THE 1905-1907 REVOLUTION IN THE KINGDOM OF POLAND: ARTICULATION OF POLITICAL SUBJECTIVITIES AMONG WORKERS

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Abstract

The paper examines the political mobilisation and construction of modern political identities among workers during the 1905-1907 Revolution in the Kingdom of Poland. Political process, creation and alternation of the political subjectivities of workers are explained in terms of hegemonic articulations as presented by the political discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau. While social claims merged with resistance against the national oppression of the Tsarist regime and the struggle for social and political recognition, political subjectivities took various contingent and competitive forms; thus the same demands could be integrated into different political narratives and collective identities. Combining discourse theory and process tracing makes alternations of the political field in time intelligible.

Keywords

1905 Revolution, mobilisation, the political, socialism, nationalism

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'Bloody Sunday', when a crowd led by Father Gapon holding icons and portraits of the hitherto praised Tsar in St. Petersburg was fired upon by Tsarist soldiers, did not only trigger the revolutionary process in "mainland" Russia, but astonishingly it instantly catalysed outbursts of rioting in the areas at the fringes of the Russian empire as well (cf. Harcave, 1964; Ascher, 2004). It was a direct impulse, a spark initiating mass resistance. Rural areas witnessed peasant strikes and the felling of the landed gentry's forests. Industrial centres such as Łódź, Warsaw or Zagłębie Dąbrowskie underwent a complex process consisting of waves of contention, and state repression began. This led to uncountable minor political and economic strikes, bloody street demonstrations, a quasi-uprising with street barricades, and fratricidal struggles between workers. After almost two years, the events of 1905-1907, however dramatic, did not bring any major change in the political system or class structure. The revolution failed and was bloodily suppressed, leading to tremendous social disintegration and political repression (Blobaum, 1995; Kalabinski & Tych, 1976). Elusive political gains against the Tsarist state such as the "October Manifesto," with moderate political liberties and a loosening of censorship and several rounds of Duma elections were soon cancelled after the tsarist regime regained some vigor. The "national question," in Poland, remained unresolved and hopes for autonomy remained in vain. However, there is another narrative to this chain of events.

Poland had vanished from the map of Europe in the late 18th century (cf. Prazmowska, 2004), after the weak state, incapable of reforms due to an archaic economic structure (neo-feudal serfdom) and the domination of regressive landed, gentry fell to the territorial ambitions of Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Prussia. The 19th century was a time of large imperial states. Struggles to regain sovereignty and independence were embodied in a series of "national," noble-led uprisings in 1894, 1831, and 1863, mostly directed against Russia, which controlled the lion's share of former Polish territory including the capital city, Warsaw. The uprisings worsened the situation, leading to diminished autonomy for the Kingdom of Poland under Russian control, heralded by waves of vicious repression and inducing a burst of cultural despair. The peasant question remained unresolved; however the Tsarist administration abolished serfdom and introduced the partial enfranchisement of peasants in 1864 in order to prevent their identification with the Polish national project of the noble class. It was no longer possible to ignore the changes in the world economy and the industrial revolution. Polish elites recognised the necessity of modernising the country, even under Russian control.

Another issue was added to the peasant question: the rapidly growing masses of proletarians denied any social or economic protection and fully exposed to the discontent of early industrial capitalism. 1905-1907 saw an outburst of accumulated tensions in the Kingdom of Poland along national and class divisions (cf. Kalabinski & Tych, 1976). Writings on revolution in Russia paint resistance by various social groups against a repressive state apparatus as a kind of liberal-bourgeois revolution in conditions of peripheral distortion, supplemented with demands of other groups – above all, the workers (cf. Harcave, 1964; Ascher, 2004).

The Polish context was significantly different as it involved a national question – resistance against the Tsar qua foreign rule- and class antagonism - economic issues driving protest against worker oppression by factory owners. The most important actor was not the Russian Empire but the industrial working class, who waged the first modern

urban uprising in the Russian Empire, and entered political parties, which crossed the threshold of mass politics in “Poland” for the first time (Blobaum, 1995, p. 73, 97, 189, respectively).

The significance of the Revolution as a certain kind of historical event (Sewell, 2005) lies not in the direct transformation of class relations or a formally recognised step toward national independence. Rather, I argue, it could be seen as the initially invisible tipping point (Sassen, 2008) for constituting the political field. The beginning of mass political participation, and an entanglement of events and processes, determined its shape for a long time. The Revolution also brought rapid change in the formation of proletarian political subjectivities and a great alternation in patterns of political experience, as well as the emergence of various forms of the proletarian public sphere (Kluge & Negt, 1993). Therefore it may also be simultaneously a critical and a paradigmatic case study, providing insight into an atypical situation which clarifies a valid logic of operation which nonetheless remains hard to grasp in other contexts (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 79). A unique situation brought an interesting logic of constructing political subjectivities, which can be scrutinised when researchers have relevant theoretical perspectives at their disposal (cf. Howarth and Glynos, 2007). Moreover, the peripheral situation with its incomparable rapidity of change and various contradictions and atypical entanglements of events may be an exciting verification field of the theory's explanatory and heuristic potential.

The theoretical background which seems especially pertinent in this context is the political discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau (2001 [1985]; 1996, 2005) and its further empirically oriented continuation, as proposed by David Howarth (2000; Howarth, Stavrakakis, & Norval, 2000). Therefore, this article collates the explanatory capacities of discourse theory with “process tracing,” known from more classical historical sociology (Mahoney, 2006), to clarify the dynamic of political contention in the heated years of Revolution. My investigations focus on relating a historical process of political mobilisation to the development of political parties' discourses directed at the workers. I attempt to critically explain the former in terms of interaction with the latter, setting aside the abundant material concerning proletarian publics (Howarth and Glynos 2007).

To utilise Laclau's discourse theory in that way, a brief clarification is essential. Numerous debates have been conducted concerning the status of discourse articulation in reference to the material (i.e. economic) processes (Boucher, 2009), political or ethical commitments of the theory (its normative deficit, hegemony as a descriptive concept contra radical democracy, cf. Laclau, 2004; Mouffe, 2000; Wenman, 2003), and a trans-historical applicability of Laclau's concept (Marchart, 2007; Mouffe, 1993; Smith, 1998). However, the size and scope of this article does not allow for discussing these arguments at length. Suffice to say, that for the following analysis, I will extract this descriptive-explanatory component, leaving aside the question of its present or non-normative commitment. Moreover, I assume that the theory of the political, at least potentially, applies also to historical reality prior to “postmodern” hybridisation of identities (in which I follow the indications of Laclau himself, cf. Laclau, 2005, p.130).

