
Demonstrating the switch from social capital to economic and cultural capital as currencies that offered continuity while navigating the changes of the 20th century, Longina Jakubowska illustrates the reasons why the Polish gentry should not be dismissed as an obsolete force. The prestige of the brand, the cultural capital of titled names, can hold steady large social groups, keeping their sense of communal self intact in a still-nascent age of globalization. By studying, with significant scholarship and exceptionally lucid academic writing, a subject seemingly remote to social scientists with an eye on current evolutions of national identities, Jakubowska argues for a class and linguistic continuity within shifting collective identities without diminishing their limitations and oppressions.

Critical to Jakubowska’s argument is her definition of both capital and nobility. Citing Bourdieu (1984), Jakubowska defines capital as economic, social, cultural and symbolic qualities. Further, she defines nobility in broader terms than the accumulation of assets or heritage; it is seen as an institutional identity. The existing literature in the field regarding Polish nobility provides little research on Polish nobility in the present day. Thus, Jakubowska’s work provides a significant contribution, in that her research offers an in-depth examination of surviving Polish nobility today, all the while drawing on historical accounts of their survival.

Within the broad spectrum of the social sciences, and specifically history and memory, Jakubowska’s work is invaluable as it takes into account readers of all backgrounds in the field. For example, Jakubowska succinctly describes the historical background involving the Polish gentry and construction of the Polish state. She spends time explaining the positioning of the Polish gentry within their institutionalized identity and the broader Polish state, and outlines key arguments in discussions around both nobility in general and, specifically, the Polish nobility. This discussion provides a strong case for how the Polish nobility constructed their nobility as the identity for a nation state. That framework is inherently necessary in understanding her arguments on the survival of Polish nobility within national identity during the social shifts within political realignments brought on by World War II and the subsequent sublimation of the rest of Polish identity into the communist identity as subservient to Russian interests.

Memory and history are therefore central themes. Continuity of a noble elite manifests both confidence and camouflage in a nation’s sense of self. These ruling institutions have relied on structural violence to sustain and enhance their position, yet in so doing
they have maintained a nation-geographically, socially, and culturally-to sustain their endowed status. This benefits the masses even as they struggle because through identification with those at the highest social strata, they can feel continuity as well, even though their lineage is likely less documented. The author argues that for nobility, history itself is currency, capital to preserve their collective character, saying, “They are not only registered in history but also wrote it” [3]. This socially realistic assessment of the advantage of maintaining a nobility within a national character often considered less than noble on the world stage argues for memory of what a group might have been, which can suggest what they still can be in times ahead.

Two additional primary themes are education and marriage, both of which distinguished Polish nobility and sustained their role as the elite. Capital also sustained this representative elite through these transitions while the nobility were able, drawing on their educational resources, to navigate an extended era of Polish character evolution. The lower classes abetted the continuity of the nobility because an imagined identification with the social elite gave the lower classes a sense of superiority over others, such as the Jews, while the Polish people endured nearly a half century of subservience to non-Polish rulers. The continuing presence of the nobility also continued the tradition, many centuries in endurance, of alliances with other national identities through intermarriage with other noble lines. The further and deeper tradition, that this noble line was descended from founding, conquering stock, the ‘Sarmation’, contributed to a national sense that Polish identity could endure beyond the temporary, highly mortal identities of the Third Reich and the Russian conglomerate assembled to win The Cold War.

This scholarly account offers the reader and researcher many strengths. If, for example, a reader knew little of non-tabloid nobility and nothing of its Polish brand, this volume argues successfully for the nature of nobility as a survival mechanism for a people, rather than simply a celebration of celebrity. Class competition, economic struggle, race relations, social political shifts, and how the elite serve the masses into the 21st century are all addressed effectively within Jakubowska’s study. Add to that the consideration that, while Poland has seldom been seen as a major international player, it is worth contemplating that this country’s geographic significance as a borderland that links major European and Asian cultures attests to the value of this perhaps unexpected, yet significant, view into pivotal social structures as motivators of change and continuity.

The author further validates the significance of her research by using the well-studied story of Polish nobility in the past, such as a key role in the American War of Independence, to situate an understanding of this group’s essential national role in an age of fast-evaporating media attention to prestige. Ethnographic research is thin in her
subject area, but her readers will acquiesce to the import and validity of this topic to social scientists. By assessing the value and challenges of an historic elite in a nation whose alliances shift often due to a strategic value that draws conquerors, Jakubowska’s material argues that history, even in seemingly antiquated institutions such as ruling bloodlines, has merit, and offers contributions, in a new and uncertain century where ethnic and national distinctions are becoming endangered species.

In conclusion, *Patrons of History* examines the survival of the Polish nobility through World War I and World War II, as well as their existence in this current day. Historically, the patterns of social demand for Polish nobility have risen and fallen with political, religious, and economic transitions. Through each transition, what separated the elites from commoners was their ability to reinvent the use of their capital and status. To this day, the Polish nobility exist and continue to redefine their status through their reconstruction of history and current situational positioning.

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