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**THE ENEMY AND THE VICTIM:
STRAY DOGS IN POLAND, 1945–70
(DISCOURSES AND ACTIONS)**

Abstract

The article argues that two primary roles were prevalently identified for dogs in the period concerned: for one thing, dogs were perceived as objects of human malevolence or at least dislike; this had to do with the dissemination of disease – particularly, rabies, dangerous to humans. For another, the dog was represented as a victim of cruelty. The exchange of arguments between adherents of different solutions to the ‘canine question’ (dog-pounds and culling vs. shelters) grew emotion-imbuend, especially in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The press published voices of protest against mass killings of dogs and reinstatement of dogcatcher’s establishments. Eminent scientists, artists, cultural workers sent requests or appeals in these respects to the authorities. This ‘canine campaign’ led to the adoption, in 1961–2, of legal acts designed to make the methods of dealing with homeless animals ‘civilised’, but they did not bring about a breakthrough in the way dogs were treated or dealt with in post-war Poland. The campaign demonstrated that an active group of dog lovers got formed in the People’s Republic. In this sense, it can be said that dogs became an object of human care (the latter topic not having been subject to the research on which the following text is based).

Keywords: animal studies, People’s Republic of Poland, history of animals, dogs, dog-pounds, animal shelters

I
INTRODUCTION

It is symptomatic that, despite blooming studies on post-war communist Poland, several research areas that quite successfully developed in Western historiography have yielded no significant publications over the recent thirty years – in the Third Republic of Poland. Animal studies, including the history of animals, is one such area. This field

of interest to diverse domains of knowledge, which has seen intense development since the 1970s, was joined by very few followers in Poland.¹ While the reasons for such negligence are difficult to identify, it is worth considering whether backlogs in this respect might be made up for, and what, in specific, are the challenges being faced by scholars specialising in these particular issues.

I, therefore, seek to enrich the knowledge on the subject while pointing to the opportunities for, and difficulties in, research of this sort, mainly related to source problems. The purpose here is to discuss the discourse on dogs in post-war communist Poland between the mid-1940s and end of the 1960s. To the extent feasible, an analysis will be attempted of actions taken by the institutions tasked with dealing with the ‘canine question’, from the standpoint of what happened to/with the animals they dealt with. I put high emphasis on the manifestations of cruelty to dogs – especially stray ones. The problem of a change in the attitude towards dogs, observable already before the Second World War and manifesting itself in interest in their welfare,

¹ The Western literature dealing with animals and their history is extremely rich; its evaluation, presentation of its achievements or deficiencies is not the point herein. The main areas of research interest of experts in these issues are presented in anthologies, to recall Nigel Rothfels (ed.), *Representing Animals* (Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2002). Pioneering to the development of human-animal relationships was the study by Richard D. Ryder, *Animal Revolution. Changing Attitudes toward Speciesism* (Oxford, 2000). A summary of the research, taking account of contributions by Polish authors, is an article by Monika Bakke, ‘Studia nad zwierzętami: od aktywizmu do akademii i z powrotem?’, *Teksty Drugie*, 3 (2011). Among (rather modest) attempts by Polish authors to ‘make up for’ this negligence, the following studies can be pointed out: Anna Barcz and Dorota Łagodźka, *Zwierzęta i ich ludzie: zmierzch antropocentrycznego paradygmatu* (Warszawa, 2015); Justyna Tymieniecka-Suchanek (ed.), *Człowiek w relacji do zwierząt, roślin i maszyn w kulturze, i: Aspekt posthumanistyczny i transhumanistyczny* (Katowice, 2014); eadem (ed.), *Człowiek w relacji do zwierząt, roślin i maszyn w kulturze, ii: Od humanizmu do posthumanizmu* (Katowice, 2014); Ewa Borkowska, Adam Borkowski, Maria Długolecka-Pietrzak and Sławomir Sobieraj, *Kot w literaturze, kulturze, języku i mediach* (Siedlce, 2018); Anna Barcz, ‘The Animal and the Musselmann as a Paradigm of Victim’, *Journal of Studies in History and Culture*, 1 (2015); Anna Barcz and Magdalena Dąbrowska, *Zwierzęta, gender i kultura. Perspektywa ekologiczna, etyczna i krytyczna* (Lublin, 2014); Michał P. Pręgowski (ed.), *Companion Animals in Everyday Life: Situating Human-Animal Engagement within Cultures* (Basingstoke, 2016); Justyna Włodarczyk and Michał Pręgowski, *Pies też człowiek? Relacje ludzi i psów we współczesnej Polsce* (Gdańsk, 2014).

is not addressed here. Given these premises, an attempt follows hereinbelow at a peripheral-history story which endeavours to be close to ‘zoocentric history’, as defined by Éric Baratay.²

The date marking the beginning of the period under discussion is justified by the end of the Second World War and the emergence of the ‘People’s Republic of Poland’; the final date is due to the present-day advancement of source queries.

The real challenge for the undersigned has been source-related difficulties. While analysis of the discourse on how to treat stray dogs has been enabled, to a considerable extent, by the research of press and documents produced by central-level offices, reconstruction of the actual conditions in which dogs lived and the methods of killing dogs turned out to be much more difficult. The effort ended up in a success, at least partly, for the archival material generated by Animal Welfare Society (TOZ), Animal Protection Society (TOŹ), and other institutions in charge of (among other things) controlling animal shelters/sanctuaries has been found and could be studied. The veil of silence over the lot was removed with the ‘canine campaign’ that rumbled through the Polish press in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Moreover, the lot of animals was dealt with by commentators and publicists, though with varying frequency, over the entire period in question. The files of central offices dealing with animal issues – such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Forestry and Wood Industry – are of considerable cognitive value.

II

DOGS IN POST-WAR POLAND: THEIR SOCIAL ROLES

Dogs appeared in the authorities’ discourse and press commentaries mainly as objects of hostility or, at best, reluctance, and rarely well-wishing and care. Negative feelings were triggered by ‘wandering’ (stray) dogs, which were accused of transmitting several diseases, including rabies – the latter being dangerous to humans. The reservoir of rabies mainly consisted of forest animals; the disease would chiefly

² Éric Baratay, *Le point de vue animal. Une autre version de l’histoire* (Paris, 2012); Polish version: *Zwierzęcy punkt widzenia. Inna wersja historii*, trans. Paulina Tarasewicz (Gdańsk, 2014).

be transmitted via dogs, cats or foxes, the recipients being humans and domestic animals.