Indeed, the political processes of the 1905-1907 Revolution initiate reflection on whether the basic conditions of the political could not be found already in the threshold of political modernity. Today, it is a multiplicity of social movements, the hybridisation of identities, and the growing complexity of social structures which raise the impossibility of an unproblematic emergence of political subjects. It was in the rise of political modernity that entangled particular antagonisms and shattered a straightforward representation of

economic positions on the political level, which induced equally complicated processes of constructing and articulating political identities.

The Polish Kingdom: An Entanglement of Social Conflicts

The social and political situation in the Polish Kingdom in the early 20th century was very peculiar. Modernity was rapidly changing an entire social reality which used to have a slightly different shape here than in Western Europe. It was connected with a specific development path for underdeveloped areas, and a different relation of socio-economic changes and political power – a distorted, insular and fragmented capitalism was introduced here licensed by the absolutist Tsarist state. Above all, completely different instantiations of power relations and emancipatory struggles occurred here.

The lack of a national state and sustained Tsarist oppression brought a completely different topography of social conflicts. A simple, class-based clash of labour and capital not only did not happen, but it was even impossible to think of in any idealising approximation. As such, there were no potential political solutions (revolutionary or parliamentary) which were available in the frame of the modern nation state. Political philosophy (cf. Walicki, 1989; Snyder, 1997; Marzec, 2013), political forces, ideologies and parties (Blobaum, 1995) had to face this complex situation. They could not rely on a one-dimensional “translation” of sociometric measures, economic positions, or group interests into political programs and identifications. Social antagonisms could no longer be conceptualised using a single criteria such as economy or class, which was at least partially possible in countries such as Germany or France. The field of forces and trajectories of tensions were divided along different lines which had to be taken into consideration. The lack of a nation state and domination by a foreign power resulted in a partial class emancipation, but in addition a struggle for national independence was a crucial issue, which was to be somehow incorporated in political programs, either affirming or rejecting it as a political goal (Kalabinski & Tych, 1976; Zarnowska, 1965).

The interference of national and class demands destroyed the illusion of transparent political representation of socio-economic positions. A dynamic of political mobilisation and growing waves of mass resistance, which culminated in the 1905 Revolution, clearly demonstrates the ‘inautomatiety’ of political affiliation, the fragility of identification, and the role of multiple factors in shaping political identities. Therefore, the articulatory practices of various political subjectivities and the very emergence of labour as a political subject (in diversified shapes) deserve a careful study.

The political landscape of that time contained constant tension between the two above mentioned forces. Apart from conservative elites who were loyal towards the Tsar (later gathered as the *Stronnictwo Polityki Realnej* – Real Politics Party), and a sparse liberal-democratic bourgeois intelligentsia (gathered in the *Postępowa Demokracja* – Progressive Democracy), all political factions had direct influences on mass mobilisations, and tried to reach peasants as well as the urban proletariat. The outcomes of their action were significant – identifications were becoming stronger (as we will see in a few pages), and it is impossible to point at any simple logic of representation of economic relations on the political level. Political programs, often appealing to the same components, answering the same issues, and mobilising and merging the same demands, were extremely diversified.

Social Democracy in the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (*Socjaldemokracja Królestwa Polskiego i Litwy* - SDKPiL) had founded its program, strategy, and

agitation on class as the basic frame of reference and affiliation, and on labour unity as the main identity, overcoming or even annulling national identity (Blobaum, 1984; Samus, 1984). There was a common struggle alongside the Russian proletariat for class goals and internationalist socialism, subsuming the nation state based on exploitation, which was to be an efficient and appealing strategy. The Polish Socialist Party (Polska Partia Socjalistyczna - PPS) tried to combine the class struggle with claims of national independence, and treated a sovereign Polish state as the path towards socialism, whereas the labour struggle was a means of regaining independence. Such an inherent tension was also a reason for the split in 1906, which had its main cause in the divergence of class and national claims in the party's political agenda (Tomicki, 1983; Zarnowska, 1965). Circles connected with National Democracy and their labour branch, the National Workers Union (Narodowy Związek Robotniczy – NZR) created in June 1905, took the nation as the basic form of affiliation, concentrating on the struggle for political and cultural autonomy and the right to use Polish in different spheres of life.

The superiority of the focus on national unity meant abandoning economic claims or class demands which could have acted against “Polish” industry. That meant, among other things, subordinating to factory owners or landlords (Crago, 2000; Monasterska, 1973; Wapinski, 1980). A socialist, class-oriented political agenda for Jewish workers was offered by Bund, also split along these lines: socialist internationalism was opposed to socialist Zionism, and an alternative Jewish national project was offered by Poalej Syjon (Tych & Hensel, 2000; for Jewish political culture during the Revolution cf. Ury, 2012). However, my analysis, for clarity of argument and due to availability of sources will be concentrated on Polish-speaking proletarians. The issues of the dynamics of contention, the parties' rivalry for proletarian support, patterns of political mobilisation, and articulating identities could be at least partially clarified by scrutinising the situation in the largest centre of the proletariat, the textile industrial city of Łódź, which seems an extremely appropriate, instrumental (Stake, 1995) or paradigmatic case study (Flyvbjerg, 2001), where all the distinct features of the process are converged and intensified¹.

The City of Łódź: A Laboratory of Political Identities

In the whole Polish Kingdom the dynamics of economic processes and the sustained cultural domination by a rural noble class of “Polishness” successfully prevented the emergence of a progressive, liberally oriented, urban bourgeois which might have aimed at a reformulation of the political situation in a manner comparable to that in the West (Kalabinski & Tych, 1976, pp. 198–200) – that is, a bourgeois-democratic revolution, in this case probably with strong national accents. Therefore, the overall social structure and the shape of social antagonisms which resulted from it were somehow peculiar in the Polish Kingdom.

