

Alena Marková
Mariia Kuznetcova
(eds.)

Memory of Central and Eastern Europe

Past Traumas, Present
Challenges, Future
Horizons

MEMORY OF CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

PAST TRAUMAS, PRESENT CHALLENGES, FUTURE HORIZONS

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Introduction

The collective monograph *Memory of Central and Eastern Europe: Past Traumas, Present Challenges, Future Horizons* deals with a number of issues surrounding memory and historical politics alongside questions of national histories, national myths, practices of memory, commemoration and even forgetting in the regions of Eastern and Central Europe.

In the last decade, a focus on memory studies in the humanities has fostered new approaches to the study of the past. At the same time, memory and commemorative practices have become sites of contestation and the politics of history are becoming increasingly noticeable. This interdisciplinary collective monograph offers a complex perception of memory and the ways in which different and changing national histories may be interpreted. It offers a view of memory as a process, as a product linking individual experiences and a collective (national) history formed through social interactions and larger-scale political and economic factors.

The current monograph is an attempt at an interdisciplinary approach to the issue of memory of Eastern and Central Europe provided by early career researchers. The monograph aims to support a dialogue between different fields of study (history and literature to name a few) as well as between theoretical and methodological approaches in memory and related studies. Thus, the monograph provides a unique platform for collaboration between different theoretical and conceptual approaches.

Over the last few decades, memory and its related historical politics have undergone changes in Europe. This has been related to the enlargement of the European Union and, more broadly, the role of the EU in world politics and wider changes in the international political landscape. However, the changes do not only concern the construction of a pan-European narrative but, even more profoundly, understandings about the very

nature of the sphere of public activity called *memory*. Almost thirty years after the fall of the communist regime, the history of Central and Eastern Europe still sparks intense discussions in the former socialist bloc as contested memories, as part of the re-thinking and re-definition of the communist regime, are relived. In recent years, all post-communist countries have seen a dramatic rise in political influence on their histories and an increase in the use of different interpretations and assessments of the past for political purposes. Thus, this monograph focuses its main attention on two connected points which explain the current proliferation of memory games in Central and Eastern Europe. Firstly, the growing number of social and political actors trying to develop and elaborate new memory forms into society and secondly, the ‘generalisation’ of conflict memories. The monograph, therefore, analyses the conflicts in memory around painful histories within contemporary political events. The connection between memory as a defensive safeguard against attempts to silence the voices of the past and the complicity of memory itself in this silencing runs throughout the book. Another purpose of this work is to introduce the reader to the most current methodological trends in the field of memory studies and to provide insights into important issues concerning the treatment of the past and discussions of the darker pages of history.

The monograph is divided into three main parts. The first part *Commemoration in Public Space* focuses on the issues related to the problematic aspects of memory in the context of urban and social media space. It is important that public memory is located within public discourse. This is realised through various practices of commemoration and remembrance intended to reify public memory by transforming it into a set of representations of the past. According to the authors of the chapter, urban and city space is expressed in a very complex interweaving of public memory, urban cultural landscapes and commemorative places and practices. These are not silent places of memory, but agents of active dialogue in the present, suggesting an awareness and rethinking of the past. The focus of memory studies has changed due to rapid technological changes which have created a new digital space that influences how individuals and collectives forget and remember. This section also includes an analysis of the use of social media platforms for commemoration. Commemoration in the public space is considered here as a form of public recognition and a way to implement the policy of memory of the state.

The first part *Commemoration in Public Space* includes Mariia Kuznetsova’s paper *The Transformation of Historical Politics in Post-Socialist Russia*

of the Urban Space. This paper provides an overview of the development and trends in historical politics through the example of the urban space of post-socialist Russia. The author considers the restructuring of the Soviet past, the restoration of 'historical justice' and the search for new images of the Soviet past as the main strategies of historical politics in post-socialist Russia. The study deals with the history of the installation of monuments to Stalin as the most effective way to commemorate the memory of the history of the USSR. The author focuses on the transformation of the national historical narrative in Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the processes of the construction of the national history narrative through historical politics.

Peter Buchmüller, in his paper *Commemorating Victims of World War II During the Communist Takeover in Hungary – A Case Study of the Budapest Bar Association*, presents the post-war remembrance of Budapest lawyers including both those who perished in the Shoah and those who died on the battlefield. The issue of a memorial is a very good example of how complex it was to deal with the question of victims of the war years and how to remember them afterward. Besides examining this process, the circumstances of the Bar Association before and after the war, their inner struggles and oppositions are also briefly presented. The process of the transition to a communist state whose official ideology had a huge impact on how to commemorate the victims of the war in Hungary is also discussed.

Charlotte Adèle Murphy in her study *Instagram Stories and Historical Re-enactment in Social Media Memory: Eva Stories and Ich bin Sophie Scholl* analyses Instagram projects as historical re-enactments and discusses the dynamics and functions of re-enactment for the collective memory of historical atrocities in the digital age. With the Instagram series *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl*, the author observes the emergence of a new and important phenomenon within social media memory: combining historical re-enactment with participatory social media practices. The author argues that historical re-enactment is not characterised by only historical authenticity; its objective is to re-create the past symbolically, and for re-enactors (their audience) to feel the events they are re-enacting on an emotional level.

Another study *Practices of Restoring Memory or Perhaps Constructing Memory? The Significance of Commemorative Murals to Their Initiators and Creators* by Adrianna Krzywik initially seeks to read the meanings contained in the messages of selected commemorative murals. Secondly, it tries to establish the meanings attributed to commemorative murals

by the agents. The author considers murals as one of the most popular forms of representation of the past in public space, calling them memory carriers. In the discussion of the research being carried out, the opportunities associated with the formation of historical awareness and attitudes towards society's past through commemorative murals will be highlighted.

Ines Skibinski in her paper *Dealing with an Unloved Past – Decommunization in Poland under PiS* presents a short outline of the change in political, social and legal systems in Poland during the early 1990s. The author focuses on what happened in 2016 after the decommunization law was passed and how it changed the sights of Polish cities, towns and villages. For a deeper understanding of these events, the paper shows the current decommunization processes in different cities, such as Warsaw, Legnica, Katowice, Wołów, and Międzychód. This paper aims to explain why decommunization is a part of the political program of the current government around Jarosław Kaczyński and his party PiS, but also aims to show the resistance that has been carried out against the decommunization law from different social directions.

The second part of the book *Memory of Nations and Rethinking History* focuses on the issues related to the interaction between nation, national history and memory. Memory is not an immutable legacy, but rather a malleable resource for creating a shared history about the past. Through historical memory, members of the community are able to retain shared values across time and space. This gives rise to a sense of community with the nation, a sense of belonging to the greater whole, which transcends the horizon of individual experience. Historical memory is one of the catalysts for social consolidation. This section reveals the role of memory of the past in creating both a shared history and a representation or rethinking of that shared history. By analysing the case studies, the chapter explores what and how societies remember in certain social and historical contexts, how memories can be a source of national unification, resistance or pain, and how societies deal with collective guilt and collective responsibility. The main purpose is to analyse the relations between memory and history by examining how different groups mobilise their memories of the past for political and economic purposes. The shared past on which different nations have based their identity is about overcoming historical differences through selective unforgetting. Memory, with its insistence on the present, is equally central to the constitution of the historical narrative within which national history is constructed. Approaching this issue from the perspective of different disciplines and

geographic areas, the authors of the part illustrate how historical splits are overcome by rethinking one's own history.

The first study by Ramil Zamanov *Militarised Masculinities: Analysis of Hegemonic Azerbaijani Masculinities During the II Nagorno Karabakh War* aims to conduct a discourse analysis on social networks by focusing on the various discourses of hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities about militarisation and the II Nagorno-Karabakh War. The paper studies Azerbaijani masculinities in terms of their opinions, militarised aims and visions and by using feminist discourse analysis. By applying Raewyn Connell's theory of hegemonic masculinities to hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities, the author aims to uncover how the support of Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities influenced the dynamics of the II Nagorno-Karabakh War and what the main reasons were behind such support.

Iuliia Iashchenko in her paper *The Experiences of Female Ethnic Prisoners in Soviet Camps: Between Collective Memory and the Historiographical Debate* addresses the problems of studying the history of totalitarianism in the USSR in the context of collective memory and working with oral sources. The research examines women's experiences and the reasons for their silencing through the lens of historiographical analysis. This sheds light on the serious fragmentation of historiography about the USSR concerning ethnic cleansing, due to the classification of archives and ideological evaluations. In essence, the research focuses on the collective memory of Russian Germans surrounding the deportations of 1941, the repressions of the 1930s, and life in concentration camps in the 1940s and 1950s. The main historical sources used were interviews with victims of ethnic cleansing in the USSR, principally collected during field research in Russia between 2018 and 2020.

Marek Kettner, in his study *A Lightning Flash on the Sky of Memory: Walter Benjamin's Late Theory of History*, analyses a significant role of memory in Walter Benjamin's late philosophy of history and draws major inspiration from the works and ideas of H. Bergson, M. Proust and G. Deleuze. Some of their thoughts and concepts regarding memory help us to see Benjamin's reflections on historiography in a new light and make them more understandable. The major claim of this study is that Benjamin was concerned with the past and that for this reason the only source of historiographical writing he considered legitimate was memory. This study tries to show why such a philosophical attitude towards history can provide some valuable insights with regards to contemporary historical studies.

The third part, *Memory and History-telling*, is devoted to the representation of memory and sheds light on the specific role of texts as a means of cultural memory. This chapter addresses different aspects of the written text as a memorial medium in its own right in order to contribute to the broader discussion on how the past is remembered. As will become apparent, text has two main roles to play in the production of cultural memory: text as an object of remembrance and text as the medium of memory. This raises the question of how a text is able to shape perceptions of the past. Texts as a form of representation help to create collective memories by recalling the past in the form of narratives. By imaginatively representing the acts of remembering and recalling, the text makes memories observable. Through texts, the authors reveal the presence of the past in the present, re-examine the connection between past and present and illuminating the multiple functions that memory performs for the constitution of identity. Texts combine the remembered and the forgotten, the real and the imagined and through narrative means they imaginatively explore the workings of memory, thereby offering a new perspective on the past. Thus, this part illustrates the role of the text not only in perpetuating pre-existing memories, but also in creating and reinforcing new patterns of memory.

The first study *Trauma, Silence, and Memory: Waiting for Godot and Shoah* by Seval Merve Sarihan focuses on the Holocaust Memory and the problems of linguistic and visual representations through S. Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* and C. Lanzmann's film *Shoah*. It suggests an analysis of these works based not on their similarities but on how they compare in terms of their approach towards employing silence as a mode of expression across different media. The author claims that both works can be productively and contrastingly viewed through a psychoanalytic lens, and by placing Beckett's linguistic minimalism next to Lanzmann's choice of multilingualism it allows for new insights to emerge.

Lena Franziska Schraml in her paper *Remembering and Forgetting in Monika Sznajderman's Falszerze Pieprzu* shows how remembrance can take place in a fictional text and thereby reveals the potential of fiction for collective memory and memory cultures. This potential is revealed in the connection between remembering and narration in the form of retrospective construction through which memory becomes observable in fictional texts. The paper asks, among other things, how the Second World War is remembered and which themes are in focus. What narrato-

logical tools does the author use and how does she deal with the problem of not having lived through the war herself?

Finally, the last study by Veselina Dzhumbeva *Memories of Russia: Ekaterina Bakunina's Account of the Homeland*, seeks to answer two questions concerning Bakunina's works: how was Russia remembered and why was it remembered? The author focuses on Russian émigré writers in interwar Europe who continued to include the image of their homeland in their works even after their ties with Russia were severed. Dzhumbeva analyses techniques of association in the first-person confessional narrative in which a trigger in the present (either contrasting or similar) prompts a fragment of the past. These memories are considered by the author as a way to restore belonging to the national identity in the struggle for self-determination.

The editors of this collective monograph believe that this publication would provide a solid interdisciplinary platform for memory studies and will initiate further fruitful debates on memory research in its different forms.

Prague, October 12, 2022

Alena Marková

Mariia Kuznetcova

Part 1:
Commemoration in Public Space

The Transformation of Historical Politics in Post-Socialist Russia of the Urban Space

Mariia Kuznetcova

Introduction

The field of historical politics has been rapidly expanding in recent years and occupies an important position at the intersection of various social and humanitarian disciplines. Expanding academic interest in the subject also stems from the increasing number of states utilising their own national history as major political tool. Such uses of historical politics represent a combination of interests such as those of the government, political opposition groups and institutions. Historical politics thus becomes a powerful tool of state building. By providing the state with internal and external legitimacy based upon historical narratives, society can be mobilised and united under a common understanding. The use of national history for political purposes has become increasingly relevant to the study of post-socialist spaces due to the consistent interpretation and re-interpretation of their own national histories.

In the case of Russia, expanding spaces for commemoration and political discourse are associated with transformations within the political sphere following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent creation of new institutions. As the largest state to undergo such changes, Russian historical politics serves as a particularly informative case study of the phenomenon. Specifically, the period following the collapse of the USSR and the Soviet bloc (1991) was a time of significant historical revision regarding the Soviet period¹. The events of this period are often an attractive resource for political forces in Russia because of an assumed

1 This paper will examine the presidencies of Yeltsin (1991–1999), Putin (1999–2008, 2012–2022) and Medvedev (2008–2012).

general social consensus. One of the dominant strategies for the modernisation of Russian society was therefore to create unity between the state and public organisations founded upon appeals to patriotism. The poor coordination of such activities has, however, meant that Russia has not formed a general national consensus on attitudes towards the past. The result is that no single and consistent version of historical politics exists that could encompass the numerous competing narratives. The main goal of this research is therefore to provide a general overview of the developments and trends in historical politics through the example of the urban spaces of post-socialist Russia. Two major approaches will also be considered. The first is the transformation of the national historical narrative in Russia since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The second is the processes involved in constructing this national historical narrative through historical politics.

Definitions of Historical Politics: an Overview of Notions

While ‘historical politics’ is a frequently used academic term, consistent definitions for the concept are not so easy to come by. Within the context of this chapter, ‘historical politics’ most accurately describes the activities of politicians in post-soviet Russia however there are many competing concepts which also describe similar phenomena: symbolic politics, political uses of the past, memory regime, the politics of the past, memory games etc.²

2 Krumrey, J., *The Symbolic Politics of European Integration: Staging Europe*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2018; Pocoluev, S.P., “Simvolicheskaya politika kak inscenirovanie i estetizaciya”, *Polis*, Vol. 5, 1999, 62–76; Kangaspuro, M., “The Victory Day in history politics” in: E. Kahla, *Between utopia and apocalypse. Essays on social theory and Russia*, Kikimora Publications, Helsinki 2011, 292–305; Levi, G., “The distant Past: On the Political Use of History”, in: J. Revel – G. Levi, *Political Uses of the Past: The Recent Mediterranean Experiences*, Routledge, London-New York 2014; Langenbacher, E., “Collective Memory as a Factor in Political Culture and International Relations”, in: E. Langenbacher – Y. Shain, *Power and the Past. Collective Memory and International Relations*, George Town University Press, Washington 2010, 13–49; Onken, E.-C., “The Baltic States and Moscow’s 9 May Commemoration: Analyzing Memory Politics in Europe”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, Issue 1, 2007, 23–46; Bernhard, M. – Kubik, J., *Twenty Years after Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014; Koposov, N., *Memory Laws, Memory Wars: The Politics of the Past in Europe and Russia*, University Printing House, Cambridge 2018; Art, D., *The Politics of the Nazi Past in Germany and Austria*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006; Mink, G., “Between Reconciliation and the

The concept of historical politics emerged as a category of political practice first in Germany in the 1980s, then in Poland in the 2000s.³ In contemporary Russian history, the concept of historical politics was first circulated at the turn of the 2000s and then during the 2010s. This popularity was primarily due to reactions from sections of the Russian academic community towards the authorities' interventions in the approval and interpretation of historical events.⁴

From the point of view of the state, the goal was to fight against revisionism in interpretations of World War II. The primary objective was to marginalise historical interpretations which rejected the war as being foundational to Russian civil identity.⁵

According to Alexei Miller historical politics is defined by a set of practices, based on the financial and administrative resources of a state, through which certain interpretations of historical events come to dominant. The memory of the past becomes a symbolic resource used not only by professional historians but also by politicians and social activists.⁶ Specifically, historical politics aims to represent a certain image of the past demanded by the current political context. Georgiy Kasianov argues that historical politics is a utilitarianist form of politics aimed based upon a relatively stable set of interrelated collective ideas about a particular historical memory.

As a result, historical politics is a means of ensuring political and cultural loyalty through the creation and/or appropriation of symbolic capital. It involves the ideological and political instrumentalization of history and memory, including the creation and/or appeal to cultural stereotypes.⁷ Thus, the concept of historical politics can be used in both a broad and narrow sense. In a broad sense, it is any purposeful activity involving the political use of the past, including the activities of the authorities in the sphere of national and state identity. It also includes the competition, within the public sphere, of influential social groups for the approval of their interpretations of the collective past. In a narrow

Reactivation of Past Conflicts in Europe: Rethinking Social Memory Paradigms”, *Czech Sociological Review*, Vol. 44, Issue 3, 2008, 469–490.

3 Malinova, O. YU., “Politika pamyati kak oblast’ simvolicheskoy politiki”, in: A. I. Miller – D. V. Efremenko, *Metodologicheskie voprosy izucheniya politiki pamyati*, Izdatel’stvo Nestor-Istoriya, Moskva 2018, 33.

4 Particularly by authorities’ attitudes to interpretations by public groups.

5 Bubnov, A. YU., “Istoricheskaya politika i bor’ba interpretacij kollektivnogo proshlogo v publichnoy sfere”, *Izvestiya Tul’skogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta. Gumanitarnye nauki*, Vol. 4, 2017, 4.

6 Miller, A. I., “Russia: power and history”, *Pro et Contra*, Vol. 13, Issue 3–4, 2009, 6–23.

7 Kasianov, G., *Ukraina i sosedi*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moskva 2019, 34–36.

sense, historical politics can be understood as a strategy to strengthen identity through a positive assessment of one's own history based on the elaboration of a difficult past.⁸

In the view of Olga Malinova, politics works not with the past, but with social ideas about the past. Moreover, it deals not so much with history – a systematic reconstruction of the past based on critical selection – it is more connected with what is commonly called “collective memory”, that is, with socially shared cultural knowledge of the past.⁹ Collective memory is based on simplified myths and emotional narratives that reduce complex and contradictory historical processes to seemingly simple schemes which are perceived as indisputable. It is therefore more accurate to discuss the ‘actualised past’: a list of historical events, figures and symbols that are given meaning through contemporary political and cultural practices.¹⁰ The core of the actualised past is formed by previously established myths, while the periphery is a set of less obvious (but recognisable) meaning constructions. The fundamental principle is that complex contemporary societies produce different memories of the same events.¹¹ This conflicting basis for memory is determined by the fact that the identity of individuals and groups are based on different myths. The interaction of political forces interested in certain interpretations of the past does not, however, always take the form of conflict. Different versions of memory can complement and support each other.¹² Consequently conflicts over the historical past draw attention to memory as a factor in domestic and international policy. By promoting or supporting certain interpretations of the past, the authorities pursue political goals that are not always subordinated to the task of making a vision of the past clearer. They seek to legitimise their own power, strengthen community solidarity and justify their decisions (amongst other motivations).¹³

8 Bubnov, A.YU., “Istoricheskaya politika i bor’ba interpretacij kollektivnogo proshlogo v publichnoj sfere”, 6.

9 Malinova, O.YU., “Politika pamyati kak oblast’ simvolicheskoy politiki”, 32.

10 Ibidem.

11 Langenbacher, E., “Changing memory regimes in contemporary Germany”, *German Politics and Society*, Vol. 21, Issue 2, 2003, 50.

12 Miller, A.I. – Efremenko, D.V., *Politika pamyati v sovremennoj Rossii i stranah Vostochnoj Evropy*, Izdatel’stvo Evropejskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, Sankt-Peterburg 2020, 28.

13 Malinova, O.YU. – Miller, A.I., “Vvedenie. Simvolicheskaya politika i politika pamyati”, in A.I. Miller – V.V. Lapin, *Simvolicheskie aspekty politiki pamyati v sovremennoj Rossii i vostochnoj Evrope*, Izdatel’stvo Evropejskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, Sankt-Peterburg 2021, 14.

Historical politics characterises public discussion regarding the connection between the past and the present through the continuing presence of political forces in the debate. The issue of historical politics has gone beyond purely theoretical reasoning into practical use, where rather abstract content from historical politics is transformed into concrete symbols and signs. Such forms of visualisation and objectification by historical politics are known as commemoration and are fundamental to commemorative practice.

Historical Politics and Commemoration

An important element of historical politics is the public commemoration of historical figures and events through contemporary acts of public remembrance and reassessment. Commemoration should be interpreted as a set of public collective practices with the aim of forming values and models of behaviour through ritual retention and reproduction within the actual cultural meaning for the group.¹⁴ It is a process which mobilises a variety of discourses and practices in order to publicly represent an event. Commemoration of the past deals with the existing socio-cultural infrastructure of memory. Such infrastructure includes monuments, museums and memorial complexes, public holidays and rituals, space toponyms etc.

Commemoration can have different semantic meanings: it is not necessarily an act of triumph that involves celebration; it can also serve as an act of mourning. Commemoration is formed through the deliberate selection of events as part of either a strategic memorialisation or censorship and banishment. The logic of remembering and forgetting takes into account not only the truth of historical facts, but also the emotions associated with them. This consists of remembering what seems important from the point of view of the present and forgetting inconvenient details, mistakes, or controversial topics. In all cases, public recollection inserts the past into the context of the present, actualises it, and reinforces group continuity.¹⁵ Memory is an image of the past which is subjectively constructed in the present. Commemoration is formed by the attitude to the past that exists in society at the moment: it is the attitude shared by a large number of people towards the representation of past events

14 SHub, M.L., "Fenomen kommemoracii: opyt kul'turologicheskogo analiza praktik publicnogo pominoveniya", *Observatoriya kul'tury*, Vol. 15(2), 2018, 162.

15 Malinova, O.YU. – Miller. A.I., "Vvedenie. Simvolicheskaya politika i politika pamyati", 28.

which confirms a sense of its unity. Thus, the practices of commemoration generate and maintain a living connection with the past and serve to strengthen and transmit said memory of the past.¹⁶ These practices act as symbolic resources for political forces and can be used by the state to manipulate historical consciousness. At the same time, they can create restrictions: in particular if their proposed interpretation of the event is significantly different from the established one.¹⁷

Through historical politics, memories of ambiguously experienced and difficult to understand historical events are embodied into contrastingly 'hard' monumental forms (statues, plaques etc.). This instils certain meanings into an urban environment. Over time, these meanings change under the influence of the changing contexts of historical politics. The systems of memorial sites themselves change: some of them disappear without a trace, others are reconstructed and re-created.