The periodical *Pies* [Dog], an official journal of the Kennel Club in Poland [abbreviated as ZwKP], published as early as in 1949 the opinion (by an author initialled as ‘Dr. I.M.’) that “among all the cultured countries, Poland has the highest numbers of cases of rabies”. Among the reasons, specified were the irrational conditions of breeding (“Thousands of homeless mongrels are wandering around villages and suburbs”), lack of consciousness among the owners, disregard of obligations towards dogs – often treated as toys (thrown away once the kid has grown up), expelled to the street when aged or sick. The author condemned illicit trade in stolen dogs, keeping dogs in unhygienic conditions, unavailability of shelters for stray animals.³

Was the rabies threat real? Taking into account the period immediately after the war, the answer is ‘yes’. As per the findings of the Ministry of Health (the 1945 statistics is incomplete), between 1945 and 1966, a total of 251 deaths were identified as caused by rabies; thereof, in 1945 alone – 5 deaths; 1946 – 48; 1947 – 33; 1948 – 46; 1949 – 66; 1950 – 35; 1951 – 2; 1953 – 2; 1953 – 2; 1954 – 7; 1955 – 4; 1956 – 1; 1957 – 3; 1958 – 2; 1959 – 1; 1960 – 4; 1961 – 2; 1962 – 0; 1963 – 3; 1964 – 2; 1965 – 3; 1966 – 0.⁴

The statistics concerning the dissemination of rabies and the number of inoculated dogs in the years 1945–66, based on publications of the Ministry of Agriculture’s Department of Veterinary, is broken down in Table 1 below.

As is apparent, rabies caused deaths among humans primarily in the earliest post-war years; from 1951 onwards, deaths caused by rabies were rare.

Rabies also severely affected the country’s farming industry. Ministry of Agriculture statistics had it that in 1948, ‘production’ or ‘farm’

³ Dr I.M., ‘Sprawa wścieklizny’, *Pies*, 2 (1949), 4; slight differences appear in the statistics see Archiwum Akt Nowych (State Archives of Modern Records, hereinafter: AAN), Ministerstwo Rolnictwa i Reform Rolnych (Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms, hereinafter: MRiRR), 411: Draft Ordinance of the MRiRR, of 1950, amending the Ordinance regarding protective vaccination of dogs against rabies [no pagination]; AAN, MRiRR 370: Draft legislation acts on vaccination against rabies [no pagination].

⁴ Anneliese and Eugeniusz Nowak, ‘Wścieklizna’, *Łowiec Polski* 3 (1968).

Table 1. Identified cases of rabies and canine inoculations, 1945–66

Year	Number of rabies cases identified in wild and domestic animals	Number of dogs inoculated against rabies
1945	[no data available]	--
1946	1,209*	--
1947	2,299*	--
1948	3,670	142,950
1949	3,682	720,208
1950	1,035	933,020
1951	259	1,062,542
1952	182	854,581
1953	183	777,567
1954	159	882,287
1955	98	957,308
1956	76**	1,004,346
1957	99**	1,058,941
1958	109**	1,184,187
1959	110	1,386,692
1960	148	1,438,880
1961	145	1,651,132
1962	185	1,610,946
1963	128	1,650,946
1964	277	1,764,765
1965	119	1,721,001
1966	143	1,932,398

* The available data is incomplete.

** Number of homesteads/pens.

Source: Anneliese and Eugeniusz Nowak, 'Wścieklizna', *Łowiec Polski*, 3 (1968).

animals killed or fallen owing to the disease totalled 524; accordingly, the State Treasury paid over 17,000,000 złotych in indemnities, reliefs or rewards. In 1949, the fallen and killed farm/production animals totalled 576, the related Treasury expenditure being roughly the same as the year before. As of 1950, the number of farm/production animals

fallen or killed for this particular reason had dropped to 372, with State Treasury loss reduced to over 294,000 złotych.⁵

Canine rabies was fought at the time under the Ordinance of the Minister of Agriculture of 9 January 1928, issued according to the Ordinance of the President of the Republic of Poland, of 22 August 1927, on the eradication of contagious animal diseases. Based on this legislation, dogs (and cats) were suspected of having been rabies-infected even if only based on a presumption that they had got in touch with infected or supposedly infected animals. According to the adopted regulations, such dogs had to be 'killed forthwith'. There were instances of all the dogs getting killed within the 'suspected' commune (*gmina*) or urban area, which turned out to be inefficient all the same. Q3 1948 saw the application of mass vaccination in Warsaw – the city and the county (*powiat*), as well as in the then-Voivodeships of Gdansk and Olsztyn. As a side effect of the action, a massive occurrence was seen, reaching above a thousand cases (in the County [*powiat*] of Warsaw) of vaccination shock, which in turn caused deaths of animals or the need to kill the affected animals. This came as an effect of applying an overly strong dose to half-blooded and puppy dogs. However, the conviction that the action had to be continued prevailed.⁶

Under the aforementioned ministerial rabies eradication regulation of 1928, secondary legislation was produced to determine the methods of dealing with sick animals as part of everyday reality and routine. The relevant procedures were set forth by, among other things, a memo of the Ministry of Agriculture and Agrarian Reforms [MRiRR], of 31 August 1948, on the eradication of rabies. It provided that in the areas considered under threat, for which it was found that a rabies-infected (or rabies-suspected) dog moved around it freely, all the dogs within such an area ought to be tethered and provided with safe muzzles. Stray dogs wandering in such potentially affected areas should be caught up. However, it was noticed already at that point that communal or urban tasked with catching and eliminating wandering dogs proved to be overzealous in a significant number of cases: dogs were caught at enclosed/fenced areas, snatched out of their owners' hands, and so on. As it was found, "Also the ways in which the dogs

⁵ AAN, MRiRR, 411, Draft Ordinance [no pagination]. For a slightly different statistics, see A. and E. Nowak, 'Wścieklizna'.