In the city of Łódź, however, there were all the characteristics of modernization. Łódź was a city of the most rapid uncontrolled and unsustainable development (Pus, 1987; Łódź: dzieje miasta do 1918 r., 1988)², the largest industrial centre in the Polish

1 Therefore Łódź constitutes a “nesting case”, being a paradigmatic instance of the broader case of Revolution, and itself posing paradigmatic case for investigating political process.

2 The scale of growth was unique in Europe and comparable only to huge US metropolises. In the years 1850 – 1900 the number of inhabitants of Łódź had risen by 2006% (sic!), whereas in London it was 192%, and in industrial Manchester, 557%. In a century the total number of people had grown 600 times. At

Kingdom, and the strongest centre of the proletariat at the time (Karwacki, 1975, p. 7). The nature of the changes was also determined by the fact that Łódź was not previously a developed urban area, where changes to the structure of employment and property occurred successively; it grew out of nothing in a very short time. Peasants coming from poor villages nearby were subjected to urban shock and rapid proletarianisation. Public and cultural institutions were very weak or absent – the entire city and life of its inhabitants were put to one aim – capitalist profit. The municipality was characterised by very weak intelligentsia, whereas the social structure was close to binary, bearing a trace of extreme class polarisation.

Moreover, in Łódź, the interspersing of class and national struggle was the strongest, creating a multidimensional field of forces and unsatisfied claims. Class or economic conflicts were often intensified by national or cultural antagonisms. For example, a Polish worker had to face the oppression of a Jewish factory owner or a German foreman, supported by a Tsarist regime equally foreign to him. However, elsewhere the worker might collaborate with a Jewish or German proletarian against exploitation practiced by fellow Poles (Karwacki, 1975, p. 73). And much more often than elsewhere, a worker was female. This complex situation prevented the construction of a unified national bloc or a stable class resistance, and enabled various patterns of antagonisms and affiliations.

Therefore, coherent identities were constantly divided, which was a political goal by rival parties. These factors, along with a poorly developed worker's organisation and a low level of political awareness and participation among workers in the years before the Revolution, made the situation in Łódź an extremely interesting case. The situation is almost an experiment or a laboratory for scrutinising political mobilisation, the gaining of political awareness, and the public engagement of workers.

Indeed, the years of the Revolution are the beginning of mass politics in Łódź, or maybe even politics as such. The inclusion of huge numbers of people into political processes had not happened before, and would not occur for a long time after. It was here where political programs were confronted with masses not used to public activity. Parties competed with each other, commonly via any means available, and tried to ferment social antagonism in the method they thought appropriate and true, to focus revolutionary zeal around certain demands, to create political subjects. Therefore, the logic of constructing and articulating the fragile unity of proletarian demands can be seen and studied here, where a political modernity crystallised.

Dynamics of Contention: Sedimentation of Demands

Before 1905 the dissatisfaction of wage labourers and various forms of resistance against the given situation were limited to opposing obvious harassment. Contention, which violated the existing order, was a concern of factory owners or foremen, who did not question the order itself. For example, complaints made by workers to the Tsarist

its peak, the population density was as high as 12,460 persons per km². The gross economic product and the number of workers were about 40 % of the whole Polish Kingdom. Textile workers were the most numerous group – above half of all industrial workers in the Polish Kingdom (data from 1913, Karwacki, 1975, p. 7). Estimations based on the data from 1905 suggest 72% of Łódź inhabitants were members of the working class (Puł, 1987, p. 60). In 1906 there were 547 factories and 76,500 workers in Łódź. These data concern only factories subjected to factory inspection – that is, ones employing more than 15 employees or having a steam engine. Further tiny factories were uncounted (Karwacki, 1975, p. 7).

administration (which have been preserved in archives), or statements in the “Czerwony Sztandar” (“Red Banner”, a newspaper for workers issued by SDKPiL), concerned violations of existing law such as sexual abuse of female workers (cf. Zródła, 1957, p. 256), forced contributions to Tsarist war efforts, or low quality raw material given to the workers in the factory (which affected piecework wages, see Zródła, 1957, p. 274). Almost no claims questioning the status quo emerged; there were no articulated political demands or even purely economic claims aimed at improving living conditions. This situation was about to change soon.

As various sociological theories of revolution try to demonstrate, the direct impulse for a riot is not connected with economic deprivation but with a resultant relative decrease in living conditions (Davies, 1962). Here this was certainly the case. The major factor releasing a revolutionary potential was the economic crisis connected with the Russo-Japan war. The impetus for a proletarian riot began to crystallise by means of reference towards an all-encompassing systemic oppression, which found its initial instantiation in the Tsarist regime. A proclamation of SDKPiL announced: “Our biggest enemy, and protector of all our enemies, is the Tsarist regime. We shall direct our struggle against it!” (Zródła, 1957, p. 104).

A spark initiating mass resistance, which manifested in the general strike in January 1905 when virtually the entire city of Łódź came to a stop, was lit by the events of the so called “Bloody Sunday” in St. Petersburg. Paroxysms of rioting hit with huge force, composed of a class strike, a national awakening, economic opposition to growing deprivation³, and a general refusal to participate in the harsh regime, all at once. It was, perhaps above all, an ultimate demand for recognition of the basic human dignity of the worker, as well as for the right to give voice to his or her own situation. The very issue of who is a political subject is a basic stake of politics tout court. The main significance of the strike is precisely the claim for legitimacy of the proletarian. Therefore, it was a *par excellence* political event (Rancière, 2007).

The events cannot be described with a simple and cohesive narrative about the definitive essence of popular demands. As the broadest resistance against an encompassing oppression, the general strike was a focal point of many different subsequent social claims, expressing as it did much more than any single narrative could contain. To some extent it was also the foundation for all future struggles, a symbolic focal point which was able to orient further heterogeneous claims. In the very process of shaping certain political positions, of changing amorphous objections into structured political opposition, a segmentation and partition of particular political identities could manifest.

An initial negative unity of resistance among the workers of Łódź, and the subsequent differentiating of political positions meets the reconstruction of political processes proposed by Laclau. In his depiction, the political field is homologous with language, as a signing system. Such a system has no positive ground and is not able to signify itself. Its border is a radical incommensurability, the impossibility of signification. This border is a condition of possibility as well as the impossibility of the system (Laclau, 1996, pp. 37–38). What gives it a “foundation” is exclusion, for it can close itself, but it has to leave something outside. “[I]f the systematicity of the system is a direct result of the exclusionary limit, it is only that exclusion that grounds the system as such” (Laclau, 1996, p. 38). What is excluded tries to constitute itself as an opposition against the system.