Urban Space

Urban spaces are continually changing and transforming environments. New elements are constantly added representing particular patterns of behaviour and social practices. Symbolic meaning is achieved through their appeal to the past and their historic presence legitimises their place in the contemporary social space. Such elements are therefore seen as monumental and indestructible in the eyes of inhabitants. The visual level of the contemporary social landscape becomes a space for political struggle and for the implementation of various strategies of historical politics. Political changes are often reflected in the symbolic structure of the urban environment: the installation and reinstallation of monuments, the renaming of streets and squares. These architectural decisions introduce new meanings into already established spaces and significantly change the cultural infrastructure of collective memory due to their long-term significance.¹⁸ Thus, it is possible to implement political strategies in relation to the consciousness of inhabitants by updating certain images of the past and their inclusion in everyday social practices.

16 Gornova, G.V., "Kollektivnaya pamyat' i praktiki kommemoracii v formirovanii gorodskoj identichnosti", *Vestnik Omskogo gosudarstvennogo pedagogicheskogo universiteta. Seriya "Gumanitarnye issledovaniya"*, Vol. 2, 2017, 19.

17 Malinova, O.YU. – Miller. A.I., "Vvedenie. Simvolicheskaya politika i politika pamyati", 29.

18 Malinova, O.YU., "Politika pamyati kak oblast' simvolicheskoy politiki", 48.

The city acts as a collective experience where historical and social associations play a huge role in defining urban space. Monuments act as markers, giving a part of the city symbolic meaning. If that value is shared collectively, it acquires the status of sacrosanct, carrying within itself the norms and rules of behaviour of a given place. Monuments are material symbols that have acquired a specific character through the activation of symbols of collective memory. These symbols unify and reinforce communal memories which form part of a framework of common meaning. Monuments symbolically connect with the temporality of the city (both past and present) and also participate in the formation of relatively static cultural images of the city. A monument therefore stands out against the urban background, attracting everyone's attention. The most important monuments are usually installed in places which Kevin Lynch has referred to as "knots" – places where communication streams are concentrated and paths connect.¹⁹ The image of the monument is included in the present-day system of routes and strongly associated with a specific place (district, avenue, square, park, etc.). However, the monument 'lives' only as long as it serves as a means of political manifestation and conveys an idea. Sometimes monuments 'die' and become only 'dead' elements of a landscape. The monumental form has the greatest visibility and fundamentality in the practices of historical politics. They provide an opportunity for subsequent generations, who do not have the appropriate experience of their own, to take part in the common memory.²⁰ Historical figures, immortalised in bronze, form a monumental "pantheon" which provides some indication of who society reveres as the founding fathers of the nation.²¹

Shadows of Stalin and Stalin's Monuments

Today, the official memory of Russia is built around the memory of the Soviet past. The current official rhetoric of historical politics increasingly speaks of the positive aspects of the Soviet Union and Stalin's rule,

19 Lynch, K., *Obraz goroda*, Strojizdat, Moskva 1982, 52.

20 Assman, A., *Dlinnaya ten' proshlogo: Memorial'naya kul'tura i istoricheskaya politika*, Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, Moskva 2014, 32.

21 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki. Monumental'nye praktiki postsovetsoj Rossii i obshchestvennye predstavleniya o vydayushchihsya istoricheskikh lichnostyah", in: A.I. Miller – V.V. Lapin, *Simvolicheskie aspekty politiki pamyati v sovremennoj Rossii i vostochnoj Evrope*, Izdatel'stvo Evropejskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, Sankt-Peterburg 2021, 38.

especially regarding victory in World War II. Even though almost 70 years have passed since the death of Stalin, the memory of him is still alive. Stalin's popularity in today's Russian society is, however, superficial, since such attitudes are associated with a nostalgia for the period of his rule and the achievements of his era (for example military success and industrialisation). These are events of the past which presuppose at least a relative social consensus and thus become an attractive resource for political forces seeking to use them to legitimise their own goals or place in political space.

The most effective way of commemorating Joseph Stalin in post-socialist Russia is by building monuments, busts and memorial plaques to commemorate anniversaries related to the history of the USSR. This includes victory in World War II, the beginning of the October Revolution and the birth of Stalin. Monuments to Stalin began to appear in the early 1930s and soon became an equally integral part of the monumental landscape. One of the first monuments to Stalin was made by the sculptor Matvey Kharlamov in 1929, on the eve of the celebration of Stalin's 50th anniversary and took the form of a bust erected in Leningrad.²² Monuments to Stalin, as a rule, were erected on the central street of a city, village or settlement, in a square that often bore the name of Stalin himself or near administrative buildings. Busts of Stalin were installed in parks, squares, gardens, school grounds, hospitals and territories of higher and secondary educational institutions. The Soviet communist project to erect monuments to Stalin incorporated great symbols of power, but also retained impeccable loyalty to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism.²³

Monuments to Stalin continued to be erected even during World War II (1939–1945). In the occupied territory of the USSR, the German fascist invaders mocked these monuments by sawing off their heads and committing other acts of vandalism. Most of the nation's monuments to Stalin were destroyed during this period of German occupation. After World War II, many of the monuments destroyed by the enemy were restored.²⁴ The majority of Stalinist monuments were erected in the first decade of the post-war period (1945–1955), when the cult of Stalin and the system he created reached its climax. Stylistic alterations were now

22 Artamonov, V. A., *Gorod i monument*, Strojizdat, Moskva 1974.

23 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki...", 43.

24 Malinina, T. A., *Iz istorii sovetской arhitektury, 1941-1945 gg.: Dokumenty i materialy*, Nauka, Moskva 1978, 176.

being made to these Stalinist monuments, with imagery of the leader beginning to be depicted in the military uniform of the generalissimo.

In the USSR, after the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956, the erection of monuments to Stalin was stopped. The destruction of monuments to Stalin, which radically accelerated after the 22nd Congress held in 1961, is probably the most ambitious monumental iconoclasm in history. Within a few months, the image and name of Stalin almost completely disappeared from public spaces.²⁵ The dismantling of monuments took place, as a rule, in the middle of the night; in the morning even traces of the pedestals had often disappeared. Dismantled bronze sculptures were usually smelted down at metallurgical plants. The sculptures cast from concrete were buried on the outskirts of the city or, in some cases, flooded in rivers. The systematic dismantling of the monuments to Stalin took place gradually and did not cause any shocks or public resonance.²⁶ The hastiness of the initiatives to dismantle one or another monument to Stalin came entirely from the local authorities at different levels. Therefore, in certain settlements, some monuments were preserved even up to the collapse of the Soviet Union.

No matter how carefully the monumental images were removed, it turned out to be a much more difficult task to oust Stalin from public perception. The de-Stalinisation measures taken by the successive leaders of the USSR were limited. In the official communist discourse, Stalin's name became a figure of silence and to the public it acquired an underground status. The same trend is present today, although in a modified form. The implicit presence of the image and name of Stalin in Soviet life, combined with the successive destruction of monuments and other forms of commemoration, allows us to assert that since 1980 the popular "pantheon" begins to diverge from the "monumental" one.²⁷

The end of the Soviet period and the collapse of the USSR (1991) marked the next phase in the destruction of monuments. The de-Stalinisation of the monumental 'pantheon' was a grassroots and often spontaneous process. Destroying monuments to the communist leaders had powerful emotional element but in reality, the destruction was less extensive than the second iconoclasm associated with Khrushchev's de-Stalinisation. The dismantling of monuments to statesmen of

25 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki...", 43.

26 Tukanov, V. P., *Monumenty v sovetskom gradostroitel'stve*, Moskva 1962, 63.

27 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki...", 44.

the early Soviet period, mainly in Moscow, was an important part of an anti-communist ideological project in the early period of Yeltsin's rule.²⁸

After the collapse of the USSR, the state had neither the strength nor a clear idea of what grounds, other than anti-communist ones, the post-Soviet Russian identity should be based on. The situation was especially difficult with national heroes: there was no clarity as to who should enter the renewed Russian 'pantheon' and, accordingly, to whom exactly new monuments should be erected.²⁹ Private initiatives, with their symbolic programs and heroes, instead came to the fore. An important direction of the monumental commemoration of this time was the restoration of historical justice. During these years various initiatives arose, the purposes of which were to pay tribute to those who were not given the honours they deserved by the state. Not all new monuments are associated with nation-building, but this trend – the restoration of justice – united many of the monuments which appeared during that period.³⁰

This does not, however, exclude the involvement of certain 'inconvenient' events of the past in the memory. Commitment to state historical politics is often accompanied by attempts to preserve or redefine the fundamental historical memories which require preservation by a particular local community. The tension that has arisen becomes the basis of the search for certain compromises, the boundaries of which are determined not only by the capabilities of local political powers, but also by the state's interest in preserving coalition unity in relation to the past.³¹ Many commemorative initiatives emerge at the regional level. The initiators are local authorities, and often just groups of citizens. Private sponsorship reappears and was actively developing in Russian cities.³² In some cases, the government supported local initiatives, such as the initiatives of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. The next stage of the restoration of old monuments to Stalin and the installation of new ones thus began.

When considering the transformation of the historical politics of post-socialist Russia, some of the more representative examples occurred

28 Ibidem.

29 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki...", 46.

30 Ibid., 47.

31 Anikin, D. A., "Konfessional'nyj muzej kak institut politiki pamyati", in: A. I. Miller – D. V. Efremenko, *Politika pamyati v sovremennoj Rossii i stranah Vostochnoj Evropy*, Izdatel'stvo Evropejskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, Sankt-Peterburg 2020, 163.

32 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki...", 49.

in the last decade. For example, for the 70th anniversary of Victory in World War II in 2015, monuments to Stalin were erected in front of the offices of the Communist Party in Penza and Lipetsk.³³ A bust of Stalin in the Pskov region was installed in 2016 as part of the Stalin Line Museum with the financial support of the Russian Military Historical Society, whose president was then Minister of Culture Vladimir Medinsky.³⁴ On the 1st of December 2018, in Komsomolsk-on-Amur of the Khabarovsk Territory, monuments to Stalin and 10 Soviet military leaders were erected on the alley of the commanders of the Great Victory.³⁵ On the 9th of May 2020, a monument to Stalin was erected in the Kirov region for the 75th anniversary of the victory in World War II. It appeared in the village of Demyanovo, Podosinovskiy district and was installed with money collected by inhabitants and the local branch of the Communist Party. On the 6th of September 2020, in the town of Kusa, Chelyabinsk Region, a rediscovered monument to Stalin was restored and erected on the initiative and with the participation of activists of the *Sut' vremeni* [Essence of Time] movement. The opening of the monument was timed to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the end of World War II and was supported by representatives of the Russian Guard.³⁶ The organisers of the event emphasised that their intentions were not to glorify these figures, but only to commemorate the history of the country. However, the fact that the bust of Stalin was installed in the regional capital caused controversy within a certain part of society. Similarly, on the 29th of April 2021, in the village of Dagestanskije Ogni, Dagestan, a bust of Stalin was installed with the participation of the mayor.³⁷ Ruslan Kurbanov, director of the

33 V centre Penzy ustanovili byust I.V. Stalinu, *Press-sluzhba Penzenskogo obkoma KPRF*, 09.10.2015, URL: <https://kprf.ru/party-live/regnews/146323.html> [accessed: 03.05.2022]; Galochka, E., "Pamyatnik Stalinu ustanovili v Lipecke pered 9 maya", *Moskovskij komsomolec*, 7.05.2015, URL: <https://www.mk.ru/politics/2015/05/07/pamyatnik-stalinu-ustanovili-v.html> [accessed: 03.05.2022].

34 Azar, I., "Trepeschite, yadom plyujte. Kak Iosif Stalin vozvrashchaetsya v zhizn' sovremennoj Rossii", *Meduza*, 25.02.2016, URL: <https://meduza.io/feature/2016/02/25/trepeschite-yadom-plyuyte> [accessed: 03.05.2022].

35 Sherstobitova, S., "Alleyu Marshalov Pobedy otkryli v Komsomol'ske-na-Amure", *Novosti Habarovska*, 01.12.2018, URL: <https://www.dvnovosti.ru/komsomolsk/2018/12/01/91719/> [accessed: 03.05.2022].

36 Pinkus, M., "V Chelyabinskoj oblasti vosstanovili najdennyj v prudu pamyatnik Stalinu", *Rossijskaya gazeta*, 06.09.2020, URL: <https://rg.ru/2020/09/06/reg-urfo/v-cheliabinskoj-oblasti-vosstanovili-najdennyj-v-prudu-pamiatnik-stalinu.html> [accessed: 03.05.2022].

37 Danilov, F., "V Dagestane ustanovili byust Stalina", *Znak*, 03.05.2021, URL: https://www.znak.com/2021-05-03/v_dagestane_ustanovili_byust_stalinu_vskore_ot_nego_ostalsya_tolko_postament [accessed: 03.05.2022].

Foundation for the Support of Humanitarian Initiatives *Al'tair* [Al'tair] and senior researcher at the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, filmed the bust and posted the video on his YouTube channel. "*Udar po chuvstvam repressirovannyh narodov*" [A blow to the feelings of the repressed peoples], read the title of the video.³⁸ Many viewers, in particular residents of southern Russia, criticised the initiative, emphasizing their negative attitude towards the Soviet leader due to the deportations of the peoples of the North Caucasus to Kazakhstan and Central Asia during World War II. On the 2nd of May 2021, the monument was dismantled. Such protests against the construction and installation of monuments to Stalin and other establishment initiatives dedicated to commemorating Stalin indicate that part of Russian society strongly condemns Stalin and his actions.

Contemporary Perspectives on Stalin and the Soviet Past

The basis for the majority of post-socialist Russian historical politics is World War II remembrance. State historical politics cannot find a resource for national unification, except for the symbols associated with the victory. In the wider narrative, Stalin is presented as a victorious leader during World War II and as the father of the nation: a strict but human leader who loved the nation. Stalin's popularity can also be explained by society's desire for the order and discipline of Soviet times and the particular rules and norms on which Soviet society was based. This view and representation of eras gone by are especially evident amongst the older generation, who remember and think about the era of the Soviet Union with a certain affection. It is not widely believed in Russian society that the Stalinist regime, and in the broader context, communism, were inherently criminal. There is no clear understanding that Stalin was a tyrant and the person responsible for genocide because there was never any thought or full analysis of the Soviet past given at the national level. The fact that the official rhetoric of historical politics emphasises the Soviet victory in the war and that Stalin is considered the main protagonist for victory makes it difficult to rationalise and rethink the past. In the framework of historical politics in Russia, such an ambivalent attitude towards

38 *Udar po chuvstvam repressirovannyh narodov* [A blow to the feelings of the repressed peoples], URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zm7VnRuGIVY> [accessed: 01.05.2022].

Stalin is often used. This allows his social cult to develop, selectively emphasising the positive example of the leader's actions and mythologising his image. The myth of victory, which is considered the greatest and most important achievement of the Russian nation, has become the mainstay of Russia's contemporary national historical politics. For the rest, positive state ideological attitudes can be formulated only in the most general form as an uncritical attitude towards the figures who embody the supreme power. The authorities do not seek to entrench ideas about characters or events in the public consciousness, they do not create any narratives.³⁹ Therefore, the official narrative breaks off mid-sentence – the authorities do not take sides, leaving a gap to preserve uncertainty.

The domination of some versions of memory in the public space and the muffling of others, or even the eradication of others, is the result of dynamic historical politics.⁴⁰ Since collectively shared views of the past are one of the foundations of the social order, changing their configuration has important implications for the legitimisation of a political regime. The collapse of the official historical narrative as a result of the restoration of historical truth in the years of Perestroika (1985–1991) proved to be one of the reasons for legitimising the Soviet regime. In turn, the ensuing anomaly in collective memory, as reflected in Soviet nostalgia, contributed to the success of Putin's legitimisation narrative.

The re-ideologisation of the Soviet past led to a revision of the historical legacy that was considered decisive for the legitimisation of the Soviet system as a whole. As a result of such breaks in worldview, only those events that were more correlated with the merits of the people as a whole retained their symbolic meaning. This, in turn, does not allow formulating and implementing a single historical politics in contemporary Russian society. The autonomy of the regions is still preserved in their ways of referring to the historical past and the mechanisms of representation of these images. Despite the fact that patriotism is proclaimed as one of the dominant strategies for the modernisation of Russian society, the real embodiment of this slogan comes up against the inability of the political elite to formulate a concept of the past that would correspond to several narratives at once. Formation of pride in the achievements of one's country in various fields of activity, which does not exclude, however, an understanding of the ambiguity of certain historical events and actions of historical figures, is a difficult undertaking. Thus, the main

39 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki...", 56.

40 Malinova, O. YU., "Rezhim pamyati kak instrument analiza: problemy konceptualizacii", 29.

strategies of historical politics in post-Soviet Russia are the restructuring of the Soviet past, the restoration of 'historical justice' and the search for new images of the Soviet past.

Conclusion

The commemoration of historical figures must therefore be seen as an important instrument of historical politics. The contemporary urban landscape is becoming both a space for political struggle and for the implementation of various strategies of historical politics. The capabilities of political forces are largely determined by both the historical material itself and the configuration of the established memory infrastructure. It can be assumed that such a result depends not only on the availability of resources, but also on the plausibility of new interpretations and their semantic conformism with the precepts of different social groups.

In today's Russia a monumental landscape is devoid of ideological unity and often turns out to be a field of contradictions.⁴¹ The creation of special public and state organisations, the installation of new monuments and other memorial signs and the search for new forms of updating the past are all manifestations of historical politics. However, there is also a poorly coordinated response by the institutions of power, acting primarily through a symbolic appeal to patriotism.⁴² Uncertainty and evasiveness in the ideological and symbolic sphere help the regime to maintain flexibility and maintain the political loyalty of a wide range of ideological forces, which is the most important factor of stability.⁴³

The contemporary Russian practice of commemoration leads to the fact that in the collective memory of the Stalin era, the discourse of triumph is reinforced in public consciousness. The triumph should give rise to a sense of pride and give a sense of belonging to a great power to every citizen. However, the implementation of these practices at present does not promote social cohesion but divides society into supporters and those who exist in the discourse of trauma. The ambiguity of the image of Stalin – a bloody executioner and leader of the nation that defeated Hitler's Germany – is part of the Soviet legacy. The position on Stalinism

41 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki...", 56.

42 Pahalyuk, K. A., "Ispol'zovanie istorii v kontekste vneshnej politiki sovremennoj Rossii", in: A. I. Miller – D. V. Efremento, *Politika pamyati v sovremennoj Rossii i stranah Vostochnoj Evropy*, Izdatel'stvo Evropejskogo universiteta v Sankt-Peterburge, Sankt-Peterburg 2020, 100.

43 Lipman, M. A., "Panteon nacional'nyh geroev kak element simvolicheskoy politiki...", 58.

is one of the most demonstrative examples of the transformation that occurred inside post-Soviet society. This trend is supported by the fact that the past is not worked through at the societal level, the historical events have not yet been subject to systematic assessment and the issue of responsibility for crimes has remained unresolved.

Thus, one of the key instruments of historical politics in Russia is the memory of Soviet times. It is used to control society and legitimise contemporary state power, providing constant social support and preserving the existing model of government. This review is not exhaustive. It does, however, give an indication of the possibilities presented by an approach which considers historical politics as a set of public interactions of power forces interested in a special understanding of the past, and analyses these interactions through the prism of power relations.

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Commemorating Victims of World War II During the Communist Takeover in Hungary – A Case Study of the Budapest Bar Association

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On the 1st of July 1947, the Memorial Committee of the Budapest Bar Association announced its intention to erect a monument for lawyers who were victims of the Second World War. The monument would include the names of all so-called ‘martyrs of the Bar’ and was an early attempt to address the memory of the Shoah in Hungary’s turbulent post-war, pre-communist period. Initially estimated to cost 75,000 forints, this project required significant financial support from current Bar members in order to fund the endeavour. These costs led to heated debate by members over the financial and political legitimacy of the enterprise, delaying its inauguration until the 26th of February 1950. In case of the Budapest lawyers, the complexity of Shoah memorialisation in post-war Hungary is exemplified and thus provides an insight into contemporary debates over identity, solidarity and commemoration.

In order to understand the question of commemorating lawyer victims of the Shoah, we need to briefly summarise the history of the profession in Hungary, particularly in the interwar years. It is also important to discuss briefly the connection between Jews and the Hungarian national identity within this framework. Although due to their legal emancipation, Jews were given the right to become lawyers as late as 1867, by 1910, 45.2% of lawyers in Hungary were Jewish,¹ while the proportion of Jews in the population was around 5%. In interwar Hungary, the proportion of Jews amongst lawyers was around 50%, while in Budapest around 55%.² This over-representation was similar in the centre

1 Kovács, M., *Liberalizmus, radikalizmus, antiszemitizmus – A magyar orvosi, ügyvédi és mérnöki kar politikája 1867 és 1945 között*, Budapest 2001, 41.

2 Karady, V., “Jews in The Hungarian Legal Professions and among Law Students from The Emancipation until The Shoah”, *CEU Jewish Studies Yearbook*, Vol. 8, 2016, 33–34.

of the Habsburg Monarchy: in 1910 in Vienna, 22.8% of law students were Jewish³ and by the Anschluss of 1938, 62% of lawyers of the Bar were Jewish. Their over-representation among lawyers was not unique to the Habsburg Monarchy. The number of Jewish lawyers also rapidly grew in Germany between the late 19th century and 1933 when out of the 3,890 Berlin lawyers, 1880 were Jewish, representing 48.3%.⁴ We cannot go into further details now; it is enough to underline that the profession served as a particularly important avenue of Jewish emancipation and assimilation in the region, especially in the Hungarian part of the Monarchy. After the collapse of the Dual Monarchy and the emergence of Hungary as a nation-state in a generally anti-Semitic political and social atmosphere, a struggle between liberal and far-right lawyers in Budapest started in the late 1920s. This was somewhat belated compared to other free professions. Due to a lack of interest, the far-right association of lawyers in Budapest, Magyar Ügyvédek Nemzeti Egyesülete, MÜNE [National Association of Hungarian Lawyers], whose main goal was to lower the number of Jewish lawyers and eventually exclude them from the profession, was only established as late as 1927. Nevertheless, after the lawyers' initial reluctance to join an openly anti-Semitic initiative, by 1939 around 47% of Christian lawyers supported MÜNE. If we reasonably disregard baptized Jews (17.3% of lawyers in 1941 in Budapest) as potential MÜNE members, then their proportion is as high as 57%.⁵ In 1942, the association grabbed power in the Bar through a coup d'état and immediately proposed the barring of their Jewish colleagues, which eventually happened only after the German occupation of Hungary in March 1944.

Even though the process of acculturation and assimilation among lawyers seems to have been exceptionally successful, the presence of a relevant group of non-Jews who did not appreciate Jews as equal members of the Hungarian nation is evident. As Gábor Gyáni stresses, a common disinclination between Jews and non-Jews had always existed that led to the fact that even the Shoah could not become an authentic Hungarian national remembrance.⁶ In addition, even at the present time, it seems to be impossible nationally to remember an event in which groups were

3 Rozenblit, M. L., *The Jews of Vienna, 1867–1914: Assimilation and Identity*, Albany 1984, 221.

4 Jarausch, K. H., "Jewish Lawyers in Germany, 1848–1938 The Disintegration of a Profession", *The Leo Baeck Institute Year Book*, Vol. 36, Issue 1, 1991, 181.

