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Polish Exiles, Britain and the Politics of Empire, 1830–1864**

Abstract

From the 1830s onward, Britain was home to a sizeable population of Polish exiles. While these individuals had diverse social and political backgrounds, they were united in their opposition to the imperial or quasi-imperial systems of government that administered Polish territories. The refuge they found in Britain, however, placed them at the heart of another large cosmopolitan imperium. This article addresses the consequences of such a situation by exploring the contribution of Polish exiles and their supporters to debates concerning the British empire. Analyses were underpinned by two contrasting visions. On the one hand, writers associated British imperial activity with the global spread of enlightened, liberal values. On the other, however, Britain was viewed as a uniquely avaricious state, driven purely by economic self-interest. Examining how these arguments were deployed uncovers some of the ways in which campaigners for an independent Polish state both resisted and endorsed British imperialism.

Key words: British Empire, Polish exiles, emigration, civilization, barbarism, self-interest

Słowa kluczowe: Imperium Brytyjskie, polscy wychodźcy, emigracja, cywilizacja, barbarzyństwo, interes własny

In the wake of the failure of the November Uprising of 1830/31, around 8,000 Poles fled or were banished from Polish territories as part of the first stage of the so-called “Great Emigration.” France was the most popular destination for this group, but substantial numbers of individuals – sometimes by choice, but often by accident – found themselves in Britain.¹ 545 Poles entered the coun-

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¹ I would like to thank Anna Rzonca for her advice on the Polish version of the abstract. Note on terminology: the terms “Britain”/“British” and “England”/“English” were used largely interchangeably within the writing of the period under discussion. Where possible, my com-

try in 1834 alone, and between that year and the early 1860s, Britain's Polish population fluctuated between approximately 450 and 800.² While exiles came from a diverse range of social and political backgrounds, they were united in their opposition to the imperial or quasi-imperial systems of government that administered Polish territories.³ The refuge they were offered by Britain, however, placed them at the heart of another large cosmopolitan imperium.

As has been well documented, such a situation provided useful opportunities for Polish campaigners and their supporters. Thus, we know a good deal about the schemes developed by Adam Czartoryski and the Hôtel Lambert group to convince the British government that the restoration of an independent Polish state was necessary to restrict the growth of Russian influence and protect British India.⁴ At the same time, historians have provided useful accounts of the work of Polish agents in Turkey, Persia, and Afghanistan, many with direct links to Czartoryski, who engaged in a series of attempts to destabilize the region and prompt a conflict between the Western powers and Russia.⁵ This article aims to develop a new perspective on Polish engagement with Britain's empire by approaching it through the history of ideas. In other words, the discussion seeks to trace the various ways in which British imperial activity was conceptualized by Polish authors and their British supporters within writing about the "Polish Question."⁶ Central to analyses were two contrasting visions. On the one hand, writers sought to associate British imperial activity with the global spread of enlightened, liberal values. Consequently, empire was – potentially at least – a benevolent, civilizing force. On the other hand, however,

mentary uses the former labels (as they better reflect the political situation). However, rather than attempting to impose a consistency which is not present in the sources, I have chosen to follow the practices of individual authors when discussing quoted material.

K. Marchlewicz, *Why Britain? The Motives and Circumstances of Polish Political Refugees' Arrivals to the United Kingdom in the 1830s and 1840s*, [in:] *Polish Culture in Britain: Literature and History, 1772 to the present*, ed. M. Bowers and B. Dew, Palgrave, Cham 2023, pp. 63–86. While the numbers of immigrants were relatively small, the extensive press coverage received during the November Uprising and the close connections between exiles and the political elite in Britain ensured their activities received considerable public attention.

² K. Marchlewicz, *Wielka Emigracja na Wyspach Brytyjskich (1831–1863)*, Instytut Historii UAM, Poznań 2008, pp. 24–25. See also S. Kalembska, *Wielka Emigracja 1831–1863*, 2nd ed., Adam Marszałek Publishing, Toruń 2003, p. 54.

³ On the political aims of Polish campaigners, see M. Cybowski, *The Polish Questions in British Politics and Beyond, 1830–1847*, PhD dissertation, University of Southampton 2016.

⁴ R. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *Wielka Brytania w "dyplomacji" Adama Jerzego Czartoryskiego wobec kryzysu wchodniego*, Sempus, Warsaw 1999. The standard English language biography is M. Kukiel, *Czartoryski and European Unity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 1955. For a useful overview in English, see R. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *The Polish Émigrés and the Eastern Question in the Nineteenth Century*, "Central Europe" 2001, vol. 19, no. 2, pp. 89–115.

⁵ J. Dutkiewicz, *Wojna persko-afgańska 1837–8 r. a sprawa polska*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1937, vol. 34, no. 1, pp. 73–133.

⁶ On the Polish question and its relationship with other modes of writing, see H. Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, A First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many other Questions over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2018.

Britain was viewed as a uniquely avaricious state, driven purely by economic self-interest. Imperialism, from such a perspective, was merely a form of mercantile exploitation. While these ideas were, at one level, in tension with one another both were used frequently within Polish discourse. An examination of their deployment, meanwhile, demonstrates some of the challenges involved in formulating nationalist arguments in an imperial context.

The focus of the discussion that follows will be on two types of periodical literature: English-language commentaries aimed at securing support among the British public for Polish causes; and Polish-language journals written by and for exiled Poles. The analysis of this material will be framed by an account of two more substantial Polish works that were preoccupied with Britain's empire: Adam Czartoryski's *Essai sur la diplomatie* (1830) and Walerian Krasiński's *The Polish Question and Panslavism* (1855).⁷

I

Adam Czartoryski, as is well known, played a key role in the political life of the *emigracja*, serving as the leader of its conservative wing from the 1830s until his death in 1861. In biographical terms, the *Essai sur la diplomatie* belongs to an earlier phase of his career; it was completed in around 1828, when, following his removal from the post of Curator of the University of Vilna, Czartoryski was traveling in Europe, and first published in Paris and Marseille in 1830.⁸ The core ideas, however, which were to shape much émigré writing on empire, are to be found in outline form within the *Essai*'s commentary on British colonial activity.

