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Olgierd Górká's Polemics on the Contours of the Polish Nation (1933-1955)

In the course of the 20th century, the Polish state faced profound challenges, from its creation in 1918, until its destruction in 1939, and again, after its refoundation in 1944, one of them being the delineation of the Polish national community. Olgierd Górká, a forgotten figure of Polish interwar public life, took on numerous occasions polemical stances in defense of the Polish state in its various shapes, first during the Second Polish Republic (1921-1939), then during exile (1939-1944) and finally, with the gradual establishment of the Polish People's Republic (1944-1955). After presenting the larger intellectual and political context, this study will focus on three debates in which Olgierd Górká engaged: first on the definition of the Polish people around 1933, its culture and the ways of its emancipation, then in 1940, on the integration of minorities in the context of the war and finally in 1946, on the intellectual roots of racism in Poland.

1. The reshaping of the people as a recurrent mission of the Polish modern state?

The essential trait of populism seems to be the claim of being a people's exclusive incarnation. Whether this claim is interpreted as a pathology of democracy (Rosanvallon 2002) or as intrinsically antidemocratic (Müller 2016), the questions populism raises are nonetheless vital in the European modern states of the post WWI period. Namely, populism claims not only to represent the people fairly, but also to be its only legitimate representation. Doing so, populism defines what the concept of

“the people” entails. As the people became the sovereign modern state, replacing the monarchy of the Ancient Regime (Hermet 2011: 154), defining the people amounts to excluding certain types of citizens, either because they belong to the elite, opposed here to the people, or for “ethnic” motives. The most salient trait of populism seems to be, however, its particular discourse, distinctive in its form and content, and best captured by Guy Hermet (Hermet 2011: 25):

The method of production of the “popular”[by the populists] [...] is based [...] on the unilateral capture and in their raw state of the individual prejudices of a more or less considerable mass of people or sometimes the majority of them. And it is these individual prejudices that the populists turn into collective myths whose factious or fallacious character results from their dissonance with the long-term legitimization work that conforms to the dominant mode of political socialization.

In other words, populism, while claiming to represent the “real” people, absorbs, produces and at the same time reshapes a collective imagination. This dimension will be the focus of the following study: not the structuration of a given mass movement but the discussion on what should constitute the people, in the Polish political context shaped by populist movements and shaken by violent transformations between 1918 and 1955.

The Polish state was rebuilt after the First World War, on the basis of territories which belonged to three different empires: Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia. The new borders¹ of this state contained a diverse population from the linguistic and religious point of view. Thus, the Treaty of recognition of Poland's independence of 28 June 1919 included an important part devoted to the protection of minorities, confirmed by international agreements and the new Polish Constitution of 1921. The political discourse in interwar Poland needs to be seen in its fragile context of intense and continuous debates around the notion of what the people of Poland entails: who are the Polish citizens? What should be the status of the minorities? In other words, while instituting universal equality among citizens, how should particular practices and minority needs be considered? The Polish state was built on the inheritance from three different empires in terms of regulations, languages, and even railway infrastructures. The heterogeneity of the citizens living in this country was not in terms of belonging to different ethnical groups, but also and maybe foremost, in terms of different rights and limitations connected to their ethnic status. The new Polish state faced major economic and political challenges, burdened by this triple imperial legacy, with the harmonisation of rights inherited from three different imperial regimes and the institutions attached to it. Political tensions were strong, around the issues of agrarian and monetary reform, as well as the place of minorities in society (Benecke 1999). The new Polish state established, with other countries, equality among citizens, including voting rights for women. At the same time, the discussion on the organisation of political life in Poland revolved around the question of a “core” Polish people (Stach & Henschel 2013) and its minorities: from West to East, the Germans, the Jews, the Lithuanians, the Belarusians and the Ukrainians. As historians

1 These borders changed between 1918 and 1921, through the Polish-Soviet war and the plebiscites on the contested territories between Germany and Poland, in Silesia and in the Masuria region, as well as the occupation of Vilnius/Wilno in 1920.

