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HOW DO YOU FEEL IN POLISH? ON MEN'S EMOTIONS, THE REFUSAL OF COMPASSION AND THE POLITICS OF FEELINGS OF THE NATIONAL DEMOCRATS*

Abstract

What does it mean to feel Polish? If Polishness is to be not only an ethnic and cultural feature, but also a way of expressing and realising the Polish spirit, it inevitably entails a particular set of desired feelings, attitudes, and ways of reacting. In my article, I focus on the emotional profile of a Pole, as postulated by National Democracy, a radical nationalist movement, in its beginnings at the turn of the twentieth century in partitioned Poland. The new Pole was to break away from the previous patterns of a conciliatory, helpless, weak, feminine nation. Based on selected journalistic texts, as well as a previously unknown short story by Roman Dmowski, the first published text, I demonstrate the type of "masculine" emotionality that was shaped and postulated by the early National Democrats. I discuss the politics of feelings promoted by the National Democracy and the emotional community it sought to build. The basis of this policy and the community it created was the refusal of compassion in all its forms: as a basis for anti-authoritarian and emancipatory efforts, as a template for relationships between individuals, societies or nations, and as a form of self-reflection. All of these, according to National Democrats, had to be rejected to create the nation of "masters of civilisation, not its lackeys".

Keywords: National Democracy, politics of feelings, emotional community, Polish nationalism, compassion

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In June 1890, the newspaper *Kurier Lwowski* published a novella signed with the initials J.R. titled 'Więciorkówna'. It told the story of a seven-year-old girl, a child of the Warsaw streets, beaten, starved and abused by her alcoholic mother. We meet little Więciorkówna when, on her mother's behest, she collects violets in the Łazienki Park and sells them on the street in the evening. She meets a gentleman wearing a shiny cylinder and an exquisitely dressed lady whose "conduct" is portrayed as questionable. The little girl elicits no compassion from them – the lady pins the violets to her bouquet, and the gentleman runs the girl off like a dog without paying anything. When she returns home, Więciorkówna faces more abuse from her mother and is thrown out of the house. "The child squats at the doorstep and cries quietly … Tomorrow will be the same, as will be the day after tomorrow … While from behind the closed door, the curses thrown by Mrs. Więciorkowa are heard in the hallway, and Mr Jacenty, whose loyalty has been tested, eagerly repeats them".[1]

The story of a child who experiences abuse both inside and outside the home was written by Roman Dmowski.[2] When he sent it to the *Kurier Lwowski*, the future leader of the National Democrats (ND, *Endeks*, *Endecja*) was 26 years old, and finishing his studies in natural sciences at the Physics and Mathematics department of Warsaw University; although he already had some experience in illegal activity, he was contemplating the choice of his life path. It is not known

[1] J.R. [Roman Dmowski], 'Więciorkówna. Obrazek warszawski', *Kurier Lwowski*, 29 June 1890, https://anno.onb.ac.at/cgi-content/anno?aid=klw&datum=18900629&seite=2&zoom=33 [Accessed: 15 Jan. 2025]. The surnames Więciorkówna and Więciorkowa are two female forms of the surname Więciorek; Więciorkówna (Miss Więciorek) is the daughter of a man named Więciorek, and Więciorkowa is his wife (Mrs Więciorek).

[2] J.R. was one of the pen names used by Dmowski (cf. Scientific Library of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Polish Academy of Sciences in Cracow, Zieliński Files, ref. no. 7785, The List of Dmowski's aliases, fol. 11). Dmowski's first published text, which appeared in *Kurier Lwowski* in 1910, is mentioned by his biographers, cf. e.g. Mariusz Kułakowski, *Roman Dmowski w świetle listów i wspomnień*, vol. 1 (London, 1968). The text remained unknown, but Dmowski's biographers and relatives were convinced that its protagonist was a lad (not a girl!) living on the streets of Warsaw. In the entire 1890 volume of *Kurier Lwowski*, there are two texts attributed to the series "Pictures of Warsaw" signed by J.R.: 'Więciorkówna' from June and 'Sklepikarz' [The Shopkeeper] from July.

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whether, in addition to a career in science and politics, he also seriously considered a career in writing.[3] What is significant about the novella about the seven-year-old girl from Warsaw, however, is not whether it was to become Dmowski's ticket to literary Olympus, but the emphasis placed on compassion, evoking which was the purpose of the text, and the construction of the protagonist, presented as a victim of an insensitive and cruel mother at home and insensitive and cruel "beautiful couple" on the street.

We know from numerous sources that Roman Dmowski as a child was himself a victim of domestic violence. The abuse went so much beyond the standards of families in the Polish lands at the end of the nineteenth century that it was mentioned repeatedly in his otherwise apologetic biographies. "The upbringing … was strict, without tenderness, but not without corporal punishment",[4] writes his friend Ignacy Chrzanowski. Father beat Dmowski until he was 16 years old, and probably began to surpass him in terms of height and strength. His mother, on the other hand, according to Maria Niklewicz, Dmowski's "daughter by choice", "was an exemplary wife and mother, but out of a sense of duty rather than affection. Still, she was able to make great sacrifices for her children. When her little son got an infection in his leg and only an amputation could save his life, the mother refused, claiming that death was better than disability. The child died in similar circumstances as her husband later on".[5]

On the other hand, in the Alexander Apukhtin-era[6] gymnasium, which will be the subject of the remainder of my article, the young Dmowski, like many other young men,[7] experienced out-of-home violence from teachers and school authorities. Thus, applying the tools of feminist literary criticism to his novella in a subversive way, I would

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[3] Dmowski was always keenly interested in literature and published literary reviews in *Głos*, and later in *Przegląd Wszechpolski* and subsequent periodicals of the National Democracy. He published two novels under the pseudonym Kazimierz Wybranowski: *W połowie drogi* [Halfway] (1931) and *Dziedzictwo* [Legacy] (1931).

[4] Kułakowski, *Roman Dmowski*, vol. 1, 20.

[5] *Ibid.*, 118.

