

Stanisław KILIAN 💿

University of the National Education Commission, Institute of Law, Economics and Administration, Kraków, Poland

On Erudite and Utilitarian Aspects of Historical Political Thought: An Analysis of the Programme of the Émigré National Party [Stronnictwo Narodowe]

O erudycyjnych i utylitarnych aspektach historycznej myśli politycznej – analiza programu emigracyjnego Stronnictwa Narodowego

· Abstract ·

On the threshold of the breakthrough events in the political life of the 1980s, Andrzej Micewski, in his article in Tygodnik Powszechny (1981, No. 9, p. 5) entitled "On the Weaknesses of the Polish Political Thought", formulated a premise that historical Polish nationalist thought had lost its usefulness as a modern and prospective ideological and political offer for the contemporary generation, which seeks ideological inspiration in history, seen as the source of contemporary political concepts. The author's doubts concerned the ethical sphere of Polish nationalism saturated with elements of ethnocentrism and national egoism. This premise gave rise to a discussion among journalists on the evaluation of the utilitarian aspects of the nationalist thought of the émigré Stronnictwo Narodowe (abbreviated: SN).

First, in the pages of *Myśl Polska* (1981, Nos. 7–8, p. 1) – the flagship organ of the SN – Wojciech Wasiutyński polemically referred to this premise, concluding that, under the ideological pressure of the Warsaw regime and the

• Abstrakt •

Na progu przełomowych wydarzeń w życiu politycznym dekady lat 80. ubiegłego wieku Andrzej Micewski w artykule "O słabościach polskiej myśli politycznej", opublikowanym na łamach Tygodnika Powszechnego (1981, nr 9, s. 5), sformułował tezę, że historyczna polska myśl nacjonalistyczna utraciła walor użyteczności w sensie nowoczesnej i prospektywnej oferty ideowo-politycznej dla współczesnego pokolenia, które w historii poszukuje ideowej inspiracji – źródła współczesnych koncepcji politycznych. Wątpliwości autora dotyczyły sfery etycznej polskiego nacjonalizmu nasyconej pierwiastkami etnocentryzmu i egoizmu narodowego. Teza ta stała się impulsem publicystycznej dyskusji na temat oceny aspektów utylitarnych myśli nacjonalistycznej emigracyjnego Stronnictwa Narodowego (SN).

Polemicznie na łamach *Myśli Polskiej* (1981, nr 7–8, s. 1) – sztandarowego organu SN – odniósł się do niej Wojciech Wasiutyński, konkludując, iż w warunkach presji ideowej reżimu warszawskiego i sowietyzacji życia politycznego "Polska skazana

Sovietisation of political life, "Poland is doomed to nationalism". He saw in democratic-national thinking the "only systematic school of political thinking", a factor for a moral rebirth of the nation as a condition for the democratisation of social life. In the following years, at the request of Witold Leitgeber (secretary of the SN's Political Committee), the postulates for making historical nationalist thought more flexible - given what was going on in Poland – were expressed by him in the question: "Should the national ideology, which was formulated in times different from our own, not be subjected to verification - not to use the word revisionism?", and included in the agenda of the Political Committee (1984, 1986). In this form, they appeared in the forum of the last, 7th Central Congress of the SN (1992), devoted to discussing the best ways of transferring the legacy of ideas and political experience of the nationalists-in-exile to Poland.

The research objective of this article is to analyse the political thought of the émigré SN from the point of view of identifying the permanent elements which defined its ideological character and at the same time led to the weakening of its usefulness in the process of democratisation of social life in the 1980s, and in the following years contributed to the electoral defeat of post-National Democracy groupings.

political thought

jest na nacjonalizm". W myśleniu demokratyczno-narodowym – "jedynej systematycznej szkole myślenia politycznego" - upatrywał czynnik odrodzenia moralnego narodu jako warunek demokratyzacji życia społecznego. W latach następnych na wniosek Witolda Leitgebera (sekretarza Komitetu Politycznego SN) na kanwie wydarzeń krajowych postulaty uelastycznienia historycznej myśli nacjonalistycznej zostały przezeń wyrażone w pytaniu: "Czy ideologii narodowej, która formułowała się w czasach odmiennych od naszych, nie należałoby poddać weryfikacji – by nie używać słowa rewizjonizmu?" i umieszczone w programie obrad KP (1984, 1986). W tym kształcie pojawiły się one na forum ostatniego, VII Centralnego Zjazdu SN (1992), poświęconego omówieniu najlepszych sposobów przekazania środowiskom krajowym dorobku idei i doświadczenia politycznego emigracyjnych narodowców.