⁶ Alfred Trawiński, 'Walka z wścieklizną psów', *Pies*, 1 (1949), 3–4.

are kept and eliminated is brutal and at odds with any humanitarian principles”. It was therefore recommended that the catching be done until 8:00 hrs. in the morning, as it was allegedly the time by which only stray dogs would wander around the streets, being the primary source of propagation of rabies within specified localities. Dogs staying inside tightly closed (fenced) pens should not be considered wandering dogs, it was remarked. Once caught up, the dog ought to be kept in a rendering plant, dog-pound, or at the owner’s premises, for three days. The dogs not having been “released by the competent office” within the three days should be put to death in electrified localities with use of electric current only, or, if elsewhere, then in line with the Ordinance of the President of the Republic of Poland, of 2 March 1928, On protection of animals (i.e., *Journal of Laws* [hereinafter: JL], no. 36, item 33). Such ‘putting to death’ should take place in a separate room, away from the other animals. The place where caught dogs are kept should provide appropriate sanitary-veterinarian conditions, and the dogs ought to be fed and watered.⁷

The animosity towards dogs on the part of authority offices was grounded not only on the fact that they could be the carriers of rabies: on top of that, dogs were treated as economic parasites. This ‘economy-related’ argument appeared, in its full-fledged form, in a note of the Minister of Agriculture dated December 1959, which estimated the number of dogs in peasant holdings at 6 million, the figure for urban areas was approx. 1.5 million. According to the Ministry, such dogs did not fulfil their ‘defensive-and-pastoral role’, and some 2.5 to 3 million of them were considered redundant. Dogs in rural areas were usually undernourished and forced to seek food by themselves. Consequently, they ate out the farm animals’ feed and hunted for small game in nearby forests. The document in question estimated that the ‘feed minimum’ for a dog had to be approx. 1 kg of fodder per day; with around three million ‘redundant’ dogs, this caused the consumption of some 3,000 tonnes of fodders daily, the annual figure being about 1 million t. In monetary terms, the fodder consumed totalled approx.

⁷ Archiwum Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej (Archive of the National Remembrance Institute, hereinafter: AIPN), ref. no. BU 1550/2971: Komenda Główna Milicji Obywatelskiej (Central Headquarters of the Civic Militia, hereinafter: KG MO) do Komendy Wojewódzkiej Milicji Obywatelskiej (Voivodeship Headquarters of the Civic Militia, hereinafter: KW MO), Warsaw, 10 Sept. 1948 [no pagination].

800,000 złotych per annum. According to the Ministry's estimation, the loss in the game caused by dogs amounted in 1959 to 15 per cent of the total loss in the population of roe deer, 45 per cent of hares, and 10 per cent of partridges. In export price terms, the loss totalled approx. 123,000,000 złotych.⁸

Economic arguments of this sort reappeared in other official documents. A memo from the Ministry of Forestry and Wood Industry [MLiPD] to the Office of the Council of Ministers, dated March 1958, estimated the number of dogs living in Poland at 8 million, of which some 6.5 million lived in rural enclosures. The authors assumed that the average nutrition per dog in urban areas would amount to approx. 100 złotych monthly, which is 1,200 annually; in rural areas, the cost would be 40 per cent of the urban figure, that is approx. 500 złotych per annum. Altogether, the total estimated 'loss' was 4.5 billion złotych per year, of which approx. 3.5 billion złotych was apparently incurred in countryside areas.

What is more, the document stated that rural residents passed a portion of these costs on the society, and this for several primary reasons. First, dogs in rural areas were hungry most of the time and had to supplement their diet with carcasses and road-kills, this having caused losses as such dogs disseminated diseases among humans and animals. Secondly, a countryside dog appeared as a rival to the other breeding animals in eating kitchen waste, thus contributing to the increased cost of feeding these animals. Thirdly, dogs would seek for more food in the fields and forests, catching animals and birds there, particularly during the breeding and lambing periods, and therefore causing year-by-year deterioration of the venery and depletion of forests and fields as the game tended to perish. "The related loss is all the more severe that, for example, partridges or pheasants, apart from direct benefits such as meat or foreign currency, eliminate a whole range of detrimental insects in farmlands ...". A pair of partridges caught alive and sold to a foreign buyer would bring the country US\$ 15, which equalled the value of one tonne of hard coal, "mined with so considerable a cost and effort". For one exported hare, the exporting party could receive an equivalency of "25 kg pork meat, or

⁸ AAN, Ministerstwo Leśnictwa i Przemysłu Drzewnego (Ministry of Forestry and Wood Industry, hereinafter: MLiPD), 57, do Ministerstwa Rolnictwa: Note re. elimination of excessive numbers of dogs, Warsaw, 12 Dec. 1959 [no pagination].

40 kg oranges or lemons, or 6 kg of coffee [grains], or 53 kg of rice”. Assuming that every rural dog destroyed one piece of game per year, the loss would have amounted to 6.5 million pieces of game.⁹ These arguments reappeared in documents generated by the directors of the Polish Hunting Association [PZŁ]¹⁰ and the State Hunting Council, the latter being a consulting body to the MLiPD.¹¹

The arguments under discussion enriched the image of ‘dog-the-enemy’ by a new element – namely, the dog being perceived as a poacher, or assistant poacher. Roman Gesing, Undersecretary of State with the MLiPD, referred to is in a 1957 letter to the Minister of Finance. As he stated, “in some of the Voivodeships, the Voivodeship of Kielce in particular, peasants are practicing a new form of poaching, with use of greyhounds. This shady practice is so disseminated that some residents are going as far as trading in greyhounds, whose price, conditional upon the quality, may equal the price charged for a quality cow”.¹² The procedure was referred to also in documents produced by voivodeship-level State authorities.¹³

The plague of poaching dogs frequently reappeared in journalistic commentaries in the fifties and sixties.¹⁴ Some publicists could find words of excuse for the dogs participating in these dealings. In 1959, Hubert Wolański wrote in *Łowiec Polski*, the organ of the PZŁ: “Not every single dog is born with a ‘bent for hunting’; many have been forced to poach by the hunger they suffer. In the countryside, dogs are usually deficiently and poorly nourished – no surprise, then, that a ravenous dog would take any chance to sneak out of its enclosure

⁹ *Ibidem*, MLiPD do Urzędu Rady Ministrów, Bureau for Presidia of the National Councils, 26 March 1958 [no pagination].

¹⁰ ‘Działalność Naczelnej Rady Łowieckiej w okresie od 15 VII 1963–26 VI 1966’, *Łowiec Polski*, 12 (1966), 10.

¹¹ Archiwum Ministerstwa Środowiska (Archive of the Ministry of the Environment, hereinafter: AMS), MLiPD, 49/1, Plenary session of the Sejm of the People’s Republic of Poland, held on 15 Dec. 1965.

¹² AAN, MLiPD, 57, podsekretarz stanu w Ministerstwie Leśnictwa i Przemysłu Drzewnego Roman Gesing do Ministerstwa Finansów, 29 Oct. 1957 [no pagination].