At the heart of the discussion is the idea that a nation possesses a divinely sanctioned claim to an independent political existence. This argument was forwarded through an analogy: just as individuals were the constituent elements of a state, so nations functioned as the "natural fractions" of the wider human race.⁹ Consequently, both the individual and the nation had similar rights and duties. The former, Czartoryski argued, "takes care of his life, preserves it, improves it; but this does not prevent him from abstaining from all injustice

⁷ Manuscrit d'un Philhellène [i.e. A. Czartoryski], *Essai sur la diplomatie*, Feissat Aîné et Demonchy, Marseilles & Paris 1830; V. Krasinski, *The Polish Question and Panslavism*, Chapman and Hall, London 1855.

⁸ A second edition was published in 1864. For a summary of the debate surrounding the timing of the writing of the *Essai*, see M. Kornat, *Studium Reforma Dyplomacji i Legitymizm Narodów*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2011, p. 361. See also R. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *Natura stosunków międzynarodowych w poglądach księcia Adama Jerzego Czartoryskiego na przykładzie Essai sur la diplomatie*, "Przegląd Nauk Historycznych" 2016, vol. 15, no. 1, pp. 297–309. On Czartoryski's wider influence, see R. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *W kręgu księcia Adama Jerzego Czartoryskiego i Wielkiej Emigracji*, Towarzystwo Edukacyjno-Naukowe Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej, Kraków 2023. A useful anglophone discussion of Czartoryski's core concerns can be found in O. Zajac, *Hôtel Lambert and the Austrian Empire, 1831–1846*, Palgrave, Cham 2024, pp. 27–32.

⁹ A. Czartoryski, *Essai*..., p. 195: "fractions naturelles."

towards others and from following the precepts of benevolence and charity, whenever it is possible to practice them.”¹⁰ By the same token, a nation was obligated to both protect itself and to “do good and prevent evil” and advance “the general good of humankind.”¹¹

These obligations ensured that attacks on national sovereignty constituted violations of universal law. Equally significantly, however, Czartoryski’s emphasis on “the good of humankind” as the key measure for assessing a nation’s actions provided a justification for certain types of colonial endeavor. Indeed, his work provides not a *tout court* rejection of empire or colonialism¹², but rather a series of criteria for establishing its legitimate operation. On the one hand, therefore, he maintained that there were regions of the world where “one can hardly distinguish any real nationality.”¹³ This, he argued, was particularly true of India, where the foreign (i.e., pre-British) invaders who ruled the country had undermined civil peace, and where the caste system had divided the populace so as to prevent the emergence of a “national existence.”¹⁴ In such circumstances, British rule – which had introduced “regular institutions” and “civilization” – could only be conceived as “an immense benefit.”¹⁵ On the other hand, however, Czartoryski developed a series of criticisms concerning the specific ways in which the British had managed their Indian territories.¹⁶ The key problem was that rule in India was exercised by a “company of merchants” solely concerned with rapidly advancing their own fortunes.¹⁷ Such a focus served to break the bonds of benevolence and charity that should unite nations; indeed, Czartoryski maintained that there was “no worse regime than one whose ultimate goal was money.”¹⁸ He could only hope, therefore, that the East India Company’s rule would “come to an end as soon as possible, and that the government itself should take into its hands the scepter which must decide the fate of sixty million men.”¹⁹

In sum, therefore, Czartoryski’s attitude to Britain was a highly ambivalent one. The *Essai* provides both a *de jure* defense of civilized Britain’s right to ma-

¹⁰ Unless otherwise indicated in the text, all translations are by the author. Ibidem, p. 202: “Chaque individu prend soin de sa vie, la conserve, l’améliore; mais cela n’empêche pas de s’abstenir de toute injustice envers d’autres et de suivre les préceptes de la bienveillance et de la charité, toutes les fois qu’il lui est possible de les pratiquer.”

¹¹ Ibidem, p. 204: “de faire le bien et d’empêcher le mal”; “bien général du genre humain.”

¹² For discussions that present Czartoryski as an anti-colonialist, see M. Kornat, *Studium...*, p. 479; M.K. Dziewanowski, *Czartoryski and His Essai sur la Diplomatie*, “Slavic Studies” 1971, vol. 30, no. 3, pp. 589–605 (p. 597).

¹³ A. Czartoryski, *Essai...*, p. 198: “on ne peut guère distinguer de nationalité réelle.”

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 199: “l’existence nationale.”

¹⁵ Ibidem, “institutions régulières”; “civilisation”; “un immense bienfait.”

¹⁶ The *Essai*’s argument here has some resemblance to that developed by Edmund Burke in his prosecution of the Indian administrator Warren Hastings. Czartoryski witnessed Burke’s speeches on the issue firsthand when visiting Britain in the 1790s.

¹⁷ A. Czartoryski, *Essai...*, p. 200: “une compagnie de marchands.”

¹⁸ Ibidem, “pas de plus mauvaise régie que celle dont le but final est l’argent.”

