

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE POLITICS OF HISTORY: CREATORS, TOOLS, AND MECHANISMS OF ACTION—POLAND AS A CASE STUDY¹

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To say that the past is always a living element of the present is a truism, yet the consequences of this presence in the life of a state, nation, and society are not so obvious and banal. The manner in which the past is used to implement the current objectives and the benefits thus achieved by the authorities represents a somewhat ambiguous topic. The space in which the narrative of the past becomes a basic tool of those in power is the politics of history. Over the past few decades, the approach to this domain of politics has undergone wide-ranging changes. They have stemmed directly from a far-reaching transformation in the way we relate to and think of the past, and above all from the constant presence of discussions on this issue in the public sphere on at least three levels: political, academic, and intellectual.²

A clearly observable trend in Poland after the 1989 transformation is that almost all issues related to humans' relationship with the past emerge in the public space and are discussed there, mainly at the initiative of people involved in politics. Regardless of the depth of research and level of insights verified and offered by experts, interest generated by a particular

¹ This paper was published in Polish in K. Kącka, J. Piechowiak-Lamparska, A. Ratke-Majewska (eds.), *Narracje pamięci: między polityką a historią* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UMK, 2015), 59–80.

² As the intellectual dimension I understand the discourse of the creative circles of writers, journalists, artists, and people generally recognised by the public as role models and authority figures.

issue is created and often deliberately heated up by politicians.³ Of course, it would be a mistake to underestimate the impact the media have in this process, as the role they play is in fact vital. It is worth noting, however, that in the era of expanding and highly prosperous social networking sites the importance of traditional media varieties, such as radio, television, and the press, is noticeably decreasing. Politicians with their PR and political image experts systematically prove that the internet is a great tool to influence people and their way of thinking. As an example of politicians being the initiators or inspiration of such discussions, we can cite the highly emotional dispute over the book by Jan Tomasz Gross⁴ and the biography of Lech Wałęsa by Sławomir Cenckiewicz and Piotr Gontarczyk.⁵ Long-lasting debates have been almost completely dominated by political arguments, obscuring the substantive issues. Growing interest in the narrative of the “cursed soldiers” or “doomed soldiers,” observed in recent years in Poland, is also largely inspired by political circles, and to a very limited extent compatible with real research on that topic. Listening to the discussion on this subject one might be led to think that the issue itself is completely new, while in fact multiple historical, archival, ethnographic, and archaeological studies have been and are being conducted on the topic of “cursed soldiers.” There are many reasons behind this phenomenon. The most important of them is the hermetic nature of the Polish scientific community, wherein researchers have become accustomed to writing basically only for other scholars, and intellectual disputes take place in the halls of academia, away from the public eye. Of course, this is largely the legacy of the previous system, but in many cases is also due to a lack of willingness of the researchers to bring their findings “to the people.” Changes in this area are already visible, but it will take time for all stakeholders to understand that the perspective of researchers may be an important voice in the public domain. The impact of intellectuals in Poland on the debate about the country’s past can be assessed on a similarly low level. For some years now, this community has been avoiding any discussion on difficult historical issues. There are at least two reasons for this. The first simply concerns finances, as, despite loud

³ M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa: Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2009), 15–16.

⁴ J. T. Gross, *Sąsiedzi. Historia zagłady żydowskiego miasteczka* (Sejny: Fundacja Pogranicze, 2000); J. T. Gross, *Strach. Antysemityzm w Polsce tuż po wojnie. Historia moralnej zapaści* (Kraków: Znak, 2008).

⁵ S. Cenckiewicz, P. Gontarczyk, *SB a Lech Wałęsa. Przyczynek do biografii* (Gdańsk-Warszawa-Kraków: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008).

declarations of support, the financing of initiatives of a (controversial) historical nature is still very much lacking. The second is the play-safe approach of many intellectuals and artists, resulting from negative personal experiences. A perfect example here is the emotional reaction to the 2012 film *Pokłosie* [*Aftermath*] directed by Władysław Pasikowski, and the numerous attacks on its creators. Quite a different situation can be observed in Germany, for example, where the impetus for discussion about the past usually comes from intellectuals and creative and academic circles, and naturally penetrates into the public sphere as a worthy topic. It is worth noting that, apart from a few exceptions, the circles of German intellectuals approach the problem of the impact of the past on the present with great caution, respect, and, above all, responsibility.⁶ The presented opposing Polish and German models can be observed in various hybrid versions worldwide. The choice of a specific balance of elements is influenced by various factors, from the state political and legal system and political culture, and ending with the historical experiences of a society.

