

## POLITICAL FANTASY AS A FORM OF IDEOLOGY – THE POLISH CASE

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*Modern Polish political thought was marked by the historical trauma that was the loss of statehood and its territorial partition between European empires. The article shows two examples of political thought – the first from the 19th-century tradition of romantic messianism, the second from early 20<sup>th</sup> century nationalism – as reactions to this trauma. These examples are reconstructed as complex fantasies that work according to specific ‘economies’ of meaning and satisfaction. Messianism operated by way of an identification with the position of the victims of political violence and sought symbolic gratification in making suffering meaningful. Nationalism tried to introduce Polish people into a realist vision of politics by glorifying domination and violence in pursuit of the interests of the national community. Both positions are ideologies in the strong sense of the notion: being not only political doctrines, they constitute points of strong attachments, but each of them is also caught in a specific impasse.*

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Leszek Kołakowski, in one of his most popular essays, recommended leaving behind dogmatic classifications inherited from the history of political thought. Every political position is partly right – it is enough to expose the right aspect of it. Liberalism protects us against the aspirations of governments, conservatism – against the irresolute disassembling of tradition, socialism conveys sensitivity to human suffering. It is enough to put these values together to obtain an ideal solution and, finally, a political position which will be simply reasonable. Even though the logic of this text is not original, its value rests in that it summarizes a certain tendency present in Western social and political thought at least since the mid-1950s, namely – the view that ideology is an anachronism. The future belongs to a rational, pragmatic discussion, focused on what is achievable and not on incantations aiming to grasp the ‘sense of history’.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See: Raymond Aron, *The Opium of the Intellectuals*, (New Brunswick-London: Transaction Publishers, 2001).

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Ideology here is approached as a dogma, a fixed formula which replaces thinking. This is also, where the weakness of this perspective rests: situated beyond political debate, it judges from a meta-level which position is right. The essay by Kołakowski, which has been evoked here, is a classic example of such thinking – as if there existed a neutral position from the perspective of which one may separate the wheat from the chaff, pick from each tradition its reasonable elements and reject the useless ones. The very idea of there being such a perspective is in itself anything but neutral: it is a form of liberal thinking based on the assumption that political processes are governed by rational deliberation. A divergent position in this respect is taken by conservatives<sup>2</sup> – the very questioning of tradition and political praxis by reason is a form of dangerous *hybris* in politics. Also leftist political thought disagrees on this point with the liberal view – it assumes that there are always some partial interests which make a position rational only from the perspective of the interests it is meant to serve. What is rational for some is not rational for others, so, for example, the rationality of any political deliberation is limited by the advantage of more powerful players, who may influence the discussion in many ways, in accordance with their interests.<sup>3</sup>

Already at this level of analysis it is possible to show that the problem of ideology cannot be so easily dismissed and closed within the archives of history. There are, however, many other ways of arguing that behind the phenomenon of ideology there is more than just a dogma and rigidity of thinking, and that ideologies point to a different, deeper rationality of certain unconscious processes which are related to the very functioning of social structures.

Such a deeper definition of ideology was formulated by a few 20<sup>th</sup> century thinkers related to Marxist and the psychoanalytical schools. Three important viewpoints worth mentioning here are – in most general terms – those centered around similar recognitions and expressed in similar language. According to a famous definition by Althusser, ideology ‘is a “representation” of the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence.’<sup>4</sup> This definition presents a whole theory of ideology in a condensed form. First, we are dealing with some ‘real conditions of existence.’ These conditions of existence are not simply and directly ‘inhabited’ or lived, they always involve a ‘relationship’ or a ‘reference’, or – putting it in other words – the way we experience these real conditions is in some way determined. This reference has an imaginary form, it is contained in identities, images of ourselves, and fantasies. Our relation towards the conditions of existence may assume

<sup>2</sup> See, for example: Michael Oakeshott, ‘Rationalism in Politics’ in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays* (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> See Adam Przeworski, ‘Deliberation and Ideological Domination’ in Jon Elster, ed., *Deliberative Democracy*, (Cambridge UP, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster, (New York-London: Monthly Review Press, 1972), 162.

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different forms: of rebellion, acceptance, or neutrality. The relation is being elaborated on in images of ourselves, our life narrative, etc.