3 Although workers had raised some spontaneous economic claims, it seems that the most important concern was a rejection of the general situation of the proletariat.

[A]ll of [the struggles] are seen as related to each other, not because their concrete objectives are intrinsically related but because they are all seen as equivalent in confrontation with the repressive regime. It is not, consequently, something positive that all of them share which establishes their unity, but something negative

Laclau, 1996, p. 40

The multitude of political struggles becomes a unity forged by opposition to the system which excludes them. All are equivalent in their negativity, but it is unnecessary for them to share any positive content. When such a “chain of equivalence” is lengthened, it is more and more difficult to sustain such differentiating identity, and common ground is less and less concrete, finally reaching nothing more than an empty idea of communitarian fullness (Laclau, 1996, p. 42). Therefore, it has to be united symbolically by a particular demand, which temporarily takes the role of a universality, expressing a quantity of unsatisfied claims. How then did such a process develop among the workers of Łódź?

After the first general strike, which occurred in January 1905, the Warsaw general-governor admitted that initially “workers, having ceased to work, did not raise any claims”(Kalabinski & Tych, 1976, p. 116). However, an amorphous refusal gradually changed its character; a certain structure of revolt began to crystallise and various alternating sets of demands emerged, along with symbolic points organising the struggle. The size and “spontaneity” of this phenomenon surprised and astonished all political factions. One of the local SDKPiL leaders wrote in his memoirs:

To what degree did our party in Łódź direct this strike? To very little. [...] The strike was commenced without any proclamations [...], was spontaneous, and organisations were completely surprised by this enormous revolutionary blow.

Pestkowski, 1961, pp. 32–33

Initially, among socialists, as well as among the industrial bourgeois, the strike was interpreted as a political expression of resistance against the Tsarist regime. Indeed, such a negative reference was an important factor of its coherence and intensity in the first phase, although it is not clear to what extent conscious anti-tsarist political agenda was directly at play among workers⁴. Thus, a partial support of workers by other social groups, which were hostile towards the Russian administration or were just interested in a modest liberalisation of the regime, is not surprising. A creation of a long chain of equivalence, consolidated by a common negation, was possible. Worth noting is a description of this dynamic prepared almost two years later, on the eve of a great lockout, by one of the major Łódź factory owners, Maurycy Poznanski:

4 Hostility against the Tsarist regime was definitely present in political leaflets of all the parties, and was the chief reason for the Revolution's support amongst non-proletarians. The very fact of correspondence of contention in Poland with strikes in Russia seems to suggest a certain “solidarity” against Tsarist rule. Historians also agree that so called “political” strikes were predominant in the beginning of the Revolution – for instance big manifestations in Warsaw – only later giving place to economic strikes expressing definite claims against factory owners. The larger initial mobilising capacity of “political” strikes over economic claims shows that one cannot reduce the initial phase of the revolution to amorphous demands for recognition and shop-floor issues (Blobaum, 1995, p. 102; Kalabinski & Tych, 1976).

In the year 1905 the political movement was prevailing. [...] Some factory owners were in a revolutionary mood, which in 1905 engulfed also the bourgeois. Making compromises with the workers, they thought that they would support a freedom movement, promising an alluring future for everyone, including the owners.

Wywiad u M. Poznanskiego 1907

The articulation of a voice of refusal and the partial recognition of this act as legitimate in a broader social context, certainly was a milestone. After the first achievement, the economic demands gained more significance, aiming at utilising the mass political act directly. These struggles also had won partial success, but this success severely affected the character of subsequent strike waves – the support, or mere acceptance, by non-proletarian social strata diminished or entirely disappeared. The negative unity against the occupant receded to give place to an antagonism defined in class terms, due to successful economic claims and the ideological work of socialist parties. The bourgeois was somehow relocated in its political position and included in a group hostile towards proletarian demands; the division was no longer “the people vs. the foreign invader” but “the people vs. the regime of exploitation (the Tsar and capitalism). Gradually, the bourgeoisie started to deny the workers' right to such resistance and supported Tsarist repression.

What is more, a clear reorganisation of proletarian consciousness occurred; earlier a politically inexperienced worker had to face very direct oppression, such as the violence of a foreman or a policeman, and had not referred it to a broader configuration of social relations in the Tsarist regime. Gradually, due to strikes, the agitation of parties, growing literacy and readership rates, and increased participation in street politics, a serious development occurred. Workers began to tie separate facts together and refer them to a broader ensemble of factors, ‘mapping’ their situation with regard to the totality of relations of production and the power configuration (Jameson, 2000). The dissolution of the primary negative unity – opposition to the Tsarist regime, had launched struggles for the realisation of various configurations of the political field – hegemonic struggles, so to speak.

Crystallisation of Political Identities and Hegemonic Struggles

Hegemony is a central category of Laclau and Mouffe's theory of the political, enabling us to describe the dynamics of the political field. The domain of hegemony is a field of fluid, relational identities, which are modified by the articulation of different elements. It is precisely the always incomplete and open character of the social, and the possible acts of articulation of unfixed elements, that give way to hegemonic practices (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001, p. 134). Hegemony is an act of political articulation, which, although it is contingent, temporarily attempts to represent the totality, simultaneously being radically incommensurable with it. “This relation by which a particular content becomes the signifier of the absent communitarian fullness is exactly what we call a hegemonic relationship” (Laclau, 1996, p. 43). Such a universality has no positive, transcendent ground, besides the particularism which temporarily institutes it. Competing propositions aiming at constituting universality and subsuming respective demands under a unifying symbolic fullness were also present in the politics of revolutionary Poland, when attempts were made to create new political identities out of a multitude of social conflicts.

In that time of mass political mobilisation and the birth of modern political subjectivities of labour, a hegemonic struggle for their symbolic organization was waged. Diverse, contradictory or oppositional programs for coping with the same social issues were proposed to workers without a deeper political consciousness or definite stances (Karwacki, 1975, p. 32). Parties competed above all for creating a certain sense of affiliation among the masses, be it an affiliation of class or nation, an identification with a definite set of meanings, or an investment in given symbols. The stakes of this rivalry were the political identity of the proletariat, as well as of its particular members. Possible configurations and deployments, the architecture of political subjectivities absorbing different unfulfilled demands, and available paths for the construction of hegemonic articulation were extremely diversified.