[6] Alexander Apukhtin, education superintendent in the Kingdom of Poland, responsible for the violent Russification of the Polish educational system and the suppression of all manifestations of political activity among the youth.

[7] Cf. Aleksander Kraushar, *Czasy szkolne za Apuchtina. Kartka z pamiętnika* (Warszawa, 1915).

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argue that Więciorkówna is not the only protagonist of the piece, and that numerous traits of masculinity have been scattered throughout the story of the little Warsaw girl.[8] Not only the characteristics of the child, a victim of violence, but also of the man (boy), who cannot write directly about the fact that he is (was) a victim, and can only show his suffering in literary disguise.

However, I will not base the story of Więciorkówna on reflections about the psychological and personal motivations of National Democratic activists (or even Roman Dmowski) who formulated the ideology of their political camp. Neither do I have sufficient background (as a cultural scientist and sociologist, not a psychologist), nor do I think that the connections between the personal experiences of *Endecja* founders and their ideology are sufficiently well-known and clear to pursue such considerations, nor that these connections explain it better than the social and political context of the turn of the twentieth century on the (semi-)periphery of global capitalism. Instead, I want to focus on the National Democratic Party's "politics of feelings": the mechanism that allowed certain emotions to be considered important, worthy of exposure and providing the basis for building the other elements of the *Endecja* worldview and political program, while others were either overlooked as unhelpful or directly rejected as harmful and extremely dangerous to both the ND party and the Polish nation as a whole. I will be most interested in the mechanisms of shifting, sanding, disguising these undesirable sentiments and then presenting them as already appropriate and constitutive of ND "politics of feelings", as well as assigning them to the gender the movement deemed appropriate.

In my article, I will consider which feelings were at the core of this politics, who was supposed to feel them, and toward whom, and how

[8] In her book *Subject to Change. Reading Feminist Writing* (New York, 1988), Nancy K. Miller addresses the issue of female subjectivity in literature and the female authorial "I". She argues that texts written by women contain "female signatures", i.e., places where a hidden message about their condition as writers and members of a patriarchal society is conveyed, a message that usually remains buried and anonymous, and which feminist critique seeks to bring to light. This is achieved through the practice of arachnology – reading a text in order to reveal the threads and fabric of the oppressive power structure in which the female writer is trapped. The subversive use of the tools proposed by Miller could therefore consist, among other things, in looking for everything that men are not allowed to reveal in a patriarchal society.

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the "politics of feelings" was supposed to contribute to the creation of a new type of Pole, with a new emotional profile, capable of achieving independence and translating feelings into a vision of the postulated national community. This will be the story of inserting feelings into a specific framework, giving them a shape through which they can be applied to political activity – the story of creating an emotional community.[9] Each such community introduces its own rules about who should feel, when, toward whom and in what way, which feelings are appropriate, considered important and necessary, which expressions of them are acceptable and which should be rejected. In discussing the early ND emotional community, I will therefore focus on which suffering the movement deemed necessary, what kind of compassion it accepted, to whom it could be directed, and, on the other hand, what was considered shameful and contemptible within that framework, what was the level of the contempt, and when compassion proved inappropriate. The originality of the *Endecja* also consisted in the fact that it used compassion and suffering in a completely new way, entirely different from the martyrdom and sentimentality of the Polish Romantics and the sober and practical disregard of the Positivists. I will focus on the early period of the ND, when it was just beginning to form its platform and operated mainly through press publications. I will refer primarily to the texts of its three leading ideologues, Jan Popławski, Zygmunt Balicki, and Roman Dmowski, with particular emphasis on those that appeared in *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, the National Democracy's formative magazine. During the period under discussion, these three activists set the tone for the National Democratic movement and shaped its ideology. Of course, there were other people in their circle of friends and associates, but they did not have a significant influence on the ND's program.

THE NEW POLITICS OF FEELINGS

The formation of a new emotional community had been a conscious move by future National Democratic activists even before their first institutions were constituted or before they founded their own periodicals. Popławski wrote about the new "politics of feelings" already in the

[9] Barbara Rosenwein, 'Worrying about Emotions in History', *American Historical Review*, cvii, 3 (2002), 821–45.

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"nebulous period", in an article, 'The Lowering of Ideals', published in 1887 in the weekly *Głos*. In the piece, he not only emphasized the "momentousness of feelings in social matters",[10] not only distinguished this new politics from the emotionality of the Romantic upsurge, but also cut himself off firmly from the "practical reason" of the triumphant bourgeoisie – the reason, in his view, caused the apathy of the leading stratum of society, namely the intelligentsia. The legitimacy of the new "politics of feeling" would be guaranteed by tying it to the aspirations of "the whole", since "the feelings of the masses, inherent, healthy, in their development and intensity could never be harmful to society, for they are its normal form of activity".[11] Only such a policy can lead society out of the terrible decline of spirit, voluntary humiliation and the gloomy darkness of apathy.[12]

Tying the new "politics of feeling" (and politics in general) to the aspirations and interests of the masses was an endeavour characteristic of the nascent National Democracy. What the people felt, however, was not always clear, nor did the issue occupy a considerable amount of space in the pages of *Endecja*'s publications. The goal, however, of the *Endeks* was clear: "the subordination of the interests of the separate strata to the interests of the people" would lead to a people that was "enlightened, healthy and economically strong, … would not fear the 'Poles' [the nobility], would not revolt over the *Scharwerk*,[13] … so that – like the Irish people – it would walk hand in hand with its representation".[14] This national unity would not be disturbed by any "rebellions over the *Scharwerk*", and the feelings of all strata would move in one direction.

Much has already been written about the "ahistorical, supra-class perspective of the people" in early ND publications and the "blurring of the fundamental class conflict of the era",[15] which ultimately served the interests of the bourgeoisie, as well as the fact that once the

[10] Jan Popławski, 'Obniżenie ideałów', *Głos*, 1 (1887), quoted after Jan Ludwik Popławski, *Wybór pism*, select., introd. and ed. by Teresa Kulak (Wrocław, 1998), 26–9.

[11] *Ibid.*, 29.

[12] *Ibid.*

[13] (Ger.) Forced contribution after the abolition of serfdom, corvée labour.