Fredric Jameson defines symbolic actions in a similar way: they are ways of 'narrativization' – mediated by language and symbols – of historical experience, which in itself carries no meaning and no order. The historical experience is what 'resists symbolization'.<sup>5</sup> Jameson refers here, obviously enough, to a concept of the Real introduced to psychoanalysis by Jacques Lacan. Rather than standing for reality as directly experienced, it points to the trauma of history as experience, which by its nature can never be exhaustively narrated and integrated into our lived world. It may become part of our experience only via subsequent multiple symbolizations and approximations, that nonetheless have to 'miss the point' and cannot reach the experience itself.

The most important impulse for the critique of ideology has come in recent years from Slavoj Žižek. His works constitute a repository of theoretical ideas and methods for a critique of ideology. For the purpose of this article, his main standpoint may be reconstructed as follows: human experience is incomplete. It contains a number of gaps (these are contradictions indicating the presence of the Real, an interference in the flow of social reality). These gaps are masked by formations of images, symbols, and fantasies. The formations, however, are not reducible to mere rationalizations. The power of their impact often depends on the surplus of enjoyment which they deliver; a contradictory, non-rational element is often the locus of extra satisfaction. That is why the critique of ideology should be of a double nature: on the one hand it should recognize the discursive structure of a given fantasy, on another – define the nucleus of enjoyment proper to a given fantasy.<sup>6</sup>

## **WHAT WENT WRONG?**

By means of the schema whereby ideological constructs are endeavors to mask the 'gaps in the order of causality',<sup>7</sup> to answer the question about the justification of our place in the symbolic order, and to decipher the meaning of one's own fate, it is possible to venture a reinterpretation of major Polish ideological positions.

In this light the key question concerning the Polish symbolic order in the modern era is the question about what 'went wrong' in Polish history. It is trivial to say that Polish experience of modernity begins with the question about the Polish failure to become

<sup>5</sup> Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), 34-35.

<sup>6</sup> See Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London-New York: Verso, 2008), 140.

<sup>7</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, (London-New York: Verso, 1991), 198.

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modern, about its causes and meaning. Historical circumstances – the loss of political autonomy in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, economic weakness, enduring cultural dependency on Western ideas, symbolic degradation, and the loss of significance on the international scene – constituted a trauma which became central for the crystallization of the Polish symbolic order. *Why did we fail, why did it happen to us* – these are the fundamental questions for Polish ideological positions – and they are still being asked by Polish social thought.<sup>8</sup>

The concept of trauma should be treated systematically here – not in its casual meaning of a ‘painful event’, but in the psychoanalytical sense of a gaping hole in one’s own experience, a gap which becomes retroactively ascribed symbolically to a traumatic event.<sup>9</sup> The answer to the question about the actual cause of trauma is contained in the very qualification of some experience as traumatic. From this viewpoint, a specific *vision* of the failure of Poland as a certain political community related to a certain institutional, legal, and symbolic order, is at once an attempt to answer the question about the causes of this failure. It is also an attempt to respond to the ‘why’ question directed at the Great Other of history – to God, a ‘world spirit’, etc. Finally, it is directed at the very symbolic order, which defines the cause-effect relations, the relations between human actions and their consequences. Therefore, the most significant political questions are those about the symbolic debt: in asking about the causes of failure we assume that reality exhibits a certain order which corresponds to symbolic exchange and its logic. In other words – wherever there is suffering, there must be either guilt or a future gratification – that is how people try to restore some meaning in history.

From this standpoint, ideological positions are not an ordinary lie, an empty promise, or a wishful fantasy about a better world. They always respond to a vital question and are deeply related to the vision we have of our own fate. This is one of the reasons there will be no end of ideologies. And for this very reason one cannot be, as against Kołakowski, a ‘conservative-liberal socialist’ because each of these positions offers a different response to our vital question. Each assumes a different fantasy, all the fantasies remaining contradictory to one another.

Let us have a brief look at a few examples of answers to the most important question asked by the Polish political community, the question about the failure and its causes. We will see that every answer locates trauma differently and points to different causes. It tries to endow trauma with a positive meaning. Yet, at the same time it reaches a certain impasse – by establishing the significance of trauma, it fossilizes it as an insurmountable horizon. Obviously, I do not intend to analyze carefully these ideological positions, or add to them any new content. On the contrary – my intention is to render them in their banalized form, the one everybody in Poland is familiar with.

<sup>8</sup> See for example: Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla. Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą*, (Kraków: Universitas, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> See Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do*, 202; 222.