Regardless of time and place, the desire to influence the behaviour and attitudes of citizens is an inherent characteristic of those in power; thus, there is no doubt that every government is active in the field of the politics of history. Differences arise only in the manner of implementation of this policy and the tools used. The “management” of history is inscribed in the process of governance itself, and requires effective instruments, matched and tailored to the specific conditions and political situation in a state. The often-posed question of whether a state *should* pursue a politics of history shows a disconnect from reality, as action in this area is something absolutely obvious for the authorities, and a politics of history is a natural element of the political scene of every state. Hence, a better question in this context would be: *how* to implement politics of history? The aim of this article is therefore to discuss the creators of state politics of history and analyse tools and mechanisms of their activity. Examples from the Polish experience will serve as illustrations.

Assuming that the politics of history is a permanent element of the process of governance, it is worth considering the reactions to such a state of affairs. Amongst the perceived attitudes, we can easily distinguish two extremes: the emotional and rational attitude models. The first can be recognised in people who in almost all aspects of the situation see a potential dividing line and a source of conflict, while the second, the rational, is represented by those who see the politics of history as just one

⁶ A. Huyssen (ed.), *Twilight Memories. Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York, London: Routledge, 1995), 37–66.

of a number of policies pursued by the government, putting it on a par with state economic, financial, social, or foreign policy. Although this clear-cut division is of course an oversimplification, it clearly shows that the emotional element dividing the two options makes the attainment of a consensus virtually impossible. This is just one of the reasons for which the study of the politics of history—regardless of discipline—remains a real challenge. However, attempting a scientific analysis of this phenomenon should lead one towards perceiving it as an “ideologically neutral category”⁷ than to emotionally-charged involvement, especially as the latter is already very much present in the public debate. Of course, for many researchers such a position is impossible to accept—historians protest especially loudly against such a perspective on the politics of history. This is due, however, to not having fully internalised the specific nature of politics as such, and the key criterion for its assessment—efficiency.⁸

Definition

The concept of the “politics of history” has for years posed many problems of interpretation for researchers. Although the phenomenon itself is known and has been described in scientific terms for a long time, a definition accepted by all has not thus far been worked out. Currently, several concepts closely associated with this term are used in the literature, but two of them appear most frequently: the politics of memory and the politics of history.⁹ While all of them function in parallel and are often considered synonymous, some in the scientific community insist on strict demarcation of their meaning, and interpret them in differing ways. Analysing the publications of Polish authors, one can indicate certain preferences common to different scientific disciplines; thus, sociologists prefer to use the term “politics of memory” while political analysts are increasingly inclined to use the term “politics of history.” In Polish, both these terms are calque translations from other languages. Therefore, *polityka*

⁷ J. Rydel, *Polityka historyczna w Republice Federalnej Niemiec. Zaszłości, idee, praktyka* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Pedagogicznego, 2011), 11; see also E. Wolfrum, *Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Der Weg zur bundesrepublikanischen Erinnerung. 1948–1990* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1999), 26–7.

⁸ Rydel, *Polityka historyczna w Republice Federalnej Niemiec*, 12; see also J. Tokarska-Bakir, “Nędza polityki historycznej,” in P. Kosiewski (ed.), *Pamięć jako przedmiot władzy* (Warszawa: Fundacja im. Stefana Batorego, 2008), 29.

⁹ M. Zaborski, *Współczesne pomniki i miejsca pamięci w polskiej i niemieckiej kulturze politycznej* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2011), 14.

historyczna (the politics of history, or sometimes historical policy) is derived from the German *Geschichtspolitik*. It is widely accepted that the term gained popularity in the 1980s, and was first used in a scientific forum by historian of antiquity Christian Meier during the congress of German historians in Trier in 1986.¹⁰ This clearly shows that science has recognised the phenomenon from time immemorial. Still, the concept has been mainly adapted by researchers specialising in twentieth-century issues, and quickly acquired a negative connotation. It was used to a great extent in the turbulent dispute of German historians concerning the assessment of National Socialism, which returned as a topic of public debate in the 1980s. In parallel, the term was adopted into the language of journalism and was used in descriptions of contemporary policy issues. It mostly signified the deliberate instrumentalisation of history for political purposes, to achieve particular benefits, and was almost always used in a negative sense. Hence, the concept of the “politics of history” is often met with criticism; its opponents contest even the possibility of combining politics with history, as for history the most important attributes are objectivity and the pursuit of truth, which often contradict the underlying goal of politics, which is to gain power and influence. Tomasz Tokarz disagrees with this critical view, and believes that “every history bears an individual stamp of its author. A historian undertakes research already with a baggage of experience—the scholar’s mind is not a blank, clear slate.”¹¹ It is of course difficult to deny these words, but personal experience is not in fact a hindrance but rather an asset in the pursuit of truth. Much more important from the point of view of this analysis is another statement by this author, this time discussing history: “A historian is not able to capture it in a complete, exhaustive manner, is not able to gather and grasp all of the facts from which it is built. In addition, historians have no direct access to the object of their research—the past is gone, its true observation is an impossibility.”¹² However, regardless of the protests of historians, professional researchers do not have a monopoly over the interpretation of the past. After all, the image of the past and the

¹⁰ Ch. Meier, “Eröffnungsrede zur 36. Versammlung deutsche Historiker in Trier, 8 Oktober 1986,” in R. Augstein (ed.), *Historikerstreit*. *Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung* (München–Zürich: Piper, 1987), 204–14.