Celem badawczym artykułu jest analiza myśli politycznej emigracyjnego SN pod kątem identyfikacji trwałych elementów, które określały jej charakter ideowy, a zarazem prowadziły do osłabienia waloru użyteczności w procesie demokratyzacji życia społecznego dekady lat 80., co w latach następnych przyczyniło się do porażki wyborczej ugrupowań postendeckich.

Keywords: political émigrés; National Party; Słowa kluczowe: emigracja polityczna; Stronnictwo Narodowe; myśl polityczna

From the first years after the end of the war, the strategic aim of the Poland-related policy of émigré nationalists - members of the National Party (Stronnictwo Narodowe, hereinafter: SN) who were feature writers for Myśl Polska – was to mobilise the émigré community on the basis of reliving the historical events from the history of Poland and their own political camp for the purposes of ideological struggle against the Warsaw regime. From then on, the analysis of history became an element of ideological work in the SN circles, taking up a permanent place in Myśl Polska and in the forum of the SN's central congresses, and featured in the émigré strategy of the "policy for the country" - historical themes appeared in the so-called "Open Letters to Society and the Country" (Giertych, 1976). This is

because the aim of the nationalists – disciples of Roman Dmowski's historical "school of political thought" - was to maintain political thought in its authentic form as national heritage, a determinant of the nation's cultural identity. Hence, they avoided discussions on updating - modernising - nationalist thought, even if demands for a revision of inter-war concepts came from their own ranks (Witold Leitgeber, Tadeusz Rzewuski) or from opinion-forming commentators, including the former SN members Stanisław Skrzypek and Zdzisław Stahl, author of the work System Dmowskiego wczoraj i dziś [Dmowski's System Yesterday and Today] (London 1953). According to the group of activists gathered around President Tadeusz Bielecki and known as "Bielecczycy", the ideological canons of the SN's political thought had a historically defined character profile; attempts to revise this thought with a view to adapting it to the changed political realities as well as the imagined social reality of sovereign Poland was interpreted by that group as a departure from the principles derived from Dmowski's school of political thought, permanent elements of Polish nationalist thought. In this context, a departure from Dmowski's school motivated by the idea of making historical national thought more flexible and contemporary would be a resignation from the imperative of defending national identity as the main objective of the émigré concept of Polish politics. For in the dissemination of the historical version of the nationalist idea among the younger generation émigré nationalists saw an instrument of struggle against the regime. They did not exclude the verification of the ethical sphere of nationalist thought in the confrontation of its ideological canons with the values of the freedom currents and social movements which had been shaping the character of Western social life since the end of the war, although it seems that they wanted to leave this task to the younger generation nationalists from discussion clubs and centres of political thought, and in the future ideologues of a national democratic party.

From the very first years of their stay abroad, the main goal of their political activity was to free the factors of cultural identity from the pressure of Sovietisation and to rebuild the national character of nationalist social life. With this objective in mind, they focused on the organisation of educational work directed towards the strengthening of ideology; the primacy of ideological upbringing over patriotic education became a permanent feature of the educational thought of the émigré National Democrats. In the opinion of the "national pedagogues" from the milieu of *Myśl Polska*, the formation of an attitude in the spirit of traditionally conceived patriotism saturated with motifs of national martyrdom, readiness to sacrifice one's life for the homeland, and strengthening of the emotional bond with the very notion of the homeland was not enough. This type of romantic-knightly patriotism initially promoted in *Myśl Polska* lost its meaning in the conditions of the escalation of the

ideological war and according to the editors of this periodical, it will not be able to restore the national character of social life or reverse the effects of Sovietisation, while the nature of the threats to the Polish nation – they seem to argue – justifies the shaping of young people's characters in the spirit of a new patriotism, or – to use a term from the journalism of the All-Polish movement – modern nationalism. The hitherto naïve, emotional, romantic and sacrificial patriotism was to give way to an intellectual nationalism expressed in the ability to identify the Polish national interest. An important place in national education was assigned to the group of "émigré youth" – born in countries of their parents' settlement. In this group they saw the architects of the social life of the "aristocracy of the nation"; young economists, doctors and lawyers educated at Western universities were to fulfil the role of ambassadors of the Polish cause and steersmen of national policy under the conditions of Poland's sovereignty.

