

In Search of the Third Canon, or Cultural Policies of the Third Republic of Poland (1989–2020)¹

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ABSTRACTS

Mit Kultur wurde in Polen nach 1989 auf zwei Arten verfahren. Im letzten Jahrzehnt des 20. Jahrhunderts und den ersten Jahren des 21. Jahrhunderts ging staatliche Kulturpolitik vom Dogma aus, Kultur müsse sich selbst finanzieren. Die zweite Periode wurde durch eine rechtsgerichtete Regierung im Jahr 2005 eingeleitet, die seit 2015 auf diesem Weg weiter voranschreitet. Kulturpolitik zielt in ihrem Konzept auf Versorgung mit nationalen Werten. Beide Konzepte ergeben sich aus der Überzeugung, dass es keinen normativen kulturellen Kanon gibt: Nach neoliberaler Praxis hat jeder das Recht, seinen eigenen Kanon zu schaffen; aber jeder Kanon ist nur insoweit von Bedeutung, als er zum Erfolg im Leben führt. Für die rechtsgerichtete Partei sollte der Kanon hingegen nationale, nicht klassische Werte ausdrücken. Im ersten Konzept ist Kultur zur raschen Vermarktung verurteilt, im zweiten zu Nationalisierung und Nationalismus. In der ersten Periode wurde der Kultur Unabhängigkeit unter der Bedingung gewährt, dass der Künstler für seinen Lebensunterhalt selbst sorgen würde. Außerdem wurde die Rolle der Kultur für die kollektive Identifikation und den inneren Zusammenhalt der Gesellschaft vernachlässigt. In der zweiten Phase unterstützte der Staat die Kultur zwar finanziell, beschränkte die Finanzierung jedoch auf nationalistische Initiativen und zensierte Ausdrucksformen unabhängiger Kunst. Die zu stellende Frage ist nun: Gibt es einen dritten Kanon, der diese Begrenzungen aufbrechen kann?

Culture in Poland after 1989 was managed with two different approaches. In the last decade of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first century cultural policy was based on the dogma of self-financing culture. The second period was initiated by the right-

1 I would like to thank Franziska Reif for proofreading the text.

wing government in 2005 and is still current politics. Here, cultural policy is based on the dogma of the self-sufficiency of national values. Both concepts result from the belief that the canon is empty but with different implications. In neoliberal practice, everyone has the right to have their own canon, while each canon matters only insofar as it leads to success in life. For a right-wing party, the canon should express national, not classical, values. In the first concept, culture is doomed to rapid commodification, in the second to nationalization. In the first period, culture was granted independence on the condition that artists earn their own living and, moreover, the bond-forming role of culture was neglected. In the second period, the state provides financial support to culture, but limits funding to nationalist initiatives, hence censoring expressions of independent art. The question to be asked: is there a third canon?

The cultural life of Central European countries after 1989 essentially consisted in an exchange of canons. Sociologically understood, the canon is not only a collection of the most outstanding works (literary, musical, cinematic, etc.), but also a basis for valuing all other works, a tool for selecting culture. To exchange the canon means to change its content and, moreover, to ask where it came from and what it is used for.

Such an exchange process was understandable and necessary. Throughout the post-war period, the canons in Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and other communist countries were derived from state policy. School reading lists for children and young people, film sets in cinemas, exhibitions in museums, and book series were all arranged in such a way as not to violate the system's foundations. The fall of communism necessitated the canon's redefinition.

1. Decentralization of Culture

The initial statement for the process of revising the canon in Poland was made by Izabela Cywińska, Minister of Culture and Art in the first post-communist government (1989–1991). She stated that the era of the political management of culture had come to an end. The political background of this declaration was understandable: Cywińska, an excellent director and long-time theatre director (Bogusławski Theatre in Kalisz 1970–1973, Nowy Theatre in Poznań 1973–1981), knew the cases of direct pressure exerted by communist party members well from her own professional biography. The 1980s in particular, following the imposition of martial law (13 December 1981), were a period of cultural policy conducted through censorship, orders, and repression. Cywińska felt this directly: she was placed in an internment camp for her performance “Accused: June Fifty-Six” (1981).