[14] Jan Popławski, 'Lud i naród', *Głos*, 19 (1888), quoted after Popławski, *Wybór pism*, 50.

[15] Janina Żurawicka, 'Lud w ideologii *Głosu*', *Kwartalnik Historyczny*, lxi, 4–5 (1956), 324.

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people were allowed onto the political stage, the *Endecja* had to force them to leave it and submit to discipline.[16] I, however, would like to address the emotional aspect of this process. If a movement takes the position that the people are the stratum whose interests should stand at the centre of political action (regardless of how those interests are interpreted), one would expect that it is the feelings of the people (real or postulated) that will be most prominently displayed in the movement's journalism. However, this was not the case at all. It was not the people whose sufferings and feelings became the subject of numerous articles, series of texts and pamphlets in the early days of National Democracy.[17] That stratum – or social group – consisted of boys and young men, students of Russified grammar schools and universities. In the journalism of early ND, it was their suffering that became the most prominent emotion, around which the entire political program of the new movement is structured.

BOYS' SUFFERING

The situation of boys and young men became the subject of a pamphlet published in 1883, *Gimnazja rossyskie w Polsce. Szkic wychowawczy* [Russian gymnasiums in Poland: An educational sketch], and two series of articles appearing in biweekly *Przegląd Wszechpolski* in 1895 ('Ze studyów nad szkołą rosyjską w Polsce' [From studies on Russian school in Poland]) and in 1896 ('Młodzież polska w zaborze rosyjskim' [Polish youth in the Russian partition]) and subsequently published

[16] Wiktor Marzec, *Rebelia i reakcja: rewolucja 1905 roku i plebejskie doświadczenie polityczne* (Kraków, 2016); Brian Porter-Szűcs, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland* (Oxford, 2000).

[17] In 1896, a year after the National Democrats took over *Przegląd Wszechpolski* from the Polish Trade and Geographic Association, the National Democrats began publishing *Polak*, a magazine addressed to the rural population and dedicated to their affairs. Significantly, here, too, the only hardship worthy of attention and political interpretation turned out to be "national" sufferings, i.e. "persecution of speech and faith". This is a perfect reflection of the stance of National Democracy, which refused to see the world in class terms. According to this worldview, the people were not a class experiencing some kind of suffering and having its own interests, but a part of the nation, its embodiment, and therefore the suffering that counts is not hunger and landlessness affecting actual villagers, but the suffering of a nation that the partitioner does not allow to express itself through its language and religion.

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under the same titles as separate books in 1900 and 1896, respectively. The issue of their suffering was also alluded to repeatedly by ND journalists in other articles. All these texts paint a picture of the school under the rule of the superintendent of the Warsaw educational district, Alexander Apukhtin, as an oppressive institution and a place to torment students in every possible way.[18] It is an endlessly stupid, boring, violent, authoritarian school, whose primary goal is to raise Russified and obedient subjects of the tsar. It is compared to a prison: its goal is to bring about the annihilation of young men who could form the Polish intelligentsia in the future. Apukhtin's gymnasiums oppress boys in a variety of ways: they lead to their physical underdevelopment and physical weakness, promote denunciation and pitting one against the other, humiliate them, destroy their sense of dignity and pride, deprive them of vitality, and the ability to think independently and originally. In these schools, boys and young men suffer humiliating punishments: flogging, detention, vile insults, police surveillance. The grim picture is completed by the Imperial University of Warsaw, where the effects of Russified grammar schools are reproduced and reinforced by young men themselves, who were deprived of education at an earlier stage.

There is, however, the puzzling rhetorical aspect of the series of articles about Apukhtin's school and the suffering it inflicts. It turns out that in the journalism of the early *Endeks* these are the only cases of suffering that count politically. Workers, peasants, women – all the groups who, at the turn of the twentieth century, asserted their rights in various ways and fought against the sources of their social and political disadvantages – do not deserve attention. In the pages of *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, the experiences of other groups, if they are mentioned at all, are never portrayed in such a detailed manner as those of the middle school students. On the contrary, when faced with a suggestion that there are other sufferings worthy of public consideration and political approach, columnists associated with the periodical respond that they are nothing compared to the plight of middle school pupils: "Meanwhile, the only question being considered in our parts is whether society will be exposed to unpleasantness and sacrifices and to a change in the status quo. But struggle requires

[18] For a detailed curriculum of a tsar-period gymnasium, see Bohdan Cywiński, 'Edukacja niepokornych', *Znak* 173–4 (1968), 1421–51.

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losses and sacrifices. In wanting to avoid losses, we do not take into account the ones we are already suffering: the morally and physically degenerate school system in the Russian partition".[19]

Why is this the case? Because only the sufferings that can be placed in a national framework are relevant. Male middle school students are the future intelligentsia elite, that is, the social stratum that is supposed to lead the nation,[20] so their degradation is national. If this group is frail, weak, submissive, passive, mentally dependent, and becomes such through the actions of the Apukhtin school, this is the greatest suffering of both the young people (who suffer torment in middle schools) and, above all, the nation, which is becoming like its youth.

The assumption that is made here without a moment's thought is that members of the elite, the leading stratum, must belong to the intelligentsia and that they must be men. Attending gymnasium and passing (even if only extramurally) the maturity exam not only allowed the intelligentsia to avoid military service, but also constituted a necessary rite of passage for its members, confirming their membership in this social group and legitimizing their leadership role. Taking all this into account, the suffering-filled middle school education was a common experience for the vast majority of the first generation of National Democrats. Thus, writing about the plight of middle school students, Dmowski depicted the fate not only of himself, but also of his comrades from the organization. However, these were exclusively male biographies. Women (and girls) in the period under discussion became neither the object nor the subject of National Democracy efforts: they were of no interest to National Democracy activists either as addressees of their activities or as co-creators of the

[19] 'Stare błędy', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 14 (1896), 314.

