

Anna Ratke-Majewska

Conflict of Memories

The Case of Poland Under the Rule of
the Law and Justice Party



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Edited by Maciej Serowaniec

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Introduction

Collective memory is a dynamic and often contentious social construct that plays a key role in shaping the national identity and the politics of memory in contemporary states. Conflicts of memories, understood as clashes of different narratives of the past, represent one of the most significant areas of contemporary political, cultural, and social disputes. With a particularly complex history, Poland is not exempt from these tensions. On the contrary, especially during times of political polarization, these conflicts become a major focus of public debate.

This monograph aims to analyze the conflict of memories in Poland within the context of the Law and Justice party's rule (2005–2010 and 2015–2025). These years represent crucial moments in the development and shaping of state memory politics, as well as in the intensification of disputes regarding the past. An important research question is how the party's governments influenced the dominant narratives of memory and what mechanisms contributed to the exacerbation of conflicts over the past. Particular attention is given to three areas of memory that have become central to the politics of memory of the Law and Justice party: the Warsaw Uprising, the Cursed Soldiers, and Polish-Jewish relations during World War II.

This analysis is based on research methods that allow for a comprehensive understanding of both the structure of narratives of memory and the dynamics of their interactions. The research reveals that the politics of memory under the Law and Justice government not only promoted specific narratives but also deepened divisions within Polish society by selectively highlighting certain aspects of history while marginalizing or delegitimizing others.

Although this monograph focuses only on selected areas of memory, it aims to thoroughly address the conflict of memories in Poland in recent decades. It is not just an analysis of the politics of memory as a tool wielded by authorities but also a reflection on its impacts on social and historical awareness as well as the formation of collective identity. Through detailed case studies, this study demonstrates how varying interpretations of the past can become part of po-

litical, social, and cultural disputes and the mechanisms that lead to their perpetuation and reinforcement.

I. The significance of the Law and Justice party's rule in the conflict of memories: an introduction to the issue

Conflict of memories from a definitional perspective

A conflict (derived from the Latin word *conflictus*, meaning collision) is, at its core, a clash, a contradiction, or a divergence between two parties. It embodies a unique form of interaction, distinct from competition or rivalry. Conflict emerges when distinct goals, needs, values, perspectives, attitudes, or concepts collide with an irreconcilable dissimilarity that engenders disputes. In essence, conflict arises when interdependent parties hold divergent stances, which are inextricable, and the objectives chosen by these parties cannot be attained without involvement or agreement from the opposing side. This situation leads to a mutual impasse that obstructs realizing their aspirations.¹ The concept of conflict is frequently elucidated in direct correlation to individuals who partake in it. In such instances, conflict is understood as “the simultaneous emergence of opposing aspirations among individuals or collectives of people (such as groups, communities, nations), prompted by the endangerment or actual diminishment of opportunities for one party by the other,”² as well as “the divergent attitudes of the two parties toward specific values.”³ It’s noteworthy to add that conflict can also manifest in an intrapersonal manner as an internal state of contradiction within an individual. This occurs when a person experiences two disparate needs

1 Anatol Bodanko/Piotr Kowolik: *Konflikty w świetle teorii psychologicznych*, in: *Nauczyciel i Szkoła* 3–4 (2007), pp. 81–98; Clinton F. Fink: *Some Conceptual Difficulties in the Theory of Social Conflict*, in: *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 12/4 (1968), pp. 348–397; Raymond W. Mack/Richard C. Snyder: *The Analysis of Social Conflict—Toward an Overview and Synthesis*, in: *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 1/2 (1957), pp. 212–248; Stuart M. Schmidt/Thomas A. Kochan: *Conflict: Toward Conceptual Clarity*, in: *Administrative Science Quarterly* 17/3 (1972), pp. 359–370.

2 Zofia Frączek: *Konflikty w rodzinie i propozycje ich rozwiązywania*, in: *Kultura—Przemiany—Edukacja* 6 (2018), p. 141.

3 *Ibid.*

that cannot be satisfied concurrently or when conflicting urges to act arise within the same individual.⁴

It is widely believed that conflicts among individuals are inevitable and constitute an integral part of life within a community. However, conflict can also be examined without referencing individuals or groups in the context of various phenomena and processes, where precisely these elements are encompassed as its components. Considering the considerations highlighted above, what then defines a conflict of memories? This concept could be best described as a clash of diverse memories, the expression of which emerges through a collision of various narratives of memory centered around the same thematic sphere related to the past or a preceding event present within memory. The aforementioned narratives of memory, in turn, encapsulate stories about past events, serving as dual expressions of their authors' memories and tools for shaping the memory content within their recipients. These narratives must be defined as the result of an interpretation of the past, familiar to their creators through personal experience or cultural engagement. As a result, they mirror all the characteristics inherent to memory, encompassing its transience, susceptibility to fallibility, bias, and selectivity. Concurrently, they arise from memory's narrative nature, enabling the recall of memory's contents in narrative forms, thus allowing for modifications and enrichments through these narrative mechanisms. This leads to the conclusion that for a comprehensive study of the conflict of memories (which themselves are narrative structures), a precise focus on the narratives, that is, the parties to the conflict, is essential.⁵

It is also noteworthy to consider that the conflict of memories can manifest, on the one hand, between individual and collective memory and, on the other, within a singular category, between the memories of distinct collectives (including the memories of two nations regarding a singular event, or between the memory of a local community and the memory of a broader national collective to which the former belongs), as well as among diverse individuals. Moreover, the very existence of particular narratives of memory holds significance, and the strength of their internalization becomes evident through their frequent occurrence and multiple reiterations within the community. Furthermore, the greater the frequency with which a specific account surfaces, the higher the likelihood of its replication in subsequent narratives. This confers particular

4 Ibid, pp. 141–142.

5 Anna Ratke-Majewska: *Konflikt pamięci. Polska po przemianach systemowych 1989 roku*, Zielona Góra 2022, pp. 65–70. See also: Aleida Assmann: *Między historią a pamięcią. Antologia*, Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (ed.), Warszawa 2013, pp. 48–49; Maurice Halbwachs: *Spoleczne ramy pamięci*, Warszawa 1969, pp. 55–57; Jacques Le Goff: *Historia i pamięć*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 25–26.

perspectives a pivotal advantage over alternative interpretations, relegating the latter to the periphery of public discourse.⁶

It is worth adding that considerations of the conflict of memories do not imply an exclusive analysis of the politics of memory, although the latter, as one of the detailed policies of the state, also constructs narratives of memory that participate in the ongoing conflict. Why, then, is the study of the conflict of memories important for understanding the sociopolitical condition of the community?

The significance of delving into the conflict of memories, and concurrently, the importance of comprehending it, is primarily determined by the phenomenon whereby holders of a specific memory of an event (regardless of whether they remember the event because they lived through it or remembered it due to adopting an existing cultural stance on its progression) become, in their perception, arbiters of the truth about a particular segment of the past. Thus, memory begins to be treated as possessing the attributes of objective history, and proponents of successive interpretations build their identity (and also the envisaged identity of, for instance, an entire nation) around specific memory contents. The conflict of memories can thus evolve into a complex dispute within societies, influencing intrastate and international relations.

Why are the years of rule by the Law and Justice party relevant to researching the conflict of memories?

The response to the question above can be found within the politics of memory of this faction. While it has already been stated that the politics of memory, by constructing narratives, constitute merely a part rather than the embodiment of the conflict of memories, it remains consequential in the course of this conflict. The intensification of narratives of memory in connection with the conduct of politics does not go unnoticed. It serves as a response to specific societal needs and as a catalyst for specific (both favorable and unfavorable) reactions. The conflict of memories with the rule of the Law and Justice (Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS) has thus become more conspicuous. The emergence of demands and commentaries within state institutions about Poland's past has stimulated many positions, contributing to social discourse and becoming an integral part of societal life.

Therefore, this monograph primarily examines 2005–2010 and the period after 2015 (alongside the preceding period of PiS's popularity-building, which resulted in electoral outcomes). In 2005, the Law and Justice party secured victory

6 Anna Ratke-Majewska: *Konflikt pamięci...*, p. 70.

in parliamentary and presidential elections (in the second round, Lech Kaczyński overcame Donald Tusk). In 2007, another parliamentary election was held due to the adoption by the Sejm of the Republic of Poland of a resolution to shorten the term of office. PiS no longer gained the majority. However, Lech Kaczyński continued to be the President (until the Smolensk air disaster on April 10, 2010). In 2015, the Law and Justice candidate Andrzej Duda became President of the Republic of Poland. The parliamentary elections also resulted in a PiS victory. The next elections of 2019 brought a victory for PiS in the Sejm, while the second presidential term of Andrzej Duda began in 2020 (he won in the second round, in which he defeated Rafał Trzaskowski).⁷ In the 2023 parliamentary elections, the Law and Justice party gained the highest result among the other parties, however, not allowing it to rule on its own. With no coalition partner, PiS thus lost government to earlier opposition parties.⁸ At that time, Andrzej Duda was still the President of the Republic of Poland, so the research process presented in this monograph also considered the end of 2023, the year 2024, and the beginning of 2025. This was due to the cognitive relevance of the narratives being conducted then.

What societal needs did the politics of memory pursued by the PiS party address? Scholarly and journalistic analyses indicate that these largely stemmed from post-transitional exclusion, a form of marginalization that has occurred since the systemic transition initiated in 1989 in Poland. Firstly, these needs were linked to frustration from attempts to emulate Western norms. This disappointment arose when entering the realm of liberal democracy and capitalism, which did not fulfill societal hopes. Secondly, these needs were connected to the emergence and persistence of disparities in living standards, which were associated with the ability to navigate new circumstances. Attributing blame for one's difficulties to those who experienced setbacks during the transformation process led to the stigmatization of significant societal groups. The intergenerational transmission of poverty was frequently attributed to a lack of "civilizational competencies." People deprived of these competencies were believed to be responsible for their absence. As a result, the issue of inequality did not take center stage in political discourse for many years after 1989, fostering a sense of alie-

7 See: Państwowa Komisja Wyborcza: *Wybory do Sejmu i do Senatu*, <https://pkw.gov.pl/wybory-i-referenda/wybory-do-sejmu-i-do-senatu>, [last accessed 17.06.2024]; *ibid.*: *Wybory Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, <https://pkw.gov.pl/wybory-i-referenda/wybory-prezydenta-rzeczypospolitej-polskiej>, [last accessed 17.06.2024].

8 Wojciech Kość: *Poland's opposition parties reach coalition agreement*, <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-donald-tusk-civic-coalition-opposition-parties-reach-agreement/>, [last accessed 19.06.2024]; Izabela Kacprzak: *Opozycja blisko władzy. PiS wygrał wybory, ale je przegrał*, <https://www.rp.pl/wybory/art39277501-opozycja-blisko-wladzy-pis-wygral-wybor-ale-je-przegral>, [last accessed 19.06.2024].

nation from the “liberal elites.” The conviction of the incompatibility between Western models and the intergenerational sense of humiliation, helplessness, and alienation thus generated a need among those wearied by this state to take pride in what is genuinely Polish, unimitated, benign, and homely. Narratives of memory, highlighting the uniqueness of Polish heroic roots, became one way to satisfy this need.⁹

What was the activation mentioned above in the sphere of politics of memory of the Law and Justice party, associated at its inception with the figure of Lech Kaczyński, consisted of? The opening of the Warsaw Rising Museum in 2004 is considered a milestone event. At the time, the mayor of Warsaw was Lech Kaczyński, who—by leading the creation of this institution established many years earlier (in 1983)—initiated the realization of the concept of commemoration he had promoted. After becoming President of the Republic of Poland in 2005, he, in turn, began to realize his idea of the politics of memory on a national scale.¹⁰ Since then, it is possible to speak of a noticeable growth in the Polish public sphere of the strength, number, and popularity of narratives of memory affirming selected aspects of the past. Therefore, the indicated two events (the opening of the Museum and the election victory of the Law and Justice party) have often been considered as marking the prelude to the political success of the subject of memory in the political sphere (that is, for some, constituting the starting point of the politics of memory in Poland, termed “politics of history” in narratives of PiS).

In addition, the program assumptions of the Law and Justice party from 2005 are worth noting. On the issue of “politics of history,” the election program was written as follows:

We intend [...] to pursue an active politics of history. It is to present in a modern way the liberating merits of Poland in the fight against Nazi and Communist totalitarianism. [...] We will pursue a thoughtful, effective politics of history both internally and externally.

Internal politics of history implies constant concern for the quality of historical education in schools and the media, as well as continuous efforts to commemorate the history of our state and nation and keep it alive in the consciousness of citizens. It is essential to support research programs and educational projects that disseminate knowledge about our past and institutions that document and popularize history.

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- 9 Michał Buchowski: *Pogardzani. Od Homo sovieticus przez “moherowe berety” do “fantomowych migrantów”*, in: Jacek Kołtan/Grzegorz Piotrowski (eds.), *Kontrrewolucja u bram*, Gdańsk 2020, pp. 99–100; Jacek Kołtan/Grzegorz Piotrowski: *O kontrrewolucji u bram*, in: Jacek Kołtan/Grzegorz Piotrowski (eds.), *Kontrrewolucja u bram*, Gdańsk 2020, pp. 20–29.
- 10 Maciej Gach: *Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego—miejsce uczące Polaków szacunku do własnej historii*, <https://histmag.org/Muzeum-Powstania-Warszawskiego-miejsce-uczace-Polakow-szacunku-do-wlasnej-historii-19128>, [last accessed 20.06.2024]; Anna Ratke-Majewska: *Konflikt pamięci...*, p. 79.

The external aspect of the politics of history includes all activities aimed at popularizing outside Poland's borders, particularly significant facts about our history. Poland played a unique role in the 20th-century history of the struggle against criminal totalitarian systems. Meanwhile, we are currently dealing with attempts to relativize responsibility for causing World War II and the crimes committed during it. [...]

We will restore proper prominence to efforts to preserve the national heritage. Understood not only as caring for monuments of material culture but also as conducting politics of history and providing proper historical education so that the nation does not forget its roots.¹¹

The postulate of “active politics of history” while providing for the “presentation of merits,” “concern for the quality of historical education,” “dissemination of knowledge about our past,” or “popularization of particularly significant facts of our history,” also promised to promote through political actions affirmative narratives of memory, that is, those praising the past achievements of the Polish nation. However, an even more significant turning point regarding the prevalence of affirmative narratives in politics (regarding explicitly designated topics) was the 2015 victories of the Law and Justice party.

This is because the affirmative narratives about past times after 2015 were primarily intended to arouse a sense of pride in Poles, descendants of great deeds, and individuals exceptional to the world's fate. This direction was announced in 2013 by the Law and Justice leader Jarosław Kaczyński, who noted during his party's congress in Sosnowiec:

We will conduct politics of history—consistent; consistent defense of Polish interests, the truth about Poland [...]. [...] In short, it is a new, active politics of history focused on defending Polish dignity and national interest. It is closely related to educational policy because the formation of the identity of young Poles [...] must be based not on shame—as is done today—but on dignity and pride.¹²

Referring to the “pedagogy of shame” category, he further pointed to the remedy for the social need to feel satisfied with themselves as Poles, which was to become a glorious past—heroism, honor, exceptional path, and unique fate. The previously politically unrepresented groups of the Polish population, seeking self-esteem and needing self-respect, thus gained a chance—through the memory of the past—to obtain the dignity demanded. This was offered to them.

The Law and Justice Party's 2014 Program highlighted similar elements. The document pointed out:

11 Serwis wyborczy. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość: *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość. Program 2005. IV Rzeczypospolita: Sprawiedliwość dla Wszystkich*, <http://www.wybory2005.pis.org.pl/program.php>, pp. 49, 110, 111, [last accessed 21.06.2024].

12 Dzieje.pl: *Kaczyński zapowiada aktywną politykę historyczną*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/kaczynski-zapowiada-aktywna-polityke-historyczna>, [last accessed 21.06.2024].

Polish foreign policy will undertake initiatives for a positive and reliable image of Poland in the world and combat all manifestations of lies and stereotypes that hurt our state and nation and mislead international opinion. For this purpose, we will significantly increase funding for the activities of Polish cultural institutions abroad and reorganize Poland's soft presence globally by launching new instruments to support Polish culture and studying the Polish language abroad. Still, we will also take decisive legal action against all those who insult the good name of Poland and Poles through lies and stereotypical slanders. An element of this endeavor will be the rapid institutionalization and intensive implementation of Polish politics of history in its international aspect.¹³

The position promoting higher activity towards specific memory contents (promoting pride and a good image of Poland) was also confirmed during the Program Convention of the Law and Justice and the United Right, held under the motto "Thinking Poland" in July 2015. The Law and Justice politician Jarosław Sellin noted then:

One of the state's most important tasks is to conduct a systemic politics of history. This is what every serious state does. It is necessary to end claims that history should be left only to historians and that we should focus only on the future. There must be an end to the dominance of pedagogy of shame and anti-patriotic revisionism in stories about our history. A wise politics of history should maintain pride in our past and achievements, on which national and social bonds are built, and promote our point of view on evaluations of the past in dialogue with other nations.¹⁴

What is the focus of this monograph?

The question thus arises as to which directions of stories about the past the Law and Justice party governments pay special attention to. The answer appears to be straightforward: to those narratives that instilled a sense of national pride and enhanced the reputation of the Polish state. However, it is important to note that among these issues were topics that could be described as "flagship" for PiS. During the 2005–2010 period, the theme of the Warsaw Uprising emerged as a prominent feature of the "politics of history" pursued by the Law and Justice party. Following 2015, the primary area of political construction of the nation's identity based on the past became the topic of the Cursed Soldiers. Additionally, the Law and Justice party considered the issue of Polish-Jewish relations during

13 Prawo i Sprawiedliwość: *Program Prawa i Sprawiedliwości 2014*, <https://pis.org.pl/media/download/528ca7b35234fd7dba8c1e567fe729741baaaf33.pdf>, p. 156, [last accessed 21.06.2024].

14 Prawo i Sprawiedliwość: *Mysłąc Polska. Konwencja Programowa Prawa i Sprawiedliwości oraz zjednoczonej prawicy. Katowice, 3–5 Lipca 2015 r. Materiały konferencyjne*, <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/konwencja-programowa-prawa-i-sprawiedliwosci-oraz-zjednoczonej-prawicy-myslac-polska>, p. 112, [last accessed 23.06.2024].

World War II to be important in shaping a “politics of history” throughout both periods of governance. Although the faction mentioned above frequently referenced many other subjects of Poland’s historical legacy, these three areas consistently occupied a central position in the political discourse of its members. Consequently, these topics also became the focal point of impassioned public debates, where opposing perspectives were articulated with heightened intensity. The proliferation and diversity of historical narratives constructed and perpetuated during these periods enabled the observation of an enduring conflict within the collective memory of Polish society.

Thus, the subject of the analyses presented in this book became three areas of memory, within the boundaries of which the conflict of memories was examined. These were the Warsaw Uprising, the Cursed Soldiers, and the Poles towards Jews during World War II. The essential periods studied were 2005–2010 and 2015–2025. In each case discussed, however, the considerations carried out took into account the background of narratives of memory (which were very often extreme and inconsistent) formulated later during the years of the Law and Justice government.

To address the primary research question—specifically, how the conflict of memories was shaped in Poland during the tenure of the Law and Justice Party, with particular reference to the three aforementioned areas of memory—a range of complementary and interrelated research methods was necessary.

The first of these was the conflict mapping method. This method is used to understand the system in which the conflict occurs and is designed to reflect the complexity of the situation by depicting the interrelationships between the various parties involved, their actions, and behavioral mechanisms. It takes into account the context of the conflict, its causes and effects, the positions of the participants, and their interrelations and actions. Therefore, during the research, this method was employed to clarify the situation by focusing on the most critical components of conflict dynamics.

The second method, crucial for conducting the presented considerations, was a statistical descriptive analysis. This method provided the most accurate presentation of the events surrounding the narratives of memory in Poland, shaping the background and circumstances of their formulation.

Another research method was the analysis of narrative structures. This method’s principles facilitated the identification of the morphological components of narratives of memory, allowing for the exploration of arrangements that generate specific meanings and fulfill specific functions. In other words, the analysis of narrative structures enabled an examination of the individual elements of narratives of memory (distinguishing the preparatory part, the core part, and the part expressing reflection, moral, or evaluation) to identify the tasks they perform.

The final method employed during the research was content analysis. This method revealed the goals, attitudes, and values underlying the narratives of memory, influencing their creators in Polish society—collectives and individuals, including state institutions engaged in the politics of memory, politicians, social organizations, and the media.¹⁵

It is noteworthy that the study, constructed using the indicated methods, enabled the presentation of the specifics of the subject under investigation, thereby revealing its inherent complexity and diversity. Indeed, the conflict of memories represents a socially significant phenomenon that affects the behavior of individuals and communities of all sizes. This conflict is ubiquitous in contemporary discourse, manifesting in the pages of newspapers, various forms of online content, scholarly debates, formal addresses, and private discussions. The conflict of memories plays a significant role in shaping political identity and the sense of national affiliation. It influences the character of the community and its stance toward the “other,” prompting collective engagement or impeding it. Furthermore, it influences political decisions and is manifested in disputes of varying kinds. It is, therefore, imperative that this phenomenon be given due attention and that a comprehensive understanding of it be sought to gain insight into the intricate dynamics of the contemporary sociopolitical landscape.

15 See among others: Simon Fisher/Dekha Ibrahim Abdi/Jawed Ludin/Richard Smith/Sue Williams/Steven Williams: *Working With Conflict: Skills and Strategies for Action*, London–New York 2000; Joanna Maria Garbula: *Teksty narracyjne uczniów w świetle morfologii Władimira Proppa*, in: *Problemy Wczesnej Edukacji/Issues in Early Education* 1/44 (2019), pp. 87–93; Łukasz Jochemczyk: *Transformacja konfliktów*, in: Jan Szomburg/Marcin Skrzypek (eds.): *Czy konflikt może być dobrem wspólnym?*, Gdańsk 2014, <https://www.kongresobywatelski.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/wis-55.pdf>, pp. 19–20 [last accessed 25.06.2024]; Matthew B. Miles/ Michael A. Huberman: *Analiza danych jakościowych*, Białystok 2000; Dušan Ondrušek/Boris Strečanský/Zuza Fialová (eds.): *Value-Based Conflicts in the Regions Between the Oder and the Danube. Mapping Study and Good Practices*, Bratislava 2018, <https://ennd.eu/document/value-based-conflicts-regions-between-oder-and-danube>, p. 7 [last accessed 25.06.2024].

II. Conflict of memories in the area of the Warsaw Uprising

Background to the narratives of memory functioning under the Law and Justice rule

The subject of the Warsaw Uprising (that is, the armed uprising, which lasted from August 1 to October 3, 1944, militarily directed against German troops occupying Warsaw and organized by the Home Army)¹⁶ had already been a troublesome issue for the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland since the end of World War II. On the one hand, they had to consider the sacrifices of the insurgents, which were present in the numerous accounts of direct witnesses to the events. On the other hand, the authorities could not ignore both the fact that the Warsaw Uprising was politically aimed at the Soviet Union (intended to stop the Sovietization of Poland in case of victory) and the fact that the Soviet side halted its offensive after the start of the Uprising, failing to help the insurgents. Thus, the official memory of the Warsaw Uprising could neither disappear completely nor accommodate criticism of the Soviet Union. For this reason, the way of recounting the Uprising, promoted by the authorities in the People's Republic of Poland, relied on political and moral discrediting and presenting events in a fragmentary, usually manipulated form. Accounts and interpretations not connected with the circles of power, in turn, had to either rise to the heights of caution or pass into unofficial circulation.¹⁷

16 Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK) or Armed Forces for Poland (Siły Zbrojne w Kraju, SZK), cryptonym: Polski Związek Powstańczy (Polish Uprising Association, PZP) was the conspiratorial armed forces of the Polish Underground State (that is, the secret structures of the Polish state) during World War II. The AK operated in the territory of occupied Poland and was an integral part of the Polish Armed Forces, subordinated to the Commander-in-Chief. See: Virtual Shtetl: *Home Army*, <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/glossary/home-army>, [last accessed 26.06.2024].

17 Jacek Z. Sawicki: *Najdłuższa bitwa Peerelu. Powstanie Warszawskie w propagandzie i pamięci*, <http://wiesz.com.pl/2017/08/01/najdluzsza-bitwa-peerelu-powstanie-warszawskie-w-propagandzie-i-pamieci/>, [last accessed 26.06.2024]; Mateusz Wojtalik: *Powstanie war-*

Official narratives on the Warsaw Uprising from the People's Republic of Poland period maintained the division between a self-sacrificing people and an evil command that was led by its actions to defeat. However, the origin of such a depiction dates back to 1944. After the establishment of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polish: Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, PKWN), a decision was made to intensify propaganda attacks against the Home Army command, aiming to discredit it and isolate it from society. Criticism of the Warsaw Uprising began in the second half of August 1944.¹⁸ As a result, "Rzeczpospolita," which was the press organ of the PKWN, reported in an article from August 24, 1944:

The tragic incidents of fighting in Warsaw [...] have shown in the light of facts the terrible truth. [...] The tragic Warsaw card is a pre-mortem act of the Sanation,¹⁹ wishing to return to power at the price of the heroism of the people who were misled. The Home Army command, composed of Sanation bankrupts, pushed the vulnerable people against tanks and heavy artillery, against aviation, and SS units. This shameful card of the Sanation, masking itself behind the back of the so-called Home Army Command, becomes clear to all honest officers and soldiers of this organization.²⁰

Therefore, during and immediately after the Warsaw Uprising, the command of the Home Army was consistently depreciated. Narratives were highlighted indicating that the outbreak of the Uprising aimed to: restore pre-war governments and relations; cede power to the reactionaries and Sanation; lead to civil war; exacerbate and complicate Polish-Soviet relations; undermine, or at least weaken, the unity of the three Allied powers; and combat democracy in Poland.²¹

It should be noted that in the subsequent years of the People's Republic of Poland, the consistent goal of the authorities remained to impose their own interpretations of the events and motives surrounding the Warsaw Uprising. Additionally, equally important were efforts to erase the memory of the Uprising from public consciousness as much as possible. The most intensive efforts to diminish the legend of the Warsaw Uprising within Polish society occurred during the Stalinist Period. From 1945 to 1946, the focus was primarily on promoting the regime's narratives, while from 1947 to 1954, the emphasis shifted to

szawskie w PRL-u, <https://www.newsweek.pl/wiedza/historia/powstanie-warszawskie-w-prl-podreczniki-polska-ludowa-newsweekpl/n67zw01>, [last accessed 26.06.2024].

18 Mariusz Mazur: *Propaganda komunistyczna wobec Armii Krajowej w latach 1943–1955*, in: *Dzieje Najnowsze* 47/1 (2015), p. 63.

19 The Sanation is the term used to describe the ruling camp in the Second Polish Republic in 1926–1939, established and functioning initially under the leadership of Józef Piłsudski. See: Włodzimierz Suleja: *Rządy sanacji*, <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/tematy/sanacja/81347,Rzady-sanacji.html>, [last accessed 27.06.2024].

20 *Na pomoc Warszawie*, in: *Rzeczpospolita*. Organ Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego 22 (24.08.1944), p. 1.

21 Mariusz Mazur: *Propaganda komunistyczna wobec Armii Krajowej...*, p. 63.

suppressing the story of the Uprising. The fight against the emerging awareness of the Warsaw Uprising was manifested during the Stalinist Period by both the activity of the censors and the “war of the graves” (the idea was to counteract the expansion of the quarters of the Home Army units in the Powązki Military Cemetery, whose growing number highlighted, contrary to propaganda, the insignificance of the People’s Army²² for the course of the Uprising). Great efforts were also made by the authorities to silence the anniversary celebrations, hinder grassroots commemoration, and prevent the creation of a monument evoking the memory of the Uprising. Meanwhile, mentions of the 1944 Warsaw battles, appearing in the government or national press, became an opportunity to criticize the Home Army and the Polish authorities in exile.²³

Similar narratives appeared in school textbooks (such as the book published in 1951 entitled *History of Poland*, the first history textbook covering World War II, whose authors were Gryzelda Missalowa and Janina Schoenbrenner).²⁴ On the other hand, if direct political accusations (aimed at the London government, the possessing class, or its specific representatives) were renounced, the focus was on suffering. References to politics were then often presented in the form of suggestions. For example, for the first anniversary of the Uprising, writer Jerzy Andrzejewski wrote in “Przekrój” magazine:

Aside from Poland, there is likely no other nation in the world where people have died for such great and enduring values while simultaneously being constrained by such evil and misguided politics. If we were to allow our attitude toward the past to be dictated by the criteria of political correctness, we would need to dismantle many legends and erase from more than one grave the symbols of heroism and sacrifice. We would then often have to repeat: here lie individuals who gave their lives unnecessarily.²⁵

22 People’s Army (Polish: Armia Ludowa, AL) was an underground military organization formed on January 1, 1944. It was an armed formation of the Polish Workers’ Party (Polish: Polska Partia Robotnicza, PPR). Its task was anti-German diversion in favor of the Red Army, participation in organizing and defending the system of government created by the PPR and helping to seize power in the liberated territories. See: Virtual Shtetl: *People’s Army (Armia Ludowa)*, <https://sztetl.org.pl/en/glossary/peoples-army-armia-ludowa>, [last accessed 28.06.2024].

