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## Thesis Review of 'Reflections on Continuity in Polish Intellectual Culture: Transborder Perspectives of Post-war Public Discussions, 1945-1956', submitted by Aleksei Lokhmatov

Traditionally, the establishment of state socialism in Eastern Europe after the end of the Second World War is associated with the takeover of central institutions by the Party, installation of Party members faithful to Moscow, the erasure of a public sphere and, soon, the repression of anyone assumed to dissent with the onset of the Cold War and a fully-fledged Stalinization. This made socialism appear as a mere installation 'from above', a view that entailed the assumption of at least implicit resistance from the respective populations and former elites. Social and cultural histories of recent years have demonstrated that the picture is more complex as postwar reconstruction, redrawn borders and 'national' agendas of newly established governments had also a mobilizing effect on different groups. The first few years before Stalinization has also received more attention as newly elected governments initially attempted to rather foster than enforce a commitment to the socialist project. How established elites reacted to the shifting political landscapes in these years has likewise received attention, whether that concerned eminent figures or academic disciplines.

— With his interest in how the public debates among Polish intellectuals, scholars and writers evolved in the context of postwar socialist reconstruction, Stalinization and Destalinization Aleksei Lokhmatov contributes to this reassessment. Covering the interactions between major figures of the postwar publishing landscape, scholars of several disciplines and groups defined by competing worldviews Lokhmatov declares in his introduction that he is less interested in the content of debates as such than the guiding ‘epistemic virtues’ that shaped these discussions in the context of an evolving political landscape that called for intellectuals to engage with the broader reconstruction efforts of the Polish postwar nation. This positions Lokhmatov’s thesis effectively at the intersection of discourse analysis, intellectual history and the history of sciences.

— Roughly half of the thesis covers the ‘gentle revolution’ of the immediate postwar years with their apparent pluralism and heated, but open debates among left-leaning, outright Marxist and Catholic scholars and intellectuals across Poland. Stalinization with its attempt at establishing Soviet style academic rituals and, finally, Destalinization take up less space with a chapter each. Lokhmatov justifies this with the relative lack of attention that historiography has allotted to the early postwar years (without much reflecting on the reasons for this). A chapter outlining the role of French theory and culture for the Polish discussion adds a transborder dimensions of these debates beyond the redrawn borders of postwar Poland.

Over the four chapters covering the immediate postwar years, Lokhmatov manages not just to touch upon the relevant political cornerstones that shaped the project of postwar reconstruction and building of a new, ‘independent’ and socialist Poland as it was envisioned as a ‘gentle’ revolution from above by central figures within the new governmental institutions. He also delves into an abundant trove of sources to review the various standpoints and intellectual discussions between various sets of leftist scholars, Marxist thinkers and Catholic intellectuals. In the process, Lokhmatov is able to carve out the fine lines between intellectual positions and styles of argument, review different traditions within disciplines such as sociology and philosophy and their links to the fault lines of the interwar period.

— That most scholars were willing to participate in the reconstruction of a 'New Poland' – including even Catholics like Piasecki with his former fascist associations – is not new. Neither is the relative weak influence of fully-fledged proponents of Marxism in the immediate postwar years. But to bring these scholars' discussions across the lines of disciplines, institutions and worldviews together is one of the central merits of this thesis. Rather than commenting at length on political positions and questions of strategy, Lokhmatov's focus on worldviews and the diverging interpretations what collaboration, the New Poland or 'progress' would constitute for the different participants in the postwar debates allows for interesting insights into how dynamic and pluralistic the negotiation of the permissible was in the immediate postwar years. At times, the review of debates and standpoints has their content overtake Lokhmatov's declared focus on the rules and logics of discussion; also the references to the epistemic virtues governing these discussions feel at times like an added afterthought. But the thesis manages to outline the differences and conflicts between the different parties engaged in debate while showing how scholars and intellectuals with considerably differing standpoints shared an attitude towards exchange that saw debate as an exchange of different arguments – even if their methodology and approaches sometimes differed considerably.

— This is contrasted with the shift to Stalinization which saw the attempt to introduce 'virtues' well-established in the Stalinist Soviet Union into the Polish intellectual landscape – namely the universal acceptance of Marxism-Leninism as the only truthful method of analysis. Together with the new requirement of self-criticisms for formerly held, 'wrongful' standpoints, this newly introduced virtue was hardly translatable to the Polish landscape. Lokhmatov not simply states the difficulty this posed not only for scholars and intellectuals promoting the 'wrong' worldview, but can show how this clashed with the differing concept of debate that had been shared by Polish intellectuals despite considerable disagreement before Stalinization. He also can introduce new participants that shape both the discussions during the Stalinist period and Destalinization considerably: a young generation of Marxists that even after the return of older, shunned intellectuals to the debate after 1956 continued to influence the intellectual landscape in Poland.

Even if less prominent than the title of the thesis might suggest, the transborder perspective of the thesis also helps to sharpen the view on the national discussions in Poland. The concise chapter on the influence of French thought and cultural reference, not just in terms of the long tradition of Polish-French intellectual exchange, but as a measure of 'truth' for all sides in the decade after the war. In fact, the transborder perspective helps to contour the developments of the Polish intellectual landscape considerably. While the second chapter on the German question and the image of the Soviet Union demonstrate how important a 'European' characterization the 'New Poland' was to Polish scholars and intellectuals was, it is the chapter on Stalinization that to some degree makes up for rather general references to the 'Soviet model' or 'Soviet realities' of previous chapters as it spells out the conditions for academic debate in the postwar Soviet Union and their stark difference to the Polish context.

Considering the circumspect reviews of different lines of academic and intellectual discussion, it is the omission or removal of important reference points from the main text that caught the eye of the reviewer. While the rather marginal attention paid to the role of postwar Polish exile might in fact mirror the less prominent role of exile in the first decade after the war, the tradition to consider it of great importance to developments in Poland proper might have warranted comment. Also, beyond a rather concise outline on the state of the art in the introduction, Lokhmatov curiously avoids a comparison of his individual findings with previous conclusions made in the historiography dealing with the same topics. One has to turn to the footnotes to gauge some impression of how his findings would compare to those of his fellow historians. Thus, the novelty or gain of his analysis gets somewhat lost. For the publication, some more explicit, if not necessarily confrontational contextualizations of the chapters' findings with those of other publications on the same field might add important orientation. The same goes for the discussion of 'virtues' that Lokhmatov identifies as central to his argument in the introduction. Sometimes it is not clear what is to be considered a 'virtue' and what not. Also, 'virtues' need discussion when (seemingly) in conflict, i.e. when Chalasinski argues for a sociological typology as the only possible approach to the analysis of the intelligentsia, but then argues for the coexistence of different approaches to sciences. Such (seeming) inconsistencies are not an issue

as such, but warrant at least a short discussion if the epistemic virtues of debate are at the center of this thesis. Minor extensions on concepts in the introduction such as the 'public sphere' and their discussion for the 'Socialist Bloc' would have also helped to embed the thesis within larger paradigms.

Despite such criticisms that would suffice to be addressed for the publication of the manuscript, I regard the thesis submitted by Aleksei Lokhmatov as fully satisfactory (pass) for the conferral of a doctoral degree.

Overall, I regard the thesis as an achievement above the majority of doctoral theses (grade: 0,7)



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