The material base for the ideological and educational work aimed at the formation of the "aristocracy of the nation" was provided by historical studies on the history of the national movement, such as Historia Ligi Narodowej [History of the National League], and the political writings of the ancestors of nationalist thought, above all Myśli nowoczesnego Polaka [Thoughts of the Modern Pole]. It was supplemented by studies on the history of the national movement contained in Myśl Polska, as well as by instructions on the organisation of ideological work in SN circles, containing a summary of the ethos of the "nationalist" referring to the educational ideal followed by the National Democracy in the interwar Second Republic. The leitmotif of the émigré SN's educational ideology was a threat to national existence from permanent enemies - Poland's neighbours - with some elements of a conspiracy-fuelled interpretation of history – a Masonic, anti-Polish intrigue. The nature of the educational ideology and ethos of the "nationalist" a type of "fighter for ideas" (to use Olgierd Szpakowski's prewar term) - was at odds with the aims of social education in the countries of uniting Europe. In other words, the aims of education and the educational ethos of the émigré National Democracy, based on the historically conditioned motif of defending Polishness from the period of the Partitions and the threat to national identity under pressure, differed from the aims of social education and the educational model of Western countries.

Certainly, nationalists perceived these differences. In letters to President Bielecki and members of the Central Executive Division and in reports on the activities of Polish centres, nationalists in the USA noted the resignation of young people from SN circles, the falling number of subscribers to *Myśl Polska* or the waning interest of young Poles in the history of the national movement and the fate of

émigrés. Against this backdrop, there were timidly articulated remarks on the need to modernise the historical national idea, and it was only the representatives of Catholic-national circles in Poland who made a clear appeal, with the voice of A. Micewski who in *Tygodnik Powszechny* asked nationalists and other émigré circles to update historical thought by subjecting its ethical sphere to a confrontation with the values carried by the ideological currents of the epoch with the intention – which is worth emphasising – of strengthening its usefulness and saving it from being relegated to the dustbin of history, above all of strengthening its competitiveness on the market of political offers – émigré political projects for sovereign Poland. "Healthy political thought", he wrote, "must be oriented towards the realities of the present and the anticipated evolution into the future" (Micewski, 1981). In his opinion, the reason for the weakening of nationalist thought was the conviction, entrenched in the public consciousness, that the national existence was constantly under threat, and that the position of the Polish nation and state was unique among European peoples.

However, neither Micewski nor Wasiutyński specified the way in which nationalist thought could be modernised. They did not specify what aspects of political thought had to be removed in order for it to meet the criterion of "modernity" while retaining the character trait shaped on the principle of national egoism. As a matter of fact, the principle of national egoism as a criterion of moral judgement was not verified by the nationalists: while in the period of the Partitions or in the interwar years national egoism was the ideological motive of the concept of nationalist policy aimed at limiting the political role of national minorities, mainly Jews, it played a similar role in the concept of the Polish SN's policy, motivating the fight against the communist regime, the "non-Polish" government and its Moscow principals dubbed "Jewish communists". It reflected the pre-war character of political thinking saturated with strands of resentment towards Jews expressed in such terms as the "Jewish threat", "anti-Polish policy of world Jewry" or the "plan to take over Poland" (AAN-4 - Information for Nationalists). The nationalists rejected the accusations of ethnic anti-Semitism expressed in the regime press and admitted only to the historical rivalry with the Jews in the economic field (Giertych, 1988, p. 5); they took the position that the sources of this rivalry stemmed from the idea of strengthening Polish national culture, did not spring from a racial background, and fell within the ethical boundaries of the Catholic religion (Rojek, 1950). In the programme pamphlet Podstawy ideowe ruchu narodowego [The Ideological Basis of the National Movement], the author argued: "The National Party bases its understanding of the good of the nation first and foremost on the grounds of Catholic ethics, and includes it within the framework of this ethics. The precepts of Catholic ethics define both

the attitude of the Polish nation to other nations and to the individual. According to this ethics, the Polish nation, defending its own right to life and fighting for the conditions necessary for its life, wants to respect and respects also the just rights of other nations" (ASN-1)¹.