[20] On the fact that the intelligentsia had functioned as the dominant national elite in Poland since the nineteenth century and that the Second Republic was an "intelligentsia republic", see the three-volume publication *A History of the Polish Intelligentsia* written and edited by three authors: Maciej Janowski, Jerzy Jedlicki, and Magdalena Micińska (Frankfurt am Main, 2014–5); Rafał Smoczyński, Tomasz Zarycki, *Totem inteligencki. Arystokracja, szlachta i ziemiaństwo w polskiej przestrzeni społecznej* (Warszawa, 2017). Almost all ND activists belonging to the intelligentsia usually had noble roots (Roman Wapiński, 'Elita endecka. Przyczynek do dziejów kształtowania się grup przywódczych polskich partii politycznych', *Acta Universitatis Wratislaviensis*, 543 [1981], 441–52).

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political program. An emblematic example of this is Gabriela Balicka (1867–1962), the wife of Zygmunt Balicki, with a PhD in biology, educated in Switzerland, whose family fortune allowed Zygmunt to devote himself to politics (and when the fortune dried up, Balicki separated from his wife) and who hosted countless meetings of national democrats. Her work remained on the sidelines of the party's activities during the period in question, at best providing organizational support for the party. According to Katarzyna Luksa, "This was due to the ideology of the National Democrats at the time, which envisaged only a very limited participation of women in politics".[21] It is clear, then, that as future representatives of the elite, the National Democrats could only imagine young boys, not girls.

The suffering of middle school students is so acute because their masculinity is affected. The Apukhtin school aims to eradicate in the youth all the qualities that the editors of the *Przegląd Wszechpolski* consider to be the ideals of masculinity: physical strength and beauty, resilience, the desire to lead, dominate, impose one's views and ideas on others, mark one's individuality, independence of thought and actions, and resistance to influence. The product of school is the opposite of this ideal – physically miserable adolescents, with no temperament to speak of, neurasthenic, effeminate, giving way to others and surrendering the initiative to them. The school "suppresses the vitality of juvenile constitution, destroys physical energy, destroys health"; "A-level certificates are granted only to physically wretched, temperamentally depleted, neurasthenic youths";[22] the effects of a gymnasium can be seen in the appearance of first-year students at the Imperial University of Warsaw: "Apathetic facial expressions, a dim eye, slowness and lack of springiness in movements: this is the average appearance of these twenty-year-old high school graduates".[23] With horror, the author of the series "Polish Youth in the Russian Partition" describes students who "renounce work in the fields intended for the intellectually superior strata of society, renounce it in the name of supposedly more pressing workers' question, while doing nothing

[21] Katarzyna Luksa, *Gabriela Balicka (1867–1962). Działalność polityczna, społeczna, naukowa, edukacyjna* (Warszawa, 2017), 53.

[22] Skrzycki [Roman Dmowski], 'Młodzież polska w zaborze rosyjskim II', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 2 (1896), 32.

[23] *Ibid.*, 30.

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in this matter, leaving its advancement to the workers, or, in a word, voluntarily condemn themselves to a completely passive social role".[24] The author cites this as an example of socialist decadence, moral impotence, and mental sterility.

However, the blame here lies not only with the school but also with the mothers, who pamper their sons and thus do not allow them to acquire the necessary resilience. They are the ones who set the tone for parenting, and their maternal instinct, "with the nervousness of today's women … grows to abnormal proportions".[25] On the other hand, the fathers, the survivors of the 1863 January Uprising, are themselves physically weak (since the physically better ones fell, only the unfit ones remained, and they are the ones who have children). They pass this trait on to their offspring. All these factors together add up to "the morbid development of the instinct of self-preservation and selfishness"; "Thus, the entire upbringing of the child is directed primarily to the preservation of his existence, regardless of whether he will be able to work, or whether he will not have physical and moral defects that can make him a burden to the entire milieu".[26] The educational practice of shielding rather than developing resilience also follows from this, leading to a weakness of muscles and, consequently, a weak character, a lack of will, and so on. The beliefs prevalent in Dmowski's family home (according to which it is better to condemn a child to death than to allow him "as a cripple to be a burden on those close to him"), met here with the Social-Darwinian view which equated physical and mental condition,

[24] Skrzycki [Roman Dmowski], 'Młodzież polska w zaborze rosyjskim VIII', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 9 (1896), 197–198.

[25] Skrzycki [Dmowski], 'Młodzież polska … II', 31. Blaming mothers for the incompetence of their sons is a theme that recurs in other parts of the "Polish Youth in the Russian Partition" series in *Przegląd Wszechpolski* (e.g., in issues 6 and 9). The emotional excessiveness for which women are usually accused distorts young male personalities and leads to the loss of the most important characteristics of their gender: "The mania for raising well-behaved children who do not misbehave, do nothing wrong, are only capable of crying and sneaking on others when they are wronged, unable to stand up to a peer who gets up to mischief – the mania has produced generations of incompetents, devoid of self-respect and the ability to cope in life, unable to behave in the most important moments as befits a person aware of their rights and interests" (Skrzycki [Roman Dmowski], 'Młodzież polska w zaborze rosyjskim', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 9 (1896), 199.

[26] Skrzycki [Dmowski], 'Młodzież polska … II', 31.

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and sanctioned the rules supposedly prevailing in nature as guidelines for social life.

Let me return to the violence in the Apukhtin-era school, an influence of which on young men raised by nervous mothers was supposed to be so irresistible: one can frame it in various ways. It can certainly be understood as abuse against children, violence of the stronger against the weaker, or as the authoritarianism of a total institution. Stories about boys locked up in a bogie, spied on and bugged, punished for the slightest act of "audacity" seem to provide a perfect reading from such a perspective – a perspective full of compassion towards child victims of school oppression. The editors of the *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, however, cannot adopt this view. For them, middle schools are a place of purely national violence. The school system is described as "ruthlessly exterminatory"[27] because it destroys the nation both culturally and socially, and its goal is the "extermination of the Polish element",[28] that is, turning the graduates into Russians, not Poles.