¹³ *Ibidem*, Prezydium Wojewódzkiej Rady Narodowej (Presidium of the Voivodeship National Council, hereinafter: PWRN) w Poznaniu do MLiPD, Poznań, 11 Jan. 1958 [no pagination]; *ibidem*, Notice of PWRN in Kielce of 31 March 1955 ‘on protection of game’; *ibidem*, PWRN w Krakowie do MLiPD, Cracow, 7 Jan. 1958.

¹⁴ See, *inter alia*, ‘Łowiectwo w ocenie posłów’, *Łowiec Polski*, 6 (1963), 3, 6; Jan Cabaj, ‘Zwalczajmy kłusowników-charciarzy’, *Łowiec Polski*, 1 (1954), 9.

to satisfy its hunger in the hunting ground. Such ‘poverty-driven’ poaching turns with time into a ‘fancier’ practice, an addiction. The same is valid for cats. The set argument has it that ‘a cat must be hungry’ – and so cats living in villages get no feed, save for small rations of milk in some cases”.¹⁵

Apart from these canine incarnations, the period’s discourse offers the image of dogs as victims to cruelty and suffering caused by humans. As it seems, until the political Thaw of the mid-fifties, this image had been rather vaguely outlined.

In the TOZ’s opinion, there was a social reason behind the way dogs, not only stray dogs but also domestic ones, were handled. In analysing the situation that occurred in post-war Szczecin [until 1945, the German city of Stettin], Edward Biłobran, Vice Chairman of the TOZ’s General Board, wrote: “A large proportion of inhabitants of Szczecin are people of rural background. As a result, the care of their dogs is that in the morning, bright and early, the dog is released into the street and may or may not be back home in the evening”. The consequences were devastating: “The municipal cleanser [i.e., dog-catcher] is doing the cleansing, on quite a large scale. The population of dogs has diminished but remains considerable all the same. Dogs getting hit by cars is a daily occurrence. You come across pedigree dogs in the streets, as the method of unrestrained releasing of dogs into the streets is commonplace. All this, put together, contributes to a most lamentable canine tragedy. Set free, a dog moves freely around tenement-houses and stairwells, defiling them, and a series of conflict follows between the owners of dogs and uninvolved citizens. Dogs get their legs injured or broken, get thrown out of windows, bricks are thrown at them, and so on. Any tenement-house where a bitch with sex-drive lives, the staircase gets besieged by the local dog-bachelors. ... With the picture completed by illicit slaughters of dogs – for the manufacture of canine suet, considered to be a miraculous agent for the tuberculosis-affected, this would be, we should think, everything that makes up the miserable lot of dogs in the town of Szczecin”.¹⁶

¹⁵ Hubert Wolański, ‘Plaga naszych łowisk’, *Łowiec Polski*, 20 (1959), 7.

¹⁶ AAN, Towarzystwo Ochrony Zwierząt (Animal Welfare Society, hereinafter: TOZ), 18: wiceprezes E. Biłobran do Zarządu Głównego TOZ, Szczecin, 26 May 1951 (confidential): The relations in the field of animal and nature protection within the area of Szczecin the City and Voivodeship [no pagination].

Reports on the activities of TOZ's field branches abound with information on punishments administered for indications of dog abuse. The Board of the Society's Lublin Branch repeatedly intervened in 'canine cases' between 15 February and 15 August 1950. According to the succinct notes, two dogs were killed with an iron crowbar; a dog was used to bait cats; a "watchdog got bestially beaten"; a dog was kept "tethered day and night, without a kennel"; a beggar would "kill dogs and consume them"; a "lapdog was mistreated by shackling with a wire"; a dog was "thrown down from the third floor"; yet another "had hot water poured onto it".¹⁷

Dog owners repeatedly complained about arbitrariness and over-zealousness of the veterinarians who applied measures provided for by the rabies eradication law. Information about these facts comes from the late 1940s and early 1950s. According to TOZ reports, cases of non-humanitarian conduct of an 'autonomous column of slaughterers' (that is, dogcatchers), all the dogs in Jagiellońska St. in Toruń were slain due to alleged rabies. The dishonest 'catchers of dogs' would hunt purebred animals in order to "blackmail their owners for ransom. ... Healthy dogs and cats were exterminated street by street, rabies gained in strength, and this was, and still is, definite evidence of the errors that have been committed". TOZ had proofs for incidents of the groundless, mass slaughter of dogs merely based on suspicion of rabies. Such conduct "undermined the trust for the instructions issued, incited to disregard the protective regulations and deservedly triggered indignation in the society". In Grębocin near Toruń, some 300 dogs were killed within just one day, with the use of a profoundly inhuman technology of putting to death. The case came to a conclusion at the municipal court where it was attested that "the children witnessing the action were fainting of dismay". Rabies eradication ordinances came as a real tribulation for the owners who "neither knew the moment nor the hour" for their animals to be forcedly taken away from their home and put to death", on the instruction of the official county veterinarian, with no results of laboratory analysis being announced to them".¹⁸

¹⁷ AAN, TOZ, 17, Zarząd Oddziału w Lublinie, Report on the activities of the Animal Welfare Society, Branch of Lublin, for the period of 15 Feb. to 15 Aug. 1950'.

¹⁸ AAN, TOZ, 18, Annual report on the activities of the Animal Welfare Society of the Republic of Poland, Branch of Toruń, for the period of 1 Feb. 1948 to 1 Aug. 1949.

That dog-pounds were an inferno – from the canine viewpoint – is attested by the earlier-quoted remarks. The workers of such establishments were officially called ‘cleansers’, which was a detail of the sanitary-epidemiological discourse which was often at work at the time when it came to describing the relation(ship)s between humans and animals.¹⁹ The way these cleansers dealt with animals harboured objections already in the late 1940s/early 1950s from TOZ inspectors.