The above context explains why after 1989 the best cultural policy was considered no cultural policy. The new principle was that politics should stay away from culture. It was grounded in the belief that cultural policy could only consist in forcing artists to communicate specific content. In a government document published in 1993, “Cultural Policy of the State. Assumptions”, one could read: “Cultural policy in our country will

never again [...] consist of exercising centralized management and ideological control over cultural life and the activities of cultural institutions.”² The identification of cultural policy with centralization made decentralization the key term of the new period. In relation to culture, it referred to legal and organizational actions that delegated power over cultural institutions down the hierarchy – so that the decision-making level is as close as possible to a particular cultural institution. The ideal was to place authority over each institution within the institution itself – hence, for example, the management of a rural public library could make decisions on its own affairs without asking the governor’s permission.

This ideal, as it soon turned out, was not only impossible. It was destructive to culture.

2. Man Creates Culture

To explain this threat, it is necessary to briefly characterize the culture of the time of the communist state. It is obvious that at that time culture was inadequately supported financially and controlled excessively. Library book collections, theatre and cinema repertoires were underfunded and censored. And yet the state, though poor, took responsibility for all these institutions. It undertook specific tasks, e.g., to establish at least one library in every urban district, in every town with a population of up to 10,000, and in certain villages to serve as a library centre for neighbouring villages. A similar rule applied to cinemas: one cinema per district in large cities, one in a small town, and one for several villages. There was the principle of the relatively even distribution of poverty. The state subsidized amateur sports centres, village and community cultural centres, neighbourhood libraries, magazine reading rooms, and cinemas. To be fair, all of this worked thanks to the commitment of the people rather than a wise state cultural policy. The rudimentary and poor infrastructure needed funding and modernization. But it existed. This anachronistic and expensive infrastructure came to a head for the new state after 1989. The decentralization programme introduced then meant that there would be no orders anymore. What did this imply for, say, the management of a housing estate community centre? In such a centre there is a small library; next to it there are several rooms where classes are held for some groups every day: for modelers, for young photographers, for choir members, for seniors. For such an institution, “ideological management” is one of the smallest problems. The biggest problem is day-to-day functioning. And this was called into question: decentralization came with less supervision by the state, but had the consequence of reduced funding.

In practice – to use libraries as an example – this meant progressive liquidation: in the years 1991–1996, 928 libraries were closed (which constituted almost 10 per cent of all libraries in Poland). An even greater reduction took place among the so-called “library points”, i.e., small branches that were modestly equipped made books available to resi-

2 Polityka kulturalna państwa. Założenia [Cultural policy of the state. Assumptions], Warszawa, 10. August 1993, p. 3.

dents in areas far from regular libraries. In the years 1991–1996, 78 per cent of such outlets were closed down. It was not until the late 1990s that the closure process was slowed down: in 1998, for the first time more libraries were opened (68) than were closed (63).³ A similar reduction affected all cultural centres: theatres, museums, art galleries, and, above all, municipal and communal centres.⁴

Of course, after 1989, Poland had problems in all areas of life: debts to foreign countries exceeded USD 48 billions, the equivalent of two thirds of the national income,⁵ and unemployment reached 3.5 million people in 1994. Everything in the public sphere was underfunded – education, health care, transportation and communications, industry. From this point of view, the declining financial outlays on culture may seem like a less important matter. However, this less important issue of cultural underfunding allows us to understand the cultural policy in Poland during the transformation period. The reduction of finances did not result from poverty but from deep convictions.

Ministers and their advisors – members of society's cultural elite, former opposition activists – believed that man creates culture, not that culture creates man.⁶ A free man finds works of art suitable for her/him and discovers her/his own aesthetic preferences. S/he gets to know her/himself and shapes her/his personality through contact with culture. The cultural education of a free man consists in the fact that s/he rejects works of art that are irrelevant to her/him and retains those important and valuable. S/he does the same with regard to politics: s/he becomes acquainted with programmes and candidates, and, by discussing them, s/he defines her/his own political views. By fighting against enslavement, s/he defines the freedom s/he cares about. By choosing a particular type of culture, s/he declares a kind of allegiance – to theatre, opera, historical essays, or philosophy, for example. So, if someone reads tabloid literature, it is not because of low cultural competence but because of preference. According to this thinking, cultural competence depends on individual choices, not on the social environment one grew up in or the schools one graduated from. If no one chooses embroidery classes at the village community centre or if no one goes to the community library, it can be concluded that no one needs it. Such beliefs made it possible to treat the cultural choices made by the citizens as a factor shaping culture. And therefore, the concept of preferences empowered the state to dispense with cultural policy.