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## **VICTIM'S POSITION**

One of the most important answers to the question about the meaning of suffering was offered by Polish romantic messianism. Perhaps the most popular formula of this movement<sup>10</sup> was proposed by the Polish national poet Adam Mickiewicz. He defined the Polish nation as a martyr, murdered as a symbol of freedom. Mickiewicz was familiar with Jewish mysticism, he was personally involved in the messianic, esoteric sect of the Frankists,<sup>11</sup> and later associated with the circle of the theosopher Andrzej Towiański. At the end of his life he also became involved in an original political mission – forming a Jewish Legion intended to support Turkey in their fight against Russian autocracy during The Crimean War. Yet the most important political heritage of Mickiewicz has been the symbolic formula according to which the suffering, political failures, and persecutions caused by the loss of political independence were meant to be the nucleus of the historical mission of Poland. As a victim of history, Poland was destined to suffer in the name of other anonymous victims of political violence. Thus, Poland was ordained to play its part in the realization of freedom, to suffer for the sake of the freedom of all peoples: 'The Nation shall rise from the dead and set the other peoples of Europe free.'<sup>12</sup> Both religious mysticism and the echo of democratic impulse resonating throughout Europe contributed to this schema of thinking. Poland was suffering from the political violence of the absolutist monarchies united by the bonds of the Holy Alliance, so its liberation had to involve the collapse of absolutism.

The reasons for the popularity of this formula are quite obvious: messianic response ennobles suffering and endows it with a historical meaning. The trauma of violence is thus redeemed since it serves something bigger than itself. This clearly is a form of compensation for the victim of suffering, but at the same time it locates the experienced harm in the symbolic order of exchange: it is no more a meaningless fact but something experienced for a purpose, it becomes part of an order of symbolic transactions. There is no need to acknowledge this debt in any form different than the symbolic one.

Meanwhile, this is where the trap of this way of thinking rests: by making suffering meaningful, by endowing it with significance and symbolic power, it crystallizes the victim's position into a position which has to be assumed of historical obligation. This schema implies closing Polish history within the paradigm of a victim economy, in the

<sup>10</sup> Andrzej Walicki, *Główne idee romantycznego mesjanizmu w Polsce. W: Mesjanizm Adama Mickiewicza w perspektywie porównawczej*, (Warszawa: IBL PAN, 2006), 15-44 and Andrzej Wawrzynowicz, ed., *Spór o mesjanizm*, (Warszawa: Fundacja Augusta hrabiego Cieszkowskiego, 2015).

<sup>11</sup> Jadwiga Maurer, *'Z matki obcej..'* *Szkice o powiązaniach Mickiewicza ze światem Żydów*, (London: Polska Fundacja Kulturalna, 1990).

<sup>12</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, *The Books and the Pilgrimage of the Polish Nation*, trans. Krystyn Lech-Szyrma, (London: James Ridgway, 1833), 20.

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light of which the whole history of Poland turns into a series of catastrophes. From this perspective, anything that might be a sign of activity and success now only contaminates the ruling victim logic, by making it incomplete. Thus, the messianic formula excludes from Polish history all positions but one: that of a victim. At the same time something else is established – a certain ‘suffering gain’, similar to what Freud called ‘gain from illness.’<sup>13</sup> Gain from illness was manifest in the attention and care of others that a neurotic patient was able to attract. In the case of victim economy, suffering gain would be part of an extra satisfaction, a surplus of pleasure achieved while recognizing one’s own suffering as a historical exceptionality of great significance.

What is important, identification with the victim position does not mean passivity in a literal sense, it does not mean a lack of activity. It resembles a mechanism which in psychoanalysis is called ‘ego-ideal’, namely a particular kind of identification which involves identifying not so much with the person we want to imitate (this is an ‘ideal ego’, a sort of role-model for our ego), but rather with a virtual place from which we are observed.<sup>14</sup> Thus, an active subject may identify with a vantage point, and from this vantage point his activity and whatever happens to him assume a certain shade of meaning – in this case, a meaning of sacrifice. The subject, then, even though it is active, can close its activity within a framework where all success is merely a pause in suffering. Even though the reality of our activity remains unchanged, it receives a specific symbolic structural frame of suffering and sacrifice.

This mechanism may be easily understood if we evoke a popular spiritual technique, reappearing at different times and in different religious contexts, namely – contemplating one’s own death. Its aim is usually not to withdraw from life but rather to add to one’s own activity a peculiar aspect – the perspective of an ending, meant to enlighten our choices, provide a reference point, and enhance prudence. The logic of messianic economy is similar. An ordinary course of history gains a particular aspect, and by means of this hardly noticeable aspect messianic fantasy influences the self-perception of community members.