COMPASSION FOR INDIVIDUALS AS A PATH TO ANARCHY

But can it be considered that middle school students deserve compassion, that in the early publications of the *Endeks* they become objects of that feeling? The articles on the Russian school are imbued with a sense of curious ambivalence. They remain in line with the biological and organicist understanding of suffering and pleasure characteristic of the ND camp – suffering is what brings harm to the whole organism, not what the individual experiences.[29] Violence is thus rewritten so that it is primarily portrayed as violence against the nation, rather than against individuals, children, and weak human beings. The price for that rewriting is to divert attention from the middle school students. Thus, even though their suffering is so meticulously described and considered so politically important, it doesn't really lead to the emergence of a compassionate perspective. Instead, we have a commentary on the condition of the national organism. The national suffering inflicted

[27] 'Z zaboru rosyjskiego', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 5 (1897), 107.

[28] 'Z zaboru rosyjskiego', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 7 (1897), 155.

[29] Zygmunt Balicki, *Hedonizm jako punkt wyjścia etyki* (Warszawa, 1900), https://polona.pl/item/hedonizm-jako-punkt-wyjscia-etyki,Njc4NTc0NTc/6/#info:metadata [Accessed: 20 June 2025].

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upon the boys by the tsarist institutions thus becomes more dignified and elevated than the usual violence used by adults against children. The crying child, a pitiable creature, spending 24 hours in detention or being punished by beating for speaking Polish with his friends, vanishes completely from our sight. The suffering of middle school students as a metonymy of the entire nation, only significant, only politically valid, does not really require the existence of a suffering individual. In this way, if we succumb to the emotional persuasion of the National Democrats, we do not need to lean specifically on the individual who could be the object of this compassion.

In such a case, it is difficult to imagine that there would be room for compassion for an individual male figure in ND publications. A victim of violence is usually seen as weak, passive, and worthy of pity. In the ND's optics, this is the essence of femininity, incompatible with the ideal of male national strength. Therefore, all such individual suffering needs to be rewritten, put into a different framework, so that, on the one hand, the characters are not disgraced, while on the other, they can express the suffering, even if it can only appear in the guise of a nation threatened with degeneration. However, the plight as a result of violence against individual men simply cannot be spoken about.

No wonder, then, that speaking out against the violence and authoritarianism of the Russified school on behalf of male and female students, rather than (merely) the nation, was regarded by the *Endeks* not only as inappropriate, but as downright pernicious and harmful. In 1905, a wave of strikes swept through the Polish lands, affecting universities, gymnasiums, and later also common schools, as young people stopped attending classes. They demanded, in solidarity with the striking workers, far-reaching democratisation and opposed tsarist and school despotism.[30] Roman Dmowski did not hide his contempt

[30] Here are some examples of strike demands presented in a resolution adopted by a general academic assembly on 28 Jan. 1905, in Warsaw: "ending the war; the replacement of autocracy with a democratic republic; municipal and provincial self-government; autonomy for the Kingdom of Poland; full equality of nationalities and religions; full legal equality of the sexes; the right of every nationality to establish institutions that would guarantee them complete freedom of cultural development; separation of church and state and of schools from the church; freedom of assembly, speech, the press, associations, coalitions, and strikes, as well as personal and residential inviolability; universal free education in the national language; replacement of the standing army with a national militia; election of all officials and judges"

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towards that measure. In his opinion, the problem with the strike was that "the youth stopped attending school not as a result of a resolution of any political organization, the command did not come from the older generation, from the parents, but the movement broke out spontaneously among the youth themselves, under the influence of the atmosphere of a general 'strike' and the agitation of a handful of individuals from outside the school. The youth were not called to 'boycott', but 'went on strike' anyway".[31] Thus, the strike was, in its essence, the effect of the Russified school and its "anarchizing, nihilistic" influence:[32] just like the school system, it shattered the national "moral cohesion", introduced disobedience and lawlessness, destroyed Polish tradition and authorities, and thus threatened that "we would lose the attributes of a civilised society, and become an incoherent, anarchic mob".[33] The negative assessment of the school strike was so important to the leaders of the National Democratic Party that, in upholding it, they were prepared to sever their close ties with 'Zet', the youth party associated with them, which had become involved in the student protests.[34] This, of course, was part of the broader context of ND's reaction to the events of 1905, and was an expression of its attitude toward any emancipatory activities that were not made under the national sign. The turn to discipline also signalled a change on the political map. The nationalist project became, from now on, associated with opposition, not so much to the so-called conciliators, but to the socialists.

YOU NEED TO TOUGH IT OUT, MAN

Compassion is a social practice and a particular relationship – it has an object and a subject who experiences it. In early ND publications, these two merge into one – it becomes equally dangerous to be a victim,

('My, młodzież Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, zebrana na wiecu ogólno-akademickim w dn. 28 stycznia 1905 r. w gmachu uniwersyteckim […]', 1905, 2, https://polona.pl/item/uchwala-wiecu-ogolno-akademickiego-z-dn-28-i-1905-inc-my-mlodziez-uniwersytetu,MTQ4MzA2MTg/1/#info:metadata) [Accessed: 20 June 2025].

[31] Roman Dmowski, *Szkoła i społeczeństwo. Z powodu t.zw. strajku szkolnego w Królestwie* (Kraków, 1905), 34.

[32] *Ibid.*, 28.

[33] *Ibid.*, 29.

[34] Roman Wapiński, *Roman Dmowski* (Lublin, 1988), 152.