3 Data provided by: J. Kołodziejka, *Szerokie okno biblioteki* [Wide library window], Warszawa 2006; *Zainteresowanie książką w społeczeństwie polskim w 1996 roku* [Interest in the book in Polish society in 1996], Warszawa 1998; *Działalność bibliotek publicznych. Wytyczne IFLA/UNESCO* [Activities of public libraries. IFLA/UNESCO guidelines], Warszawa 2002; *Biblioteki publiczne w liczbach 2003* [Public libraries in numbers 2003], Warszawa 2004.

4 For decentralization with respect to theatres, see P. Płoski, *Pełzająca reforma* [Creeping reform], in: D. Wasyl-Jarząbek/M. Kościelniak/G. Niziołek (eds.), *20-lecie. Teatr polski po 1989* [Twenty years. Polish theater after 1989], Kraków 2010, pp. 397–417.

5 *Mały rocznik statystyczny 1990* [Statistical Yearbook 1990], Warszawa 1990, p. 232.

6 See J. Szacki, *Liberalizm po komunizmie* [Liberalism after communism], Kraków 1994, esp. chapter IV: "Protoliberalizm: autonomia jednostki i społeczeństwo obywatelskie" [Protoliberalism: individual autonomy and civil society], pp. 90–146.

3. “Breaking the State Monopoly in the Field of Education”

At the beginning of the 1990s, culture was left to its own devices, because it was believed that the free decisions of citizens determined which forms of activity could remain and which – due to the lack of persons interested – must simply disappear.

The policy regarding school reading lists corresponded to this. The first governments after 1989 recognized that the reading list was part of the old political regime: the list forced children and young people to read books not chosen by them, their parents, or teachers. Education ministers did not decide to completely abandon the school reading canon. Instead, they reduced the number of compulsory readings and expanded the list of optional readings from which all students in a given class, together with the teacher, chose several books. Moreover, in the 1990s, based on ministerial decisions, secondary school teachers were authorized to conduct the so-called author’s programmes.⁷ They gave the teacher the right to propose an individual outline to the headmaster, including – in addition to the obligatory books – a wide selection of works of European culture.⁸ Both educational innovations led to a loosening of the canon. Both also initiated activities that had been difficult to imagine before, such as allowing students to co-determine the reading list and individualizing their teaching.

This loosening of the canon interacted with the new right authorizing the establishment of private primary and secondary schools. The key decision was made in 1991. The Act of 7 September 1991 on the Educational System⁹ stipulated in Article 5.1 that a school could be either public or non-public. The term public school denoted an institution financed by the state, while non-public school referred to an institution financed from other sources (primarily tuition fees)¹⁰. The commentaries to the Act used the expression “breaking the state monopoly in the field of education”.¹¹ In 2006, private schools accounted for 10 per cent of the total number of school establishments in Poland,¹² in

7 Legal basis: Act of 7 September 1991 on the Educational System (Journal of Laws 256 (2004), item 2572, as amended), Article 22a.

8 The prevalence of authoring programmes is evidenced by the fact that already in the second half of the 1990s the first manuals for creating such programmes appeared – see Ś. Bogusław, *Edukacja autorska* [Author’s education], Kraków 1996; M. Szczepańska, *Program autorski – warto spróbować* [Author’s programme – it’s worth trying], Słupsk 1999; M. Szczepańska, *Program autorski. Jak go napisać* [Author’s programme. How to write it], Słupsk 1999.

9 Legal basis: Act of 7 September 1991 on the Educational System (Journal of Laws 1991 No. 95, item. 425). See: <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU19910950425> (accessed 13 January 2021).

10 Public schools are open and free on an obligatory basis, while non-public schools have the right to select applicants and are paid for.

11 I. Grzeszak, *Szkolnictwo publiczne i niepubliczne w Polsce*, <https://www.profesor.pl/publikacja,8369,Artykuly,Szkolnictwo-publiczne-i-niepubliczne-w-Polsce> (accessed 12 January 2021): “The model of education so diversified protects school education from state monopoly and creates conditions for further democratization and socialization of education. It encourages competition and efforts to improve the quality of education, upbringing and care.”