Animal protection movement activists expressed their opinion on this issue in a memorial sent in 1947 to Edward Osóbka-Morawski, the then-Minister of Public Administration; as they remarked, the dogcatchers had no appropriately constructed vehicles available for use in their work, where sick or suspect dogs could have been segregated from healthy ones; they had no humane nets with which to catch dogs and only used nooses that damaged the animal’s larynx. Dogcatcher’s establishments were not equipped with electric killing apparatuses. The animals would be killed with bludgeons, whereas the earlier regulations required veterinarian supervision assisting at such executions. “Besides that, they do not observe the duty hours for catching dogs, snatch them in the street from the owners’ hands, thereby arousing infamous brawls and street assemblages; they would even not retrogress from abducting dogs from fenced places, which they are not supposed to do, by any means. Based upon what has become known to us, dogcatchers catch even pedigree dogs and, in general, practice trading in the valuable material [thus acquired], while dogs of lesser value are kept for less than twenty-four hours or killed on the spot, whereas the former regulations provided for such period to be up to three days, with the duty to feed the animals”. The authors moreover raised the question of overrated tax fees on dogs imposed by municipalities, with the result that the less-well-to-do payers tended to “purposefully lost” their dogs – and the latter, now stray, wandered then around streets and roads, causing the danger of disseminating epidemic diseases. The Municipal Board of Bydgoszcz had administered a progressive tax, regardless of the useful value of the dog, of up to 10,000 złotych (for those owning three or more dogs), which resulted in the appearance of a considerable

¹⁹ See Gabriela Jarzębowska, ‘Retoryka deratyzacji w PRL: od czystki etnicznej i politycznej do czystki gatunkowej’, *Teksty Drugie*, 2 (2018), 120–37.

number of stray dogs in the streets of Bydgoszcz and in the city's vicinity.²⁰

Inspections carried out in 1951 at the dog-pounds in the Voivodeship of Lublin confirmed that this bleak picture reflected the reality. In Tomaszów Lubelski, Presidium of the Municipal National Council, as the body in charge, dispensed no licence to the local dogcatcher until April 1951 – and so he did not receive the gloves, apron, rubber boots, or first-aid kit (as otherwise due to him). “The dogcatcher's establishment is not equipped with cages for keeping the caught dogs. The burial site does not conform to the sanitary conditions, and it is unenclosed, the dogs and the fowl are spreading the carcasses all around the area. The dogcatcher is forced to do the slaying inhumanely, for there is no electric plate available”.

The peer establishment in Krasnystaw was found grossly negligent, through an inspection on 30th April 1951: “The caught dogs are famished and are given no water to drink”.²¹ Having audited the dog-pound in Grajewo, also in 1951, TOZ inspectors wrote: “The dogs are kept in a kennel. They are slain with a club, or have their hearts pierced with a knife. Carrion is served as the feed. The products of the slaughter industry [*sic!*] are transferred to the C.C. [Communal Cooperative] in Grajewo. The burial site is partly fenced – the carcass is covered by sand, the carrion from the slaughterhouse is sprinkled with creolin. No disinfection agents are available. The dogcatcher has one horse – the stable is inappropriate”.²²

The dogs were famished, and often kept concentrated in an area so small that they bit each other due to extremely confined space. In lack of electric apparatuses, they were mostly killed with clubs.²³

²⁰ AAN, TOZ, 58: Zarząd Główny Towarzystwa Opieki nad Zwierzętami (General Board, Animal Protection Society, hereinafter: ZG TONZ[RP]) do premiera i ministra administracji publicznej Edwarda Osóbki-Morawskiego, Warsaw, 23 July 1947, 18–19.

²¹ AAN, TOZ, 23: Breakdown based on the inspection of dogcatcher establishments carried out within the Voivodeship of Lublin in April, 1951, by the Regional Section of Inspectors, General Board, TOZ in Lublin.

²² AAN, TOZ, 19: ‘Breakdown based on the inspection of dogcatcher establishments carried out within the Voivodeship of Białystok in the month of February, 1951, by the Regional Section of Inspectors, General Board, TOZ in Białystok’.

²³ AAN, TOZ, 58: ZG ZTONZ to the Minister of Agriculture and Rural Reforms, 29 Apr. 1949, sht. 98; AAN, TOZ, 25: TOZ, Regional Section of Inspectors, General Board in Poznań, to PWRN, Veterinary Branch in Szczecin, Poznań, 7 Sept. 1950.

At the peak of Stalinism in Poland, the discourse on methods of handling dogs narrowed down remarkably as the authority had eliminated one of the parties to the dispute: after being increasingly marginalised, TOZ was eventually liquidated in 1952. Acts of cruelty to animals, including dogs, occurred more and more rarely in press commentaries. However, articles taking up the problem, though basically in the way characteristic to the Stalinist ideology, can be found in the press until the end of the forties.

As an example, let us use a text published in the press organ of Poland's Kennel Club in 1950, which opened by enumerating some terrifying cases of dog abuse, often perpetrated by young people or children. At a party in Łódź, for example, a local Meat Establishment worker threw a dog into a burning stove. In Józefów near Warsaw, a shopkeeper smashed a dog's head against a telegraph pole, as the dog intruded into his fenced area. A professor at the University of Warsaw drove out a dog on which he previously performed vivisection, and ordered the caretaker to beat it to death. In Bydgoszcz, some little boys hanged a dog on a tree and bludgeoning it to death with sticks, beat it on the nose and eyes, with passers-by watching, incurious. The Kennel Club kept "dozens of pieces of evidence ascertaining bestial slaughtering of dogs with a club, tied a few of them together in a bag, which is taking place in several dog-pounds". In one at Radomsko, "the inspection of the Animal Welfare Society inspection has found hanging dogs, meticulously trimmed; when asked what the purpose was for the dogs to have been so carefully trimmed, the establishment was unable to give an answer". This bundle of facts was accompanied by an attempt at interpreting them: "The State authority's crackdowns on the symptoms of sadism and brutish morals, as surfacing from time to time onto [*sic*] the order of the day, show how monstrous is the inheritance we have received from the Hitlerist rule in our country, and how deep the Hitlerite plague's penetration was, in so many cases. Extremely appalling is the state of intensified abuse of animals, which arouses serious concern among the sound majority of our society". Decaying social systems, the author argued, trigger craziest instincts, passing on to the new society the heritage of moral savagery.

As we can read further on, in the capitalist system, animals were treated, like any other good, as private property; the only reflex dictated by the bourgeois sentimentalism being 'pity' toward the animal, which could be helpful as much as alms thrown to a beggar. In the capitalist

period, overexploitation had led to the complete extermination of whole species and, moreover, numerous peoples. Now, it is an obligation of the socialist culture is to extend protection to every single living being. Any acts of wrong against animals must be wiped out. One needs to fight for depleting any remnants of the Hitlerist savagery.²⁴

Interrelatedness between cruelty to animals and Hitlerism is a deliberately exaggerated thread – and a convenient one, as it allows one to avoid accusations of cruel practices applied to animals as a fixed element in Polish culture, which appear in cultures of Polish social groups.