5 *Ügyvédi Határidőnapló az 1940. szököévre*, Budapest: MÜNE, 1939.

6 Gyáni, G., *Nép, nemzet, zsidó*, Pozsony 2013, 204.

in opposition as victims and perpetrators.⁷ Nevertheless, the Budapest Bar Association aimed to commemorate its Jewish and non-Jewish victims together, probably in order to strengthen the bridge between the two; not only in the past but in the future as well. In the following, we will see what the procedures were and, to a limited degree, evaluate how successful they were.

The victims of the Shoah and World War II, in the case of Budapest lawyers, can be divided into three groups: Jews who were victims of persecution, Christian war victims who were members of the far-right associations and those who were no. All groups are considered to be problematic when commemorated in the Hungarian context. The first and largest group was, of course, Jewish lawyers who died in deportation, during forced labour, or were murdered by Hungarian Nazis in Budapest. I have already identified 642 Budapest lawyers who died in such circumstances.⁸ Especially after 1949, remembering and commemorating the Shoah was a taboo topic for the Communist regime. In parallel with the Soviet campaign against ‘cosmopolitanism’ and Zionism, in Hungary there was also no space to properly discuss the so-called Jewish question. As Randolph Braham underlines, even Communists with Jewish origins, who were in many cases survivors of the Shoah, were urged to forget their traumas and work on building the new socialist society instead.⁹

The Christian victims of the war fall into two groups: those who had been members of the aforementioned far-right association, and those who had not. It was obvious that the Bar refused to commemorate those who had actively participated in an initiative that urged the exclusion of Jews from the Bar, even though membership did not necessarily mean enthusiastic engagement. The strong suspicion that in 1944, a MÜNE member had provided a list of Jewish lawyers to the Gestapo which was followed by arrests and deportation, did not support the reputation of the association.¹⁰ As the Bar emphasized: “those cannot be commemorated on a memorial who had participated even by their membership in an organization that played a key role in the necessity of erecting such a memorial now.”¹¹ Many of those Christian victims who did not support MÜNE were still forced

7 Ibid., 204–205.

8 Buchmüller, P., “A holokauszt során elhunyt magyar ügyvédek”, in: M. Kovács, *Kései főhajtás – A holokauszt jogász áldozatai*, Budapest 2016, 87–108.

9 Braham, R. L., “Assault on Historical Memory: Hungarian Nationalist and the Holocaust”, in: P. A. Shapiro – R. M. Ehrenreich, *Hungary and the Holocaust: Confrontation with the Past. Symposium Proceedings*, Washington 2001, 50.

10 Kovács, M., *Liberalizmus, radikalizmus, antiszemitizmus*, 163.

11 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Jegyzőkönyv*, 1949, november 8.

to become soldiers in the Hungarian Army, a group that would have been equally embarrassing to commemorate in the eyes of the Communists. This was primarily because they were fighting against the Soviet Army and hence were considered to be supporters of a fascist regime. Consequently, high politics had several reasons for not supporting a memorial for any of the groups suggested by the Bar. Nevertheless, the memorial was finally erected in 1950 after a long procedure and was criticized from different sides. There were issues concerning the who, the where, the why, and the how of commemoration.

The first idea of erecting a memorial came from the prominent lawyer, Géza Vekerdy, in October 1946 who was the president of the Independent Lawyers Party. In a letter, he asked the Bar to commemorate the “memory of martyr lawyers of the 1942–1944 terror”. He also asked the National Lawyer Home Association to provide a space for it in their courtyard and suggested that the memorial should be funded by the members of the Bar.¹² The Bar did not support the idea to place a monument in that courtyard. They circulated their opinion in a January 1947 letter arguing that it was not a public space and would also require constant care and attention. Instead, they recommended the main hall of the Bar or the street façade of the building for the memorial.¹³ By July 1947, a Memorial Committee had been organized. Immediately they sent an official letter to all members of the Bar in which they asked for their financial support for the memorial. The estimated cost of the monument was 70,000 forints.¹⁴ The Committee received many letters against the suggested place of the memorial. The most telling one came from the National Lawyer Home Association itself: “We have concerns whether the ceremonial hall would provide the necessary publicity for the memorial, enough relief, consolation and accessibility for widows and orphans of our former colleagues. [...] The other concern is that the hall is often a place of parties and dancing schools.”¹⁵ The Home Association aimed to separate the memorial even spatially from everyday life events of the Bar but, as there was no other prominent and publicly available space in the building of the Bar, it was finally erected there. This question is indeed connected to the very concept of the memorial. Choosing the main hall

12 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Vekerdy Géza levele a Választmányhoz*, 1946, október 4, [All translations of these documents by Peter Buchmüller].

13 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Levél Dr. Dániel Miklós részére*, 1947, január 14.

14 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Körlevél a kartársaknak*, 1947, július 1.

15 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Levél a BÜK részére az Országos Ügyvédotthon Egyesülettől*, 1947, július 5.

as a location of the memorial expresses the serious intentions of the Bar to consider it as a memento, rather than a mere memorial plaque.

Besides the debate about the ideal location of the memorial, opinions were also divided on whether the monument should be a ‘symbolic grave’ or only a memorial. Interestingly enough, even the president of the Bar, Ármin Ladányi expressed his view that instead of a monument, a foundation would have been more appropriate and useful to support the widows, orphans, and lawyers who lived in very bad circumstances.¹⁶ Zsolt Szirmai was of the same opinion stating it more vehemently though: “I find it not only wrong-headed, but really displeasing to use 75,000 forints on a memorial under the given circumstances, when the Pension Fund is unable to take care of the widows and orphans of our lost colleagues [...] I will be the first to support them with a proper donation, but I will not give money for a memorial.”¹⁷

Not surprisingly, Memorial Committee’s urge to financially support the memorial created a huge response from Bar members. There are several letters in which lawyers allude to their extremely bad financial situation, hence they are unable to take part in the initiative, which is quite understandable given it was only two years after the end of the war. Besides the generally harder living and working conditions for lawyers, many of them were suspended due to their former participation in far-right initiatives such as MŰNE, which the official authorities already considered to be a fascist association. That was the case of Gyula Szögyéni, who wrote the following to the Bar in October 1947 as an excuse: “the 1-year suspension by the Examining Committee will expire at the end of the year; if my income is higher afterward, I will definitely send my contribution.”¹⁸ The Examining Committee investigated the political role of all members of the Bar, but rarely adjudicated a serious penalty. Still, the example of Antal Rainprecht shows how chaotic the political situation was at the end of 1947. He was arrested on the 10th June of 1947 and, even though he was dispensed from all charges, remained under arrest, requiring his mother to inform the Bar of his situation on his behalf.¹⁹ The Memorial Committee insisted on the support of all members

16 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Ladányi Ármin levele Dr. Friedmann Ignác részére*, 1947, november 27.

17 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Szirmai Zsolt levele az Emlékmű Bizottsághoz*, 1947, július 7.

18 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Szögyéni Gyula levele az Emlékmű Bizottsághoz*, 1947, október 18.

19 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *ö.zv. Dr. Rainprecht Antalné levele az Emlékmű Bizottságnak*, 1947, október 27.

of the Bar and in October 1947 they sent again a firmly toned notice to those who had neglected it before: “Since it is our obligation who luckily survived and stayed alive to maintain the memory of victims of a fascist regime and World War II, we urge you again to support the memorial with an appropriate amount of money immediately.”²⁰ Certainly many lawyers reacted to this tone with indignation and several letters expressed their resentment, particularly because some lawyers had already lost their job due to the process of nationalization that had already begun. The most convincing response however was given by Károly Wagner: “It is not necessary to emphasise my duties twice; if I want to help, I do at the first call. I myself buried my brother-in-law, László Dénes, who had been beaten to death. I took care of his daughter’s marriage, who received nothing from the Bar, and now I take care of his 82-year-old mother, too. I assume I have won the charity contest. Do not use strong words unless you are familiar with reality.”²¹ The frustration of both the Memorial Committee and members of the Bar was palpable. Beyond the memorial’s main purpose of maintaining the memory of lost colleagues, it was also intended to strengthen collegiality instead of creating additional tensions.

It also became obvious that members of the Bar had very different concepts of who should be remembered and what exactly had happened to their colleagues. József Károly Kovács argued: “I would be willing to support the monument, if it was not called a memorial to martyrs, but a memorial to murdered lawyers.”²² In a meeting of the Memorial Committee on the 24th of November 1947, they repeatedly declared that “the Bar intends to commemorate around 800 martyrs who died during fascist times.”²³ It is clear that this intention is conceptually different from the original one proposed by Géza Vekerdy. In his letter quoted above, Ármin Ladányi also stresses that in addition to commemoration, the purpose of the memorial is to be “a memento for future colleagues that lawyers must not be as fool again to sacrifice their colleagues in their madness.”²⁴ It still remained unclear whether the memorial was meant to be dedicated to the victims of the Shoah and/or to be a memorial to

20 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Budapesti Ügyvédi Kamara Emlékmű Bizottságának levele*, 1947, október 6.

21 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Wagner Károly levele a Kamarának*, 1947, október 22.

22 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Kovács József Mihály levele az Emlékmű Bizottságnak*, 1947, október 22.

23 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Jegyzőkönyv*, 1947, november 24.

24 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Ladányi Ármin levele*.

all lawyers who died in the war years and in addition, whether it should emphasize the responsibility of those who supported the perpetrators. In the end, the memorial can primarily be considered a Holocaust memorial, as the final 638 people whose names were engraved had almost all (with a few exceptions) been considered to be Jews by anti-Semitic legislation. It is still not known when and why the Memorial Committee made the final decision to dedicate the memorial first and foremost to the victims of the Shoah and gave up on the idea of commemorating both Jewish and non-Jewish victims.

The halt in progress and the lack of documents for the year 1948 express the confusion of the Bar concerning the memorial. The process of collecting the necessary amount of money for the memorial was also going very slowly. Moreover, as Imre Adler underlined in a letter of October 1948, to the best of his knowledge it had been unsuccessful. Therefore, he offered to collect on his own 10,000 forints for this purpose but also asked the Bar if erecting the memorial was still on the agenda as he had received no information about it for months.²⁵ From a letter written by the president of the Memorial Committee to the Bar it becomes clear that the Committee had had to deal with yet another problem. “The Committee together with the leadership of the Bar decided that the list of passed away colleagues would not be finalized before the last war prisoners came home. We do not want to place a person’s name onto the memorial who might still possibly come home, and this way destroy the family’s remaining hope.”²⁶ This concern was valid, since even Jews who were working in forced labour battalions on the battlefield and captured by Soviet soldiers were not allowed to go home before 1947.²⁷ The question of war prisoners was indeed a sensitive issue as well. Jewish prisoners were not much differentiated from regular soldiers in the Soviet Union. In general, they did not support any sort of autonomous initiatives, even Jewish ones. Thus from 1948 the Soviet Union brutally attacked Zionist initiatives as well. Consequently, in Hungary, Zionists were barred from the Hungarian Working People’s Party²⁸ and in 1949 a so-called Zionist trial was organized following the Soviet example (like other satellite states of the region).²⁹ For the Communist state, Jewishness was only considered to be a religious denomination and hence could only

25 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Adler Imre levele a Kamarához*, 1948, október 4.

26 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Dániel Miklós levele a BÜK-höz*, 1949, február 1.

27 Komoróczy, G., *A zsidók története Magyarországon...*, 877–878.

28 *Ibid.*, 992.

29 *Ibid.*, 993–995.

be manifested within a church, similar to Christianity. Nothing besides or beyond that was tolerated.³⁰

The situation can briefly be compared to the Raoul Wallenberg Memorial. The idea to commemorate Wallenberg with a monument, thereby providing a memento for the victims and the struggle against fascism, also arose not long after the end of the war.³¹ Indeed, the Soviets and the communist leadership felt it risky to erect a monument for a person who had most probably been arrested and murdered by the Soviet secret police. The inauguration was originally scheduled to be on the 17th of January 1949 but was finally postponed “due to technical problems”, as was officially communicated. Eventually, a day before the officially planned inauguration (which was previously postponed), the monument was erected on the 8th of April 1949. The monument was subsequently removed the very next day.³² As Géza Komoróczy summarizes the case: “it is obvious, that the monument had to be hidden, more precisely, it had to be detached from the case of saving Jews.”³³ The case of the Wallenberg memorial in a public space was even more problematic and complex than the memorial to lawyers. This aptly represents that victims of the Shoah, victims of the war, Zionists, war prisoners, as well as other groups were very problematic for the political leadership to define and judge. The contradictory and ambiguous decisions and hesitations made by memorial politics expresses the uncertainty of contemporary decision-makers.

After a long silence, on the 19th of November 1948 the secretary of the Bar recommended the following to the Board: “the Bar should desist from erecting a memorial and should find a different way to commemorate the martyrs; the Bar will offer an alternative way at a later date.”³⁴ The Board accepted the suggestion. Nevertheless, according to the documents of the year 1949, preparations of the memorial were continuing, however, it was still uncertain who exactly would be commemorated according to the correspondence of the lawyers involved. On the 1st of February 1949, Miklós Dániel stated that “the Memorial Committee has started to collect the data of those who died during the

30 It is not the main topic of the present paper but it is worth to emphasize that by this tactic it was possible to employ left-wing antisemitism in the future. In detail see in Novák A., *Átmenetben. A cionista mozgalom négy éve Magyarországon. 1945–1949.* (In Transition. *The Four Years of the Zionist Movement. 1945–1949*, Budapest 2000.

31 Komoróczy, G., *A zsidók története Magyarországon...*, 961.

32 *Ibid.*, 963.

33 *Ibid.*, 965.

34 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Kivonat a BÜK Választmányának üléséről*, 1948, november 19.

fascist persecution.”³⁵ In June, the Bar published an announcement in which they declared that “the Budapest Bar Association will commemorate the memory of the martyrs of fascism and the heroes of the second world war with a memorial in the hall of the Bar.”³⁶ A month later in a letter, the memorial was mentioned as the “memorial board of martyrs”,³⁷ which suggests that both the victims of the Shoah and the war were considered to be martyrs of the Bar. This shows the Bar had good intentions but at the same time confused the meaning of the memorial. Consequently, it was challenging to put a proper title and exact years to the memorial. One plan was to write “To the Memory of our Martyrs, 1944–1945”, another one with the years 1940–1945, not to mention Géza Vekerdy’s original proposal which suggested 1942–1944 and clearly focused on Jewish victims. The final decision was to have the following title “To Our Colleagues Who Suffered Martyrdom, 1938–1945, a Memorial and a Remonstrance”.³⁸ Not only the inscription, but also the years may suggest different meanings. 1944–1945 would have indeed emphasized the victims of deportations, while having 1938 as the starting year emphasizes the introduction of the first anti-Jewish law in Hungary. Indeed, if we do not take into consideration the so-called *numerus clausus* law that was introduced as early as 1920 and limited the proportion of Jewish students in higher education to 6%,³⁹ then the first openly discriminatory act was the 1938 legislation. It is likely that the Memorial Committee of the Bar wanted to signal that legal discrimination started with this initial legislation and gradually led to tragic results. Géza Dombóváry can be considered the first lawyer victim of the persecution of Jews in Hungary since he committed suicide that very same year due to the proposition of the second anti-Jewish law⁴⁰. The law was finally introduced in 1939. Even so, the life of Jews in Hungary basically was physically threatened by the introduction of compulsory forced labour in 1941. All the identified martyrs of the Shoah and most war victims died between 1941 and 1945 (the vast majority of course were in 1944 and 1945). Therefore, it could have been more logical to use this time frame on the memorial, but it seems the Committee had slightly different intentions. We do not know

35 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Dániel Miklós levele a BÜK-höz*, 1949, február 1.

36 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Felhívás*, 1949, június 17.

37 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Válaszlevel Dr. Berkes Istvánnak*, 1949, július 21.

38 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Jegyzőkönyv Emlékmű Bizottság*, 1949, július 22.

39 In detail see: Kovács, M., *Törvénytől sújtva – a numerus clausus Magyarországon, 1920–1945* (Down by the Law – the Numerus Clausus in Hungary, 1920-1945), Budapest 2012.

40 Ádám, I. P., “Dr. Géza Dombóváry and the Budapest Circle of Jewish Legal Defenders”, in: *S:IMON Shoah: Intervention, Methods, Documentation*, Vol. 6, Issue 2, 2019, 56.

how far leaders of the state put pressure on the Bar in this respect but the idea to simply consider the interwar years as a fascist regime from its beginning to the end, in this case the period between 1938 and 1945, was in line with the contemporary communist ideology.

The Memorial Committee was continuously working on an accurate list of martyrs, but the names were in constant change. In order to ensure that the final list they engraved on the marble monument was correct, the Budapest Bar Association published a call in June 1949, announcing that they had made a draft list publicly available to give family members and colleagues a chance to signal any kind of mistake.⁴¹ This call received many responses from people who reported their missing relatives and friends who should have been on the list. The numerous available letters in the archive are all about lawyers who died in deportation, during forced labour, or were murdered by Hungarian Nazis. The Memorial Committee accepted most of these requests. Nonetheless, they refused some and acted quite strictly in this question. In a reply letter they stressed that the applicant had to prove “when, under what circumstances he died, whether he is officially proclaimed dead, and if yes, the relevant document should also be provided.”⁴² For example, György Lichtenstern, who passed away at home right after forced labour service, was refused by the committee.⁴³ Similarly Ignác Somos, who died in the Budapest Ghetto when the city was being bombed, was also refused.⁴⁴ Jenő Láncki, who disappeared during forced labour, is also missing from the memorial, even though his case was confirmed by many other colleagues.⁴⁵ Besides these martyrs, there are other names that could have appeared on the monument but, for some unknown reasons, the committee did not accept their applications.⁴⁶ In addition, the Committee strictly insisted on dealing only with Budapest lawyers. When there was a letter from a lawyer whose father-in-law and uncle were both deported and died in Auschwitz, the application was refused because they had been members of the Bar of the city of Kalocsa.⁴⁷ The two huge marble tables with the list of names on them were completed by the end of 1949 when the Memorial Committee realized that accidentally five members of

41 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Felhívás*, 1949, június 18.

42 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Válaszlevél Dr. Lakatos Andornénak*, 1949, június 21.

43 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Lichtenstern Györgyné levele*, 1950, február 27.

44 Buchmüller, P., “A holokauszt során elhunyt magyar ügyvédek”, 105.

45 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, Document without title, 1950, március 1.

46 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Kotányi István özvegyének bejelentése* (a note without date) *Dr. Kepes Józsefné levele* 1950, március 18, *Dr. Bader Márkné levele a BÜK-höz* 1950, március 22.

47 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Dr. Berkes István levele a Kamarához*, 1949, július 7.; BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Válaszlevél Dr. Berkes István részére*, 1949, július 21.

the far-right lawyers' association MŰNE had also been engraved on them. The Committee reacted quickly and decided to immediately remove these names from the monument.⁴⁸ Afterwards, the deleted names were replaced by newly found victims.

After a very long process of planning and preparation, the inauguration of the memorial was decided however it was then subsequently postponed many times. Originally, it should have been on the 23rd of October 1949⁴⁹ but finally it took place on the 26th February 1950, most probably due to the unexpected emergence of MŰNE members on the list. The Bar aimed to publish an invitation in the newspapers, however, they realised that it was not an option for them to advertise an event like that in the press as it was already the property of the Hungarian Working People's Party.⁵⁰ Hence they placed the announcement in the few remaining fairly autonomous dailies. The Hungarian Working People's Party and the Bar Association did not maintain a good relationship as the Bar still acted or aimed to act as an independent, autonomous organization of lawyers. For instance, the official periodical of the Party called *Szabadság* [Freedom] published an article on the 5th of March 1948 in which they criticized members of the Bar and the Bar itself. The article claimed that recently there had been positive changes in the leadership of the Bar which at last got rid of its "rightist social democrats" who were involved in "frauds, tax evasions and fascist conspiracies".⁵¹ The article personally attacked Ignác Friedmann (who himself was being persecuted) who had received his position from Gyula Gömbös hence had "defended criminals" before the war.⁵²

While family members of the victims were informed about the inauguration by the press, ministers, politicians, and leaders of the juridical systems were invited to the event as guests. Representatives of different associations, the city, the county, police, the army and so on were all invited as well as the Hungarian secret police.⁵³ Subsequently, other Bar Associations and representatives of the press were not invited. Nevertheless, there are still a few remaining photos of the event available in the Archive of the Bar which very well reflects the atmosphere. The hall was

48 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Jegyzőkönyv*, 1949, november 8.

49 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *BÜK Választmányának Jegyzőkönyve*, 1949, szeptember 2.

50 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Ismeretlen szerző levele Beregi Mikósnak*, 1950, február 16.

51 *Szabadság*, 1948, március 5, 2.

52 Gyula Gömbös was prime minister under regent Miklós Horthy between 1932 and 1936.; *Szabadság*, 1948, március 5, 2.

53 BÜK Irattár II/V, 28-as számú doboz, *Emlékmű Bizottság Jegyzőkönyve*, 1950, február 2.

full of people with widows in black in the first rows. Notably, at the back of the podium the photos of communist leaders and the bust of Stalin were placed and in addition, party flags were flying all around the hall. There were also some boards with slogans on them, for example “Hail Stalin, leader of peace-loving nations of the world.”⁵⁴ One can have the impression that it was an official party event, rather than a commemoration of victims of persecution and the war.

The memorial, in its original condition, located in the hall of the Budapest Bar Association and presently containing 638 names, is indeed hard to define in clear terms. The initial intention of the Bar was nearly unique: to commemorate together the victims of the Shoah and victims of the war since both of these groups of people were members of the same community of lawyers. In comparison, the vast majority of memorials in Hungary are either dedicated to those who perished in the Shoah, or to those who died on the battlefield and are considered to be war heroes. A mixture of the two is a rarity, and this memorial had also primarily become a memorial of the Shoah. Most probably, besides the intention of commemoration, the memorial should have served as a signal of unity between colleagues in order to emphasize the importance of maintaining the remaining autonomy of the Bar in times when autonomous organizations were not tolerated by the state. By applying Jan Assmann’s concept, it can be said that the memorial was an attempt to support “hot memory” which “not only measures out the past, as an instrument of chronological orientation and control, but it also uses past reference to create a self-image and to provide support for hopes and for intentions.”⁵⁵ At the same time, although the memorial has an inclusive concept and excludes those who support far-right associations within the Bar, it still oversimplifies the process that led to the death of hundreds of their colleagues. Hence, it underestimates the personal responsibility of not only perpetrators but also the passive bystanders. Claiming that all victims of war years were prey to the fascist ideology is not only in line with the official communist ideology, but interestingly also with the current official memory politics, too. It not only provides a schematized picture of interwar society but also overshadows the agency of contemporary people. The story of the memorial erected by the Budapest Bar Association demonstrates how complex it was to deal with the burdened past even in the case of a relatively small community, particularly in politically chaotic times when

54 Ibidem.

55 Assmann, J., *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization – Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Cambridge 2011, 62.

on top of inner uncertainties there was additional pressure from outside and above the Bar.