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an object of compassion, as it is to feel compassion for others and be guided by this emotion in one's actions. It seems as if compassion corrupts both the object of compassion and its subject. This corruption consists in depriving an individual of their masculinity, rendering them effeminate, and applies to both sides of the compassionate relationship. Under no circumstances can it therefore become the foundation of national politics. Describing the positive changes in the Polish national character in 1902, evident among Poles from the Prussian partition and consisting in the fact that their nation was becoming increasingly masculine, *Przegląd Wszechpolski* explained:

> This new breed of Pole could not accept the concept of homeland lulled by poetry, idealised in its long suffering, symbolically represented by a woman stretched out on a cross, beautiful, pure, unblemished. He said to himself: homeland is us, with all our virtues and vices, with our needs, interests, and aspirations; work in the name of the homeland is not a priesthood, but the work of self-preservation … Having understood his homeland in this way, the Pole could not find patriotism in weeping and wringing one's hands over it, for that would be crying and hand-wringing over himself, that is, repulsive helplessness. His patriotism in the face of injustice arouses only one feeling – the desire to resist, and his manly character, tempered by a life of hardships, makes him capable of this resistance, of a constant, daily struggle for the rights and interests of the nation. And so the din of battle became the everyday music of this society. It turned out that this sober, calculating, realistic Poznań native, who laughed at lofty patriotic rhetoric, was more persistent in the struggle for the good of the nation and more capable of sacrifice than legions of sentimental patriots who wring their hands over the woman stretched out on the cross – Poland.[35]

The gender aspect of this strategy is evident.[36] The idea behind it is that men leading the nation should embody masculinity, as this will make the nation itself more manly: resilient, proactive, physically and morally strong, assertive, and decisive. Masculine, i.e., utterly devoid of compassion. To escape from a position of weakness and

[35] 'Odrodzenie patryotyzmu', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 1 (1902), 4.

[36] On the role of masculinity in the political imagination of National Democracy, see Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez, 'Male Poland, global ambitions and turn toward discipline. Polish nationalism at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries in the context of Central and Eastern Europe', in Anna Cieslak and Anna Muller (eds), *Gender and Nation in East-Central Europe. An Uneasy History* (Lanham, MD, 2025), 217–43.

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helplessness, neither Poland nor Poles should sully themselves with compassion and despair; neither Poland nor Poles should have anything to do with femininity.

This view of masculinity is deeply rooted in the geopolitical imagination and linked to a vision of the world as a place of struggle for national supremacy.[37] The losers in this struggle – the weak, effeminate, those who submit to the domination of others and are assimilated by them – are victims who deserve no pity. The ideal of masculinity, to which one aspires and which is held up as an example of male beauty, is based on the British model: combining the most desirable physical, moral, and intellectual qualities, comparable to the ideal of ancient Greece and forming the basis of the "power of the English nation".[38] This model assumes ruthlessness, individualism, and violence, and it is precisely these traits that the journalists of *Przegląd Wszechpolski* consider its greatest advantages: "A nation known and hailed as the embodiment of selfishness, whose behaviour is the antithesis of humanitarian principles, working only for itself, seemingly indifferent to the affairs of humankind, has rendered the greatest service to humanity, and has earned merit by not living by imitation, by despising intellectual alms, but by striving to create everything for itself through its own independent work, and by accumulating treasures through this work which others reap in handfuls".[39] "The national education of the English makes them the most useful people for their nation, and the nation as a whole the most useful for humanity. The average educated person there understands that the more English he is, the greater his value as a human being".[40]

The rejection of compassion is the most important element of the National Democratic Party's politics of feelings. The rhetorical gesture of refusing to experience and express compassion turns out to be both a political and a civilisational choice: it is not so much a question of whom to feel compassion for, but rather whom not to sympathise with. The stake is a place in the geopolitical hierarchy, and compassion,

[37] Marius Turda, *The Idea of National Superiority in Central Europe 1880–1918* (Lewiston NY, 2004).

[38] Skrzycki [Dmowski], 'Młodzież polska … II', 32.

[39] Skrzycki [Roman Dmowski], 'Młodzież polska w zaborze rosyjskim IV', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 4 (1896), 77.

[40] *Ibid.*, 78.

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as an emotion relating to relations between nations, is dismissed by the *Endeks* as "sterile humanitarianism" and an obstacle to reaching the peak of that hierarchy.

> Today, we are the most polite, most humane, and most indulgent nation towards others, believing that these qualities are a testament to our civilisational maturity. Unfortunately, these are not the attributes of the masters of civilisation, but of their lackeys. National ruthlessness, harshness, violence, etc., did not prevent the English, Germans, and French from taking the leading positions; on the contrary, they helped them to advance in the race of civilisations. A nation that has a strong sense of its own identity and values its dignity cannot be either docile or sluggishly humanitarian.[41]

It was no coincidence that the English were treated as role models in early ND publications. They were perceived by *Endecja* as "masters of civilisation, not its lackeys" precisely because, instead of being guided by humanitarianism and compassion towards all other people, they thought about the interests of their own nation.

THE MASTERS OF CIVILISATION, OR THE GEOPOLITICAL EFFECTS OF COMPASSION

The refusal to show compassion comes in two forms. The first is to reject it because it's absurd and harmful to "us". The second form consists of demonstrating that compassion is misdirected: contemptuous or ironic references are made to "sterile humanitarianism" directed towards some "strangers", even though they are not the ones experiencing the greatest suffering, which is "the morally and physically degenerate school system in the Russian partition".[42] Interestingly, both forms have the same outcome, since the second is only a superficial alternative: in the end, the middle school students do not become the proper object of this compassion. In both cases, the refusal to feel

[41] Jastrzębiec [Jan Ludwik Popławski], 'Z całej Polski', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 2 (1896), 35.

[42] 'Stare błędy', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 14 (1896), 314. Jane Lydon discusses similar rhetorical figures used in imperial discourse to discredit humanitarianism in her book *Imperial Emotions. The Politics of Empathy across the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2020).

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compassion also turns out to be an endorsement of a social Darwinist vision of the world, in which survival can be ensured through progress, growth, civilisation, but above all by looking after one's own interests, not those of others, and by not wasting energy on compassion for those around us. The English are masters at this, while those who are unable to achieve it are doomed to extinction, like the Indians in Ludwik Powidaj's famous text.[43]

This view, expressed in writing by individuals who identified with a country that had been partitioned and erased from the map, may seem odd.[44] However, it was precisely this social Darwinist thinking which was supposed to be the driving force behind Poland's liberation from foreign rule. According to the National Democrats, Poland is weak not because of the ruthless expansionist policies of its neighbours, but because it succumbed to these policies (considered normal for healthy societies) due to its weakness – weakened by a lack of political sense and national consciousness, compassionate and effeminate. What it needs is to stand firm on its "national position", i.e., national egoism, also proudly referred to by the *Endeks* as chauvinism. On an emotional level, this boils down to renouncing all compassion, humanitarianism, and to recognising only what benefits the nation.