III

‘CANINE CAMPAIGN’ – ITS COURSE AND OUTCOMES

The motif of abuse and cruelty towards dogs became the leitmotiv of the ‘canine campaign’ the period’s press dealt with, and it was reflected in open letters to the top communist-party and State authorities in the years between 1958 and 1961.

The communist party’s Central Committee’s daily *Trybuna Ludu* was the first to write, in 1958, about what dogcatchers were doing in Poznań’s Warszawskie housing estate: “to avoid destroying the valuable canine leather ... they peeled it off the living dogs” they caught, and then could get a higher price for it at the collection centre.²⁵ In any case, it was not a singular incident. In 1959, the press wrote about an illegal dog-pound discovered in Bydgoszcz: “A usurpatory dogcatcher put dogs and cats in a bag and banged them with an axe. He sold fat from the animals being killed in such a cruel way to all those whoever wanted to buy it for medicinal purposes. W. has been dealing with this shady business for years now. The case against him has been referred to the Public Prosecutor”.²⁶

How great the problem was, we can also learn from a report of the activities of the Central Board of TOnZ for the years 1959–62. The report found that there are dogcatcher’s establishments operating

²⁴ Rudolf Kryspin, ‘Kultura pozostawiona sama sobie, a nie kierowana świadomie... zostawia za sobą pustkowie (z listu K. Marksa do Fr. Engelsa 25 marca 1868 r.)’ [When on its own, rather than consciously directed, ... culture produces nothing but wasteland (from K. Marx’s letter to F. Engels, 25 March 1868)], *Pies*, 1 (1950), 6–7.

²⁵ AAN, MLiPD, 57, *Trybuna Ludu*, 44 (1958).

²⁶ ‘Prasa donosi’, *Pies*, 4 (1959), 17.

within Poland in which dogs and cats “are kept in conditions denying the most elementary requirements of hygiene and humanitarianism, where dogs are usually killed with clubs, axes, knives, and where dogcatchers, frequently trading in canine lard as a superstitious anti-tuberculosis medicine, grow wealthy on the howl of dogs. These catchers are mostly engaged by the National Councils. There are, on top of this, ‘clandestine dog-pounds’, ‘clandestine dog butcheries’, dealing mostly with canine lard”.²⁷ All this was happening despite the Ordinance of the Council of Ministers of 25 July 1958 (JL, no. 49, item 242) having abolished formally the dogcatching business and dogcatcher establishments restricted to removing animal cadavers.²⁸ Once again, a legal norm proved unable to regulate the standard practice efficiently.

The crassness of the world of dog-pounds and dogcatchers was laid bare based on documents produced by TOnZ inspectors after 1956. In 1958, a TOnZ delegate at the dogcatcher establishment in Wołomin (not far from Warsaw) came across, “in a kennel knocked together of timber boards, a few dogs bound with wires to the walls, no bedding, on bare concrete, no water. The animals received as food some unspecified remnants of intestines and meat, probably made of corpses of killed dogs. The catcher admitted he was killing dogs with the use of a hammer, uses a small knife to finish off, and then pulls off the skin immediately. There was skin peeled off and fat extracted from the dogs, from the intestines as well as off-alls. It turned out that the catcher ate canine meat together with his family, as well as the fat and the fat and greaves rendered from it. The remainder of the fat he would sell to those reporting at his place, as a tuberculosis cure. The animals were killed in greatly cramped conditions, in the presence of the other dogs and, worse even, children. The dogs were caught all over beforehand in a sneaky manner”.²⁹

²⁷ AIPN, BU 1585/22813: ‘Report on ZG TOnZ for the period of 25 October 1959 to 30 June 1962, as read out at the General Meeting of Delegates of the TOnZ Branch Office on 30 June 1962’, 215–16.

²⁸ Ordinance of the Council of Ministers, of 25 July 1958, ‘on permissions for performing the industry, craftsmanship, and certain services by non-State-owned entities’, JL No. 49, Item 242.

²⁹ AAN, MLiPD, 57: ‘Excerpts from a memo of the General Board of the Animal Protection Society in the People’s Republic of Poland to the Public Prosecutor in Wołomin, of 18.12.1958’ [no pagination].

However, the way dogcatcher establishments operated was not the only problem dealt with as part of the campaign: the other one was mass killings of stray dogs by hunters under the pretext that such dogs transmitted diseases, which, according to the rules of the sanitary-epidemiological discourse, was referred to as ‘sanitary culling’. The press described cases of the zealotry of such hunters who did the culling not only within controlled hunting zones but also targeted at dogs kept inside fenced premises, some of them attended by their owners at the moment of shooting.³⁰ A discussion held at the conference held at the Office of the Council of Ministers in July 1961 tells us that ‘expeditions’ took place at that time in Poland during which hunters murdered dogs in pens, by the houses, on village roads, “neglecting in their obstinacy even the tears of children or elderly people [witnessing such scenes]”. The necessity to do the imposed quotas of culled dogs (under pain of financial penalties) caused that, seeking to demonstrate that they had met these norms, hunters cut off noses and ears of shot but surviving animals, slaughtered dogs in homesteads, and so forth.³¹

For the combat against dogcatchers’ establishments and the cruel handling of dogs – and, to a lesser extent, the culling of wandering animals – several public personages were mobilised (writers, professors, actors, actors, scientists) of recognised authority. Professor Tadeusz Kotarbiński, President of the Polish Academy of Sciences, wrote for the press and delivered lectures on the subject³²; collective letters addressing the matter were sent to Władysław Gomułka, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party [KC PZPR] and to Prime Minister Józef Cyrankiewicz.³³

³⁰ ‘Sprawa strzelania do psów’, *Pies*, 2 (1958), 10; dog shooting/culling was addressed also in the article ‘Wyrok za zastrzelenie dwóch psów’ *Pies*, 7 (1962), 17.

³¹ *Ibidem*, TONZ of Warsaw, Note at the conference with Minister J. Wiczorek, Warsaw, 10 July, 1961 [no pagination].

³² Tadeusz Kotarbiński, ‘Psia krew’, *Życie Warszawy*, 19 (1961). In November 1961, Professor Kotarbiński delivered, at a Society for Moral Culture gathering, a lecture ‘On ethical issues regarding the attitude of humans towards other living creatures’, drawing upon the material supplied by TONZ; see IPN BU, 1585/22813: ‘Report on the activities of ZG TONZ for the period of 25 Oct. 1959 to 30 June 1962, as read out at the General Assembly of Delegates of the TONZ Branch on 30 June 1962’ [no pagination].