¹⁹ Ibidem, “vint à cesser au plus tôt, et que le gouvernement prît lui – même dans ses mains le sceptre qui doit décider du sort de soixante millions d’hommes.”

nage Indian territories, and a *de facto* criticism of the self-interested, avaricious, and distinctly uncivilized way in which it had done so to date. These ideas were to be extended when Czartoryski came to discuss the history of England's diplomacy. Ultimately, he argued, England constituted a paradox: "her laws breathed only liberty, equity, and philanthropy, [but] her external conduct was often tainted with injustice, ambition, and almost cruelty."²⁰ And even England's better actions had their origins in self-interest. The 1807 Slave Trade Act prohibiting the trade in slaves in the British Empire, for example, constituted a "glorious example of benevolence and humanity" which had done much to inspire "the same sentiments of philanthropy" in other powers.²¹ Any claim on England's part to the moral high ground, however, was weakened by a knowledge of its motivations. It was not humanitarianism that had driven reform, but rather an awareness that American territories could not flourish and "cause [England] offence" as long as the slave trade was prohibited.²² Czartoryski's conclusion, therefore, was a blunt one: "the fixed principle of English diplomacy is the national interest, and this principle is followed with all rigor."²³ This is not to say that England was worse than other states, but rather that "one had the right to expect better from such an enlightened nation."²⁴

II

Both ideas about Britain as an enlightened/civilizing force and as a fundamentally self-interested, economically motivated polity featured in discussions of Polish causes during the 1830s. They were, however, employed in distinctive ways and for particular audiences. Key to the early years of the *emigracja* was the emergence of an anglophone literature with contributions from British writers and Polish exiles, principally concerned with gaining popular support for the re-establishment of an independent Polish state.²⁵ Activities were directed by the Literary Association of the Friends of Poland (LAFP), an organiza-

²⁰ Ibidem, p. 285: "ses lois ne respiraient que liberté, équité, philanthropie, sa conduite extérieure était souvent entachée d'injustice, d'ambition et presque de cruauté."

²¹ Ibidem, p. 286: "un glorieux exemple de bienfaisance et d'humanité; 'les mêmes setimens de philanthropie.'"

²² Ibidem, p. 287, n. 1: "causer de l'ombrage." This note was incorporated into the main text in the 1864 edition.

²³ Ibidem, "le principe fixe de la diplomatie anglaise est l'intérêt national, et ce principe est suivi à toute rigueur."

²⁴ Ibidem, p. 285: "on était en droit d'attendre mieux de la part d'une nation si éclairée."

²⁵ On these activities, see J.H. Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia in Britain: A Study of the Interaction of Policy and Opinion*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1950, pp. 119–134. It is worth noting that British sympathy for Poland had a substantial history, see D.B. Horn, *British Public Opinion and the First Partition of Poland*, Oliver and Boyd, Edinburgh and London 1945; and M.E. Wicklum, *Britain and the Second and Third Partitions of Poland*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics 1999. On British sympathy for Poland at the time of the inception of the Congress Kingdom, see A. Zamoyski, *From the Moon to Kennington Common: British Perceptions of Poland and the Poles*, [in:] *Polish Culture in Britain: Literature and History, 1772 to the present*, ed. M. Bowers and B. Dew, Palgrave, Cham 2023, pp. 30–31.

tion founded in February 1832, which had both strong cross-party support at Westminster and close links to Czartoryski. The initial work of the LAFP was supported by a series of short-lived periodicals specifically concerned with Polish affairs: *Polonia; or Monthly Reports of Polish Affairs* (1833); *The Hull Polish Record* (1832–1834) and *The Polish Exile* (1833).²⁶ Of much longer duration, however, was the Annual General Meeting of the LAFP, which acted as an important and widely reported expression of pro-Polish sentiment.

Underpinning much of the analysis in these publications was a patriotic rhetoric that drew on conventional ideas of Englishness and Britishness. The argument here was a straightforward one: England, it was claimed, had a unique history of upholding liberal values, and the English were a people innately predisposed to oppose despotism and support the oppressed. As a consequence, the suffering of Poland at the hands of despotic Russia served to “excite the generous feelings of Englishmen of all parties.”²⁷ While there was a general consensus on the existence of these “generous feelings,” there was rather less agreement on what political action, if any, they should prompt from the British state. Exiled writers, however, saw potential in such an approach and were very willing to lavish praise on British political institutions. Thus, Leon Szadurski, one of a group of individuals who toured Britain delivering lectures on Polish history in the 1830s and 1840s proclaimed:

Britain! mighty Britain! – object of the high jealousy of enslaved nations, – seat of learning and genius, – island of the beautiful, – bright star of European liberty and wisdom, – darling clime of the brave and free, and ever open asylum of the persecuted.²⁸

Writing like this cuts two ways. On the one hand, there was a sense of genuine gratitude to Britain for the refuge it had offered exiles and the financial support organizations like the LAFP provided. On the other, commentators sought to show that Britain, through its unwillingness to provide tangible military and diplomatic support for Poland, had failed to live up to the standards of its own “Britishness.”

In the main, arguments that drew on ideas of Englishness or Britishness tended to avoid direct mention of overseas territories. Indeed, it is noticeable that, particularly during the 1830s, references to Britain’s role in colonial activity were generally invoked to criticize, rather than buttress, British support

²⁶ On these publications, see S. Szostakowski, *Z kart Wielkiej Emigracji: Prasa obozu arystokratyczno-konserwatywnego w latach, 1832–1848*, Pojezierze, Olsztyn 1974; R. Żurawski vel Grajewski, *Ziemie Zabrane w angielskojęzycznej prasie związanej ze stronnictwem księcia Adama Jerzego Czartoryskiego w początkach emigracji*, “Prace Historyczne” 2023, vol. 150, no. 1, pp. 47–75. For other English-language publishing ventures supported by Czartoryski, see R. Żurawski vel Grajewski, “The Portfolio” *Brytyjscy publicyści, polscy emigranci i tajna rosyjska korespondencja dyplomatyczna*, “Rocznik Historii Prasy Polskiej” 2014, vol. 17, no. 1, pp. 7–23.

²⁷ *Manchester Times*, November 28, 1835.

²⁸ L. Szadurski, *An Epitome of the History of Poland*, S. & T. Dunn & Co., Glasgow 1842, p. 10.

for the Polish cause. Thus, *The British and Foreign Review* for 1837 drew attention to a recent French publication which had asked: “what right can [Britain] have to thunder against Russia in behalf of the Poles, after she has tyrannized over India by means of Lord Hastings?”²⁹ Similar sentiments were expressed by the more pro-Russian elements of the British press. An author signing himself “a Conservative” noted in a November 1836 letter to the *Morning Post* that in bringing up “the old grievance” of the partition of Poland we “either feign or our national vanity has prevented us from learning, that foreigners judge but little more favourably of our conquest of Hindoostan.”³⁰ Britain’s position in India – not to mention her wider global empire – ensured, therefore, that criticisms of Russian imperialism smacked of hypocrisy.