12 *Oświata i wychowanie w roku szkolnym 2006/2007. Informacje i opracowania statystyczne*, Warszawa 2007.

2018 the proportion increased to 20 per cent.¹³ At the beginning of the third decade of the twenty-first century, every fifth school in Poland is private.

This can be considered a logical part of the transformation process. In this process, as already mentioned, government decisions on education and the decentralization of culture stemmed from the deep conviction that a free person chooses the kind of culture she or he needs. Freedom was understood negatively here – as freedom from compulsions, orders, pressures. Therefore, the cultural policy of the state consisted in restoring freedom, i.e., removing regulations, loosening restrictions, eliminating orders. This worldview entails the belief that less regulation would result in more freedom, and more freedom would have the outcome of a richer life.

This view was held not only by members of the government. The vast majority thought so. Society, with its fresh memories of poverty and the regime, was also convicted that the end of the regime would mean the beginning of prosperity. Economic transformation was accepted because it was believed that once ideological restrictions were lifted, everyone would be able to make a good life for themselves.

Thus politics, economics, and culture were considered identical. It was believed that in each of these spheres each person, free from compulsion, chooses what suits her or his preferences. The victory of a party in an election, the market success of a commodity, the popularity of a work of art are all the result of choices made by society. Such thinking led to a redefinition of the canon. It was considered not as a permanent collection of the best works, but as an empty collection that people fill with objects meeting their needs.

4. Vote for Your Canon!

Extensive processes of deregulation and decentralization took place in every sphere of life. The condition for their success was the activation of society. In the cultural sphere, the 1990s proved to be unprecedented in this regard. Never before and never since had society been so intensively encouraged to participate in selecting canons. Not one canon, but many.

The two daily newspapers with the highest circulation (*Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Rzeczpospolita*), the most important opinion-forming weeklies (*Polityka*, *Wprost*, *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Newsweek*), cultural monthlies and quarterlies invited their readers to evaluate Polish literature (especially of the post-war period¹⁴) and to vote for various sets of the most

13 See Raport o szkolnictwie niepublicznym w Polsce 2019. Our Kids Media 2019, <https://ourkids.net/pl/pdf/2019-raport.pdf> (accessed 15. January 2021). The report informs (p. 8) that the number of all non-public educational institutions increased from 2014 to 2018 by 17.15 per cent (from 8,502 to 9,960). During the same period, the number of students attending them increased by 29.73 per cent (from 393,211 to 510,111), while the number of state schools increased by 0.39 per cent and the number of students decreased by 0.51 per cent. In 2014, non-public schools accounted for 18 per cent among all schools; in 2018, this percentage increased to 20 per cent.

14 See the survey in Włodzimierz Bolecki, *Pisarze niedocenieni – pisarze przecenieni*, in: *Kultura* 7/8 (1992), pp. 153–154. The questionnaire was sent to 43 prominent literary historians and critics in Poland (23 responses were

outstanding works. The elections were announced there,¹⁵ i.e., for the canon of young readers, the most outstanding Polish writers of the twentieth century¹⁶, the most outstanding world writers of the twentieth century, works of all time, the canon for children and young people,¹⁷ the canon of science-fiction literature, the canon of women's literature, the canon of all canons.¹⁸

The movement died out in the early 2000s. The government did not inspire the surveys, although the state media often publicized and supported them, increasing the elections' reach. The actions were not coordinated by anyone, and the fact that between 1990 and 1999 a wave of canon-picking swept through the Polish press was due to the economic situation and competition. The boom was born out of history: a strong caesura encouraged people to look through past resources and to check cultural capital, even if it comprised maximum reduction, gave the impression of richness. The media sensed a favourable moment of revising the past and began to compete among themselves for diverse canons.

The results of the canon action lasting over more than a decade, however, were far beyond conjuncture. First, there has been a denaturalization of the canon. The canon, of course, is not a natural creation, but until we start thinking about it, it exists like naturally inevitable, unchanging, and independent of voting. However, the decade of the 1990s made us realize that the canon is not only subject to change, but also that it is created by collective decisions. Additionally, allowing diverse social preferences to have a say led to a proliferation of canons. And the proliferation of canons has made people aware that the canon is secondary to the identity of a given social group: if there can be a feminist canon

received). The respondents were asked: "Which works of contemporary Polish literature or which writers do you think are underestimated – and why, and which writers are overestimated – and for what reason?". Most often mentioned as overrated were: A. Szczypiorski, T. Konwicki, K. Brandys, A. Zagajewski, J. Mackiewicz, P. Huella. Most frequently mentioned as underrated were: L. Buczkowski, Z. Haupt, A. Bobkowski. For polemics see S. Barańczak, *Tylko pości*, in: *Zeszyty Literackie* 41 (1992), pp. 154-183.