23 Marcin Napiórkowski: *Powstanie umarłych. Historia pamięci 1944–2014*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 137–198; Jacek Z. Sawicki: *Najdłuższa bitwa Peerelu...* See also: Hubert Koziel: *Armia Ludowa w powstaniu warszawskim*, <https://www.rp.pl/historia-polski/art38902161-armia-ludowa-w-powstaniu-warszawskim>, [last accessed 28.06.2024].

24 See: Gryzelda Missalowa/Janina Schoenbrenner: *Historia Polski. Materiały pomocnicze dla klasy IV*, Warszawa 1951.

25 Jerzy Andrzejewski: *W pierwszą rocznicę*, in: *Przekrój* 16 (29.07.1945), p. 6.

After these words, he pointed out: “We carry not only our own lives but also the deaths of others. Having lost millions of people, we have received to affirm the freedom and dignity for which they died.”²⁶

Furthermore, it’s important to mention an article that generated significant controversy in the mid-1940s. That text was entitled *National Reckonings* (Polish: *Porachunki narodowe*) and was published in 1945 in the weekly magazine “Tygodnik Powszechny.” Its author, Stefan Kisielewski, emphasized that the tragedy of the Warsaw Uprising was in fact the tragedy of Warsaw’s youth, pushed to fight by “psychological necessity” and misunderstood honor.²⁷ The author highlighted:

Like our other uprisings, the Warsaw Uprising was not an act of mature manhood but an act of impatience, of youthful incontinence. That is why it brought harm to the fundamental axiom of patriotism, which is the existence of the nation above all else.²⁸

Thus, disputes over the balance of the Warsaw Uprising began immediately after it ended, although conflicting opinions about the decision to undertake the struggle were formed while it was still in progress. Moreover, criticism of its outbreak did not always stem from the authorities. Voices of dissent also emerged unrelated to the regime’s requirements in intellectual or journalistic circles, both in Poland and abroad.²⁹

After the death of Joseph Stalin, commemorations of anniversaries of the Warsaw Uprising continued to be under the protection of the services. The Thaw, however, brought a certain relief (evident in 1954–1957 and especially after October 1956). At that time, in the wave of political changes, the past was discussed slightly more openly, although the topic of the Uprising continued to be subjected to strict control and ultimately served to legitimize the authorities. It was possible to talk about the heroism of regular soldiers, liaison officers, and juvenile insurgents, but necessarily adding that they were used for a politically unjust cause. Thus, the authorities’ attitude towards former members of the independence underground, including those who fought in the Uprising, did not change dramatically, and the fight against the strengthening myth of the Warsaw

26 Ibid.

27 Andrzej Brzeziecki: *Wewnątrz rozdwójni*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/wewnetrznie-rozdwójni-123687>, [last accessed 29.06.2024].

28 As cited in: *ibid.*

29 Dariusz Gawin: *Powstanie Warszawskie a powojenne spory o kształt polskiego patriotyzmu*, <http://www.polskietradycje.pl/artykuly/widok/381>, [last accessed 29.06.2024]; Mariusz Jaroński: *66. rocznica Powstania Warszawskiego*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/66-rocznica-powstania-warszawskiego>, [last accessed 29.06.2024]; Paweł Ukielski: *Spór o Powstanie Warszawskie. Najgorętsza debata toczyła się na emigracji*, <https://www.rp.pl/Powstanie-Warszawskie/307269967-Spor-o-Powstanie-Warszawskie-Najgorętsza-debata-toczyła-sie-na-emigracji.html>, [last accessed 29.06.2024].

military action intensified again in the late 1950s. However, the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland no longer sought to eliminate the emerging narratives but to subordinate them to their vision. Censorship countered excessive popularization of the Home Army's struggle or objectivity in the presentation of events and figures (that is, descriptions that lacked political assessments), and anniversary commemorations were attempted to be reduced to a local dimension.³⁰

In the 1970s, the confrontational attitude of the People's Republic of Poland authorities toward the Uprising softened. Meanwhile, the sustained narratives on World War II pushed the issue of fighting in Warsaw out of the ranks of the most popular topics in the area of Poland's recent history. However, this does not mean that the issue of the Warsaw Uprising disappeared from the discourse. On the contrary, it was enriched by, among other things, new publications, including those from the "second publishing circuit" (i.e., underground publications without approval for distribution by the Main Office for the Control of the Press, Publications, and Public Performances, and since 1981, the Main Office for the Control of the Publications and Public Performances). Therefore, the issue of the Uprising gained the status of a topic integrating opposition circles at that time. The subject of the 1944 Warsaw fights was featured in the independent magazine "Tygodnik Solidarność," published since April 1981. Commemorating the Warsaw Uprising also became an essential point of consolidation for oppositionists during martial law in Poland (1981–1983), being a particularly significant way of expressing the political views relevant to them.³¹ It is worth quoting the words of cultural semiotician Marcin Napiórkowski, referring to the construction of opposition identity in the People's Republic of Poland, in which the author noted:

Among the events commemorated by the opposition, the Katyń Massacre and the Warsaw Uprising were particularly important. Throughout the People's Republic of Poland, these two events referred to each other in a seemingly surprising way. Through them and in their perspective, other historical facts were also evoked. The Polish-Bolshevik war became in oppositional memory a prefiguration of the Uprising, while the Katyń Massacre appeared as revenge for the 1920 victory. The Stalinist terror, on the other hand, represents a repetition of Katyń, which affects the heroes of the Uprising

30 Marcin Napiórkowski: *Powstanie umarłych...*, pp. 191–238; Jacek Z. Sawicki: *Najdłuższa bitwa Peerelu...*; Bartosz Wójcik: *PRL opowiada o Powstaniu*, <https://klubjagiellonski.pl/2015/08/02/prl-opowiada-o-powstaniu/>, [last accessed 29.06.2024].

31 Wanda Kiedrzyńska: *Powstanie warszawskie w książce i prasie. Poradnik bibliograficzny*, Warszawa 1972; Marcin Napiórkowski: *Powstanie umarłych...*, p. 287; Jacek Z. Sawicki: *Najdłuższa bitwa Peerelu...*; Katarzyna Utracka: *Walka o pamięć Powstania Warszawskiego*, <https://warsawinstitute.org/pl/walka-o-pamiec-powstania-warszawskiego/>, [last accessed 30.06.2024]. See also: Eugeniusz Olczyk: *Druga wojna światowa w świadomości współczesnych Polaków*, Warszawa 1978.

with particular cruelty. Similar examples of symbolic connections could be multiplied. [...] Oppositional memory practices thus propose a vision of history within which the continuity of the independence movement from the 19th century to the contemporary opposition to communism is preserved. The struggle in 1918, 1944, and 1988 turns out to be the same struggle. Similarly, the victims of the Katyń Massacre, the Stalinist terror, and the pacification of strikes in the 1980s fall into one category of martyrs.³²

The above considerations show that the narratives sustained by the opposition were very expressive. Thus, it would seem evident that the transformation in Poland became their success. However, this is an illusory impression. Although the start of the democratic transition in 1989 provided an opportunity to detach the narratives of the Uprising (previously held by the opposition) from the opposition, without oppositional activity these narratives largely lost their meaning, at least in the form used previously. This was because symbolic links were no longer needed to build resistance. Maintaining the memory of the continuity of the struggle for independence (even though it could be crowned with the declaration of victory, that is, the achievement of the goal of a free and democratic Poland) was the narrative too weak, especially in the face of the economic collapse and severe pauperization of society in the era of changes. In the opening year of the transition, the anti-system potential of the story of an independence uprising in Warsaw was exhausted, and no new one was created in its place for several more years.³³

The first significant signs of the creation of new narratives of memory concerning the Uprising were observed in 1994, in the context of the 50th anniversary of the event. For years, the Warsaw Uprising was presented as a defeat and unimaginable suffering, the instigation of which should be treated as a crime. Fifty years later, in the public sphere, it began to be openly pointed out that the Uprising was a victory (in the moral, spiritual dimension), that the struggle was inevitable (also laying the foundation for post-1989 independence), and even as pointed out by then Polish President Lech Wałęsa—was “Polish destiny.” At that time, the public sphere also began to talk about reconciliation (with a difficult past and with other nations). This was a significant change in the area of narratives, but it was too weak in society to speak of a breakthrough.³⁴ Instead, this narrative breakthrough came with the construction of the Warsaw Rising Museum and the years of the first rule of the Law and Justice party.

32 Marcin Napiórkowski: *Powstanie umarłych...*, pp. 292, 293.

33 See: *ibid.*, p. 297.

34 *50. rocznica Powstania Warszawskiego w relacjach prasowych*, in: *Biuletyn Stowarzyszenia Wspólnota Polska* 7/30 (1994), pp. 3–10, <http://wspolnotapolska.org.pl/pismo/1994-007.pdf>, [last accessed 30.06.2024]; Eugeniusz Duraczyński: *Powstanie warszawskie—badań i sporów ciąg dalszy*, in: *Dzieje Najnowsze* 27 (1995), pp. 71–88.

Conflict of memories in the years 2005–2010

The finalization of the Warsaw Rising Museum is considered the founding act of the Law and Justice party's "politics of history" and the heated debates over the importance of the memory of the past for politics, the nation, and society. Preparations for the construction of the Museum at the site of the ruins of the Bank of Poland had been going on since 1984, and in 1994 the groundbreaking ceremony took place (the project did not come into effect due to unclear property rights at the location where the facility was to be built). The situation changed in 2002 when Lech Kaczyński became the mayor of Warsaw and promised to build the object. In 2003, it was decided that the new institution's location would be the historic building of the former Tram Power Plant. The established facility was the first super museum in Poland, whose displays, based on the models of modern museology, used the latest technologies and interactive ways of communication. Influencing all the senses, the designed exhibitions became a powerful tool for affecting visitors (including those of the younger generation).³⁵

The Museum opened a day before the 60th anniversary of the Uprising, on July 31, 2004. In a speech delivered at the facility's opening ceremony, Lech Kaczyński pointed out that the Warsaw Uprising was a great act of independence (which was part of the continuity of the independence movement born in the late 19th and early 20th centuries), as well as an inevitable struggle for freedom and national and human dignity. The Museum was thereby built to pay absolute tribute to the participants of the Uprising. As Lech Kaczyński said:

Thus, the Warsaw Rising Museum is a tribute to all the insurgents, commanders, soldiers, and civilians who supported the Uprising. It is a tribute to the very decision to fight, to how they fought, to the fact that they were perhaps the best soldiers in our nation's thousand-year history, to their unparalleled heroism in battle, but also to their combat prowess, persistence, toughness, and readiness to fight to the end.³⁶

An issue worth particular attention is that the later part of Lech Kaczyński's speech on the occasion of opening the Museum extended the narratives about the continuity of the independence movement to the period after 1989. This was evident in the words:

35 Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego: *Ekspozycja*, <https://www.1944.pl/artykul/ekspozycja,4500.html>, [last accessed 30.06.2024]; *ibid.*: *Historia*, <https://www.1944.pl/artykul/historia,4513.html>, [last accessed 30.06.2024].

36 As cited in: *Niezależna.pl: Na ten gest czekano latami! Przypominamy słowa śp. Lecha Kaczyńskiego podczas otwarcia Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego*, <https://niezalezna.pl/232198-na-ten-gest-czekano-latami-przypominamy-slowa-sp-lecha-kaczynskiego-podczas-otwarcia-muzeum-powstania-warszawskiego>, [last accessed 30.06.2024].

It is obvious why the communists did not want to build this Museum. After all, the Uprising was directed against their principals and, therefore, against them. [...] But why do we open this Museum only on the 60th and not the 50th anniversary of the Uprising? [...] The peculiar nature of 1989 and the subsequent years has meant that there are still powerful forces in our lives for whom Polish independence, present in Polish hearts and minds, is not a value but a threat. Forces for whom it is better to dignify the memory of the Uprising than to fight for its reminding to the world, for the reminding of facts obvious to each of us but unknown among other nations or, worse, completely falsified.³⁷

In this way, the struggle for independence has transcended the 21st century, not ending at the dawn of the 1990s. The anti-system potential of the Warsaw Uprising narratives was clearly aroused again; however, the system to be wrestled with was no longer the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland but the remains of them and other enemies of sovereign Poland. The creation of the Warsaw Rising Museum thus became one element of a broader struggle. It should be noted that this direction of the story of the Warsaw Uprising was sustained in the Law and Justice circles in subsequent years, more and more widely since 2005. For example, in 2006, at the Warsaw Rising Museum during the celebrations preceding the next anniversary of the Uprising, Lech Kaczyński, already as President of Poland, pointed out:

The memory of this incredible act by our nation has been kept hidden for decades. Many of those who fought in the ranks of the Uprising after the war either could not return to their country or fell victim to repression. [...] Only free Poland—and not immediately, unfortunately—was able to restore the memory, this historical memory, the symbol of which is the Museum, now fully completed.³⁸

Two years later, on the other hand, he indicated:

For citizens, the Polish Republic must be the highest value. This is the message of that [insurgent—ARM note] generation, which binds us and our successors, our children, and our grandchildren because today, the generation of great-grandchildren of the Insurgents is already growing. It is something to be extremely happy about, and also among these often still small children, the tradition of the Uprising, the tradition of struggle, and the tradition of heroism is beginning to revive. Let's hope it continues.³⁹

In establishing the Museum and the “active politics of history,” President Lech Kaczyński viewed a mission to promote Polish national values, particularly

37 As cited in: *ibid.*

38 Prezydent.pl: *Hold obrońcom godności Narodu*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwalne-aktualnosci/aktualnosci-rok-2006/hold-obroncom-godnosci-narodu,28388,archive>, [last accessed 30.06.2024].

39 Prezydent.pl: *Przesłanie tamtego pokolenia*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/aktualnosci/rok-2008/przeslanie-tamtego-pokolenia,26779,archive>, [last accessed 30.06.2024].

among young people. By emphasizing Poland and Polish identity, he aimed to provide not only hope but also tangible results, according to his statements.

It cannot be denied that the political arousal of the subject of the Warsaw Uprising marked the beginning of the popularity in certain circles of narratives of memory in which the Uprising was a struggle for higher values, the suffering of the insurgents made a heroic sacrifice for independence, and the brave attitude of the fighters should be exemplified and taken pride in today. The narratives initially stirred up in 1994 were, therefore, significantly reinforced a decade later and complemented with references to the present. They took over some significant patterns of perception regarding the Warsaw Uprising from the opposition narratives of the People's Republic of Poland, supplementing them with new content.⁴⁰

The above direction of formulating narratives of memory was strongly reinforced by establishing the National Day of Remembrance of the Warsaw Uprising in 2009 (done by an act, the draft of which was presented by President Lech Kaczyński). In this way, a new national holiday was created, intended, as indicated in the justification of the project, to be an expression of “gratitude to the heroes of Warsaw for the bravery shown in defense of a free and sovereign Poland and for the bloodshed for the good of the entire Polish nation.”⁴¹ Continuing this thought, it further stated:

The Warsaw Uprising was the culminating moment of the Polish Underground State's activity, the fight for a free Poland, which finally brought victory after 45 years. The Free Republic today entirely refers to the values and traditions of the Polish Underground State. For this reason, honoring the day of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising will pay tribute to all the heroes of the Warsaw Uprising, known and unnamed, those who fought with weapons in their hands or actively supported the fighting insurgents, those who built the state, but also those who acted in the conspiracy. In this way, free Poland can repay its debt of gratitude.⁴²

In the fragment shown, all the most essential elements of the concept of the continuity of the Polish independence movement, the victory of the Warsaw Uprising, and the universality of patriotic values, rooted in tradition and sustained in a free Poland (to which freedom this Uprising ultimately led), are evident. It is worth noting that the justification did not include passages suggesting the rejection of forces for which Polish independence is still a threat. Thus, the debate on the act, which took place in the Sejm and the Senate, took

40 Compare: Marcin Napiórkowski: *Powstanie umarłych...*, pp. 297, 310.

41 Prezydent.pl: *Projekt ustawy o ustanowieniu Narodowego Dnia Pamięci Powstania Warszawskiego*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/archiwum-lecha-kaczynskiego/ustawy/ustawy-zgloszone/art,39,projekt-ustawy-o-ustanowieni-narodowego-dnia-pamieci-powstania-warszawskiego.html>, p. 2, [last accessed 30.06.2024].

42 *Ibid.*, p. 3.

place in a spirit of consensus,⁴³ which led to the establishment of a new holiday, created in “tribute to the heroes of the Warsaw Uprising—those who, in defense of state existence, with weapons in hand, fought to liberate the Capital, strived to recreate the institutions of an independent Polish State, opposed the German occupation, and the specter of Soviet captivity threatening the next generations of Poles.”⁴⁴

How has the above form of narrative about the Uprising been received? Among many, it garnered significant approval, being one that had been anticipated for decades. Consequently, in the following years, it was effectively supported by some, defended, and regarded as embodying Polish modern patriotism, appropriate to the developments occurring in the contemporary world. The Uprising, presented in this way, could therefore begin to be seen as a breakthrough event, almost the most important in Poland’s history since it constituted the founding act of a free Polish state (where the proof of the victory achieved in the Uprising is today’s independent Poland, as essayist Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz stated in his book *Kinderszenen*).⁴⁵ Thus, through the prism of the stories, the Uprising gained a strong, meaningful dimension, often reaching the rank of a metaphysical struggle between good and evil.

It should be noted that the form and content of the narratives of memory about the Warsaw Uprising, sustained since the opening of the Warsaw Rising Museum, have been significantly strengthened by the efforts of the Institute of National Remembrance.⁴⁶ For nearly every year, activities were carried out within this institution to disseminate information and research on the issues of the Uprising, as well as to encourage reflections and opinions on them. Notably, the narratives promoted by the IPN frequently presented the Warsaw fights as a victory, embodying heroic suffering for higher values and depicting them as part

43 Senat Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: *Zapis stenograficzny (1156) 47: Posiedzenie Komisji Kultury i Środków Przekazu w dniu 22 października 2009 r.*, <http://senat.gov.pl/download/gfx/senat/pl/senatkomisjeposiedzenia/1202/stenogram/047ksp.pdf>, [last accessed 30.06.2024].

44 Internetowy System Aktów Prawnych: *Ustawa z dnia 9 października 2009 r. o ustanowieniu Narodowego Dnia Pamięci Powstania Warszawskiego*, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20092061588/T/D20091588L.pdf>, [last accessed 30.06.2024].

45 Jarosław Marek Rymkiewicz: *Kinderszenen*, Warszawa 2008.

46 The Institute of National Remembrance—Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Polish: *Instytut Pamięci Narodowej—Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu*, abbreviated IPN) is a state legal entity encompassing organs and structures with research, educational, national heritage protection (archival, museum and library), investigative, vetting, search, commemorative and publishing tasks. The establishment of IPN dates back to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance passed by the Polish parliament on 18 December 1998. This act aimed to restructure and expand upon the functions of the prior Main Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation, which originated in 1991. See: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *O IPN*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/o-ipn/24154,O-IPN.html>, [last accessed 01.07.2024].

of the continuum of the struggle for independence. Indeed, the promotion of this content dimension was shaped by the long-standing information campaign itself, which propagated witness accounts and made documents available. As for the years 2005–2010, the IPN conducted publication activities, and its employees participated in conferences, sessions, and scientific and popular science lectures (often organized by the Institute), raising the issues of the Warsaw struggles. It was also common practice to organize exhibitions that depicted the events and participants of the Uprising.⁴⁷

At the same time, it should be remembered that between 2005 and 2010, narratives affirming the Warsaw Uprising at the state level as a necessary act of independence and an inevitable and still ongoing struggle for higher values were just becoming an important point in the public debate about Polish history and the political dimension of the past. With each passing year, the number of initiatives and projects grew (especially in the context of anniversary celebrations and the activities of the Warsaw Uprising Museum). Controversy also increased, as praise for the new direction in state policy was accompanied by criticism. It is, therefore, worth paying attention to the accusations made against the new narratives of memory. First were those related to their political affiliation. This is because these affirmative contents began to be identified with the broadly defined right wing, conservatives, or directly with the Law and Justice party. While pointing out that after 2004 a new quality of narrating the events of Warsaw in 1944, which is part of the right-wing variety of modern patriotism, came into existence (and was constituted after 2005), more than once a parallel accusation was made that in this way the evocation of the memory of the Warsaw Uprising was used for political struggle, rather than to satisfy the need for greater commemoration of the event. It was indicated that with the new narratives, the politicization of the anniversaries of the Warsaw Uprising has significantly increased, and the anniversary celebrations have become a pretext for manifesting personal political views (on this background, there have been incidents such as whistling at official participants of the celebrations and disrupting the ceremonies). Accusations of politicization further intensified after the 2010 Smolensk air disaster.⁴⁸

Additionally, it should be noted that criticism regarding the Warsaw Uprising has not solely focused on its political commemoration. As narratives of memory praising the Warsaw Uprising (as a stand against enslavement, symbolizing

47 See: *ibid.*: *Informacje o działalności IPN*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/o-ipn/informacje-o-dzialalnosc>, [last accessed 01.07.2024].

48 See: Rzeczpospolita: *44 i 09: każdemu jego tragedia*, <https://www.rp.pl/kraj/art15487571-44-i-09-kazdemu-jego-tragedia>, [last accessed 02.07.2024]; Wirtualna Polska: *Władysław Bartoszewski wygwizdany na Powązkach*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/wladyslaw-bartoszewski-w-gwizdany-na-powazkach-6037569482691201a>, [last accessed 02.07.2024].

moral victory and hope for the future) increased, critical contemporary narratives emerged with greater frequency, suggesting that the Uprising was unnecessary and a failure. However, it is important to emphasize that the negative narratives about the Warsaw Uprising that arose during the initial period of PiS rule were quite different from the criticism articulated during the People's Republic of Poland, which was steeped in ideological references. The Uprising as a wrongful act was analyzed in various ways, highlighting several fundamental groups of arguments, with the foremost being reflections on the fact that it represented a political defeat on one hand and a humanitarian one on the other (thus, it also involved moral and social dimensions).

A particularly important narrative among those expressing a negative assessment of the decision to launch the Warsaw Uprising is the book titled *Ant on the Chessboard* (2007) by former insurgent Jan Kurdwanowski. In it, the author presents the Uprising from the perspective of both a participant and a critical observer, avoiding idealization of the insurgent struggle, not omitting descriptions of negative or shameful incidents, and assessing decisions made during the fighting with a cool detachment. Although Jan Kurdwanowski did not glorify heroism in his memoir, maintaining a distance from it, he depicted the persistence of the insurgents, the hardships of the struggle, and the sacrifices made. For this reason, many regard the book as an important and objective account. Conversely, others viewed it as undermining the legend of the insurgent struggle and conforming to the official narratives of the People's Republic of Poland, especially since the diary's first edition was published in 1983 in New York.⁴⁹ In a 2007 interview, Jan Kurdwanowski confirmed his position, noting:

The rank-and-file insurgents, like their officers, had neither training nor experience in urban combat. Officers assigned positions to be filled to the lower ranks, presented plans of action, and inevitably made mistakes that were (unnecessarily) paid for in blood. [...] Of course, the Uprising promised to be an excellent adventure for me when it began, when I heard the first shots. The flight of the Germans in panic from the Berezina to the Vistula, the assassination of Hitler, the invasion of Normandy—it seemed that we would chase the beaten Germans to the gates of Berlin.⁵⁰

Jan Kurdwanowski added further:

People who lost their families, friends, their own health in the Warsaw Uprising, went into exile, find it difficult to admit to themselves and others that it was all in vain, that the Warsaw Uprising was a mistake. That's why they look for the positives: that the Warsaw Uprising saved Europe from Soviet occupation, that Warsaw would have been

49 Jan Kurdwanowski: *Mrówka na szachownicy*, Warszawa 2007.

50 Stowarzyszenie Pamięci Powstania Warszawskiego 1944: *Wywiad z Panem Janem Kurdwanowskim*, <http://www.sppw1944.org/index.html?http://www.sppw1944.org/wywiady/kurdwanowski.html>, [last accessed 02.07.2024].

destroyed anyway, the inhabitants murdered, so at least we showed how we Poles can fight heroically; that if there had not been the Warsaw Uprising, Poland would have become the seventeenth Soviet republic and there would have been no “Solidarity.” “If there had not been a Warsaw Uprising, we would still have a hangover today,” as one historian wrote.⁵¹

The narratives of memory formulated by J. Kurdwanowski are essential because they include issues often overlooked in descriptions affirming the Warsaw Uprising: naivety, organizational errors, and the need to search for meaning in the tragedy. Another participant in the Uprising, Stanisław S. Kwiatkowski, presented a similar perspective. In his text entitled *Remarks on the Warsaw Uprising of 2009*, he noted:

I choose to write mainly for two reasons. First, after the period of vilification of the Uprising, a time has come in which two trends are emerging. One is its idealization, reinforced by the reaction to the official rebuke. The other is the response to this reaction: condemnation of the AK activities in general and the Uprising in particular. Both of these tendencies distort reality in different ways. The first is sympathetic but, in my opinion, more dangerous. Namely, it threatens that instead of accurate, reliable knowledge about the Uprising in all its complexity, we will create a false myth. Not for a moment do I question the countless acts of genuine heroism by many soldiers and civilians. But while acknowledging the bright side, let us not ignore the shadows, the facts of irresponsibility, stupidity, cowardice, or ordinary crimes.

Secondly, reading numerous, better and worse, accounts of the Uprising, I find that many of its realities are passed over in silence, overlooked, and condemned to oblivion. In a dozen years or so, there will be no living witnesses to the Uprising, and what is not written about it by then will disappear from people’s memories. To give just one example: so far, I have not encountered any account of the smells of the Uprising in the literature, and yet it smelled, and smelled strongly. There are plenty of such omissions.⁵²

Both of the above-mentioned stances (by J. Kurdwanowski and S.S. Kwiatkowski) are part of the narratives of memory trend (expanded in parallel with affirmation), which indicated that the Warsaw Uprising was a primarily humanitarian defeat. These depictions (appearing in science, media, and art) usually emphasized the hardships of daily life during the insurgent struggle (amplified by significant shortages of armaments and supplies) and the severity of the losses of Warsaw’s civilian population.⁵³

51 Ibid.

52 Stanisław S. Kwiatkowski: *Uwagi o Powstaniu Warszawskim*, <https://www miesiecznik.znak.com.pl/uwagi-o-powstaniu-warszawskim/>, [last accessed 02.07.2024].

53 Andrzej Dryszel: *Zapomniane ofiary*, <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/zapomniane-ofiary/>, [last accessed 02.07.2024]. See also: Culture.pl: *Literature of the Warsaw Uprising: Then & Now*, <https://culture.pl/en/article/literature-of-the-warsaw-uprising-then-now>, [last accessed 02.07.2024].