This is not to say, however, that discussions of Britain’s imperial role were avoided entirely by Polish polemicists. Indeed, with careful selection of examples, it was possible to extend arguments about Britain as “darling clime of the brave and free” to discussion of the colonies. Perhaps, the most promising line of argument here, as had been highlighted by Czaratoryski, related to the abolition of slavery. *An Address of the Polish Refugees in Paris to the House of Commons* (1832), for example, noted that Great Britain “has carried to the remotest parts of the globe the blessings of civilization.”³¹ The writer then proceeded to develop an analogy between individuals and states, arguing that as England had secured “the glory of having abolished the odious man-trade [...] it behoves her to put an end to the far more odious traffic of nations.”³² By failing to provide military support for Poland, therefore, Britain, given its status as a civilizing influence on global affairs, was behaving in an un-British manner.

Even more prevalent were a series of attempts to argue that the security of Britain would be best served by the re-establishment of an independent Polish state. In part, these claims involved a return to the early modern notion of Poland as an *antemurale christianitatis*, a barrier to preserve Christianity and European civilization against the barbarous hordes of the east.³³ Such ideas had acquired new force after the Treaty of Vienna: while the defeat of Napoleon had removed one threat to the European balance of Power, it ensured, as Martin Malia has argued, that Russia “assumed France’s traditional position as the preponderant and hence potentially most aggressive power on the European continent.”³⁴ Pro-Polish activists made much use of such

²⁹ *British and Foreign Review*, 1837, no. 5, p. 302.

³⁰ *Morning Post*, November 24, 1836.

³¹ Contained within: *Manifesto of the Polish Nation to Europe*, London 1832, p. 20.

³² *Ibidem*, p. 20.

³³ See J. Tazbir, *The Bulwark Myth*, “Acta Poloniae” 2005, vol. 91, pp. 73–97; J. Tazbir, *From Antemurale to Przedmurze: The History of the Term*, “Odrodzenie i Reformacja w Polsce” 2017, vol. 61, no. 2, pp. 67–87. Tazbir argues that Poland started to be described as a bulwark from the mid-fifteenth century (J. Tazbir, *Bulwark Myth*..., p. 73).

³⁴ M. Malia, *Russia Under Western Eyes: From the Bronze Horseman to the Lenin Mausoleum*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1999, p. 89. On this issue, see also J.H. Gleason, *The Genesis of Russophobia*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1950.

arguments, but their concern was as much with the danger that Russia posed to Britain's empire – particularly British India – as it was to Europe. The first number of *Polonia* from August 1832, for example, contained an essay by “a member from Lithuania to the late Polish diet” concerning ‘the suffering of the old Polish provinces incorporated with Russia.’³⁵ The discussion concluded with dire warnings about Russian imperial aggression. If allowed to proceed the “the Russian giant” had the potential “to realise the project of the Emperor Paul [and] profiting by her conquests in Persia, despoil Great Britain of her oriental dominions.”³⁶ Immediate action, therefore was required: the only way to “arrest the progressive march of Russia” was to establish a strong Polish state that could act as a “bridle for the ambition and insolence of the Muscovite.”³⁷

At one level, such arguments constitute an attempt to link British colonial self-interest with the Polish cause. However, an ethical dimension was always added to such claims; the point was that the “justice,” “dignity,” and “interest” of Britain were *all* best served through support for Poland. This can be seen particularly clearly in a paper read at the Hull Literary Polish Society in the summer of 1832 by T. J. Buckton, a local banker and one of the Vice Presidents of the society. After bringing under its scepter, “half of Europe and a third part of Asia,” Buckton argued, Russian “lust for dominion was now excited by Turkey, Persia, and India.”³⁸ Given this situation, “we [Britain] ought to regard with a jealous eye every systematic aggression on independent states,” considering that our own interests as a people “are deeply involved in preserving such a combination among the more highly cultivated nations of the West and South of Europe as may counterbalance the immense power and lust of territorial aggrandisement [of Russia].”³⁹ In part, these arguments appear to justify the claims of hypocrisy leveled at pro-Polish activists by international and pro-Russian critics; Britain was hardly in a position to criticize other powers for their “lust of territorial aggrandisement.” Buckton's claim, however, was that British and Russian practices arose from entirely different preoccupations; whereas Britain was seeking to advance cultivated and enlightened values Russia was engaged in illegal acts of despoilation.

Arguments linking Poland with imperial concerns were to be a regular feature of the political analysis developed by *Polonia* and similar publications in the early 1830s. The claims made, however, were general and rooted in speculation rather than a specific threat. From the mid-1830s onward, however, stories began to circulate in Britain concerning the direct possibility of a Russian attack on India through Persia and Afghanistan. Both were, theoretically, independent polities; however, British influence in Persia had waned as the Persian government aligned itself with Russia. This put a renewed emphasis

³⁵ *Polonia*, August 1, 1832, p. 27.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Polonia*, August 1, 1832, p. 36.

³⁹ *Polonia*, August 1, 1832, p. 37.

on the strategic importance of Afghanistan and prompted claims that if Russia could take the Afghan hill fort of Herat, British India would be left exposed. For many commentators, such ideas were simply scaremongering.⁴⁰ However, they were soon shown to have some substance. In November 1837, seemingly with official Russian backing, a large Persian army began a military siege of Herat. Britain intervened relatively quickly, strengthening its support for Afghanistan and launching a diversionary action in the Persian Gulf, and the siege was eventually withdrawn.