Christhardt Henschel and Stephan Stach have shown, there was a constant tension in terms of minority policies regarding the construction of the administrative structures of the new Polish state. One could say that with the sectorial reforms occurring under different political majorities in the 1920s, the degree of liberalism or recognition of the rights of minorities varied according to the domain, not to mention a large disparity in the application of standards in time and space. The border regions as well as the major cities, like Warsaw, were characterised by a high ethnic diversity and most of all, by the inherited imperial ethnic categorisation that had to be adapted to the new regime, which introduced a principle of equality among its citizens. Another element of complexity in these policies was the competition for competencies in that field among various ministries: that of the interior, foreign relations, religion and public education and, last but not least, the army.

The minority policies could be divided into three periods (Stach & Henschel 2013). The first period ran from independence in 1918 until the 1926 coup with the seizure of power by Józef Piłsudski. It is generally considered as a phase of national assimilation to the Polish ethnic community. After his coup in May 1926, Piłsudski (1867-1935) introduced a more state-based, less of an ethnic integration policy qualified as governmental populism. The state became the sole representative of the people, and the people was defined by its loyalty to the state more than by ethnic criteria (Hermet 2001: 263). The last phase, after Piłsudski's death in 1935, was marked by a tightening of the situation for minorities, in particular for Jews and Ukrainians, with more discriminatory laws and rising xenophobia. The challenge for the state apparatus in post-world war I Poland was to reinforce the minorities' relation to the Polish territory and its people. To that end, after the fight for the Eastern borders, during the Polish-Soviet war of 1920, the occupation of Vilnius (becoming Wilno) and, on the Northern and Western side, after the plebiscites in Silesia (20 March 1921) and Masuria (11 July 1920), the conception of a "core" Polish nation that should constitute the backbone of the new state gained weight. The state-centered conception of "assimilation" or "loyalty" saturated the public debate in the interwar period.

2. The rise of a dedicated expertise serving the new Polish state (1918-1939)

In this context, some attempted to shape the collective discourse using expert knowledge, as a way to frame the discussion and define some practical policies, based on a "reliable" perception of the situation. This periodization could be qualified, *inter alia*, by the growing commitment of intellectuals and experts in the preparation of policies addressing minority rights, in particular, those introduced by Władysław Grabski (1874-1938), who headed the government from December 1923 to November 1925. The school or agrarian reforms were accompanied by commissions, made up of experts who themselves came from newly founded institutions in the 1920s, such as the Research Institute on National Minorities [*Instytut Badań Spraw Narodowościowych*]. Their work consisted in the collection of field data and the preparation and dissemination of more general reflections on the political conceptions of Polish society.

Among them, the Institute of the East in Warsaw [*Institut Wschodni*, 1926-1939] harboured many backers of the promethean idea, according to which the former non-Russian nations from the Tsarist empire should unite against Moscow to gain their freedom. After 1921 and the Riga Peace treaty signed between Poland and the Soviet Union, this conception of foreign policy was relegated to less prominent fields, namely the secret services, and no longer constituted official policies (Kornat 2012), as the emancipation of the Ukrainian minority within Poland was a burning issue. The Institute of the East became part of this unofficial policy and sheltered the activities of some emigré Ukrainian intellectuals, while also offering a platform for discussion with Ukrainian political forces within Poland (Maj 2007).

Its experts took part in public debates, with contributions in newspapers or short books on more cultural dimensions. Its Secretary General Olgierd Górka (1887-1955) was an eminent contributor to the public debate, in particular on the Ukrainian question. Olgierd Górka was an uncommon character, not afraid of polemics in political debates of his time. He defended his PhD thesis in 1911 and, during the First World War, he joined J. Piłsudski and his legions. He then took up diplomatic functions, and participated in the negotiations in Versailles as member of the military commission of the provisional Polish government. After 1918, he became a military attaché in the embassies of Berlin, Bern, Bucharest and Kharkiv. During the war, he also pursued his academic career, qualifying for a professorship in Lemberg in 1916. In 1925, he entered the military reserve and dedicated himself to his academic career (Romek 1997). When he was called on to become the secretary of the Institute of the East in 1931, it was probably because of his military and state service but also because of his academic profile: he was an expert and clearly spoke as such. In his texts, the tone contrasts with the usual tone of academics, by their explicit political and polemical dimension. Górka's work consisted, in a significant part, in making his compatriots reflect on the cultural context in which they built their knowledge on minorities.