¹¹ T. Tokarz, “Problem subiektywizmu w konstruowaniu narracji historycznej,” *Kultura i Historia* 8 (2005): 9.

¹² *Ibid.*

historical consciousness of a society and nation have always been elements the authorities want to manage and influence.¹³

The term *polityka pamięci*, extremely popular in Poland, is in turn a calque of the English “politics of memory,”¹⁴ and is widely used mainly in the social sciences, where the broad category of memory is a popular reference. Its proponents suggest that the term “memory” captures the sense much better than the alternative, “history.” In the politics of memory, the point is not to establish historical truth, but to use a particular perception or vision of the past present in social and individual consciousness to achieve specific objectives. The term also hints at the possibility of shaping the perception of the past by a community to make influencing the present easier. Still, regardless of the semantic discussions in the academia, in the public debate both terms are applied interchangeably, and scholars increasingly copy this manner of using them as synonyms.

The simultaneous functioning of various, often extremely different approaches to politics of history makes it difficult to create a definition acceptable to all parties. Edgar Wolfrum, one of the most important German scholars in the politics of memory, considers it a, “field of activity of politics in which various political actors attribute concrete political interests to the past, and fight for their acceptance among the public.”¹⁵ Anna Wolff-Powęska, on the other hand, defines it as, “a conscious action of the political class aimed at shaping the scope and nature of collective historical memory.”¹⁶ A position similar to these two is presented by Beatrix Bouvier and Michael Schneider, who consider the politics of history as “deliberate support offered for the memory of specific events, processes and historical figures with political intent and for political purposes.”¹⁷ Another definition of the politics of history—although in this case the author consistently uses the term “politics of memory”—has been suggested by sociologist Lech M. Nijakowski, who identified its three dimensions or sub-types. In the first sense, the politics of memory is, “any

¹³ A. Wolff-Powęska, “Polskie spory o historię i pamięć. Polityka historyczna,” *Przegląd Zachodni* 1 (2007): 3.

¹⁴ In German, *Erinnerungspolitik*.

¹⁵ E. Wolfrum, “Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. 1949–1989. Phasen und Kontroversen,” in P. Bock, E. Wolfrum (eds.), *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 58.

¹⁶ A. Wolff-Powęska, “Polskie spory o historię i pamięć. Polityka historyczna,” 10.

¹⁷ B. Bouvier, M. Schneider (eds.), *Geschichtspolitik und demokratische Kultur: Bilanz und Perspektiven* (Bonn: Dietz, 2008), 1.

action—conscious and unconscious, intentional and accidental—that leads to consolidating and strengthening of the collective memory of Poles, or to its change.”¹⁸ In the second sense, he described it as, “actions that an individual intentionally undertakes on a public forum in order to reinforce aspects of collective memory of citizens or to change it.”¹⁹ In the third, narrowest interpretation, the author limits the definition to “actions legitimized by the public,” which in practice means, “public lectures in official institutions or read by state officials, actions of state bodies—and then only within the limits of the law, such as the formal establishment of a history curriculum for schools, and so on.”²⁰

The quoted—subjectively selected—definitions of the politics of history already reveal some patterns. First, all the authors attribute to the creators of the politics of memory a certain intent and awareness, as well as the arbitrary nature of the actions undertaken. Lech M. Nijakowski leaves some leeway here, but still only in the broadest of his suggested definitions, which is however the one that seems the least convincing from the perspective of political science. In the context of political practice, this means a need to institutionalise state activities in this regard. Authorities implementing the politics of history need specific state bodies and civil servants that will pursue the objectives set at all levels. In a way, this confirms the thesis on the similarities in the functioning of all individual policies in a country, which also require a specialised group of employees or officials to be carried out.²¹ This first pattern gives birth to the second: the above theorists seek the creators of the state politics of history amongst the ruling political class, though they give this term a very broad meaning. Another common element is the presupposition of the existence of a particular political interest or goal driving the policy. The method for its attainment is the meticulous selection and extremely precise interpretation of historical narratives supporting the particular goals of the authorities. The last noticeable pattern is the component of desire to influence the consciousness and collective memory of a community in order to shape its political identity and values, as well as individual attitudes. Such an interpretation of the politics of memory thus excludes the possibility of spontaneous action by accidental actors. In political practice, this means that if a government abandons the use of some of the tools at its disposal,

¹⁸ L. M. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, 2008), 43.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ M. Halbwachs, *Spoleczne ramy pamięci* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2008), 339–45.

one should assume that this happened on purpose, and only to achieve some particular political interest that might be unclear to the observer.