<sup>13</sup> Sigmund Freud, *On Beginning the Treatment*, trans. James Strachey, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XII, (London: The Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1958) and Sigmund Freud, *Lecture XXIV: The Common Neurotic State*, in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. XVI, (London: Vintage, 2001), 378-391.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 116-119.

## THE POSITION OF THE PERPETRATOR

Polish nationalism is opposed to messianism in many ways. A classical work of this school, written by the doyen of the Polish national movement, Roman Dmowski, appeared under a suggestive title *Thoughts of a Modern Pole* (1904). In this manifesto, which has been published many times, Polish nationalism presents itself as a modern and rebellious force, turning upside down the intellectual schemata of the Polish intelligentsia. Dmowski sees the political sphere as a realm of force and not of moral righteousness – only those who risk violence are capable of laying political foundations. In the race of civilizations only powerful nations, which give themselves the right to dominate others, are bound to survive.

Dmowski is writing almost a century after the romantics and views from this temporal perspective the discourse of justified victim as an anachronism. He is similarly scathing of the schools of critical historiography and social thought of the second half of the nineteenth century, which treated Polish political reality in terms of an exception in the midst of the regular development of other political communities in Europe. The category of nation allows Dmowski to construct the concept of Polish normality: Poles are a nation like all other European nations, one which may have found itself in specific historical conditions, out of the regular track of development, but definitely not a 'chosen' one. It has its particularities – most of all it is young, it has not played an important political role so far, and it must find its own form, win it in confrontation with other nations. These particularities, however, belong to the ordinary circumstances of the regular course of history – the principles of politics are everywhere the same, they come down to force, energy, and the capacity to survive. History, like the laws of nature, makes no exception.

Dmowski criticizes what he calls 'elevating physical and moral weakness to the dignity of a virtue'.<sup>15</sup> He thus targets the mechanism which is central to messianic economy, and more specifically – the way it generates the surplus of gratification. The national movement wanted to replace this surplus with another way of generating gratification, namely – by means of a fascination with activity, power, and domination. In *Thoughts* Dmowski says: we have the right to become the source of the violence which we once fell victim to, we have the right to exchange positions with those who once dominated us politically. The national movement in the interwar period 'staged' this domination symbolically, as exemplified by the funeral ceremony of Roman Dmowski himself (January 1939), documented in film archives. The funeral procession is dominated by persons in folk costumes and military-like uniforms – the former stand for the unity of the national 'body', the latter – for its power, discipline, and the potential for expansion. Members of the national movement, obviously enough, not only staged violence but engaged in real

<sup>15</sup> Roman Dmowski, *Mysli nowoczesnego Polaka*, (Skultuna: Ligatur, 2007), 40.

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acts of violence; these, however, could play only a secondary role. As I will try to show next, no real act of violence could cope with the special task which the national movement imposed on themselves.

If messianic ideology was based on a fantasy which presented the nation as a martyr, the primal scene of national ideology was a fantasy about the presence of the nation at its own birth – the moment of its emergence as an actor in history. Paradoxically – in a way typical for fantasy – a nation must win its own emergence. The nation, then, literally becomes its own midwife. Rather than posing a problem for a fantasy, this temporal contradiction indicates that the temporal condensation (subject witnessing its own birth) contains also a significant *quilting point*, a libidinally invested knot, that – as such – constitutes a fundamental form of fantasy also for an individual subject, who is always fantasizing about the moment of its own conception.<sup>16</sup>

Identification with the victim and the pathos of suffering are replaced by identification with the perpetrator and the pathos of 'the deed' and fight. In this light, martyrs, although they have fought for the cause, do not accelerate historical change, the coming messianic time, but are the ones who have had the courage to fight in the name of national interest. This is how a radical nationalist activist, who died during anti-Semitic riots at Vilnius University, was celebrated during the interwar period.<sup>17</sup> Thus, the framework endowing historical events with a certain aspect is changed: that of martyrdom is replaced by one of heroism and courage to act in the name of national interest.

