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Out of Date Remarks on the 1951 “Index of Books to be Immediately Excluded”

Book collections and librarians

In 2002, the Wrocław-based Nortom publishing house published a document from the history of censorship at the beginning of the People’s Republic of Poland entitled *Index of books to be immediately excluded 1 Oct 1951*, approved by the Central Management Office for Libraries at the Ministry of Culture and Sports. Zbigniew Żmigrodzki, a valued specialist in library science and bibliography as well as a commentator¹, presented the list of prohibited items in the *Afterword* as one of the instances of “the tragedy of Polish books” after 1939². He, in fact, viewed the actions of the authorities of post-WWII Poland as the planned destruction of Poland’s cultural heritage under German and Soviet occupation. He also outlined the effects of such practices³, which can be felt even today. In his opinion, the consequences of these administrative measures could have only been amended through government-level decisions. In 1989, an opportunity for “the restitution of Polish books” appeared. It should had been conducted “in the possibly fullest range and scope” considering the world-wide diversity of Polish literature and all its circulations⁴. Żmigrodzki lamented that during the political transformation

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¹ His most recent book was entitled *Państwo Jednej Partii* [Single-Party state], Wrocław 2012.

² Z. Żmigrodzki, *Posłowie*, in: [Cenzura PRL]. *Wykaz książek podlegających niezwłocznemu wycofaniu 1 X 1951 r.*, Wydawnictwo Nortom, Wrocław 2002, p. 78.

³ Krystyna Heska-Kwaśniewicz reflected on the cultural results of the devastation laid upon the generation whose childhood occurred during the Stalinist era. K. Heska-Kwaśniewicz, *Przed czym chciano chronić młodego czytelnika w PRL-u, czyli o czyszkach w bibliotekach szkolnych lat 1948–1953*, in: *Młody człowiek w świecie książki, bibliotek, informacji*, K. Heska-Kwaśniewicz (ed.), Katowice 1996.

⁴ Z. Żmigrodzki, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

the restitution program did not become a governmental priority, as a result of which, for example, literature with a catholic world-view was not able to balance the losses which it suffered in the People's Republic of Poland and thus could not successfully compete with "literature of a secularising, ethically and socially "liberal" nature"⁵. The latter has come to dominate Polish cultural life.

The author, of course, used a journalistically sharpened theses. I shall not discuss his view of the relations between the left- and right-wing trends in culture⁶, though the issue is important and surely deserves a closer consideration. However, he was certainly right about the fact that the post-WWII management of book collection as per the needs of the communist authorities caused extensive and irreversible results⁷. Not only were there no attempts at amending them but also the social-political atmosphere after 1989 did not encourage a broader reflection.

I analyse the 1951 *Index of books to be immediately excluded* not to lament the "abandoned restitution". Today, that would be impossible. Moreover, it would also be impossible to get any media coverage of the debate regarding the need for such a restitution. In this age of the digital revolution, such a demand would appear obsolete. Even though the cultural losses resulting from decisions made in post-WWII Poland for propaganda purposes cannot be undone, it is important to

⁵ Ibidem.

⁶ In his remarks, Żmigrodzki did not consider the Church as one of the national political powers when in 1989 the bishop's conference enjoyed a much stronger position than in the early-1950s.

⁷ The Ministry of Culture and National Heritage relentlessly seeks information on wartime cultural losses. Yet it seems to forget any post-WWII losses. Its website states that: "Since 1992 the Ministry of Culture has been collecting information regarding wartime losses of Polish libraries and works of art from the territory of Poland within the borders after 1945. Initially, the records were maintained by the Office of the Representative of the Government for Polish National Heritage Abroad. Since 2001 the Minister of Culture has fulfilled his responsibilities and the work was continued by the Department for the Polish National Heritage Abroad, currently Department of Cultural Heritage. In 1998, a portion of the competences of the Representative of the Government regarding Polish-German talks regarding the settlement of WWII effects in terms of culture was taken over by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Until now appropriate institutions have been able to gather documentation regarding the losses of over 40,000 libraries in Poland. That is only a portion of the stock from before 1939, but it does include the most important book collections and it is representative in terms of typology. On that basis as well as other sources one might assume that institutional libraries and private book collections of the interwar period included approx. 70 million volumes, 70–75%, i.e. over 50 million volumes, are considered wartime losses. Out of those 1.2 million (some documented; presumably much more after WWII) originated from special collections of literary artefacts of great value which cannot be neither recreated nor repurchased. School and educational libraries lost over 90% of books, post-WWII professional and private approx. 70%, post-WWII academic 50–55%. It need be stressed that in this circumstances, the losses were selective in nature: only the most valuable works were removed. Documents, destroyed by the occupying forces on purpose, suffered even greater losses than books. The materials gathered by the Department are later processed and published in printed form": <http://www.mkidn.gov.pl/pages/strona-glowna/kultura-i-dziedzictwo/ochrona-dziedzictwa-kulturowego/obiekty-utracone-w-wyniku-wojny.php> [accessed on: 15.09.2012].