Such events provided ample opportunity for discussion of Polish affairs. Thus, a report in the *Sunday Times* from November 1838 with the headline “Great Military Movements in India: the advance of the Russians,” emphasized the difficulties of maintaining a pro-British regime in Afghanistan and defending the frontier with India. “Our better policy,” the writer added, is to attack “Russia nearer home. She is vitally weak on the side of Poland and may be assailed with deadly effect on the side of the Caucasus and in the Black Sea.”⁴¹ At a June 1839 meeting of the LAFP, meanwhile, Lord Douglas Stuart, the organization’s Vice President, used a discussion of Herat to talk about support for Poland. Herat, he argued, showed both the dangers that Russia posed to British possessions in the east, and the capacity of Britain to exert diplomatic influence in distant places.⁴² If it was possible, Stuart concluded, to counter Russian aggression at an Afghan hill fort, as Britain had done successfully, it was surely possible to do so in much less remote Kraków. Frederick Cortazzi, speaking at the LAFP meeting for 1842, put the matter in even more stark terms:

If this country [Britain] would only give them [the Poles] the least moral support, they would be able to drive out the invader; which I think would be our best policy, as their independence would form a barrier against Russian encroachment in the East: and who can doubt that Russia looks to the east with a view to prosecute conquests in that direction, and lay hands on our possessions.⁴³

Polish writers employed similar tropes in their own polemics. In a rabble-rousing, English-language speech in Portsmouth in November 1841, Zenon Świętosławski, a socialist agitator based in the Channel Islands, emphasized that once a Russian army had reached Kabul, it would inevitably proceed onward to the wealthy, abundant, and warm lands of India rather than returning to its own icy homeland. Immediate action, therefore, was required on former

⁴⁰ On Herat, see J. Parry, *Promised Lands: The British and the Ottoman Middle East*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2022, pp. 136–143. See also J. Dutkiewicz, *Wojna persko-afgańska...*, pp. 102–116.

⁴¹ *Sunday Times*, November 4, 1838.

⁴² *The Times*, June 19, 1839.

⁴³ *Report of the Proceedings of the Tenth Annual General Meeting of the London Literary Association of the Friends of Poland*, London 1842, p. 88.

Polish territories, as: “The only place in which you can defend the East Indies is in the Baltic Sea, at the Gate of St Petersburg.”⁴⁴ Support for Poland was, therefore, the best way of preserving the global influence of civilized British values.

Running alongside such anglophone commentary were a series of reflections on the British Empire in the Polish language press of the *emigracja*. A whole gamut of political opinions was covered, ranging from the reports circulated by Adam Czartoryski and the Hôtel Lambert organization on the conservative right (e.g., *Kronika Emigracji Polskiej*, 1834–1839; *Trzeci Maj*, 1839–1848; *Wiadomości Polskie*, 1854–1861⁴⁵), through a range of liberal publications (foremost among them *Demokrata Polski*, 1841–1863⁴⁶), to the socialist writings of Świętośławski. Commentators of all political stripes, however, reported at length on British imperial affairs. Material included accounts drawn from the European press on British activities and extensive coverage of debates at Westminster, particularly those which touched on any potential conflict between Russia and Britain over territories in and around India. However, while the British parliamentary speeches that were translated made frequent reference to Britain defending civilized values and pursuing a foreign policy of “interest and honor”, Polish sources generally maintained a more skeptical attitude. This can be seen particularly clearly in the detailed Polish language coverage of Afghanistan in the late 1830s.⁴⁷ At one level, the Afghan situation was viewed as an opportunity for Poland. As *Kronika Emigracji Polskiej* noted:

For several years various things had been written about the discord between England and Russia, because of the latter’s attacks on East India. [...] It befits us Poles to know where the truth lies. Such a strong diversion as a war between England and Russia would be the most desirable event for us.⁴⁸

There was an awareness, however, that any sort of conflict would be difficult to achieve. England and Russia had never previously gone to war, and “because of their commercial relations their friendship is natural, for every state of high industry will feel a natural attraction to a country rich in raw products.”⁴⁹ Si-

⁴⁴ *Lud Polski w Emigracji: 1835-1846*, ed. Z. Świętośławski, Drukarnia Powszechna, Jersey 1854, pp. 236–7. On Świętośławski, see P. Brock, *Zeno Świętośławski, a Polish Forerunner of the Narodniki*, “American Slavic and East European Review” 1954, vol. 13, no. 4, pp. 566–587.

⁴⁵ See S. Szostakowski, *Z Kart Wielkiej Emigracji...*, pp. 67–142.

⁴⁶ See S. Kalembka, *Prasa Demokratyczna Wieków Emigracji: Dzieje i Główne Koncepcje Polityczne*, Uniwersytet Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 1977, pp. 56–100.

⁴⁷ *Kronika Emigracji Polskiej*, for example, provided a complete translation of British and Russian correspondence relating to affairs in Herat, which took up around 7 percent of its 400-page volume for 1839.

⁴⁸ *Kronika Emigracji Polskiej*, t. 8, Paryż 1839, p. 145: “Od lat kilku rozmaicie pisano o niezgodzie między Anglią a Rosyją, z powodu zamachów tej ostatniej na Indye wschodnie [...]. Jeśli komu to nam Polakom przystoi wiedzieć, gdzie leży prawda. Tak silna dywersja, jak wojna Anglii z Rosyją, byłaby najpożądalszym dla nas wypadkiem.”

⁴⁹ *Kronika Emigracji Polskiej*, t. 8, Paryż 1839, p. 146: “z powodu stosunków handlowych przyjaźń ich jest naturalna, bo każde państwo wysokiego przemysłu, czuć będzie naturalny pociąg do kraju bogatego w surowe płody.”

milar concerns were addressed in rather more despairing terms by *Demokrata Polski* in 1842, which noted the tendency of England to treat Poland as a pawn in its diplomatic games.