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Instagram Stories and Historical Re-enactment in Social Media Memory: *Eva Stories and Ich bin Sophie Scholl*

Charlotte Adèle Murphy

Introduction

As social media has become such an important medium of communication in the digital age, it is unsurprising that historical memory practices are also experiencing a parallel shift towards utilising such platforms.¹ Social media can now be considered the main venue for social interaction and information-sharing among younger generations,² which also makes these platforms an important space for the remembrance of historical atrocities. Although commemorative projects on social media present challenges as well as raise ethical questions, they represent a tool in the dissemination of knowledge and make it possible to present individual personal accounts to a contemporary, younger audience.³

The trend towards internationally accessible social media memory projects and digital remembrance initiatives was also accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic through its social distancing regulations and which lead to the increased use of social media for remembrance ceremonies and projects. One important example is the campaign #Remembering-FromHome #ShoahNames on the Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day on the 20th/21st of April 2020. This global online name-reading initiative was organised by Yad Vashem and invited “the public to participate in

1 This has resulted in a new interdisciplinary research subfield of Social Media Memory Studies, proposed by the German communication studies researchers Thomas Birkner and André Donk in 2018. See Birkner, T. – Donk, A., “Collective memory and social media – Fostering a new historical consciousness in the digital age?”, *Memory Studies*, Vol. 13, Issue 4, 2020, 367–383.

2 Bohus, K., “Éva on Insta. Holocaust Remembrance 2.0”, *Cultures of History Forum*, 31.10.2019, URL: <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/eva-on-insta-holocaust-remembrance-20> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

3 Ibidem.

an international campaign to record themselves reciting the names of Holocaust victims, and share the video on social media.”⁴ Another example is the ceremony *Vozvrashchenie imyon* [Return of the names] organised by the Russian NGO Memorial which takes place annually on the 29th of October, the Day of Remembrance for Victims of Political Repression. Since 2007, the names of those murdered during the years of Stalin’s Great Terror have been recited in a public ceremony on Moscow’s Lubyanka Square. In 2020, it took place online due to COVID-19, with people from all over Russia and the world participating by submitting or sharing short videos of themselves reading names of victims with the hashtag #ВозвращениеИмен [#ReturnOfTheNames].⁵ These digital initiatives were accessible to a wide audience from all over the world and made it possible for many people to participate directly by creating their own videos, or interactively by watching, sharing and commenting.

The most influential social media memory project to date is the Instagram series *Eva Stories* from 2019.⁶ In this paper, I will explore *Eva Stories* and its “copycat project” *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* from 2021 and their relevance for the collective memory of historical atrocities in the digital age.⁷ The projects combine aspects of historical re-enactment with the remembrance of victims of historical atrocities on social media. The common objective is to reach a younger audience, educate people about the Holocaust and the Nazi regime, and stimulate discussion about the respective historical events by making the content relatable. This research will analyse the projects as historical re-enactments on social media in the context of ‘mimetic mourning’ as outlined by Alexander Etkind and discuss the dynamics and importance of re-enactment for collective memory practices.

Eva Stories

With the launch of the Instagram series *Eva Stories* on the 2019 Israeli Holocaust Remembrance Day [Yom HaShoah], Israeli entrepreneur

4 Yad Vashem, Holocaust Martyrs’ and Heroes’ Remembrance Day 20–21 April 2020. *Yad Vashem*, URL: <https://www.yadvashem.org/press-release/06-april-2020-12-41.html> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

5 The official *Vozvrashchenie imyon* [Return of the names], URL: <https://october29.ru/> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

6 The *Eva Stories* project on Instagram, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/eva.stories/> [accessed: 30.04.2021].

7 The *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* project on Instagram, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/ichbinsophiescholl> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

and producer Mati Kochavi and his daughter Maya Kochavi attempted to create a new genre of social media memory. The project re-enacts Holocaust victim Éva Heyman's tragic experiences during the German occupation of Hungary in a series of 70 short videos – known as 'Instagram stories' – and posts on the social media platform Instagram based on Heyman's diary. Why was Éva Heyman's story chosen for this project? In an interview with Israeli newspaper Haaretz, Mati Kochavi explained that he chose Éva Heyman's diary from 30 diaries written during the Holocaust.⁸ He felt that her story deserved to be made accessible to younger generations and that it was necessary to speak about Holocaust memory "in a way that a lot of people would want to see it":⁹

Eva wanted to be a famous photographer in London, so we gave her a camera, let her tell her story on Instagram, and put up huge billboards in Tel Aviv. We said that instead of London, it's Tel Aviv and she'll be famous in Israel.¹⁰

For Maya Kochavi, Instagram is not to be considered a trivial medium. It "is essentially the new diary, and to use this platform, to exploit the way it enables you to feel that you are living the life of the person you're seeing, is incredible."¹¹ For this reason, the creators wanted to use Instagram as a tool to reach the younger generation about a serious topic.¹² Aware that their project could cause controversy and in order to guarantee their creative freedom, Mati and Maya Kochavi decided to fund their project privately to ensure their greatest possible independence from official institutions and established practices in commemoration and remembrance.¹³

Who was Éva Heyman? Born on the 13th of February 1931 in Oradea¹⁴ to Jewish parents, Heyman witnessed the German occupation of Hungary

8 Anderman, N., This Father-and-daughter Team Explains Why It's Good to Put the Holocaust on Instagram, *Haaretz*, URL: <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-the-father-and-daughter-team-who-brought-the-voice-of-a-holocaust-victim-to-instagram-1.7189733> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

9 Ibidem.

10 Ibidem.

11 Ibidem.

12 Ibidem.

13 Kershner, I., A Holocaust story for the social media generation, *The New York Times*, 30 April 2019, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/30/world/middleeast/eva-heyman-instagram-holocaust.html> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

14 The city of Oradea (hung. Nagyvárad) is located in Transylvania in the Romanian-Hungarian border region and was under Hungarian rule from 1940 to 1944, until the Germans occupied Hungary in March 1944. Romanian and Soviet troops captured the city in October 1944. It has been part of Romania since.

which began on the 19th of March 1944 – ordered by Adolf Hitler under the name *Operation Margarethe*¹⁵ – as a thirteen-year-old girl. After the occupation, the Nazis actively began to plan the genocide of the Hungarian Jews. Sent to Hungary for this purpose, SS-Obersturmbannführer Adolf Eichmann organized their ghettoization and the subsequent mass deportations of Hungarian Jews to Auschwitz.¹⁶ Hungarian authorities were also involved in order to expedite the process. According to an official report by SS-Brigadeführer Edmund Veessenmayer, who was also involved in the deportation and murder of the Hungarian Jews, 437,402 Jews had already been deported from Hungary by the 9th of July 1944.¹⁷ It is estimated that of these people, 300,000 were murdered in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.¹⁸

Éva Heyman documented her experiences during this time in her diary between February and May of 1944.¹⁹ On the 3rd of June 1944, she was deported from Nagyvárad to Auschwitz together with her grandparents and was murdered in the gas chambers on the 17th of October 1944. Her mother Ágnes Zsolt and her stepfather Béla Zsolt (a well-known leftist journalist) were able to escape to Switzerland via Bergen-Belsen on the famous yet controversial Kasztner train on the 30th of June 1944.²⁰ Ágnes Zsolt allegedly received her daughter Éva's diary from their former housekeeper in 1945 and published it in 1947 under the title *Éva lányom. Napló* [My daughter Éva: Diary].²¹ There has been some academic discussion and speculation about the authenticity of the diary with social historian Gergely Kunt arguing that Zsolt must have written the diary herself “in the format and style of a young girl's diary to explore Éva Heyman's short life from the child's perspective and to help Ágnes process her grief over losing her daughter.”²² The diary was published just before the Holocaust became a taboo topic in post-war socialist Hungary.²³ The publication of Heyman's diary and the nature

15 Ránki, G., *Unternehmen Margarethe. Die deutsche Besetzung Ungarns*, Wien 1984; Durucz, P., *Ungarn in der auswärtigen Politik des Dritten Reiches 1942–1945*, Göttingen 2006, 159–173.

16 Gerlach, C. – Aly, G., *Das letzte Kapitel. Realpolitik, Ideologie und der Mord an den ungarischen Juden 1944/1945*, Stuttgart 2002, 249–343; Ránki, G., *Unternehmen Margarethe...*, 298.

17 *Ibid.*, 346–347.

18 *Ibid.*, 347.

19 Zsolt, Á., *Éva lányom* [My daughter Éva], Budapest 1947.

20 Kunt, G., “Ágnes Zsolt's Authorship of her Daughter Éva Heyman's Holocaust Diary”, *Hungarian Studies Review*, Vol. XLIII, Issue 1–2, 2016, 127–154, 129–130.

21 Zsolt, Á., *Éva lányom...*; Schwartz, A., “Éva Heyman, the Hungarian Anne Frank. Writing Against Persecution and Trauma”, *Hungarian Studies Review*, Vol. XLII, Issue 1–2, 2015, 117–134, 117–118.

22 Kunt, G., “Ágnes Zsolt's Authorship of her Daughter Éva Heyman's Holocaust Diary”, 127.

23 Zsolt, Á., *Das rote Fahrrad*, Wien 2012.

of her story led to her becoming known as a “Hungarian Anne Frank”,²⁴ although her story has not received widespread recognition until now.

In *Eva Stories*, Heyman is played by British actress Mia Quiney, who speaks with a Hungarian accent and re-enacts scenes and situations from her diary. She documents the events surrounding the German occupation of Hungary in stories, photographs and posts on her social media channel as though she were a young girl with access to a smartphone and social media. The Instagram series was filmed mostly in *selfie* format from Heyman’s perspective in Lviv, Ukraine, with hundreds of actors and extras and many historical props, such as military tanks, furniture, clothing, and everyday objects. The dialogue is in English with Hebrew subtitles. With the question “What If a Girl in The Holocaust Had Instagram?”, contemporary social media users are invited to imagine themselves in Heyman’s position as a girl living in Nagyvárad, Hungary in 1944, in order to witness the events prior to her deportation to Auschwitz as though they were happening now, and to react to them.

Like her diary, *Eva Stories* begins on the 13th of February 1944, with her stories chronicling Éva Heyman’s feelings and thoughts on her thirteenth birthday, her carefree everyday life with her family and friends, and her relationship with her first teenage crush Pista Vadas (a boy from Nagyvárad). All of this is shown taking place against the backdrop of the war and the German occupation. Her stories soon take on a sinister tone with the deportation of her cousin Martha, which Éva documents in one of her stories with the hashtag #lifeduringthewar, writing “This is the first time the war has entered my home.”²⁵ She uses the hashtag #reporterlife when she is documenting important historical events in her stories, such as on the 19th of April, when she films the Nazis emptying her friend Annie’s house of its belongings. Another example of her using this hashtag is on the 5th of May, when her family is brought to the Nagyvárad ghetto.²⁶ The last entry in Heyman’s diary was on the 30th of May 1944 on the day of her deportation from the ghetto to Auschwitz.²⁷ *Eva Stories* takes her story beyond the timeline of the original diary, doc-

24 See for example Schwartz, A., “Éva Heyman, the Hungarian Anne Frank. Writing Against Persecution and Trauma...” and Bohus, K., “Two Diaries, Two Holocaust Memories in Communist Hungary”, *Remembrance and Solidarity*, Vol. 5, 2016, 97–113.

25 The *Eva stories* story from 15th of February, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17998120066205191/?hl=de> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

26 The *Eva stories* story from 19th of April, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/18061359865032810/?hl=de> [accessed: 30.04.2022]; The *Eva stories* story from 5th of May, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17959394311269817/> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

27 Zsolt, Á., *Das rote Fahrrad*, Wien 2012, 125–126.

umenting the Nazis leading a large group of Jewish people through the ghetto to a cattle train and filming herself and her reactions from a selfie perspective in her stories from June.²⁸ Her invisible camera films what she sees as she walks up the ramp into the cramped cattle truck and we can hear her heavy breathing as well as groaning sounds from within the car. The last stories are filmed from a selfie perspective and capture Eva's terrified facial expression as the train leaves the station.²⁹

These stories are followed by another story entitled "Eva", in which the viewer receives more information about Eva's fate and her death in the gas chambers of Auschwitz.³⁰ Before the credits, there is a short video of Eva and her friend sitting on the floor of the cattle truck with her friend saying: "Yes Eva, your journal, everyone will remember us." The viewers are encouraged to react to this story with the words "Write a message in memory of Eva."³¹

Ich bin Sophie Scholl

Following the example of *Eva Stories*, the German state television channels SWR and BR launched a similar project *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* [I am Sophie Scholl] on Instagram in May 2021. The project seeks to commemorate German student and anti-Nazi political activist Sophie Scholl, who was part of the non-violent *White Rose* resistance group, and what would have been her 100th birthday on the 9th of May 2021.³² Today, Sophie Scholl and her brother Hans Scholl – two of the most famous activists to resist Adolf Hitler and the Nazi regime – occupy a central place in Germany's culture of remembrance with many streets, squares and schools named after them and numerous books and films covering their story.³³

Sophie Scholl was born on the 9th of May 1921 in the German town of Forchtenberg into a Lutheran family with five brothers and sisters. In

28 The *Eva stories* story from June, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17926929286293660/?hl=de> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

29 Ibidem.

30 The *Eva stories* story "Eva", URL: <https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17877652939352743/?hl=de> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

31 Ibidem.

32 Südwestrundfunk, "Instagram-Projekt zu Sophie Scholl von SWR und BR", *SWR*, 26.04.2021, URL: <https://www.swr.de/unternehmen/ich-bin-sophie-scholl-projekt-100.html> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

33 Gottschalk, M., *Wie schwer ein Menschenleben wiegt: Sophie Scholl. Eine Biographie*, München 2020, 304–305.

1932, the family moved to Ulm – a stronghold of the National Socialist Party.³⁴ During her childhood and teenage years, Sophie Scholl was an ardent supporter of the National Socialist Party as was her brother Hans, with him joining the *Hitler Youth* [Hitlerjugend] in 1933 and Sophie joining the *League of German Girls* [Bund Deutscher Mädel] in 1934 when she was thirteen.³⁵ Their parents, especially their father Robert Scholl, reluctantly supported their children's decision as they were sceptical of the National Socialist party.³⁶ Sophie Scholl remained an enthusiastic member of the League of German Girls until 1941, two years longer than required.³⁷

In 1937, Sophie fell in love with her old acquaintance Fritz Hartnagel, with whom she went on to have an ambivalent relationship. He wanted to become a military officer and was stationed in Augsburg as a lieutenant. They sent each other letters, in which they discussed their relationship, poetry, their religious beliefs and eventually Fritz's experiences in the war.³⁸

In 1942, Sophie Scholl began her studies at the university of Munich, where her brother Hans had already been studying Medicine since 1939.³⁹ Motivated in part by the intellectual university environment and his experiences in France as a medic in the Wehrmacht, where he had been enrolled during the semester break in 1940, Hans Scholl began to question the National Socialist ideology and the purpose of the war.⁴⁰ Hans Scholl and his friend Alexander Schmorell founded the resistance group White Rose in June 1942, which Sophie Scholl later joined. Their resistance began with a campaign in which they anonymously disseminated leaflets and pamphlets around Munich, calling for active opposition against the regime and for the war to end, and denouncing the mass murder of the Jews.⁴¹

After having supported the regime's ideas in her youth, it is important to note that Sophie Scholl shifted her opinion of National Socialism. After the war started, she began to have doubts about National Socialism, distancing herself from her former views as she could no longer reconcile her religious beliefs with her animosity towards the Nazi regime and the

34 Ibid., 51–54.

35 Ibid., 57–59, 67–77.

36 Zoske, R. M., *Sophie Scholl. Es reut mich nichts. Porträt einer Widerständigen*, Berlin 2020, 38–42.

37 Ibid., 44.

38 Ibid., 80–81.

39 Ibid., 219.

40 Zoske, R. M., *Flamme sein! Hans Scholl und die Weiße Rose. Eine Biografie*, München 2018, 129.

41 Gottschalk, M., *Wie schwer ein Menschenleben wiegt...*, 229–234.

war.⁴² Fritz was sent to the Eastern Front in 1942, where he eventually ended up in Stalingrad.⁴³

Similar to *Eva Stories*, the Instagram series *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* uses the phrase “Imagine it’s 1942 on Instagram...” to draw in the social media audience. It depicts German actress Luna Wedler playing Sophie Scholl and documents the last ten months of Sophie Scholl’s life before she is executed for her activism against the National Socialist regime. The dialogue and subtitles are in German, but some of Scholl’s weekly updates have also been translated into English to make them accessible to a wider audience. Based on letters and diary entries written from 1937 until her execution in 1943, as well as additional historical documents about Sophie Scholl and the resistance group *Weißerose*, the project re-enacts Scholl’s experience in Instagram stories and social media entries from the perspective of a contemporary social media user.

Ich bin Sophie Scholl was launched on the 4th of May 2021, with Sophie Scholl travelling by train to study in Munich. From this date on, she creates Instagram posts and stories about her life, her relationship with Fritz Hartnagel, her studies and eventually about her resistance to the Nazi regime. She shares photographs, quotes, her favourite music, and some of her drawings as well as her thoughts about the current events she is experiencing during the war.⁴⁴ The audience is meant to imagine the events are taking place in ‘real time’ in 1942. Viewers accompany Scholl through her life as she becomes more aware of the injustices of the Nazi regime and the war and joins the *Weißerose*. In some of her Instagram stories, Scholl addresses the audience directly, asking questions such as “Is anybody to be trusted in these times?”⁴⁵

Ich bin Sophie Scholl and Scholl’s documentation of her life on Instagram ended in February 2022: On the 18th of February 1943, Sophie and Hans were arrested, tried in a show trial and sentenced to death on the same day.⁴⁶ The other members of their group – Alexander Schmorell, Christoph Probst, Willi Graf and Kurt Huber – were also apprehended and executed in July and October 1943.⁴⁷

42 Zoske, R. M., *Sophie Scholl...*, 243.

43 *Ibid.*, 80–81.

44 This was a creative addition by the creators of the project as Sophie Scholl was known for her drawing talent. The drawings and illustrations were created by French illustrator Édith Carron and are integrated into *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* as Sophie’s own drawings.

45 *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* post from 11 January, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CYIfB4SM0Ux/> [accessed: 30. 04. 2022].

46 Südwestrundfunk, “Instagram-Projekt zu Sophie Scholl von SWR und BR”.

47 Gottschalk, M., *Wie schwer ein Menschenleben wiegt...*, 303.

With *Ich bin Sophie Scholl*, the creators aimed to tell Sophie Scholl's story from a more personal and relatable angle in order to "make history tangible and emotional, to show a young resistance fighter from a perspective that few people know from history lessons."⁴⁸ To them, their project embodies "Living History on Instagram," representing a "unique way to let users participate in history."⁴⁹ Since its launch, *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* has gained 840,000 subscribers.⁵⁰ Initially aimed at a younger audience of 18 to 25-year-olds, to the surprise of the producers this group only makes up 20% of the subscribers with 50% of them belonging to the demographic of 25 to 35-year-olds.⁵¹ This demonstrates that this format is also interesting to an older demographic. Originally, all of the social media posts for *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* were planned out in advance by the producers up to and including February 2022, but in reaction to numerous comments and responses, they decided to add some details suggested by viewers and have adapted the project to match the audience's reactions and discussion. One such adaptation is the addition of more religious content, as the Scholls' resistance to the Nazi regime was influenced in part by their Lutheran upbringing and values – an aspect the creators had decided not to focus on at first.⁵²

Media Response and Critique of the Projects

Both *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* sparked intense discussions about appropriate and respectful approaches to remembering victims of the Holocaust – and in Sophie Scholl's case of National Socialism – with some individuals criticizing the fact that Instagram or social media in general was not a suitable platform for such serious topics.⁵³ The media response as well as the comments received by the projects highlight the ambivalence of public opinion about these projects.

Eva Stories was criticised for its "aggressive marketing campaign" – with huge billboards being installed in Tel Aviv promoting the project

48 Südwestrundfunk, "Instagram-Projekt zu Sophie Scholl von SWR und BR".

49 Ibidem.

50 The *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* project on Instagram, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/ichbinsophiescholl> [accessed: 30. 04. 2022].

51 Jakob, J., "Ich bin Sophie Scholl!": Zwischen Fiktion und Wirklichkeit", *NDR Kultur*, 14.05.2021, URL: <https://www.ndr.de/kultur/-Sophie-Scholl,sophiescholl110.html> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

52 Ibidem.

53 Henig, L. – Ebbrecht-Hartmann, T., "Witnessing *Eva Stories*. Media witnessing and self-inscription in social media memory", *New Media & Society*, October 2020, 1.

before its launch.⁵⁴ During this campaign, the project was also promoted by the Israeli prime minister at the time, Benjamin Netanyahu, in a Twitter post on the 29th of April 2019, in which he drew attention to *Eva Stories* before it went online.⁵⁵ This could be deemed problematic as it could point towards a political instrumentalization of Éva Heyman's story for purposes of national identity.

Some critics took a culturally pessimistic stance, claiming that *Eva Stories* was exploiting a Holocaust victim's story to "generate likes."⁵⁶ This corresponds with Eva Hoffman's critique of contemporary media portrayals of Holocaust accounts as "hyper-mediated memory", which she understands as the fetishization of (Holocaust) memory through media such as films and books aimed to provoke feelings of empathy for victims.⁵⁷ This discussion may be part of a pattern in Holocaust memory. As executive director of the Anne Frank House, Ronald Leopold, said when *Eva Stories* was launched, it "always stirs a controversy" when the Holocaust is portrayed with new media.⁵⁸ This was already the case with Marvin J. Chomsky's television series *Holocaust* (1978), Art Spiegelman's two-part graphic novel entitled *Maus* (1980, 1991) as well as Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* (1993) which were accused of trivialising as well as inaccurately portraying the Holocaust when they first came out.⁵⁹ However, these books and films ultimately contributed positively to Holocaust awareness around the world. Similarly, critics of *Eva Stories* are sceptical of the way in which the portrayal of such stories on Instagram may trivialize and distort the real experience of Holocaust survivors – as it was documented in Heyman's diary.

54 Kershner, I., "A Holocaust story for the social media generation".

55 Netanyahu, B. [@netanyahu], *Join Eva's story*, URL: <https://instagram.com/eva.stories?igshid=j8x4qsx7rqgm> [Translation by Charlotte Adèle Murphy], 29. 04. 2019, Twitter, URL: <https://twitter.com/netanyahu/status/1122835826709270528> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

56 Schwarz, C., "Likes für den Holocaust", *Taz*, 03. 05. 2019, URL: <https://taz.de/Erinnerungskultur-bei-Instagram!/5592218/> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

57 Hoffman, E., *After Such Knowledge. A Meditation in the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, London 2004.