at least realise their extent. I will present the complexity of this matter by analysing one of the 1951 *Index*'s three parts in particular. An important reason behind the study was the noticeable increase of interest in recent years interest in the world which emerged from the Second World War, including interest in the pre- and post-WWII history of Central and Eastern Europe⁸. I am mainly referring to *Bloodlands* by Timothy Snyder (Warsaw 2011)⁹, *Poisoned Peace* by Gregor Dallas (US edition 2005, Polish translation 2012), *Moscow, 1937* by Karl Schlögel (Cambridge, 2012) and *Wielka trwoga* [Great Fear] by Marcin Zaremba (Kra-kow 2012). In view of those publications the *Index* is something more than just a document discussing the “tragedy of Polish books”, as referred to by Zdzisław Żmigrodzki, since it offers an account lifted from the “bloodlands”, an account of Cold War sentiments and practices and an account of the time of the “great fear”. Though discussing books, the *Index* touches upon human fortunes and tragedy.

The document consists of three lists of authors and their works in alphabetical order. First names are abbreviated. The first list is untitled, the second includes “books out of date” and the third – “children’s books”. Some authors in lists 1 and 3 are marked “all works”.

Why some of the books listed must be “immediately excluded” is justified only in the second list: because they are “out of date”. As for the first and the third list, it seems it must had been absolutely obvious why some authors and works had to be excluded from circulation. The initial “remark” to the third list also informs readers that the books had to be excluded not only because of their reprehensible authors or titles but also because the place of publication could had been “inappropriate”¹⁰.

Even though the *Index* was written as if caused by a sudden necessity, it was not the first or the last of such documents in the post-WWII Poland¹¹. What makes it stand out from the others is that it was the largest. The course of its creation was traced back by Marcin Zaremba in an article *Amputacja pamięci* [Dismembering memory]. The order came from top brass – from the Office of the Political Bureau

⁸ I also decided to undertake the subject in relation to the “Banned Books Week” (30 Sep – 6 Oct), which is a Polish counterpart of the American event organised since 1982.

⁹ Snyder visited the Historical Festival in Wrocław held on 12–16 May 2012.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 58.

¹¹ In Marcin Zaremba’s article one might read the following about the indexes of unwelcome books: “Between 1949 and 1957 at least three extensive indexes of books intended for exclusion were created”. M. Zaremba, *Amputacja pamięci*, “Polityka” 1996, issue 2064, http://www.niniwa2.cba.pl/amputacja_pamieci.htm [accessed on: 15.09.2012]. The issue of ministry “operations” was discussed to a larger extent by Dorota Degen in “...szkodliwe, zdezaktualizowane i bezwartościowe...”. *Zarys działalności Komisji Oceny Wycofywanych Wydawnictw (1954–1956)*, in: *Niewygodne dla władzy. Ograniczanie wolności słowa na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX w.*, D. Degen and J. Gzella (eds.), Toruń 2010. The issue was also raised by Stanisław Adam Kondek in *Papierowa rewolucja. Oficjalny obieg książek w Polsce w latach 1948–1955*, Warsaw 1999.

after a meeting of 11 May 1951 which gathered included Bolesław Bierut, Jakub Berman, Józef Cyrankiewicz, Hilary Minc, Franciszek Mazur, Zenon Nowak, Edward Ochab, Aleksander Zawadzki and Roman Zambrowski. The Press Division of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers' Party (KC PZPR), managed by Stefan Staszewski,¹² was responsible for the list of books for “immediate exclusion” but the work began at the Division of Evaluation and Selection of Books of the Central Management Office for Libraries¹³. Apparently, the Institute of Literary Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences also helped with the development of the index. The size of the bureaucratic machine used for this effort was astounding: Secretariats, Bureaus, Institutions, Divisions, Institutes... In spite of, or maybe because of, all these various agencies, the work on the *Index* continued sluggishly and it was not released for printing until the end of 1951. The directive of the Central applied to all public libraries in the country. According to Zaremba, 2,000 copies of the brochure were printed, much too few to reach all 80,000 libraries and library stations nationwide. Therefore, the order to exclude the listed books was weakened because of the inability to quickly implement it. How to justify that incoherence? An answer can be found in the period's style of management. The copies were not meant for individual librarians, so the volume of brochures was not aligned with the number of entities it actually applied to. Małgorzata Korczyńska-Derkacz recently discussed the organisational details of the operation. According to the accounts she quoted, appropriate documents were to be held by three-person teams of Party officials supervising the “top secret” operation. Edward Ochab, Secretary of KC PZPR¹⁴, communicated with Voivodship Committees in that regard.