It is impossible at this point not to cite the book entitled *Neither Triumph nor Death...* by Polish prose writer, essayist, and dramatist Tomasz Łubieński.⁵⁴ This publication, in its first edition,⁵⁵ was published in the year of the opening of the Warsaw Uprising Museum and thus became an important voice in the multiplicity of narratives about the direction of the politics of memory developed by the Law and Justice party in 2005–2010. This is because Tomasz Łubieński's publication can be seen as a tribute to the fallen and an attempt to speak in their voice—often overlooked in narratives where the perspective of the heroes who survived the Uprising prevails, presenting them as participants of a great deed. It was they, the living heroes, who built the myth of the Warsaw Uprising. On the other hand, the 200,000 victims are, in Łubieński's words, a number “too huge for a gesture, a symbol, a legend.”⁵⁶ He wrote:

The girls raped in the green grocery market, the boys shot in Narutowicz Square, the wounded murdered in the hospitals, the children, women, and old people killed only because they were unable to hide from the bombs in time, or they managed to get into the basement, but there they were buried alive or torn apart with grenades that the enemy threw through the basement windows, are not fit for a legend.⁵⁷

Therefore, in the considerations made, the author raised the issue of omitted narratives. He also examined the burden of responsibility for the outbreak of the Uprising, seeking blame in the pre-insurrection and insurrection propaganda inspired by a fatalistic view of history, filled with sacrifices and defeats in the name of honor, which represented proof of moral superiority and was incurred in the name of freedom, justifying every mistake. The author deemed the promotion of this content to be an undignified act, as it forced heroic attitudes upon people whose right it was to oppose a trial that was too challenging in order to avoid the humiliating situation of defeat.⁵⁸

It is worth adding that criticism of the Uprising in the period under study often referred to the political naivety and megalomania of some Polish commanders.⁵⁹ There were also frequent calls to stop romanticizing the argument about the inevitability of the Uprising (often regarded by its critics as a myth intended to relieve AK commanders of responsibility). As Paweł Dybicz pointed out in 2009:

54 Tomasz Łubieński: *Ani tryumf, ani zgon... Szkice o Powstaniu Warszawskim*, Warszawa 2004.

55 The second edition was published in 2009.

56 Tomasz Łubieński: *Ani tryumf...*, p. 42.

57 *Ibid.*, pp. 42–43.

58 *Ibid.*, pp. 19–52.

59 Jan M. Ciechanowski: *Nie tylko głupota, ale zbrodnia*, <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/nie-tylko-glupota-ale-zbrodnia/>, [last accessed 02.07.2024].

It is time to stop using the myth of the inevitability of the Uprising, the argument that the young soldiers were even raring to fight and no force could stop them. Because if that were the case, it would be a poor and undisciplined army that does not listen to its commanders. [...] Their decisions were not the orders of young commanders grown up on the literature of the Romantics, but political decisions that resulted in the deaths, depending on estimates, of 150–200 thousand people. I know no case in the civilized world where commanders who led such a catastrophe were not brought to justice. Meanwhile, in our country, their cult is spreading.⁶⁰

Conflict of memories in the years 2015–2025

A clear continuation of the narrative of memory of the Uprising undertaken by Lech Kaczyński was the approach presented after 2015 by President Andrzej Duda. In 2016, during another anniversary of the Uprising, calling the insurgents “Our Dearest, Greatest,”⁶¹ he stated:

It is a great honor for the President of the Republic of Poland to meet with the heroes and award decorations on behalf of the Polish state to the heroes of the Warsaw Uprising and the heroes of the memory of the Warsaw Uprising—this excellent Polish and Warsaw tradition, this foundation on which we are building and should build for the following centuries the attitude of the subsequent generations of young Poles. Thank you for this.⁶²

He further added:

I thank the insurgents for their presence. You are invaluable. You are not only heroes of the Uprising—you are also educators and role models. You are those to whom the eyes of the younger generation—your children, your grandchildren, and now your great-grandchildren—are gazing. They look at you with pride. They proudly remember your extraordinary courage, your heroism, and, above all, your love of the Fatherland.⁶³

Stressing in his speech that “insurgents are our greatest treasure”⁶⁴ and “the Uprising is a monument to our memory”⁶⁵ (of which the Museum is a temple), he responded to the criticism directed at the Uprising. He said:

60 Paweł Dybicz: *Święto wielkiej klęski*, <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/swieto-wielkiej-klaski/>, [last accessed 02.07.2024].

61 Prezydent.pl: *Wystąpienie prezydenta w 72. rocznicę Powstania Warszawskiego*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/art,60,wystapienie-prezydenta-w-72-rocznice-powstania-warszawskiego.html>, [last accessed 03.07.2024].

62 Ibid.

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

Sometimes, in the public space, there are voices of criticism—from publicists and historians—that the Uprising was unnecessary and that it was a hecatomb [...]. [...] Let me be told today by those who doubt the sense of the Warsaw Uprising whether they can prove that if there had not been this Uprising, there would be this free Poland in which we live today. None of them can prove it. And I will say more: It would not be there. It wouldn't be there if the Warsaw insurgents hadn't told their children about the Uprising, about heroism, about how they were raised in the Second Republic, and why they went to the Uprising.⁶⁶

The Warsaw insurgents were thus presented as those who “fought for Poland to be free, independent, and without war [...] also when World War II ended, because it was then when those who wanted a sovereign, free, and independent Poland were repressed by the communists.”⁶⁷ The memory of this—“the fact that Poles wanted to be free again, just as their fathers wanted to be free”⁶⁸—became the fundamental source of the “Solidarity” movement's uprising. President Duda's narrative was thus officially based on the belief that without the Warsaw Uprising, there would have been no post-1989 free Poland. The heroism of the insurgents transcended their own time, significantly influencing later democratization. Andrzej Duda maintained this stance in subsequent years.

In 2021, during the celebration of the 77th anniversary of the Uprising, he said thus:

There probably would not have been a free, independent, fully sovereign Poland without the blood shed by the Warsaw insurgents, their heroism, their effort, and their attitude [...]. No one can bring back the lives of the fallen; no one can erase the scars left by wounds; no one can heal the scars in hearts—from the loss of loved ones and friends, from the tragedies you witnessed. Yet, I always tirelessly point this out amid various discussions that occur in many places; questions often arise in these discussions about whether it was worth it, and frequently, they undermine the significance of that heroism. It was worth it. No one can truly measure the immense contribution of those days to today's free Poland, but there is no doubt it exists, and your contribution later to the fact that this freedom was reclaimed—by you and by your successors, those who emerged from your guidance—matters greatly [...].⁶⁹

Two years later, in 2023, President Andrzej Duda linked the memory of the Uprising to national security issues, stating:

The Warsaw Uprising, that extraordinary armed act—unique in the entire Second World War because there had never been another uprising of such magnitude, espe-

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Ibid.

69 As cited in: *Rzeczpospolita: Prezydent Duda do powstańców warszawskich: Było warto*, <https://www.rp.pl/wydarzenia/art18449221-prezydent-duda-do-powstancow-warszawskich-bylo-warto>, [last accessed 04.07.2024].

cially an urban one, before or since, in history, is for us today also here in Poland, this very free, sovereign, independent Poland, a significant event not only in history but also a fundamental lesson on how to take care of the homeland so that the homeland lasts and survives; what it means to have a safe homeland [...].⁷⁰

Then Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (PiS), on the other hand, referred in 2023 to the first narratives about the Uprising, formulated within the ranks of the Law and Justice party. In a speech commemorating the event, he noted, indeed:

The Warsaw Uprising, which began on August 1, 1944, continues to this day. It started then but persists indefinitely; it carries on into eternity, and we walk alongside it. Alongside those insurgents, the vast majority of whom have passed away, as well as those who still bear witness to truth, freedom, and justice today. Alongside their desires, and their testimony, which they pass on to us, to the next generation, we collectively build a better future, a brighter tomorrow.⁷¹

The celebrations of the 80th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising in 2024, as portrayed by the Polish Right, have, to some extent, showcased similar themes. President Andrzej Duda brought up the Uprising's influence on Poland's modern independence while connecting it to current politics. This was reflected in his words:

We gather here to ensure that there will never be an occupation again, to express that there is no consent to occupation, including the occupation of Ukraine [...] there is no consent to it from the free world, to which we, thanks to the Warsaw insurgents and their heroism, also belong today.⁷²

It is apparent, therefore, that the narratives of memory of the Warsaw Uprising, upheld by the Law and Justice, were characterized by constancy: a conviction that the significance of the event was crucial to the current national identity, that the memory of the event had a real impact on later sociopolitical events, and that it had a special mission in the context of the present (in the suggestion that without the Uprising and the memory of it, Poland would not be safe).

Did constancy also characterize public debate? It can be said that, in basic terms, the answer is yes. Arguments repeated in subsequent years, particularly during the anniversaries of the Warsaw Uprising, matured over time. Narratives

70 Prezydent.pl: *Wystąpienie podczas Apelu Pamięci w 79. rocznicę Powstania Warszawskiego*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/wystapienia/wystapienie-prezydenta-rp-podczas-uroczystego-apelu-pamieci-w-79-rocznice-powstania-warszawskiego,72551>, [last accessed 04.07.2024].

71 Wprost: *Politycy oddali hołd powstańcom. Premier: Powstanie warszawskie trwa do dzisiaj*, <https://www.wprost.pl/warszawa/11331283/politycy-oddali-hold-powstancom-premier-powstanie-warszawskie-trwa-do-dzisiaj.html>, [last accessed 04.07.2024].

72 Prezydent.pl: *Prezydent RP upamiętnił Bohaterów w 80. rocznicę wybuchu Powstania Warszawskiego*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/80-rocznica-wybuchu-powstania-warszawskiego,89626> [last accessed 04.09.2024].

highlighting the insurgent effort and sacrifice often focused on the symbolic significance of the event's memory. Such portrayals invoked principles of fidelity to the highest virtues, the universal struggle between good and evil, and a message for the contemporary world. Essays, articles, and statements, updated each year in the mass media, consequently conveyed the same meanings.⁷³

How, on the other hand, was it with critical narratives? These—also after 2015—repeated arguments about political mistakes and humanitarian failure. However, the criticisms also addressed the issues of established forms and modes of commemoration. Arguments were raised about the wrong direction of memory maintenance, the absurdities of the instrumentalization of memory, and the high dependence of accounts of the past on current politics. It is, therefore, worth examining these criticisms.

The first point of criticism of the narratives of memory about the Warsaw Uprising after the Law and Justice party's victory in the 2015 parliamentary and presidential elections was the politicization of the topic of the insurgent struggle and the celebrations of the event's anniversaries. Accusations of the plundering of memory for the purposes of current politics intensified when the Smolensk Appeal was added to the Appeal of the Fallen on the anniversaries of the Warsaw Uprising (in its version combining both of those mentioned above, it was called the Remembrance Appeal).⁷⁴ While in earlier years, veterans' circles had already called for politicians not to come to the celebrations at the time of commemorating the "W" Hour⁷⁵ (fed up with this festival of politicians' popularity), after 2015, voices began to be raised that the Warsaw insurgents were losing the battle for memory, as neither the shape of the ceremony nor the content conveyed during it were in any way dependent on them anymore. Polish sociologist Sławomir Sierakowski, among others, commented on this with the words:

The bloodbath provoked by Antoni Macierewicz's [then Minister of National Defense —ARM note] attempt to include the Smolensk victims in the Warsaw Uprising, plus the

73 Marek A. Cichocki: *Dni wolności*, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/marek-a-cichocki-dni-wolnosc/>, [last accessed 04.07.2024]; Dariusz Gawin: *Powstanie Warszawskie domaga się uniwersalizacji*, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/prof-dariusz-gawin-powstanie-warszawskie-domaga-sie-uniwersalizacji/>, [last accessed 04.07.2024]; Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego: *Tak rodziło się społeczeństwo obywatelskie*, <https://www.1944.pl/artykul/tak-rodzilo-sie-spolczestwo-obywatelskie,2794.html>, [last accessed 04.07.2024].

74 Newsweek Polska: *Apel smoleński i apel o spokój. Jak będą wyglądały obchody 73. rocznicy Powstania Warszawskiego?*, <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/spoleczenstwo/obchody-73-rocznicy-powstania-warszawskiego-apel-powstancow/zgggd1j>, [last accessed 04.07.2024]; *ibid.*: *Apel smoleński na rocznicę powstania warszawskiego? Zdecydowana większość Polaków jest przeciw*, <https://www.newsweek.pl/polska/apel-smolenski-sondaz-rocznica-powstania-71-proc-przeciwko/f6y0k0q>, [last accessed 04.07.2024].

75 The "W" Hour is the code name for the day and time of the start of the Warsaw Uprising ("Burza" action in Warsaw), that is, 5 p.m. on Tuesday, August 1, 1944.

fact that he was allowed to do so, gives the impression that for the Law and Justice party, the Uprising is no longer a useful instrument of politics of history. As if it were no longer enough to excite the electorate and portray themselves as Olympic champions of Polish patriotism. Carelessly antagonizing the insurgent circles makes it seem like the Uprising is meant to be yet another “institution” that belongs to the authorities and is expected to submit to them. To be humiliated like the President, public media, or prosecutors and sing the Smolensk anthem of PiS. It is not enough to accept the new power in silence. It is necessary to applaud the new masters by adding the Appeal of the Fallen at Smolensk to every state ceremony with honorary military assistance.⁷⁶

Sławomir Sierakowski thus alluded to the view that the Law and Justice party’s sustained narrative of memory of the Warsaw Uprising has, after years, overstayed its welcome, and since 2015, its political potential has been exhausted.⁷⁷

Major contradictions in the period under study were also aroused by the constantly increasing participation of radical groups in the anniversary celebrations of the Warsaw Uprising and the accompanying theatricalization of the ceremonies, displacing commemorative content as well as elements recalling the accounts of witnesses to the events and expanding historical knowledge. And this includes the red-and-white smoke from flares set off on subsequent anniversaries of the “W” hour, T-shirts, tattoos, and other gadgets with the symbol of the Fighting Poland Anchor,⁷⁸ along with costumes of insurgents worn by re-enactment groups. In opinions critical of such attitudes, there was a recurring view of the dangerous effects of the ongoing pop-culturalization of the Uprising and the trivialization of the suffering and sacrifice of the insurgents. Among the perpetrators of such a state of affairs, in turn, were pointed out not only the narratives created on the wave of building the Warsaw Rising Museum but also the institution itself as consolidating Polish martyrdom in the form of a role model for young people.⁷⁹ The form of the message proposed by the Museum was

76 Sławomir Sierakowski: *PiS porzuca powstanie warszawskie*, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/felietony/slawomir-sierakowski/pis-porzuca-powstanie-warszawskie/>, [last accessed 04.07.2024].

77 Ibid. See also: Krytyka Polityczna: *Sutowski: Podziemie antykomunistyczne zastąpiło powstańców warszawskich*, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kultura/historia/sutowski-podziemie-antykomunistyczne-zastapilo-powstancow-warszawskich/>, [last accessed 04.07.2024].

78 “On 20 March 1942, residents of Warsaw passing the Lardelli’s bakery saw a stylised symbol of an anchor painted on a post. It was the first time it appeared on the streets of the capital, to then forever become the symbol of Fighting Poland. One year later, Anna Smoleńska, the co-author of the victorious symbol, was transported to the German Auschwitz concentration camp, where she died on 19 March 1943.” See: Institute of National Remembrance: *Fighting Poland Anchor*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/digital-resources/articles/9266,Fighting-Poland-Anchor.html>, [last accessed 05.07.2024].

79 Kalina Błażejowska: *Powstańcze przebieranki*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/powstancze-przebieranki-34959>, [last accessed 05.07.2024]; Tomasz Leszkowicz: *Pamięć o powstaniu warszawskim—co zmieniło się przez 15 ostatnich lat?*, <https://histmag.org/Pamiec-o-powstaniu-warszawskim-co-zmienilo-sie-przez-15-ostatnich-lat-19133/>, [last accessed 05.07.2024].

also blamed: “a building that looks like a dummy from an amusement park,”⁸⁰ “a gadget store where you can buy insurgent mess tins,”⁸¹ as well as the installation: “a canal that is like a castle of fear in a funfair—exciting rather than frightening, without heat, stench, sludge, and rotting corpses.”⁸² As an accusation, moreover, the view was often repeated that the Warsaw Rising Museum portrayed the armed struggle of 1944 as a “wonderful adventure,”⁸³ creating “an image of the Uprising as a joyful revolt of young, beautiful people who should find imitators among today’s youth.”⁸⁴ This, in turn, often led to reflections on the shape of contemporary Polish patriotism, the meaning of which can be read in the words:

But is it possible to learn patriotism when, in entirely safe conditions, when absolutely nothing is threatened, one plays, for example, a Warsaw insurgent? Does anyone really believe that during the reconstruction, it is possible to learn something about what Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński⁸⁵ thought and felt in the last moments of his life? It is impossible to enact a patriot.⁸⁶

Moreover, the comments formulated in the public space also emphasized that the simplified form of patriotism may fit into the canons of pop culture, but what is more socially disastrous is that it does not conform to the original assumptions of modern patriotism created in conservative circles. This patriotism was supposed to be an inspiration, a catalog of role models, and a guide to a changing reality. Others, in turn, pointed out that although the activities of institutions creating the memory of the Warsaw Uprising significantly influenced public attitudes, the growing interest in the Uprising over the years was not only due to the activities of political marketing specialists but also to the actual importance of this event. These voices were not isolated, and they were often accompanied by the results of opinion polls indicating an increase in social belief that the Warsaw Uprising was a significant moment in the history of the Polish nation. Thus, for the perception of the role of the Uprising, both the intensification of various types of narratives in the public sphere and the entry of the subject of the Warsaw fights into pop

80 Ibid.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid.

83 See: *ibid.*: Kalina Błażejowska/Tadeusz Rolke: *Rzeczony kadr*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/rzeczony-kadr-30355>, [last accessed 05.07.2024].

84 Paweł Machciewicz: *Muzeum*, Kraków 2017, p. 220.

85 Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński was a Polish poet during the Second World War. He died during the Warsaw Uprising as a soldier of the Home Army’s “Parasol” battalion (which was a unit for special tasks). See: Barbara Wachowicz: *Krzysztof Kamil Baczyński: Pomnik z płomienia*, Warszawa 2021.

86 Andrzej Brzeziecki: *Czy w starzeniu się i umieraniu można odnaleźć sens?*, https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/spoleczenstwo/1701070,1,czy-w-starzeniu-sie-i-umieraniu-mozna-odnalezc-sens.read?fbclid=IwAR12T1Gvwzs-1w0I9OcpHBj_Z266lax-FKBBaVjR-m0n-KIBKk2firwB620, [last accessed 05.07.2024].

culture were not without significance. Furthermore, it is worth noting that there were not uncommon positions in which the attitude promoted by, among others, the Warsaw Rising Museum, right-wing circles, or the Institute of National Remembrance regarding the Warsaw Uprising was considered dangerous in a much broader perspective context. In such approaches, it was reiterated that depicting dying for the homeland without showing the fear of death, despair, pain, and tragedy, but with exposing the excitement about the heroism of the achievements, could have serious social consequences (along with a drive towards self-destruction). Criticism was thus mixed with praise and the construction of further justifications for the rightness of the direction taken (including those relating to identity, the present, or expectations for the future), expanding the already rich array of extreme narratives.⁸⁷

What, then, is the balance of the narratives of memory about the Warsaw Uprising popularized in society during the second Law and Justice governments? First, a significant effect is the perceived increase in awareness of the Warsaw events in 1944. Second, maintaining and developing the debate on social and national values in Poland is also a significant effect. Third, the politicization and instrumentalization of the subject of the Uprising, which began several years earlier, became shallower and oversimplified after 2015.

Conclusions

The narratives of the Law and Justice party, particularly from 2005 to 2010, emphasized that the Warsaw Uprising symbolized a victory in moral and spiritual terms and that the heroic struggle of the insurgents was inevitable. This sense of inevitability in taking up arms was linked to political, social, and historical factors and was a key element in the fight for freedom and state sovereignty. Official narratives (especially from the Polish Right) highlighted that the Uprising was the foundation of post-1989 independence, enabling the Polish population to endure years of earlier dependence on the Soviet Union. The establishment of the Warsaw Uprising Museum (2004), in turn, expanded narratives about the continuity of the independence movement into the period following the systemic transformation, representing the years of struggle against the remnants of the People's Republic of Poland and other enemies of a sovereign Poland. Thus, in the political narratives of the Law and Justice party, the Warsaw

87 Kalina Błażejowska: *Powstańcze przebieganki...*; Tomasz Leszkowicz: *Pamięć o powstaniu warszawskim...*; Marcin Napiórkowski: *Powstanie umarłych...*, pp. 321–365; Narodowe Centrum Kultury: *Pamięć o Powstaniu Warszawskim. Komunikat z badań*, <https://www.nck.pl/badania/aktualnosci/pamiec-o-powstaniu-warszawskim-komunikat-z-badan>, [last accessed 05.07.2024].

Uprising has taken on the status of the founding act of the free Polish state, sometimes even representing a metaphysical struggle between good and evil. Statements about the Warsaw Uprising have consequently gained the power to ignite (and reinforce within the collective identity) national pride, a sense of satisfaction for the uncompromising heroes, and admiration for the courageous and dedicated struggle for freedom that was undertaken regardless of the price paid. These depictions refer to the martyrdom of the Polish nation, viewed through the lens of the sacrifices made by the residents of the fighting Warsaw, highlighting their commitment to the struggle in pursuit of professed ideals and the most important values, such as the independence of the Fatherland, justice, and goodness. Expressions of dissatisfaction with the Warsaw Uprising, along with the impatience and resentment of civilians involved in the aftermath of the German suppression, as well as the issue of civilian casualties—within the context of Law and Justice narratives that affirm the Warsaw Uprising—were viewed as part of heroic sacrifice and the cost of pursuing freedom. These narratives established a division between the good—the Poles who fought in the Warsaw battles—and the bad—the individuals responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands and the destruction of a vital center of Polish culture, namely, the Germans and the Russians in the broadest sense.

III. Conflict of memories in the area of the Cursed Soldiers

Background to the narratives of memory functioning under the Law and Justice rule

Organizing the underground army and structures of political authorities in the Polish territories began while the September Campaign was still in progress. The core of the underground struggle was represented first by a military and political underground organization called the Service for Poland's Victory (Polish: Służba Zwycięstwu Polski, SZP) and later by the Union of Armed Struggle (Polish: Związek Walki Zbrojnej, ZWZ), which was subordinate to the government in exile and intended to be nationwide and non-partisan. Apart from this, smaller military organizations developed under the command of various political groups operating secretly. With the development of warfare, their number systematically increased. And although some of them joined the structures of the Union of Armed Struggle, organizational dispersal continued to grow. Over time, one of the most essential issues became integrating the established formations. With this task (to unite Polish underground organizations), the Home Army was formed on February 14, 1942, out of the transformation of the Union of Armed Struggle. More structures were successfully incorporated into the Home Army in the following months. Not without problems, however, and some organizations did not join the Home Army at all.⁸⁸

The main goal of the Home Army's activities was self-defense and preparing a general uprising, which was to begin when Germany collapsed. For this, it was necessary to consolidate forces and resources. Therefore, underground army training was organized in infantry reserve cadet schools (with a five-month curriculum), officer cadet schools (with a four-month curriculum), and special courses in sabotage, artillery, attack, mechanics, armaments, propaganda, or tanks. Weapons were attempted to be accumulated using supplies buried by

88 Stefan Korboński: *Polskie Państwo Podziemne. Przewodnik po Podziemiu z lat 1939–1945*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 31–46, 69–81.

Polish units after the defeat of the September Campaign and acquired using purchases, own production, captures, and airdrops. In addition, the active and passive resistance put up against the occupier by the civilian population was included in the organizational framework, creating and organizing regulations on what a Pole should do under occupation. With this in mind, the Directorate of Civil Struggle (Polish: Kierownictwo Walki Cywilnej, KWC) was created with the following departments: judicial, sabotage and diversion, radio information, armament, delegalization, chemical, and registration of German crimes. Underground courts, whose verdicts were disseminated by the underground press and radio, became guarantors of executing the Civil Struggle regulations. Secret education was also active. Thus, the resistance movement embraced all areas of life. In this way, the military and civilian structures of the Polish Underground State, a unique formation on a world scale, were consistently built up under the authority of the government in exile.⁸⁹

The beginning of the end for the thriving development of underground structures in Poland came in 1944. At that time, in the territory of “Lublin” Poland,⁹⁰ the policy against the revealing soldiers of the Home Army and the structures of the Polish Underground State became significantly stricter. Terror spread under the regulations of the PKWN decree of October 30, 1944, on state protection, which created almost unlimited possibilities for repressing opponents of the new authorities imposed and controlled by the Soviet Union.⁹¹

The years 1944–1945 passed in the Polish territories under the sign of violence, murders, and pacification on the one hand, and on the other, the transition to the underground of those threatened with repression, arrest, or army conscription. Prisons began to be repopulated, death sentences were executed, and concentration camps were opened for “anti-state elements” and “the most vicious enemies of the system of people’s democracy.” In the following years, the Home Army continued to be a political enemy for the new authorities of the Polish state, as it represented the Polish government-in-exile, which, although it no longer

89 Ibid, pp. 69–92; Janusz Marszałec: *Polskie Państwo Podziemne. Ciągłość i trwanie*, in: *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 2 (2002), pp. 11–33.

90 “Lublin” Poland is an unofficial term for the Polish territory seized in 1944 as a result of the July–August offensive by the Red Army and units of the First Polish Army (which was formed in the Soviet Union in 1944). The territory was formally administered by the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN). See: Adam Lityński: *Prawo karne Polski “lubelskiej” (1944)*, in: *Studia Iuridica Toruniensia* 31/2 (2022), pp. 129–144.

91 Ibid. See also: Internetowy System Aktów Prawnych: *Dekret Polskiego Komitetu Wyzwolenia Narodowego z dnia 30 października 1944 r. o ochronie Państwa*, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19440100050/O/D19440050.pdf>, [last accessed 08.07.2024].

had international recognition in 1945, could still be a threat to the newly imposed order.⁹²

Partial rehabilitation of the underground occurred in the second half of the 1950s when Poland experienced some political changes called the Polish October (Polish: Polski październik), also known as October 1956, or Gomułka's Thaw. With liberalization in socio-political life, consideration of the Polish Underground State and secret organizations was raised in public discourse for some time. However, fearing an excessive increase in the influence of former members of the Home Army, the authorities tried, on the one hand, to take over the narratives on the underground and, on the other, to consistently silence the subject of the AK in the public space. Officially, one established pattern was being pushed: the people's regime was right, and the responsibility for the tragic course of events during the occupation and the building of post-war statehood lay with the government in exile and the underground command, which were oriented towards pursuing their own interests instead of national concerns. This narrative, as an official one (although rarely raised anyway), continued to the very end of the People's Republic of Poland.⁹³

The diversification of public views, however, was influenced by the "second publishing circuit," which developed the subject of the underground in various publications from the late 1970s (thus filling the gaps in official historiography) and also, due to the expansion in the community of the scope of knowledge, by scientific publications of the "first circuit," the content of which developed the topic of the Polish Underground State to the extent permitted by censorship. This way, the issue of secret organizations entered the period of systemic changes in 1989 with firm and extreme judgments of the Polish wartime and postwar underground.⁹⁴

Since 1989, the issue of the Polish underground during the Second World War and the post-war years has increasingly become a topic of discussion and analysis

92 Krystian Bedyński: *Naczelnicy więzień w Rawiczu i Wronkach 1945–1956*, in: *Archiwum Kryminologii* 31 (2009), pp. 345–387; Mariusz Mazur: *Propaganda komunistyczna wobec Armii Krajowej...*, pp. 61–79; Muzeum II Wojny Światowej: *Koniec wojny '45–08 terror i represje*, <https://muzeum1939.pl/koniec-wojny-45-08-terror-i-represje/galeria/747.html>, [last accessed 08.07.2024].

93 Łukasz Kamiński: *Polskie Państwo Podziemne – długie trwanie w PRL (1956–1989)*, in: *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 2 (2002), pp. 59–66; Tomasz Leszkowicz: *Armia Krajowa i opozycja demokratyczna w PRL: długie trwanie oporu*, <https://histmag.org/Armia-Krajowa-i-opozycja-demokratyczna-w-PRL-dlugie-trwanie-oporu-15533>, [last accessed 08.07.2024]; Polskie Radio – Historia: *"Na spotkanie ludziom z AK" – krok ku rehabilitacji żołnierzy Armii Krajowej*, <https://www.polskieradio.pl/39/156/Artykul/2275956,Na-spotkanie-ludziom-z-A-K-krok-ku-rehabilitacji-zolnierzy-Armii-Krajowej>, [last accessed 08.07.2024].