“We, the workers-Poles,” announced the proclamation of NZR, “consider the national solidarity as a primary unity consolidating us together; our holiest obligation is above all to deem this solidarity...” (Zródła, 1958, p. 176). That meant abstaining from strikes in the name of national prosperity. “We call You, then, brother-workers to not interrupt occupations in factories, to firmly resist against the pressure of agitators, to hold back any manifestations, processions and, last but not least, military actions, bearing in mind the calamities it would bring” (Zródła, 1958, p. 656). In the creation of such problematic unity, National Democracy did not hesitate to clearly exclude Jews (Wapinski, 1980, p. 101). The figure of the other, as unassimilable outsider, which could be the foundation for constructing the national community was an important part of National Democracy's discourse. It enabled the drawing of clear lines dividing the social field, and the relational integration of one's own identity.

On the contrary, an alternative class unity was emphasised in the publications of SDKPiL, openly resisting anti-Semitism, and protesting against its various forms utilised by National Democracy, as well as by the Tsarist government.

We are members of different parties, but we have a common enemy and we are aiming at the same goal! Remember, comrades, that only united with everybody, regardless of differences in language, clothing and religion, we will be strong, that the time of victory could be approached only by ties between workers of all nationalities.

Zródła, 1957, p. 239

Here, also a necessity of a relational reference to an outside enemy can be observed, which enables a construction of unity out of heterogeneous groups and demands, as well as a temporary universalisation of one's own particularity, capable of expressing more than itself. In comparison, PPS promoted the postulate of rebuilding a Polish nation state while acknowledging the principle of class struggle, the struggle of proletariat against bourgeois (Tomicki, 1983, p. 77). Among its members, there was no concord about the means of bringing socialist independence into reality, or about possible alliances between different nations and classes. Although such a proposition, due to this double division or a diversified delimitation, potentially excluded many groups, it still appealed to many, meeting their hybrid and multiple identity of Pole-proletarian (though PPS worked also among Jews). Parties federating the Jewish proletariat, also numerous, attempted to find a place for a distinct religious, national, or linguistic, identity.

The stakes of these reconfigurations of political identities were also defining the lines of antagonisms. According to Laclau and Mouffe, antagonisms “reveal the limits of all objectivity” (2001, pp. xiii–xiv) and are indispensable for every identity, therefore conditioning the very political dimension. It “is clear that antagonism does not necessarily emerge at a single point: any position in a system of differences, insofar as it is negated, can become the locus of an antagonism. Hence, there are a variety [sic] of possible antagonisms in the social, many of them in opposition to each other (2001, p. 132).

In this case, the class-based division of society was rendered more and more significant and superseded national antagonism as the main principle organising political discourse (cf. Kalabinski & Tych, 1976, p. 402). However, various parties attempted to do it according to their own programs, as I demonstrated above. As Laclau notes, every discursive redeployment also changes the very “content” of signifiers at play, as their “identity” is secondary to the relationships they enter with the whole discursive field. Class unity or nationalism “can be substituted by other terms in its role as an empty signifier, but also that its own meaning will vary depending on the chain of equivalences associated with it” (2005, p. 227). Therefore, the very notion of class or nation being grounds for proposed identities was rendered differently. Discursive redescrptions (Griggs & Howarth, 2006; Skinner, 1999) were made to articulate different demands along the given signifier and build a constant political identity. However the very existence of antagonism and a certain contingency of the political field is necessary (it is a necessary or “radical contingency”, cf. Marchart, 2007) and any given social unity, identity or subjectivity (as class, nation, any political affiliation) is a contingent outcome of competing hegemonic articulations (Laclau, 1990).

The dynamics of protest were not always reined in with such attempts at constructing a stable political affiliation. Party organisations stayed a step behind the spontaneous development of the strike movement. They were surprised by its outburst; later, in spite of a rapid growth in organisational power, they usually strove just to keep up with the dynamics of the mass resistance at best, and direct it in the manner according to their ideology. However political discourse was to a large extent a creation of party-led ideological struggles, and though on the street level political affiliations were expressed in terms imposed by parties, the dynamics of protest were far from being controlled by “official” parties' enunciations. The fact that party politics was directed to a remoulding of “spontaneous” resistance at best, does not mean that the latter was in any way outerdiscursive, or preceded discursive articulation of political subjectivities qua people acting on the streets. Nevertheless, in analysis of written sources concerning political discourse it is hardly possible to comprehend something prior to these parties' impositions.

One element of a bottom-up strike movement was constant, regardless of whether it was a spontaneous resistance, a time of the highest self-organisation of workers while the power of the Tsar was temporarily weakened, or directed by party's agitation regarding economic claims. This element could probably be described as both a symbolic and real struggle for recognition, which is another heterogeneous component of the political field. Through the whole time of the revolution it could be observed that one of the basic stakes was a kind of proletarian dignity, or perhaps just recognition as a fully-fledged human being, capable of expressing political voices in individual instances. Of course the very strike, even with precise economic demands, also bears this meaning, but this

issue was expressed in a much more explicit and definite manner. Hated foremen, the closest instance of oppression in the factory hall, were thrown out or carried outside in wheelbarrows, and their permanent removal from an occupation often appeared to be the most fiercely defended demand of a given strike. During processions with banners, policemen or factory administrators who were passing by were often forced to praise the socialist insignia (for example by taking off a hat), or even to walk ahead of the procession, personally holding the banner (Karwacki, 1975, p. 112; for testimonies from administrative documentation cf. Zródła, 1958, p. 121). Tsarist gendarmes were pushed aside to the pavement; they had to make way for groups of workers, whereas policemen were simply insulted and driven away (Zródła, 1958, p. 123). A revolutionary spurt, the possibility of breaking the charmed circle of labour and reproduction of biological life (cf. Rancière, 2012), a shade of agency – these had awakened enthusiasm, which finds confirmation in various biographical testimonies (cf. Łeczycki, 1969, p. 104; Jastrzebski, 1966, p. 138; Spieralski (ed.), 1967, p. 25; Koral, 1933, p. 33). One witness to building barricades on the streets of Łódź gave a testimony about a fellow participant, a poor Jewish old man:

His eyes are laughing, his face is glaring, he is carrying almost without any effort a huge timber, throwing it across the street, and like in a triumph he straightens his body. He is truly beautiful at that moment. Out of his posture, happiness could be read; it can be seen that he has lived to see what he had been waiting for a long time. He was killed on the barricade and he died with happiness.