The operation's organisation demonstrated that its aim in addition to removing “harmful” books included in the, by its nature, limited list, was also verifying the library staff and encouraging them to maintain or accept the required attitude. Since librarians could not read the list of banned books and only heard about it, and the verifications were obviously not held on the same day everywhere, all were considered suspects. The feeling of uncertainty was conducive for overzealous behaviour. Library employees received a chance to show their loyalty to the state by properly, somewhat independently, engaging in browsing library stock, thus, taking pre-emptive actions in relation to the control commission's doings.

¹² In 1934, Stefan Staszewski (one of the people mentioned in *Oni* by Teresa Torańska) moved to the USSR where he taught at a Party school. In 1936, he was sent to a camp in Kolyma, from which he was released in 1945.

¹³ The Central Management Office for Libraries was established in 1951 replacing the General Directorate of Libraries.

¹⁴ M. Korczyńska-Derkacz, *Książki szkodliwe politycznie, czyli akcja “oczyszczania” księgozbiorów bibliotek szkolnych, pedagogicznych i publicznych w latach 1947–1956*, in: *Niewygodne dla władzy: ograniczanie wolności słowa na ziemiach polskich w XIX i XX wieku. Zbiór studiów*, D. Degen and J. Gzella (eds.), Toruń 2010, p. 345.

The boundaries between accepted and reprehensible behaviour as perceived by the communist authorities were anything but clear. Was it an intended result of the procedures for implementing orders or just a side effect or a reflexive action showing the extent of indoctrination or a feeling of threat among the state officials? It is difficult to decide that today. Researchers of that era often are faced with a question: intentional or just inert? A devious plan or chaos? Consider even the lexical choices made in official documents regarding library collections. Circulars and official reports from various years consistently referred to the “cleansing” of libraries¹⁵. The discussed *Index* also read: “When cleansing collections, pay particular attention to...”¹⁶. From today’s perspective, the word seems like a euphemism. In post-WWII years, however, it brought about specific associations.

Cleansing

In the title of his article on “cleansing” the book collections, Marcin Zarembo used an original and graphic metaphor of “amputation”, thus reflecting the depth of the intention and the long-term effects of the discussed activities. When ordering a “cleansing”, the authors of official documents in the 1940s and 50s did not demonstrate their linguistic prowess but only drew from a previously used discourse of power. The use of the term in relation to the limitation posed on books has a long tradition (*Index Expurgatorius*). But in the post-WWII years “cleansing” was not used as an association to church indexes but with far more recent practices. On the one hand, it was supposed to be associated with political “cleansings” in the USSR¹⁷. On the other: it brought to mind Nazi propaganda, which extensively discussed racial purity, operations of “cleansing” areas of Jewish inhabitants and all other hostile individuals (also, contemporary discourse uses the term of an “ethnic cleansing” as a technical term). When ordering “cleansing” in the period right after WWII, a state official was using a word extremely tainted with still vivid memories of its usage in the context of Stalinist terror and the Nazi policy of extermination. It is difficult to define to what extent that was a purposeful decision to refer to those issues and to what extent just a linguistic habit. It is certain, though, that when discussing post-WWII Poland one must bear in mind the experiences in the context of which the solutions of the communist rule were

¹⁵ Many examples of this style can be found in quotations from official documents included in the article by M. Korczyńska-Derkacz.

¹⁶ [Cenzura PRL]. *Wykaz książek*, p. 58.

¹⁷ The “cleansings” in Russia were covered extensively, e.g. in the pre-WWII *Robotnik* magazine. The term “library cleansing” appeared in a library conference report of 2 Mar 1949. M. Korczyńska-Derkacz, *op. cit.*, p. 341.

being implemented. The 1951 *Index* need also be treated in relation to the actions undertaken by both occupying forces: Soviets and Nazi Germans.