Insofar as the impasse of messianism was the result of the investment in the victim role, the impasse of the perpetrator identification is implied by the impossibility of achieving the aims of action. As already mentioned, nationalistic fantasy is a fantasy about the birth of a nation, the birth witnessed by the very nation itself. It is the fundamental impasse which cannot be superseded by national thought. All attempts at solving it – for example by distinguishing between the national elite (who is more conscious) and the masses – are bound to fail. Sacrifice in the name of the nation is meaningful as long as we know what this sacrifice is going to serve and give rise to; it is a mature nation, then, that is the patron of the birth of a nation, not a farsighted national elite.

Žižek recognized this vicious circle in the birth of the people as a revolutionary political subject,<sup>18</sup> terror in the era of French Revolution was meant to be justified by the purification of the People commanded by the People itself. The deputies, then, were legitimized by the future, in other words – it was they, the future purified People, embodying the 'superego voice', that imposed this mission of purification on themselves.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>16</sup> See Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor*, 198.

<sup>17</sup> See Joanna Beata Michlic, *Obcy jako zagrożenie. Obraz Żyda w Polsce od roku 1880 do czasów obecnych*, (Warszawa: Żydowski Instytut Historyczny, 2015), 178-180.

<sup>18</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 262-263.

<sup>19</sup> Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 262.



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The same paradox recurs in nationalist thought in many guises. The nation is at once 'ancient' and immature; it must be born, yet it has 'always' been mature enough to recognize its own specificity and singleness. This is one of the reasons, as I mentioned before, why no particular political act, no single act of violence might be 'the one' awaited by the national movement. Under any circumstances the nation is always too imperfect to match its own eternal form. The birth of a nation, as imagined by Dmowski, would have to be an unceasing act. In Dmowski's vision the nation emerges out of a fight, it must purify itself, so whatever is specific for the Polish nation at once exists but is not born yet. There exist some characteristics proper to the Polish 'race', but they are yet to emerge out of the struggle for independence.

### **ECONOMIES OF FANTASY**

Relation towards the Jews is a theme through which one may unveil different economies of fantasy, different formal configurations in which certain questions are differently settled.

Mickiewicz, particularly in the final years of his life, ascribed to the Jews a strategic role in the rebirth of Poland. Historical transformation was to begin with the transformation of Polish-Jewish relations. A trait of classical messianic thinking of biblical origin is evident here – just like in the prophecy from Psalms (Ps 118:22), what had once been foreign and rejected was now to become the kernel and the foundation. Mickiewicz challenged the traditional 'theological anti-Semitism' of the Church by proposing the formula defining the Jews as 'elder brothers'.<sup>20</sup> The Polish poet translated this idea into a schema of Polish-Jewish relationship, where the reconciliation between both parties was expected to lead to the resurrection of Poland.<sup>21</sup> His engagement in the creation of a Jewish military unit in Turkey was part of the plan meant to accelerate this solution; the Polish poet imagined the arrival of a Jewish army to the Polish lands triggering the insurrection of all those longing for the rebirth of Polish statehood. It is worth mentioning that Mickiewicz's scheme was rooted in a peculiar form of ideological critique, namely – he wanted to awaken civil consciousness by undermining the stereotype of a Jew as unfit for fighting and unable to defend Poland. That is why the coming of the Jewish Legion was expected to be a flashpoint.

Bringing an end to the traditional relations of contempt and indifference, of the reluctance of the Poles towards the Jews, translates itself into the resurrection of Poland, which, in turn, marks the beginning of new political principles in the life of nations. The messianic time is the time of the reversal of political rules, the time of a new order. Victim identification acquires a particular meaning here, it introduces the intention of changing

<sup>20</sup> Adam Mickiewicz, *Skład zasad*, in *Dzieła*, vol. 12, (Warszawa: Czytelnik, 1997), 10.

<sup>21</sup> Jadwiga Maurer, *Z matki obcej... Szkice o powiązaniach Mickiewicza ze światem Żydów*, 103-104.

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the laws of reality, of exorcising by quasi-magical means the violence it has experienced. In yet another context, victim identification introduces the reversal of values – that which is weak is celebrated as a source of a hidden, greater power.

Dmowski in *Thoughts...* also represents the Jewish presence in Polish society as particularly significant for Polish history,<sup>22</sup> but in an utterly different way than Mickiewicz does. According to Dmowski, the Jews remain culturally alien, have no political ambitions, are concentrated solely on becoming rich, while structurally occupying the empty place that should belong to the nonexistent Polish bourgeoisie. All this contributes to the deviation of the nation from the course of its historical evolution. Even though, according to Dmowski, the Polish nation is too young to evolve into its destined form,<sup>23</sup> the Jews, so typical of a vicious circle, have already turned out to be too alien to be assimilated by the 'Polish element'.<sup>24</sup> Consequently, the only solution is to displace them, move them out of those spheres of life in which they are already present, this being a favorable opportunity for fighting and fortifying the young nation's powers.