3. Olgierd Górka as tireless middleman between the Polish state and its people (1933-1934)

Górka was part of a pro-state or even state-centered movement that emerged in the 1920s: for him the priority was to legitimise the “reborn” Polish state. He fought for the Polish state in his field of expertise, history, for a historiography that would favour an inclusive conception of Polish history, rather than exacerbating national feeling (Romek 1997: 62-63). To that end, he favoured a “revision” of the historiographical discourse inherited from the period of the partitions of Poland, where this exacerbation had been needed, in his view. To serve the Polish Second Republic, he advocated a non-Polish-centric historiography that could be used to educate the citizens of the new state and prompt their loyalty (Romek 1997: 67). This was the position he took on the discussion around the withdrawal of H. Sienkiewicz's 1846-1916 “With Fire and Sword” from compulsory readings in Polish primary schools in 1933 (Romek 1997: 69). One of the problems identified by Górka was that the Ukrainian question arose for the Poles in the context of a rich cultural, literary and historical heritage.

It was marked by the symbolic function of Eastern Europe and Ukraine, particularly in nineteenth-century literature relating to the history of the First Polish Republic, with its main representative Henryk Sienkiewicz, the author of the trilogy about Polish history, written between 1884 and 1888. This trilogy entails *With Fire and Sword* [*Ogniem i mieczem*, 1884], *The Deluge* [*Potop*, 1886], *Fire in the Steppe* [*Pan Wołodyjowski*, 1888]. It was written in the aftermath of the failed Polish uprisings of 1830-31 and 1863-1864 and functioned as a receptacle for questioning about the fate of Polish nation. It depicts key events of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569-1795) and of Ukrainian history: the Cossack uprising of Khmelnytsky (1648-1657) that led to the Russian-Cossack alliance of the Pereyaslav Agreement (1654) and preceded the Swedish invasion of central Europe in 1655-1660, depicted in *The Deluge*. The debate in interwar Poland was “based on solid research, although biased in a clearly pro-Polish way” and, “its original role was to uplift Polish hearts in hard times, showing how the defeats of the seventeenth century were overcome by the patriotic nobility” (Lerski 1996: 541). A more recent research explains the importance of these novels: they “helped to give a sense of national continuity in the period of divided Poland” (Bujnicki & Axer 2007: 14). The first part of the trilogy is summarised by Tadeusz Bujnicki as portraying the weakening of the Polish Republic through the confrontation between the autocratic aristocrats and the rebellious Cossacks (Bujnicki & Axer 2007: 264). When published, the novel immediately provoked a heated debate (Bujnicki & Axer 2007).

According to Olgierd Górka, the Polish perspective in the 20th century on the Ukrainian question, was heavily influenced by this epic novel. He criticized the Polish-centric and apologetic bias not only in public discourse but also among historians, with the recurring argument that it was necessary to return to historical sources but, above all, that the sources used to support historiography should feature both Polish sources and sources from other countries and in other languages. He started this polemic during a series of conferences on the topic, in the double context of a decision to withdraw this part of the trilogy from the obligatory readings in Polish schools (Bujnicki & Axer 2007) and the 50th anniversary of its publication. Several heated critiques led him to write several articles in the cultural weekly *Pion* (Górka 1933), which themselves led to many heated answers (Kosętko 2006) to which Górka answered with a short book a year later (Górka 1934).²

Górka recognized Sienkiewicz’s ability to crystallize the feelings of Polish society of the late nineteenth century on the Polish-Ukrainian-Russian history of the seventeenth century. He did not deny the importance of literary myths in politics and took the example of William Tell for Switzerland, as an example of a fertile myth.

2 On the echo of that debate: Halina Kosętko first published an analysis of the polemic in 1985, 100 years after the first publication of *With Fire and Sword*, stressing the critics’ side (Kosętko 1985). A year later, in the editions of the Ministry of Defence, Górka’s answer was republished with comment on its historicity and a biography of Górka (Górka 1986). The collective publication on Sienkiewicz’s place in Polish culture mentions this debate also on several occasions (Bujnicki & Axer 2007).