- 15 See [editorial article], *Kanon lektur za ćwierć miliona*, in: *Polityka* 38, 22 September 1990, p. 32. The results of the survey "What do (young) Poles read today?" (average age of respondents: 20–35) were: 1) W. Wharton, *The Birdman*; 2) K. Vonnegut, *Slaughterhouse 5*; 3) J. Heller, *Catch 22*; 4) K. Kesey, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*; 5) M. Bulgakov, *The Master and Margaret*; 6) U. Eco, *The Name of the Rose*; 7) G. G. Marquez, *One Hundred Years of Solitude*; 8) R. Kapuściński, *Lapidarium*; 9) A. Solzhenitsyn, *Cancer Ward*; 10) E. M. Remarque, *Night in Lisbon*; 11) G. Grass, *The Tin Drum*; 12) A. Szczypiorski, *Początek*; 13) Cz. Miłosz, *Zniewolony umysł* (The Captive Mind); 14) T. Konwicki, *Kompleks polski* (Polish Complex); 15) G. Herling-Grudziński, *Inny świat* (Another World).
- 16 See the survey addressing historians and literary critics under the heading "Kanon literatury polskiej XX wieku" (*Polityka* 11, 13 March 1993, and *Polityka* 14, 4 April 1993). The most frequently mentioned works are: S. Brzozowski, *Legend of Young Poland*, W. Gombrowicz, *Trans-Atlantic and Diary*, M. Dąbrowska, *Dzienniki*, B. Leśmian, Łąka, S. Wyspiański, *Wesele*, *Wyzwolenie*, *Akropolis*.
- 17 On 18 February 2003, *Gazeta Wyborcza* announced the list of 50 titles selected as The Canon of Books for Children and Young People. Half of the titles was chosen by writers, critics, translators, and publishers (including five proposals for translation suggested by experts on the children's book market). The other half was chosen by the participants of the poll (here the winner was J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series). For an alphabetical list see <https://wyborcza.pl/1,75410,1330796.html> (accessed 10.02.2021). Until mid-2004, 17 items from the list were published.
- 18 In 1999, the editors of the *Polityka* weekly announced a triple poll: a) for the most outstanding Polish writers of the twentieth century, b) for the most outstanding foreign-language writers of the twentieth century, c) for works of all time.

and a nationalist canon, a homosexual canon¹⁹ and a Catholic canon, each collective can define its identity through its own canon. Such a group, by announcing its canon, sends a complex message to the world: “We exist, we are rooted in tradition, we have our masterpieces.” Furthermore, this act has the implication of minimal and maximal social intentions. The minimal intention is “We will define ourselves”, while the maximalist intention is “We want others to conform to our canon”. In this context, the selection of canons in the 1990s should be seen as a test run for cultural domination. The middle class with the world’s classical canon requiring high cultural competence, the “nationalists” with the Polish canon, and minority groups joined the fight. This indicated cultural colonization or cultural conflict.

By the 1990s, the middle-class canon had gained dominance. However, the freedom of elections provided the opportunity (or the illusion) of cultural balance. This is why the polls of the 1990s were an ideal substitute for cultural policy. Successive ministers felt that they could not and should not have a cultural policy. They could not because the state of public finances did not allow them to. They should not because, following liberal beliefs, cultural policy is about forcing people to participate in culture in a way the authorities consider appropriate. Meanwhile, according to politicians, culture exists thanks to the choices made by individuals. The success a particular cultural institution (theatre, museum, philharmonic) enjoys is a result of the preferences manifested by many citizens. Thus, the canonical campaign of the 1990s fulfilled the hidden dreams of governments: the people themselves chose what they considered valuable. They founded schools, launched original programmes in schools, revised the existing canons, and created new ones. The media told the public: tell what you want, and the market will provide it. Thus, the elections confirmed the rightness of the idea of no cultural policy. However, it was only apparent.