Policymakers

The cited definitions of the politics of history offer some hints as to the image of its creators—the policymakers—in the minds of the quoted scholars. It should be emphasised that, when discussing politics, one cannot avoid mentioning the concept of “the political.”²² The image painted by this term is that of rival groups, with each reserving for itself the right to interpret reality—including the past. This, in turn, means projecting personal interests and goals onto history, in fact the instrumentalisation of the past in order to ensure the optimal effectiveness of the group’s actions.²³

Edgar Wolfrum points to politicians, journalists, intellectuals, and scientists—members of what he calls *Deutungseliten*: opinion-shaping elites and the co-creators of a nation’s historical culture—as creators of the politics of memory.²⁴ Amongst this varied group, however, he considers the political elite to be particularly important, and sees it as constituting a significant share of its total makeup. The task of defining constitutive norms, values, and symbols to be put on the political market falls, according to Wolfrum, to this subgroup.²⁵ Wolfrum represents a typical German pluralistic point of view, with the underlying assumption of a broad spectrum of actors and stakeholders in the public sphere aspiring to create a politics of history. Still, one should clearly distinguish between players that can and do shape a state politics of memory and those that contribute to shaping historical culture or participate in the discourse on

²² Probably the most accurate interpretation of the term for our purposes would be the one offered by Carl Schmitt, for whom “the political” means the distinction friend–enemy: “The enemy is not merely any competitor or just any partner of a conflict in general. He is also not the private adversary whom one hates. An enemy exists only when, at least potentially, one fighting collectivity of people confronts a similar collectivity. The enemy is solely the public enemy, because everything that has a relationship to such a collectivity of men, particularly to a whole nation, becomes public by virtue of such a relationship.” C. Schmitt, *Teologia polityczna i inne pisma* (Kraków, Warsaw: Znak, 2000), 200.

²³ H. H. Hahn, “Polityka historyczna a stosunki binarodowe. Głos na rzecz stworzenia kodeksu zachowań w polityce pamięci,” in H. H. Hahn, R. Traba (eds.), *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, vol. IV: *Refleksje metodologiczne* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2013), 149.

²⁴ E. Wolfrum, “Geschichtspolitik in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland,” 26.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 58.

the past. Anna Wolff-Powęska leaves no doubt: the right to implement a politics of memory requires public legitimacy and is thus essentially limited to the actions of the political class.²⁶ A position similar to Wolfrum is represented by Harald Schmidt, who considers the political class, the media, and historians as policymakers of the politics of history. Also in this case, the group of actors truly relevant in the domain of politics of memory is listed together with simple participants of the public debate on history, the past, and memory.²⁷ After analysing the German literature on this subject there is no doubt, however, that the authors fully grasp this division, but it is simply not important enough from their point of view to attempt to draw a precise demarcation between, for example, politicians and historians.

This distinction is much more visible in Polish research, due to at least three reasons. First, the politics of history is still a relatively new and still-developing research topic in Poland.²⁸ The researchers thus attempt to use existing conceptual frameworks with as much precision as possible, systematically expanding it with new phenomena. Second, years of communist propaganda have to a large extent distorted the image of the politics of memory in Poland, and society's associations are currently almost exclusively negative. The third reason closely follows from the previous: the attitude towards the past is a powerful and emotionally-charged element that divides the Polish society. It is also an important argument in political disputes, meaning that to take part in the public debate is synonymous with declaring oneself a supporter of one side of the political conflict.

The above discussion allows for the following generalisations: the main creators of the politics of history in a particular country are current rulers (authorities), with the participation of opposition groups (whose influence, of course, depends on their relative position and the political program which, to a greater or lesser extent, may accentuate issues of the past). After all, a state uses the politics of memory to influence the

²⁶ A. Wolff-Powęska, "Polskie spory o historię i pamięć. Polityka historyczna," 10.

²⁷ H. Schmid, *Geschichtspolitik und kollektives Gedächtnis. Erinnerungskulturen in Theorie und Praxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 73.

²⁸ It should be noted that, prior to 1989, truly unique (on a global scale) sociological research in the field of the collective dimensions of memory was conducted in Poland. The study was initiated by Nina Assorodobraj-Kula and continued by such researchers as Barbara Szacka and Andrzej Szpociński. See N. Assorodobraj, "Żywa historia. Świadomość historyczna: symptomy i propozycje badawcze," *Studia Socjologiczne* 2 (1963).