What is rather problematic for Olgierd Górk'a is the credibility granted by Polish society to the story depicted by Henryk Sienkiewicz (Górk'a 1934: 10):

The overturned image [of reality] of "With Fire and Swors" as it is in the face of historical reality, is not the fact of the unfaithful historical details of Sienkiewicz, for which, for the most part, he is not responsible, but rests on the completely false perception of these decisive and tragic years. This led him to glorify these aspects, these types and moments, which merited condemnations and thunderstorms, and led him to omit in "With Fire and Sword", truly beautiful moments of the years 1648-1649, who still await a great pen, guided by a true aspiration to the knowledge of the time.

He observed that the knowledge of the period, which has spread in Polish society following these novels, was more clearly marked by Sienkiewicz's narrative than by actual historical research. The Poles were better acquainted with the battles, which Sienkiewicz had treated, than with their historical importance. This applied not only to the general population but also to historians, even to Ukrainian historians such as Mykhailo S. Hrushevsky (1866-1934). Górk'a expressed hope in the successors of Ukrainian historians and cited in particular Miron Korduba (1876-1947), and his critical distance to M. Hrushevsky's work. A way out of the discourse inherited from Sienkiewicz in Polish society was, according to Górk'a, to return to a more serious historical study, presenting the brutality of struggles or presenting the characters of this novel in their less heroic historical reality. Beyond academic rigor, Górk'a advocated more awareness of the one-sided sources that were used in general by historians: chronicles written in their own language, in a particular context. He dedicated a whole part of his book to a critique of the sources used by other historians that he described as anachronistic. In other words, he drew on his academic status to discredit his opponents in the mediatic sphere.

His critics attacked his methodology and the lack of (adequate) sources to support his claim for revision. They also accused him of attacking a crucial element of the "Polish soul" (Kosętk'a 2006: 22). The intensity of the reactions testified to the place this book occupied in the Polish collective imagination (Baczko 1984) of his time; this was the actual target of Górk'a, not Sienkiewicz *per se*.

According to him, the enthusiasm for emancipation of the Polish people, as fostered by Sienkiewicz's novel, was not relevant anymore for a sovereign Polish state that, on the contrary, needed less divisive references and a more cohesive cultural frame. Olgierd Górk'a used his experience as a medieval historian who worked on sources in different languages and experienced the need to diversify the "evidence" on which an analysis was based. Doing so, he transposed his scientific expertise, especially the methodology, to inspire a more political stance. Górk'a made himself the spokesman of the people and its unheard elements but not in a Polish-centric sense: he integrated the point of view of the Ukrainians. Legitimated by his knowledge of the political aspirations of other peoples, he aimed at the promotion, the sharing of the recognition of their aspirations. His involvement was not limited to the production of analyses; he also supported the Ukrainian intellectuals who had emigrated to Poland or the right of Ukrainians to (re)create a university in Lwów after 1918. He took on the role of go-between for these groups, combining his political conceptions with his academic practice of source criticism. His conception of emancipation for the Polish people

relied on the need for solidarity and loyalty of the citizens of Poland to the Polish state, guardian of the sovereignty and freedom of the Polish people.

A few years later, he formulated the idea of the “ownership” of the Polish state, one that should belong to the majority, the Poles, but without using a restrictive conception of the Poles. He argued that doing so would lead to a segmented and weakened society. His attacks targeted nationalism within the country, in the context of the rise of fascism in Italy and of Nazism in Germany and tried to offer his own views on the relationship between state and nation in Poland. In this book, *The Nation and State as a Task for Poland* [*Naród a Państwo Jako Zagadnienie Polski*] (Górka 1937), he claimed not to be the creator of this conception, but the mere translator of the political figure that inspired him: Józef Piłsudski.³ Here, he formulated more directly how he understood his role as an “expert” on the Polish nation: an agent of transformation of the self-definition of this nation, its relation to the Polish state and to all parts of Polish society.