94 Andrzej Friszke: *Spór o PRL w III Rzeczypospolitej (1989–2001)*, in: *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość* 1 (2002), p. 9; Łukasz Kamiński: *Polskie Państwo...*, p. 61; Janusz Marszałec: *Polskie Państwo...*, p. 12.

each year. As early as the 1990s, both journalistic and scholarly discourse began to explore how to address the events that unfolded in Poland after 1944 in relation to the operations of underground structures, as well as how to assess the activities of the Polish Underground State and post-war underground organizations. Liberated from the constraints of censorship, narratives began to be officially formulated based on unrestricted reflection, with the substantive aspect supported by access to archival materials previously unavailable in the People's Republic of Poland. Did postwar Poland become an arena of civil war, unilateral terrorization, and the destruction of the Polish patriotic element, or was it an anti-communist uprising? This question emerged as one of the earliest issues in public and scholarly discourse, with answers that have remained contentious over the years, as each perspective has garnered equally passionate supporters and opponents.⁹⁵

In the ongoing discussions, the phrase Cursed Soldiers (sometimes Unbroken Soldiers, understood as soldiers of the anti-communist underground who were cursed and eliminated from Polish history) began to appear, with time becoming more common. The source of this term has been attributed to the publicist Leszek Żebrowski. The phrase appeared for the exhibition "Cursed Soldiers, the anti-communist armed underground after 1944," organized in 1993 by the Republican League at Warsaw University. In 1996, on the other hand, journalist Jerzy Ślaski used the term in the title of his book on the Polish independence conspiracy, thus consolidating the expression in the public consciousness.⁹⁶

Conflict of memories in the years 2005–2010

The subject of the Cursed Soldiers was not the main topic of the "active politics of history" of the Law and Justice party between 2005 and 2010. However, during this period, the first initiatives appeared that were precursors to the narrative direction that this political party would later choose. Consequently, these years were characterized by the emergence of a nascent commemorative culture spearheaded by public institutions. Additionally, this period witnessed the emergence of opposition to the tribute paid to specific soldiers and formations of

95 See among others: Henryk Ślabek: *W związku z problematyką sesji i publikacji. Wojna domowa czy nowa okupacja? Uwagi*, in: *Dzieje Najnowsze* 31/1 (1999), pp. 103–109; Rafał Wnuk: *Uwagi do artykułu Henryka Ślabka dotyczącego sesji i publikacji "Wojna domowa czy nowa okupacja?"*, in: *Dzieje Najnowsze* 31/4 (1999), pp. 99–104.

96 Robert Jurszo: *"Żołnierzy wyklętych" wymyślono w 1993 r. OKO.press przedstawia historię politycznego mitu*, <https://oko.press/zolnierzy-wykletych-wymyslono-1993-r-oko-press-prz-edstawia-historie-politycznego-mitu>, [last accessed 09.07.2024]; Jerzy Ślaski: *Żołnierze wyklęci*, Warszawa 1996.

the Polish underground. It was also during this time that the project to establish the National Day of Remembrance of the “Cursed Soldiers” was born. Each of these issues is worth recalling.

Research on the Polish post-war underground at the Institute of National Remembrance began almost as soon as the institution was established, and its conduct was facilitated by the access that historians employed there had to files of the security apparatus that had not previously been available to researchers. Initially, they were concerned in particular with the problem of the underground in a regional dimension, referring both to the years of the Second World War and the period after its end, as well as whether it is appropriate to speak at all of the two anti-totalitarian underground conspiracies, and to call the attitudes taken self-defense, moral duty or the actions of conscious citizens.⁹⁷

It is worth noting that in 2007, the Institute of National Remembrance began to intensively disseminate the issues of the wartime and postwar underground through the press. The first issue of the “Bulletin of the Institute of National Remembrance” (Polish: “Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej”) of that year was issued with the leading theme “*Cursed Soldiers*” – *about the anti-communist armed underground 1944–1956* (Polish: “*Żołnierze wyklęci*” – *o antykomunistycznym podziemiu zbrojnym 1944–1956*). At the same time, researchers from the IPN were preparing mini-monographs depicting the profiles of individual Cursed Soldiers. Meanwhile, “*Nasz Dziennik*” (a nationwide Catholic-national daily) began a series of monthly supplements to present items from the Institute of National Remembrance’s research output. The first issue of the supplement was devoted entirely to the history and commemoration of the underground. Among the articles were texts entitled *Cursed Soldiers: The Post War Independence Underground* (Polish: *Żołnierze Wyklęci – powojenne podziemie niepodległościowe*), *Silhouettes of the Unbroken* (Polish: *Sylwetki niezłomnych*) and *Monument to the Cursed Soldiers* (Polish: *Pomnik Żołnierzy Wyklętych*) by Piotr Szubarczyk, or *The independence underground in Poland after 1944* (Polish: *Podziemie niepodległościowe w Polsce po roku 1944*) by Piotr Niwiński. The December 2007 supplement, on the other hand, was titled *The Polish Underground State* (Polish: *Polskie Państwo Podziemne*),⁹⁸ and the issue discussed both the phenomenon of the organization of underground structures, the course of the “Storm” action,⁹⁹ the trial of the sixteen leaders of the Polish Underground

97 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Informacje...*; Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół mitu “żołnierzy wyklętych”*, <http://przegladpolityczny.pl/wokol-mitu-zolnierzy-wykletych-rafal-wnuk>, [last accessed 11.07.2024].

98 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Informacje...*; *ibid.*: *Dodatki historyczne do prasy*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/periodyki-ipn/dodatki-historyczne-do>, [last accessed 11.07.2024].

99 The “Storm” action (Polish: *akcja “Burza”*) was a military operation organized and undertaken by units of the Home Army against German troops in the final phase of the German

State,¹⁰⁰ and the profiles of the “Unbroken.” It is worth adding that in the same year, 2007, the Institute of National Remembrance published *Atlas of the Polish Independence Underground 1944–1956* (Polish: *Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944–1956*; depicting the activity of various underground organizations in different regions of the country).¹⁰¹ This was when, as historian Paweł Machcewicz pointed out, “the term ‘Cursed Soldiers,’ although already widespread, was not then treated as only valid.”¹⁰²

It is worth noting that in 2008, in the pages of the second issue of the “Nasz Dziennik” supplement, researchers from the Institute of National Remembrance declared their efforts to substantiate the view that there was an anti-communist national uprising in Poland after World War II. Historian Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński, in the opening text of that supplement, pointed out that although resistance existed in other countries occupied by Stalin, only in Poland did it have such a mass character and great scope, making it legitimate to call it an uprising. At the same time, the author seemed to settle the dispute over the interpretation of post-war events, dividing the narratives into those disseminating the truth, promulgated by scholars of the younger generation (siding with the “Polish anti-communist uprising”), and those post-communist, pseudo-scientific, which are an attempt to “salvage what they can from the ‘legacy’ of communist propaganda,” aiming to blur the distinction between victim and executioner.¹⁰³ In this way, through the press, a very clear, far-from-neutral approach (dividing narratives about the post-war underground into those reflecting good and those embodying evil) was conveyed to a broader audience. The initiated form, spreading the description of members of the underground as “the cursed” or

occupation, immediately before the entry of the Red Army, carried out within the borders of the Second Polish Republic. It lasted from January 1944 to January 1945. The order to begin the action stated, among other things, “In the face of the regular Russian army entering our lands, act as a host. One should strive to have a Polish commander who has had a battle with the Germans and, as a result, the best right of a host, come out to face the encroaching Soviet troops.” From a military point of view, then, the “Storm” was an attempt at Polish-Soviet cooperation in the fight against the Germans, while politically its goal was to get the Soviets to recognize Polish rights to the lands of the Second Polish Republic into which the Red Army was entering. See: Mariusz Jarośniński: *Powstanie Warszawskie 1944*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/powstanie-warszawskie-1944>, [last accessed 11.07.2024]; Stefan Korboński: *Polskie...*, pp. 160–170.

100 The show trial of the political leaders of the Polish Underground State, held on June 18–21, 1945 in Moscow in front of the Military Collegium of the Supreme Court of the USSR. See: *ibid.*, pp. 228–229.

101 Rafał Wnuk/Sławomir Poleszak/Agnieszka Jaczyńska/Magdalena Śladecka (eds.): *Atlas polskiego podziemia niepodległościowego 1944–1956*, Warszawa–Lublin 2007.

102 Paweł Machcewicz: *Muzeum...*, p. 59.

103 Wojciech Jerzy Muszyński: *Polskie powstanie antykomunistyczne*, in: *Nasz Dziennik 2/9* (2008), pp. 1–3, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/periodyki-ipn/dodatki-historyczne-do/9735,Po-1944-roku-nie-wojna-domowa-lecz-powstanie.html>, [last accessed 11.07.2024].

“unbroken” participants of the “anti-communist uprising,” was sustained in subsequent publications produced by the IPN, which in 2008 were added not only to “Nasz Dziennik” but also to the monthly “Niezależna Gazeta Polska.”¹⁰⁴

Why was the phrase “anti-communist uprising” so important? It is worth referring here to the words of journalist Krzysztof Pilawski, who noted in March 2010: “Non-high-ranking IPN officials offered Lech Kaczyński a new national uprising. The President accepted the gift with gratitude.”¹⁰⁵ At the same time, he added:

In recent years, the employees of the Institute of National Remembrance have popularized the term ‘anti-communist uprising,’ which is meant to reflect the nature of the actions taken by the Cursed Soldiers. [...] The word uprising has a fundamental meaning here. It is about eliminating the calling of the ongoing struggle in Poland after the Second World War a civil war. This is because civil war presupposes the existence of two or more parties to the conflict that have a social base. Recognizing the post-war fighting as a civil war requires, at the same time, accepting that the forces that seized power in 1944–1945 had the support of part of society behind them. Using the term uprising sets historical events on a different plane: there was no Polish-Polish civil war, but a national uprising directed against a foreign Soviet invader, an occupying power.¹⁰⁶

Therefore, Krzysztof Pilawski criticized the narrative direction perpetuated at that time by the Institute of National Remembrance, which portrayed the actions of the post-war conspiracy as an expression of the will of the entire Polish nation.

After only a few IPN’s historical supplements to the press in 2009 that referred to the topic of the Polish underground, in 2010 (and 2011) this subject became very popular. Publications appeared in newspapers with Catholic-national, conservative-Catholic, right-wing-conservative and conservative-liberal profiles.¹⁰⁷ Accordingly, the 2010 report on the activities of the Institute of National Remembrance wrote:

“On March 1, 2010, on the Day of the Soldiers of the Anti-Communist Underground, although formally not yet established by the Parliament of the Republic of Poland, the Institute honored the soldiers of the independence underground. On that day, commemorative supplements were published in the press [...]. In Program 1 of the Polish Public Television, on the initiative of the Institute and with its participation, an 8-episode series of short documentary forms entitled Cursed Soldiers, showing profiles of

104 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Dodatki...*

105 Krzysztof Pilawski: *Święci wyklęci*, <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/swieci-wyklęci/>, [last accessed 11.07.2024].

106 Ibid.

107 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Dodatki...*

soldiers who sacrificed their lives fighting for the independence of the fatherland, was broadcast.”¹⁰⁸

Thus, with the use of various media, calling members of the underground “cursed” or “unbroken” became increasingly popular in the public space.

What is the history of the above-mentioned national memory day? The idea of establishing the Day of the Soldiers of the Anti-Communist Underground in the calendar of national holidays (on March 1) was formulated in 2009 by circles gathered in the Alliance of Combatant and Independence Organizations. Support for the project was declared by the parliamentary clubs of the Civic Platform (Polish: Platforma Obywatelska, PO; a centrist political party) and the Law and Justice party, while the legislative initiative was put forward in 2010 by President Lech Kaczyński. In the justification for the bill, however, the president proposed a different name for the holiday than the term put forward by veterans’ circles, replacing a formulation closer to academic considerations with a term of greater pathos. After the plane crash near Smolensk, the project to establish the National Day of Remembrance of the “Cursed Soldiers” was upheld by President Bronisław Komorowski.¹⁰⁹ Although the establishment of this holiday goes beyond the period of the first Law and Justice governments, since it was the initiative of President Lech Kaczyński, and because of how the celebrations of this holiday became part of the Law and Justice party’s subsequent memory narratives, these issues should be discussed.

The Culture and Media Committee conducted the first reading of the draft law on the new holiday in February 2011. Secretary of State at the Chancellery of the President of the Republic of Poland Krzysztof Łaszkievicz noted during the meeting that it is intended to be created “in tribute to the soldiers who, in defense of the sovereign existence of the state and the realization of the democratic aspirations of Polish society, with arms in their hands opposed foreign aggression and the system imposed on Poland by force, which was not accepted by the vast majority of citizens.”¹¹⁰ And while the issue of the necessity of commemorating those who fought against the system in itself did not raise objections at the meeting, the terms “anti-communist insurrection” and “Cursed Soldiers” included in the justification did. Doubts were raised, among other things, by the selective treatment of the victims of that period, tearing at the wounds of the past

108 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Informacja o działalności Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej – Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu 1 stycznia 2010 r. – 31 grudnia 2010 r.*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/o-ipn/informacje-o-dzialalnosc/24312,w-okresie-1-stycznia-2010-r-31-grudnia-2010-r.html>, [last accessed 12.07.2024].

109 Paweł Machcewicz: *Muzeum...*, p. 222; Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół...*

110 Kancelaria Sejmu. Biuro Komisji Sejmowych: *Biuletyn z posiedzenia Komisji Kultury i Środków Przekazu (nr 147)*, p. 3, [http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Biuletyn.nsf/0/262E9A34B2520FA4C1257833004FD5FA/\\$file/0466706.pdf](http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Biuletyn.nsf/0/262E9A34B2520FA4C1257833004FD5FA/$file/0466706.pdf), [last accessed 12.07.2024].

and creating divisions. In the course of the discussion, however, the option prevailed that the term “Cursed Soldier” is to be a symbol and not an expression firmly established in historiography or the result of “bidding martyrdom.”

The term “anti-communist uprising” was, in turn, questioned during the debate on the bill, firstly because it was not sufficiently anchored in the works of scientific authorities, and secondly as one around which there is no consensus in science,¹¹¹ and “the Sejm is not for writing history”¹¹² (as independent MP Andrzej Celiński explicitly pointed out). It was, therefore, decided that the term used in the draft was only a specific formula that a better expression could replace. Thus, the decision was made to delete this phrase (as formally in documents non-existent and functioning mainly in journalism), proposing terms indicating that the law was created in tribute to “heroes of the anti-communist resistance movement,” “heroes of the anti-communist underground and civilian resistance movement,” or “heroes of the anti-communist underground” who fought “with weapons in hand, as well as in other ways.” After discussions and almost unanimous votes on the amendments and the entire bill in the Commission (with few abstentions or dissenting votes),¹¹³ the law establishing the National Day of Remembrance of the “Cursed Soldiers” was passed. It came into force on February 15, 2011. Its purpose was to pay tribute to

The “Cursed Soldiers”—heroes of the anti-communist underground who, in defense of the independent existence of the Polish State, fought for the right to self-governance and the realization of the democratic aspirations of Polish society, with weapons in hand, as well as in other ways, resisted Soviet aggression and the communist regime imposed by force.¹¹⁴

It is worth noting that over the years after 1989, the two terms evoked above, “anti-communist uprising” and “Cursed Soldiers,” took on different dimensions of meaning. “Cursed Soldiers,” from a pathetic name for members of the post-war underground (or, more broadly, all those who opposed the Moscow-imposed system in the first post-war years), moved to be seen as the unquestionable embodiment of patriotism and a heroic stance. On the subject of changes within narratives about Cursed Soldiers, extensive reflections were presented by historian and political scientist Rafał Wnuk. He noted that, as early as the 1990s, a two-track understanding of this term emerged. The interpretation of the Republican League circles, made in connection with the 1993 exhibition mentioned

111 Ibid., pp. 4–10.

112 Ibid., pp. 8–9.

113 Ibid., pp. 10–17.

114 Internetowy System Aktów Prawnych: *Ustawa z dnia 3 lutego 2011 r. o ustanowieniu Narodowego Dnia Pamięci “Żołnierzy Wyklętych”*, <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU20110320160/T/D20110160L.pdf>, [last accessed 15.07.2024].

above, perceived the “cursing” of the Cursed Soldiers as not so much a forgetting in the period of the People’s Republic of Poland but as the omission of their subject in the narratives of the opinion-making elites of the Third Republic. Thus, the term was an accusation of the intentional elimination of the history of these fighting groups from the social consciousness built under conditions of freedom. In contrast, the interpretation presented in Jerzy Ślaski’s 1996 book, also mentioned above, referred to the condemnation to oblivion of the subject of the struggle of the post-war underground by the Polish People’s Republic, postulating the restoration of its memory. Thus, the second interpretation acted against the decisions of the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland (dominating in veterans’ and academic circles), while the first (turning against the policy on the construction of collective memory in the Third Republic) became, with time, an element of the postulates of some circles of the Polish Right, co-creating the ideological platform of the Law and Justice.¹¹⁵ As R. Wnuk pointed out:

When the chancellery of Polish President Lech Kaczyński metamorphosed the name proposed by the veterans, the Day of the Soldiers of the Anti-Communist Underground into the National Day of Remembrance of the “Cursed Soldiers,” for a significant part of right-wing circles this change had a fundamental meaning. This is because, in their understanding, it delegitimized the direction of the changes taking place in Poland after 1989. Socio-political actors outside the right wing, including those active in the sphere of the politics of memory, were unaware of the term’s ambiguity. When politicians from PO, PiS, SLD,¹¹⁶ and PSL¹¹⁷ pressed the “yes” button almost unanimously while voting on the law establishing the National Day of Remembrance of the “Cursed Soldiers,” they only ostensibly advocated common values.¹¹⁸

The authorities’ activities outlined above were accompanied by other acts evoking and commemorating individual figures of the Polish independence underground. Of particular note in this context are the commemorative actions relating to those figures who aroused contradictory assessments, where approval was accompanied by condemnation.

The first such figure was Zygmunt Szendzielarz “Łupaszka” (also: “Łupaszko”), commander of the 5th Wileńska Brigade of the Home Army. During the communist period, he was negatively portrayed as a bandit committing

115 Joanna Podgórska: *Jak prawica wykorzystuje do swoich celów historię antykomunistycznego podziemia*, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1659844,1,jak-prawica-wykorzystuje-do-swoich-celow-historie-antykomunistycznego-podziemia.read>, [last accessed 15.07.2024]; Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół...*

116 The Democratic Left Alliance (Polish: Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, SLD); Polish left-wing party.

117 The Polish People’s Party (Polish: Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL) is an agrarian political party in Poland.

118 Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół...*

numerous bloody crimes in the areas of Białystok and Podlasie (for which he was sentenced to an 18-fold death sentence in 1950 and executed in 1951). Access to previously unavailable data after 1989 allowed researchers to verify the deeds of “Łupaszka,” although this did not remove all doubts. Nevertheless, in 1993, the Military District Court in Warsaw and the Military Chamber of the Supreme Court rehabilitated Major Z. Szendzielarz, overturning the death sentences imposed on him in the People’s Republic of Poland.¹¹⁹ In 2006, his memory was commemorated at the state level with a resolution of the Sejm, which announced that:

Major [...] became a symbol of the unbroken struggle for an Independent Poland waged by the Cursed Soldiers—soldiers of the anti-communist resistance movement from the Freedom and Independence organization, the Home Army in the Eastern Borderlands, the Mobilization Center of the Vilnius District of the Home Army, the National Armed Forces, the National Military Union, the Home Army Resistance Movement, the Conspiratorial Polish Army and from many other organizations; the subordinates of Lieutenant Colonel “Kotwicz,” Second Lieutenant “Zagończyk,” Captain “Młot,” Major “Orlik,” Major “Zapora,” Captain “Warszyc,” Major “Ogień,” Captain “Bartek,” and many others, whose soldierly trail was ended by death in an uneven fight with the communist security forces or by a secret police shot in the back of the head.¹²⁰

The resolution ended with the statement: “The Sejm of the Republic of Poland, honoring their memory, states that the Cursed Soldiers served the Homeland well.”¹²¹ In addition to Z. Szendzielarz, other commanders were also rehabilitated in this way, including those, like “Łupaszka” himself, who were judged variously in historiography and journalism. During the work on the document, however, there was awareness of the existing controversy, as in the Report of the Committee on Culture and Media on the parliamentary draft of the resolution mentioned above, MP Mirosław Krajewski pointed out:

The fact is that the figure of “Łupaszka” still arouses controversy and is presented in a good or unfavorable light, evoking feelings that are often heterogeneous. This is how it is with unremarkable people, especially those who found themselves in incredible political and military turmoil. However, one cannot give credence to those opinions that

119 Biuro Bezpieczeństwa Narodowego: *100. rocznica urodzin mjr. Zygmunta Szendzielarza*, <https://www.bbn.gov.pl/pl/wydarzenia/2139,100-rocznica-urodzin-mjr-Zygmunta-Szendzielarza.html>, [last accessed 16.07.2024]; Piotr Szubarczyk: “*Łupaszko*” *wychodzi w pole*, <https://przystanekhistoria.pl/pa2/tematy/zbrodnie-sowieckie/39337,Lupaszko-wychodzi-w-pole.html>, [last accessed 16.07.2024].

120 Internetowy System Aktów Prawnych: *Uchwała Sejmu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej z dnia 23 marca 2006 r. w 55. rocznicę śmierci majora Zygmunta Szendzielarza “Łupaszki”, dowódcy 5 Wileńskiej Brygady Armii Krajowej*, <http://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WMP20060240263/O/M20060263.pdf>, [last accessed 16.07.2024].

121 Ibid.

put the men of “Łupaszka” on a par with groups that conducted robberies and engaged in ordinary banditry.¹²²

Awareness of doubts, therefore, did not cancel the symbolic act of cleansing the image of Z. Szendzielarz (decorated a year later, on November 11, 2007, by Polish President L. Kaczyński with the Grand Cross of the Order of Rebirth of Poland, and in 2008 buried symbolically in the Powązki Military Cemetery).¹²³

On the other hand, the rehabilitation of “Łupaszka” did not remove skeptical voices, as the issue concerned the killing of civilians (both the legitimacy of executions of confidants and random victims, but primarily the question of responsibility for the crime in Dubinki). About the issue of civilian blood on their hands and the infliction of punishment on people who collaborated with the secret political police (Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB), the question was sometimes asked: could there be a certainty that this was justified, or on the contrary, did it exceed the limits of self-defense?¹²⁴ Some approaches considered those killed in executions alongside random civilian victims, to some extent justifying their deaths by the chaos of war conditions, although not in every case. One such incident is precisely the crime in the Lithuanian town of Dubinki on June 23, 1944, which was a direct retaliatory action for the murder of Polish citizens of Gliniszki. The operation was carried out by subunits of the 5th Brigade of “Łupaszka,” under the direct command of his subordinates: Jan Węcek “Rakoczy” and Antoni Rymśza “Maks.” There is no evidence that Z. Szendzielarz gave them orders to murder civilians. Their absence has left researchers and publicists to speculate only, wondering whether the action against Lithuanian civilians incriminates “Łupaszka” personally (since he was the commander) or whether the responsibility for it lies solely with his subordinates, for whom the order became a field for over-interpretation.¹²⁵ Many researchers took the position that, in the absence of any incriminating material, it should be assumed that Z. Szendzielarz, while giving the order to carry out retaliation against Lithuanian perpetrators of crimes against Poles, did not order the murder of

122 Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej: 5 kadencja, 14 posiedzenie, 2 dzień (23.03.2006). 17 punkt porządku dziennego: *Sprawozdanie Komisji Kultury i Środków Przekazu o poselskim projekcie uchwały w 55. rocznicę śmierci majora Zygmunta Szendzielarza “Łupaszki”, dowódcy 5 Wileńskiej Brygady Armii Krajowej*, <http://orka2.sejm.gov.pl/Debata5.nsf/main/1700B2CF>, [last accessed 16.07.2024].

123 Archiwum.rp.pl: *Symboliczny pogrzeb “Łupaszki”*, https://archiwum.rp.pl/artukul/789482_Symboliczny_pogrzeb_%E2%80%9ELupaszki%E2%80%9D.html, [last accessed 16.07.2024]; Piotr Szubarczyk: “Łupaszko”...

124 Joanna Podgórska: *Jak prawica...*

125 Waldemar Kowalski: *Zygmunt Szendzielarz “Łupaszko”, czyli walka o Polskę bez kompromisów. W obronie wyklętego bohatera*, <https://natemat.pl/171037,zygmunt-szendziela-rz-lupaszko-czyli-walka-o-polske-bez-kompromisow-w-obronie-wyklętego-bohatera>, [last accessed 16.07.2024]; Joanna Podgórska: *Jak prawica...*; Piotr Szubarczyk: “Łupaszko”...

women and children.¹²⁶ Others, on the other hand, thought that every action of the subordinates incriminated the commander and that the extermination of random victims could in no way be justified. Some spoke forcefully about the war crime.¹²⁷

The second of the figures worth noting in the context of formulating different judgments towards them is Major Józef Kuraś “Ogień,” a soldier of the Tatra Confederation, the Home Army, and commander of the People’s Security Guard units. He was a partisan in Podhale during World War II and one of the commanders of the independence and anti-communist underground.¹²⁸ On the one hand, he was heroized; on the other, he became an object of criticism. In praise of the activities of J. Kuraś and his men, actions such as punishing common criminals operating in Podhale, fighting Slovak nationalists, or liquidating collaborators and secret political police officers are indicated, which are considered elements of pro-independence operations. In the criticism formulated, however, there are accusations that in addition to partisan independence activities identifying the Jewish population with the communist regime, J. Kuraś murdered Holocaust survivors. Józef Kuraś was not burdened solely by the issue of killing Jews, and many researchers and publicists have pointed out that the issue of murders and other crimes against civilians (including Polish and Slovaks) is still unresolved, and its evaluation cannot be limited solely to the perspective of independence activity. In this context, reflections were also conducted on the correctness of the selection of sources of information about J. Kuraś’s activities, which were guided by the question of the reliability of both the content produced by partisans and the accounts of witnesses to events.¹²⁹

The judgments of this figure were, therefore, significantly different. However, this did not prevent the authorities and state institutions in 2005–2010 from honoring his commemoration. In fact, in the spirit of recognizing the merits and

126 Dziennik.pl: *Dr Łabuszewski: Nie ma żadnego dowodu na to, że “Łupaszka” wydał rozkaz mordowania kobiet i dzieci*, <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/historia/aktualnosci/artykuly/612501,lupaszka-dubinki-ipn-zygmunt-szendzielarz-historia-odwet-mord-zbrodnia.html>, [last accessed 16.07.2024].

127 Paweł Dybicz: *Falszwy mit “Łupaszki”*, <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/58176-2/>, [last accessed 16.07.2024]; Paweł Rokicki: *Głinciszki i Dubinki. Zbrodnie wojenne na Wiłęszczyźnie w połowie 1944 roku i ich konsekwencje we współczesnych relacjach polskoliteńskich*, Warszawa 2015.

128 Dawid Golik/Maciej Korcuć: *Józef Kuraś “Ogień” i Zgrupowanie Partyzanckie “Błyskawica”. Broszura edukacyjna Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/publikacje-edukacyjne-i/100191,Jozef-Kuras-Ogien-i-Zgrupowanie-Partyzanckie-Blyskawica.html>, [last accessed 18.07.2024].