Zbigniew Żmigrodzki had this idea, but he used it in a questionable manner when he focussed on assessing the diversity of the techniques used by both occupying forces. “Soviet occupying forces” destroyed all libraries and books that they got a hold of while Nazi Germans operated methodically: first they recorded all the destructive Polish books and only then checked the collections, eliminating the “destructive” items. He also mentioned the burning of books in Germany in 1933. He considered that public mode of annihilation less morally harmful than destroying them in paper mills, without much publicity or many witnesses, which was the practice in Poland¹⁸. The question remains whether there is any point in posing moral assessments while ignoring the accompanying circumstances. Instead of hastily assigning different assessments it would be better to ask what goal was fulfilled in burning books publicly and not destroying them without publicity. The goal of the organisers of the Berlin spectacle was obviously different from the intention of the decision-makers who ordered the “cleansing” of Polish libraries after WWII. During the book burning in the Opera Square on 10 May 1933 there was an appearance by Goebbels who explained to the crowd what they were participating in. Fragments of that speech are quoted by Eugeniusz Cezary Król in his book entitled *Propaganda i indoktrynacja narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919–1945* [Propaganda and indoctrination of National Socialism in Germany in 1919–1945]. The act of destruction, said the creator of Nazi propaganda, was to symbolise “external and internal cleansing of the nation”¹⁹. Therefore, as intended by its organisers, the event in the Opera Square was a ritual performance of purification. In the sacred fire, which consumed the books, the nation was supposed to restore itself, its untainted identity. This is how Roger Caillois described the holiday paroxysm characteristic of primitive societies:

All transgressions are permitted as it is in transgressions, waste, orgy and act of violence that the society expects its regeneration, where it seeks a hope for new strength enabling impulsive development until another state of exhaustion²⁰.

Regardless of all other considerations, could anyone image a similar spectacle directed by the communists in post-WWII Poland? Where would it be staged? Obviously not in Warsaw, which still had not risen from the rubble. It would also

¹⁸ “Such a public ‘death’ of a book was, at least, overt and, thus, honourable”. Z. Żmigrodzki, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

¹⁹ E.C. Król, *Propaganda i indoktrynacja narodowego socjalizmu w Niemczech 1919–1945*, Warsaw 1999, p. 376.

²⁰ R. Caillois. “Wojna i sacrum”, in: *Antropologia widowisk. Zagadnienia i wybór tekstów*, A. Chałupnik, W. Dudzik, M. Kanabrodzki, L. Kolankiewicz, (eds.), Warsaw 2005, p. 264.

be impossible because of the new authorities' opposition to any form of retrospective utopia or to any local history.

The moral detriment of the method of eliminating unwelcome books used in Poland is revealed not as much when compared with the Berlin spectacle as when discussed together with the parallel efforts made right after WWII to rescue the cultural heritage from ravages of war. Mind you, this careful approach was applied not only to Polish, but also German books²¹. It would seem that all saved copies were of incalculable value. 1946 *Przegląd Biblioteczny* journal published a report on organising the book collection of the National Library. In 1945, it was in a deplorable condition and the building on Rakowiecka St. (new prints division) was very close to a section completely destroyed during the methodical destruction of left-bank Warsaw by the Nazis:

(...) missing window panes, frames, leaking roof, damp floors with torn out tiling, rain and snow dripping in upper floors, wind raging through the cabinets, litter, dirt and rubble everywhere mixed with scattered and pieces of paper, files and documents flying around. (...) Some inconsiderable portions of books remained in place, on the shelves, in the storage. A majority of them was lying in a large disarray, getting wet and becoming moulded on the floor; under tables and cabinets, on window sills, etc. Thus books of the National Library, some bound in packets, other chaotically in bags ready to be removed, filled every nook and cranny of the building²².

In the first years after WWII, *Przegląd Biblioteczny* often included texts about the losses, revindication and restitution of book collections whereas the "cleansing" operations conducted at the same time were not the subject of any official reports²³. Yet librarians participated in both restitution efforts and in destroying book resources. It is difficult to assume that, when reviewing a memoir entitled *55 lat wśród książek* [55 years surrounded by books], Bogdan Horodyski did not realise that, according to the new official classification, the majority of

²¹ On rescuing book collections in the Regained Territories read in: R. Nowicki, *Działalność Stanisława Sierotwińskiego w latach 1945–1946 jako delegata Ministerstwa Oświaty do zabezpieczania księgozbiorów opuszczonych i porzuconych na Ziemiach Zachodnich*, "Roczniki Biblioteczne" 2006, issue 50; R. Nowicki, *Rezultaty działalności Zbiornicy Księgozbiorów Zabezpieczonych w Szczecinie w latach 1947–1950*, "Roczniki Biblioteczne" 2007, issue 51. Zbiornica Księgozbiorów Zabezpieczonych [Secured Collections Storage] in Szczecin existed since May 1947 until the initial months of 1950. Post-German book collections were segregated there.

²² H. Więckowska, *Z prac nad odbudową Biblioteki Narodowej*, "Przegląd Biblioteczny" 1946, vol. 1–2, pp. 109–110.