political behaviour of citizens, for example in an election.²⁹ All activities in the field of politics of memory are implemented by state institutions, from financial bodies (funds allocated for specific projects) and courts (the problem of so-called transitional justice), to cultural (museums, theatres, cinemas, television, the internet) and educational institutions (school curriculum). Emphasising this point is particularly important as the politics of history are very often, erroneously, considered to be all references to the past in the public discourse, which results in a gradual but observable blurring of the meaning of this term. It is worth noting that, depending on the prevailing political and administrative system, several levels of such activities can be distinguished. In Poland, this all happens on two levels: state-wide (initiated by state authorities) and local (led by local governments). The latter has, in the current conditions, all the possible means and competences to build an independent local political narrative. Still, these competences are used to a highly variable degree in different regions. Moreover, significant disparities between the real impact of the state-wide and local politics of memory can be observed in Poland. Instead of pursuing the original politics of history, local governments seem content to simply copy the trends and approaches adopted by the central authorities.³⁰

In addition to state entities, we should also point out that non-state actors can create a politics of history and significantly influence the former in this regard. Quite often, an initially purely “inspirational” mission evolves into a real impact and equal-rights participation in the decision process. Such trends are also reflected in scientific studies, in which researchers are increasingly applying the concept of a “cross-border politics of history.”³¹ Currently, such policymakers are international organisations and religions, with the European Union³² being the best example. EU representatives quite happily employ the narrative of the

²⁹ L. Koczanowicz, “Memory of Politics and Politics of Memory. Reflections on the Construction of the Past in the Post-Totalitarian Poland,” *Studies in East European Thought* 49 (1997): 259–60; R. Smith, *Stories of Peoplehood: The Politics and Morality of Political Membership* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 56–8.

³⁰ K. Kaćka, “Lokalny wymiar polityki historycznej—studium przypadku: Toruń,” in D. Plecka (ed.) *Administracja publiczna w projektach politycznych* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2014), 281–97; see also R. Poczykowski, *Lokalny wymiar pamięci. Pamięć zbiorowa i jej przemiany w północno-wschodniej Polsce* (Białystok: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu w Białymstoku, 2010).

³¹ H. H. Hahn, “Polityka historyczna a stosunki binarodowe,” 150–60.

³² There is no agreement among scholars as to whether the European Union should be seen as a *sensu stricto* international organisation.

common European past and the so-called European identity. A significant role in Poland is also played by the strongly institutionalised Catholic Church, firmly rooted in national history and tradition. Over the years, this institution has served as a guardian of memory.

Emulating the rhetoric of German researchers, it is worth mentioning other circles shaping the nation's historical culture and aspiring to be seen as policymakers as regards the politics of history. In the first place, we should mention the scientific community. Sometimes—as emphasised by Schmid—its representatives are tempted, “under the guise of scientific research [to] transform into politicians pursuing politics of history, and [turn] history into a science legitimizing politics.”³³ This position seems to be greatly exaggerated—after all, regardless of the times and political regimes, every group produces individuals that are “seduced” by the possibility of getting closer to those in power. It would therefore be an injustice to say that this applies to scientists in any greater extent than other circles. Journalists and commentators—in turn accused by Schmid of disseminating false and distorted representations—should be treated similarly.³⁴ Undoubtedly, as has been shown previously, the role of the media in the implementation of the politics of history is undeniable. However, also in this case, Schmid's accusation brings nothing new, and can be applied equally to all topics present in the media, not only those linked to the past. At this point we should once again mention the opinion-shaping elites, creators of culture, members of associations, etc. who, with varying intensity, are also involved in creating the historical culture of a state. The Polish example—which is not unique in the European context—shows that political activists also strive to achieve a dominant position in this domain.

Tools

One of key questions asked in this paper is: What tools do the creators and implementers of politics of history use? Experiencing the past is a permanent and often unconscious element of every human life. The effectiveness of the politics of memory is therefore based on making use of this experience and elevating the importance of certain elements of the past, so that the particular interpretation provided for it by the state translates into the desired behaviour of citizens in the present. How, then, can one define the tools to ensure that a certain, carefully selected

³³ H. Schmid, “Vom publizistischen Kampfbegriff zum Forschungskonzept,” 73.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

narrative dominates all others? First of all, such an action must be multidimensional, which in practice means communicating a cohesive message in various spheres of human activity: at school, at work, and during leisure time. It is also necessary to maintain cohesiveness, and remove any contradictions in communications when one event is narrated in various ways. So, for example, recognition of someone as a national hero should be communicated and emphasised using various means, for instance a monument erected to this historical figure, a school bearing their name, a documentary, a feature film or biography, a website focused on this character, references in school handbooks, etc. Each additional form of communication will only strengthen the message.

After analysing the entire catalogue of tools of the politics of memory, four main groups of individual instruments can be distinguished.