Cited in Karwacki, 1975, p. 64

Lines of Antagonism and Struggle for Shaping Political Subjectivities

The power of initial enthusiasm and solidarity was to gradually weaken and give way to other confluences of political demands, although formulated in the same socio-economic circumstances. Similarly, a gradual sedimentation of class identities and an economisation of the protest broke the unity of populist demands against the Tsar – non-proletarian social strata usually removed their support for the strikes, and the very workers themselves began to differ severely in their political attitudes. At the beginning, almost every political program was at least partially based upon a rising hostility against the Tsarist regime (*Spółeczeń*). A kind of investment uniting various demands could concern many symbolic keystones or unify empty signifiers (Laclau, 2005, p. 69). So it was the case that the negative references to the Tsarist regime as an oppressive system in different political factions appeared to have very little in common – the class struggle, national aspirations, or even reactionary loyalism could be articulated within this opposition. Of course, eventually it was no longer possible to maintain this unity; various ideological projects diverged and a rivalry over hegemony (of course not all-encompassing but limited to mobilising proletarian opposition against the Tsarist system) commenced. An empty signifier began to be a floating one (Laclau, 2005, p. 129), which different political narratives wanted to take control of. Differentiating and crystallising political identities were looking for a means of better consolidating themselves, and after reaching some degree of durability (such as sustaining engagement in party work), attempted to disseminate amongst – and so further agitate – adherents, often by weakening competing identities.

None of these transformations could be eternal or ultimate because the social field is unavoidably divided by a rift, an irreducible dislocation usually articulated as an antagonism. It could be freely instituted, its position is, so to speak, contingent, as Laclau and Mouffe argue (2001, p. 125), but it cannot be ultimately removed; a final “reconciliation” or “closure” of society on the basis of any transcendent principle is impossible. The antagonism emerges from the very intrusion of the other into our subjectivity – thus, it is not a contradiction between any given subjects, but the impossibility of the self-constitution of anyone of them. But the very line dividing the social field is the subject of constant attempts directed to its relocation. At stake here are the conditions of possibility for the emergence of certain political subjectivities.

During the political awakening of the Revolution as well, major divisions of the social field – those lines separating groups which were included in a certain political block from those always excluded, were labile and exposed to political interventions. Similarly, minor sectional divisions separating certain subject positions, being in a constant flux of mutual relations, were subjected to struggle and change.

Programmatic offers by socialist parties (SDKPiL, PPS, but also Bund) and different sets of political identities demanded special procedures aimed at relational differentiations, especially in the context of rhetorical presentations to agitated workers. During mass-meetings in factories, speakers competed with each other, fighting with arguments, and referring to the emotions of the gathered crowd of listeners. Usually, they concentrated on the basic, easily perceptible differences in political programs, or referred to various types of affiliations precious to workers. A typical example could be an accidental meeting of two open air rallies called “majówka”⁵ in the Łagiewniki forest near Łódź, where severe polemics of party speakers had taken place. Speeches attempted to attract the attention of listeners and appeal to their political commitment.

One of our workers (the narrator was an SDKPiL member) had given a speech clarifying the reasons of poverty among the working class under the despotic rule of the Tsar; subsequently, he indicated that a Russian worker is exploited and oppressed no less than a Polish one, and called for a united struggle with the common enemy of the working class [...]. Afterwards, a speaker of PPS appeared [...]. He tried to argue that we, the Poles, cannot unite with the Russians [...], that after winning the constitution we would be still oppressed [...], that [...] we have to fight to defend our religion, nationality, and native language, and he had made an accusation towards us, that social democracy ‘does not recognise nationality’.

Czerwony Sztandar, 1906, nr 27

Sometimes forthcoming strike days were announced deliberately in order to differentiate one socialist party from another, and not as an outcome of a broader political strategy. Of course it brought some confusion, weakening the party’s influence among workers, as well as attenuating the overall political struggle (Zródła, 1964, p.

5 It was a kind of organisational form of the early proletarian public sphere among Polish workers (especially in Łódź), merging new influences like the political meeting with older traditions brought by the workers from their folk culture, such as the open-air dance meeting. A group of workers used to go to the forest near the city on Sundays and there play, drink, play music, but also discuss political issues and listen to agitation speeches.

142). Tensions emerging from the necessity of demarcating identity also grew inside parties; in SDKPiL it was mainly polemics about Rosa Luxemburg's theory of "organic incorporation", and in PPS, disputes connected with the increasing tendency towards a national-independence military struggle and differences in the attitude towards class struggle, which eventually lead to a split in PPS: PPS-Lewica ("the Left") and PPS-Frakcja Rewolucyjna ("Revolutionary Faction") emerged as the outcome (Zarnowska, 1965).

There was no need, however, to emphasise the differences in disputes and fights of the socialists with the National Democracy and NZR – their proposed solutions to social problems were divergent enough. Considering the range of support for the NZR among workers and the intensity of their engagement, one cannot reduce them as a "bourgeois manipulation of uneducated masses" of unconscious workers⁶. The NZR is to some extent a clear indication of the impossibility of direct political representation of economic positions; proletarian demands cannot be automatically and "naturally" translated into socialist programs of this or that kind. A sharp illustration of the possibility for extraordinarily strong political mobilisations of the very same demands by different political forces is the scale of this national identification. Radicalising differences culminated in so called "fratricidal" struggles among workers, which grew along with the revolutionary cycle⁷.

Time effaces history, producing a homogeneous, distant view and a coherent narrative about the past, making it difficult to comprehend the severe and powerful antagonisms that existed among the workers themselves. More than once they threw each other out of factories. For long months more militants were murdered in these "fratricidal" struggles than killed by Tsarist troops and police. "Łodzianin", a newspaper issued by Łódź PPS-Lewica, reported: "For some time [...] Łódź has been an audience to constant murders among workers. These assassinations used to have the same character: a falcon gang [that is national-democratic] assaulted flats or murdered socialists passing by" ("Łodzianin" PPS-Lewicy, 1907, nr 30). The climax of these conflicts was an attack on a funeral cortège where workers who were following the cortège fell into fights with national-democratic groups.