²³ In an article by Józef Grycz published in the first issue of the occupation magazine re-established after WWII, one could only read that among the "secured" books, Nazi propaganda material will be sent for recycling. J. Grycz, *Problemy biblioteczne obecnej doby*, "Przegląd Biblioteczny" 1946, vol. 1–2, p. 21.

Świętokrzyska Street's used book stores' offerings, to which Jan Michalski, author of the memoir, was referring, would be considered as "bourgeois" rubbish²⁴. Or maybe this thought was conveyed through the nostalgic tone of the review:

(...) we wander with the author around a Warsaw which is no more [the author of the memoir died in 1946 – E.D.]. We visit the well-known used book stores in Świętokrzyska St., we recognise the Kleinsigers, the Baumkolers, the Jablonkas, the Jonaszes, and the Fiszlers. And only there do we realise that nothing remains of the entire community of people, stores, and piles of books gathered there. No even ashes survived (...)²⁵

Even if some copies of the books by the anti-communist Ferdynand Ossndowski or by Adam Nasielski (a popular author of crime stories) had survived those piles, there would had been no place for them in the general post-WWII libraries.

By placing the post-WWII "cleansing" of book collections closer to the Soviet rather than Nazi methods, Zbigniew Żmigrodzki simplified the image too much. In the case of the Polish version of the operations aimed at book collections, what was important was not only the fact that they were conducted in the Soviet area of influence but mainly that the communist authorities used, appropriately to their talent and will, a rich repertoire of strategies which had been used in Poland by both occupying forces. Thus, there did not occur a plain appropriation of the Soviet model but a rather sequential diffusion of the state strategy.

Referring again to the previously quoted book by Król, he discusses there the functioning of the political-bureaucratic machine in the Third Reich (the Reich Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, the Reich Chamber of Culture or the Reich Chamber of Literature) which supervised literature and writers. The tasks of those institutions included removal from the market and libraries books considered "destructive and unwelcome". The title of the 1935 list of prohibited items, devised by the Reich Chamber of Literature, was exactly that: *Liste des schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums*. The second index was created in 1939, the next one in 1940 and the final one in 1945²⁶.

The works of specific authors and thematic groups fell victim to those cleansings, including political literature of various focuses, books presenting a positive attitude towards the Weimar Republic, pacifistic publications and a significant portion of religious texts. Many publications from within the social and medical sciences were con-

²⁴ One of the "book collection selection" reports mention "littered" libraries. Vide M. Korczyńska-Derkacz, *op. cit.*, p. 343.

²⁵ B. Horodyski, a review of a book by J. Michalski. *55 lat wśród książek. Wspomnienia, wrażenia, rozważania* (Wrocław 1950), "Przegląd Biblioteczny" 1951, vol. 1–2, pp. 143–144.

²⁶ E.C. Król, *op. cit.*, p. 380.

sidered unwelcome and destructive, including books on women’s liberation, sexual life and abortion. Finally, the authorities fought with “trivial” literature: mainly crime stories, erotic stories, Western fiction and *science fiction* novels²⁷.

As for the type of literature that was recommended for removal, the Polish prohibition lists displayed many similarities with their Nazi counterparts. Hence, someone could draw a conclusion that all totalitarian regimes are analogous, regardless of their physical location, and the similarity of their procedures result from the same characteristics or rather the structure of the totalitarian rule. However, in the case of the immediate post-WWII period, the question about the diffusion rather than the structure of the system will prove more cognitively promising. Just as in the co-existence of restitution and extermination of book collections, a somewhat similarly schizophrenic attitude by the authorities towards Nazi heritage could be observed. Officially, its relics were sentenced for extermination but, in practice, the heritage of the Third Reich offered a great catch for the victors. They seized not only material goods but also their extensive intellectual, organisational and logistics achievements. 1946 *Tygodnik Powszechny* magazine included warnings addressed to left-wing politicians against abusing propaganda towards a society which had been subjected for several years to Goebbels’ techniques²⁸. Thus, the authors rather unambiguously suggested that the communists used Nazi methods for their benefit. Even if the goal of the *Tygodnik Powszechny*’s journalist in using the above-mentioned association was to radically discredit left-wing politicians, the statement did not lose its significance as evidence for the diffusion theory. It proved, at the very least, that such usage of enemy achievements was something acceptable in those times. Mind you, it would probably be difficult to decide, just as in the case of the word “cleansing” discussed earlier, where the borderline lay between intentional usage of propaganda techniques and being involuntarily “infected” by them. The debate in the post-WWII press on being “infected by death” was vivid. It could surely be extended to include other toxins. The adoption and progressive incorporation of the language of propaganda from the WWII occupation period was exemplified, in a fragment of Władysław Szpilman’s recollections recorded by Jerzy Waldorff, which was exactly why the fragment was questioned by censorship as including “alien” language. In the uncensored version Szpilman recollected:

In order to describe our lives in those terrible times in the most accurate way, only one comparison comes to mind: bedbugs. Once you find in a dirty flat a nest of those insects and you start pouring poisonous powder on it, the bugs will scatter in all

²⁷ Ibidem, pp. 380–381.