The credibility of this declaration formulated in the early 1950s was weakened by the statements of President Antoni Dargas regarding the Solidarity revolution. In his opinion, it did not have a "national" Polish character, it was dominated by the "forces of the liberal left" and "leftist-Trotskyist political circles", which stood on the basis of a confrontational strategy and opposed reforms of the socialist system. It was yet another stage in the implementation of the plan of an organisation of Masonic-Jewish provenance ("world Jewry", to use Jędrzej Giertych's term) to "take over Poland" by controlling the process of political change, controlling the centres of central power and the law-making system, as well as the programme of school history education. For this reason, fearing Jewish machinations in the form of the so-called "laicity left", the nationalists took credit for the decision to impose martial law. The "secular left", wrote Dargas, "which imposed its leadership on Solidarity, lost. Its leading representatives, mainly of Jewish origin, have been neutralised by internment in Poland or by leaving. They will disperse to universities, foreign radio stations or the editorial offices of some of the old and new journals, such as Kultura and the new Zeszyty Literackie in Paris, Aneks and Nowy Przegląd in London. They will share the fate of the so-called intellectuals of 1968" (ASN-2).

A characteristic feature of the style of political thinking of émigré nationalists, a kind of label of National Democracy, was to analyse domestic and international events from the angle of a Masonic-Jewish conspiracy (Łętocha, 2024). Hence, the starting point of the analysis of national (and international) political events was often the analysis of the biographies of the inspirers of these events with the intention of pointing out the "Jewish trace". Undoubtedly, the motif of the "Jewish threat" was a permanent element in the political thought of the interwar National Democracy-in-exile, functioned in a latent form. In the 1970s, some attempts were made aimed at verifying the anti-Jewish aspects of the political agenda so as to adapt it to the contemporaneous reality of social life and democratic standards. The first such attempt was an initiative to start a dialogue between the émigré SN and Jewish organisations in the USA expressed by Witold Nowosad in the form of a letter to President Dargas. "The Jewish question plays a huge role", he wrote, "and our Party

¹ At the stage of source query, the collections of the Archives of the National Party were not catalogued, therefore the materials do not have full bibliographic descriptions; in the form of photocopies, audio records and flashcards, they are stored in the author's private collection.

should review its entire attitude to this question in the spirit of Christian humanism. The history of this period [of Poland's recent history – the author's note] awaits elaboration and illumination not in the name of revenge but in the name of truth" (AAN-1). Witold Leitgeber, Secretary of the SN's Political Committee, came up with a somewhat broader initiative: "Let them say – in the form of a questionnaire – what they think about the accusations that have been made, which of them they consider untrue and which of them are correct, with a short justification of their opinion" (AAN-3). The fate of this initiative and Nowosad's appeal remain unknown; on the basis of a query of *Myśl Polska*, it is difficult to determine its effects.

It seems that for personal reasons, influenced by the imperative to defend one's own political biography threatened by attacks of the regime's propaganda as well as ideological limitations, the nationalists, tied to the patterns of political thinking, did not take the initiative to settle accounts with their own past, especially the accusations of historical anti-Semitism. They did not accept a moral evaluation of the programme on the basis of post-war democratic ethical standards, not least because the fundamental elements of this programme continued to profile the ideological image of the émigré National Democracy. An important element of this thought, its distinguishing feature, was the assumption concerning the existence of permanent enemies of the nation, Poland's neighbours, the presence of a constant threat from Russian and German policy, Ukrainian nationalism, and the anti-Polish policy of "world Jewry".

It was against this background that the above-mentioned Rzewuski made his postulate, addressed to the organisers of the 6th Central Convention of the SN (London, 1987): "It would be good", he wrote, "if our convention declarations included a clear statement that we do not recognise the concept of permanent, mortal enemies, from whom we have suffered the greatest wrongs. We want mutual and good relations with all our neighbours" (AAN-2). It was not possible to meet Rzewuski's demand, as it depended on abandoning the steadfast stance and confrontational strategy of Polish politics in favour of negotiations and search for some common understanding, which, in the opinion of a large group of nationalists, would be a denial of the sense of the choice to emigrate. They were reluctant to accept the demands for a more flexible stance towards Soviet Russia formulated by the group of "political realists" from the editorial office of *Horyzonty*. J. Giertych, the leader of this group, saw Soviet Russia as the only guarantor of the inviolability of the western border on the Oder and Nyssa Rivers; he did not count it among the nation's permanent enemies. Giertych's position was not an isolated one; it was gaining the tacit, unofficial recognition of a group of nationalists from Polish émigré centres in Chicago and New York, as illustrated by the contents of personal letters