Above all, the lack of a cultural policy created the mistaken impression that culture had nothing to do with politics. Since the government does not impose anything, and people themselves choose literary/musical/film works, culture becomes a sphere of free choice. The understanding was that the emerging canons revealed a desire for domination. Furthermore, the lack of cultural policy led to a crisis of shared cultural traditions. Multiple canons arose in place of a common one, dividing society into separate groups. Plural systems of aesthetic preferences should mean that a pluralistic and tolerant society was born. However, the multiple canons of the 1990s were not so much an expression of a new social consensus but merely a social pact of non-aggression. This pact collapsed when it became clear that canons were cultural representations of collective subjects and that the middle-class canon and the nationalist canon came into conflict. The third problem was related to this: the multiplicity of canons resulted into the individualization and rationalization of contacts with culture. This assumption collapsed when it became clear that engagement with culture, combining individual preferences with collective identity,

19 See *Dyskretne namiętności: antologia polskiej prozy homoerotycznej* [Discreet Passions: An Anthology of Polish Homoerotic Prose] [J. Strykowski and others]. Selected by W. Jöhling, Poznań 1992.

is always driven by emotions. These three issues – power, conflicting collective identities, and emotions – defined cultural politics in the decades that followed.

5. A Good Change for the Worse

In 2005, a right-wing party (PiS) won the parliamentary elections and formed a coalition government with conservative and nationalist parties. The new government immediately began to implement cultural policies.

The first sign of the direction of change came with the modifications to the secondary school reading lists made in 2005 by Education Minister Roman Giertych. The corrections concerned only a few titles but were significant: the minister removed Gombrowicz, Kafka, and Dostoyevsky and introduced patriotic and religious books.²⁰ In an interview with a right-wing newspaper, he explained: “We promote [...] books that help shape characters. Such values as dutifulness, honesty, truthfulness, reliability, diligence, patriotism, prudence, etc.”²¹

At the same time the new government replaced the authorities in the Warsaw Rising Museum (WRM) and made it a tool for shaping patriotic identity. In the multi-storey building unprecedented conditions were created – multimedia means, photographs, and films were shown in the space stylizing 1944 Warsaw. Going down to the underground or walking through the corridors made the viewers feel as if they were hiding behind a break in the wall or a fragment of an insurgent barricade. Particular parts of the exhibition forced the visitors to behave actively – especially children were invited to transform the viewed objects into drawings or paintings. The WRM designers made living contact with the space to get in touch with the past. The whole composition allowed the audience not so much to understand the uprising as to experience it – to experience the emotions of running through the streets of insurgent Warsaw, shooting at Germans, hiding in the gate. The museum has gained enormous popularity: in the period between 2004 and 2014 it was visited by 4.5 million people.²²

The activity of the museum was not limited to organizing exhibitions only. In 2005 a competition for a comic book dedicated to the uprising was announced. In this way the idea of feedback communication was combined with the modernization of means of communication. The idea “caught on”: every year dozens of works were submitted, most of them created by young people. The winning works were published, which provided young artists with publicity and widened the circle of interested people. There was a significant change in the history of the contest: in 2007, the winning entry was *Ostatni koncert/The Last Concert* (script: Monika Powalisz, drawings: Tymek Jezierski); it was

20 There were three books written by Jan Dobraczyński, one work written by Pope John Paul II (Memory and Identity) and the Pope biography *Wujek Karol. The Papal Priestly Years* by Paweł Zuchniewicz.

21 *Nasz Dziennik*, 2 July 2007.

22 See O Nas, in: Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego (The Warsaw Rising Museum), <https://www.1944.pl/artykul/onas,4512.html> (accessed 14 February 2021).

about the life of civilians during the uprising and was pacifist in nature. Dissatisfied with this approach, the museum's directorate introduced a restriction to the competition regulations in 2008, requiring authors to base their work on archival photographs published on the WRM website. And since the pictures are not about everyday life but about the battle (destruction, victims), it was obvious that the museum's management was trying to control the freedom of association and social memory, directing participants towards heroism and martyrdom.