[England] needed to repel [Nicholas I] from the East Indies – again Lord Dudley Stuart [Vice President of the LAFP] dwelt on the misfortunes of Poland – today new difficulties have arisen, new clashes between England and Russia in the depths of Asia – and we see that parliament, in unanimous agreement with the Minister, wants to deal with the Polish nationality.⁵⁰

This was, therefore, “a continuation of the same old history, the beginning and end of which was the exclusive interest of England, without any regard to the real good of Poland.”⁵¹ Such an approach was only to be expected from states dominated by “industry and trade; consequently, the article concluded, Poles needed to work independently for their own liberties and stop being playthings of foreign interests.”⁵² What we begin to see, therefore, are some of the limits of arguments for Polish independence based on British imperial interests; they were only effective so long as the agendas of Poland and Britain could be presented as intertwined. And given the general similarities between Britain and Russia – two large empires with extensive territories and commercial ambitions – it seemed inevitable that their concerns would be in sync with one another at least as often as they would be in opposition. Moreover, occasions when British and Russian interests were at odds frequently only served to further highlight the fundamental similarities between them. Thus, *Kronika Emigracji Polskiej*, quoting from German sources, conceived of Britain and Russia as engaged in parallel imperialistic and opportunistic seizures of the lands between British India and Turkey and speculated whether their motives were “need and necessity,” or as might seem more likely “plans of deep and calculating pride and greed for glory.”⁵³ Either way, both were states that exerted an influence in the region that was “equally invincible.”⁵⁴

III

Attempts to use debates about the British Empire to garner support for Poland receded in the 1840s. They never, however, entirely went away and there was a resurgence in activity around the time of the Crimean War (1853–1856). Not

⁵⁰ *Demokrata Polski*, June 30, 1842, p. 18: “[Anglia] potrzebowała odeprzeć go [Nicholas I] od Indyj wschodnich – znów lord Dudlej Stuart rozwodził się nad nieszczęściami Polski: dziś nowe zaszczyt trudności, nowe ścierania się Anglii z Rosyją w głębi Azji – i widzimy że parlament jednomyślnie z ministrami chce się zajmować narodowością polską.”

⁵¹ *Demokrata Polski*, June 30, 1842, p. 18: “dalszy ciąg tej samej historii, której początkiem i końcem – wyłączny interes Anglii, bez żadnego względu na istotne dobro Polski.”

⁵² *Demokrata Polski*, June 30, 1842, p. 18: “przemysłem i handlem.”

⁵³ *Kronika Emigracji Polskiej*, t. 5, 1837, p. 84: “potrzeby i konieczności”; “[czy też pchnięte] planami głębokiej i rachującej dumy i chciwości chwały.”

⁵⁴ *Kronika Emigracji Polskiej*, t. 5, 1837, p. 84: “równie niepokonalny.”

only had the long hoped for conflict between the West and Russia come to pass, but the possibility had emerged – through the formation of a Polish legion – for the partial resurrection of a Polish national army. There was also a spike of interest in Polish affairs in the British press, and a series of attempts to reflect on the global significance of Russian ambitions. Much of this material returned to the idea of a conflict between Russian despotism and barbarism and European (specifically Anglo-French) liberty and civilization which would be played out, in part, in Asia. In October 1853, for example, *Lloyd's Illustrated Weekly* turned its attention to Napoleon's prior claim that Russia had designs on British possessions in the east. "For if," the French Emperor had argued, "[the Tsar] succeeds in incorporating Poland [...] he has gained the greatest step towards subduing India."⁵⁵ In the summer of 1855, meanwhile, *The British Quarterly Review* claimed that the "extension of Russian ascendancy" could not but have an effect on Britain's colonies and that "there is a conceivable point not very far distant at which the progress of that ascendancy will involve the positive destruction of the British Empire."⁵⁶ The only way to counter such threats, it was argued, was through the reconstruction of the Polish nation. On occasions, similar ideas were employed in the discussions of the LAFP; indeed, the Earl of Harrington, the Association's President, explicitly invoked Napoleon's predictions about the Tsar's plans for India in a speech about Russia's "mighty Empire" in August 1855.⁵⁷ The overwhelming emphasis in LAFP meetings, however, was on the threat Russia posed to "European liberties." Moreover, there is a sense in which the forcefully anti-Russian rhetoric that underpinned LAFP speeches was premised on an avoidance of any explicit reference to Britain's record as a colonial power. To give one example: it was perhaps easier for British supporters of the Polish cause to argue, as Douglas Coutts-Stuart did at the LAFP Annual General Meeting in May 1854, that the "Tsar should rule over his own people, but not over others" within the context of a discussion of Europe than one that took too close a look at Britain's engagement with global affairs.⁵⁸

Events in Crimea were also followed closely by the Polish press. There were lengthy descriptions of the military action and extensive coverage of British parliamentary debates on the war, including discussion of the danger posed by Russia to British interests in the east. Claims, for example, like those made at a public meeting in Bath in 1855 that "the English people feel deeply that that the solution of the eastern question lies in the solution of the Polish question" were met with particular interest.⁵⁹ However, as the war continued, journals became increasingly pessimistic about the chances of Polish interests benefi-

⁵⁵ *Lloyd's Illustrated Newspaper*, October 16, 1853.

⁵⁶ *Newcastle Guardian*, July 21, 1857.

⁵⁷ *Morning Post*, August 9, 1855.

⁵⁸ *Report of the Proceedings of the Twenty Second Annual General Meeting of the London Literary Association of the Friends of Poland*, London 1854, p. 45.

⁵⁹ *Wiadomości Polskie*, vol. 1, no. 3, 1855, p. 180: "rozwiązanie kwestii wschodniej leży w rozwiązaniu kwestii polskiej."

ting from the conflict and increasingly critical of Britain itself. *Wiadomości Polskie*, the main mouthpiece for the Czartoryski wing of the *emigracja*, complained that: "The French and English, considering themselves today the masters of the world and not thinking at all that the question of Poland was ever capable of influencing a change in their fortunes, can treat it lightly and with reluctance."⁶⁰ The next number of the paper, a continuation of the same essay, developed this line of argument to provide a rigorous critique of western "cosmopolitanism" and ideas of "civilization."⁶¹ At the heart of this philosophy, it was argued, was a rejection of "family," "nationality," and, perhaps most importantly, "fatherland": proponents of cosmopolitanism were entirely indifferent about who ruled over them.⁶² Their real concern, rather, was with progress, which was conceptualized in entirely material terms: these were people who "reduce all relations between man and man, and between nation and nation, to the single view of sale and purchase."⁶³ In adhering to such values, meanwhile, the focus of civilized western activity had shifted away from Europe: what the author, with heavy irony, referred to as "the esteemed lovers of humanity" had chosen to embrace "Hottentots and Tungusians [...]" so as to be free from brotherly sympathy for the Europeans.⁶⁴ The implication of such an argument was, therefore, that civilization and empire were synonymous with a selfish and soulless trading mentality. People who adhered to such values could have little sympathy for the Polish cause and little understanding of Poland.