³³ AAN, MLiPD, 57: To Citizen W. Gomułka, First Secretary of the [Central Committee] of the Polish United Workers’ Party [PZPR], Warsaw, 1 March 1960 [no pagination]; To Citizen J. Cyrankiewicz, Warsaw, 2 June 1961 [no pagination].

This massed campaign was largely inspired by the TOnZ leadership team, who supplied many a public figure with documents depicting how cruel the dealing with dogs commonly was. The opposite party in this dispute consisted of the responsible ministries: the one for Agriculture, Forestry and Wood Industry [MLiPD], Municipal Administration [MGK], and the hunters associated with the PZŁ. General Zygmunt Berling, then in office as General Inspector for Hunting, opted for radical steps to be taken in this respect. As he stated in 1959, resolving this “burning issue calls for ruthless elimination of at least 50 per cent of dogs, and only this may give the basis for creating possibly good conditions for the protection of the fauna against predators”. To make the hunting economy up to the appropriate standard (in economic terms), Berling proposed to apply financial gratifications for ‘destruction’ of wandering dogs, increased buying-in prices for canine skins, and taxes charged for owning dogs. Berling, moreover, supported dog-catching activity.³⁴

For its part, TOnZ promoted an animal sanctuary (asylum) movement. According to the concept formulated in a memo from Jan Matecki, Chairman of TOnZ’s General Board, to Prime Minister Cyrankiewicz in June 1961, the closed-down dogcatcher establishments would be replaced by shelters or sanctuaries where stray dogs, brought by the locals and full-time inspectors would be kept for a “defined short time”. Dogs would be escorted to such places in a way that attracts no attention to avoid any “drastic and shameful scenes of pursuit, noosing, and the like”. The owners of detained animals would be sought through advertisement or otherwise. “Elimination of redundant dogs” was supposed to be done in a most humane fashion possible – so that they “would remain of their [coming] death until the very last moment”. This was supposed to be done by qualified persons with a high sense of responsibility for what they do. To inhibit proliferation of scrubs, it was proposed that they be sterilised and their blind broods put to sleep under control of, or directly by, TOnZ.³⁵

Did these controversies and polemics around ‘doggy affairs’ impact the lot of the animals concerned?

³⁴ *Ibidem*, Zygmunt Berling, General Inspector for Hunting, to Minister Dąb-Kocioł, Warsaw, 29 May 1959’ [no pagination].

³⁵ *Ibidem*, ZG TOnZ, przewodniczący Jan Matecki do tow. J. Cyrankiewicza, Warsaw, 7 June 1961 [no pagination].

The campaign has probably affected the legal solutions adopted in 1961–2. October 1961 saw the release of the guidelines of the Minister of Municipal Administration on the settlement of the issue of stray dogs and cats in urban areas. The competencies of the bodies dealing with stray dogs were determined. Municipal administration and housing management sections of National Councils were tasked with earmarking and equipping suitable premises as animal shelters. Appropriately equipped – water supply, sewerage network connection or cesspool provided, compartments with enclosure for dogs, cages for cats, separate compartments for quarantine, and internal space heated in the cold season – these facilities were to be run by city waste removal enterprises (sanitation departments) and TOnZ branch offices. Appliances with which to prepare (cook) the feed, a room where the animals would be disposed of, and a not-too-big storage space had to be provided. When in a shelter, animals had to be fed on a regular basis and taken care of by specialised orderly staff, all instructed for the humane treatment of animals. Delivering animals to such asylums “ought to be mostly based upon assistance from the society”. In collaboration with the competent TOnZ branch, a broad propaganda action should be held to promote the delivery of stray animals to the sanctuary. “As part of the propaganda action, the society ought to be informed of the possibility to bring to the shelters animals being redundant in breeding – in particular, broods of dogs and cats when still blind, in order for them to be instantly put to sleep in a humane manner”.

The guidelines said that animals were not supposed to be brought into shelters if set free but clearly under the attendance of the owner who is present nearby, watching – unless the local regulations issued under the Ordinance of 22 August 1927 on the eradication of contagious animal diseases banned untethering or unlashing. Dogs were to be kept in an asylum basically up to fourteen (14) days. On the demand of TOnZ and its expense, this period could extend to another fourteen days, the premises and facilities permitting. As for cats, they could be kept for up to five days each. Within these timeframes, the owner could take the animal back, as long as they could prove their ownership; concerning dogs, the condition also had to be met of anti-rabies inoculation completed and due tax paid. In case a pedigree dog was brought to the shelter, the relevant branch of PZŁ or Kennel Club had to be notified, for hunting breed dogs and any other breed,

respectively; this to be accompanied by a call to look for a person ready and willing to take the animal away with him or her, in case the owner has not turned up within 14 days. In case no such branch operated in the given locality, or no individual willing to take the 'quadruped' off has been reported by either organisation, pedigree dogs could be dispensed to a person other than the owner. Before bringing away, the animal had to be inoculated against rabies (for a fee paid by the taking-away person). Individuals and associations taking dogs away were obligated to pay relevant fees and to sign an obligation to take appropriate care of the dog. Incurable or contagious animals were subject to instant putting to sleep, under the veterinarian's diagnosis. "The other animals could also be put to sleep, with the relevant regulations observed (i.e., having been kept for fourteen days), unless they have been brought away from the shelter". The putting to sleep was to be carried out in a humane way. The corpse was to be transferred to the nearest rendering plant.³⁶ As it seems, these guidelines resolved the dispute summarised in the 'dog-pound, or sanctuary?' dilemma – in favour of the latter. It soon turned out, however, that in respect of animal-keeping conditions, some shelters were dangerously close to neglected dogcatcher establishments.

The disputes around the culling of stray dogs (and cats) finally led to the formulation of regulations covering the existing practice. A circular letter of the Minister of Forestry and Wood Industry and the Minister of Agriculture, dated 13 April 1962, determined that "a dog that, while within a controlled hunting zone and unattended, or under the care of a person not authorised to do the hunting, is found to quest for or catch game, shall be recognised as a wandering dog". The circular forbade any shooting at: (i) dogs kept on a leash; (ii) muzzled dogs, irrespective of its whereabouts; (iii) pastoral dogs; (iv) dogs used to perform work; (v) guide dogs; (vi) any dog while in a public road; (vii) Bernardine dogs and any small dog of the size of Pekingese or miniature-pinscher. Shooting was forbidden at any dog from a distance of less than 100 metres away of residential buildings or less than 500 m away of public gathering places at

³⁶ Circular Letter no. 48 of the Minister of Municipal Administration of 3rd October 1961 'on the regulation of the issue of stray dogs and cats within urban areas. Appendix: Guidelines re. regulation of the issue of stray dogs and cats within urban areas', *Dziennik Urzędowy Ministerstwa Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji*, no. 17, 7 Nov. 1961, item 103.

the moment of such a gathering, even if suspected of questing or catching game.³⁷

Such were the attempts at ‘civilising’ what had hitherto not been regulated in detail and aroused specific tensions. Did the ‘canine campaign’ effect change Polish everyday realities for good? Despite the practice being groundless and illegal in the light of the above-quoted regulations, shooting at dogs did not wholly cease to occur.