129 Kamil Boruc: *Złudzenie bohaterstwa*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/zludzenie-bohaterstwa-128966>, [last accessed 18.07.2024]; Łukasz Łoziński: *Kontrowersje wokół Józefa Kurasia “Ognia” i jego podkomendnych. Narracje historyków oraz mieszkańców Podhala*, in: *Rocznik Antropologii Historii* 12 (2019), pp. 191–226.

forgiving the faults of J. Kuraś “Ogień,” one can read President Lech Kaczyński’s statement of August 13, 2006, when, during the unveiling of the monument to J. Kuraś in Zakopane, he remarked that “Ogień,” although a figure that arouses various kinds of disputes, is worthy of commemoration.¹³⁰ His words, however, were not interpreted as an invitation to understanding and forgiveness by opponents of commemorating “Ogień,” who took the presence of the head of state at this event very badly. Those who have opposed the streamlining process and the praising of J. Kuraś over the years have included the victims and witnesses of the actions carried out by “Ogień,” as well as their families. These people recalled both situations when J. Kuraś’s partisans forced them to hand over their possessions without compensation (thus committing robbery) and carried out assaults, rapes, and self-judgments on innocent people (or administered punishments inadequate to the offense, often acting arbitrarily). They, therefore, demanded that the formulated judgments of “Ogień” and his sub-commanders take into account the losses suffered by civilians.¹³¹

The third figure worth noting in the context of 2005–2010 was Romuald Rajs “Bury”. This man was engaged in conspiratorial activities in the Vilnius region as early as 1939. During World War II, he became commander of the 1st Assault Company of the 3rd Vilnius Brigade of the Home Army. After 1944, he took up combat as part of the 5th Vilnius Brigade of the Home Army, reconstituted in the Białystok region under the command of Zygmunt Szendzielarz “Łupaszka.” When it was temporarily disbanded in September 1945, Rajs became commander of the 3rd Vilnius Brigade of the National Military Union and the Special Action Emergency of the National Military Union Białystok District Command. He gave up fighting in 1946 and was arrested in 1948. During the investigation, he completely denounced himself, and during his trial, he admitted to pacifying Belarusian villages. In turn, he did not confirm the order to kill Orthodox Belorussian peasants (carters) near Puchały Stare. He was sentenced to death by the Military District Court in Białystok; the sentence was carried out on December 30, 1949.¹³²

130 Roman Sidorski: *W Zakopanem odsłonięto pomnik Józefa Kurasia, ps. “Ogień”*, <https://histmag.org/W-Zakopanem-odslonieto-pomnik-Jozefa-Kurasia-ps.-Ogien-239>, [last accessed 18.07.2024].

131 Leszek Konarski: *“Ogień” był bandytą*, <https://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/ogien-byl-bandyta-0/>, [last accessed 18.07.2024]; Józef Słowik: *Waksmund: protest przeciw obchodom śmierci Kurasia “Ognia”*, <https://zakopane.naszemiasto.pl/waksmund-protest-przeciw-obchodom-smierci-kurasia-quotognia/ar/c1-324604>, [last accessed 18.07.2024].

132 Jerzy Kułak: *Romuald Adam Rajs (1913–1949)*, in: Wojciech Frazik (ed.), *Konspiracja i opór społeczny w Polsce 1944–1956. Słownik Biograficzny. Tom II*, Kraków–Warszawa–Wrocław 2004, pp. 432–439; Michał Ostapiuk: *Komendant “Bury”. Biografia kpt. Romualda Adama Rajsa “Burego” (1913–1949)*, Białystok–Olsztyn–Warszawa 2019; Magdalena Semczyszyn:

After the system transformation in Poland, on September 15, 1995, the Warsaw Military District Court annulled the death sentence handed down to Romuald Rajs “Bury.” The justification included a statement that Romuald Rajs had acted in support of a superior goal, that is, Poland’s independent existence, and that his actions aimed to prevent repressions against those fighting for Polish independence. Thus, his orders (concerning, among other things, the pacification of Belarusian villages) were considered a state of higher necessity, which forced him to take actions that were not always ethically clear-cut. On this basis, the family of Romuald Rajs was awarded compensation, and “Bury” and his soldiers were rehabilitated. However, although welcomed by a part of the Podlasie community, this act did not extinguish the disputes. This is because the issue of the crimes of Romuald Rajs and his subordinates was not resolved, and this, in turn, gave strength to the initiators of the commemoration of the victims.¹³³

In 1995, the Social Committee for the Exhumation of the Remains of Persons Murdered in Puchały Stare sent a request to the then-acting District Commission for the Investigation of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Białystok, which resulted in the initiation of activities by this Commission in the case of the murder of the carters in the forest near Puchały Stare, as well as other acts remaining in direct temporal, spatial and subjective relation to this matter. On March 25, 1997, the investigation was opened, but due to the liquidation of the District Commissions, it was temporarily suspended. On April 4, 2002, after the Białystok Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes Against the Polish Nation started functioning, the investigation was resumed. A decision to discontinue the investigation was issued three years later, on June 30, 2005.¹³⁴ However, the final findings of this investigation (in the material released to the media) attested clearly:

Based on all the evidence, there can be no doubt that the directing perpetrator—the person giving the orders—was R. Rajs “Bury,” and the executors were some of his soldiers. [...] Based on the investigative activities that have been carried out, it must be concluded that the other perpetrators who committed the criminal acts cannot be

Pacyfikacja pięciu wsi. O ciemnych kartach biografii kapitana Romualda Rajsa “Burego,” in: *Kwartalnik Historyczny* 127/2 (2020), pp. 369–396.

133 Anna Moroz: *Konflikt pamięci na pograniczu polsko-białoruskim na przykładzie działalności Romualda Rajsa ps. “Bury,”* *Studia z Geografii Politycznej i Historycznej* 5 (2016), pp. 61–91.

134 *Ibid*; Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Informacja o ustaleniach końcowych śledztwa S 28/02/Zi w sprawie pozbawienia życia 79 osób – mieszkańców powiatu Bielsk Podlaski w tym 30 osób tzw. furmanów w lesie koło Puchał Starych, dokonanych w okresie od dnia 29 stycznia 1946 r. do dnia 2 lutego 1946*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/dla-mediow/komunikaty/9989,Informacja-o-ustaleniach-koncowych-sledztwa-S-2802Zi-w-sprawie-pozbawienia-zycia.html>, [last accessed 26.07.2024].

individualized. [...] Without questioning the idea of the struggle for Poland's independence carried out by organizations opposed to the imposed authority, which include the National Military Union, it must be firmly stated that the murders of the carters and the pacifications of villages in January–February 1946 cannot be equated with the struggle for the independent existence of the state, as they bear the hallmarks of genocide. Also, under no circumstances can whatever happened to be justified by the fight for the independent existence of the Polish State. On the contrary, the actions of “Bury” carried out against the inhabitants of Podlasie villages supported the communist apparatus of power and, above all, lowered the prestige of underground organizations, providing propaganda arguments about the banditry of partisan units.¹³⁵

Conflict of memories in the years 2015–2025

The law on establishing the National Day of Remembrance of the “Cursed Soldiers” described above, although it seemed to unite political camps in opposition to each other, in fact became one of the most important elements of the politics of memory of the Law and Justice party. Around this thread for the Law and Justice party, it became possible to build a cult of the “Cursed Soldiers,” with a catalog of espoused values and attitudes as well as rules for creating a self-image and political legend of the inheritors. The expressive power of this narrative was strengthened by assurances about the conspiracy of silence against the underground by the “post-communist elite,” the “second and third generation of departmental children,” whose ancestors were involved in fighting the post-war resistance.¹³⁶ Such a direction for shaping the story of post-war Poland was announced by PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński as early as 2012 when he stated during a ceremony organized in Piaski (Lublin voivodeship) to commemorate the last partisan of the independence underground, Józef Franczak (alias “Lalek”):

Poland must really change. Only then will this truth about heroes become common property and become what it should be: one of the foundations of building a truly independent Poland, which is in the hearts of Poles who are ready to work for it, live for it, and, when the need comes, defend it.¹³⁷

At the same time, he added, Polish society has been lied to about the “Cursed Soldiers” for decades, making it still necessary to fight for the truth about their merits. “This truth is still not a universal truth. This truth is still being covered up,

135 Ibid.

136 Paweł Machcewicz: *Muzeum...*, p. 222; Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół...*

137 See: Money.pl: *Kaczyński: Trzeba zmian w Polsce, by prawda była powszechna*, <https://prawo.money.pl/aktualnosci/wiadomosci/arttykul/kaczyński;trzeba;zmian;w;polsce;by;prawda;była;powszechna,34,0,1037090.html> [last accessed 21.08.2024].

still being hidden,”¹³⁸ he pointed out. In this way, he outlined the basic assumptions of his party’s politics of memory, aimed at uncovering what the political and intellectual elites of the Third Republic tried to hide, and focused on showing the pursuit of this unraveling in terms of the actual independence that has not yet been achieved. It is worth noting that the stance adopted in this form, which became one of the fundamental directions in the policies of the Polish right in the second decade of the 21st century, seemed not to recognize as sufficiently crucial for building the collective memory of Polish society the previous acts of commemoration of the post-war underground (i. e., resolutions honoring particular individuals or formations, the law on the National Day of Remembrance of the “Cursed Soldiers,” as well as numerous publications, museum exhibitions and many other elements). The Law and Justice party’s way of telling the story of the post-war underground, as a truth hidden by all other political forces of the Third Republic, did not change even when commemorative activities intensified in strength and 2013 was declared the Year of Cursed Soldiers.¹³⁹ Thus, since 2015, thanks to the victorious political camp that became the Law and Justice party, stories about “Cursed Soldiers” have come to the forefront of the narratives conducted by the Polish authorities (playing the same leading role as the narratives about the Warsaw Uprising after 2004).

It should be noted that strengthening the predominance of the theme of “Cursed Soldiers” in the post-2015 discourse has often been accompanied by the constitution of this issue based on the narratives of years past to create a broader journalistic and scientific tradition for them. In 2016, for example, publicist Cezary Gmyz stated that the publication of *the Atlas of the Polish Independence Underground 1944–1956* in 2007 had led to a notable increase in the cult of the ‘Cursed Soldiers.’¹⁴⁰ He also indicated:

I had 10 copies of *Atlas* at home; I don’t have any because I gave them all away. It is simply a white raven. [...] *The Atlas* of the independence underground referred to the people’s closest environment. Anyone who took the *Atlas* in his hands could see what unit, at what time, was active in his neighborhood. This actually appealed to young people.¹⁴¹

Referring to the above words, the co-editor of *Atlas...* Rafał Wnuk, while not denying that the topic of the independence underground has become increasingly popular since the publication indicated, emphasized:

138 Ibid.

139 Rok Żołnierzy Wykłętych: *Idea*, https://rokozolnierzywykletych.pl/?page_id=145, [last accessed 21.08.2024].

140 See: Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół...*

141 See: *ibid.*

For the editorial board members and most of the authors, this project had the character of professional research, which aimed to describe the post-war underground in quantitative and spatial terms. The editors of *Atlas...* were aware of the ambiguity [...], and as a result, the word “Cursed Soldiers” was not mentioned even once in the publication. Nor did they later join in the process of building the mythology of the “cursed.”¹⁴²

It is worth adding that after 2015, more and more often, publicists and right-wing activists began to combine narratives about “Cursed Soldiers” with strong support for the concept of a “Polish anti-communist uprising” (more than once presented as the longest in the history of Poland and with the highest number of participants, constituting “the obvious opposition of Polish patriots to the yoke imposed once again on Poland, by foreigners, by the Kremlin, by Moscow”¹⁴³). This was already done in September 2015 by President A. Duda, who, in a letter read at the funeral ceremonies of the victims of communist terror exhumed in the quarters at the Powązki Military Cemetery, noted:

This is one of the most meaningful symbols of the Third Republic. Here, for nearly seventy years, rested the remains of the soldiers of our last uprising: the anti-communist uprising. The extermination of the participants of the second conspiracy was the foundation of post-war power. It was a prerequisite for the regime imposed on the nation to maintain control over the country. [...] Cursed Soldiers, unbroken, you have served the Fatherland well! Free Poland thanks you today. Free Poland is proud of you. Glory to the heroes!¹⁴⁴

It should be noted that his words also included the issues announced by J. Kaczyński in 2012. First, President A. Duda pointed out that the dissemination of the truth about the “Cursed Soldiers” is the basis of Poland’s independence (“For the truth about the heroism and tragedy of the anti-communist underground is the foundation of the sovereign Republic”¹⁴⁵). Second, he emphasized that according to the order of the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland, members of the underground were to be forgotten (“Those whom we bury today with state honors as heroes of free Poland were to be forgotten forever. [...] And then, when the totalitarian empire of evil finally fell, the truth about the soldiers of the post-war underground resounded with a full voice. And today, it is our

142 Ibid.

143 Szymon Bafia: *Jan Józef Kasprzyk: walka Niezłomnych to powstanie antykomunistyczne*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/jan-jozef-kasprzyk-walka-niezlomnych-powstanie-antynomunistyczne>, [last accessed 22.08.2024].

144 Prezydent.pl: *List na uroczystościach pogrzebowych ofiar terroru komunistycznego ekshumowanych w kwaterze na Powązkach Wojskowych*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/inne/art,26,list-uroczystosci-pogrzebowych-ofiar-terroru-komunistycznego-ekshumowanych-w-kwaterze-l-na-powazkach-wojskowych.html>, [last accessed 22.08.2024].

145 Ibid.

common heritage and a marker of Polish identity”¹⁴⁶). Thirdly, he noted that the commemoration of members of the independence underground in the Third Republic is full of omissions and negligence (“For too long, the relatives of the victims and all of us Poles have had to wait for dignified commemoration of our heroes. For too long, free Poland delayed restoring historical and human justice to them”¹⁴⁷).

The highlighted elements were also part of President A. Duda’s later statements. For example, in 2017, in a letter to the organizers and participants of “ceremonies commemorating the heroes of the anti-communist uprising,”¹⁴⁸ he stated:

The heroic struggle of the Cursed Soldiers was another act in the historical drama of the fight for a free Poland. In the absence of any real chance of success and hope for a change in the country’s political position, its dramatic character resembles the situation known from the history of the January insurgents.¹⁴⁹ At the same time, the unbreakable attitude of these last defenders of the sovereign Republic of Poland unequivocally points to the most important values for our nation, which we Poles cherish more than our own lives: freedom and honor, solidarity with our brothers and sisters, and devotion to the national cause.¹⁵⁰

This statement not only described the events in post-war Poland as an uprising but also placed it in the context of other Polish independence uprisings, comparing it to the January Uprising. In the text of the letter, it was also noted that narratives about the “Cursed Soldiers” are directed primarily to young people, who are to draw from the example of the heroes of these events the imponderables inherent in the Polish nation. This position was also maintained by President A. Duda in subsequent years.¹⁵¹

Also in 2017, participating in the celebration of the National Day of Remembrance of the “Cursed Soldiers” on the grounds of the former Warsaw-Mokotów Detention Center, President A. Duda appealed to the families of members of the independence underground (which, as he stated, “by their suf-

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Prezydent.pl: *List Prezydenta RP do uczestników uroczystości upamiętniających bohaterów powstania antykomunistycznego*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/listy/list-prezydenta-rp-do-uczestnikow-uroczystosci-upamietniajacych-bohaterow-powstania-antykomunistycznego,5196>, [last accessed 23.08.2024].

149 The January Uprising was a Polish uprising against the Russian Empire. It broke out on January 22, 1863, in the Congress Kingdom of Poland and on February 1, 1863, in Lithuania. It lasted until the autumn of 1864 and covered the lands of the Russian partition. See among others: Norbert Haładaj: *Powstanie styczniowe 1863*, Warszawa 2022; Jacek Jaworski: *Powstanie styczniowe. Fakty znane i nieznanne*, Warszawa 2024.

150 Prezydent.pl: *List Prezydenta RP...*

151 Ibid.

fering at that terrible time and later in communist Poland can be boldly called [...] cursed families, and at the same time unbroken families”¹⁵²). He addressed the following words to them:

You are the ones who, through all these years of trampling, covering up the memory, and blasphemy, carried this memory in your hearts and your homes, passing it on to the next generations. And it is thanks to you, primarily thanks to you, that we are speaking loudly about it today in free Poland, which, after years, is rebuilding its potential and—I sincerely believe—is returning to its rightful place.¹⁵³

Gratitude to the “cursed families” for keeping alive the memory of the achievements of their loved ones, which the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland intended to destroy, President A. Duda also expressed in other speeches, filling in some elements of this narrative. Thus, in 2019, while emphasizing the heroism of the families of the soldiers of the post-war underground, he spoke of the repression falling on them (from torture in prisons to condemning them to starvation and poverty, preventing their development). At the same time, he pointed out that a genuinely independent Poland would not exist today without the “unbroken” whom the Communists feared and all the time had in their minds that they might return. “This is why the killed and murdered were buried in nameless graves. This is why sidewalks were laid over their burial sites, and asphalt was poured,” he stressed while adding, “so that no one would ever reach them, so that no one would find them, so that there would be no relics. But also out of fear, out of a vile, shameful fear.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, the official narrative about the “Cursed Soldiers” evolved from a negation of the order of the Third Republic, a disagreement with the oblivion entrenched in the People’s Republic of Poland, to present it as an almost religious apotheosis.

The merging of the narrative of “Cursed Soldiers” and the “Polish anti-communist uprising,” which became increasingly evident in the public sphere after 2015, did not mean, however, that disputes over the interpretation of post-war events ceased in the scientific community, although researchers who did not share the uprising thesis (using the terms “civil war” or “a kind of self-defense”) became less and less visible in the right-wing-oriented media. Sometimes, their positions were called a modified version of communist propaganda, its apologia, or a desperate attempt to save the remnants of it. Some media reports used manipulation of scientific statements for the effect the editors intended.¹⁵⁵ And

152 See: *GazetaPrawna.pl: Duda: Dzięki rodzinom Żołnierzy Wyklętych mówimy dziś o tych bohaterach*, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/artykuly/1023720,duda-zolnierze-wyklęci.html>, [last accessed 26.08.2024].

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid.

155 See: *wPolityce.pl: To było prawdziwe antykomunistyczne powstanie! Prof. Wnuk: “Przez wszystkie organizacje podziemia przewinęło się około 120 tys. Osób”*. WYWIAD, <https://>

although the dispute over the interpretation of postwar events seemed to be gaining strength, often losing its academic dimension, there were still debates based on factual arguments. It is worth noting, therefore, the conversation with historians Tomasz Łabuszewski and Rafał Wnuk published on the *Więź* portal in 2017 (led by journalist Zbigniew Nosowski and historian Andrzej Friszke), which brought the substantive dimension of the scientific discussion on the post-war underground closer.

Tomasz Łabuszewski sided with the term “anti-communist uprising” as the fairest term for a historical description of the situation. He reasoned:

The scale of armed resistance (mass passive resistance); its strong escalation in the spring-summer of 1945; the decisive influence of a foreign state hostile to Poland on the situation in the country; the fight by foreign formations (NKVD, Smiersz) against the structures of the legal Polish government-in-exile, still recognized by the international community—all these factors indicate that, at least in 1945, we can speak of an anti-communist uprising uniting almost the entire society. [...] I consider the reflex of self-defense in most members of the independence underground to be natural and inalienable. If their choice was to die in the woods or to be bludgeoned in the District Security Offices—that is, they faced the same choice as the Jewish insurgents in the Warsaw Ghetto.¹⁵⁶

In his statement, he also likened the recalled events to the January Uprising, pointing out common features such as a similar scale of armed involvement, an overlapping map of insurgent activity, the idea of an independent state, and the goal of fighting the occupation.

Rafał Wnuk, on the other hand, who objected to describing post-war events as an uprising, asked: “Is every rebellion, every fight against the occupier an uprising?”¹⁵⁷ In his view, the assumption that an armed action involving one percent of the people in a country is an uprising is wrong because such a perception would automatically force the conclusion that in Estonia the rebellion began in 1944 and lasted probably until 1972, that in Lithuania the uprising lasted until the 1960s, and that in Latvia the uprising lasted from May 1945 to the mid-1950s, led mainly by former soldiers of the Latvian Waffen SS. He added: “There, the ‘forest brothers’—our ‘Cursed Soldiers’ counterparts—were active everywhere. In those countries, the partisans had a much greater range than in Poland—as a percentage of the population—but no one there talks about insurgen-

wpolityce.pl/historia/283378-to-bylo-prawdziwe-antykomunistyczne-powstanie-prof-wnuk-przez-wszystkie-organizacje-podziemia-przewinelo-sie-okolo-120-tys-osob?strona=1, [last accessed 26.08.2024].

156 *Więź*: Czy “żołnierze wyklęci” prowadzili antykomunistyczne powstanie?, <https://wiewz.pl/2017/02/16/czy-zolnierze-wyklenci-prowadzili-antykomunistyczne-powstanie/>, [last accessed 27.08.2024].

157 *Ibid.*

cy.”¹⁵⁸ Rafał Wnuk also added that there is no record of underground members defining their activities in insurgent terms, and the lack of this awareness precludes such an interpretation. He also pointed out that the order to lay down their arms put soldiers in a tough situation with no good way out, but “most commanders and soldiers obeyed orders—and fortunately there was no anti-communist uprising,”¹⁵⁹ which the researcher considered “a great success for the post-war underground.”¹⁶⁰ He thus recognized the following terms as appropriate for the underground’s activities in 1945–1946: “extensive self-defense, limiting the influence of the communist authorities, periodic seizure of an area by some branch or organization (assuming that ‘seizing an area’ is not the seizure of a village but the surrounding forests).”¹⁶¹ The issue of comparing the actions of the post-war underground to the January Uprising was countered by the argument that there were differences between the level of crystallized national consciousness of Poles in the 19th century and the 20th century.

Although the cited excerpts from the discussion reveal only a tiny fragment of the debates regarding post-war events in the Polish territories, they show how strongly the narratives clashed after 2015, also on the scientific level, co-creating and responding to the disputes and differences in the stories about the same fragment of the Polish past that occurred in the public sphere.

In the context of the actions taken after 2015 by the authorities regarding the Polish independence underground, it is also worth noting the activity of the Institute of National Remembrance. First, there was another increase in the number of press supplements on the topic of “Cursed Soldiers” and the “anti-communist uprising.” This was joined by other initiatives. Among those worth mentioning are numerous book publications, a high number of scientific and popular science articles, brochures, and comic books, as well as many conferences, seminars, meetings, workshops, and exhibitions. Also noteworthy are artistic events (such as patriotic concerts) or film productions. Alongside these, educational portfolios, web portals, outdoor history lessons, urban games, educational projects, and competitions for young people were created, organized, and promoted. The growing number of initiatives was driven by interest in the topic of the “unbroken,” which was reflected by the attendance at initiated events and the popularity of implemented projects. Young people became a special target group—so the number of projects aimed at them continued to grow. Strong public support for the IPN’s activities, enabling the memory of the “Cursed Soldiers” who initiated the “anti-communist uprising” to take root, was

158 Ibid. See also: Joanna Podgórska: *Jak prawica...*

159 Więż: *Czy “żołnierze...”*.

160 Ibid.

161 Ibid.

also provided by foundations and associations, such as the Patriotic Association, the Association for the Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers, the Association of Families of the Cursed Soldiers, the Unbroken Foundation (dealing, among other things, with initiating educational and informational events, searching for the burial places of members of the post-war underground or organizing fundraisers for their exhumation and identification).¹⁶² This also became the goal of the Museum of Cursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of the People's Republic of Poland in Warsaw, founded in 2016.¹⁶³

Another important element of the activities undertaken by the Institute of National Remembrance was the search for the graves of "Cursed Soldiers" and the organization of funerals for the found victims. On November 10, 2011, the IPN President Łukasz Kamiński, Secretary of the Council for the Protection of Remembrance of Struggle and Martyrdom Andrzej Krzysztof Kunert, and Minister of Justice Krzysztof Kwiatkowski (PO) signed a letter of intent on cooperation in efforts to find the secret burial places of those who suffered death as a result of repression by the post-war authorities in Poland. Shortly after this event, a nationwide research program "Searching for unknown burial sites of victims of communist terror 1944–1956," was established at the Institute. Its purpose was to determine the location of the graves of those executed and murdered during the Stalinist years, as well as to exhume and identify the remains found. On November 17, 2011, Krzysztof Szważyk was appointed as the plenipotentiary to implement the letter of intent. On September 28, 2012, an agreement was reached between the IPN and the Pomeranian Medical University on the establishment of the Polish Genetic Database of Victims of Totalitarianism. Because of the expanding scope of the search, two years later (on May 6, 2014), the Council of the Project for the Search for Burial Sites and Identification of Victims of Totalitarianism was established, after which cooperation was formally established (through the signing of an agreement on May 22, 2014) with the Wrocław Medical University. On June 1, 2014, in turn, the Independent Search Department was established, with Krzysztof Szważyk entrusted with its management. Among the Department's tasks were archival searches, the preparation of expert reports and documentation, as well as the scientific processing of search results. The symbol of the project became the archaeological and exhumation work that was carried out at the Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw, however, search activities, exhumations, and identifications were carried out throughout the country. Burial sites of varying sizes were discovered, usually ranging from

162 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Dodatki...*; *ibid.*: *Informacje o działalności...*

163 *Dzieje.pl: IPN i Muzeum Żołnierzy Wyklętych zawarły porozumienie o współpracy*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/instytut-pamieci-narodowej-i-muzeum-zolnierzy-wykletych-zawarly-porozumienie-o>, [last accessed 27.08.2024].

several to several hundred people. For many victims, traces of the “Katyn method of killing,” that is, a shot or shots fired from a small weapon into the back of the captive’s head, were spotted. The identification work evoked a great deal of emotion. Although it did not always yield the expected results, the identities of many victims were uncovered, and they were later buried with honors, with representatives from the highest state authorities participating in the funeral ceremonies. Referring to the period from 2015, it should be noted that on June 16, 2016 (in connection with the entry into force of the Act of April 29, 2016, amending the Law on the IPN and certain other laws), the Office of Search and Identification of the Institute of National Remembrance was established. The new Office not only took over the tasks previously carried out by the Independent Search Department but also began to carry out broader activities, including the search for the resting places of those who lost their lives as a result of fighting against the imposed totalitarian system or as a result of totalitarian repression or ethnic cleansing in the period from November 8, 1917, to July 31, 1990.¹⁶⁴

Narratives at funerals have always served to honor and commemorate the victims, but sometimes, individual actions or statements have been criticized. This was the case at the funerals of Danuta Siedzikówna “Inka” and Feliks Selmanowicz “Zagończyk” (Gdańsk, August 27–28, 2016). On August 28, a memorial service was held in St. Mary’s Basilica in Gdańsk, at the end of which Polish President Andrzej Duda spoke.¹⁶⁵ He said:

This is an important day. Is it a sad one? After all, it is a funeral. No, it is not a sad day. Those closest to them have been experiencing sadness since the beginning of their lives because these deaths occurred 70 years ago. The descendants of these families are with us today. If we grieve, it is only for the fact that it took 70 years to wait for this funeral. And as many as 27 years after 1989. Ladies and gentlemen, while until 1989 it can be said that the regime was ruled by the same traitors who murdered Inka and Zagończyk, after 1989 theoretically not. Then how come it took 27 years to wait? Then how did it happen that we had to wait 27 years for Poland to bury its heroes? [...] Because do you know what the greatest punishment is? Being forgotten, erased, trampled, and buried under the sidewalk so that it is impossible to find one’s grave so that no one will ever know. This is the greatest punishment for the person’s memory and the greatest trampling for his family. It is extremely cruel to do things this way. They were able to do it. And do you know what? Today, they are fighting at all costs so that the names of those who murdered the Unbroken Soldiers are not mentioned and so that no one asks where they are

164 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Poszukiwania nieznanych miejsc pochówku ofiar terroru komunistycznego 1944–56*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/polityka/poszukiwania-nieznanych/33329,wwwwposzukiwaniaipngovpl.html>, [last accessed 28.08.2024].

165 Ibid.: *Pożegnaliśmy bohaterów! Uroczystości pogrzebowe Danuty Siedzikówny “Inki” i Feliksa Selmanowicza “Zagończyka” – Gdańsk, 27–28 sierpnia 2016*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/aktualnosci/36198,Pozegnalismy-bohaterow-Uroczystosci-pogrzebowe-Danuty-Siedzikowny-Inki-i-Feliksa.html>, [last accessed 29.08.2024].

buried. Because there is such a thing as the pride of a hero [...], which then flows down to future generations. But there is also the stigma of a traitor, and it too is very permanent. [...] Yes, here is the Polish state after 27 years, because I don't mention the previous one, finally regaining its dignity through this funeral.¹⁶⁶

The statement shows the narrative direction previously chosen by the Law and Justice party about the conspiracy of silence of the “post-communist elites,” which has also been repeatedly noticeable in other speeches of President A. Duda. However, this is not all. The narrative of the constant threat by traitors and the ongoing persistence of the heroes in a state of siege, unabated for decades, stood out firmly. This was noticed by critics who, stressing that the formulated accusation of the Third Republic also includes the Law and Justice government of 2005–2007, asked, among other questions: did President Andrzej Duda insult former President Lech Kaczyński?¹⁶⁷

It should be noted that the aforementioned speech of President A. Duda was not the only element criticized. The direction of the narratives, how they were conveyed, the forms chosen, the reasons for their construction, and the effects on society were also negatively assessed. Rafał Wnuk, who has already been quoted, developed these questions very broadly, considering the phrase “Cursed Soldiers” to be an advertising banner that obscures the accurate picture of the past. “The appeal to emotions and the language of comic books meant that the audience did not receive objectified, scientifically based, reliable historical knowledge but a simplified and increasingly ideologized message,”¹⁶⁸ he pointed out. In his opinion, the deepening romanticization of the narrative turned the “Cursed Soldiers” into an anti-system icon, “to which both political parties critical of or hostile to the Third Republic, as well as circles of fanatical football fans operating on the border of the criminal underworld, began to refer.”¹⁶⁹

From the above approach, it seems that the symbol of the Cursed Soldiers, based on simplifications, served primarily to enable the Law and Justice party to gain power (using circles that undermined the post-transitional order), to legitimize this power and to ensure the longevity of the government (as a result of influencing national identity and directing the message of the symbols to young people, including in the area of pop culture accepted by them). In this way,

166 See: RadioMaryja.pl: *Przemówienie Prezydenta Andrzeja Dudy wygłoszone podczas pogrzebu “Inki” i “Zagonyczyka”*, <https://www.radiomaryja.pl/multimedia/przemowienie-prezydenta-andrzeja-dudy-wygloszone-podczas-pogrzebu-inki-i-zagonyczyka/>, [last accessed 29.08.2024].