The liberal press maintained an even more skeptical attitude towards Britain. In an editorial in 1848, the editors of *Demokrata Polski* had explicitly described England as a "conquering country" and, as such, similar to "Moscow, Austria and Prussia."⁶⁵ Its motives, were, meanwhile, conceived as fundamentally commercial: this was a state which "calculates everything by percentage."⁶⁶ True, such suspicion did ease somewhat with the start of the Crimean War, and there was acknowledgement that the situation in Crimea might provide an opportunity for "us Poles."⁶⁷ However, once it became clear that there were few gains to be had, the paper quickly reverted to its standard position: that the attempts

⁶⁰ *Wiadomości Polskie*, vol. 3, no. 1, October 10, 1855, p. 3: "Francuzi i Anglicy mając się dziś za panów świata i nie myśląc wcale aby kwestya Polski była kiedykolwiek zdolną wpłynąć na zmianę ich pomyślności, mogli sobie traktować ją lekko i od niechcenia."

⁶¹ *Wiadomości Polskie*, vol. 3, no. 2, October 20, 1855, p. 5: "kosmopolityzm"; "cywilizacja."

⁶² *Wiadomości Polskie*, vol. 3, no. 2, October 20, 1855, p. 5: "rodzina"; "narodowość"; "ojczyzna."

⁶³ *Wiadomości Polskie*, vol. 3, no. 2, October 20, 1855, p. 5: "wszelkie stosunki między człowiekiem a człowiekiem, i między narodem a narodem, musi sprowadzić ostatecznie do jedyne go widoku sprzedaży i kupna."

⁶⁴ *Wiadomości Polskie*, vol. 3, no. 2, October 20, 1855, p. 5: "[ogarniający braterskiem objęciem] Hotentotów i Tunguzów żeby przez to być wolnymi od braterskiego współczucia dla Europejczyków."

⁶⁵ *Demokrata Polski*, August 16, 1848, p. 109: "Anglia jest kraj zaborczy, lubo nie w Europie, ale zawsze jak Moskwa, Austria i Prusy."

⁶⁶ *Demokrata Polski*, August 16, 1848, p. 109: "obliczająca wszystko na procenta."

⁶⁷ *Demokrata Polski*, October 15, 1853, p. 89: "nas Polaków."

to engage with Western diplomacy practiced by Czartoryski and his followers had achieved nothing, and that Poles were better off working independently from the “Western courts.”⁶⁸ On occasions, such attitudes resulted in something resembling a direct attack on colonial practices. There are, therefore, references to be found to European government that, without exception, “pursue colonies and oppress peoples who have never wronged them in any way – in Asia, Africa, Australia and America.”⁶⁹ However, such references never developed into a sustained critique, and the paper was just as capable of providing tacit endorsements of colonial practices. This can be seen particularly clearly in an 1857 editorial that looked forward to the forthcoming anniversary of the November Uprising. The discussion began by noting that “never does national unity manifest itself in a more tangible expression, in a more powerful summary, in a grander sense, than on the day of national celebrations.”⁷⁰ It then proceeded to describe the recent (October 7) Day of Humiliation that had taken place across Britain and Ireland to express sympathy for the British population killed and injured in the Indian Uprising.⁷¹ To an extent, such commentary served to reinforce the idea of the Britain as a fundamentally commercial state: the power of the description lies in the fact that the populace, as a result of the “Indian disaster,” had rejected its normal mercantile focus and “for once stopped moving, stopped working, put aside industrial calculations, closed shops, renounced profits, and gone to the temples to humble itself before the Most High.”⁷² Equally significantly, however, the writer – while acknowledging a shared “feeling of sadness” in Britain in recollection of “the mistakes that had been made” – emphasized that the nation had spent the day reflecting on “the care of the Asian Indians entrusted to it by civilization.”⁷³ The ultimate effect of the passage, then, is to equate British mourning over India with Polish regret over the events of 1830.

IV

The most direct criticisms of British colonial self-interest were, as we have seen, reserved for the Polish-language press. One Polish émigré, however – Walerian

⁶⁸ *Demokrata Polski*, November 30, 1855, p. 10: “od dworów Zachodnich.”

⁶⁹ *Demokrata Polski*, November 20, 1853, p. 96: “gonić za kolonijami i uciemniać ludy, które im nigdy niczém nie zawiniły – po Azji, Afryce, Australii i Ameryce.”

⁷⁰ *Demokrata Polski*, November 20, 1857, p. 73: “Nigdy jedności narodowe nie objawiają się w dotykalszym wyrazie, w potężniejszym streszczeniu, w bardziej zmysły uderzającej wielkości, jak w dnie obchodów narodowych.”

⁷¹ J. C. Bender, *The 1857 Indian Uprising and the British Empire*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 2016, p. 42.

⁷² *Demokrata Polski*, November 20, 1857, p. 73: “[z powodu] klęski indyjskiej”; ‘na raz, stanął w ruchu, zatrzymał się w pracy, odsunął na stronę rachuby przemysłowe, pozamykał sklepy, rzekł się zysków, i poszedł do świątyni ukorzyć się przed Najwyższym.”

⁷³ *Demokrata Polski*, November 20, 1857, p. 73: “uczuciu smutku”; “[w jednym rozpamiętywaniu popełnionych błędów”; “z poruczonej mu przez cywilizację opieki nad azatyckimi Indyjczykami.”