²⁸ Paweł Jasienica wrote that “the organism of the nation produced anti-toxins against propaganda”. P. Jasienica, *Nieporozumienia*, “Tygodnik Powszechny” 1946, issue 42.

directions and run around in circles to find a way out, but, either because they are dazed by the sudden attack or affected by the poison, instead of going straight as far as possible, they run around in circles re-entering their previous paths, unable to pass the borderline of the deadly circle and... they die. So do we, run around in circles, from dawn to dusk, helpless, dazed, falling in one trap, then another one, bouncing off the wall and returning to the ghetto, everyone in search of being saved from death, which was inevitable²⁹.

It seemed inappropriate to compare Jews to bedbugs. The text was altered:

In order to describe our lives in those terrible times in an accurate way, only one comparison comes to mind: an ant colony in danger. Once the brown foot of a mindless cad starts destroying their colony with his shod heel, ants scatter in all directions and run around in circles trying to find a way to escape, but, either dazed by the sudden nature of the attack or completely consumed by their attempts to save their offspring and the remains of their property, as if poisoned, instead of going straight as far as possible, they run around in circles re-entering their previous paths, the same locations, unable to pass the borderline of the deadly circle and... they die. The same happens to us...³⁰

In the uncensored recollections, by being compared to bedbugs, Jews are deprived of any human features, while when transformed into ants, though in a panic, they retain some humanitarian reaction: they worry about the fate of their children and their property. In the original version of *Pamiętniki*, the act of killing bedbugs in a flat is something absolutely normal and legitimate. Everyone would do the same. Who does not react to bedbugs with disgust? So, if Szpilman compared himself, his loved ones and his compatriots to bedbugs, he was emulating the dehumanising method of perceiving them by the oppressors³¹. He seemed to accept as his own the anti-Jewish perspective of the Nazi propaganda. The ant colony, on the other hand, is destroyed by a “mindless cad”. **He commits an action which he does not understand.** The positive aura of the insect victims was strengthened by literary traditions, e.g. through association with Julian Ursyn Niemcewicz’ patriotic poem entitled *Mrowisko* [Ant Colony].

The bedbug perspective of the fragment of *Pamiętniki* from before the censorship intervention would have been somewhat similar to the lagered man from

²⁹ AAN (Archives of New Records), GUKPPiW (Main Office of Control of Press, Publications and Shows), ref. no. 170 (32/32).

³⁰ *Śmierć miasta. Pamiętniki Władysława Szpilmana 1939–1945*, J. Waldorff (ed.), Warsaw 1948, p. 96.

³¹ The dehumanising perception in the relations between own and alien groups, vide *Poza stereotypy. Dehumanizacja i esencjalizm w postrzeganiu grup społecznych*, M. Drogosz, M. Bilewicz, M. Kofta (eds.), Warsaw 2012.

Tadeusz Borowski’s prose. The *Index of books to be immediately excluded*, so similar in terms of its form to Nazi indexes, evoked a similar impression as the “bedbugs” in Szpilman’s recollections; this was yet another point of view for reading the index of prohibited items.

By referring to the operations of adapting book collections to the needs of the communist rule as “cleansing”, their mandators treated unacceptable books as rubbish. Some were sent for milling. One must also remember that the fate of a book was often painfully intertwined with the fate of its author. The discussed regulations caused no harm to deceased or foreign authors. The lists of books to be “excluded” did, however, also include names of authors who survived WWII and remained in Poland. In such cases, they took on the features of proscription lists. When libraries were being “cleansed”, some writers were imprisoned while others were probably seriously entertaining that possibility. The first list of the 1951 *Index* included Jerzy Braun (*Książka harcerska, Kultura polska na bezdrożach, Szopka harcerska*) and Jan Hoppe (*Myśli społeczne, Wybory w r. 1935*) sentenced to lifetime imprisonment for, as the judgement stated, “an attempt to overthrow by force the new political system”³². General Stefan Moszor (“all works”) tried at another widely known lawsuit for anti-state activities, received a similar sentence. In 1950, Stefan Łoś was arrested for a short period of time (again in 1954, this time for a year); he was listed in the *Index* because of his two novels: *Strażnicy* and *Szajki*³³. Waław Kostka-Biernacki (“all works”) and Adam Czekalski (*Dżungla, Łuny nad Hiszpanią, Rekordy*) were also imprisoned. For many other writers, being listed in the Indexes meant they were cut off from income. Joanna Siedlecka discussed the careers of several poets destroyed through imprisonment or banned reissue in her book *Oblawa. Losy pisarzy represjonowanych*. While some writers listed in the Indexes felt inclined to abandon the profession of a writer, others felt stimulated. When undertaking new challenges, one had to strive for the authorities’ approval. There was a reason why the second list was named “books out of date”. In a sense, all the items listed in the 1951 *Index* belonged to that category.