The idea was very cunning. [...] One had refused to bless the corpse, initiated a quarrel and at the same time arranged a bloodshed of socialists, and hereafter said, that socialist had insulted a church. [...] How it had been intended, so it was done [...] [On] the battlefield remained 8 killed, 15 severely wounded and 30 injured [...]"

"Łodzianin" PPS-Lewicy, 1907, nr 30, cf. Zródła, 1964, p. 633; Kalabinski & Tych, 1976, p. 572.

Fierce fights, increasing waves of aggression, and mutual revenge occurred equally

6 In Łódź NZR used to have extensive support. The local proletariat was composed of recent newcomers from poor village settlements with strong traditional values and religious beliefs. In the late 19th century only 10 to 15% of inhabitants were born in Łódź (cf. Zarnowska, 1974; Monasterska, 1973, p. 27).

7 In the peak of popularity - Autumn 1906 – the number of worker members of NZR was as high as two-thirds of SDKPiL and almost half of PPS – in Łódź these shares were probably even higher (Monasterska, 1973, p. 40). It is worth noting that revolutionary events brought an increase in political activity also to their enemies or sceptics.

on both sides of the conflict, often out of the control of the parties' headquarters.

Both National-Democrats and Tsarists were striving to prevent the workers from constructing a consolidated class identity. They fruitfully utilised in their political practices the introduction of additional sectional divisions and attempts to relocate the main line of antagonism. On the one hand, one attempted to shatter the unity of class demands. On the other hand, in the case of National Democracy, there were attempts to introduce new rifts, which enabled the relational, negative creation of an alternative national identification. It could appear to be stronger and more durable than a class one, because it was based on older, more primary, emotional feelings of filiation and exclusion of the Other at the same time. In National-Democratic discourse the role of the Other was assigned to Jews. Ceaseless attempts were undertaken to persuade Polish workers that indeed the Jewish proletariat initiated disturbances, which influenced the condition of the Polish economy and Polish workers negatively. Moreover, N-D discouraged Polish workers from acting in solidarity with Jewish workers⁸ or just incited hostility against Jewish colleagues (Zródła, 1958, p. 371). From the very beginning socialist parties tried to resist these intentions clearly and firmly, out of ethical, as well as tactical reasons. "Polish and Jewish workers should struggle together, under the one common banner", called SKPiL in an early proclamation (Zródła, 1957, p. 283); PPS exhorted in a similar vein - "united struggle and united aims are the best warranty of brotherhood" (Zródła, 1958, p. 372). It was even more useful, considering the fact that Tsarist power also had not hesitated to induce national or religious quarrels, and to hold Jewish demonstrators responsible for its own repressions on the streets. The Russian administration and Tsarist police did not recede from attempts to initiate pogroms, which could shatter the class unity of workers, but above all redirected anger onto different paths, less dangerous for the ruling regime. The investment of riot energy against the Jewish inhabitants of Łódź and national quarrels could have neutralised the resistance against the Tsar.

In spite of all these efforts, along with the development of revolution, a stabilisation of class antagonism occurred. The reason was the gradual disconnection of other links on that chain of demands (diminishing support for strikes among other social groups), that had consolidated its relative unity. Above all, however, it was through the construction of a distinct, relative point of negative reference. The bourgeois of Łódź began a program to prevent further revolutionary successes and to cancel workers' gains. The outcome of this cooperation was above all a "great lockout". It affected all workers, regardless of their political or national affiliation, which of course initially introduced some sense of unity between Poles, Jews and Germans, as well as between socialists and National-Democrats. "Łodzianin" contended in this situation: "In this time there is no party, there is only one proletariat, which is finding itself" ("Łodzianin" PPS-Lewicy, 1907, nr 30). Subsequently, the class line of division began to weaken again, and a negative relation towards economic oppression was no longer enough. However the social divisions were construed, the class line was always instituted on the symbolic level with rhetorical endeavours - the activation of libidinal, cathectic mechanisms firming affiliations and identifications with certain political projects.

8 As an example, an article from the NZR newspaper "Pochodnia" ridiculed the reasons for strikes and tried to discourage workers from participation, pointing at Jewish demands that underlay the course of events. ("Pochodnia", 1905, 8 lipca).

Symbolic Unity of the Political Subject

In *On Populist Reason*, Laclau attempts to comprehend the structural logic of populism being a hidden principle conditioning the political as such. However, it is based on some affective or rhetorical components, but they are, in different measures, typical in every form of political mobilisation. Thus it cannot be said that populism is an opposition of political rationality, but rather it is a “necessary ingredient of politics tout court” (Laclau, 2005, p. 18). What enables the constitution of a popular subjectivity consisting of many differentiated positions and demands is at play in every process of constructing political identity. Incommensurable demands can be combined and merged into chains of equivalence due only to the operation of a symbolic keystone – an empty signifier, as Laclau puts it. Such “a positive symbolic expression” (Laclau, 2005, p. 82) acts upon the emergence of “one differential element [which] should assume the representation of an impossible whole. [...] Thus a certain identity is picked up from the whole field of differences, and made to embody this totalising function” (Laclau, 2005, pp. 80–81). The lack of positive core content enables the over-determination by various unfulfilled demands, which finds in this identity a kind of symbolic unity. Laclau utilises here the Freudian notion of cathexis – one of the elements (a demand, an ideal, or a political subject) represents the totality (according to the synecdoche rhetorical figure), which it is not. It becomes a partial object incorporating and expressing universality, condensing hopes contained in any other demand – an affective, libidinal aspect of the political appears here.

This is why an equivalential chain has to be expressed through the cathexis of a singular element: because we are dealing not with a conceptual operation of finding an abstract common feature underlying all social grievances, but with a performative operation constituting the chain as such.

Laclau, 2005, p. 92

In the processes of political mobilisation in the 1905 Revolution as well, one can observe a relational play of different demands, and an emergence of such demands that express much more than themselves alone: they are overdetermined by the whole set of other unfulfilled claims. In different constructions of the political subject, it may be nationalist sentiment or class struggle which become a focal point of mobilisation, overdetermined by other demands – themselves being empty signifiers for other political contexts. Moreover, the role of symbolic representations of the strongly invested elements is crucial. They enable the expression of a multitude of heterogeneous factors and identification with the whole revolutionary movement. It is around them that political unities are constituted.