58 Holmes, O., "Instagram Holocaust diary Eva.Stories sparks debate in Israel", *The guardian*, 08. 05. 2019, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/08/instagram-holocaust-diary-evastories-sparks-debate-in-israel> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

59 See Wiesel, E., "Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction", *The New York Times*, 16. 04. 1978, URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/1978/04/16/archives/tv-view-trivializing-the-holocaust-semifact-and-semifiction-tv-view.html> [accessed: 30.04.2022]; Doherty, T., "Art Spiegelman's Maus: Graphic Art and the Holocaust," *American Literature*, Vol. 68, 1996, 69–84; Burkeman, O., "Biographer takes shine off Spielberg's Schindler", *The guardian*, 25. 11. 2004, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2004/nov/25/germany.film> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

In Leopold's opinion, it "is really important that we should do our utmost to make the story itself as reliable and authentic as possible."⁶⁰ This statement hints at the fact that *Eva Stories* contains inauthentic imagery and historically inaccurate information. According to Kata Bohus, this would not have been problematic if the producers had "simply said so and framed the project as an artistic representation instead of a realistic (accurate) one."⁶¹ The age-old question of historical authenticity versus creative freedom in depicting the past seems to be at the core of this discussion.

Nevertheless, *Eva Stories* was immensely popular in Israel, attracting the attention of Instagram users from the third and fourth generations after the Holocaust, as well as viewers from abroad, and gaining 1.2 million subscribers.⁶² After the project's launch, the World Holocaust Remembrance Center Yad Vashem – which was not involved in the production – also released a statement, describing the use of social media platforms for Holocaust memory as "legitimate and effective" without explicitly mentioning *Eva Stories*.⁶³

Eva Stories has pioneered a new genre in social media memory, as evidenced by the launch of the *Anne Frank video diary*⁶⁴ on YouTube on the 30th of March 2020 by the Anne Frank House and Every Media. The creators described this project as "a new way to introduce young people around the world to Anne Frank's life story"⁶⁵ and to reach "young people who are less likely to pick up a book, but who do watch videos on social media."⁶⁶ The episodes were aired on YouTube twice a week until the 4th of May 2020. The project translated Holocaust victim Anne Frank's diary, which she wrote between March and August 1944, into the format of a video blog or 'vlog' consisting of fifteen episodes, filmed from Anne Frank's perspective without the viewers ever seeing her camera. Replicating the approach used in *Eva Stories*, the *Anne Frank video diary*

60 Holmes, O., "Instagram Holocaust diary Eva.Stories sparks debate in Israel".

61 Bohus, K., "Éva on Insta. Holocaust Remembrance 2.0", URL: <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/eva-on-insta-holocaust-remembrance-20> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

62 Henig, L. – Ebbrecht-Hartmann, T., "Witnessing *Eva Stories*...", 1.; The *Eva Stories* project on Instagram, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/eva.stories/> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

63 Brandes, S., "Die Schoah als Story", *Jüdische Allgemeine*, 02. 05. 2019, URL: <https://www.juedische-allgemeine.de/israel/die-schoah-als-story/> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

64 The *Anne Frank video diary*, URL: [youtube.com/annefrank](https://www.youtube.com/annefrank) [accessed: 30.04.2022].

65 Anne Frank House, "New: Anne Frank video diary", URL: <https://www.annefrank.org/en/about-us/news-and-press/news/2020/3/30/new-anne-frank-video-diary/> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

66 Anne Frank House, "FAQ Anne Frank video diary", URL: <https://www.annefrank.org/en/museum/web-and-digital/video-diary/faq-anne-frank-video-diary/> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

asks the question “What if Anne Frank had a camera instead of a diary?”, inviting young viewers to approach Anne Frank’s story from a different perspective and to “connect with Anne, the girl, in a direct way.”⁶⁷ Although the *Anne Frank video diary* can be considered as a reaction to the *Eva Stories* project, it does not include the interactive functions made possible by the Instagram story format. In the words of media studies scholars Lital Henig and Tobias Ebbrecht-Hartman, “the project lacks the engaging dimension of social media witnessing that was prevalent in *Eva Stories*”.⁶⁸ It has instead taken a more traditional pedagogical approach, providing additional information as well as questions for the viewers to discuss.

Making use of the *Eva Stories* approach to depict a story of resistance against National Socialism in Germany, *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* has also been discussed with similar intensity. Some critics claim that the re-enactment of Sophie Scholl’s life from such a trivial and historically inaccurate perspective – with her taking on the role of an influencer – is draining her story of meaning.

What does it mean to re-enact the foreignness of historical events with disguised actors and fabricated sentences? If it is the “conscience of the historian” to gradually gain insight into past forms of life by meticulously gathering and deciphering sources, then the genre of docu-fiction whitewashes the gap between today and yesterday with the gleefully applied costumes and dialogue.⁶⁹

Reminiscent of the discussion surrounding new media and Holocaust memory, this critique seems to imply it is distasteful to use social media for the purpose of engaging with historical memory through interpretative historical re-enactment, underlining the potential danger of historical inaccuracy.

In a Twitter post from the 7th of May 2021, German Political scientist and author Max Czollek highlighted the dangers of historical inaccuracy in this context. He criticized *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* from a different perspective by calling the emphasis on Sophie Scholl as a heroic figure

67 Anne Frank House, “New: Anne Frank video diary”.

68 Henig, L. – Ebbrecht-Hartmann, T., “Witnessing *Eva Stories*...”, 21.

69 Bernard, A., “Selfie vom Schafott. Der neue Instagram-Kanal “ichbinsophiescholl” lässt die Widerstandskämpferin in Echtzeit posten”, *Die Zeit*, 01. 06. 2021, [Translation by Charlotte Adèle Murphy] URL: <https://www.zeit.de/2021/23/ichbinsophiescholl-instagram-kanal-geschichte-nationalsozialismus-widerstand> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

in Nazi resistance into question entirely, as she was largely passive until affected personally by Nazi rule. In his opinion, this sends the wrong message to the German public, making it seem as though resistance to the regime was a widespread phenomenon when it was, in fact, largely absent.⁷⁰ Social scientist Samuel Salzborn elaborated on this phenomenon in his 2020 book *Kollektive Unschuld* [Collective Innocence], in which he describes how Germany's post-war memory politics and culture of remembrance were – and still are – aimed towards creating a narrative of a society victimized by National Socialism and dodging responsibility for the atrocities committed or tolerated collectively.⁷¹ In this vein, the choice of Sophie Scholl as a figurehead of German remembrance culture reflects Germany's ongoing approach to the past: an approach which focuses more on heroes of resistance and on Germany's "model behaviour" in coming to terms with its problematic past and less on the widespread support for the Nazi regime and the complicity of the majority of German society.⁷² As *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* was created by German state television and is therefore state-funded, one may ask whether the project is politically motivated and shaped by such dominant narratives of German remembrance culture.

It is also important to note that both *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* represent the perspectives of female victims of historical atrocities. As Henig and Ebbrecht-Hartmann have already pointed out, Éva Heyman embodies the "ideal child victim", who is not to blame for becoming a victim of National Socialism and the Holocaust.⁷³ This concept of the 'ideal victim' stems from criminal victimology and is understood as an innocent and weak victim, who was victimized "going about their daily life", equivalent to how Éva and her circumstances are portrayed in the project.⁷⁴ She may also be seen as a female "victim-hero", a category which combines the concept of the ideal victim with that of the virtuous

70 Czollek, M. [@rubenmclloop], *The celebration of ideologically questionable people like Sophie Scholl [...] reveals [...] how absent resistance against Nazi Germany actually was & how much one reaches for the few examples that are available* [Translation by Charlotte Adèle Murphy], 07. 05. 2021, Twitter, URL: <https://twitter.com/rubenmclloop/status/1390592341203947521> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

71 Salzborn, S., *Kollektive Unschuld. Die Abwehr der Shoah im deutschen Erinnern*, Leipzig 2020.

72 See also Gabowitsch, M., "Replicating Atonement. The German Model and Beyond", in: M. Gabowitsch, *Replicating Atonement. Foreign Models in the Commemoration of Atrocities*, London 2017, 1–21; Neiman, S., *Learning from the Germans. Race and the Memory of Evil*, New York 2019.

73 Henig, L. – Ebbrecht-Hartmann, T., "Witnessing Eva Stories...", 7.

74 Álvarez Berastegi, A. – Hearty, K., "A context-based model for framing political victimhood: Experiences from Northern Ireland and the Basque Country", *International Review of Victimology*, Vol. 25, 2019, 19–36.

hero, who refuses to give up their agency and continues to create while surviving.⁷⁵ Éva Heyman also “created while surviving” by documenting her experiences in her diary.⁷⁶ This was intensified with *Eva Stories* as she documents horrific moments, creating a social media journal for her to be remembered by. Sophie Scholl on the other hand has been celebrated and stylised as a (Christian) anti-Nazi martyr in German remembrance culture as she suffered for what she believed in and chose to follow the path of resistance knowing about the possible consequences. *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* does not show Sophie Scholl as a heroic female martyr figure, but instead depicts her in the relatable manner of a contemporary online activist, standing up for what she believes in.

As we can see in the discussion of *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl*, there is ongoing debate not only about the combination of new digital media and historical re-enactment in social media memory as a new and controversial genre to commemorate victims of historical atrocities, but also about who is commemorated in which way and how this shapes respective national cultures of remembrance. This discourse in itself represents an important dynamic in contemporary remembrance culture. It is also important to keep in mind how national interests and historical narratives may determine how certain topics are framed and remembered.

Postmemory and Social Media Memory Projects

Social media memory projects such as *Eva Stories*, the *Anne Frank video diary* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* also contribute to the creation of mediated memories in the digital age in the time following on from ‘postmemory’. Marianne Hirsch – professor of Comparative Literature at Columbia University – coined the term and defines it as follows:

“Postmemory” describes the relationship that the “generation after” bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before – to experiences they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and affectively as to seem to constitute memories in their

75 Khlevnyuk, D., “Victim-heroes in collective memory: Surviving soviet repressions heroically”, *Memory Studies*, 2021, 1–14.

76 *Ibidem*.

own right. Postmemory's connection to the past is thus actually mediated not by recall but by imaginative investment, projection, and creation.⁷⁷

Hirsch originally developed the concept of postmemory to specifically describe the experiences and traumas of the second generation after the Holocaust and their creative methods and modes of remembrance. However, this concept has also been applied to post catastrophic memory in general, focussing on the intergenerational transmission of traumatic experiences of war, terror or disaster, such as in a post-Soviet or post-fascist context, thereby making the concept applicable to *Ich bin Sophie Scholl*.⁷⁸

As Marianne Hirsch stated in an interview, with the children of the survivors no longer alive, it is now necessary to “open” the concept of postmemory and develop new and innovative methods of remembrance which the younger generations are likely to embrace:

The second generation has acted as a gate-keeper but we now have to realize that we are ourselves handing the story on to the third, and making it available for others to connect their own very different histories. The future, as I see it, is comparative and connective, it is dominated by new media and new strategies of memorialization that are being invented in new museums and memorials. The Holocaust is one event in a global space of remembrance that looks toward a future that will know the past deeply but that will not be paralyzed by its darknesses.⁷⁹

In this light, social media memory projects such as *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* may represent a new generation of postmemory practices which make use of new forms of digital media and address the younger generations ‘in their own language’, namely on the social media platforms they use daily. As Hirsch puts it, postmemory also relies on “iconic visual imagery [...]” because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through collection but through representation,

77 Hirsch, M., *The Generation of Postmemory. Writing and visual culture after the Holocaust*, New York 2012, 5.

78 See Etkind, A., *Warped Mourning. Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied*, Stanford 2013 or Simões, A., “It is not yet resolved. Post-memories of the Third Reich”, in: E. De Gregorio Godeo – J. A. Caride, *Constructing Selves. Issues in Gender, Age, Ethnicity and Nation*, Castilla 2014, 129–140.

79 “An Interview with Marianne Hirsch”, *Columbia University Press*, URL: <https://cup.columbia.edu/author-interviews/hirsch-generation-postmemory> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

projection, and creation”,⁸⁰ which also captures the essence of how social media memory projects may interact and connect with the past creatively through re-presentation and re-enactment.

The Value of Historical Re-enactment

With phenomena such as “re-enactment”, “restoration”, “replacement” and “re-presentation”, the idea of bringing the past into the present, making up for past injustices or mourning historical crimes can take on many different forms.⁸¹ “Historical re-enactment” is classically associated with re-enactment ‘games’ or parades and is characterized by an “experiential mode of engagement” which results from the “desire to bring things close and [...] to have a personal, felt connection to the past.”⁸² Historical re-enactment is therefore an important part of participative or “living history” defined by Jay Anderson as “the simulation of life in another time.”⁸³ At the heart of such ‘historical simulations’ which can be found in many different areas such as museums or re-enactment performances, lies the goal of re-creating a piece of the past.⁸⁴

Eva Stories and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* do just this by bringing ‘living history’ re-enactment performances to social media and enabling viewers to experience and follow the protagonists’ lives in real time (in the case of *Ich bin Sophie Scholl*). Is it ethical or even necessary, however, to involve real historical figures or could one create fictional characters in such projects instead? Or is it the ‘historically authentic’ that makes these projects interesting to begin with?

By re-enacting biographical material such as diary entries as well as historical imagery with actors, the two projects aim to frame and create an authentic-looking scene. In the context of historical re-enactment, social and historical anthropologist Mark Auslander stresses the importance of “historical replicas and props and how these [...] often bring about powerful sensations of historic authenticity on the part of reen-

80 Hirsch, M., “Surviving Images. Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory”, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 14, Issue 1, 2001, 5–37, 9.

81 Lowenthal, D., *The Past is a Foreign Country. Revisited*, New York 2014, 464–496.

82 Landsberg, A., *Engaging with the Past. Mass Culture and the Production of Historical Knowledge*, New York 2015, 3.

83 Anderson, J., *The living history sourcebook*, Nashville 1985, 3.

84 Handler, R. – Saxton, W., “Dyssimulation. Reflexivity, Narrative, and the Quest for Authenticity in “Living History””, *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 3, 1988, 242–260.

actors and their audiences” enabling re-enactors to “touch the past.”⁸⁵ This can be confirmed when watching the Instagram stories of both the *Eva Stories* and the *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* profiles. The portrayal of authentic looking props as well as everyday objects such as clothes, shoes, newspapers or books in their Instagram stories and social media posts stand in stark contrast to the momentousness of the events ahead and as harbingers of what is to come. A striking example of this is Éva’s red bicycle, which Heyman writes about in her diary entry from the 7th of April 1944, describing how her beloved red bicycle was confiscated by the police and how she put up a fight, not wanting to let them take it.⁸⁶ In *Eva Stories*, this event is not mentioned, but we see the bicycle at the periphery of Eva’s stories on the 15th of February when her cousin Martha is taken away, framing the terrible events that are being captured by the camera (Fig. 1).⁸⁷



Figure 1: The *Eva Stories* story from 15 February

85 Auslander, M., “Touching the Past: Materializing Time in Traumatic “Living History” Reenactments”, *Signs and Society*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2013, 161–183.

86 Zsolt, Á., *Das rote Fahrrad*, 82–83.

87 The *Eva stories* story from 15 February, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/stories/highlights/17998120066205191/?hl=de> [accessed: 30.04.2022].



Figure 2: *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* post from 18 May 2021

Both *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* represent a point of intersection between social media practices and re-enactment techniques. Here, the re-enactment of past events has moved to a new platform with social media users able to *interact with the re-enactment* by commenting, sharing, and reacting to the posts, expanding the concept of historical re-enactment and living history by the dimension of social media. The projects involve the users in the events in an emotional manner, creating an interactive platform for remembrance.

In both *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl*, there are aspects of historical re-enactment which creatively re-create the atmospheres and surroundings in which Heyman and Scholl found themselves. These re-enactments are highly aestheticized and emotionally charged interpretations of Heyman's and Scholl's experiences. They contain historical inaccuracies and are embellished with elements of fiction, which is also determined by the projects' contemporary social media perspective with Heyman and Scholl documenting their experience on camera. An example of this is a drawing posted to the *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* profile on the 18th of May 2021 with the caption "*Liebe machen statt Krieg*" [Make love instead of war] portraying a naked couple having sexual intercourse on a chair accompanied by some of Sophie Scholl's thoughts on how her boyfriend has changed during the war (Fig. 2).⁸⁸ Not only does the

⁸⁸ *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* post from 18 May 2021, URL: <https://www.instagram.com/p/CPBa7dThZDz/?hl=de> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

caption seem like an anachronism from the 1970s, but the drawing has little to do with the real Sophie Scholl, who tried to avoid a physical relationship with Fritz, instead preferring an intellectual-spiritual connection, which is something she emphasized in her letters to him.⁸⁹ This example demonstrates how Scholl's story was manipulated and made more 'contemporary' in order to engage the viewers and to motivate them to contribute their own thoughts about her situation. Another similar example from *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* is her post from the 24th of September 2021, in which she writes about her menstrual pain and asks the viewers to share their experience.⁹⁰ The creators of the Instagram project are thereby involving the 'influencer' Sophie Scholl in the current discussion about period awareness on social media.

“Mimetic Mourning” on Social Media

The two projects should also be considered from the perspective of “mimetic mourning” – a concept advanced by psychologist and cultural scientist Alexander Etkind and characterized as “mournful reenactments of suffering, which are cultural processes that involve contemplation and aestheticization.”⁹¹ He elaborated on this concept in his study *Warped Mourning: Stories of the Undead in the Land of the Unburied* (2013), describing it as “a recurrent response to loss that entails a symbolic re-enactment of that loss.”⁹² Both *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* are informed by ‘mimetic mourning’ in the sense that they can be considered as historical re-enactments created for collective mourning and remembrance. Here, mimetic mourning is performed as a creative contemporary re-enactment of Heyman's and Scholl's experiences through the interactive media of Instagram stories and posts. Presented from the perspective of a contemporary social media user, the viewers are able to identify with the individualized victims through their personal perspective, feelings and anecdotes, and develop feelings of empathy and understanding towards them. These social media memory projects also encourage their viewers to interact with and contemplate the ‘current events’ being experienced by Heyman and Scholl and to play an active role in their memorialisation

89 Zoske, R. M., *Sophie Scholl. Es reut mich nichts. Porträt einer Widerständigen*, Berlin 2020, 84–85.

90 *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* post from 24 September 2021, URL: https://www.instagram.com/p/CUMmNHbD_eo/ [accessed: 30.04.2022].

91 Etkind, A., *Warped Mourning...*, 98.

92 *Ibid.*, 1.

and remembrance by liking, sharing or commenting on posts, answering questions or polls in their Instagram stories or reacting to them with emojis and stickers. Their realities are re-created, re-enacted and designed to evoke an emotional response in the viewers and to create a greater proximity to the events.

As if replying to the critiques of *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* mentioned above, Etkind points out that historians tend to be uncomfortable with such stories because “postcatastrophic memory often entails allegories rather than facts and imaginative fiction rather than archival documentation.”⁹³ Mimetic mourning is therefore characterized by re-presentations or re-enactments of the past in a “symbolic, detoxicated form”⁹⁴ which address core questions of mourning such as how, where and when an event happened and if one could have done anything to prevent it. *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* explore these questions creatively by integrating them into their portrayal of Heyman’s and Scholl’s experiences and by allowing the viewers to interact with them during their experiences, for example by directly answering their questions in the respective comment sections or stories. Etkind also argues that re-enactment and therefore the repetition of traumatic events can help to process them and mourn the catastrophic past, because it does not matter whether “the mourner has evidence that testifies to the circumstances of the loss, or whether the reminiscence and the witness are pure fantasy, these re-presentations – bringing the dead back to life in imagination, social interaction, or performance – are at the core of mourning.”⁹⁵ In this sense, it is not the projects’ goal to re-enact historical imagery, footage or biographical material in a realistic or historically accurate manner, but to create an important responsive space for participation in cultural memory and memorialisation. This observation also corresponds with Maurice Halbwachs’s definition of the creation of collective memory as a negotiation between a past event and contemporary culture.⁹⁶ At the core of these social media memory projects lies the creation of a connection between “past event and present memorialization”⁹⁷ created through “the presence of engaging social media memory that inscribes the users into the mediation of past events and memo-

93 Etkind, A., *Warped Mourning...*, 244.

94 *Ibid.*, 1–2.

95 *Ibidem.*

96 Halbwachs, M., *The Collective Memory*, New York 1980.

97 Balestrino, A., “Mimetic Mourning at 9/11MM”, 164.

ry into present media lives.”⁹⁸ This is a process which we can witness with *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* judging by the number of subscribers and comments, the media response and the intense, controversial and often emotional discussions sparked by the two projects.

Conclusion

With the Instagram series *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* we are able to observe the emergence of a new and important phenomenon within social media memory, combining historical re-enactment with participatory social media practices. These projects are aimed at a younger and digitally literate demographic with the objective of making historical remembrance and memorialisation accessible and interactive in an age where public discussions have moved to the digital space.

As shown in this paper, there are historical inaccuracies present in the two projects which distort the realities of both Heyman’s and Scholl’s stories. Yet, historical re-enactment in ‘mimetic mourning’ is not characterised by historical authenticity – its objective is to re-create the past symbolically, and for re-enactors – and in this case their audience – to ‘feel’ the events they are re-enacting on an emotional level. As this applies to *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl*, I have argued that the projects are informed by mimetic mourning as emotionally charged interpretative re-enactments of Éva Heyman’s and Sophie Scholl’s experiences on Instagram.

Although many critics have called the appropriateness of these social media memory projects into question, their positive media response and impact may quite possibly outweigh the criticism – proving social media memory projects to be effective in sparking discussion and in creating an interactive genre of digital remembrance on social media. This demonstrates the increasing potential and international relevance of social media memory projects and initiatives and proves how valuable this approach is in keeping victims’ memories alive in the age *after* postmemory, as Hirsch originally defined it. This is *crucial* for the negotiation of a collective memory of historical atrocities in the digital age and during a time in which the number of living witnesses is sadly diminishing and younger generations (the third and fourth generations after the Holo-

98 Henig, L. – Ebbrecht-Hartmann, T., “Witnessing *Eva Stories*...”, 2.

caust and the Second World War) need to be involved in the discussion and in the process of memorialisation.

Due to the potential of digital and online remembrance projects as highlighted above and as shown with *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl*, it is likely that we can expect to see a proliferation of similar projects and initiatives commemorating the victims of past atrocities on social media. One such example is the highly controversial project *Equiano.Stories*⁹⁹, which was launched in February 2022 during the American Black History Month, commissioned by the *DuSable Museum Of African American History in Chicago* and produced by Stelo Stories¹⁰⁰, the Kochavis' film studio behind *Eva Stories*. The project is based on the biography of the writer and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano from the Eboe region in the Kingdom of Benin (today's southern Nigeria), who as a young boy was sold to a Royal Navy officer as a slave and taken to the Caribbean in the mid-18th Century before being able to purchase his freedom in 1766. *Equiano.Stories* aims to portray his traumatic experience on Instagram from his point of view and has – much like *Eva Stories* and *Ich bin Sophie Scholl* – been criticized for its profiteering commercialisation of memory and trauma.¹⁰¹

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Practices of Restoring Memory or Perhaps Constructing Memory? The Significance of Commemorative Murals to Their Initiators and Creators

Adrianna Krzywik

Introduction

The first wall paintings created by humans during the Palaeolithic primarily depicted the realities and surroundings of the primitive people who made them. Prehistoric art, commonly known as ‘cave art’, effectively represent Palaeolithic ‘art galleries’ which have survived for thousands of years and offer a window into the priorities of early man. The oldest examples of such cave paintings can be found in the Chauvet cave in France and date to more than 32,000 years ago. These paintings are the starting point for the artwork, murals and frescoes found all over the world today.