Condemned by the *Endecja*, compassion is associated in the ND's worldview with submissiveness towards others. Those who feel compassion are themselves worthy of sympathy, because their non-expansive attitude allows them to give way to others. "A nation that subordinates its vital interests to some higher considerations, that dilutes its intellect with tolerant criticism, and weakens the energy

[43] Ludwik Powidaj, 'Polacy i Indianie', in Stanisław Fita (ed.), *Publicystyka okresu pozytywizmu 1860–1900: antologia* (Warszawa, 2002), 30–6.

[44] An interesting perspective on a similar issue is provided by Raymond Patton in "The 'Vanishing Indian' and the Vanishing Pole: From a Middle Ground to a Logic of Elimination in the European and Global Periphery, 1840–1880", *Slavic Review*, 81 (2022), 609–30. The article addresses the tension present in the writings of Henryk Sienkiewicz, Paweł Edmund Strzelecki, and Sygurd Wiśniowski between, on the one hand, the ability to perceive and criticize the injustices of colonialism and the sense of solidarity with non-European victims of the empire, and, on the other hand, the need to confirm the questioned status of Poles as white Europeans and the temptation to participate in the colonial enterprise. In the cases of Sienkiewicz, Strzelecki, and Wiśniowski, the latter position prevails, also due to racial thinking and social Darwinism.

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of its sentiments with humanitarianism and leniency, will not be able to withstand competition with others who do not impose any restraints on themselves in the pursuit of their goals",[45] wrote Jan Ludwik Popławski.

At the end of the nineteenth century, in terms of actual political tactics these words were meant to discredit the conciliators – a diverse group of conservatives, reactionaries, members of the Polish circle in the Austrian and Prussian parliaments dominated by the aristocracy, i.e., all those who believed that in the partitioned Poland, the national identity should be preserved through tripartite loyalty, social conservatism or cautious liberalism, avoiding radicalism and adapting to the ruling powers. In opposition to them, the early National Democracy developed its politics of feelings, treating conciliation not only as the result of (either rational or irrational) political decisions, but also as an expression of an emotional profile that must be rejected immediately if Poland is to avoid demise. In their description of conciliatory attitudes and sentiments, Balicki, Dmowski, and Popławski expressed an unprecedented emotional commitment – their reaction to conciliation was as spontaneous as, in their opinion, the feelings that were to replace it should be.

Of course, it was not sympathy for the partitioning powers that motivated the conciliators. In their speeches, however, they expressed belief in the goodwill of the authorities and imagined the possibility of entering into various, more or less self-serving relationships with them. They interpreted the initiation and pursuit of these relationships as an expression of a "civilised", non-chauvinistic approach, a sign of political competence and an appropriate cultural level. Of course, it can be argued that this was merely a rhetorical strategy and an image-building exercise on their part, using the ideology of "civilisation" and "realism" to cover up the real economic interests behind their policies – after all, they were the group that benefited most from economic relations and the opening of the partitioning powers' markets to companies from Polish lands. On the other hand, the ND's effective rhetorical and image-building strategy was to accuse the conciliators of "sterile humanitarianism", submissiveness, clumsiness, helplessness, sluggishness, and treason, and to present their own vision

[45] Jastrzębiec [Jan Ludwik Popławski], 'Z całej Polski', *Przegląd Wszechpolski*, 2 (1896), 35.

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of "civilising" cultural and political competence, consisting in rejecting the former traits and attitudes to emphasize their distinctiveness from the conciliators; they strived to become "masters of civilisation, not its lackeys".

The adoption by the National Democrats of an "orientation towards Russia" in 1905 and their entry into the role of a group that reached an agreement with the partitioner[46] may be considered inconsistent in this context, but it will cease to seem so if we note that here too the *Endeks* positioned themselves as a barrier to the dangerous flood of everything that is at the antipode of the disciplined order of feelings built under the national banner, a flood of claims perceived by them as particularistic, undermining national unity, hysterical, wild, and above all – stemming from the recognition of individual and class suffering, not national suffering, a suffering demanding changes in the name of solidarity, brotherhood and compassion. They therefore did not perceive their strategy as proof of conciliation and compromise, but rather as a stance on the side of force and order, one that did not give in to the wave of anarchy.

THREE FORMS OF COMPASSION, ALL REJECTED

Compassion can be expressed in three ways. Firstly, it can serve as a basis for anti-authoritarian and emancipatory efforts (as a form of resistance against oppressive practices and violence perpetrated by schools, authorities, and capital). Secondly, it can be a template for relationships between individuals, societies or nations (as the ability to take into account the perspective and interests of the other side). Thirdly, it can be a kind of self-reflection and building of one's own subjectivity (as the recognition that one can be weak and suffering, require empathy and support, instead of being called upon to be tough and masculine, not soft and feminine). Regardless of which variant it appeared in, compassion had to be rejected by the *Endecja* as a threat. It was considered harmful to be the object of compassion as well as its subject. The rejection of compassion becomes the emotional

[46] Wapiński, *Roman Dmowski*, 157–227; Krzysztof Kawalec, 'Narodowa Demokracja wobec kryzysu państwowości rosyjskiej w latach 1905–1907', in Anna Żarnowska, Arkadiusz Kołodziejczyk, Andrzej Stawarz, and Piotr Tusiński (eds), *Dziedzictwo rewolucji 1905–1907* (Radom–Warszawa, 2007), 75–86.

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backdrop for the "turn towards discipline",[47] remaining at the centre of the National Democracy's rhetorical and image-building strategy, like a black sun in the ND's worldview and politics of feelings.