The first group of tools are those used to fill the symbolic space of a state—one of the most important tools of the politics of history—in both material and “mental” terms. The two dimensions interpenetrate, reinforcing their message. Thus, an attempt to awaken a specific narrative in society can be effective when it is reinforced and expressed in material form, such as in a monument, a solemn celebration, or a historical reconstruction.³⁵ One of the most important instruments in this area is the calendar of national holidays and the associated set of rituals. This is, according to all researchers, considered to be the primary and most natural way of talking about the past,³⁶ especially as the celebrations of national holidays, regardless of the current political system, are invariably an element of a nation’s political life. After a glance at the Polish calendar of holidays, there is no doubt as to which narrative is the most important.

A similar role is played by the so-called carriers of memory in shaping the symbolic space. The most important such objects are monuments, serving as specific totems of the given times. They are a component of memory of a particular nation and society, becoming a visual sign and

³⁵ Por. K. Kačka, “New Symbols. The Role of Power in the Creation of the Symbolic Space during Transition: The Example of Poland,” in M. Bonda, M. Sirutavičius, L. Venclauskiene, R. Kamuntavičius, L. Glemža, A. Lastouski, G. Lagzi, L. Tovaišis, A. Grifante, A. Slabý, A. Švarplys, K. Antanatis, T. Błaszczak, E. Aleksandravičius, K. Kačka, H. Beresnevičiute Nosálová (eds.), *The Construction of National Narratives and Politics of Memory in the Central and Eastern European Region after 1989* (Vilnius: Vytauto Didžiojo universitetas, 2014), 277–92.

³⁶ J. Le Goff, *Historia i pamięć* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 2007), 152.

symbol of their values while not performing any useful function.³⁷ It is also worth mentioning that the act of demolishing monuments is just as important as the act of their erection. The image of the destruction of obelisks dedicated to the heroes of the past certainly survives in the minds of all those who remember the Polish systemic transformation.³⁸

Another group of instruments are activities of memory institutions, understood as different types of publicly funded, specialised institutions that deal with the broader sphere of memory and public knowledge. These include archives, libraries, museums, and state/national theatres whose task is to support the current historical narrative. They might play a passive or active role. The former is attributed to archives and libraries, whose main task is to archive, catalogue, and make available objects created in the past.³⁹ Increasingly often, however, these institutions—mainly libraries—are trying to meet the challenges of the current market, also seeking a place for themselves in the sphere of interpretation, for example by organising discussion clubs and meetings with authors, or preparing exhibitions. Museums and theatres have been classified as having an active role in the process of the implementation of the politics of history. They not only show the past as it was but also explain it. In their case, the past should come alive and give appropriate meaning to images and symbols, thus playing a somewhat utilitarian, supporting role.⁴⁰ They do this *inter alia* by preparing relevant thematic exhibitions or selecting the repertoire played in compliance with the current “canon.” There is no doubt that the narrative—but also commercial—success of the Warsaw Rising Museum has translated directly into arousing an interest, mostly amongst young people, in the history of the Second World War and a return of the narrative related to events of that time in the Polish public sphere.

³⁷ K. S. Ożóg, “Kapsuła pamięci na piedestale wzorca. Rzecz o wychowaniu, edukacji i pamięci we współczesnych pomnikach,” in A. P. Bieś SJ, M. Chrost, B. Topij-Stempińska (eds.), *Pamięć—kultura—edukacja* (Kraków: Akademia Ignatianum: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2012), 191–9; M. Zaborski, *Współczesne pomniki*.

³⁸ Por. K. Kaćka, “Upamiętnianie jako zadanie i wyzwanie władz administracyjnych. Sprawa pomnika wdzięczności Armii Czerwonej w Toruniu,” in D. Plecka (ed.), *Współczesne wyzwania administracji rządowej i samorządowej* (Toruń: Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, 2013), 305–23.

³⁹ K. McDermott, “Archives, Power and the ‘Cultural Turn’: Reflections on Stalin and Stalinism,” *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 5 (2004): 7–9.

⁴⁰ A. Landsberg, “America, the Holocaust, and the Mass Culture of Memory: Towards a Radical Politics of Empathy,” *Journal of Holocaust Education* 8 (1999).

The third group includes education and upbringing, as well as research. School is a natural space for implementing a politics of memory for every state, especially where universality of education and free access to it have been introduced. Of course, the influence exerted there may also reach an extent unacceptable by modern democratic standards. The history of many countries—including Poland—shows, however, that school is a great place for spreading ideology. A properly managed (re)education campaign can bring spectacular and rapid results.⁴¹ A system in which the content of school curricula taught in the classroom can be very easily controlled emerged in Poland after 1989. Whether this takes place in practice is in this case secondary. Several important factors are responsible for this state of affairs. The first is the fact that schools are financed from public funds, which as a consequence gives the appropriate authorities—using the control and supervision mechanisms granted—the ability to influence their activities and the conditions in which they operate. The second factor consists of the teachers and directors of educational institutions being extended the status of public officials, meaning that all offences committed against teachers are prosecuted *ex officio*.⁴² This privilege is coupled with additional obligations and restrictions, including the need to run and publicly announce competitions for open positions and the obligation for teachers to advance to higher professional ranks. This gives the organs responsible for schools—in Poland, local government units—direct control over who is employed by educational facilities. Another factor is the total centralisation of educational standards through the creation of so-called ministerial curricula and establishment of a meticulous monitoring system to control their implementation in schools. Next comes the fact that in recent times the state has provided free school handbooks, which for obvious reasons are subject to selection by school principals and teachers, despite the existence of relative pluralism in the educational publications market. And finally, the most important factor is compulsory education, which ensures that the most formative years in

⁴¹ Z. Wang, “National Humiliation, History Education, and the Politics of Historical Memory: Patriotic Education Campaign in China,” *International Studies Quarterly* 52 (2008): 783–806.