4. Olgierd Górka’s efforts for national inclusion during the war (1939-1945)

After the death of Józef Piłsudski in 1935, the political situation in Poland became tenser and Olgierd Górka took more and more distance from the government’s minority policies. He opposed the annexation of the Czechoslovak city of Těšín/Teschen by Poland following the Munich agreement in September 1938. He resigned from his position at the Institute of the East. When the war broke out, he joined the army once more but only briefly before he fled to France via Romania, where he joined the Polish government in exile. Between 1939 and 1945, he headed the Office of Jewish Affairs of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (*Biuro Spraw Żydowskich Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych*) in London of the government in exile and offered alliances to both Jewish and Ukrainian organizations (Romek 1997). This position, again halfway between academia and government, seemed to have offered him a relative freedom of movement. He continued to publish on Polish history, adapting it to contemporary issues. During the war, Górka faced renewed strong tendencies of rejection of minorities within Polish society. By then, he had a long political and diplomatic experience in the thorniest situations, and seemed to have taken the habit of confronting them frankly, without fear of polemics. Again, he faced the prejudices of his compatriots, this time in exile.

In 1940, the government in exile called for no contribution to German anti-Jewish actions, as they discredited the government with the Allies. On September 25, 1941, the *Armia Krajowa* [the national resistance army] called on the government in exile not to give too much publicity to actions in favour of the Jews because they demotivated the fighters in Poland. At the same time, Prometheanism resurfaced, supporting nationalist independence movements among the major non-Russian peoples that lived within the borders of Russia and the Soviet Union. In November 1939, the resistance body in

3 He concluded his book with a vibrant tribute to the authoritarian marshal, central figure of the Polish government from his coup in 1926 until his death in 1935

Poland of the Polish government in exile [*Komitet Ministrów Spraw Kraju*] issued a declaration supporting the creation of an independent Ukraine, federated to Poland. Later, in April 1940, Deputy Foreign Minister Zygmunt Graliński (1897-1940), in turn, suggested that the government in exile should reactivate Promethean policy in the light of new international developments, notably in the Caucasus and Finland, where anti-Soviet resistance was organized. The government in exile discussed the advisability of supporting Ukrainian forces, which included Polish citizens of the Ukrainian minority (Stoła 2012).

Olgierd Górk'a responded to these governmental positions and highlighted the contradictions of the Polish government. In January 1940, he proposed a memorandum on the Ukrainian question, in the context of the formation of a Polish army abroad, which raised the question of the loyalty of different groups of Polish citizens. He made a tour of the various Ukrainian political groups in exile, the supporters of Skoropadski, the communists, as well as Petliura's partisans. In his wartime analyses, he maintained his straightforward tone in his texts and underlined that he relied "on personal information". Indeed, his panorama of Ukrainian political parties was based on his past experience and the contacts he had had with various Ukrainian political circles in his previous duties.

The Ukrainian question took a more dramatic turn after the defeat of France. On 10 August 1940, he transmitted to Stanisław Stroński (1882-1955), the information minister of the government in exile, a detailed and factual analysis prepared by a Polish army officer Roman Zawadzki on the Ukrainian question. He presented in detail the various Ukrainian political organizations, their positions and the evolution of these positions towards Poland, Germany and communism. In this synthesis the main actors of each Ukrainian movement were named, with a description of the internal conflicts in these organizations. R. Zawadzki was particularly interested in the contacts of certain Ukrainian organizations with the Germans, notably on an "antikomintern" line without, however, indicating the contacts on the German side. He recalled and condemned the errors of Poland before 1939, including the pacification of 1930 in Volhynia. R. Zawadzki mentions the Jews only in the context of their leading role in the Bolshevik movement. The final and central point of this synthesis was the question of the Ukrainians in relation to the Polish army. The report concluded with a series of cases of Ukrainians preferring to join the French Foreign Legion rather than to remain under Polish command. Roman Zawadzki estimated that 4,000 soldiers left the Polish army, either because of communist nationalist ideology. Górk'a commented on this text, relativizing Zawadzki's remarks, highlighting alliances with the Ukrainian National Democratic Alliance (UNDO) movement and the goals of Prometheism. He tried to ease the animosity between the Polish majority and the Ukrainian and Russian minorities, perceived as natural by his interlocutors. As head of the Office of Jewish Affairs in London (seemingly a very small and loose structure), he mobilized against anti-Semitism. He maintained contact with the political representatives of the minorities from pre-war Poland and tried to attract the attention of the government in exile to their opinion. He regularly wrote reports on those contacts.