The politics of feelings based on the refusal to show compassion is the emotive backdrop and context for the political choices made by the *Endeks*. The relations between the emotional and the political certainly require further research aimed at describing the feedback between the two and the ideological nature of these relations. How does the political nature of the politics of emotion work? What is its ideology? One may also consider the effectiveness of the National Democracy's politics of feelings in gaining widespread support. To what extent, for example, did the reconfiguration of the political landscape after the 1905 revolution[48] and the ND's takeover of the social base of the conciliators,[49] i.e. the landowners and the moderately progressive bourgeoisie, stem not only from economic issues but also from the shape of this politics? From imbuing political decisions with emotional expression? Was this recognised by the *Endecja*'s political opponents and exposed as something that should be opposed with their own politics of feelings just as strongly as they opposed traditional political solutions of the ND? Or perhaps the refusal to show compassion crossed political boundaries and spread to other groups? Indeed, the question of the construction of an emotional dichotomy within the National Democracy worldview requires further research: on the one hand, compassion, submissiveness, femininity, passivity, sterility, and ineffectiveness; on the other, refusal to show compassion, offensiveness, brutality, masculinity, activity, and vigorous, effective,

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[47] Marzec, *Rebelia i reakcja*; Porter-Szűcs, *When Nationalism*; Grzegorz Krzywiec, '"Z taką rewolucją musimy walczyć na noże": Rewolucja 1905 roku z perspektywy polskiej prawicy', in Wiktor Marzec and Kamil Piskała (eds), *Rewolucja 1905: Przewodnik* (Warszawa, 2013), 232–397. The authors place this turning point in the period of the 1905–07 revolution. In the article 'Exercises in expansion. Colonial threads in the Endecja's turn toward discipline', *Praktyka Teoretyczna*, xxxvi, 2 (2020), 105–33, I argue that its symptoms could already be seen ten years earlier.

[48] Marzec, *Rebelia i reakcja*, 393–419.

[49] Zbigniew Markwart, 'Stronnictwo realistów w okresie kryzysu imperium rosyjskiego w latach 1904–1905', in Anna Żarnowska, Arkadiusz Kołodziejczyk, Andrzej Stawarz, and Piotr Tusiński (eds), *Dziedzictwo rewolucji 1905–1907* (Radom–Warszawa, 2007), 103–16.

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violent action. How did the components of both sides form a lasting complex and begin to define each other? All these questions beg for answers.

ERASING THE LITTLE GIRL/LITTLE BOY

Let us conclude by returning to the story of Więciorkówna. Even during Dmowski's lifetime, this short story was considered lost. The most important biographers of the leader of the National Democracy movement reported on its creation, but its content and title remained unknown – it was not accessible to those close to Dmowski, nor to the compilers of the materials collected in Zieliński's files, i.e., the largest archive on the history of *Endecja*, nor to subsequent scholars who conducted research based on them. Dmowski's friends, and later his biographers, believed that it was a "short story about a Warsaw street urchin" and were convinced of its significance, not least because it was his first published text, but also because, in their opinion, the text contained important themes necessary to understand the influence of Dmowski's biography on his ideological evolution. In line with these suggestions, the author of the story presented his own experiences as a street kid from Warsaw, who was raised on the streets and adhered to their morality (depending on the researcher's perspective: either a simple, strict, and noble sense of honour, or the glorification of violence and the cult of strength typical of the hooligan subculture); then, in his adult life, he turned it into an essential element of the National Democratic ideology.[50]

The protagonist of the story is a girl, not a boy, "a Warsaw street urchin". It is certainly not a stylistic exercise or art for art's sake – like all of Dmowski's texts, literary ones included, it remains a positivist "tendentious" piece, i.e., one in which the author wants to express a thesis and make a difference in the world. So what is the message of "Więciorkówna"? Why did Dmowski's relatives not know this text, misunderstand its meaning, and believe that its protagonist was a Warsaw street urchin? Why is the protagonist a girl? How does this short story relate to all of Dmowski's later texts and, more broadly, to the National Democratic worldview and politics of feelings?

[50] Grzegorz Krzywiec, *Chauvinism, Polish Style. The Case of Roman Dmowski (Beginnings: 1886–1905)* (Peter Lang, 2016), 33–4.

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Compassion is the primary emotion which structures the text's effect. The female protagonist is constructed as the perfect object of compassion, while the narrator is the subject that expresses that feeling – and the purpose of the novella is to evoke it in the reader, as well. "Więciorkówna" allows us to identify with the child's helplessness, as the main character is a victim of abuse and cruelty; to pity the girl and cry over her plight, to form a community of compassion. It therefore proposes something that all *Endecja* texts reject with utmost force. Even if we remain sceptical about whether compassion is a "natural" human disposition that must find its expression and always seeks a more or less appropriate outlet, we can nevertheless assume that only by dressing compassion up as a seven-year-old girl did Dmowski manage to make this emotion the central element of his youthful novella. The story of the suffering of a boy, rather than a girl, used to evoke the subject and object of compassion through writing, could certainly have been justified by Dmowski's biography, but it would no longer fit into the forming worldview of the leader of the National Democracy. But evidently, over time, even using the figure of a girl was no longer considered sufficient by Dmowski to explain compassion. It must have been difficult for him to "disguise" himself as a little girl and to address the subject of compassion. The story about Więciorkówna – his first published text, which for most debuting authors is usually a source of pride and excitement – had to remain misrepresented, forgotten, and lost. And that is precisely why I believe that all those close to Dmowski and scholars of the history of the National Democracy were right to treat this short story as significant, even without knowing its content.

So let's look at the tension between the (deliberately?) lost text about the girl's suffering, the suffering of the boy behind her, and the compassion they invite on the one hand, and all the subsequent ND's texts extolling the refusal of compassion on the other: the tension will allow us to see the potential of using not only the category of gender, but also the category of ideological formation as a tool that allows us to historicize and relativize emotions. The fact that, within the National Democracy worldview, it was impossible to display compassion in its specific sense was a political choice, and the refusal of compassion was one of the ways National Democrats pursued their policies. They placed control, masculinity, domination, and the enforcement of discipline at the opposite end of the spectrum from compassion,

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turning the former qualities into an armour of feelings and attitudes that was supposed to ensure the resurrection of the manly nation, reinforce its position and civilizational role. In the masculine Polish nation, there would be no compassion, and there would be no more little Więciorkówna girls or anyone who would pity such individuals. The world of the National Democrats was not built for them.

Translated by Krzysztof Heymer

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