⁴² The Act of January 26, 1982—Teachers’ Charter (Journal of Laws of 1982, No 3, item 19, as amended) art. 63 sec. 1: “a teacher, during or in connection with the performance of official duties, enjoys the protection provided for all public officials on the terms specified in the law of 6 June 1997—The Penal Code (Journal of Laws No 88, item 553, as amended)”; *ibid.*, sec. 2, “the school authority and school principal are obliged *ex officio* to act in defence of the teacher whenever the rights and entitlements of such teacher have been breached.”

development of one's personality and character are spent by young citizens in state educational institutions. In Poland, the home schooling option is used by a very small percentage of students. Together, all these factors give the state a powerful tool which, if used improperly, can cause irreparable damage. Another separate topic is the implementation of the objectives of the state politics of history in the domain of scientific research. To what extent does the power over funding granted to research projects also give the state real power to influence research conducted by various academic circles? This question will remain unanswered for a long time yet.

The catalogue of tools ends with instruments in the broad category of the justice system. This class of instruments is particularly varied and multidimensional; I will focus on the most important tool supporting the achievement of objectives of the politics of history on this list: transitional justice. Greatly simplifying, the term means the accountability of the former ruling elites, and redress for victims of previous regimes enacted during a transition from an authoritarian to a democratic system.⁴³ The past in this case is narrated by representatives of the judiciary, and their task is not only to uphold the rule of law as in any democracy, but to influence how this concept is understood. Such a process is, by its very nature, always political, but carrying it out is particularly important for the continued functioning of society and its stability. After all, societies mid-transition do expect perpetrators of abuses to be identified and punished, and are almost always highly emotional about this process.

Mechanisms

The last topic of this study concerns the mechanisms used to attain the objectives of the politics of memory. Two basic phenomena observed as concerns events and heroes of the past are remembering and forgetting.⁴⁴ These are simply the natural processes of the human mind, which, efficiently used, may be highly useful in all types of political activity. It is interesting to ask whether it is possible to extrapolate individual ability to

⁴³ See R. L. Siegel, "Transitional Justice: A Decade of Debate and Experience," *Human Rights Quarterly* 20 (1998): 433; J. Piechowiak-Lamparska, "Dependence Path in the Process of Achieving Transitional Justice in the Post-Soviet Area: Comparative Studies on the Transition in Estonia, Georgia, and Poland," *Athenaeum. Polskie Studia Politologiczne* 44 (2014): 164–76, DOI: 10.15804/athena.2014.44.10.

⁴⁴ A. Lewaty, "Zapomnienie jako zjawisko kulturowe—z punktu widzenia polityki i krytyki kultury nowoczesnej," in *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*.

remember and forget onto a community, or whether these processes should still be considered as purely individual. Researchers in memory have not reached a consensus on this issue.⁴⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, one of the precursors of theories on memory, ruled out such a possibility, but the younger generation of researchers already shows greater openness to the alternative answer to this question. Regardless of one's theoretical position on this issue, there is no doubt that one of the basic tasks of the politics of history is to diagnose what should be remembered and what is to be forgotten, and to create a strategy to convince society of the same. This message must be delivered directly using the previously mentioned tools in the form of a ready-made narrative, providing answers to the most-important questions. The mechanism/strategy using human ability to remember and forget was named "historical manipulation" by Joanna Tokarska-Bakir. Such an interpretation is not surprising, especially since manipulation is inherent in all political processes. The author distinguishes two types of such manipulation, in her opinion the most important ones. The first is *suggestio falsi*, understood as communicating an openly false history to the public.⁴⁶ This situation would be typical for authorities in non-democratic systems, though it cannot be ruled out in democracies. The blatant lie of the ruling elite in the latter system is sharply condemned and met with severe consequences, although it would be naive to believe that all cases of such false proclamations are detected and duly punished. The second, much more common mechanism is *suppressio veri*, or the deliberate suppression of remembrance of inconvenient events or characters in the official narrative. It does not consist of the total erasure of specific events from public awareness—this would require other instruments—but a deliberate attempt to stop their memory from emerging as a topic or narrative in the public space.⁴⁷ In Poland after the Second World War, such a process could be observed in the case of the so-called cursed or doomed soldiers, whose myth is now being built up in the public space, with all the possible uncomfortable elements of the narrative removed from the official interpretations.