The development of the institution of sanctuaries was somewhat gradual, and their condition triggered some objections. To give an example: a 1963 ‘medical-veterinary’ inspection of the sanctuary at Niepodległości Ave. in Warsaw found that the facility was equipped with no fenced enclosure and no skip whatsoever. The dog runs were provided with no shelter to protect against sunlight or rainfall. Dogs kept in cages lay on grass mattresses covered with dirty sheets and soaked with discharges.³⁸

Stage director Konrad Swinarski expressed his scathing criticism of the sanctuary in the Warsaw district of Paluch, in a January 1975 letter to the Plenum of TOnZ’s General Board. What he (quite aptly) stated was that the organisation’s leaders focused on internal fighting between its coteries, to the detriment of animal care: “the problem of three hundred dogs literally thrown onto water-flooded fields at the Paluch Sanctuary, into cold barracks (how wet the [last] summer was, we can all remember), dogs fleeing through a poorly-made fencing, dogs run over by buses, killed by soldiers from the [nearby Okęcie] airport (getting over to the runways, they could cause a catastrophe) – is the problem nobody cares about”, he wrote. The managers of this facility have all been a failure. With the most recent managerial team, “the sanctuary has turned into a quintessential ‘dog-pound’” (“thirty dogs put to sleep [in] the last days of last year”).³⁹

³⁷ Circular Letter of the Minister of Forestry and Wood Industry and the Minister of Agriculture, of 13 April 1962 ‘on interpretation of the provisions of Article 24 of the Act of 17 June 1959 on breeding and protection of wild game and the Hunting Law’, *Dziennik Urzędowy Ministerstwa Leśnictwa i Przemysłu Drzewnego*, 30 April 1962, no. 7(24), item 71.

³⁸ IPN, BU 1585/22813: Report written on 13 May 1963 in Warsaw, related to the medical-veterinary inspection of the Animal Sanctuary located in Warsaw, at Niepodległości Ave., run by the Animal Protection Society, 297.

³⁹ AIPN, BU 1585/22823: Konrad Swinarski and Barbara Swinarska to the Plenum of ZG TOnZ in the People’s Republic of Poland, Warsaw, 4 Jan. 1975, 323–4.

The comparison to ‘a dog-pound’ becomes even more apparent when we read a notification by a worker of a Wrocław shelter (at 2 Mokrzańska St.). On 10 October 1974, upon her arrival at work, she noticed that in one of the rooms there were thirty-five dogs which had been injected to be put to sleep, a number of them inefficiently. Some twenty dogs “were alive and squirmed in some convulsions to the walls in those rooms”. And this was not a single case. As a result of these dogcatcher practices, “there is a very small number of dogs presently in the shelter ... around seventy. Under the former board and the former manager, the order and care were so different; only sick dogs would be put to sleep, the other dogs were sought by purchasers and finally got cared by good hands. Now, dogs are bought [in] very small [numbers], for there is nothing to offer. ... In the month of August, there was an event in the area of the Shelter that pregnant bitches were put to sleep, there were about twenty of them. I called the Clinic in Januszewicka St. [to report] on this fact, asking if such bitches can ever be put to sleep; ‘no’, I was answered, ‘one is never supposed to do any such thing’. ... Big dogs are usually put to sleep, small ones remain; it is known also that a dog brought to the shelter is put to sleep after two days, although such dogs have their owners, and the rule says that a dog, if found, should go through for fourteen days. I want to point out that the dogs are [kept] in confined units of space and are never let out of the looseboxes in[to] the runs, because [*sic*] these runs are dismantled and not mended, though the gauze and material to make the runs with is [available] at the shelter. The shelter’s condition is very poor, the animals are much wronged, for they have nothing to eat, as the manager, Mr. ..., takes everything for himself”. The author of this complaint had quit the job with the shelter: “it seems to me that it is just like in Auschwitz, which is something I cannot really watch”.⁴⁰

The question how typical the conditions so described were for a larger number of such institutions or facilities. Most of information found with respect to the matter seems to testify that well-equipped sanctuaries whose workers really cared about the animals were quite uncommon.

The exemplary acts of cruelty to dogs discussed above and being part of a broader phenomenon of human cruelty against animals were

⁴⁰ AIPN, BU 1585/22823: Jadwiga Salata, Wrocław, 2 Mokrzańska St., Wrocław, 15 Oct. 1974, 264.

committed in communist Poland, but blaming the political system in this respect would be an oversimplification. It was definitely a *longue durée* phenomenon – one that may become a fragment of serious and fascinating studies in peripheral history.

IV CONCLUSIONS

The official and journalistic discourse in post-war Poland extensively highlighted the role of dogs as objects of human hostility, if not reluctance. These negative feelings were reportedly aroused, in the first place, by so-called wandering (i.e., stray) dogs, accused of transmitting diseases, including rabies – the latter posing a threat also to humans. While rabies incidences did intensify in the 1940s, the number of deaths reported due to rabies was sparse from 1951 onwards.

Mass culling was the method of fighting wandering dogs that was preferred by government offices and the Polish Hunting Association. Apart from sanitary-epidemiological reasons, economic considerations were at work there: ‘poacher’ dogs caused losses in wild game, and game was an export commodity.

The period’s discourse also featured the image of dog as a victim of cruelty, experiencing the suffering caused by humans. This image becomes particularly evident when analysing materials related to inspections of dogcatcher’s establishments, which were performed already in the forties by the Animal Welfare Society. Such a picture was rarely drawn under Stalinism. Cruel acts committed to animals, including cases of bestial killing at dog-pounds, became the object of emotion-imbued discussions in the aftermath of the political Thaw of October 1956, and especially in the late fifties and early sixties. Protests started appearing in the press against mass killings of dogs; eminent scientists, artists, and other cultural workers appealed in this respect to top communist-party and government authorities.

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