In November 1940, in the context of Molotov's visit to Berlin, he again addressed Stanisław Stroński with an analysis of the international situation and called on the

government in exile to organize a dialogue with all Polish citizens, using a more provocative rhetoric (Górka 1940). He began by noting bitterly that his compatriots were focused on dreaming of a great Poland. He recalled that war was not the time for such abstract plans, for great patriotic declamations, but for taking advantage of the situation on a day-to-day basis and not letting others take control. To convince his interlocutors, he recalled the Ukrainian experience of the First World War. They had not been able to bring about a sovereign state. He then tried to present the importance of a policy of alliance with the Jews in the USSR who would be the sincerest partners for the destruction of the pact between Hitler and Stalin.

To convince his interlocutors, he used terms and concepts that could be qualified as anti-Semitic. However, he advocated a policy of rapprochement with Jewish organizations, as they were potentially the most loyal Polish allies against Hitler (Górka 1940):

If there is a case where one can speak in general of an “anonymous Jewish power” and consequently of Jewish influence, then we must affirm that they agree on a one and only purpose, namely the destruction of the Hitler-Stalin association. To this end, all Jewish circles are ready for all efforts and actions, especially, they are ready to use every opportunity to compromise Stalin, first in the eyes of the Germans, then of the Bolsheviks. That is why all the Jewish elements, whether they support Zionism, or are Aguda followers [Agudas Yisroel, Union of Israel, an Orthodox Jewish political movement], or communists, etc. are absolutely in favour of Poland’s revival, of course as a dreamed of Judeo-Polish State [“Judeopolonia”] with great ease for the Jews, and, of course, equal rights.

The brutal truth, exclusively dictated by Polish interests, commands us to declare that Poland has its most sincere ally in the present world, only in the Jewish world and in democracy, in other words, in an orientation better known to us as Judeo-masonry.

This is a completely obvious truth, whether it pleases the Poles or not. The absurdity of Polish domestic politics was not that some yearnings were bad or good in themselves, but that they were inspired by Hitler’s agents. We stifled political life with slogans preparing us for war with the Soviets, whereas it was against Germany that we inevitably went to war. The tenfold absurdity showed itself in inconsistencies such as the excesses, of [pacification of 1930] in Lesser Poland [Małopolska] against the Ukrainians. This could only be damaging in one and the other case [of the war against the Germans or the Soviets], because it was simply the same political suicide as the anti-Czech campaign.

In this excerpt, he reversed the logic of anti-Polish influences attributed to the Jews by other currents of Polish political thought. He advocated a sort of common dream of the past, in order to motivate Polish politicians to accept future co-operation. By redefining Poland as a country where the “liberal, anti-fascist, and Freemason Jews” could blossom, he attributed a new interpretation of the relationship to this image of the Jew, which he drew explicitly from the anti-Semitic register to better underline its absurdity. He condemned in one breath Polish fascist thought, which led to anti-Semitism, the violent repression of Ukrainians and the ambitions of annexation of parts of Czechoslovakia. Loyal to his pre-war attitude and status of expert serving the state, he made all these denunciations in the name of the Polish state interest. Poland would survive only if the diversity of its population was recognized, not as an end *per se* but as a signal of credibility towards the inside (Polish society) and the outside (foreign governments and public opinions). In the context of extreme violence targeting the Jews in Poland, he tried to make his compatriots aware of their prejudices, that he addressed in a provocative way, to spark a change of these representations.

He was constantly concerned about the viability of the Polish state, the best way to ensure the safety of the Polish people. To that end, he replicated the style of his opponents to better reverse their discourse: he used their language and references to reframe them and advocate another conception of Polish patriotism, a more inclusive one. In his expert position, he tried to defend the political heritage of Piłsudski, marginalised in the government in exile dominated by the conservatives. From that perspective, his notes seemed to have received little echo and, at the end of the war, he preferred to return to Poland to put himself at the service of the new Polish state.