Kraśiński – did develop an innovative English-language account which drew, in part, on ideas of Britain's pre-occupation with trade and commercial gain. Kraśiński was born in 1796 in Lithuania and raised as a Protestant. He initially embarked on a political career and served as chief of the Ministry of Public Instruction. Following the November Uprising of 1830, he was sent to England as part of Czartoryski's Polish diplomatic mission. He was to remain in London and the surrounding area for the rest of his life, working principally as an anglophone historian. From 1848 onward, however, his writing took a more political turn, and he embarked on a series of historico-political studies concerned with relations between the Slavic and German-speaking worlds. These accounts culminated in his final and most sophisticated work: *The Polish Question and Panslavism* (1855).⁷⁴

The core aim of his analysis was to show that the destiny of Central and Eastern Europe lay in the hands of the west, particularly Britain. If Britain did nothing, he argued, the fundamental racial and linguistic affinity between the various Slavic nations would draw them into a large and powerful Russian-led state. The only possible alternative to such a measure was the re-instigation of a Polish state based either on pre-1772 borders or on a new foundation – with guaranteed access to the Baltic and Black Seas. Both states, however, would fulfil the same basic functions. In domestic terms, they would preserve religious and civil liberty for all inhabitants and eliminate any distinctions of class or religion in the civil and military services. Internationally, the state would act as a bulwark to preserve civilization and liberty from the ever-present threat of bellicose Russianism. If the western powers supported the re-establishment of such a polity, Kraśiński emphasized, this was something that could be achieved with relative ease; the attachment of the Poles to an independent national identity remained strong and this was their preferred option. However, if the West continued to treat the Polish cause with contempt, it was inevitable that the Poles would look to the East and agitate for a state based on anti-Western principles.

To persuade his readers of the need for such support, Kraśiński invoked versions of the two core arguments with which this article has been concerned. On the one hand, he viewed Britain as the embodiment of enlightenment and civilization. Indeed, in appealing directly to the “people of Great Britain,” Kraśiński was calling on the British to live up to the liberal values for which they were famed.⁷⁵ On the other hand, however, he drew on a series of ideas about Britain as a commercial empire. It would, he argued, be cheaper for Britain to support a Polish uprising now than to deal with Russia itself later. His plea was, therefore, that his British audience respond to the issues he raised in a British “practical business-like manner.”⁷⁶ At the same time, the threat posed

⁷⁴ On Kraśiński, see A. Maxwell, *Walerjan Kraśiński's "Panslavism and Germanism" (1848): Polish Goals in a Pan-Slav Context*, “New Zealand Slavonic Journal” 2008, vol. 42, pp. 101–120.

⁷⁵ W. Kraśiński, *The Polish Question and Panslavism*, London 1855, p. 182.

⁷⁶ *Ibidem*.

by Russia was not just to Europe but also to British commercial and territorial interests in India. Indeed, the most remarkable passage in *The Polish Question and Panslavism* is a lengthy speech in which Krasiński imagines what Russia might say to convince the Poles to support the Pan-Slavist cause. The imaginary “Russian” speaker draws specific attention to “selfish Albion” who looks on “other nations simply as objects of her commercial speculations.”⁷⁷ Ultimately, however, Britain’s position is weak: the Russian giant “frowns upon the rich plains of India as upon a prey that cannot escape his grasp.”⁷⁸ What was likely to emerge, Krasiński maintained, was an armed conflict between a modern-day Rome (Russia) and a modern-day Carthage (Britain), in which, as had happened in the ancient world, “the nation which strives for dominion” would inevitably overcome “that which only seeks for its wealth.”⁷⁹ Only a resurrected Poland, it was implied, could save Britain from its own self-interest.

Conclusion

This article has provided a sketch of the two contrasting “voices” employed within Polish writing about the British Empire. On the one hand, commentators offered an endorsement – sometimes tacit, on other occasions explicit – of imperial practices by conceiving of British imperial endeavors and Poland’s struggle for independence as part of a worldwide conflict between the forces of civilization and those of barbarism. On the other hand, however, writers conceptualized Britain as a commercial state with a single driving motivation: the advancement of its own economic interests. These ideas could, as demonstrated by the analyses of Czartoryski and Krasiński, be made to work together. More frequently, however, we see them in isolation. Anglophone material sought to highlight the alignment of the Polish cause with Britain’s global interests; Polish-language material of a variety of political persuasions, conceived of those interests as a barrier to sustained support for Poland.

To an extent, the differences between these voices can be attributed to the nature of the émigré experience. Just as Poles arriving in Britain acquired or developed skills in the English language, they were also obliged to hone their abilities in the dominant language of British politics. Part of such an endeavor entailed, with support from British campaigners, expressing ideas about national liberation using the conceptual framework of British liberal imperialism. In the semi-private spaces of Polish journalism, however, Poles continued to speak in their own language and to employ less-Anglicized political idioms. The tensions within Polish political discourse can also be seen, however, as a symptom of the difficulties in developing a nationalist mode of politics within an imperial context. Any explicit endorsement of British colonialism risked providing a justification for Russia’s own imperialist projects. Indeed, as we

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 175.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 175.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 175.

have seen, pro-Russian authors in Britain sought to deflate outrage over Russian practices by highlighting their parallels with British governance, particularly in India. By the same token, an overly broad critique of Russian imperialism had the potential to raise uncomfortable questions about the policies pursued by Britain and the West. Such tensions were eased, in part, by a consistent emphasis from both Poles and their British supporters on the cultural and political divides between Europe and non-Europe. There was, commentators assumed, an absolute difference between violations of national sovereignty – particularly against a civilized, Christian polity with a thousand-year history of self-governance – and extensions of the European sphere of influence into, say, Indian or Hottentot lands. Ultimately, therefore, while Polish campaigners sought to connect Polish independence with global imperial concerns, their analyses resisted the idea of a truly global politics. Europe in general, and Poland in particular, it was consistently maintained, were unique.

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