sent to President Bielecki (ASN-3). The latter, however, did not share this position; at an SN meeting in Chicago, he argued that the "Polish national idea does not need to change its principles and aims. They have withstood the test of time admirably and have gained even greater strength forged by the fire of experience" (Kilian, 2000). This is most evident in the contents of Stanisław Skrzypek's article in *Biuletyn Stronnictwa Narodowego w AP*: "Whether one likes it or not, the guarantor of the inviolability of our western borders is the Soviet Union – and in this aspect, the Polish-Soviet alliance – is not at all contrary to the Polish raison d'état" (Skrzypek, 1980, p. 6).

However, the nationalists of the SN's Central Executive Division did not follow the path outlined by Giertych and Skrzypek. Engaged on the frontline of the ideological struggle in the spirit of the American strategy of liberation, they resigned from developing an independent concept of Eastern policy and were unable to define, for various reasons – mainly financial dependence on the Free Europe Committee – a viable concept of Eastern policy, nor the conditions for good neighbourly relations with a democratic Russia. Expert opinions prepared in "Sovietological" centres financed by the KWE [National Committee for Free Europe] were of little help, as they were burdened with the ballast of ideological struggle with accents of Russophobia and handed over to the nationalists in the early 1990s.

In a similar historical version, saturated with Germanophobia, émigré nationalists gave the ones in Poland some indications about the neighbourhood with Germany. Those concerning the vision of a neighbourhood with a sovereign and democratic Ukraine were also devoid of utility. The analysis of historical Polish-Ukrainian relations became the leitmotif of the political journalism of the editor of *Horyzonty*. It will not be an exaggeration to say that Giertych's remarks on the neighbourhood with Ukraine made him more popular than his postulates on Polish émigrés' policy towards Soviet Russia. The nationalists made future cooperation with the Ukrainians conditional on the fulfilment of a precondition: the admission of Ukrainian guilt for the massacres of Poles in Volhynia as a gesture of moral reparation to the victims and their families. Apart from Klaudiusz Hrabyk's initiative to exchange opinions in Kronika, a magazine published in Frankfurt am Main (1947), with the aim of getting to know the positions of both sides, the nationalists did not hold political talks with the Ukrainians (The Author's Interview with J. Baraniecki, 1996). It seems that as regards Polish-Ukrainian reconciliation, a way out could have been – as suggested by a contemporary researcher of this issue - the creation of a mixed expert-historian team with the task of clarifying mutual grievances on the basis of historical resentments as a first step towards solving – to use the term of Myśl Polska – the "Ukrainian problem" (Łaptos, 2012). In Giertych's opinion, the massacres in

Volhynia highlighted the exceptional scale of hatred towards the Poles, further soured the relations between the neighbours and weakened the cooperation between the émigré representations of both nations in the face of the threat of Soviet policy. For this reason, he refused to support Ukrainian independence aspirations. "Ukrainian independence", he argued, "is not in Poland's interest" (Giertych, 1955, p. 10). Journalists of Myśl Polska expressed similar views on this issue: Józef Baraniecki, Stanisław Skrzypek, Zygmunt Celichowski, and Wacław Całus distanced themselves from the idea of a Polish-Ukrainian federation promoted by Jerzy Giedroyć, editor of Kultura, as a way of removing mutual grudges and avoiding territorial disputes. They made cooperation dependent on the Ukrainians admitting their guilt as a moral compensation for victims of the massacres in Volhynia and their families. They were reserved about projects to create political-military unions of Central and Eastern European states with the participation of an independent Ukraine or a Polish-Ukrainian federation based on the foundations of the Jagiellonian idea. "Building theoretical political concepts", argued Baraniecki, "which would include an independent Ukraine is beyond the possibilities of the present and the future, no matter how we want to define it" (1976, p. 51). The anti-Ukrainian phobia could not be weakened by political events – the autumn of nations (1989) or the collapse of the USSR. In its émigré version of the "Ukrainian problem", the "Ukrainian issue" became a permanent feature and a hallmark of the political thought of the émigré SN. In this version, because of the scale of resentment towards the Ukrainians, it constituted the most difficult obstacle to the modernisation of the historical shape of nationalist political thought. If one accepts the statement that modernisation (contemporisation) is achieved by eliminating the dysfunctional elements of this thought with a view to strengthening its utilitarian aspects, then the stance of the nationalists towards the so-called "Ukrainian problem" made it impossible to achieve this goal. Due to accusations of historical anti-Polonism and those related to the Volhynian massacre, Ukrainians found themselves on the list of permanent enemies of the nation and the anti-Ukrainian sentiment became an emblem of the émigré SN.