Four⁴⁸ other mechanisms suggested by Aleida Assmann in the context of attitudes represented by the Germans after the Second World War⁴⁹ can

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ J. Tokarska-Bakir, "Nędza polityki historycznej," 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ The author suggested five, but one of them—silence—has been mentioned above.

⁴⁹ A. Assman, "Pięć strategii wypierania ze świadomości," in M. Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa i kulturowa: Współczesna perspektywa niemiecka*

be added to the above two. Their universalism allows us to generalise them onto processes also observed in other countries. The first is compensation, or activating an event that symbolically cancels out guilt. This instrument is very often used in the politics of history, as covering up past wrongdoings with examples of good deeds is a natural human psychological mechanism, and also functions effectively at the level of a community. A good example of this mechanism in the case of Poland consists of attempts at “making up” for the Kielce pogrom by repeatedly recalling the heroic attitudes of Poles saving a large number of Jews during the Second World War. Reminiscing about the scale of aid offered to the Jewish population during the war is intended to first override guilt, and second diminish the seriousness of the crime.

The second mechanism is externalisation; the term itself was adopted by Aleida Assmann from Rainer M. Lepsius, who used it in describing the attitudes of the representatives of the German Democratic Republic, who put all the blame for the tragedy of the Second World War onto their West German compatriots.⁵⁰ This term signifies attempts at distancing oneself, usually completely, from participation in an event, or transferring responsibility to another person or group, a strategy well known to the Germans. In addition to the original example by Lepsius, the mechanism was employed also when the burden of guilt for tragedy of the War was placed onto the Nazis, a group clearly distinguished in the narrative from ordinary citizens. The Katyń lie, functioning for long in the post-war period, in which the Russians blamed the killings of Polish officers in Katyń on the Germans is another example.

The third mechanism defined by Assmann is exclusion, involving deliberate refusal to allow remembrance of a specific experience. This mechanism involves a curious psychological “trick” of the mind: not seeing certain phenomena means that they do not exist. After all, in order to be able to remember something one needs a memory in the first place. This procedure is regularly used in totalitarian states, and boils down to desensitizing society to certain phenomena, allowing citizens to be mired

(Kraków: Towarzystwo Autorów i Wydawców Prac Naukowych Universitas, 2009), 333–49.

⁵⁰ Por. R. M., Lepsius, “Das Erbe des Nationalsozialismus und die politische Kultur der Nachfolgestaaten des ‘Großdeutschen Reiches’,” in M. Haller, H.-J. Hoffmann-Nowotny, W. Zapf (eds.), *Kultur und Gesellschaft: Verhandlungen des 24. Deutschen Soziologentages, des 11. Österr. Soziologentags und des 8. Kongresses der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Zürich 1988* (Frankfurt am Main, New York: Campus Verlag, 1989).

in lethargy of sorts. The tragedy of communism has been and still is pushed aside by the grotesque, the image of the absurdities of the regime.

The last mechanism of note is distortion, meaning adapting history to fit the desired narrative. The Polish communist authorities after the end of the Second World War used it successfully *inter alia* to re-invent the legends of the Warsaw Uprising, the Home Army, and the Polish Underground State. Initially, the authorities tried to completely exclude these events and institutions from the state narrative, and when that failed they instead started to systematically downplay their importance.⁵¹

The mixing of the politics and history has proven to be—as shown by the experiences of individual countries, including Poland—a very natural phenomenon. As it turns out, it is much more difficult to accept this fact as a reality. After all, even if we accept objective arguments telling us that the politics of history is just another type of policy, the same as a fiscal, social, or foreign policy, as it also uses specialised institutions legally established by the state and operating in accordance with the law, with the help of official clerical staff, it still touches upon a highly sensitive matter and brings out emotions. This approach, despite its flaws, is undoubtedly cautious and safe, as from the point of view of a scientist it allows for the creation of a model within a specific research category. Assuming the research method and procedure adopted are correctly followed, one can say with a high degree of probability that the results obtained will be objective. As noted above, however, this subject matter is highly sensitive and emotionally charged, which cause considerable communication chaos in the public sphere where the concept of the politics of history functions in parallel. The term itself also has strong negative connotations, which makes a constructive discussion on the role and place of the past in the present at least difficult, if not impossible. Overcoming this impasse currently seems very difficult, if not entirely unattainable.

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⁵¹ B. Korzeniewski, *Transformacja pamięci. Przewartościowania w pamięci przeszłości a wybrane aspekty funkcjonowania dyskursu publicznego o przeszłości w Polsce po 1989 roku* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskiego Towarzystwa Przyjaciół Nauk, 2010), 82–101.

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