Although mural painting has, for centuries, fulfilled aesthetic, symbolic, magical and social functions (as well as conferring rank and prestige on a given piece of architecture), it has not always been respected as art by the public.¹ A possible reason is the confusion of monumental painting with graffiti; a phenomenon associated with vandalism by sub-cultural groups. The definition of ‘murals’ as all paintings or inscriptions, painted with or without permission, on public facades can also add to this confusion.² This is because phenomena aimed at both aestheticisation and deformation of public space are lumped together leading to a critical attitude by the public towards the murals. Such attitudes may also be influenced by the events sometimes accompanying the realisation of murals: namely street demonstrations. Violent political and social changes stimulate not only the formation of a social movement but also

1 Bąkowska, M., “Obrazy w pejzażu miasta – murale”, *Architektura krajobrazu*, Vol. 1–2, 2006, 43.

2 Mendelson-Shwartz, E. – Mualam, N., “Taming murals in the city: A foray into mural policies, practices, and regulation”, *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, 2020, 2.

artistic and propagandistic actions. One of the most important events in the development of muralism was the *Movimiento muralista mexicano* [Mexican art movement], during which revolutionaries used murals to try to reach a wide range of illiterate audiences.³ The murals by Mexican artists were a prelude to artistic debate in public spaces. Murals in Northern Ireland or Iran are a reflection of political change. It would be tactless not to mention this political background to the development of muralism however this article dissects a slightly different category of murals. Commemorative murals are flourishing in Poland and their presence in urban spaces is in many cases formalised and planned by the government, institutions or individuals active in the sphere of remembrance.

Among many such works the subject of interest is the murals that have been created within last ten years in Polish towns and cities to commemorate people and events that have gone down in the pages of Polish history. The main aims of this article are, firstly, an attempt to read the meanings contained in the message of selected commemorative murals and secondly, to establish the meanings attributed to commemorative murals by the agents. Efforts have also been made to recount the declared values of the named memorial agents and to classify them into the appropriate groupings of memorial agents.⁴

The semiological theory developed by visual sociology has been used to analyse photographs of memorial murals. In addition, the qualitative method of in-depth interview (IDI) has been used to investigate the meanings attributed to the murals by the agents of memory.

Memory Studies

Before describing the phenomenon of commemorative murals and their significance for the actors of memory, it should be considered what memory actually is. In the works of early researchers of memory, this term often gave way to the reconciliation or overcoming of the past. The most accurate definition, on which there is consensus in the memory community, was proposed by Maurice Halbwachs. He defined memory as a phenomenon emerging from certain common ideas, values, beliefs

3 Coffey, M. K., *How a Revolutionary Art Became Official Culture: Murals, Museums, and the Mexican State*, Duke University Press, London 2012, 66.

4 Kansteiner, W., *In pursuit of German memory: history, television, and politics after Auschwitz*, Ohio University Press, Athens 2006; Assmann, J., *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, C.H. Beck, Munich 1992.

and perceptions about the past of a given community. This reinforces the sociological approach that memory is a phenomenon that determines the persistence of a collective.⁵ Nevertheless, contemporary scholars have struggled to define the boundaries of what could be called collective memory. Pierre Nora has written that: “to speak today of collective memory poses the same difficulties as the word mentality did in the 1930s. It is a vague and ambiguous expression.”⁶

In the realm of memory there are constant debates around the very concept of memory and its complexity. Particularly when it comes to the types of memory that have been introduced to the literature in large numbers. Barbara Szacka has already pointed to the excess of synonymous terms. Her attention was focused in particular on the distinction between collective, social and historical memory which are often used interchangeably.⁷ But she is not the only one who has undertaken to discuss the difference and relationship between collective and historical memory.⁸

Based on the criteria of functionality and vitality of memory, Andrzej Szpociński proposed three categories for remembering the past: antiquarian, historical and monumental memory.⁹ Antiquarian memory is a non-functional memory and is not used in the process of memory transmission. Historical memory, like antiquarian memory, is non-functional because it “lacks overt references to the present”.¹⁰ On the other hand, its elements are commonly remembered – it is ‘alive’. An appropriate type of memory, from the point of view of the problem addressed in this article, is monumental memory. Monumental memory is subject to constant reconstruction and redefinition. It also constitutes the basis for the formation of collective identity and thanks to which it can be described as both ‘living’ and functional.

5 Olick, J. K., “Collective memory: A memoir and prospect”, *Memory studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2008, 23–29; Halbwachs, M., *On Collective Memory*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1992.

6 Nora, P., *Mémoire collective*, in: J. Le Goff (red.) *Faire d'histoire*, Gallimard, Paris 1974.

7 Szacka, B., *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit*, Warszawa 2007, 22.

8 Garagozov, R., *Collective memory: how collective representations about the past are created, preserved and reproduced*, Nova Science Publishers, New York 2015; Erll, A., *Memory in Culture*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2011; Halbwachs, M., *Los marcos sociales de la memoria*, Anthropos, Madrid 2004; Nora, P., *Mémoire collective*, in: J. Le Goff (red.) *Faire d'histoire*, Gallimard, Paris 1974.

9 Szpociński, A., “Formy przeszłości a komunikacja społeczna”, in: P. Kwiatkowski – A. Szpociński, *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu*, Scholar, Warsaw 2006, 30.

10 Ibidem.

Memory is closely connected with both individual and collective identity. It is determined not by the past but by the present. This is because each generation remembers what is important for it from the point of view of the present. What is remembered depends precisely on the identity adopted and the time and space in which one finds oneself.¹¹ David Lowenthal, in his book *The Past is a Foreign Country*, writes that “the past as we know it is partly a product of the present; we are constantly reshaping memory, rewriting history and renewing relics of the past.”¹² It follows that the past is not a closed chapter – it is present in the present through attempts to understand or justify phenomena currently occurring through an interpretation of the past¹³.

Understanding the past depends on the intergenerational transmission of memory. This is a process in which biographical knowledge contributes to the construction of collective memory. Due to the nature of “sharing knowledge about the past with contemporaries”,¹⁴ Jan Assmann distinguished communicative memory, which includes memories of the immediate past, from collective memory. He also distinguished cultural memory as an established memory the basis of which is remembered history rather than facts.¹⁵ It is similar in the case of social memory: “socially created, transformed, relatively unified and accepted knowledge relating to the past of a given community. This knowledge includes various contents, performs various functions, persists thanks to various cultural carriers and reaches the consciousness of individuals from various sources.”¹⁶ It is also worth outlining that there is a certain connection between cultural memory and historical memory. Both notions refer to phenomena that are emotionally involved and intertwined on individual and collective, private and public levels. Both historical memory and cultural memory refer to the past of a social group – a class, a society or a nation. It can be seen here that the term ‘memory’ covers a diverse set of phenomena including commemoration.

11 Gillis, J., *Commemorations. The politics of national identity*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey 1994, 3.

12 Lowenthal, D., *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1985, 26.

13 Szacka, B., *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit...*, 43–45.

14 Assmann, J., *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, Schrift, Erinnerung...*, 212.

15 Ibidem.

16 Golka, M., *Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2009, 15.

Memory Makers

The past is visible in the present not only through stories or signs of memory that can be erased or transformed. It is also visible thanks to the actions of the activists of the 'sphere of memory' in the space of everyday life. Commemorative practices enable audiences to confront the past.¹⁷ They allow us to better understand the consequences of the events and to learn from them. These practices include activities such as the commemoration of national worlds and other anniversaries. There is probably no country in the world that would not celebrate an event regarding its history. In this way, a nation maintains continuity with its past – it does not break away but draws from it what makes a society a nation. Participation in ritual practices allows the participants to build a collective identity and a sense of belonging to a group.¹⁸ On the one hand, it makes a given group aware of its common past through, among other things, created symbols readable only for the members of this group. On the other hand, it justifies the existence of this group in a given time and space.

The connection between memory, identity and territory is inseparable. It would be difficult to recall a specific event from the past without mentioning the place where it took place. These places require a series of cyclical activities within it or memory carriers placed in their area that transforms the 'place' into a place of memory.¹⁹ Places and memory carriers are one of many elements that influence the shape of memory.

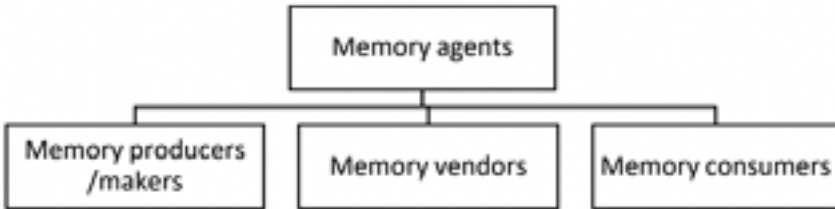
The shape of memory depends on how knowledge about the past is transmitted, maintained and received. In this process activists of the sphere of memory, interchangeably called agents or actors of memory, have a significant role which was described in more detail by Wulf Kansteiner.²⁰ He identified a triad of interacting elements that create

17 Sroczyńska, M., "Rituals as the memory practices in generational transmission (in the reflection of sociologist of religion)", *The Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 2, Issue 268, 2018, 33–53; Connerton, P., *How Modernity Forgets*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009; Golka, M., *Pamięć społeczna i jej implanty*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2009; Le Goff, J., *Histoire et Mémoire*, Gallimard Folio, Paris 1993.

18 Durkheim, E., *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, Allen & Unwin, London 1964, 355–371.
19 Kula, M., *Nośniki Pamięci Historycznej*, Wydawnictwo DIG, Warsaw 2002, 7–31.

20 Nijakowski, L. M., "Sejmowe uchwały upamiętniające jako medium pamięci zbiorowej. Studium przypadku: Muzeum Śląska Opolskiego", *Studia Socjologiczne*, Vol. 1, Issue 240, 2021, 43–60; Głowacka-Grajper, M., *Transmisja pamięci. Działacze "sfery pamięci" i przekaz o Kresach Wschodnich we współczesnej Polsce*, WUW, Warszawa 2016; Bogumił, Z., *Gulag Memories: The Rediscovery and Commemoration of Russia's Repressive Past*, Oxford: Berghahn Books, New York 2018; Kansteiner, W., *In pursuit of German memory...*, 2006.

memory: memory makers, memory audiences, and cultural traditions.²¹ This approach has been extended based on the process of memory consumption to memory producers and consumers, as well as memory vendors.²²



Source: own diagram literature-based (Assman²³, Kansteiner²⁴, Kapralski²⁵)

It is worth mentioning that different discourses of memory and commemorative practices clash between these groups. The disputes in the field of memory that we encounter today such as the statutes of museums and the transfers of memory media are of political significance. The interpretation of the past depends on power and the politics of memory.²⁶ It is the political elites who decide who society should remember and who should forget. Sometimes in the field of memory there are clashes between one authority and the next. Especially when the new one is convinced that its interpretation of the past is decisive.²⁷

21 Kansteiner, W., "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies", *History & Theory*, Vol. 41, Issue 2, 2002, 180.

22 Kaiser, S., "Memory Inventory. The Production and Consumption of Memory Goods in Argentina", in: K. Bilbija – L. A. Oayne, *Accounting for Violence. Marketing Memory in Latin America*, Duke University Press, Durham – London 2011, 313–338; Kapralski, S., *Naród z popiołów. Pamięć zagłady a tożsamość Romów*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warsaw 2012, 57–58.

23 Assmann, J., *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis, Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*.

24 Kansteiner, W., "Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies".

25 Kapralski, S., *Naród z popiołów. Pamięć zagłady a tożsamość Romów*.

26 Szpociński, A., "II wojna światowa w komunikacji społecznej", in: P. T. Kiatkowski – L. M. Nijakowski – B. Szacka – A. Szpociński, *Między codziennością a wielką historią. Druga wojna światowa w pamięci zbiorowej społeczeństwa polskiego*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar-Muzeum drugiej wojny Światowej, Gdańsk-Warszawa 2010, 55–81; Hobsbawm, E. – Ranger, T., *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1994.

27 Szpociński, A., "II wojna światowa w komunikacji społecznej", 55–81.

Above all it is the producers of memory (witnesses or researchers of history), who influence the shaping of memory policy and social memory. They produce information, often subjecting it to manipulation and selection, which is then passed on to consumers of memory. These consumers are recipients of, for example, memory media and use, ignore or transform memory according to their interests. The intermediaries in this relationship are the sellers of memory, both individuals and institutions, who transform the interpretations of the producers of memory into ‘portions of knowledge’.

Looking at the space of larger and smaller towns over the last dozen or so years, one can observe numerous transformations of sites of memory and forms of commemoration. One of the most popular initiatives in Poland, and at the same time the subject of this article’s research, are commemorative murals. Observation of the process of their creation has made it possible to distinguish particular phases of their implementation: announcement of a competition for the design, selection of the most suitable among the submissions and the final phase or execution of the mural. We should consider which groups are responsible for particular phases and in which groups of memory makers they should be classified.



Source: own chart

Murals can be inspired by people or institutions with a strong interest in the past or who are active in the sphere of memory. The creators are artistically talented people such as painters or muralists. Of course, the creator of a commemorative mural can also be its originator, therefore classifying individuals or groups is not an easy task. Should the originators be classified as producers of memory and the muralists as vendors of memory?

Commemorative Murals

Murals, as an alternative to gallery art, can be viewed without any restrictions related to fees or opening hours of galleries and museums.

Not surprisingly, they are increasingly found in the spaces of smaller or larger towns and cities around the world. They have become a strong site for increasing interest in cultural heritage.²⁸ Murals bring many benefits to individuals, communities and the spaces in which they are located.²⁹ They are seen as vehicles for shaping place and community, tools for revitalising neglected buildings, promoting tourism and socio-economic development.³⁰ The aforementioned benefits demonstrate that the popularity of murals has influenced their division into private and public identities. The public identity of murals is associated with the arbitrary action of the artist or grassroots community action. The private identity of murals is related to the decision of authorities and political elites to realise them and place them on specific walls of buildings. Concerning these factors, murals should be analysed as products of conflicts between social and local government interests.

When studying murals in Poland, conflicts between different interest groups can be observed. The most common occurrence is the painting over of commemorative murals which depict historical figures with a residually known past or which are associated with values incompatible with those shared by the persons painting the mural. An example of such devastation is the murals commemorating the 'cursed soldiers' (a post-war anti-communist guerilla), whose past has been demythologised in Polish memorial discourse in recent years. Despite this there are still groups that do not share the opinion that they are figures worth commemorating. Such opinions are manifested, for example, in murals commemorating the members of the Unbroken Soldiers in Białystok, Mińsk Mazowiecki or Gorzów Wielkopolski, which have been painted over.

It is difficult to point to examples of commemorative murals which were painted over at the request of the authorities. Perhaps this is because

28 Skinner, J. – Jolliffe, L., "Wall-to-wall coverage. An introduction to murals tourism", in: J. Skinner – L. Jolliffe (eds.), *Murals and Tourism. Heritage, Politics and Identity*, Routledge, London 2016, 6.

29 Mendelson-Shwartz, E. – Mualam, N. Y., "Taming murals in the city: a foray into mural policies, practices, and regulation", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol. 27, Issue 2, 2020, 2.

30 Austin, J., "More to See than a Canvas in a White Cube: For an Art in the Streets", *City*, Vol. 14, Issue 1–2, 2010, 33–47; Drescher, T., "Introduction", in: J. Braun-Reinitz – J. Weissman – A. Goodman, *On the Wall: Four Decades of Community Murals in New York City*, Press of Mississippi, Jackson 2009; Golden, J. – Scobey, D. M. – Rice, R. – Kinney, M. Y., *Philadelphia Murals and the Stories They Tell*. Philadelphia, Temple University Press, Pennsylvania 2002; Young, A., *Street Art, Public City: Law, Crime and the Urban Imagination*, Routledge, London 2013; Markusen, A. – Gadwa, A., "Arts and Culture in Urban or Regional Planning: A Review and Research Agenda", *Journal of Planning Education and Research*, Vol. 29, Issue 3, 2010, 379–391; Hall, T. – Robertson, I., "Public Art and Urban Regeneration: Advocacy, Claims and Critical Debates", *Landscape Research*, Vol. 26, Issue 1, 2001, 5–26.

murals are a new phenomenon in the discourse of memory. Nevertheless, in a dozen or so years, it may turn out that the importance of some figure was overexaggerated through their commemoration on a mural. Thus, as in the case of toppled and destroyed monuments or renamed streets, the mural will be painted over. Such a narrative encourages people to think about historical figures or events in binary terms.³¹

Commemorative murals are representations of communities' ideas about the past.³² They are modern and intentionally produced media in which memories are stored.³³ Modern, because they belong to visual messages that have replaced oral messages.³⁴ Intentional, because they are created by activists of the sphere of memory to commemorate and protect from being forgotten.³⁵ Commemorative murals most often appear before (but not exclusively) national celebrations or on the anniversary (sometimes immediately after) the death of a culturally or historically important figure. The problem can be the lifespan of murals which, due to their nature (murals placed on the outside walls of buildings can corrode) and the meanings and values given to them, is uncertain.³⁶ Therefore, the field of research around the restoration of murals has been recently expanded.³⁷

Methodology

The analysis of the meanings attributed to memorial murals as intentional and modern carriers of memory falls within the field of memory stud-

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- 31 Light, D. – Young, C., “Public Memory, Commemoration and Transitional Justice: Reconfiguring the Past in Public Space”, in: L. Stan – N. Nedelsky (eds.), *Post-Communist Transitional Justice: Lessons from 25 Years of Experience*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2015, 233–251; Czerwiński, M., “Archive of Signs: The Semiotics of Cultural Memory”, *Tekst i Dyskurs*, Vol. 7, 2014, 32.
- 32 Hołda, R., “You are in our memory”: Polish murals as memory medium and a popular form of patriotism, *Intercultural Relations*, Vol. 1, Issue 7, 2020, 48.
- 33 Kula, M., *Nośniki Pamięci Historycznej...*, 7–31.
- 34 Karkowska, M., “Międzypokoleniowe transmisje pamięci. Na podstawie badań we wsiach świętokrzyskich”, *Studia Socjologiczne*, Vol. 3, Issue 222, 2016, 112.
- 35 Szpociński, A., *Współczesna kultura historyczna i jej implanty*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2021, 93.
- 36 McCormick, J. – Jarman, N., “Death of a Mural”, *Journal of Material Culture*, Vol. 10, Issue 1, 2005, 49–71.
- 37 Remesar, A., “Del arte público al post-muralismo. Políticas de decoro urbano en procesos de Regeneración Urbana”, *On the w@terfront*, Vol. 61, Issue 1, 2019, 3–65; Gralińska-Toborek, A., *Experience of Art in Urban Space. Urban Forms Gallery 2011–2013*, Urban Forms, Łódź 2014.

ies. Memory is treated as a complex phenomenon that manifests itself in different spheres and changes under the influence of various factors.³⁸ Therefore, it was important to select appropriate research methods that would allow for in-depth analysis and to answer the main research questions. The research objectives were firstly to attempt to read the meanings contained in the messages of selected commemorative murals and secondly to establish the meanings agents gave to the commemorative murals. It was decided to use qualitative methods: semiological analysis and in-depth interviews with the creators and initiators (originators) of the commemorative murals. The combination of the two aforementioned methods enabled a multifaceted approach and objective knowledge of the phenomenon of the mural boom in Poland.

The first method used was the semiological analysis of media images developed by Roland Barthes³⁹ most probably based on Ferdinand de Saussure's linguistic analysis of cultural texts.⁴⁰ The semiological analysis of images (in the case of this article: commemorative murals) is nothing other than the decomposition of a cultural product into 'significant' and 'signifie' elements.

The second method used to investigate the meanings attributed to commemorative murals was individual in-depth interviews with the creators and originators of the murals completed in the last ten years. The interview method provided insight into how murals are talked about and narrativised.

The planned interviews included a group of twenty creators of commemorative murals and a group of twenty originators of their implementation. The respondents were selected in a deliberate manner; based on photographs of murals searched on the internet, information about the mural's creator and originator was found on websites. Subsequently, selected representatives of both groups were contacted by e-mail (contact to respondents was possible thanks to publicly available information on websites). Due to the coronavirus pandemic, interviews were conducted by telephone and instant messaging. During the interviews, the researcher based himself on the thematic threads which had been written out in advance. This included the respondent's artistic path or activities in the public space, the respondent's attitude to Polish history, history in the public space, factors influencing the decision to realise com-

38 Olick, J. K., "Collective memory: A memoir and prospect", *Memory studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2008, 23–29.

39 Barthes, R., *Mythologies*, Hill and Wang, New York 1970.

40 De Saussure, F., *Course in General Linguistics*, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York 1959.

memorative murals, the meaning and impact of commemorative murals, or the attitude to historical policy. The topics which had been prepared in advance formed the basis not only for establishing the meaning of the murals for the respondents but also for answering the questions: “to which group of activists of the ‘sphere of memory’ do the authors belong?”, “to which group do the originators belong?”, “to whom do they direct their activity?” and “what is their goal?”. In the case of the last question, the interest oscillates around the process of creating memory and social bonds.

Semiological Analysis of Selected Commemorative Murals

Roland Barthes’ semiological theory was applied to the analysis of the memorial murals. This theory is used for the qualitative analysis of media and cultural products and, more specifically, their social impact and functioning. Barthes assumed that publicised products, especially media texts, strongly resonate socially and their meaning is not well known.⁴¹ Therefore, a semiological analysis of them is a necessity. Two types of analysis have emerged in the sphere of sign science: the semiology of communication and the semiology of meaning. The first focuses on the relationship between the message and the sender and receiver in relation to the communication situation as a whole. The second examines the relationship between the elements of the message. It is a division of a given creation into *significant* elements and *signifie* elements, which form a coherent sign for both groups. The difference between the mentioned elements will be easiest to explain on the basis of examples.



Figure 1: Pleszew

41 Barthes, R., *Mythologies...*, 203.



Figure 2: Radzymin



Figure 3: Kozienice



Figure 4: Władysławów

Murals commemorating the Battle of Warsaw and the people associated with it were a subject of analysis. This group of murals was chosen because they were created in large numbers on the occasion of the centenary celebrations of the battle which was victorious for the Poles. The idea of one of the largest initiatives commemorating the battle came from the Ministry of National Defence, which announced a competition entitled “Historical Mural – 1920 Polish”.⁴²

Most of the painted murals depict the year 1920, the year of the battle between the units of the Bolshevik Red Army and the armies of the Polish Army fought between the 13th and 25th August. Some of the murals depict fragments of the decisive battle of the Polish-Bolshevik war. In the village of Władysławów (Fig. 4.) a mural depicting a fragment of the painting “Cud nad Wisłą” by Wojciech Kossak was painted. For example, the mural in Pleszew (Fig. 1.) depicts two fronts, the Polish and the Bolshevik, on a white and red map. These colours appear on all murals referring to the Battle of Warsaw as a national symbol, similar to a flag or emblem. The objects depicted in the large-format murals include machine guns, tanks, aeroplanes and armoured cars, although most often the figures depicted in the murals were accompanied by horses which outnumbered armoured equipment during the battle. The murals also depict people of merit in the fight against the Bolsheviks. Primarily the image of Józef Piłsudski, Commander-in-Chief of the Polish army, was used. Less frequently, Tadeusz Rozwadowski can be found on the murals, who, as Chief of General Staff of the Polish Armed Forces, co-created the operation of outflanking the Soviet troops. Apart from these two important figures in the history of Polish defence, the murals also feature the figure of the Polish Army chaplain, Father Ignacy Skorupka, whose death became one of the symbols of the Battle of Warsaw. The elements listed above are *significant* elements formed on the first level: that is, visible to the consumer of memory at first sight.