As I have mentioned, the economy of perpetrator identification, identification with the need to act and expand, is equivalent to the identification with what is perceived as the laws of history, namely – power and domination as a means of securing a collective interest. The same violence, the trauma of which was compensated for symbolically as the dignity of a martyr and a savior, here is idealized into a vehicle of civilizational progress, a route to 'normality'. In Dmowski's language, rich in biological metaphors – this is a form of 'health'.

This shows that both positions, identification with the victim on the one hand and perpetrator identification on another, are not symmetrical – rather than being simple opposites, they are based on different mechanisms. If we go back to the problem posed at the point of departure – the symbolic reworking of the trauma of historical failure – both these positions involve denial, but the denial concerns different elements in each case. Messianism tries to transform the meaning of failure by reformulating violence, nationalism tries to transform victim identity into perpetrator identity, to 'change skin'.

Meanwhile, both positions are not independent from one another. The distinction between an ideal ego and an ego-ideal, mentioned earlier, is worth evoking at this point. An ideal ego is a positive image of ourselves; an ego-ideal – is a place from which I am perceived as worthy of love. If we associate this distinction with messianism, we will be able to distinguish two forms of identification. The positive image of ourselves is the image of a savior, a messiah. When looking from a particular vantage point, in turn, we see – in messianic terms – a victim of suffering. For whom is this show of suffering being staged? Obviously enough – for a significant Other. The significant Other may first of all be 'Europe' – the world of politics governed by typical laws, the rules of the game. The specific Polish

<sup>22</sup> Dmowski, *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka*, 55-56; 58-59.

<sup>23</sup> Dmowski, *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka*, 103.

<sup>24</sup> Dmowski, *Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka*, 164-165.

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situation seems extraordinary in contrast with 'normal politics' – it is in the light of politics as if a cynical game ruled by force and violence that sacrifice and patient suffering signify something exceptional. In other words, messianism is a performance staged for the 'rotten' Europe with its ruthless rules of the game.

National fantasy accepts the brutal vision of politics directly. 'Positive image of ourselves' means playing the game 'just like others' do. The problem with this position is that it is hardly acceptable in the long term – one can barely imagine a subject wishing to live in a world as described by Dmowski, a world of indiscriminate rivalry, where nations engage in deadly fights only to exhaust their powers and finally perish. It is, then, a form of 'cynical consciousness',<sup>25</sup> which leads a critic of ideology to seek a sort of imaginary support, which makes this kind of consciousness bearable at all. The fantasy of a nation witnessing its own birth is such a form of support. Nation is sublimated into an ideal thing, an object of love, which is ancient yet unachievable, exists as an impossibility – an object which is unceasingly emerging out of history yet it can never be established as a positive, existing object.

### THE CHOICE OF ONE'S OWN FATE

Both these positions have a long lineage and they are reenacted in Polish politics in many ways because they constitute basic patterns of experiencing history. They do so firstly by celebrating Polish exceptionality and the experience of the victim of different forms of violence; secondly, by laying the ground for the paradigm of politics as a form of fight for Poland, striving for the survival and protection of what is just about to be born and what is always endangered in its existence. None of these positions carries a concrete content, they rather refer to major signifiers which structure the experience of history.

The power of these visions does not stem from rational persuasion but is constituted by a series of satisfactions. It is fuelled by subtle shifts in perspective and the aspect under which historical experience is perceived and remembered.

The question remains – is there a way of going beyond these positions, of abandoning them? This would entail rejecting both the satisfaction they offer and the meaningful context for historical experience that they provide. Beyond ideology there remains acceptance of historical fate as devoid of any symbolic sanction, any place in the Order of history. Žižek might call it the 'acceptance of contingency', for Jameson it means accepting the fundamental openness of political conflict as a basic framework of history. Nothing justifies our fate – the only thing we can do is 'choose' this fate as our own. Beyond the satisfaction offered by fantasy there is the choice of one's own destiny, its acceptance as the only possible field of action.

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<sup>25</sup> Slavoj Žižek, *On Belief*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 13-15.