Thus, cultural policy re-appeared in 2005 – and immediately in a harsh version. Its shortest explanation can be found in the statement of one of the intellectuals who created legitimacy for the new program during the debate “Memory as an object of power”, which took place in 2007. Dariusz Gawin stated in his speech then: “A democratic and modern language of national pride was not proposed in the 1990s. A lot of bad things happened because of this.”²³ This statement signals three key issues for cultural policy in the right-nationalist version. First, the essence of cultural policy is the shaping of the collective, which means that policy must focus on the masses rather than on individuals. Second, the collective is defined nationally, which gives cultural policy the character of a mass nationalist enterprise. Third, while cultural politics is supposed to be democratic, democracy is not about increasing public participation in governance, but about increasing public participation in pride.

This programme indicated the essential and necessary moves of the government. First of all, the victorious party proceeded to staff all cultural institutions relevant to the new policy with its own people. No subsidies were increased for libraries or theatres, museums, or cultural centres. Instead, those institutions were selected that could serve the programme – mass, metropolitan ones. New directors were also appointed at scientific and cultural institutions (e.g. the Institute of National Memory, the National Cultural Centre) to assist in designing activities or assessing their ideological correctness.

By bringing “their people” into such institutions, the cultural policy programme was partially maintained after 2007, when the nationalist right wing lost power to the liberals. Thus, in 2009, the National Cultural Centre announced a competition for alternative histories; the winning books (as well as some older ones) were placed in the “Time Turners” series. The series was inaugurated by Maciej Parowski's novel *Burza* (Storm). Fourteen volumes were published over the next six years.²⁴ In the series – commissioned, paid for and selected by a state institution – almost all the texts (with the exception of Twardoch's and Inglot's novels) turned out to be biased works. The authors portrayed a heroically suffering or victorious homeland, fulfilling the compensatory task assigned to them by the institution.

23 Dyskusja, in: P. Kosiewski (ed.), *Pamięć jako przedmiot władzy [Memory as an Object of Power]*, Warszawa 2008, p. 37.

24 The full list: S. Twardoch, *Wieczny Grunwald*; Ł. Orbitowski, *Ogień*; M. Wolski, *Wallenrod and Jedna przegrana bitwa*; Z. Wojnarowski, *Miraz*; J. Inglot, *Quietus* (2nd edn); A. Przechrztła, *Gambit Wielopolskiego*; K. T. Lewandowski, *Orzeł bielszy niż gołębia* and *Utopie*; A. Pietrasiewicz and W. Bogaczyk, *Powroty*; W. Szyda, *Fausteria. Powieść antyhistoryczna* and *Sicco*; see also the anthology *Sniąc o potęgę*, ed. by A. Haska and J. Stachowicz.

Liberals, having regained power in 2007, tried to dissipate the energy of nationalist pride and channel it towards other goals – especially sports.²⁵ Their basic idea was to turn “pride” into “satisfaction” and “nationalism” into “Europeanness”. However, they did not change the fundamental idea that the recipient of culture is the individual, not the mass. In this respect, their “programme” was a repetition of the old views on mass culture. They believed that it was used to make money, that it was manufactured rather than created, and that it was dangerously emotional. They increased financial outlays on cultural institutions, launched programmes to support science, and set aside money to support individual artistic projects. But they did not practice cultural policy.

When the nationalist party returned to power in 2015, the members of the new government did not have to change anything. They had a programme and, moreover, they had an idea of how to implement that programme. So, the policy of satisfying national pride was still in place. The government only accelerated the replacement of personnel, expanding the scope of operations. Thus, while in the 2005–2007 period the government focused on the largest institutions, everything has been taken since 2015 – from the community level to the ministerial one: municipal theatres, small and large museums, municipal cultural centres, metropolitan cultural centres, councils granting money for scientific projects.²⁶ Simultaneously the educational system was reformed: “The fundamentals of school curricula were changed, emphasizing the traditional canon and patriotic education. Middle schools were also abolished, which of course promoted integration and centralization of the system [...]”²⁷ In connection with the school reform, even the principals of elementary schools were replaced.²⁸ Thus, almost all means to conduct cultural policy were appropriated. The government can influence cultural institutions in terms of content, funding, and personnel. It can also “encourage” citizens to “take matters into their own hands”, that is, to picket theatres, block theatre performances or museum exhibitions, and demand the withdrawal of state subsidies for a particular institution.

