the picture of culture as created by the underground culture- specialized press. I decided on choosing '*Kultura Niezależna*' being a magazine that successfully played the role of one of the most important commentators on the state of Polish culture in the period between 1983-1991. The period of publication of '*Kultura Niezależna*' overlaps with the dates covered by the Helsinki Committee documents, what constituted one of the main reasons for the inclusion of this magazine in the research. My research comprised all the issues released in the period 1983-1990 with special focus on the materials that I encountered in the collection 300-55-10-1, as well as in the electronic files provided by OSA. '*Kultura Niezależna*' presented the strive for independent culture in Poland as stemming not from the necessity to make a political protest, but from the natural need for enjoyment of culture (metaphorically named: '*painting and looking at the pictures*') and from preference for the 'program' of independent cultural movement over the governmental projects. The main editorial 'line' of the magazine was that culture cannot exist without having its self- esteem. People, creating culture of that time, had the obligation to ensure that the moral values were guaranteed. From among crucial sources of knowledge on the understanding of the notion of 'culture' as provided by '*Kultura Niezależna*', the most useful turned out to be the article series within which different (often 'unnamed') authors were defining the term of 'independent culture'. The texts gave distinctively varying definitional

outcomes starting with perception of independent culture as a phenomena standing in opposition to barbarity, to complete denial of the existence of the term treating it as an oxymoron that cannot appear and continue its existence without being subjected to any limitations.

The last part of the research elaborated on the idea of cultural rights as stemming from underground press 'law' profiled *i.e.* 'Praworzędność' and 'Prawo i Bezprawie'. Both magazines strongly criticized authorities for the limitation policy towards culture and information. The journals provided readers with the follow-up articles contrasting information on law as provided by authorities with the legal-reality assessment delivered by the underground. 'Praworzędność' criticized the situation of Poland being a country where even for the peaceful opposition activities, one could be sentenced for death penalty being classified as a high treason, where one could spend 5 years in prison for the distribution or printing of illegal literature. The progressing censorship and ideologization gave the country only 31% in the research on the human rights obedience held by the magazine. The magazine, stressed the ideological pressure put on the society and the slow loss of power by the authorities what was specific for that period.

During my stay at Open Society Archives I was fortunate to work under the supervision of a Polish OSA researcher- Piotr Wciślik who provided me with a bunch of useful information on available collections, as well as effectively supported my research by helping in systematizing and dividing collected materials into the three aforementioned groups. Having in mind, that the majority of available resources were produced in Polish, this help provided by a Polish-speaking researcher was of a great importance. Some of the important suggestions were given also by Andras Mink, the author of the book: *'The Defendant: the State – The Story of the Hungarian Helsinki Committee'*, who had already researched similar issues but from the Hungarian perspective. This enabled me to compare and contrast some of the phenomena that arose on the Polish side, with the Hungarian experience. My OSA research provided me with an opportunity to collect materials that will be of significance to further preparation of article which hopefully will be published this year.

Ewelina Tylec holds a master's diploma in law from the University of Wrocław (Poland) and is a graduate of the LL.M. in Human Rights from the Central European University. She currently works at the Belgrade Center for Human Rights (Serbia) dealing with the refugee law issues. Her major fields of interest encompass rights of vulnerable groups (with special focus on national minority issues), cultural rights and diplomatic law.