167 Karolina Błaszkwicz: *Kompromitacja Dudy na pogrzebie “Inki” i “Zagonyczyka”. Mówił o 27 latach hańby. Miał na myśli rządu PiS?*, <https://natemat.pl/188607,kompromitacja-dudy-na-pogrzebie-inki-i-zagonyczyka-mowil-o-27-latach-hanby-rowniez-z-winy-pis#>, [last accessed 29.08.2024].

168 Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół...*

169 Ibid.

narratives about the Cursed Soldiers began to overshadow the discourse on the Polish Underground State or the activities of the Home Army, making them less exciting topics and more an introduction to the main subject.¹⁷⁰ “From the entire complicated reality of the 1940s, practically only the supreme imperative remained, that after the end of the War, it was necessary to go into the forest with weapons and fight the occupant,”¹⁷¹ wrote P. Machcewicz. He further added that the phenomenon of the Polish Underground State is still insufficiently present in Polish historical memory, obscured by the story of military struggles, and is devalued among the components of the contemporary advocated model of patriotism, “in which every day work for the community is not valued as highly as the hypothetical readiness to die for it.”¹⁷²

It is worth pointing out, moreover, that persons voicing criticism or skepticism of narratives affirming unconditionally the Polish secret structures of World War II and the post-war anti-communist conspiracy often put forward the accusation that such affirmation seeks to unify the underground, excluding its diversity, and thus prevents the formulation of different assessments of the activities of separate formations. This is supposed to result in removing any criticism from the mainstream discourse, which is treated as an unnecessary, retrograde, and even harmful proposition. Thus, any story expressing doubts about the legitimacy, motivation, or morality of the actions taken by a particular underground faction can be considered an attack on Polish national identity or “modern patriotism” caused by low motives. It can also be classified as post-communist and pseudo-scientific content. Therefore, it is worth looking at this issue by analyzing the narratives appearing after 2015, pointing to the heterogeneity of the underground and presenting disapproval or objections to some of its members’ actions.

Since 2015, many researchers and commentators on social life have objected to the unification of “Cursed Soldiers,” which can lead to the exclusion of critical judgments, stripping public and scholarly discussion of objectivity. Among the emerging opinions, significant were those whose authors emphasized the diversity of the independence conspiracy (and thus the impossibility of its unified evaluation). Researchers and publicists of this trend noted that each underground formation had its own ideological face, making it impossible to interpret their assumptions or motives for action uniformly. They pointed out, among other things, that the Freedom and Independence Association, the most significant post-war underground organization, preached the idea of non-violent struggle. Moreover, they pointed out that those who originated from the Home

170 Joanna Podgórska: *Jak prawica...*

171 Paweł Machcewicz: *Muzeum...*, p. 223.

172 *Ibid.*, p. 225.

Army and the structures of the Polish Underground State were not among the proponents of continuing the armed struggle. The researchers and commentators also noted that there were fundamental differences between the underground formations in the area of visions for the future organization of the Polish state (from a pro-democratic approach to an extreme nationalist one). This led them to conclude that unification, because of its inability to take care of the details, tends toward an extreme deformation of the picture of the past. They commented that the unified narrative about the Cursed Soldiers would create a unified collective of national character (united by the bond of experiences and emotions) but not a civic community. It is worth noting that such voices, although they have appeared more than once since the beginning of the political transition, have increased in strength on the occasion of commemoration or rehabilitation acts of controversial figures or organizations. Those proclaiming such positions wondered who should be included in the pantheon of heroes (and especially if there was room for controversial individuals). After 2015, these attitudes of skepticism about narratives of memory of the Law and Justice party also became more prominent.¹⁷³

After 2015, the topic of Cursed Soldiers became more vivid, manifested in the expressiveness of the commemoration of specific individuals. Significantly, at that time, extreme emotions were aroused by figures already judged ambiguously in earlier years, such as Zygmunt Szendzielarz “Łupaszka,” Romuald Rajs “Bury” and Józef Kuraś “Ogień.”

The ongoing discussions in the public space about Zygmunt Szendzielarz “Łupaszka” intensified in 2016. After his remains were found in the Powązki Military Cemetery in 2013, Major “Łupaszka” was posthumously promoted to lieutenant colonel on February 29, 2016, and to colonel on April 24, 2016. He became a colonel on the day of his funeral,¹⁷⁴ in which representatives of the state’s highest authorities took part. The ambiguous assessments of “Łupaszka,” which were aroused especially in the press and social media, multiplied in the face of the funeral ceremony itself. Indeed, for many commentators, the official celebration has become not so much an expression of respect for the deceased as a political demonstration enriched with elements of a football match setting. Critics of this lavish ceremony, which fit in with the football fan culture, treated the adopted form of commemoration as the culmination of an uncritical mass cult, which had been building since the first stage of idealization of the generation of “Cursed Soldiers” (and which began in the 1980s in second-circuit publications). Pompous in their view, funeral ceremonies in honor of Łupaszka

173 Joanna Podgórska: *Jak prawica...*; Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół...*

174 Piotr Szubarczyk: „Łupaszko”...

were more than once called masking the truth, falsifying the past, or white-washing war criminals aimed at current political goals.¹⁷⁵

In this manner were interpreted by critics the words of President Andrzej Duda about restoring the dignity of Poland through the funeral ceremony of “Łupaszka” (“Today this dignity returns together with a proud Republic, with a proud Poland, which bows its head low and pays tribute to its great son,”¹⁷⁶ the President said during the funeral). The words of the then Minister of National Defense Antoni Macierewicz that without the suffering and determination of Zygmunt Szendzielarz (and the entire post-war underground), there would be no Poland today, “which was to be erased from the pages of history, which was to be transformed into a Soviet republic, which was to be a semblance of Polishness, a semblance of Poland, which was to be a fiction in foreign hands,”¹⁷⁷ were met with the same criticism. Criticism of the contemporary exploitation of “Łupaszka’s” political potential was accompanied by objections referring to the burial place of Zygmunt Szendzielarz (he rests in his current symbolic grave in the Powązki Military Cemetery) as one where only unquestionable heroes should be located. Although such radical voices did not dominate critical attitudes, the reaction to the emerging criticism of “Łupaszka” was extreme in some circles. In right-wing circles, any criticism of Z. Szendzielarz began over time to be described as a “rehabilitation of Stalinist lies,” “alliance with post-communists,” or “an attempt to introduce communist propaganda into today’s public debate.”¹⁷⁸ These approaches were sometimes accompanied by apotheosis, comparing the death of “Łupaszka,” his burial in an unmarked grave, and his second life in the hearts and memory of the Polish nation to the fate of Jesus Christ.¹⁷⁹

After 2015, the case of Romuald Rajs “Bury” also revived. Indeed, on March 11, 2019, on the website of the Institute of National Remembrance, there appeared a statement addressed to the press which declared that in “light of the latest scientific research, the information from the final findings of the investi-

175 Paweł Dybicz: *Falszywy mit...*; Tomasz Stryjek: *Hipertrofia polityki pamięci w III RP i jej konsekwencje od roku 2015*, in: *Zoon Politikon* 8 (2017), p. 100, https://www.civitas.edu.pl/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/ZP_08_2017.pdf, [last accessed 12.09.2024]; Rafał Wnuk: *Wokół...*

176 Prezydent.pl: *Prezydent na pogrzebie “Łupaszki”: Przywracamy godność Polsce*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,201,prezydent-na-pogrzebie-lupaszki-przywracamy-godnosc-polsce.html>, [last accessed 12.09.2024].

177 Dziennik.pl: *Macierewicz na pogrzebie “Łupaszki”: Powojenna konspiracja ocaliła Polskę*, <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/historia/aktualnosci/artykuly/518921,szef-mon-na-pogrzebie-lupaszki-powojenna-konspiracja-ocalila-polske.html>, [last accessed 12.09.2024].

178 Katarzyna Gójska: *Rehabilitacja stalinowskich kłamstw*, <https://niezalezna.pl/297683-rehabilitacja-stalinowskich-klamstw>, [last accessed 12.09.2024].

179 Wprost.pl: *Brudziński zestawia śmierć “Łupaszki” i Jezusa. “Grobu Chrystusa też strzegli ówcześni siepacze”*, <https://historia.wprost.pl/10419936/brudzinski-zestawia-smierc-lupaszki-i-jezusa-grobu-chrystusa-tez-strzegli-owczesni-siepacze.html>, [last accessed 12.09.2024].

gation into the case of ‘Bury’ is flawed in many areas.”¹⁸⁰ The statement (speaking on behalf of the Institute of National Remembrance) undermined the investigators’ earlier findings, according to which the perpetrators directed their actions against groups of specific national origin (Belorussian) and religion (Orthodox), which made it possible to consider their acts as aimed at destroying particular communities based on their national-religious affiliation (which in turn enabled the recognition of these actions as belonging to the crime of genocide, falling into the category of crimes against humanity). In support of this negation of the earlier findings, the statement indicated that: “According to experts on the subject, Dr. Kazimierz Krajewski (IPN Warsaw) and attorney Grzegorz Wąsowski (We Remember Foundation¹⁸¹), the thesis that the determinant of the actions undertaken by the 3rd Vilnius Brigade of the National Military Union were religious-nationalist motives should be decisively rejected.”¹⁸² It then proceeded to quote an excerpt from their 2016 article, where the authors, rejecting the position proclaiming that “Bury” acted to destroy the Belorussian or Orthodox community, stated,

After all, he could burn down not five but many more Belorussian villages in Bielsk Podlaski district. Meanwhile, the five villages that were partially burned down, the shooting of a total of a dozen men, and the killing of the carters are unprecedented events in his activities, as in those of the entire Białystok District of the National Military Union.¹⁸³

The statement then referred to subsequent publications and cited the February 23, 1991, law on the recognition of invalid verdicts issued against persons repressed for activities for the independent existence of the Polish State, according to which the invalidity of a verdict means acquittal. At the end of the statement, the conclusion was made that, in light of the current law, R. Rajs is innocent.¹⁸⁴

The March 2019 statement was met with a strong reaction, as in its tone, it not only undermined but seemed to cancel the investigators’ earlier findings. After its publication, there were voices of outrage in the media, indicating that the Institute of National Remembrance was “whitewashing” Romuald Rajs. People also wondered what role the anonymous statement posted on the website served:

180 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Komunikat dotyczący informacji zawartych w ustaleniach końcowych śledztwa S 28/02/Zi w sprawie pozbawienia życia 79 osób – mieszkańców powiatu Bielsk Podlaski, w tym 30 osób tzw. furmanów w lesie koło Puchał Starych, dokonanych w okresie od dnia 29 stycznia 1946 r. do dnia 2 lutego 1946 r.*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/dla-medio-w/komunikaty/67471,Komunikat-dotyczacy-informacji-zawartych-w-ustaleniach-koncowych-sledztwa-S-2802.html>, [last accessed 12.09.2024].

181 Polish: Fundacja Pamiętamy.

182 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Komunikat dotyczący...*

183 See: *ibid.*

184 *Ibid.*

as a piece of information, a note, a polemic, or perhaps a nullification. The lack of a signature was negatively perceived as an attempt by the author to divest himself of scientific responsibility for his words. Moreover, under a hail of criticism was the citation of a fragment suggesting that R. Rajs burned only a few villages.¹⁸⁵ For example, when asked for comment, historian Mariusz Mazur stated:

This is a curiosity! Burning too few villages? This has nothing to do with practicing science. Such a thing can be published in some unserious right-wing newspapers. Note that no one in this IPN's note denies the murder committed by Bury. The thesis is that the murder was justified; optionally, it was accidental. Burning five villages by accident?

¹⁸⁶

Mariusz Mazur further described the books cited in the statement as works that have “little to do with the historian’s workshop,” containing “ideological, even unacceptable parts,” in which the authors “overinterpret certain facts to suit their thesis.”¹⁸⁷ Some media reactions were even harsher (formulating, for example, accusations that the Institute of National Remembrance invoked “nationalist publications and dubious authorities to rewrite history”¹⁸⁸). It is important to note that the head of the IPN’s investigative division, prosecutor Andrzej Pozorski, emphasized that the statement was not discussed with his subordinate unit and holds no legal weight.¹⁸⁹ On March 21, 2019, a corrigendum was posted, indicating that the IPN is not conducting any new proceedings in the “Bury” case and that polemizing with the findings of the investigation closed in 2005 does not affect its outcome.¹⁹⁰

It should be emphasized that the recognition of R. Rajs’ crimes as bearing the hallmarks of genocide did not exclude his place among the Cursed Soldiers. The promotion of information about subsequent members of the Polish post-war underground intensified with the establishment of the National Day of Re-

185 Sebastian Łupak: *IPN wybiela Burego*. “Spalił tylko pięć wiosek, a było ich więcej”, <https://opinie.wp.pl/ipn-wybiela-burego-spalil-tylko-piec-wiosek-a-bylo-ich-wiecej-6358577075730049a>, [last accessed 12.09.2024]; Jakub Szymczak: *IPN wybiela “Burego”. Nie jest winny ludobójstwa, bo “mógł puścić z dymem więcej białoruskich wiosek”*, <https://oko.press/ipn-wybiela-burego-nie-jest-winnny-ludobojstwa-mogl-puscic-z-dymem-wiecej-bialoruskich-wiosek/>, [last accessed 12.09.2024].

186 Sebastian Łupak: *IPN wybiela...*

187 Ibid.

188 Jakub Szymczak: *IPN wybiela...*

189 Estera Flioger: *IPN wybiela zbrodnie “Burego”, a prokurator IPN nic o tym nie wie*, <https://wyborcza.pl/7,75398,24546205,ipn-wybiela-zbrodnie-burego-a-prokurator-ipn-nic-o-tym-nie-wie.html>, [last accessed 12.09.2024].

190 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Stanowisko IPN w związku z opublikowanym 11 marca 2019 komunikatem w sprawie informacji zawartych w ustaleniach końcowych śledztwa dotyczącego Romualda Rajsa “Burego”*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/dla-mediow/komunikaty/68002,Stanowisko-IPN-w-zwiazku-z-opublikowanym-11-marca-2019-komunikatem-w-sprawie-informacji-zawartych-w-ustaleniach-końcowych-śledztwa-dotyczącego-Romualda-Rajsa-“Burego”>, [last accessed 12.09.2024].

membrane dedicated to them, and this figure was not omitted. Thus, in official narratives, R. Rajs began to be presented as one of the heroes of the anti-communist underground, actively fighting for the independence of the Polish state. In the portrayal of his crimes against the Belarusian population (although unquestionable), however, the difference in interpretation began to become increasingly apparent, existing between those who advocated viewing the murders of Belarusians through the prism of their approving attitude towards the communist state, and those who focused on explaining their background with national-religious issues. Thus, in the first view, characteristic primarily of right-wing circles, the crimes of R. Rajs were presented as an element of the pro-independence fight and the struggle against the occupier and its collaborators, which can be justified as such. The intensification of support for Cursed Soldiers after 2015 strengthened this type of narrative while approving their creators to intensify the accents of heroism, patriotism, and the merits of “Bury.” The atmosphere of conflict around R. Rajs, which was growing in Podlasie, also contributed to this. In March 2014, a meeting occurred in the Hajnówka House of Culture, organized by the Cyril and Methodius Orthodox Brotherhood. It was held under the slogan “Romuald Rajs ‘Bury’ not our hero.” It included the screening of two films by Jerzy Kalina on the pacification of Belarusian villages by the R. Rajs unit and on the subsequent disputes over the burial of the killed. The meeting provoked numerous comments. Voices were raised about the blatant discrimination against the patriotic Polish minority by Hajnówka’s local government and cultural and educational institutions, the lambasting of Polish national heroes, post-Soviet celebrations with the participation of local government representatives, and the presence in the city’s public space of communist propaganda and primitive narratives about the murder of the Orthodox population by Catholics. The response to the Hajnówka House of Culture meeting was forming the organization National Hajnówka (Polish: Narodowa Hajnówka). Since 2016, it undertook, together with the National-Radical Camp and Jagiellonia Białystok supporters, to organize counter-meetings and annual Hajnówka Cursed Soldiers Marches. In subsequent years, the atmosphere of conflict did not fade.¹⁹¹

As in the case of R. Rajs, the controversy surrounding Józef Kuraś “Ogień” intensified after 2015. On the one hand, there were his critics, who raised the question in the public space of how someone who supported ethnic cleansing and (according to many reports) terrorized the people became, after years, a noble

191 Adam Białous: *Hucpa w Hajnówce*, <https://naszdziennik.pl/polska-kraj/71729,hucpa-w-hajnowce.html>, [last accessed 16.09.2024]; Izabela Próchnicka/Robert Fiłóńczuk: *Marsz Pamięci Żołnierzy Wyklętych w Hajnówce*, <https://dzieje.pl/wiadomosci/marsz-pamieci-zolnierzy-wykletych-w-hajnowce>, [last accessed 16.09.2024]; Tomasz Stryjek: *Hipertrofia polityki...*, pp. 87–125.

leader of the anti-communist underground, fighting exclusively against the communist authorities. His thefts and robberies turned into narratives about the system of supply, fitting into the myth of Janosik, a noble robber who fought tyranny and brought aid to the poor.¹⁹² On the other side stood his supporters, who emphasized that J. Kuraś served Poland (although not always with righteous methods).¹⁹³ Alongside them were those who fully rehabilitated “Ogień,” recognizing him as a fighter in the fight against the communists for Poland, with the total support of the Podhale population. It should be pointed out that for years, such a perspective was appropriate, especially for the radical right-wing circles of Podhale,¹⁹⁴ after 2015 gained almost full state acceptance. In 2016, President Andrzej Duda awarded the Commander’s Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta (granted by a decision of November 6, 2015) to the last partisan from the “Ogień” unit. The President awarded the decoration for outstanding merits in activities to benefit veteran circles and to nurture the memory of Poland’s recent history.¹⁹⁵

Ceremonial celebrations of anniversaries of J. Kuraś’s death have for years focused the attention of both their supporters and opponents. Some change, however, came in 2024. On February 16, 2024, Minister of Family, Labor, and Social Policy Agnieszka Dziemianowicz-Bąk (the New Left,¹⁹⁶ Polish: Nowa Lewica) decided to discontinue organization by the Office for Veterans and Victims of Repression (which is subordinate to her Ministry) of events commemorating Józef Kuraś “Ogień” and the Świętokrzyska Brigade of the National Armed Forces. The Ministry indicated in the information published on its website that for many years, the Podhale circles of Home Army veterans, residents of the Nowy Targ region, the Jewish and Slovak communities, and Polish historians had been demanding that the cultivation of the memory of J. Kuraś as an unbroken hero should stop. Nevertheless, the ceremonies took place, organized by the Memory and Freedom Foundation (in Polish: Fundacja Pamięć i Wolność).¹⁹⁷

192 See among others: Paweł Dybicz (ed.): “Ogień”. *Falszywy mit*, Warszawa 2017.

193 Krzysztof Strauchmann: *Ogień zasłużył na pomnik – mówił ks. Józef Tischner. To nie znaczą ołtarz*, <https://plus.nto.pl/ogien-zasluzyl-na-pomnik-mowil-ks-jozef-tischner-to-nie-znaczy-oltarz/ar/11844479>, [last accessed 16.09.2024].

194 Łukasz Łoziński: *Kontrowersje wokół...*, p. 201.

195 Podhalański Serwis Informacyjny WATRA: *Szef MON na uroczystości w Waksmundzie*, <https://www.watra.pl/waksmund/wiadomosci/2016/02/21/szef-mon-na-uroczystosci-w-waksmundzie>, [last accessed 16.09.2024].

196 The New Left is a social-democratic political party in Poland.

197 *Dzieje.pl*: *Szefowa MRPiPS podjęła decyzję o zaprzestaniu upamiętnia Józefa Kurasia “Ognia”*, <https://dzieje.pl/wiadomosci/szefowa-mrpips-podjela-decyzje-o-zaprzestaniu-upamietnia-jozefa-kurasia-ognia>, [last accessed 16.09.2024]; *Solidarność Małopolska: Wracają “zakazane uroczystości” tym razem upamiętniające Józefa Kurasia “Ognia”*, <https://solidarnosc.krakow.pl/wracaja-zakazane-uroczystosci-tym-razem-upamietniajace-jozefa-kurasia-ognia/>, [last accessed 16.09.2024].

Conclusions

After 2015, the narratives of memory of the Law and Justice party focused on portraying the positive aspects of the Polish underground. They concentrated on portraying victories, exemplary attitudes, character traits, and heroic behaviors for which one should pay tribute. Any defeat or suffering experienced by soldiers of underground units thus also became a positive factor, as an element of heroism in the unequal struggle against the occupying forces, selfless valor inherent in heroes, or a manifestation of overcoming the weakness of the human individual, acting in danger and fighting a much stronger enemy. The approaches promoted and supported by the Law and Justice party began to depict one overriding goal of the activity of each organization – the independence of Poland, free from both the yoke of the German occupier and the communist system. Thus, unification covered all spheres: one goal determining the uniformity of the underground, equally public solid support, and consequently, equally extraordinary heroism, glory, honor, and necessary commemoration. Such a move, however, forced the need to justify exceptions. Undignified, shameful criminal acts thus became tactics, marginal insubordination, provocation, and a relic of the propaganda of the People's Republic of Poland.

IV. Conflict of memories in the area of Poles towards Jews during World War II

Background to the narratives of memory functioning under the Law and Justice rule

Within the narrative of the post-war Polish state, the extermination of the Jews had its place, although this subject was heavily instrumentalized in official discourse. This manipulation of collective memory meant that, for decades, the annihilation of the Jewish population was closely tied to a broader narrative—the martyrdom of the Polish nation. Thus, the suffering of the Jews was often overshadowed by the suffering of Poles under Nazi occupation. Moreover, through their propaganda, the post-war authorities sought to convince citizens that, due to changes in borders, Poland had become an ethnically homogeneous state, contrasting sharply with the multinational Second Polish Republic. The doctrine of Poland's ethnic homogeneity was in force in the Polish political and social space from 1944 to 1947. This led to the perception that the presence of non-Polish populations in Polish territories was a temporary phase, existing only until the end of the resettlement action.¹⁹⁸

In the context of promoted homogeneity on one hand and public attitudes on the other, the issue of the Jewish population in postwar Poland became problematic as early as 1944. This was due to a significant portion of this community in Poland comprising Jews who were returning from the East, specifically from the territories of the USSR. Their increasing presence, often coupled with concerns about claims against the new owners of loan properties, sometimes led to anti-Semitic excesses. Between 180,000 and 200,000 Jews returned to Poland from the East, most of whom immediately emigrated to the West. The Jews returning from the East were often viewed (particularly in narratives from extreme right-wing national underground organizations) as a threat to Poland and agents

198 Eugeniusz Mironowicz: *Polityka narodowościowa PRL*, Białystok 2000, pp. 32–33; Dariusz Stola/Piotr Kosiewski: *Co pamiętamy, o czym zapomnieliśmy*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/co-pamietamy-o-czym-zapomnieliśmy-24637>, [last accessed 01.02.2025].

working for the USSR to spread communism. Rumors spread through society about millions of Jewish communists arriving from the Soviet Union and seizing control of the government in Poland, along with the allegation of drawing blood from Christian children for ritualistic purposes. In such an atmosphere, pogroms took place in dozens of towns and cities in 1945–1947, with more than a hundred, usually random, victims. It should also be noted that pogroms and anti-Semitic incidents were often met with a lack of response from local Polish authorities, leading to impunity for the perpetrators. Nevertheless, this was not the norm, as the authorities emphasized more than once that there was no tolerance for anti-Semitism in Poland.¹⁹⁹

The pogroms and anti-Semitic incidents had a dual effect. On one hand, they prompted the exodus of the Jewish population from Poland. On the other hand, they fostered closer ties between Jewish community members and the emerging Polish authorities, as the sense of threat encouraged a sentiment within the Jewish minority that accepted the new political order. Thus, the years 1946 to 1948 represented a period of controlled stabilization for the Jewish community in Poland, which was evident in, among other things, the propaganda-driven and regulated revival of its cultural and social life.²⁰⁰

In 1948, the idea of an ethnically homogeneous Poland became outdated, and official propaganda narratives began promoting the notion that national conflicts and nationalism are inherent only in capitalist states, having no place in socialism. Simultaneously, the degree to which a person accepted the changes in the state was considered a measure of their worth. Thus, being a non-Polish person ceased to be viewed as inherently wrong; instead, wrongness was attributed to “right-wing nationalist deviations” manifested in denying the system. Consequently, the behavior of the Polish authorities towards minorities changed significantly, elevating class divisions above national identity. However, that same year, 1948, witnessed the establishment of the US-supported State of Israel, prompting the Soviet Union to tighten its policy toward the Jewish community, which, in turn, affected Poland’s approach to Jews. This resulted in another wave of Jewish departures from Polish territories. For those who remained, the peak of Stalinism (1949–1953) was characterized by anti-Israel, anti-Jewish, and anti-Zionist actions from the central authorities. During the Thaw years (1953–1957), on the other hand, there was a gradual revival of religious and cultural activities

199 Eugeniusz Mironowicz: *Polityka narodowościowa...*, pp. 33–34, 83–84, 86–87.

200 Ibid, pp. 84–92; Magdalena Semczyszyn: *W czasach PRL-u z Polski wyjechała przeszłość połowa Żydów ocalałych z Zagłady*, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/historia/1701608,1,w-czasach-prl-u-z-polski-wyjechala-przeszlo-polowa-zydow-ocalalych-z-zaglady.read>, [last accessed 01.02.2025]; Bożena Szaynok: *Ludność żydowska w Polsce (1944–1968)*, https://www.polin.pl/pl/system/files/attachments/wstep_kontekst_historyczny_0.pdf, [last accessed 01.02.2025].

among Jews in Poland (although the changes taking place, unfreezing nationalist and anti-Semitic sentiments, caused a flurry of protests against all national minorities, since Polish society saw them as the mainstay of the system, often the guardians of Stalinism and guilty of Stalinist crimes). The 1960s heralded a further shift. In 1967, another Israeli-Arab war commenced, resulting in the Eastern Bloc countries breaking off diplomatic relations with Israel. In Poland, the issue of the Israeli state became a pretext for intra-party political maneuvers, and the socio-political crisis of March 1968 spurred another wave of Jewish emigration from Poland. The Jews, labeled a potential “fifth column” by Władysław Gomułka, First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Polish United Workers’ Party (PZPR), were portrayed as symbols of alienation, treachery, and aggressive imperialism. Although there was a change in course again in the 1970s, the anti-Semitic campaign of the mid-1960s continued to cast a long shadow over Polish-Jewish relations in the ensuing decades.²⁰¹

Postwar Polish policy toward the Jews was thus far from uniform. One element, however, remained constant: the narratives of memory regarding those who were captured, detained, and murdered in German concentration camps were utilized for contemporary politics throughout the People’s Republic of Poland. The origins of the victims were frequently overlooked at the time to achieve maximum effectiveness of the propaganda message, steering the public towards the desired lines of thought about current affairs. It is worth mentioning that, alongside the official narratives from the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland regarding the Holocaust (described as part of the suffering of the Polish nation under occupation) and those about the Jewish ghetto uprising, narratives about Poles who saved Jews from German extermination have taken on an essential role in the public space. Of great importance in this area was the recognition of individuals of Polish nationality awarded the title of Righteous Among the Nations, a term introduced several years after the end of World War II to honor those who helped Jews between 1939 and 1945. In 1953, the Israeli parliament (Knesset) passed the Remembrance Act, which established the Yad Vashem Institute for the Remembrance of Holocaust Martyrs and Heroes. One of the tasks of the established institution—besides primarily commemorating the victims—was to collect and organize materials about those who, for humanitarian reasons and often at the risk of their own lives, saved Jewish people from extermination. Since 1963, they have been awarded the title Righteous Among the Nations (one of the conditions for recognizing someone as worthy of this title was a written statement from a survivor or witness who personally encountered the

201 Piotr Madajczyk: *Mniejszości narodowe a Październik 1956 roku*, in: *Dzieje Najnowsze* 27 (1995), pp. 89–105; Eugeniusz Mironowicz: *Polityka narodowościowa...*, pp. 10–11, 93–94, 135–136, 191–193, 233; Bożena Szaynok: *Ludność żydowska...*

situation of saving a life). It is worth noting that the commemoration of those honored with the title of Righteous Among the Nations was tied to the symbolic act of planting olive trees in the Avenue of the Righteous in Jerusalem, as well as the awarding of medals bearing the motto from the Talmud: “Whoever saves one life, saves the whole world.” A 1985 amendment to a 1953 law enabled granting honorary Israeli citizenship to those honored with the title.²⁰²

Regarding Poles honored with the title of Righteous Among the Nations during the period of the People’s Republic of Poland, it is important to note that the list expanded almost every year, even despite the suspension of official diplomatic relations. The first Polish names among the Righteous emerged as early as the 1960s, including Irena Sendlerowa, Marianna, Jan and Feliks Gut, Antonina and Jan Żabiński, Władysław Misiuna, and Władysław Bartoszewski. Applications to honor Poles with this title were organized by the Israeli Embassy in Warsaw until diplomatic relations broke down in 1967. The end of official relations caused a ten-year hiatus in preparing documentation regarding the territory of the People’s Republic of Poland to enable Poles to be added to the list of the Righteous. However, in 1978, a delegation from Yad Vashem visited Poland, presenting the long-overdue titles and medals. In 1979, the responsibility for preparing the applications was assigned to the Jewish Historical Institute, where a separate Yad Vashem Honors Department was established in 1982.²⁰³

How did the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland exploit the memory of the Righteous Among the Nations? Since the first Polish decorations were awarded in the mid-1960s, the practice of honoring Poles with a medal recognizing their rescue of the Jewish population from extermination became one of the key narrative elements in the wave of anti-Semitic campaigns that erupted shortly thereafter. In this way—referring to the Polish Righteous—public content often aimed to contrast the compassion of the Polish population protecting the Jews with the ingratitude of those evil representatives of the Jewish people who, oblivious to the help they received, are anti-socialist and anti-Polish.