The terror of currentness

The clear political profile of the books included in List No. 1, which included mainly books published in the interwar period, but also the core items of contemporary literature, indicates that its goal was to “cleanse” libraries of relics of the

³² J. Siedlecka, *Oblawa. Losy pisarzy represjonowanych*, Warsaw 2005, p. 46.

³³ Siedlecka writes about, e.g. Jerzy Braun, Stefan Łoś and Helena Zakrzewska.

past era. In the same period, official publications placed the interwar period on historical trial, or rather dealt it the highest of penalties. Sanation Poland was to be expunged without a trace. Everything had to be reorganised in the “cleansed” areas. Communists, who treated the past as a burden, positioned themselves as modernisers. Interwar Poland was to be removed from perception so that it would not interfere with the march towards the future. Elisabeth Eisenstein has described this defined relationship between the past and the future, between memories and creative abilities, as a feature of modernisation discourse which developed thanks to the dissemination of the printing press³⁴. However, even though this discourse was usually characterised by the “obsession of novelty”, the post-WWII Poland discourse should be understood as an obsession of currentness.

List No. 2 of the *Index* included books issued after WWII and no longer relevant. It seems unbelievable now, but the list considered such items, among others, as reports from concentration camps as not deserving to be read again. Which poses a question about what the word “current”, so commonly used both in the press and official discourse, really meant? What was expected of writers when they were incited to create “current” works? The expected result was not so much about current issues, but rather the ideological and political engagement of the writers in their output. During a 1947 convention of Wrocław Professional Union of Polish Writers (ZZLP) in a paper entitled *Aktualna problematyka literatury współczesnej* [Current problems in contemporary literature] Stefan Żółkiewski highlighted a significant shortcoming of post-WWII works in the form of a “still uncombated heritage of the outdated alien in terms of ideology literary traditions”³⁵. “Outdated”, in the understanding of the quoted sentence, meant “alien in terms of ideology”.

Maria Jarczyńska, who published in *Tygodnik Powszechny*, lamented in 1946 in an article entitled “O aktualności w sztuce, o dyletantyzmie i o Breughelu” [On the currentness in arts, on diletantism and on Breughel] the omnipresence of the term and the terror it carried:

We have a complex of currentness. One cannot glimpse an inspiring personality from a past era just like that, casually gape out of unbiased admiration without immediately being asked: actually why someone should do that and what that person will receive in return. The present and its worries constitute the limitations of any interests, the measure of all problems, and any instance of thinking of something else than the present is perceived as a kind of disloyalty³⁶.

³⁴ Vide E.L. Eisenstein, *Rewolucja Gutenberga*, translated by H. Hollender, Warsaw 2004.

³⁵ As cited in: M. Radziwon, *Iwaszkiewicz. Pisarz po katastrofie*, Warsaw 2010, p. 248.

³⁶ M. Jarczyńska, *O aktualności w sztuce, o dyletantyzmie i o Breughelu*, “*Tygodnik Powszechny*” 1946, issue 51–52, p. 6.

While demanding her right to admire Breughel freely she presented him as the ideal realist, a painter who was not swayed by illusion. The contemporary spokespeople of “currentness”, **contrary to what they proclaimed, were no realists**. Their “currentness” was a test of loyalty not so much to their own times as to the communist rule.

Obviously, censors were also finely tuned to this understood “currentness”. They welcomed any manifestations of it. In a 1952 review of Paweł Jasienica’s *Świt słowiańskiego jutro* [Dawn of the Slavic tomorrow], the reviewer noted that the author’s historical hypotheses “are of current nature”. He evaluated the book as “undeniably advantageous”³⁷. In a 1953 review of Leopold Staff’s *Wiklina* [Willow Twigs], the censor focussed on a few poems with “current themes” (fight for freedom, rebuilding). In general, however, there was very little “currentness” in the collection: a view too humanistic, with only traces of realism, an insufficiently articulated “resonance of our epoch”. The censor hankered: “Alas, one cannot define precisely in which period the poems were written”³⁸. He postulated to mark each of them with dates so that the readers would not think that they manifested “uncurrentness”.