At all times, the unstable unity of particular political subjectivities active in revolutionary struggles have to be supported by consolidating acts, referred-to symbols expressing cohesion and allowing every participant to adhere to them. Usually a strong leader could embody the heterogeneous wholeness of such political mobilisation based on a mass movement, drawing from people who are rather “underdeveloped” politically and inclined to emotional reactions. However, in 1905 participants could not easily adhere to a political leader. Fragmented work in tiny districts or factory circles, “flying” agitators, and the necessity of conspiracy affected the situation and made the connection with one

central figure difficult. There was also no religious movement involved in the events (even though some aspects resembled one, cf. Chwalba, 1992). It was impossible to reach for any outer transcendence; there was no established pantheon of heroes or events with which one could keep faith.

All the above elements were shaped in the course of revolutionary struggles, enabling the construction of revolutionary subject positions, among which was also a class subjectivity, mobilised by socialists. A party's banner used to have a great role and symbolic significance. More than one ensign colour bearer died in demonstrations, protecting the banner with slogans calling for proletarian unity. The great importance of emblems, standing for whole sets of values, was also confirmed by aggression against the symbols of the enemy. Portraits of the Tsar and Tsarist state emblems were destroyed as representations of the all-encompassing oppression. Another element of constructing unity was a proletarian song, the content and usages of which are, on their own, evidence of a complex set of revolutionary values (Karwacki, 1975, *Spółeczeństwo i polityka*, 1993). Thus competition, or sometimes direct fights, took place between symbols and songs of various groups during mass actions. Funerals and mournful processions were important occasions to manifest solidarity and to show resistance against the killing of proletarian militants by Tsarist troops and other political groups as well (Karwacki, 1975, pp. 54–56). Growing common values were praised on such occasions. Those who died on the field were also sometimes revered as martyrs or heroes of the movement. What is interesting here is the fact that it was a collective martyrdom and group hero – the proletarian – corresponding to the collective ethos of the working class (Karwacki, 1975, p. 199).

Towards a Conclusion

Discourse theory provides a powerful and convincing explanation of the above mentioned political processes, allowing us to comprehend the changing dynamic of contention and patterns of political mobilisation during the 1905 Revolution in the Kingdom of Poland. In the conditions of the peripheral modernisation of the Kingdom of Poland (where social demands were intermingled with struggles against national and cultural oppression and with claims for recognition and acclaim as a distinct political voice), political processes had a different trajectory when compared with the areas where this entanglement had not taken place. Particular historical conjunctures made for more stable identities, which could have pretended somehow to be direct expressions of structural positions, vulnerable to hegemonic rearticulations. These circumstances exposed those logics of the political which otherwise remained hidden at this time. The multitude of struggles and differently defined antagonisms removed the hope for a unity of class identification. Class, as well as nation, began to be described as politically instituted; conditions of its construction and political intervention were noticed. In local, situated circumstances it became clear early on that sustaining a solid foundation of society was an illusion, and a deterministic economic analysis or an organic concept of nation could no longer be maintained. Struggles superimpose, political subjectivities can take various shapes, and the very same demands can be a part of different political narratives.

The structural fluidity of the field makes various operations of articulation and the division of subject positions possible in a discursive domain. If the deployment of

positions, meanings, and discursive elements are not predetermined, their ensemble in a given historical moment is an outcome of contingent settlements or decisions. The very structuring of the political field is par excellence a political moment, and therefore is an act of hegemonic struggle. Not only these constellations, but also the identities of elements are labile: “If every subject position is a discursive position, the analysis cannot dispense with the forms of overdetermination of some positions by others” (Laclau & Mouffe 2001, p. 116). However, in one respect, the type of inter-subject relations is determined – it is always contingent. As an example, in a given configuration, structural positions could be differently subjectivised and transformed into subject positions (Smith, 1998, pp. 55–69), which define their political countenance and further alternations of the social field.

This means that the antagonism is not inherent to the relations of production, but it is established between the relations of production and an identity which is external to them. Ergo, in social antagonisms we are dealing with a heterogeneity which is not dialectically retrievable.

Laclau, 2005, p. 149

An elusive, impossible foundation and a necessary contingency (Marchart, 2007), as conditions for the possibility for a plurality of politics, are not exclusively features of contemporary society. They concern, rather, the overall conditions of possibility of the social field, and post-foundational Laclauian theory describes modern political space as such. The reality of the peripheral modernisation of the Polish Kingdom and the emerging mass political sphere during the 1905 Revolution indicate that these confluences of the political were present at least since the emergence of political modernity. The dynamics of political mobilisation, and growing waves of mass resistance culminating in 1905–1907, are direct evidence of the non-automaticity of political representation and affiliation, unveiling the crucial role of various contingent factors in constructing political identities. The very political subject is an outcome of the process of political articulation, and not an expression of any pre-existing identity.

However, in every historical conjuncture there is certain limit of contingency in forming political identities. Not everything is possible; hegemonic articulations are constantly made in given circumstances, as other laminations of already sedimented practices. Notwithstanding this, there is always a place for rearticulation and the establishment of alternative temporary closures of system of meaning; “locally” in particular political narratives or more generally as hegemony on, for example, the state level. The construction of political subjectivities may run differently. Structural factors or economic positions matter, but by no means are they the last determining instance, always being mediated through discourse and prone to hegemonic remoulding. In the Kingdom of Poland we certainly deal with pre-existing processes such as industrialisation, proletarianisation and class polarisation. Nevertheless the political subjectivities of the working class are an outcome of contingently rendered hegemonic struggles.

These conclusions also have certain political consequences. There is no need to mourn the end of the proletariat as political subject qua agent and to lament the presupposed impossibility of leftist politics today. Political reality and its logic certainly have not been altered so much. Just as it was essential to arbitrarily construct and articulate political subjectivities in the political struggle in 1905, so it is essential now. The proletariat as an active subject of class politics (say class for itself) has always been a certain constructed

political subjectivity. Therefore, in the iterated, altered form corresponding to present circumstances, an active subject of class politics (be it proletariat or something else) can in the same manner be articulated today. We are even in a better situation, as we are aware of the basic logics of these processes.

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