202 Centrum Badań nad Zagładą Żydów: *Wstęp prof. Władysława Bartoszewskiego*, <http://www.holocaustresearch.pl/nowy/index.php?show=424&strona=425&template=print>, [last accessed 02.02.2025]; Yad Vashem – The World Holocaust Remembrance Center: *Sprawiedliwi Wśród Narodów Świata*, <https://www.yadvashem.org/education/other-languages/p Polish/righteous-among-the-nations.html>, [last accessed 02.02.2025].

203 Anna Kruszyńska: *Sprawiedliwi wśród Narodów Świata*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/sprawiedliwi-wsrod-narodow-swiata>, [last accessed 02.02.2025]; *Sprawiedliwy wśród narodów Świata – Życie za życie: Lista Polaków uhonorowanych tytułem “Sprawiedliwy wśród narodów Świata”, poddanych represjom za pomoc ludności żydowskiej w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej*, <https://zyciezazycie.pl/download/23/5536/sprawiedliwi.pdf>, [last accessed 02.02.2025].

These narratives thus said that Jews who accuse Poles of anti-Semitism²⁰⁴ are spreading these slanders to absolve the German Nazis of guilt for their crimes, which is proof of the pact of these Jews with the Nazis and their descendants. Thereby, it was suggested that:

Zionists willingly participate in whitewashing the erstwhile executioners and attribute all their guilt to the victims—the Poles. Polish citizens are thus victims in a double sense—as part of the fascist extermination policy and the German-Jewish lie industry. Thus, the theme of the survivors’ ingratitude shifts into another one—the doubly undeserved guilt of the Poles.²⁰⁵

As confirmation of the thesis regarding the alliance between bourgeois Jews and the descendants of Hitlerism, the subject of the 1952 agreement in Luxembourg between West Germany and Israel was often cited. In this agreement, the German state pledged to pay reparations for the genocide committed during World War II. In return, according to narratives supported by the Polish government since the 1960s, the Israeli authorities were to justify the Germans by implicating Poles in Nazi crimes. The Luxembourg Agreement was thus presented as a form of selling the memory of the murdered by the survivors (sometimes by comparing it to the Judas pieces of silver)²⁰⁶. As historian Grzegorz Berendt stated:

In 1968, the Communists used—in a highly instrumental way—the knowledge of helping the Jews. To provoke public resentment against “Zionists”—as the Communists called all Jewish circles critical of their anti-Semitic actions—they began to promote the view that Jews, speaking and writing about Polish-Jewish relations during the German occupation, portray Poles only in a bad light as collaborators involved in their persecution. To prove the ill-will of the “Zionists,” references were made both to the findings of researchers on the subject, which had been known for several years, and to *ad hoc* accounts of selfless Polish assistance to the Jews. Publicizing these facts and the Righteous Among the Nations title, awarded to Poles, was a regular feature of the People’s Republic of Poland authorities’ actions.²⁰⁷

Regarding the scholarly field, it should be noted that the issue of Polish aid to the Jewish population was scarcely discussed for over a dozen years after World War II. However, the situation changed in the early 1960s, when Polish research on the aid provided to Jews by Poles began. They were conducted with the full approval

204 *Biedni Polacy patrzą i ratują. Z Grzegorzem Berendtem, Markiem Wierzbickim i Janem Żarynem rozmawia Barbara Polak*, in: *Biuletyn Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej* 3 (2009), pp. 9–10, <https://www.polska1918-89.pl/pdf/biedni-polacy-patrza-i-ratuja.-z-grzegorzem-berendtem,-markiem-wierzbi,4628.pdf>, [last accessed 02.02.2025].

205 Sławomir Buryła: *Marzec a Zagłada – płaszczyzny spotkania*, in: *Studia Judaica* 2/44 (2019), pp. 315.

206 *Ibid*, pp. 318; Krzysztof Lesiakowski: *Mieczysław Moczar “Mietek”. Biografia polityczna*, Warszawa 1998, p. 337.

207 *Biedni Polacy patrzą i ratują...*, p. 7.

of the authorities and continued until the end of the People's Republic of Poland. This does not mean, however, that all topics were covered (among those omitted was the topic of collaboration, as martyrdom themes were to prevail). It can even be said that the authorities of the People's Republic of Poland, who supported the research, were more interested in examples practical in foreign relations than in conducting comprehensive studies on aid and Polish-Jewish relations during World War II. Polish works on the subject of the Jewish population (including the Holocaust) since the end of the war have, therefore, not been particularly numerous, which may have been influenced by both post-war trauma and the political context that forced compromises in the topics explored in academia.²⁰⁸ However, they have appeared. Importantly, in the latter half of the 1970s, independent books and press publications began to emerge, partially bridging the gap in the topics addressed in official circulation.²⁰⁹ It should be noted that some second-circulation publications contained a strong tendency to recall Polish guilt toward the Jewish population, manifested in texts discussing the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation. They addressed, among other issues, problems such as blackmail and the seizure of Jewish property, which were almost entirely absent from officially published narratives (or, when they did appear, were attributed to individuals on the fringes of society).²¹⁰ A breakthrough in this matter was the text *Poor Poles Look at the Ghetto* (Polish: *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto*) by Jan Błoński, which appeared in *Tygodnik Powszechny* in 1987. It was then that a critical examination of Polish transgressions against the Jewish people emerged for the first time in public, non-opposition discourse.²¹¹

Meanwhile, it's important to note that the growing number of attempts over the decades to address Polish-Jewish relations in academic, journalistic, artistic, and oppositional contexts during the People's Republic of Poland did not significantly penetrate the social consciousness of Poles. This was largely influenced by education. Indeed, analyzing the content of post-war school history textbooks reveals that the most extensive text addressing the German policy of extermi-

208 Ibid, pp. 6–7.

209 Michał Szukała: *Prof. G. Berendt: W latach 80. pojawiła się dwutorowość narracji obchodów i nowa, niezależna narracja o powstaniu w getcie*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/prof-g-berendt-w-latach-80-pojawila-sie-dwutorowosc-narracji-obchodow-i-nowa-niezalezna>, [last accessed 02.02.2025].

210 Anna Kilian: *Jak podziemna prasa w PRL mierzyła się z Zagładą*, <http://wiesz.com.pl/2020/09/24/jak-podziemna-prasa-w-prl-mierzyla-sie-z-zaglada/>, [last accessed 02.02.2025]; Jan Olaszek/Martyna Grądzka-Rejak: *Holokaust, pamięć, powielacz. Zagłada Żydów i okupacyjne stosunki polsko-żydowskie w publikacjach drugiego obiegu w PRL*, Warszawa 2020.

211 Ewa Koźmińska-Frejłak: *...Przestać się bronić, usprawiedliwiać, targować...*, <https://www.jhi.pl/blog/2018-03-12-przestac-sie-bronic-usprawiedliwiac-targowac>, [last accessed 04.02.2025].

nating Jews was found in a textbook from the 1950s. However, over the next thirty years, this information became increasingly scarce. Consequently, Poles' knowledge of the Jewish population, their fate, and the dynamics between Poles and Jews gradually diminished across subsequent generations. This does not imply, however, that the private memories of witnesses to events were erased. In many cases, the trauma they experienced remained unspoken for years.²¹² This was confirmed by a 1984 survey conducted by the Department of Ethnography at the University of Warsaw, in which respondents were asked about what happened to Jews during World War II. Many interviewees responded instinctively that they did not know and that the Jews had likely fled somewhere. However, when pressed further, they provided detailed accounts of the Holocaust, the killings, their own guilt, and the assistance they offered.²¹³ It is clear that the understanding of Polish-Jewish relations during World War II gradually developed in Polish society after 1945. During the political transition and the years that followed, this understanding began to gain momentum, thanks in part to an expansion of research, a growing diversity of literature, and an increase in the range of cultural works.

Conflict of memories in the years 2005–2010

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, two social processes overlapped, shaping accounts of the Holocaust while also revealing stories about Polish attitudes toward Jews during World War II. One was the increasing interest in the wartime fate of the Jewish population and the need to explore various aspects of this complex issue. Simultaneously, the other process involved a growing number of accounts, interpretations, and dissertations on the Holocaust and Polish-Jewish relations that went beyond simple descriptive analysis as they sought to embed moral choices within wartime reality. Thus, both processes can be categorized as socio-cultural and scientific while also highlighting that the narratives produced within them received significant attention, manifesting also in the political sphere.

In numerous comments, it was noted that a generational change was crucial for the emergence of both processes—children and grandchildren began to ask questions about the reality of World War II, searching for the roots of their

212 *Biedni Polacy patrzą i ratują...*, pp. 8–9; Dariusz Stola/Piotr Kosiewski: *Co pamiętamy...* See also: Michael C. Steinlauf: *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*, Syracuse 1997.

213 Alina Cała: *Ludowe narracje o zabijaniu, polowaniu i ratowaniu*, in: *Nigdy Więcej* 22 (2016), https://www.nigdywiecej.org/pdf/pl/pismo/22/ludowe_narracje_o_zabijaniu_polowaniu_i_ratowaniu.pdf, [last accessed 04.02.2025].

identity. This inquiry led to hundreds, if not thousands, of publications concerning the Holocaust, public attitudes, the terror, and reactions to the tragedy. Alongside these, many works detailed Jewish culture and the pre-war history of Jewish communities in the world and the Polish territories. One branch of these narratives, arising from research and scholarly reflection, focused on Poles rescuing Jews. Of great significance in this area were biographical accounts that described the experiences of individuals who attempted to save the Jewish population during the occupation, accompanied by analyses of accounts, diaries, and statistical sources. These publications, although only a small part of the studies produced in subsequent years, gained increasing popularity and received more widespread commentary during the period from 2005 to 2010.²¹⁴

It is important to note that the previously mentioned publications on Polish-Jewish relations during World War II did not shy away from addressing the issues of anti-Semitism or the passivity in the face of terror but rather focused on Polish aid to Jews threatened with extermination, highlighting its significance given the circumstances under which it was provided. The assistance offered to Jews (manifested through hiding them, aiding their escape from ghettos, and supplying them with food, documents, information, or correspondence, as well as trading with them and showing them favor) in Polish territories under German occupation faced a wide array of penalties—ranging from fines, property confiscation, arrest, beating, torture, imprisonment, exile for forced labor, or being sent to a concentration camp, to the death penalty (including execution by firing squad or hanging in public).²¹⁵

Reflecting on the wide range of opinions appearing inside the narratives locating the uniqueness of Polish attitudes around anti-Semitism, it is worth noting a conversation published in the “Bulletin of the Institute of National Remembrance” in 2009 with historians Grzegorz Berendt, Marek Wierzbicki, and Jan Żaryn. The comments in it reflect the multiplicity of approaches to the topic while avoiding the temptation to follow a path of simplification. For example, the issue of a certain untranslatability of pre-war anti-Semitism and philo-Semitism into later behavior during the occupation was an important issue taken up in the discussion. Grzegorz Berendt pointed out in this area:

214 See among others: Anna Dąbrowska: *Światła w ciemności. Sprawiedliwi Wśród Narodów Świata. Relacje*, Lublin 2008; Piotr Forecki: *Od Shoah do Strachu. Spory o polsko-żydowską przeszłość i pamięć w debatach politycznych*, Poznań 2010; Jacek Leociak: *Ratowanie. Opowieści Polaków i Żydów*, Kraków 2010; Joanna Beata Michlic: *Jewish Children in Nazi-Occupied Poland: Survival and Polish-Jewish Relations During the Holocaust as Reflected in Early Postwar Recollections*, Jerusalem 2008; Irene Tomaszewski/Tecia Werbowski: *Code Name: Żegota. Rescuing Jews in Occupied Poland, 1942–1945. The Most Dangerous Conspiracy in Wartime Europe*, Santa Barbara–Denver–Oxford 2010.

215 See: Aleksandra Namysło/Grzegorz Berendt (eds.): *Rejestr faktów represji na obywatelach polskich za pomoc ludności żydowskiej w okresie II wojny światowej*, Warszawa 2014.

In the survivors' accounts, I found several instances of behavior surprisingly inconsistent with the pre-war stereotype. They concern, for example, situations where a Jew walking down the street or in another public place encountered a pre-war acquaintance associated with the National Democrats. The first reaction was horror. It seemed that in a moment, there would be a denunciation, a handing over into the hands of the Germans, or a collaborating police formation. In the meantime, these acquaintances, known for their anti-Semitic prejudices, behaved differently; they gave immediate or long-term help. I am not saying that such behavior was typical among pre-war anti-Semites, but I believe that it should not be forgotten. (Hence, bearing in mind that they did not result from a kind of philo-Semitic reincarnation but from a firm rejection of the barbaric methods used by the Germans and hostility towards them).²¹⁶

This was confirmed by J. Żaryn, who, analyzing the inconsistency of attitudes presented by Poles, stated:

In the underground press published by the national camp, such as in “Walka” (where Rev. Jan Stepien, a rescuer of Jews, was one of the editors) or in “Szaniec,” there remained a strong aversion toward Jews, who were viewed as a political group with their own anti-Polish interests. In some instances, they were described with shameful contempt. At that time, the Warsaw ghetto was on fire. Even while Jews were dying at Treblinka, there were still articles criticizing them; at the same time, their authors were protecting the Jews at home—Edward Kemnitz and Roman Blum, for instance. They did not change their worldview or political stance regarding the Jewish minority; rather, due to Christian and anti-German motives, they took things for granted by extending help to specific individuals. In the national press, Jews were portrayed as captives who faced their deaths without resistance.²¹⁷

Another issue to address within the framework of the interview presented is the problem of crimes and guilt against the Jewish population, which is interpreted in various ways. The perpetration of these crimes is often attributed solely to a narrow group of low-status individuals in society. Marek Wierzbicki commented on this approach as follows:

We often say that all sorts of injustices and cruelty toward Jews were committed by people from the social margins and that blackmailers came from these margins. What does ‘social marginality’ mean in wartime conditions? What does ‘decent people’ mean in those circumstances? In peacetime, these concepts differ significantly. There is a lack of research that would help us define these concepts for wartime.²¹⁸

He further added:

I am aware of witness accounts that clearly indicate poverty was the reason for the erosion of moral constraints, leading many to seize various opportunities to improve their situation—such as robbing a neighbor's apartment. Banditry also arose, about

216 *Biedni Polacy patrzą i ratują...*, p. 5.

217 *Ibid.*, pp. 5–6.

218 *Ibid.*, p. 13.

which we know little. It was a widespread and proliferating phenomenon, particularly in the rural areas of central and eastern Poland. Banditry affected both Poles and Jews. Everyone was robbed, regardless of nationality, if it presented an opportunity to enrich oneself at the victim's expense. The Jews were the weakest victims because they were outlawed; they wandered in the forests. [...] To understand under what conditions Jews were victimized and under what conditions they were helped, detailed research is required.²¹⁹

Another interpretative simplification concerning the topic of Poles rescuing Jews highlighted in the interview mentioned above was the issue of viewing Polish attitudes in isolation from wartime reality. This was not merely a matter of punishment for supporting the Jewish population but involved a broader understanding of the conditions under which various types of aid were provided—considering the extent of wartime poverty, the pervasive terror that dulled moral sensibilities, the principle of collective responsibility, and the influence of German anti-Semitic propaganda. Indeed, to understand the phenomenon of rescuing Jews without factoring in these elements, as noted in the 2009 conversation described above, overlooks the immense strength required for long-term support.²²⁰ Thus, history researchers have called for what M. Wierzbicki expressed: “We need a reliable social history of the Second World War, a study of the history of individual local communities, social structures, social organizations, and national or ethnic groups.”²²¹ Consequently, the researchers considered the exploration of these topics essential despite the gaps in source material, particularly in eyewitness accounts that are no longer accessible. They also emphasized that the limited number of materials detailing recollections does not indicate a lack of assistance but rather reflects wartime trauma and post-war realities. In some communities, for instance, helping the Jewish population was often stereotypically associated with personal enrichment for the helper, exposing them to potential robbery as a result.²²²

Between 2005 and 2010, there was a noticeable increase in public awareness regarding Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, highlighting the need for further research into the variety of attitudes and an acknowledgment of the complexity of the situation faced by people of different nationalities under German occupation. Importantly, raising awareness also included recognizing the political potential of this topic. However, this does not imply that the issue of historical Polish-Jewish relations was extensively investigated in politics. The years from 2005 to 2010 marked a time of significant, albeit limited, initiatives,

219 Ibid, p. 14.

220 Ibid, pp. 10–15.

221 Ibid, p. 10.

222 Ibid, pp. 20–21.

particularly associated with President Lech Kaczyński of the Law and Justice party.

In L. Kaczyński's statements after 2005, references to the need to remember the fate of the Jews in Poland became prominent. He touched upon themes of cultural presence, the significance of the Polish-Jewish neighborhood, the necessity to repair and strengthen relationships,²²³ and the importance of recalling the crimes of the Holocaust "so that our children and grandchildren never experience a similar tragedy."²²⁴ In his speeches, President L. Kaczyński also referred several times to the memory of the Righteous among the Nations. For instance, in his statement at the 65th anniversary of the liquidation of the Litzmannstadt Ghetto in Łódź on August 27, 2009, he stated:

More than six thousand Poles are on the Righteous Among the Nations list. But this is only a tiny part of those who saved the lives of Jews. I know this for a fact. I know, even from my own experience. I knew people in my life who rescued two young Jewish women and never found themselves on any list of honored people or on Yad Vashem's list. They have been dead for many years. There were many such people, and although everything must be done to make their names known, we will never know them all. But in honoring those we know today, I would like to say that this is an order for all those who have acted in a similar way. I want to say this to my compatriots. I want to say this to the millions of Polish Jews who no longer exist and their descendants who survived. I would also like to say this to the entire international public.²²⁵

Therefore, concerning political references to the past of Polish-Jewish relations, the subject of the Righteous among the Nations did not dominate the narrative. A few years later, this fundamentally changed.

Conflict of memories in the years 2015–2025

To begin with, it is important to note that during the presented period, the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II in Markowa played a significant role in disseminating information about Poles who saved Jews from extermination. During the German occupation, Józef and Wiktoria Ulma sheltered eight Jews, for which they lost their lives on March 24, 1944, along with their

223 Jolanta Grzywacz-Borensztejn et al. (ed.): *Warto być Polakiem. Idea i myśl Lecha Kaczyńskiego*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 81–89.

224 *List z 28 stycznia 2008 roku na obchody Międzynarodowego Dnia Pamięci o Holokauście*, in: Jolanta Grzywacz-Borensztejn et al. (ed.), *Warto być Polakiem. Idea i myśl Lecha Kaczyńskiego*, Warszawa 2010, p. 85.

225 *Wystąpienie na obchodach 65. rocznicy likwidacji Litzmannstadt Ghetto w Łodzi, 27 sierpnia 2009 roku*, in: Jolanta Grzywacz-Borensztejn et al. (ed.), *Warto być Polakiem. Idea i myśl Lecha Kaczyńskiego*, Warszawa 2010, p. 87.

children and those they were hiding. In 1995, Wiktoria and Józef Ulma were posthumously honored as Righteous Among the Nations. In 2010, the President of the Republic of Poland, Lech Kaczyński, awarded them the Commander's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta. The idea to establish the Ulma Family Museum emerged at the end of 2007, and the facility opened in 2016. The aim of this institution, Poland's first museum dedicated to this topic, is to showcase the heroic actions of Poles who helped Jews during the German occupation, risking their own lives and the lives of their families in the area of the contemporary Podkarpackie Voivodeship (although it was planned to expand the scope of interest to other regions of occupied Poland). It is worth noting that the noble actions of Poles were presented in the exhibition within the context of various behaviors, including the infamous ones, to foster an atmosphere of dialogue and mutual respect.²²⁶

Significant achievements in expanding knowledge about Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation were particularly notable after 2015 by the Institute of National Remembrance. This occurred because the long-standing research on the extermination of the Jewish population and Poles rescuing Jews, conducted under the Institute's Central Research Projects, proved to be quite substantial. The most recent project, titled "History of Jews in Poland and Polish-Jewish Relations from 1914 to 1989," deserves special mention (in 2017–2018, the initiative operated in a narrower capacity under the name "Polish-Jewish Relations from 1918 to 1968," and until 2017, it was referred to as the "Holocaust of Jews on Polish Lands"). The name change of the project in 2017 indicated that the research began focusing on the assistance provided to Jews by Poles and the nature of Polish-Jewish relations, which gained prominence within Holocaust studies. As outlined in its new framework, the purpose of this undertaking was understood to include the historical context that had previously been overlooked or downplayed in research analyses, particularly the conditions established by the occupier. However, this subject was not entirely disregarded previously; it was addressed during investigations on the activities of "Żegota" and also within the scope of the project "Index of Poles Murdered and Repressed for Helping Jews during World War II," initiated at the end of 2005, which aimed to document the experiences of non-Jewish citizens of the Second Polish Republic who faced repression for assisting Jews. The first outcome of this project was the publication of *The Register of Facts of Repression against Polish Citizens for Helping the Jewish Population during World War II*, released in 2014. Another Central Re-

226 Muzeum Polaków Ratujących Żydów podczas II wojny światowej im. Rodziny Ulmów w Markowej: *O muzeum*, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/pl/muzeum/o-muzeum/>, [last accessed 13.02.2025]; *ibid*: *Rodzina Ulmów*, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/pl/muzeum/historia-rodziny-ulmow/>, [last accessed 13.02.2025].

search Project that addressed aspects of Polish-Jewish relations was titled “The Fate of Poland and its Citizens during World War II” (this project operated under the name “Polish Lands under Occupation 1939–1945” until 2019). The findings from ongoing investigations also contributed to the body of knowledge acquired.²²⁷

The activities of the IPN suggested that Polish-Jewish relations have been approached, particularly since 2017, mainly from the Polish perspective, focusing primarily on Polish aid, honoring the Righteous, and the Holocaust, often viewed through the lens of the experiences of Jewish citizens of the Polish state. While anti-Semitism in occupied Poland was undeniable, it was not the central focus of the narrative. This is evidenced, among other things, by the Institute’s involvement in discussions concerning viewpoints that highlight only anti-Semitic matters within the context of events, disregarding other factors that complicate definitive judgments, such as the anti-Jewish propaganda propagated by the Germans during World War II. A good example of this approach is the extensive polemical review of the book *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland* (Polish: *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*), edited by Barbara Engelking and Jan Grabowski.²²⁸ This review was created as a brochure by Tomasz Domański from IPN and received negative feedback in certain circles.²²⁹ In addition to promoting a multidimensional approach to the conditions surrounding the extermination of the Jewish population, the Institute of National Remembrance also developed narratives about the course of the Holocaust and the realities of German occupation in European countries beyond Poland. These activities aimed to broaden the perspective on the Holocaust issue and enhance public knowledge on the topic.²³⁰

A long-standing problem for Polish state authorities and society has been the emergence of the phrases “Polish death camps” or “Polish extermination camps”

227 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Informacje...*

228 See: Barbara Engelking/Jan Grabowski: *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski*, Warszawa 2018; Jan Grabowski/Barbara Engelking: *Night without End: The Fate of Jews in German-Occupied Poland*, Bloomington 2022.

229 Tomasz Domański: *Korekta obrazu? Refleksje źródłoznawcze wokół książki “Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wybranych powiatach okupowanej Polski”, t. 1–2, red. Barbara Engelking, Jan Grabowski, Warszawa 2018*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/publikacje/ksiazki/88671,Korekta-obrazu-Refleksje-zrodloznawcze-wokol-ksiazki-Dalej-jest-noc-Losy-Zydow-w.html>, [last accessed 13.02.2025]. See also: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Wobec ataku medialnego na pracownika IPN dr. Tomasza Domańskiego*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/dla-mediow/komunikaty/96258,Wobec-ataku-medialnego-na-pracownika-IPN-dr-Tomasza-Domanski.html>, [last accessed 13.02.2025]; Hanna Radziejowska: *Czego Grabowski nie napisał. Instytut Pileckiego odnalazł dokumenty, które władze PRL przekazywały RFN*, <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/amp/1493701,czego-grabowski-nie-napisał.html>, [last accessed 13.02.2025].

230 Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Informacje...*

outside of Poland. While some viewed these as a linguistic error needing correction and others as a deliberate anti-Polish action, the institution that often fought against foreign disinformation, besides the diplomatic services, was the Institute of National Remembrance.²³¹ At this point, it is essential to mention the Act of January 26, 2018, amending the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, the Act on Graves and War Cemeteries, the Act on Museums, and the Act on the Liability of Collective Entities for Acts Prohibited under the Penalty.²³² Articles 55a and 55b were particularly noteworthy. The first paragraph of the controversial article 55a stated:

Whoever publicly and contrary to fact attributes to the Polish Nation or the Polish State responsibility or shared responsibility for the Nazi crimes committed by the Third German Reich as defined in Article 6 of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal appended to the International Agreement for the Prosecution and Punishment of the Major War Criminals of the European Axis, signed in London on August 8, 1945 (Journal of Laws of 1947, item 367), or for other crimes constituting crimes against peace, humanity or war crimes or otherwise grossly diminishes the responsibility of the actual perpetrators of these crimes, is subject to a fine or imprisonment for up to 3 years. The sentence is made public.²³³

Paragraph 2 of this article stated that if the perpetrator acted unintentionally, they would face a fine or restriction of liberty. In paragraph 3, the legislator noted that a crime is not committed by someone acting in a prohibited manner as part of artistic or scientific activity.²³⁴ On the other hand, Article 55b indicated: “Regardless of the regulations in force at the location where the prohibited act occurred, this law shall apply to Polish citizens and foreigners who commit the offenses referred to in Articles 55 and 55a.”²³⁵ The punitive nature of the articles provoked extreme reactions both domestically and internationally, though most of the comments – including those from society and legal experts – were negative.²³⁶ Facing significant internal and international criticism, including from the

231 Ibid.

232 Internetowy System Aktów Prawnych: *Ustawa z dnia 26 stycznia 2018 r. o zmianie ustawy o Instytucji Pamięci Narodowej – Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, ustawy o grobach i cmentarzach wojennych, ustawy o muzeach oraz ustawy o odpowiedzialności podmiotów zbiorowych za czyny zabronione pod groźbą kary*, <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20180000369>, [last accessed 15.02.2025].