Signifie elements are culturally inferred; they are shared in a similar way by members of a given culture⁴³. Culture according to Clifford Geertz is a pattern of meanings transmitted over time⁴⁴. Therefore, societies with common memory and common roots find similar meanings in cultural products and recognise symbols (compound meanings that

42 The competition “*Historical Mural – 1920 Polish*”, URL: <https://www.gov.pl/web/obrona-narodowa/konkurs-pn-historyczny-mural-1920-polskie-zwyciestwo-dla-wolnosci-europy-rozstrzygniety2> [accessed: 03. 08. 2022]

43 Griswold, W., *Cultures and Societies in a changing world*, SAGE Publications, Los Angeles 2013, 53.

44 Geertz, C., *The Interpretation of Cultures*, Basic Books, New York 1973.

orative murals usually have higher education in the humanities or social sciences. They are people who have vast experience in scientific or cultural circles. They are people with doctoral or professorial degrees or employees of local government or cultural institutions.

The division of duties related to the realisation of the murals has always been specific. Most often, a muralist was commissioned or won a competition announced by public institutions to design a mural. The technical assumptions of the project prepared by the originators usually specified the characters and events which should be included in the painting. The process of accepting the project often took slightly longer due to changes introduced after consultations with the originators. The artists were mainly responsible for the meticulous execution of the mural.

For muralists, the walls of buildings are like canvases. The difference is that when they paint on canvases at home they only listen to their inner voice and can fulfil themselves creatively. Muralists treat society's everyday living space as a stage or an urban gallery. It is very important to them that their works – murals – will be seen by a larger audience than in galleries or museums. For muralists, murals, even if commemorative, are an art in themselves. Art which everyone should have regular contact with. Art, although containing a simple message, is supposed to stimulate the viewer to think. The originators, who also pointed to the aesthetic value of murals, focused more often on the popularity of muralism worldwide. The success of the mural phenomenon lies precisely in the fact that it was a unique phenomenon when people started to take interest in it. Murals were a tourist attraction in many countries. Today, this phenomenon has become so popular that even commemorative plaques or monuments are giving way to these modern forms of commemoration. Commemorations in the form of colourful murals (although murals often appear in grey) can be a more effective attempt to reach the public than a single-coloured monument.

Both groups pointed out that the commemorative murals are primarily addressed to the younger generation who to learn something mainly by reaching for visual materials. This is all the more so because for years researchers in Polish literature have been observing a decline in interest in the past among Polish society.⁴⁵ The creators themselves, but above all the originators, are unaware of the problem of lack of interest in the

45 Kwiatkowski, P. T. – Nijakowski, L. M. – Szacka, B. – Szpociński A., *Between everyday life and great history: World War II in the collective memory of Polish society*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2010.

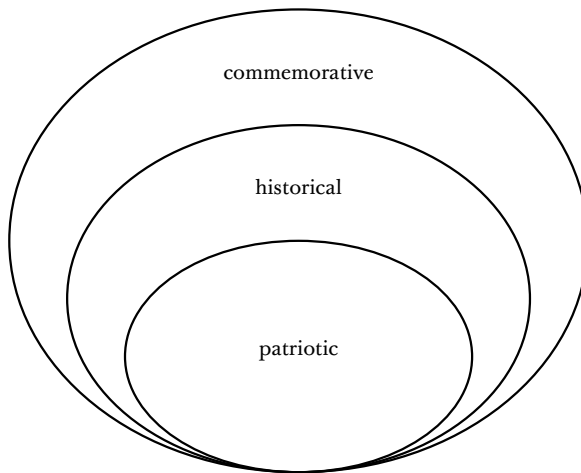
past. The creators of the murals, more often spoke about the interest in the local past, while the originators spoke of the national past. Both groups cited numerous stories related to the fate of elderly family members during the wars. In many cases, the respondents admitted that it was the family stories that made them want to get involved in activities in the sphere of memory or in the social affairs of the locality in which they live.

Interest in history was one of the motives behind the decision to realise the commemorative mural especially when it came to the originators. The originators work in institutions that, according to their status, should cherish the national heritage. They are therefore obliged to be active in this respect. Although they can decide themselves who or what to commemorate, they often make suggestions such as a resolution by the Sejm to establish a particular patron of a given year or on anniversaries of national holidays. The originators pointed out that they are willing to engage in commemorative practices because the goal of nurturing and shaping memory sustains the persistence of society. Muralists, on the other hand, were the first to indicate that they undertook commissions for commemorative murals because of their desire to expose their work to social negotiations or tensions⁴⁶. As with their work exhibited in galleries they want a relationship to be formed between the mural and the viewer. In addition, most artists were also motivated by gratification for the commission and a desire to present historical figures they valued to the viewer. The factor of declared values was more pronounced in the group of mural artists. Each muralist emphasised that they would not undertake to paint a character they did not identify with or a subject contrary to their views.

For both groups, commemorative murals are a tool for the transmission of memory. As a carrier of memory, it does not in itself analyse the past but contains a 'portion of knowledge' about the past. Commemorative murals are an expression of a popular form of patriotism. As long as patriotism is mentioned, different terms for murals commemorating a historical figure or event – commemorative, historical and patriotic – resonated during the interviews. Although they were used interchangeably, some respondents tried to specify the differences between them. According to the interviewees, patriotic murals include murals depicting national symbols such as the flag, white and red co-

46 Greaney, M. E., "The Power of the Urban Canvas : Paint, Politics, and Mural Art Policy", *New England Journal of Public Policy*, Vol. 18, Issue 1, 2002, 6–48.

lours, the national emblem or fragments of the national anthem. They are carriers of memory with a specific message: patriotic values. Historical murals present elements referring to national and local history. These can be murals depicting a timeline of events related to a given locality, or a place that used to be in the place of execution. Both patriotic and historical murals are described as commemorative, so they fall into the largest group. Below is an attempt to delineate the relationship between these three types of murals.



Source: own diagram based on IDIs

According to the respondents, the role of murals is extremely complex. The creators emphasised the role of restoring memory while the originators emphasised the role of shaping memory. These two words, although synonymous, give food for thought because they speak of something different. Restoring means transferring knowledge about the past as it was. Shaping, on the other hand, often means interfering with historical facts. Such activities are referred to as actions on memory; that is, interpreting the past for one's own purposes. For the originators, the role of popularising history through commemorative murals and the transmission of the values which guided the person painted is very important. According to the respondents, all these factors contribute to making the past present and shaping a sense of belonging to a community among individuals.

Limitations and Future Research Directions

Commemorative murals are a phenomenon of the last dozen or so years. They constitute a kind of substitute for monuments and commemorative plaques. A substitute perhaps (or rather, certainly) more attractive to recipients in terms of the popularity of murals. As the mural is a cultural product, it is followed by a deeper sense: it sometimes refers not only to the past but also to the present, identifying a given figure or event in a broader meaningful context. It would be worth examining the murals taking into account the theory of the cultural rhombus otherwise known as the relations between authors and originators, recipients, the mural and the social world. Perhaps this would show more closely the process of shaping social bonds and collective identity through commemorative murals. The theory of reflection (functionalist or Weberian) within the cultural rhombus could also be used.

This article may be the beginning of further reflections on the different discourses of memory and their clashes in public space. What has become apparent are the different roles of memory activists in the sphere of commemoration through murals. Although an attempt was made to answer the question as to which groups (producers or sellers) the originators and creators belonged to, it was difficult to frame both groups. The creators of commemorative murals are closer to sellers, who transform interpretations of the past into portions of knowledge in the form of murals. The originators, on the other hand, are closer to producers, because they have a real influence on the shape of memory. Nevertheless, these groups are not homogeneous. As indicated, the creator can also be the originator.

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Dealing with an Unloved Past – Decommunization in Poland under PiS

Ines Skibinski

Introduction

Since 2016 an enormous wave of decommunization has swept across Poland. Almost 30 years after the fall of communism in 1989, the national-conservative party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)* [Law and Justice] has deemed it necessary to discuss this issue again. As a result, PiS passed a decommunization law in 2016 which includes the renaming of public places and the demolition of monuments.¹

This paper deals with the direct consequences of the political changes after 1989, as well as the question of what went so wrong in this process that it now seems necessary to start a second decommunization. In addition, this paper will show how and why different communities and local actors have reacted to the new decommunization law of 2016.

First of all, this paper will present a short outline of the failures in political, social and legal systems in Poland during the early 1990s. Afterwards, it will focus on what happened in 2016, after the decommunization law was passed and how it changed the sights of Polish cities, towns and villages. For a deeper understanding of the subject, it will show the current decommunization processes in different cities, such as Warsaw, Legnica, Katowice, Wołów, and Międzychód. This paper aims to explain why decommunization is a part of the political program of the current government around Jarosław Kaczyński and his party PiS,

1 Ustawa z dnia 1. kwietnia 2016 r. o zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego totalitarnego przez nazwy budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej, *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Warsaw 01. 04. 2016, URL: <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20160000744> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

but also aims to show the resistance that has been carried out against the decommunization law from different social directions.

The topic of the current decommunization in Poland perfectly fits into the frame of memory culture and history politics. Until today, the era of the *Polska Republika Ludowa*, PRL [People's Republic Poland] is a traumatic part of an unloved history as these decades are overshadowed by the negative feelings that the foreign rule of the USSR brought with it. It is also important to highlight that the people of Poland have not only been victims of this system but that they also have played their active parts in it.

Saying that one has been ruled by an external power pushes away any kind of responsibility for the matters that went wrong at that time. The very same thing will always be an explanation for failures that can be searched outside, not inside of the system. From time to time, it is easier to place the responsibility on others, as this can contribute to stabilising a current system of power and building a national identity on this belief. But before diving too deep into this, let us start at the beginning and take a look at Poland in the early 1990s.²

1989 – What was missed?

Inside the socialist bloc, Poland was the first country to take advantage of the opportunity for a system change and sought reforms that would lead to an overcoming of the old communist system. However, at the same time, Poland was last to finish this transformation.³ This long process unfortunately made it easier for the Polish nomenclature to prepare themselves for the system change. They were able to obliterate documents that could have proven illegal actions or offenses committed by the communist government between 1944 and 1989.⁴ Because of Poland's pioneering role, the country also did not have the opportunity to follow the example of previous transformations that other countries were going through. Therefore it had to find its own way.

2 This research paper is based on my Master's thesis "Dekommunisierung in Polen. Umgang mit der ungeliebten Vergangenheit." (Bonn/Warsaw, 2020) and my research done for the conference "Memory of Central and Eastern Europe: past traumas, present challenges, future horizons" (2021).

3 Ziemer, K., *Das politische System Polens. Eine Einführung*, Wiesbaden 2013, 21.

4 Buras, P. – Tewes, H., *Polens Weg von der Wende bis zum EU-Beitritt*, Stuttgart 2005, 14.

Poland is one of few countries where the previous rulers participated in the transformation and continued to hold high positions even after the fall of communism.⁵ This was called an elite compromise. For example, Wojciech Jaruzelski remained President, Czesław Kiszczak became Minister of the Interior and party functionaries continued to work in the police, the military, and the secret service.⁶ In this way the nomenclature could still control the most important political fields and protect themselves from unwanted charges. There is no denying that these former elites had an enormous impact on the shaping of post-Soviet Poland's politics. Moreover, they did not want to disturb the partners of the Warsaw Pact and – with Jaruzelski at the top – there was no clear cut from the USSR and the previous system.⁷ The revolution was discussed in an extensive process and compromising with the elites had a huge role in this process. Tadeusz Mazowiecki was elected Poland's first Prime Minister and in his first official speech he said the following about dealing with the communist past:

The government I form does not bear responsibility for the mortgage it inherits. However, it has an influence on the circumstances in which we will act. We will separate the past with a thick line. We will only be responsible for what we have done to bring Poland out of the current collapsing situation.⁸

With this statement, Mazowiecki laid the foundation for the decommunization of Poland that never happened. Furthermore, the files and documents of the secret service created several problems, due to the fact that Mazowiecki did not want to make them accessible for the public, as in his eyes they were non-credible testimonies.⁹ In this period many files were destroyed under the supervision of the Minister of the Interior, Czesław Kiszczak.¹⁰ Even previous opponents of the regime, such as Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuroń and Lech Wałęsa, spoke out in favour

5 Borodziej, W., *Geschichte Polens im 20. Jahrhundert*, München 2010, 385.

6 *Ibid.*, 383.

7 Ziemer, K., *Das politische System Polens*, 21.

8 Mazowiecki, T., Tadeusz Mazowiecki's inaugural address at the Sejm on August 24, 1989, URL: <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/wystapienie-tadeusza-mazowieckiego-w-sejmie-24-sierpnia-1989-r> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

9 Fehr, H., *Vergeltende Gerechtigkeit – Populismus und Vergangenheitspolitik nach 1989*, Berlin-Toronto 2016, 14.

10 Paradowska, J., "Aufarbeitung und Ranküne. Gründe und Abgründe der Lustration in Polen", *Osteuropa*, Vol. 56, Issue 11–12, 2006, 207.

of a conciliatory approach to the old elites.¹¹ More than once there were ambitions to start a lustration in the 1990s but the attempts were not successful. It is important to know that the Kaczyński brothers were also present at the round table talks, against which PiS is making serious accusations and through which they are trying to legitimise their politics and the current decommunization.

While discussing decommunization at The Round Table Talks, the first post-communist government decided not to give in to lustration demands. This amounted to a general amnesty. At that time, obvious street names were changed and monuments of famous communists, like that one of Feliks Dzierżyński in Warsaw, were knocked down. In general, the approaches of a first decommunization wave had been very superficial as the politicians did not agree on profound lustration or decommunization laws after the system had already been broken down. Indirect procedures also came to life such as the changing of the Polish constitution, the national anthem, and important public holidays.¹² The state's official name was changed from the People's Republic into the Third Republic and the eagle on the flag was given a crown which is a reference to the aristocratic republic before Poland was divided.

It was not only politics which failed at that time but also the legal system's ability to prosecute perpetrators for crimes which had been previously committed. The issue of the legal processing after the system change was dragged out for more than 20 years until it lost its relevance and explosiveness. It included shooting orders given by high-ranking politicians such as Kiszczak or Jaruzelski, as well as the murder of political opponents such as the priest Jerzy Popiełuszko and many others.¹³ In some cases other culprits were found but in most cases there were no further investigations. Some cases had been closed because Jaruzelski's state of health and his age. There were always reasons for interrupting the trials again and again. Over the years, trials against people who were involved or responsible were repeatedly initiated but not even one conviction was made.¹⁴

11 Zagańczyk-Neufeld, A., *Die geglückte Revolution. Das Politische und der Umbruch in Polen 1976–1997*, Paderborn 2014, 319.

12 Ziemer K., *Das politische System Polens*, 23.

13 Puttkammer, von J., "Enttäuschte Erwartungen. Die Strafrechtliche Aufarbeitung kommunistischer Diktatur in Polen", in: J. Ganzenmüller, *Recht und Gerechtigkeit. Die strafrechtliche Aufarbeitung von Diktaturen in Europa*, Köln 2017, 173.

14 Ibid., 191.

Moreover, former elites made up a large part of the active economy. 70% of the economic and financial elites were brought over from the old system.¹⁵ Thus, one can clearly see a continuity of the old system and a lack of decommunization in the 1990s. As time went on, the issue became more and more unpopular in the society.

The Remembrance Culture of the *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*

The national conservative party, PiS, has been governing since 2015 and they were also previously in charge of Poland between 2005 and 2007. At this time, the Kaczyński twins owned the highest offices as the Prime Minister and the President of Poland. One of their goals at the time, which overlaps with the current government, was to introduce the so-called “Fourth Republic”.¹⁶ This ideology wants to separate the current Polish state from the Third Republic (the one that has existed from 1989 until today) and create a better, more democratic, more national, and more social version of Poland. Through this demarcation they want to demonstrate that they have nothing to do with the previous governments which they associate with communist structures from before 1989. The best example for this is the hatred of the PiS towards the first Polish President after the end of communism, Lech Wałęsa. Wałęsa’s achievement in fighting for a free Poland (and even a free Europe) has been widely recognised by many. Only PiS is constantly trying to discredit him and is desperately looking for evidence on his collaboration with the elites of that era. This case is also known as the “Bolek” file.¹⁷ This kind of discrediting is also experienced by other *Solidarność* fighters. For the “Fourth Republic”, the rotten compromise of 1989 is about to be abolished and replaced with a new model of democracy. This is to be done, among other things, through a targeted history policy, which includes decommunization and the development of deep Polish patriotism. The highest priorities are independence and the free nation of Poland,

15 Jaskułowski, T., “Polen Erfolge und Misserfolge der ersten osteuropäischen Transformation 1989”, in: C. Vollnhals, *Jahre des Umbruchs. Friedliche Revolution in der DDR und Transition in Ostmitteleuropa*, Göttingen 2011, 58.

16 Lang, K.-O., “Auf dem Weg zur 4. Republik. Die Parlamentswahlen in Polen vom 25. September 2005”, *Osteuropa*, Vol. 55, Issue 10, 2005, 143.

17 Paradowska, J., “Aufarbeitung und Ranküne. Gründe und Abgründe der Lustration in Polen”, *Osteuropa*, Vol. 56, Issue 11–12, 2006, 213.

which – in the vision of the conservatives – collides with any kind of EU-membership. The underlying problem is that in order to implement the ‘Fourth Republic’, the current narratives are being reshaped. Existing narratives that do not fit into the scheme are being concealed, denied, or questioned. Patriotic heroic narratives are being deliberately created and criticizing Poland is practically forbidden. This can be seen in the *Institut Pamięci Narodowej* [Institute of National Remembrance, IPN] law, which criminalises statements about Poland.¹⁸ According to the Director of the Willy Brandt Institute in Wrocław, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, there are four ways to implement the desired historical policy.¹⁹ First, one has to design public space with monuments and anniversaries which fit the ideology one wants to spread. The educational system is also very important: schools should teach the ideologically distorted image of history to the youth. To create a new reality and awareness, science should also be regulated by the ruling party. Last but not least, one has to adjust jurisdiction. In the meantime, these methods are tolerated and dealt with quite openly. Official discussions are only held with historians that represent the prescribed narrative. Universities and their professors get surveilled, sometimes dismissed, and new, patriotic history books find their way into schools. Even monuments are removed and replaced by others.²⁰

The main danger of state-controlled memory is that uncomfortable truths are left out, while more positive memories are specifically brought up or are heroised.²¹ There are state-sponsored programs that are aimed primarily at young people which are supposed to revive patriotism and their love for the Polish nation. An example of this is the program “*Patriotyzm Jutra*” [Patriotism of tomorrow]. They organize patriotic festivals, concerts, meetings, and re-enactments of battles.²² The government and the ruling party, PiS, do not make a secret of this special

18 Ustawa o zmianie ustawy o Instytucji Pamięci Narodowej – “Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, ustawy o grobach i cmentarzach, ustawy o muzeach oraz ustawy o odpowiedzialności podmiotów zbiorowych za czyny zabronione pod groźbą kary”, *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polkiej*, Warsaw 14.2.2018, URL: <http://ipn.gov.pl/pl/o-ipn/ustawa/24216,Ustawa.html> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

19 Ruchniewicz, K., “Zur Geschichtspolitik der PiS”, in: A. Rostek, *Polska first. Über die polnische Krise*, Bonn 2018, 204.

20 Lang, K.-O., “Auf dem Weg zur 4. Republik. Die Parlamentswahlen in Polen vom 25. September 2005”, 144.

21 Ruchniewicz, K., “Zur Geschichtspolitik der PiS”, 208.

22 Steffen, K., “Ambivalenz des affirmativen Populismus. Gründe und Abgründe der Lustration in Polen”, *Osteuropa*, Vol. 56, Issue 11–12, 2006, 29.

instrumentalisation of history and their state control. In 2015, shortly after the presidential election, Andrzej Duda said: “To pursue history, politics is one of the most important activities of the President”.²³ With this in mind, it is no surprise that historical debates are often led by politicians rather than historians. That is the reason why laws to regulate historical politics, such as the decommunization law or the IPN law have been passed. The IPN, as the leading institution of history, takes a very important part in this field and a decisive role in the governmental control of remembrance. This institution is supported and financed by the government.²⁴ Since the founding of the IPN, the institution has been an instrument of the governing parties to steer the political history, but PiS takes it to another level.

The reasons behind this approach to dealing with the past are diverse and come from Polish history itself. Poland’s most common metaphor for their own identity is the term “Christ among the nations”, which was shaped by the national writer Adam Mickiewicz. Poland’s pain, selflessness and its role as a victim of aggression should also be pointed out.²⁵ Catastrophes like *Katyń*, *Wolyń* and *Smoleńsk*, as well as foreign rule, which is accompanied by the oppression of national identity, strengthen the urge of self-assertion in this country. In fact, it is particularly strong in Poland. The suppression and censorship during the Cold War have led to long suppressed memories returning to the collective memory.²⁶ In addition, the conservative forces in particular did not feel included during the redesign phase after 1989. This complex, which is based on the fact that they were not involved in the reorganisation of Poland, is a scar that goes deep and that ultimately led to the recent political situation.

Decommunization

The current decommunization is based on the law named “On the prohibition of the spread of communism or other totalitarian regimes through

23 Duda, A., in: Saryusz-Wolska – Stach – Stoll, *Verordnete Geschichte*, 447. Translated by the author.

24 Leschnik, H., *Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik in Polen von 1998 bis 2010*, (Studien zur Ostmitteleuropaforschung, Vol. 42), Marburg 2018, 435.

25 Ruchniewicz, K., “Die historische Erinnerung in Polen”, *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 5–6, 2005, 18.

26 Steffen, K., “Ambivalenz des affirmativen Populismus. Gründe und Abgründe der Lustration in Polen”, 222.

the names of buildings, institutions and facilities of public use²⁷. It was published on the 1st of April 2016. The main message of this legal text is:

1. The names of buildings, facilities, and installations of public use, including streets, bridges, and squares, given by public authorities, may not be used for any commemorate persons, organizations, events, or dates that symbolize communism, or other totalitarian regimes, or otherwise propagate these political systems.
2. Names of people, organizations, events, or dates that symbolize the repressive, authoritarian and non-sovereign power system in Poland in the years 1944–1989 are also regarded as names that propagate communism.²⁸

According to the IPN, there were approximately 1,000 street names to be changed prior to this bill.²⁹ Mostly those named after former PZPR members (with 44 the absolute leader: Leon Kurczowski)³⁰ and some more or lesser-known politicians. Furthermore, streets carrying the name of the People’s Army or the 1st of May were also renamed. The most commonly assigned names were: Witold Pilecki, Zbigniew Herbert, and Anna Walentynowicz.³¹ Most of the criticism they earned was for the renaming of streets into Lech Kaczyński Street. It is particularly noticeable that most of the criticism about renaming streets came from bigger cities. It can be assumed that in smaller towns and in the Polish countryside, people tend to be more conservative and vote for PiS. In big cities like Warsaw, Gdańsk or Wrocław, the population in general is more liberal, modern and well educated. Traditionally it is more difficult for

27 Ustawa z dnia 1. kwietnia 2016 r. o zakazie propagowania komunizmu lub innego totalitarnego przez nazwy budowli, obiektów i urządzeń użyteczności publicznej, *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Warsaw 01.04.2016, URL: <http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/DocDetails.xsp?id=WDU20160000744> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

28 Ibidem.

29 Frey, D., “O dekomunizacja rozstrzyga opinia Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej”, *Rzeczpospolita*, January 27, 2018.