The uncurrentness was sometimes an argument for halting a publication. That was the justification for finishing off *Dziecię Starego Miasta* [Child of the Old Town] by Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (Przełom publishing house wanted to re-issue it)³⁹. A study by Wiktor Szramm and Helena Szrammówna entitled *Materiały do osadnictwa i spraw gospodarczych we wsiach doliny Tarnawki i Hoczewki Ziemi Sanockiej* [Materials on the settlement and economic issues in the villages of the valley of the Tarnawka and the Hoczewka in the Sanok land] was found suspicious for the same reasons. The reviewers found the old-fashioned “spirit of solidarity” in the studied rural community as troublesome⁴⁰. But sometimes the situation was quite the opposite. Publications were halted because the topics they referred to were not yet “quite historical”, as in the case of the study by Roman Reinfuss entitled *Lemkowie jako grupa etnograficzna* [Lemkos as an ethnographic group]. The reviewer concluded that the issue of Lemkos had been settled completely partly by repatriating them to the USSR and partly by relocating them to other areas of Poland, but the issue was so recent that it was impossible to write about the group without referring to the contemporary context⁴¹. At times, the requirement for currentness resulted in some ridiculous ideas. The censor reviewing the libretto to *The Haunted Manor* concluded that it was about time (!) to replace it with a new one⁴².

³⁷ AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 386 (31/132).

³⁸ AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 386 (31/124).

³⁹ AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 173 (32/43).

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ibidem.

⁴² Ibidem.

Currentness was something that ensured publication, though it also entailed the danger of quickly becoming outdated, which is confirmed by List No. 2 of the *Index*. It included several works referring to the theme of the Regained Territories (Z. Bednorz, *Od Opola do Wrocławia*, Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, Warsaw, 1946; A. Bolewski, *Gospodarcze znaczenie Ziem Odzyskanych dla świata słowiańskiego*, Polski Związek Zachodni, Poznań, 1947; M. Czekańska, *Z biegiem Odry*, Państwowe Zakłady Wydawnictw Szkolnych, Warsaw, 1947; T. Gede, *Co nam dają Ziemie Zachodnie?*, Książka, Warsaw, 1946; L. Gustowski, *Szczecin. Fakty i liczby*, Wydawnictwo Zachodnie, Poznań, 1947 et al.). It seems that in 1951 Regained Territories were thought of much differently than in 1946 of 1947. Books lost their currentness like yesterday's newspapers. And they were treated just like newspapers. One could throw them away the following day since a new one, more current and recommended, came out. List No. 2 of the 1951 *Index* constituted exactly that: the proof that the entire literary output was newspaperised (which also applied to the quality of the paper itself...) That may have been the reason behind the undeniable success of the cultural policy of that time: the functional removal of the book as a cultural relic which offered integral guarantee of identity and durability of its message.

But if an author who wrote just to pay his or her bills really embraced the currentness requirement, she or he could count on an understanding on the part of the People's Republic of Poland. Kazimierz Koźniewski, the censor of *Piątka z ulicy Barskiej* [Five from Barska St.], thus wrote about the ability of the post-WWII state to forget: "The People's Republic of Poland will forgive the past of anyone who understood their mistakes, who wish to work honestly, and who wish to add their effort to the act of building socialism"⁴³. For many writers, such a promise proved an offer they could not refuse.

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⁴³ AAN, GUKPPiW, ref. no. 386 (31/132).

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Elżbieta Dąbrowicz

Out of Date
Remarks on the 1951 “Index of Books to be Immediately Excluded”

(Summary)

This article seeks to identify some of the uses of „the index of books to be immediately excluded” issued by the Ministry of Culture and Arts in 1951. At that time, decrees of the sort specified inventories of books permitted to be included on the shelves of Polish. In the process,

many books were to be removed for good both from libraries and from native heritage. Additionally, the procedure of “purification”, as it was called by the officials, bore significant similarities to the repressive practices of the German and Russian occupants used during WWII. The author argues that analogies were drawn wittingly or impulsively at least for the effectiveness of German and Russian inventions. The 1951 list of books forbidden for the Polish common reader offers their obsolete character as the reason for exclusion. Up to date did not mean “contemporary” but up to the demands of state authorities. Administrative pressure to reflect the political agenda converted books into somewhat fatter newspapers and in this way seriously damaged book, which had always been the important vehicle of national and cultural memory.

Keywords: “index of books to be immediately excluded”, censorship after 1945, censorship towards literature, public libraries in Polish People’s Republic