233 Ibid.

234 Ibid.

235 Ibid.

236 Jacek Lepiarz: *Die Welt: o milczeniu polskiego rządu wobec antysemityzmu*, <https://www.dw.com/pl/die-welt-o-milczeniu-polskiego-rz%C4%85du-wobec-antysemityzmu/a-49384862>, [last accessed 15.02.2025]; Jacek Nizinkiewicz: *Junczyk-Ziomecka: Ratować dziedzictwo Lecha Kaczyńskiego*, <https://www.rp.pl/Konflikt-Polska-Izrael/302049945-Junczyk-Ziomecka-Ratowac-dziedzictwo-Lecha-Kaczynskiego.html>, [last accessed 15.02.2025].

United States and Israel, Articles 55a and 55b were repealed after a few months by the Act of June 27, 2018. The legislator emphasized that the intention behind the introduced regulations was to combat phrases like “Polish death camps.” He regarded the repeal of these controversial articles as a more effective means of protecting the good name of Poland and the Polish nation through civil law measures.

The January 2018 amendment to the IPN legislation mentioned above, which aimed, among other things, at combating narratives that associate Poland with the Nazi death machine, has sparked a new wave of discussions regarding Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation. Notably, the statements of Polish President A. Duda were part of the debates surrounding the initial document at that time, during which the narratives of Poles saving Jews from the Holocaust were strongly reinforced. Among the numerous manifestations of this shift in the politics of memory, it is worth mentioning that in 2016, the President awarded state decorations to dozens of individuals for their “heroic attitude and extraordinary courage shown in saving the lives of Jews during World War II, and for outstanding contributions to the defense of human dignity and human rights.”²³⁷ Additionally, in 2018, on the President’s initiative, a state holiday was established, named the National Day of Remembrance of Poles Who Saved Jews Under German Occupation, observed on March 24.²³⁸ Shortly after the amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance was published, during a meeting with the citizens of Żory on 29 January 2018, President A. Duda thus stated:

I will never agree that we, as a nation—Poles or Poland as a state—are slandered by distortions of historical truth and completely false accusations. There have been far too many such accusations in recent days against our country and our nation for me to remain indifferent. [...] There was no participation—neither by Poland as a non-existent state nor by Poles as a nation—in the Holocaust. [...] We must demand that this fundamental truth and these essential facts be respected; it is our right as a nation, just as it is the Jews’ right to fight anti-Semitism, and just as we have the right to combat this tremendous and terrible slander. Of course, I am not saying that there were no wicked people. Some wicked individuals even sold their neighbors for money. Yes, there

237 Prezydent.pl: *Odnaczenia za bohaterską postawę w ratowaniu Żydów*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/ordery-i-odnaczenia/art,35,odnaczenia-za-bohaterska-postawe-w-ratowaniu-zydow.html>, [last accessed 15.02.2025].

238 Ibid: *Narodowy Dzień Pamięci Polaków Ratujących Żydów pod okupacją niemiecką PL/ENG*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/aktualnosci/wydarzenia/art,931,narodowy-dzien-pamieci-polakow-ratujacych-zydow-pod-okupacja-niemiecka-pleng.html>, [last accessed 15.02.2025].

were, I admit, but they were not the Polish nation; they were just individuals. It was not an organized action; these were merely instances of meanness.²³⁹

This position aligned with postulates (previously articulated in public discussions) that gestures hostile to Jews during World War II should be viewed as individual actions, heroic behaviors – due to their prevalence (sometimes cited in millions) – as a defining characteristic, and thus inherent to Polish society (the nation). Under President A. Duda, this approach, which has been advocated in some circles for years, has become a crucial direction in the Polish state's politics of memory. In early February 2018, during a meeting at the Presidential Palace honoring Poles who saved Jews and Holocaust survivors, the President defended the legitimacy of his support for the amendment to the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance. He emphasized that his decision to sign the law stemmed from a strong belief in the necessity of the solutions it provided. He stated:

It's not even about punishing someone. Regarding the law's effectiveness as a basis for punishing a crime, it may turn out to be unrealistic. This is especially true since we often encounter these false historical statements outside of Poland, making it very difficult to punish the perpetrator.²⁴⁰

He then added:

Let me put it this way: it is a sign that the Polish state recognizes this as a problem that affects us. This is indeed an issue for us. It's not just that we disagree with certain statements; this is genuinely something that impacts us: the accusations made, particularly the strong ones, regarding the systemic involvement of Poles as a nation in the Holocaust. We all know that no such involvement occurred.²⁴¹

He also pointed out that:

If there was anything systemic and organized regarding the Holocaust, it was the systemic opposition to it; the efforts of “Żegota” were systemic; the Polish Underground State engaged in organized and systemic activities, such as sending Jan Karski or Cavalry Captain Pilecki [...] or by executing death sentences for blackmailers. There was no systematic action against Jews. Therefore, in my view, the systemic participation of Poles in the Holocaust cannot be asserted.²⁴²

At this point, it should be emphasized that this presentation of the motives for agreeing to the amendment of the IPN legislation has attracted criticism, in-

239 Kancelaria Prezydenta RP: *Prezydent: Nie było żadnego udziału ani Polski, ani Polaków w Holokauście*, https://www.facebook.com/notes/3300261510027481/?comment_id=1815529725188829, [last accessed 19.02.2025].

240 See: Agata Szwedowicz: *Prezydent spotkał się z grupą Sprawiedliwych wśród Narodów Świata*, <https://www.pap.pl/aktualnosci/news%2C1277293%2Cprezydent-spotkal-sie-z-grupa-sprawiedliwych-wsrod-narodow-swiata.html>, [last accessed 19.02.2025].

241 Ibid.

242 Ibid.

cluding from Holocaust historian Dariusz Libionka. In an interview published in “Tygodnik Powszechny” in early February 2020, he stressed that the murdered Jews were Polish citizens: “And, of course, the Polish government did not act against them and did not participate in their murder.”²⁴³ He added, however, after a while:

Except that no one is claiming that. No one is accusing the Polish state, the government-in-exile, the Home Army, or the Government Delegation for Poland of participating in a planned German murder. The amendment to the IPN legislation is a fight against phantasms, unleashed for reasons unknown and further reinforcing these phantasms.²⁴⁴

At the same time, he questioned claims of Poland’s “systemic participation” in the fight against the Holocaust because “Żegota” was created spontaneously and was a Polish-Jewish organization (with much of the funding for its activities coming from Jewish organizations abroad).²⁴⁵

Another accusation—repeated multiple times within narratives of memory constructed by the Law and Justice party regarding Polish-Jewish relations during the occupation—was the political use of the number of Poles who saved Jews (including claims that Polish assistance during the occupation could be estimated at hundreds of thousands, or even millions,²⁴⁶ of individuals). In 2019, historian, sociologist, and publicist Adam Leszczyński, while discussing the National Day of Remembrance of Poles who saved Jews under German occupation, observed a “miraculous multiplication”²⁴⁷ of the Righteous in political statements. He noted that during the celebration:

The Prime Minister and the President, along with other state dignitaries, praised [...] the heroism of Poles who rescued Jews and highlighted that in Poland—unlike in Western countries—there was a death penalty for hiding Jews and assisting them. [...] All of this is true [...]. So, what was the issue? It lies in the proportions—specifically, the numbers cited by politicians—and the persistent silence on the well-documented instances of Poles’ involvement in German crimes.²⁴⁸

He further referred to a statement by historian Jan Grabowski, who emphasized that while the Righteous Among the Nations deserve to be honored, the context of this commemoration is crucial because efforts to present their actions as

243 Dariusz Libionka/Michał Okoński: *Niepamięć narodowa*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/ustawa-niepamienci-narodowej-151885>, [last accessed 20.02.2025].

244 Ibid.

245 Ibid.

246 See: *Biedni Polacy patrzą i ratują...*, p. 16.

247 Adam Leszczyński: “Miliony ratowały”. *Morawiecki cudownie rozmnaża Polaków ratujących Żydów*, <https://oko.press/miliony-ratowaly-morawiecki-cudownie-rozmnaza-polakow-ratujacych-zydow/>, [last accessed 20.02.2025].

248 Ibid.

typical of Poles under occupation distort history.²⁴⁹ Jan Grabowski stated, “I believe that the Righteous are being used in a cynical and wicked way. They are meant to cover up the very issue that Poles struggle to confront—the problem of unaccounted crimes against Jews.”²⁵⁰

Among the criticisms of narratives that emphasize the significant positive role played by Poles during the German occupation in terms of increasing the number of those who helped Jewish people, there were voices arguing that the count of the Righteous is not truly important, as it fails to capture the complexities of the occupation. Others emphasized that inflating the number of rescuers undermines the memory of the true heroes. For instance, Irena Steinfeldt, director of the Righteous Department at Yad Vashem, remarked: “To gain a more complete understanding of the situation, one must delve deeper into the context; simply comparing the numbers of the Righteous is insufficient. It deeply troubles me to witness the instrumental use of the Righteous, such as for political purposes.”²⁵¹ Journalist and publicist Michał Okoński added: “If we transform instances of helping Jews during the German occupation into a mass phenomenon, cloning heroic individuals into hundreds of thousands, we not only distort reality but also rob the memory of the Righteous.”²⁵²

The above considerations indicate that the narratives of members and supporters of the Law and Justice party after 2015 centered on the assertion that the exceptionality of Poles in their behavior toward Jews during the German occupation lay in the widespread acts of rescuing Jews, despite anti-Semitic attitudes in Poland. At times, this narrative took the form of approaches emphasizing the magnitude of the assistance while disputing the existence of widespread anti-Semitic sentiments in Polish territories (although acknowledging a marginal scale of anti-Jewish behavior) and thus constructing claims of Polish uniqueness. Alongside these narratives were others that contended Poles did not behave heroically toward Jews in a manner distinct from other nations during World War II. This group included narratives that highlighted the diversity of attitudes within the Polish population toward Jews (including passivity, distancing, and hostility) that overshadowed heroism, with passivity often cited as the most prevalent attitude in this context. However, some positions suggested that the

249 Mirosław Maciorowski: *Prof. Jan Grabowski: Pomagaliśmy Niemcom zabijać Żydów*, <https://wyborcza.pl/alehistoria/7,121681,23154070,prof-jan-grabowski-pomagalismy-niemcom-zabijac-zydow.html>, [last accessed 20.02.2025].

250 Ibid.

251 Irena Steinfeldt/Karolina Przewrocka-Aderet: *Wciąż dostajemy wiele świadectw*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/wciaz-dostajemy-wiele-swiadectw-32997>, [last accessed 20.02.2025].

252 Michał Okoński: *By człowiek przeżył*, <https://www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/by-czlowiek-przezyt-151422>, [last accessed 20.02.2025].

anti-Semitic orientation in Poland was a primary driver of actions, rendering hostility the foundation of Polish behavior. A significant variation of these views described Poles—as a result of their anti-Semitism—as complicit in the wartime fate of the Jewish population.²⁵³

The presence of such positions in Polish academic and cultural discourse sparked numerous debates within Polish society. In this context, the phenomenon known as the “pedagogy of shame” in public space was also analyzed. The “pedagogy of shame” is a metaphorical term for narratives about the past of Polish society that seek to exaggerate the negative aspects of the national characteristics of Poles, highlighting the dark chapters of Polish history and the flaws of members of the Polish nation. This term, primarily found in journalism, has also gained traction in politics and academia, becoming part of social discourse in Poland. It emerged during debates surrounding Polish guilt towards others, with the discussions around the Jedwabne case and the issue of Polish collaboration²⁵⁴ (2000–2001) marking a significant moment for its conceptualization.²⁵⁵ At that time, the legitimacy of revising history was considered, along with its potential benefits and drawbacks for the national community and the state’s image. In the scientific sphere, some researchers did not see criticism and acknowledgment of national sins as undermining collective bonds or threatening the national identity of Poles and the state’s position in the international arena.²⁵⁶

253 See among others: Barbara Engelking: *Jest taki piękny słoneczny dzień... Losy Żydów szukających ratunku na wsi polskiej 1942–1945*, Warszawa 2011; Barbara Engelking/Jan Grabowski: *Dalej...*; Elżbieta Janicka: *Pamięć przyswojona. Koncepcja polskiego doświadczenia zagłady Żydów jako traumy zbiorowej w świetle rewizji kategorii świadka*, in: *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 3–4 (2015), pp. 148–226; Elżbieta Janicka/ Tomasz Żukowski: *Przemoc filosemicka? Nowe polskie narracje o Żydach po roku 2000*, Warszawa 2016; Michael C. Steinlauf: *Bondage...*; Tomasz Żukowski: *Wielki retusz. Jak zapomnieliśmy, że Polacy zabijali Żydów*, Warszawa 2018.

254 The investigation into the Jedwabne massacre was launched on September 5, 2000. On June 30, 2003, the investigation was discontinued, and as a result of its activities, the probable course of events on the day of the pogrom (July 10, 1941) was established. The hypothesis was accepted that the murder in Jedwabne of no less than 340 Polish citizens of Jewish nationality was committed by a group of several dozen Poles acting on German inspiration, committing this crime with a sense of both German acquiescence and complete impunity. See: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej: *Postanowienie o umorzeniu śledztwa w sprawie zabójstwa obywateli polskich narodowości żydowskiej w dniu 10 lipca 1941 r. w Jedwabnem (S 1/00/Zn)*, <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/sledztwa/postanowienia-konczone/24215,Postanowienia-konczone-sledztwa.html>, [last accessed 26.02.2025].

255 Jerzy Lackowski: *Pedagogika wstydu*, <https://teologiapolityczna.pl/jerzy-lackowski-pedagogika-wstydu>, [last accessed 26.02.2025]; Tomasz Szkudlarek: *Pedagogika wstydu i bezwstydną polityka*, in: *Forum Oświatowe* 30/1 (2018), pp. 37–52.

256 See among others: Marcin Kula: *Lepiej nie nadużywać historii*, in: *Przegląd Polityczny* 76 (2006), pp. 39–48; Lech M. Nijakowski: *Baron Münchhausen, czyli o polskiej polityce pamięci*, in: *Przegląd Polityczny* 75 (2006), pp. 54–63; Andrzej Werner: *Pamięć i władza: komu służy polityka historyczna*, in: *Przegląd Polityczny* 76 (2006), pp. 51–55.

Conversely, others strongly criticized the ongoing revision of the past or the tendency to focus on historical Polish faults.²⁵⁷

At the beginning of the 21st century, discussions about the legitimacy of shame in shaping a nation, its consciousness, and its identity in the world began to surface. Social psychologist Michał Bilewicz noted that introducing the term “pedagogy of shame” into public debates was a regulatory response to the emotion of shame, aiming to reduce the intensity of this negative feeling while fostering positive emotions simultaneously. According to his perspective, this reaction occurred alongside other mechanisms. These include, first, the strategy of selecting situations, which emphasizes the glorious episodes of Polish society’s history rather than the shameful ones. This strategy is evident in the avoidance of informants who recount deeds that evoke feelings of shame. Second, there is the strategy of modifying the situation, which is noticeable in efforts to discredit the competence of those producing shame-inducing content and attempts to censor it; this also involves highlighting the marginal and unrelated nature of shameful phenomena to the national community. Last but not least, the strategy of cognitive reinterpretation includes all processes of causal attribution or spontaneous explanations that allow us to accept the facts while downplaying their significance, thus maintaining a positive image of the group. This strategy encompasses procedures of dehumanization directed at the victims, which entails ceasing to recognize emotions in them. It also includes moral switching—a method that excludes the ethics of concern and justice in favor of the ethics of loyalty and obedience—and ethnocentric attributions, where the criminal actions of compatriots are explained situationally (e.g., by the behavior of the opposing side), while the crimes of opponents are seen dispositionally (e.g., as stemming from their innate inclinations or predispositions). Bilewicz viewed the term “pedagogy of shame” as a strategy for modulating emotional expression, which involves attempts to suppress social manifestations of shame emotions.²⁵⁸

The issue of combating the “pedagogy of shame” was frequently raised and defined within the journalistic and political narratives of the Polish right (particularly articulated by members and supporters of the Law and Justice party). On the 60th anniversary of the Jedwabne massacre in 2001, President Aleksander Kwasniewski (SLD) apologized for the crime.²⁵⁹ A decade later, in 2011, President

257 Dariusz Gawin: *O pozytkach i szkodliwości historycznego rewizjonizmu*, in: *Przegląd Polityczny* 75 (2006), pp. 33–43; *ibid.*, *Oczekujemy szacunku dla naszej historii*, <https://www.rp.pl/artykul/228189-Oczekujemy-szacunku-dla-naszej-historii.html>, [last accessed 26.02.2025]; Jerzy Lackowski: *Pedagogika...*

258 Michał Bilewicz: *(Nie)pamięć zbiorowa Polaków jako skuteczna regulacja emocji*, in: *Teksty Drugie* 6 (2016), pp. 54–65.

259 *Prezydent.pl: Prezydent RP wziął udział w uroczystościach żałobnych w Jedwabnem*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/archiwum-aleksandra-kwasniewskiego/aktualnos>

Bronislaw Komorowski (PO) emphasized, “We feel pain and shame to this day for what happened then,”²⁶⁰ adding, “With respect and gratitude, we simultaneously think of those Poles who, in that terrible hell of war and destruction, brought help to the Jews.”²⁶¹ The combination of these two narratives, of crime and glory, did not eliminate the burden of using the term “guilt.” As early as the following year (2012), after U.S. President Barack Obama used the phrase “Polish death camp” during the ceremony honoring Jan Karski²⁶² with the Presidential Medal of Freedom to describe the Nazi transit camp in Izbica, J. Kaczyński emphasized that the Polish response to the claim attributing the establishment of death camps during World War II to Poles must be very strong, as the Polish nation had been insulted in a highly drastic manner. He added that he does not think using the term was a mistake but rather the culmination of a “pedagogy of shame.”²⁶³ This led him to conclude, “No more pedagogy of shame, no more endless expiation of our nation for reasons unknown, no more self-recrimination because this facilitates and even encourages such actions; it causes terrible damage to us.”²⁶⁴ In 2013, he reiterated this concept in his announcement regarding the new “politics of history,” which would be closely linked to educational policy, as the formation of young Poles’ identity must be rooted in dignity and pride. Thus, “pedagogy of shame” was contrasted with “pedagogy of pride.”²⁶⁵

A year after PiS’s victory in the 2015 parliamentary and presidential elections, during the symposium “Faces of Manipulation – Sources and Effects” at the Higher School of Social and Media Culture in Torun, J. Kaczyński delivered a speech titled *Manipulations in the so-called Polish-Polish War*. In his remarks, he emphasized that the “pedagogy of shame” represents “the destruction of Polish national pride and, to a large extent, the destruction of identity as well, by

ci/rok-2001/prezydent-rp-wzial-udzial-w-uroczystosciach-zalobnych-w-jedwabnem,31942 ,archive, [last accessed 26.02.2025].

260 Prezydent.pl: *List prezydenta odczytany w Jedwabnem*, <https://www.prezydent.pl/kancelaria/archiwum/archiwum-bronislaw-komorowski/aktualnosci/wypowiedzi-prezydenta-rp/inne/list-prezydenta-odczytany-w-jedwabnem,17361>, [last accessed 26.02.2025].

261 Ibid.

262 Jan Karski was a courier for the Polish Underground State; in 1942, he passed on information to the Western Allies about the extermination of Jews (collecting data, he was twice introduced into the Warsaw ghetto, he also spent a few hours in the transit camp in Izbica, from where Jews were transported to the death camps in Sobibor and Majdanek). See: Fundacja Edukacyjna Jana Karskiego: *Historia Jana Karskiego*, <https://www.jankarski.net/pl/o-janie-karskim/historia-jana-karskiego.html>, [last accessed 26.02.2025].

263 *Wiadomosci.wp.pl: Kaczyński: naród Polski został obrażony w sposób niezwykle drastyczny*, <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kaczynski-narod-polski-zostal-obrazony-w-sposob-niezwyklye-d-rastyczny-6036812426249345a?c=96&nil=&src01=6a4c8>, [last accessed 26.02.2025].

264 Ibid.

265 *Dzieje.pl: Kaczyński...*

referencing various facts—some true and mostly fabricated—intended to compromise Poles.²⁶⁶ The “pedagogy of shame” (initially practiced at the media level and later incorporated into school curricula, affecting Polish historians as well) was concurrently viewed by J. Kaczyński as an expansion and sharpening of the new scientific worldview, which, due to manipulation by communists and post-communists, has become an element of a severe transmission weakening Polish resources and part of a broader operation involving foreign funds (aimed at rewarding Polish historians for an appropriate attitude).²⁶⁷ Consequently, the phenomenon of “pedagogy of shame” has been framed as a legacy of the non-democratic system, sustained, among other things, by those linked to it (whether real or ideological). Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki also discussed the “pedagogy of shame” in the context of both the Third Republic and the People’s Republic of Poland. In 2018, when asked why, in some cases, the authorities of the People’s Republic of Poland did not thank the recipients of the Righteous Among the Nations title, he said: “This is a voice that proves how un-Polish the Polish state was during the People’s Republic of Poland—in particular, and later also—how this pedagogy of shame applied to us overshadowed the normal behavior of the Polish state.”²⁶⁸ A year after these words, the already-mentioned J. Żaryn noted that “The pedagogy of shame has been pushed to the margins of public life. The pedagogy of pride has undoubtedly become the leading approach in Polish politics of history.”²⁶⁹ Meanwhile, between 2020 and 2021, then Minister of Education and Science Przemysław Czarnek (PiS) announced a definitive end to the “pedagogy of shame” in the educational sphere.²⁷⁰ Thus, it was intended to disappear not only from the state’s political realm, both internally and externally, but ultimately from society’s collective and individual identity.

Declarations and actions to reject shame and the pedagogy that supports it have generated enthusiasm in some circles.²⁷¹ The emerging criticism, in turn, noted, among other things, that the promoted struggle against the “pedagogy of

266 Wiadomości w Onet: *Symposium naukowe “Oblicza manipulacji” w Toruniu z udziałem Jarosława Kaczyńskiego*, <https://wiadomosci.onet.pl/kraj/symposium-naukowe-oblicza-manipulacji-w-toruniu-z-udzialem-jaroslaw-kaczynskiego/4wfp13>, [last accessed 26.02.2025].

267 Ibid.

268 Marek Sławiński: *Premier: Instytut Solidarności i Męstwa ma uczcić osoby, które ryzykowały swoje życie*, <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/premier-instytut-solidarnosci-i-mestwa-ma-uczci-c-osoby-ktore-ryzykowaly-swoje-zycie>, [last accessed 27.02.2025].

269 Tygodnik Solidarność: *Prof. Jan Żaryn: wśród środowisk żydowskich jest coraz mniej partnerów do rozmów*, <https://www.tysol.pl/a37721-Prof-Jan-Zaryn-wsrod-srodowisk-zydowskich-jest-coraz-mniej-partnerow-do-c2%a0rozmow>, [last accessed 23.11.2020].

270 GazetaPrawna.pl: *Czarnek: Mamy skończyć z pedagogiką wstydu, a postawić na pedagogikę dumy, tak jak robi każdy normalny kraj*, <https://serwisy.gazetaprawna.pl/edukacja/artyku/ly/8165909,czarnek-historia-przedstawiana-prawdziwie.html>, [last accessed 27.02.2025].

271 See among others: Jerzy Lackowski: *Pedagogika...*

shame” began to signify not so much the negation of facts (which serves to eliminate the discomfort of shame) and the covering up of irritating aspects of collective memory, but rather the shameless unveiling of what should be hidden (that undergoes shameless exposure).²⁷² This observation was made by pedagogue Tomasz Szkudlarek, who, while analyzing the PiS pedagogical strategy based on the thesis about the “harmfulness of public reckoning with the infamous elements of national identity”²⁷³ and emphasizing a “pathetic-heroic image of Poland’s past,”²⁷⁴ pointed out:

PiS’s policy, however, appears to be surprisingly, in the words of Jaroslaw Kaczyński, remarkably free from the restraints of shame. Almost everything, including manipulative tools, is laid bare here. [...] The declaration of an active politics of history is, after all, a straightforward promise of manipulation: the announcement that history taught in schools, the media, and museums will be selective, that it will be propaganda aligned with the objectives of current politics, and that it will not even feign its connection to the complexity and multifaceted nature of historical truths. I do not remember any previous government—including those from the People’s Republic of Poland era—being as disarmingly candid in such declarations.²⁷⁵

Conclusions

Regarding Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, the narratives of memory represented by the Law and Justice party, particularly after 2015, primarily emphasized the universality of heroic attitudes among Poles toward the Jewish people, highlighting acts of rescue and assistance while acknowledging the dangers posed by the occupier. At the same time, these depictions often overlooked Polish offenses against the Jewish population, tending to marginalize this issue. Consequently, the narratives from the Law and Justice party portrayed Poles rescuing Jews as heroic while excluding (often almost entirely) contrary behaviors—shameful, selfish actions and even indifferent, passive attitudes. The statements from party members and supporters were frequently supported by data, showcasing the numerous Poles who risked their lives to save Jews from extermination. This included summaries of the titles of Righteous Among the Nations awarded to Poles by Yad Vashem and estimates of the potential scale of assistance, sometimes citing figures as high as a million or more people who may have aided the Jewish population. Accordingly, the narratives within the Law and Justice party often employed quantitative comparisons, presenting Polish ac-

272 Tomasz Szkudlarek: *Pedagogika...*, pp. 39, 41.

273 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

274 *Ibid.*

275 *Ibid.*, p. 46.

tions alongside other nations' behaviors, thereby highlighting Poles' uniqueness and heroism. Using data, they presented interpretations and assumptions that favored an affirmative view, dismissing doubts about the proposed understanding. Furthermore, this affirmation of the Polish attitude toward Jews during the occupation relied on an almost arithmetical reasoning: good cancels out evil. Thus, within certain frameworks, the good deeds of the Polish nation representatives for the Jewish people during the German extermination period were seen as negating all the harm inflicted on the Jews by Poles, rendering discussions of Polish guilt unwelcome, unjustified, and often perceived as hostile or anti-Polish.

Summary

The analysis of the conflict of memories in Poland during the Law and Justice party's rule demonstrates that the party's politics of memory significantly influenced public perception of the past. By consistently promoting certain narratives—especially regarding the Warsaw Uprising, the Cursed Soldiers, and Polish-Jewish relations—the authorities shaped a national identity grounded in heroic models and the mythologization of selected historical events. However, these actions simultaneously exacerbated conflicts of memories, deepening social divisions and contributing to the radicalization of public debates.

In the case of the Warsaw Uprising, the Law and Justice party's politics of memory focused on an affirmative narrative that emphasizes the heroism and patriotism of the Uprising's participants while marginalizing critical voices that highlight its tragic consequences. Regarding the Cursed Soldiers, there has been an almost complete reevaluation of previous assessments—figures once considered controversial have become symbols of an indomitable struggle for freedom, often without considering the more complex context of their actions. In contrast, when discussing Polish-Jewish relations during World War II, the government narrative has sought to highlight the heroic role of Poles as rescuers of Jews while downplaying discussions about the participation of some in the persecution.

The conflict of memories in Poland is not merely an academic issue but a significant process with real consequences for the functioning of society and the state. The way narratives of memory are constructed influences the shaping of civic and political attitudes, as well as international relations. For this reason, it is essential to continue researching the mechanisms of utilizing and building social memory in politics and the long-term effects of this process.

In conclusion, the Law and Justice governments marked periods of intense politics of memory, which significantly impacted public debate on Poland's past. These activities perpetuated certain narrative patterns and increased social tensions stemming from competing interpretations of the past. This monograph illustrates that the conflict of memories in Poland is not just a dispute about the

past but also about the present and future—concerning how national identity is defined and which values form the foundation of a political community.

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