5. In post-war Poland: Epilogue of an expert criticism of misuse of scientific knowledge on the people (1947-1955)

After the war, Olgierd Górka returned to Poland, and became the director of the Office of Jewish affairs. In that capacity, he edited a newspaper dedicated to the fight against racism and xenophobia, *Prawo człowieka* [*Human rights, or literally The Right of the Human*], where he published a very insightful analysis on the pre-war intellectual atmosphere in Poland, and its anti-Semitism. Its first issue from 15 September 1946, called for the Poles to react to the Kielce pogrom that had just happened in July 1946 and was signed by Władysław Bartoszewski (1922-2015), a prominent figure of the *Żegota* (*Rada Pomocy Żydom: an organisation in occupied Poland that helped Polish Jews*).

In the “mission statement” [*“Nasze wyznanie wiary”*], also on the front page of the newspaper’s first issue, the authors, including Górka, declared that their ambition was to fight against racism and anti-Semitism, fostered by the Germans but nonetheless present in pre-war Poland. However, the Cold War spirit already tainted these texts: against the accusation of generalised anti-Semitism in Poland, the authors recalled, on the one hand, the help of *Żegota* and Western anti-Semitism, on the other.

A longer article on racism, written by Górka was published in the same issue, titled: “The absurdity of racism” (Górka 1946b). After his long years of polemics on fundamental issues, Górka started by recalling how one of his professors once told him that the more an idea was wrong, the more it was attractive. He recalled how he had hoped that debates and calm explanations could help overcome this. Unfortunately, the last forty years had proven him wrong. He then developed an acid critique of racism and of the absurdity of the attribution of physical traits to certain “races”, jokingly stating that many Jews had a more “Nordic” appearance than Polish or even German peasants. He referred then to the absurdity of a more “scientific” discourse on races and quoted a pre-war Polish anthropologist who wrote in 1925 that Prussians and Jews had the same psychological traits and constituted a single racial community. He concluded with a call for more progressive ideas for Poland.

In the next issue, he tackled another stereotype about Polish-Jewish relations (Górka 1946a). He recalled that statistics, especially the demographic ones, are in the hands of the state, which uses them to legitimise its authority. He then started a systematic critique of the construction of such statistics, exploited by a “pseudoscience that took up 90 % of the pre-war public debate [*publicystika*]”. The most classical target were the Jews: either their presence was underestimated, to lower

their rights, or the numbers were inflated to fuel the “flooding” [*zalewka*] image. Again, these numbers and ideas were circulated by professors in the Polish pre-war universities. Again, Olgierd Górka used exaggerations to criticise his opponents, but henceforth in a context where the debate was much less open than it used to be. His attacks on pre-war scientific culture were now led in a context of general attacks on the pre-war Polish regime. The newspapers were rapidly Stalinised and dedicated to supporting independence struggles around the world, especially in Asia, and the discussion on clearing the Polish heritage of anti-Semitism disappeared from its columns.

Górka then joined the Polish diplomatic service, and represented Poland in Jerusalem between March 1947 and August 1952, before returning to Poland. In December 1952, he returned to his academic career, at the University of Warsaw, as an independent researcher [*samodzielny pracownik nauki*] at the Institute of History, after a car crash had forced him to leave his work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Romek 1997: 23). He was however banned from teaching students. He pursued his work on the Polish history and its myths until his death in 1955.

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Through Olgierd Górka, one can trace the emergence of experts on the Polish nation in the public debate: a figure using his knowledge and status to support his political conceptions as well as pedagogical and scientific tools to disseminate and defend his political positions. He refused the exclusion of stigmatized groups and assumed the complexity of Polish society. He did that in the name of historical and contemporary truth reflecting the reality of Polish society. He tried to promote another discourse on his people, one that was less defined by national demarcations, attacking the discourses that had a more segregating conception of Polish citizens. His polemical style, strongly inspired by his nationalist opponents, served the revision of the emancipation concept inherited from the partition period until 1918, that he deemed harmful for the contemporary viability of Polish society, without succeeding in reversing the tendencies of the governments he served.

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