In the political thought of the nationalists concerning the positioning of Poland on the map of Europe, an image emerges of a state at odds with its neighbours, entrenched by historical enemies and lonely due to the lack of true and tested friends. The hopes associated with the American liberation policy gave way rather quickly since the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 to doubts about the goals of American political objectives in Central and Eastern Europe. Since then, there have been signs of waning confidence in US declarations of aid to Poland, which intensified in the era of Solidarity. At that time, the idea of "counting on one's own strength"

was revived by mobilising society to fight the regime and creating the nuclei of an anti-system opposition, which, under internationally favourable conditions under the influence of growing tension in the Washington-Moscow-Beijing geopolitical triangle of political dependencies, would lead to the democratisation of political life. Nationalists feared a waning interest in the position of the Polish cause as a consequence of the focus of US foreign policy on German unification and the process of European integration. However, they did not show much interest in the integration process in the 1950s under the influence of information about the successive stages of the unification of Western Europe, and expressed fears (Bielecki, Dargas) that "Europe preoccupied with its own affairs will stop thinking about Polish affairs". The nationalists did little to disseminate information on European integration, they did not prepare a methodologically mature study on the place of sovereign Poland on the map of a united Europe, or a programme position on the conditions of Polish participation in it (with the exception of support for the "Europe of Nations" formula).

As a result of the abandonment of postulates for the modernisation of historical thought and the concentration of émigré activity on its ideological petrification, leaders of the SN writing for Myśl Polska did not undertake ideological and programme work motivated by the idea of organising the social life of a sovereign Poland; they did not draft a decommunization or enfranchisement act or a programme of school history education for which they had been calling for years with the idea of restoring a place for the history of the national movement in mind. Nevertheless, they did fulfil their task – they defended the historical shape of nationalist thought and wanted to pass it on to nationalists in the country in an authentic form, devoid of any utility value, in the hope that they would enrich its ethical sphere with the elements carried by the ideological currents of the epoch. These hopes were hardly fulfilled; in the first free elections they came up with a simplified, hybrid programme of a "national and democratic Poland", a systemic concoction combining historical ideological motives with the ethical values of freedom-related ideas and mass emancipation movements, which did not gain the recognition of the generation of sovereign Poland (Radomski, 2010).

Conclusion

At the time when émigré nationalists referred to the demand for the modernisation of historical political thought, a book entitled *Po co nam historia?* [Why History?] (1985) was published in Poland, a collection of columns by Mexican journalists

who formulated the premise that the removal of archaic elements of historical political thought was not enough for it to play the role of a "teacher of politics" (they refused to call it a "teacher of life"). In order for it to become an inspiration in the organisation of the social life of contemporary generations, a profound verification of its ethical sphere, of ideological and moral values was needed. In a similar vein, the postulate of adaptation of historical thought was addressed by W. Wasiutyński, quoted here in the introduction. In his work entitled Czwarte pokolenie. Szkice z dziejów nacjonalizmu polskiego [The Fourth Generation: Sketches on the History of Polish Nationalism] (1982), he wrote: "Each generation must think for itself, from scratch and anew [and systematically – the author's note] confirm what has already been confirmed". What is more, the task of modernising history is the responsibility of contemporary generations; it cannot be entrusted to its creators, for these, as heroes of past times, will always defend their political biographies and ideological choices. This seems to have been forgotten by the nationalists at home, the authors of a political programme for a sovereign Poland, who, as heirs to the legacy of the political thought of the émigré National Democracy, uncritically imbedded the elements of this agenda in the ideological foundations of the historical ND.

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