The scale of the action revealed previously hidden implications. First of all, it became apparent that the category of the nation, if it was to have a unifying function, had to be defined in opposition to “anti-nation”. On a similar note, satisfying collective pride

25 In 2008, a government programme was established to build playing fields for youths. In the period 2008–2012, 2,600 pitches were built at a total cost of PLN 1 billion.

26 See M. Kubecka, *Prawa i sprawiedliwa? Polityka kulturalna PiS*, in: *Res Publica Nowa*, 20 October 2015, <https://pubblica.pl/teksty/prawa-i-sprawiedliwa-polityka-kulturalna-pis-53554.html> (accessed 14 February 2021). See also K. Kasia, *Polityka kulturalna PiS-u: wymiana kadr, słabnące instytucje*, in: *Kultura Liberalna* 598 (2020), <https://kulturaliberalna.pl/2020/06/16/polityka-kulturalna-pis-u-wymiana-kadr-slabnace-instytucje/> (accessed 14 February 2021).

27 I. Kurz, *Powrót centrali, państwowcy wyklęci i kasa. Raport z “dobrej zmiany” w kulturze* [The return of the headquarters, the cursed state members and the cash register. Report on the “good change” in culture], Warszawa 2019, p. 14. The author writes that the change in the education system “has led to chaos, job cuts, and increased discrimination against children from rural areas and smaller centres, in other words, it has produced exactly the social phenomena criticized in the programme [legitimizing the reform of the education system].”

28 For a synthetic discussion of the changes in Polish education after 1989, see P. Sadura, *Państwo, szkoła, klasa* [State, school, class], Warszawa 2017.

required finding someone who did not deserve it. For these reasons, the production of “national strangers” (Germans, Russians, Jews, Ukrainians, Muslims) and people “undeserving” (false Poles, false elites, leftists) was attached to the agenda of cultural policy. The saturation with pride of the nation shaped in such a way is based on simultaneously recalling national victories and sufferings,²⁹ on arousing hatred to the “strangers” and on maintaining contempt for the “unworthy”. Thanks to this, the connection between culture and power was made to look like (because ministers speak the same language of hatred as ordinary people), collective identity was formed, and culture was saturated with emotions.

6. Two Emptinesses

With regard to the notion of canon, in this text proposed as a prismatic category, it can be said that both cultural policies have done away with the canon. In neoliberal practice, the canon ceases to exist not because it is proliferated, but because it proves being empty; according to the neoliberal’s beliefs, everyone has the right to choose their own works. But this approach means that culture has no relevance to politics or to society. On the one hand, the neoliberal tells society: “It is not important what you read/listen to/watch – the measure of your life is individual success.” The nationalists, on the other hand, abolish the canon because they believe it is a collection of works subservient to the needs of the state, not a collection of outstanding works (anymore?). In the first conception, culture is doomed to rapid commodification, in the second to nationalization. In the first period, culture was granted independence on the condition that the artist would earn her/his own money. In the second period, the state gives financial support to culture but limits funding to nationalistic initiatives, hence censoring manifestations of independent art.

The results of the second programme turn out to be miserable: several hundred worthless works (film, literature, painting, etc.) have been financed; the education system has been deformed, deepening the inequality among students; over a dozen serious cultural institutions have been disorganized (e.g., Teatr Polski in Wrocław, the Museum of World War II in Gdansk); and the promotion of Polish culture abroad has been ridiculed. There is not a single outstanding work of art that would prove the rightness of the nationalist cultural policy. On the other hand, works that gained national and international recognition in the second decade of the twenty-first century (e.g., *The Jacob Books* by Olga Tokarczuk or Paweł Pawlikowski’s film *Ida*) were deemed hostile, anti-Polish and leftist by nationalists, which compromises their criteria.

29 In 2015, the National Cultural Centre announced the “Trauma and Pride” programme: “In a workshop, youths document a story, event, or character that is a cause of PRIDE or TRAUMA for the local community. It is preferred that the stories uncovered are from 1939–1949” (see www.nck.pl/projekty-kulturalne/projekty/trauma-i-duma/o-programie).

Thirty years on, we know how the wrong cultural policies work. Wrong policies are those that condemn culture to market competition, disregard collective identity needs, and exclude collective emotions. Even greater harm is caused by cultural policies that reinstate censorship and incite hatred in the name of collective identity needs. Two cultural policies have produced two empty canons. Is there a third one?