30 Ferfecki, W., “Dekomunizacja: Nowi patroni ulic wygodni dla PiS”, *Rzeczpospolita*, June 21, 2018.

31 Frey, D., “O dekomunizacja rozstrzyga opinia Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej”, *Rzeczpospolita*, January 27, 2018;

Pilecki was a Polish officer, who wrote the first report on Auschwitz and the Holocaust. After the war, he was found guilty by the Polish court of espionage. As a result, he was sentenced to death and was eventually rehabilitated after 1989;

Herbert was a writer from Lwów and lived from 1924–1989.

Walentynowicz was a founding member of the Solidarność in the 1980s. She died in the aeroplane disaster in 2010 in Smoleńsk, Russia.

conservative parties to find voter communities there. This phenomenon can be illustrated by the following examples:

Warsaw

Warsaw is the capital and the biggest city in Poland with a population of 1,8 million. The decommunization in Warsaw was more difficult than in other parts of the country. The inhabitants of Warsaw often did not agree with the changes. Therefore, Warsaw was rather reluctant to enforce the decommunization law. Initially, the Voivode of Mazowia demanded 50 changes. However, 44 of them were rejected by the Administrative Court and consequently only 6 names were changed.³² Some places used a trick to avoid the changing of street names: they looked for a new patron who carried the same surname as the one who had to be changed. The overall changes were therefore kept to a minimum as in Poland the first name is rarely used.³³ In most cases renaming also had financial and bureaucratic reasons, as not only did it affect the state, but also the inhabitants of the streets. The PiS politician, Filip Franckiwiak, was pleased about the changes that had taken place but accused those who were involved of undermining the seriousness and meaning of the measures which defined this action.³⁴

One of the most well-known name changes in Warsaw is the renaming of one of the main streets “*Aleja Armii Ludowej*” [People’s Army Avenue] to “*Aleja Lecha Kaczyńskiego*” [Lech Kaczyński Avenue], which angered many citizens. Signatures were collected, petitions were signed, and the city held massive demonstrations against the new name.³⁵ In the end, after a long legal dispute, the first name “*Aleja Armii Ludowej*” remained.

This case shows that, especially in big cities, the population shares a critical attitude towards the changing of street names and stands up against PiS or IPN regulations.³⁶ It is also clear that the changes, for the most part, are left to the discretion of politicians, judges or authorities, as there are no clear and unambiguous provisions in this regard. At this

32 Krupa-Dąbrowska, R., “Dekomunizacja – zmiana nazw ulic pochłania pieniądze i czas mieszkańców”, *Rzeczpospolita*, December 10, 2018.

33 Osowski, J., “Dekomunizacja ulic w Warszawie. Radni zmienili szesc imionnazwiska zoastaly”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 31, 2017.

34 Ibidem.

35 Osowski, J., “Koniec dekomunizacji nazw w Warszawie? Nie ma ulic Duracza i 17. Stycznia, są protesty”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 5, 2019.

36 Ibidem.

point, the different approaches by Aleksandrów Lwowski and Warsaw should be mentioned. In both cities there was a street called “*Ulica 17 Stycznia*” [17 Stycznia Street], a name on the list of those that had to be changed.³⁷ Due to different legal judgements in these cities, in Aleksandrów they had to change the name, while in Warsaw the name could be retained.³⁸ Unlike in smaller towns, bigger cities seem to give more attention to matters like a politically ordered name change. In contrast to this stands the example of Miedzzychód.

Miedzzychód

Miedzzychód is a small town in the western part of Poland with a population of approximately 11,000 citizens. According to the IPN, a street with the name of Słaniszław Langowicz, had to be renamed.³⁹ Langowicz was a local politician who stood up for the community and the city but who also belonged to the *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza, PZPR* [Polish United Workers’ Party]. When it became clear that this street had to change its name, the citizens held a consultation. This consultation took place without protests or complications. Since the local stadium of the football team is located on that street, it was immediately suggested to rename it “*Ulica Sportowa*” [Sports Street].⁴⁰ The law met no resistance, which makes it clear that the electorate of the conservatives are mainly located in the rural areas and small towns, in contrast to Warsaw which possesses a different population structure.

Not only has the renaming of streets been a much-discussed topic, but abolition of monuments that have a connection with the communist system was also addressed. Next are three examples showing how the Polish society handled this matter.

In Poland’s large, important centres the first decommunization wave had already taken place by 1989/90. The best example is the toppling of Feliks Dzierżyński’s monument on *Warsaw’s Plac Bankowy* [Bank Square], former *Plac Feliksa Dzierżyńskiego* [Feliks Dzerzhinsky Square]. This action

37 Vgl. Homepage Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Zmiany nazw ulic, URL: <https://ipn.gov.pl/pl/upamietnianie/dekomunizacja/zmiany-nazw-ulic/37180,Zmiany-nazw-ulic.html> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

38 Osowski, J., “Dekomunizacja ulic w Warszawie. Radni zmienili szesc imionnazwiska zoastaly”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 31, 2017.

39 Sobkowski, K., “Dekomunizacja w Międzzychodzie. Czyli ulice Gwardii Ludowej Kaczarka i Langowicza do zmiany”, *Miedzzychod Nasze Miasto*, July 5, 2017.

40 Ibidem.



Ulica Sportowa and the local football stadium in Międzychód. Photo: Ines Skibinski

can be seen as symbolically dedicated to the decline of communism in Poland.⁴¹ Today, new monuments are constantly being erected to spread a new historical narrative. The most common monuments to be erected are monuments of Lech Kaczyński or symbols commemorating the tragic accident of the presidential plane in Smoleńsk from 2010. Both of those can be seen in Warsaw on the central and famous “*Plac Piłsudskiego*” [Piłsudski Square], which is the main square for historical and political events. The newest memorial site in the city centre of Warsaw is for the *Solidarność* [Solidarity]. The memorial depicts a big *Solidarność* logo crashing into a part of the Berlin Wall. It is not only a symbolic monument that should transfer patriotism and pride in the nation, but also an excellent instrument for competing with Gdańsk as the center of the *Solidarność*, since Gdańsk holds one of the biggest oppositions against the conservative PiS-party.

By contrast in Kraków and smaller cities monuments of John Paul the Second are very common (as shown on the picture from Prochowice in Lower Silesia). These places demonstrate a deep attachment to Catholicism and the pride that there was a Polish Pope who helped to end communism.

41 Jaskułowski, T., “Polen Erfolge und Misserfolge der ersten osteuropäischen Transformation 1989”, 60.



A statue of John Paul the Second in Prochowice. Photos: Ines Skibinski.



New Solidarność monument from 2021 in the center of Warsaw. Photo: Ines Skibinski.

Legnica

Legnica is a medium-sized city in Lower Silesia with around 100,000 residents. Legnica was the largest garrison town of the Red Army and held the highest number of Soviet soldiers in Poland (it was therefore called “*Little Moscow*”). To honour the Soviet soldiers a monument of Polish-Soviet friendship was erected in the centre of the town. This monument had been discussed for a long time, but many inhabitants considered it to be a part of the history of their town and of their own identity. It had become one of the landmarks of the city. When they decided to demolish the monument, the decision was successfully opposed initially although this did not last long:⁴² in 2018, was demolished. During the removal, some people shouted “Down with communism”, while others had tears in their eyes.⁴³ The unique thing about the case of Legnica and its statue is that a grassroots action took place. Activists have erected their own monument at the place where the Polish-Soviet friendship stood, after it was removed. It was a rubber duck attached to a cardboard base. It was called the “*Pomnik czystości narodu*” [Monument to the Purity of the Nation].⁴⁴ An unknown group organized this action and it consisted of young activists who were very critical not only of decommunization, but of the entire government and its current policies.⁴⁵ In this way, they wanted to show their protest and, through the humorous allusion of the duck⁴⁶, also underlined their criticism of Jarosław Kaczyński and his way of ruling Poland from the second row. This was the explanation from the activists:

We (...) referring to the campaign in our homeland to cleanse the Polish nation of filth and to its getting up from its knees, want those knees to be clean. By placing the Duck on a pedestal in a non-accidental place, a place where for years there was a monument that provoked and divided us Poles, we want to introduce a good, clean change. The Monument to the Purity of

42 Ruchniewicz, K., Polskie rozrachunki ze spadkiem po komunizmie, URL: <https://krzysztofruchniewicz.eu/polskie-rozrachunki-ze-spadkiem-po-komunizmie/> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

43 Dobkiewicz, A., “Frontwcy zniknęli z cokołu, W ramach dekomunizacji pozbyli się znanego pomnika”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 24, 2018.

44 Dobkiewicz, A., “W Legnicy stanął pomnik czystości narodu z kaczką na cokole”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 5, 2018.

45 Ibidem.

46 Some political opponents call J. Kaczyński “Kaczor” = Male duck.

the Nation is an appropriate symbol for modern times, when Great Legnica was born out of Little Moscow.⁴⁷

Many monuments that were removed, ended up in depots where they were never seen again. This monument has changed its location and now stands on the military cemetery of the Red Army in Legnica with several other monuments of this kind, including some obelisks and me-



The Monument of Polish-Soviet Friendship at the Red Army cemetery in Legnica.
Photo: Ines Skibinski.

47 Dobkiewicz, A., “W Legnicy stanął pomnik czystosci narodu z kaczką na cokole”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 5, 2018.



The place where the statue of Marshall Rokossowski stood. Photo: Ines Skibinski.



“Monument to the Purity of the Nation” (Pomnik czystości narodu). Photo: Gazeta Wyborcza/Wrocław.

morial stones, and one of Marshall Konstantin Rokossowski.⁴⁸ The city made a lapidary out of these monuments. It is like an exhibition. Each monument and memorial stone has an information board explaining when they were erected, their significance and symbolism. Not everyone agreed with this decision and it was met with some criticism. Resulting from that, the monument to Marshall Rokossowski was stolen from the lapidary by vandals in the summer of 2020.⁴⁹ The statue was found beheaded in a local field.⁵⁰ On the photo below it is visible that the place of his bust is still empty. Since that day the exhibition of this lapidary is closed to visitors. There was also a debate for some time whether a big memorial cemetery should be built in Borne Sulinowo with all of the demolished Monuments.⁵¹ This proposal was discarded as it would be too much logistic effort and would not be financially profitable.

Wołów

Wołów is a small town with nearly 13,000 inhabitants in Lower Silesia. In these regained territories, now in western Poland, exist another type of monument that also should be removed. These are the monuments which commemorate the return of the western towns and territories to Poland after the Second World War. The return of these memorial plaques is an issue that Barbara Świętek, a local councilor from Wołów, is fighting for. In late summer of 2021, I met her for an interview in which she told me about the history of the boards and handed over documents on the subject.

There was a small memorial plaque in Wołów, on which was written: “In memory of the return of the Wołów region to the homelands. On the 20th anniversary, the inhabitants. 26.1.1965”⁵². This memorial stone was removed without public knowledge by the city and the mayor. When inquiries came, it was said that it had been taken away for restoration.

48 Konstantin Rokossowski was a Polish-Soviet Marshall and later the Defense Minister of Poland. He came to Poland after WWII on behalf of Stalin. His task was to help to sovietise Poland, especially in the field of the military.

49 Różanski, M., “W Legnicy skradziono pomnik marszałka Rokossowskiego, który stał na cmentarzu”, *Nasza Legnica*, July 30, 2020.

50 Karko, “Policja złapała drugiego wandalę, który ukradł i zdewastował pomnik Rokossowskiego”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 15, 2020.

51 Madejski, T., “Borne Sulinowo chce radzieckich pomników”, *Radio Szczecin*, April 22, 2016.

52 Translated by Ines Skibinski.

Later, citizens found the broken plaque on a local dump.⁵³ Since then, a bitter dispute over the restoration of this memorial stone has raged between the mayor and the municipal council. The situation was so tense that the Councilor started petitions and even corresponded with the Chancellery of President Andrzej Duda. The response was that before the plaque could be reinstalled, parts of the stone had to be revised and removed.⁵⁴ The biggest point of contention is the date which is engraved on the plaque. It symbolizes the day of the Red Army invasion in Wołów. The eagle is also a part of the dispute because it is shown in the socialist manner without a crown. As long as there is no removal of these details, the demolition is right and even demanded. Unfortunately, the memorial stone is still not in its place and will probably not be put up again. This example shows that it was also done against the will of the population, without consultation and in the hope that no one would notice it. However, many people associate much more with this memorial stone than the invasion of Red Army. It is about family histories and the collective memory of a city that was erased. Many residents cannot accept that they are prescribed how and what they can commemorate.



The plaque before the destruction.
Photo: Nasze sprawy – Powiat Wołowski



The plaque after the destruction.
Photo: Ines Skibinski

⁵³ Interview with Barbara Świętek (City Councilor), 31.8.2021, Wołów.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

The latest development in this case is that the city has agreed to rebuild the board. A local architectural firm has already made sketches of the new stone. Road works are currently taking place on the former place where it was to be reinstalled.⁵⁵ But since the war of aggression started by Russia in Ukraine, a debate has arisen again, initiated by the mayor, about the reinstallation of the stone. The mayor argued that under the circumstances it would be irresponsible to erect this memorial. We will see how the situation develops in the future.⁵⁶

Katowice

Many municipalities and cities rely on exceptions to preserve their monuments as they have now become part of their own history and identity. One important example of this is the memorial for the PZPR functionary Jerzy Ziętek in the Silesian Katowice.⁵⁷ The city feels strongly connected to him thanks to his services during the Silesian uprisings of 1919–21 and is therefore against the removal of the sculpture. Critics of Ziętek condemn him for his role in the brief renaming of Katowice to Stalinoród and also for his high position in the Polish workers' party. As a result, the city found a loophole in the legal text and transferred the sculpture and the ground on which it stands to the nearby Historical Museum in Katowice.⁵⁸ It therefore now has an educational mandate and must no longer be removed. The journalist Andrzej Paterek von Sperling, from the conservative and PiS-related daily *Rzeczpospolita*, is furious in his article that the transfer of the statue's rights to the museum undermines the meaning behind the decommunization law.⁵⁹

Another way to maintain these kind of monuments is to put them under official monument protection. Consequently, there are ways to keep these historical works of art in the street scene. These exceptions are also anchored in the amendment of the decommunization law from 2016:

The provision provides for exceptions for monuments that are not open to the public, that are exhibited for any purpose other than to promote a totalitari-

55 Ibidem.

56 Interview with Barbara Świętek (City Councilor), 18.4.2022, Wołów.

57 Paterek von Sperling, A., Pomniki, które depczą pamięć – Andrzej Paterek von Sperling o ustawie dekomunizacyjnej, *Rzeczpospolita*, August 11, 2018.

58 Ibidem.

59 Ibidem.

an system, as part of an artistic, educational, collector's, scientific or similar character, as well as monuments that are in the monument register are registered. The above exclusions are intended to preserve monuments that do not promote a totalitarian system.⁶⁰



Statue of Jerzy Ziętek in Katowice. Photo: Wiki Commons.

Conclusion

One can see from these examples that there are a large number of actors who oppose the guidelines of the PiS. There is resistance from councillors

⁶⁰ Nowelizacja Ustawy o Dekomunizacji, Uzasadnienie Ustawy, URL: <http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/Druki8ka.nsf/0/DCD65AD302762207C125811C003E21C8/%24File/1538.pdf> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

like Barbara Świątek from Wołów and her commitment restoring the plaque but also institutions like the local museum in Katowice (which found a loophole in the law) or even the citizens and inhabitants of the streets of Warsaw that are meant to be renamed. In Legnica, one sees another special way to show resistance against the current decommunization and the politics of the PiS, in form of a civic movement. They oppose it with humour and sarcasm, showing their rebellion not only against the decommunization law but also against the current policies around history. “The duck of the purity of the nation” also aimed to show that in Poland a group of people exist who think critically and are brave enough to say their opinion out loud. This is in contrast to Miedzychód where an official vote on name-changing was decided by citizens without any opposition. Here it also became clear that in smaller towns, it is much easier to carry out this law than in larger cities. But we see resistance also in small communities like Wołów, where councillors and citizens are fighting against the mayor and trying to rebuild the dissent plaque at its original place. These are only a few examples of selected resistance cases that happened after the decommunization law was published. On the one hand, the existence of these cases is a sign that the law from 2016 was very controversial and not easily enforced in Polish society. On the other hand, we see new monuments that were erected in a patriotic, national, Catholic, and Pole-centred spirit. Monuments, such as the Statue of John Paul the Second, Lech Kaczyński or even the newest Solidarność monument in Warsaw, intend to show that the Solidarność, and therefore only Poland, were responsible for the fall of the Berlin Wall. It is obvious that these monuments and the new narratives go hand in hand.

However, the decommunization does not stop with the abolishing of monuments and changing street names. The civil service, the judiciary, the military, and police will also be decommunized. In the judiciary, judges are replaced at the pleasure of the PiS, with the justification that the legal system is in big parts still as it was during the PRL.⁶¹ It is a paradox that people who were strongly connected to the old system are now working at the decommunized offices. Krystyna Pawłowisch and Stanisław Piotrowicz are the best examples that decommunization does not apply to PiS party members. One can see that the actual idea of decommunization might be only pretended, since these two people are allowed to hold the offices of constitutional judges despite their

61 Nowosielska, P., Pis i pędzająca dekomunacja. “To nie zemsta, ale naprawianie zanieczeń”, *Forsal*, March 11, 2020.

professional past in the PRL. The situation is similar in the military and the police. There were plans to cut the pensions of retired soldiers who have served in the Polish People's Army.⁶² In Warsaw, there have been debates and demands to decommunize the Palace of Culture and Science and the Powaski cemetery but there are currently no concrete plans to do so. In 2022 we are seeing a completely new development on this issue. Putin's war in Ukraine has triggered a new wave of monument demolitions. Since the war of aggression, monuments related to the Red Army have been re-examined and removed at the request of city residents or local authorities who had previously opposed their removal. In many places, vandalism has already occurred.⁶³ Red paint has been poured on these monuments to symbolize Ukrainian blood. These current issues are still being discussed today and we can safely say that this topic is not closed yet.

The Polish historian and political scientist Antoni Dudek raises the following thesis:

Kaczyński continues to fight against [...] post-communist clans, although only marginal remnants remain. He wants to destroy a Poland that has not existed for a long time.⁶⁴

In the eyes of Dudek, the policies of the PiS are deeply anachronistic. There is no doubt that in the last 30 years, the vast majority of people, who were more or less deeply anchored in the communist system of Poland, have already left their working lives behind and are now pensioners. It seems absolutely outdated to assume that after such a long time, people are still ideologically anchored in the previous system. The thought that decommunization is used as a pretext to create a party-loyal elite becomes clearer and clearer. The principle is very reminiscent of the communist system that prevailed in Poland and that the current government actually wants to fight. The ideology is different but the methods with which one acts are almost the same. The problem is that in order to implement this, narratives are being reshaped, existing narratives that

62 Ibidem.

63 Szofucha, S., "Derusyfikacja po polsku: czasem uroczyzny demontaz, czasem czerwona farba", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 20, 2022.

64 Vetter, R., Kaczyński's PiS und die "Dekommunisierung. Entprofessionalisierung durch Personalwechsel in Justiz, Diplomatie und Streitkräften", *Bundeszentrale für Politische Bildung*, 2017, URL: <https://www.bpb.de/248425/analyse-kaczyskis-pis-und-die-dekommunisierung-entprofessionalisierung-durch-personalwechsel-in-justiz-diplomatie-und-streitkraeften> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

do not fit into the scheme are being concealed, denied or questioned. Patriotic and heroic narratives are created, and the critical treatment of Polish history is forbidden. One example is the so called IPN law which criminalises critical statements about Poland's history.⁶⁵ Recent victims of this law and the treatment were Barbara Engelking and Andrzej Grabowski from the book *Dalej jest Noc*, which deals with the Jews in occupied Poland during the Second World War and especially how they were threatened by Poles.⁶⁶

It is obvious that some things were missed in the chaotic early 1990s when coming to terms with the past. However, it is also clear that decommunization by the PiS is being utilised to erase certain narratives (in this case everything that has to do with the time of the PRL) and to build new narratives, as well as taking the opportunity to use party-loyal personnel in all areas of political and social life.

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65 Ustawa o zmianie ustawy o Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – “Komisji Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, ustawy o grobach i cmentarzach, ustawy o muzeach oraz ustawy o odpowiedzialności podmiotów zbiorowych za czyny zabronione pod groźbą kary”, *Dziennik Ustaw Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej*, Warsaw 14.02.2018, URL: <http://ipn.gov.pl/pl/o-ipn/ustawa/24216,Ustawa.html> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

66 Engelking, B. – Grabowski, J., *Dalej jest noc. Losy Żydów w wzbranzach powiatów okupowanej Polski*, Warsaw 2018.

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Interview

Interview with Emilia Barbara Świątek, Wołów, 31.8.2021, author’s archive – Ines Skibinski.

Interview with Emilia Barbara Świątek, Wołów, 18.4.2022, author’s archive – Ines Skibinski

Part 2:
Memory of Nations
and Rethinking History

Militarised Masculinities: Analysis of Hegemonic Azerbaijani Masculinities During the II Nagorno Karabakh War

Ramil Zamanov

Introduction

Of all the post-soviet countries which have undergone tremendous change since the 1990 collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijan is amongst the most severely affected.¹ The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been the defining feature of post-soviet Azerbaijani history and the resultant culture of militarism has deeply affected the character of the country's hegemonic masculinities. This paper therefore analyses the impact of militarisation on masculinity during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and vice versa. Hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities helped to shape the dynamics of the war through discourse on social media channels which in turn fed into the militarisation process. This process is the method by which a society adapts and prepares itself for military conflict and for the different forms of violence to come.² The central role of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the construction of masculinities is also apparent from these online discourses, indicating both reinforcement and interdependence.³

The themes of humiliation, war crimes and martyrdom by Azerbaijani men have been chosen as examples of issues affected by both militarism

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- 1 See: Shahnazarian, N. – Ziemer, U., “Young Soldiers Tales of War in Nagorno-Karabakh”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, Issue 9, 2012; Zamanov, R., “Challenges of Gender Studies in Azerbaijan”, in: *IN:SIGHTS, International Student Journal of Anthropology*, Strasbourg 2022; Waal, T., *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*, New York 2005.
 - 2 See: Adelman, M., “The Military, Militarism, and the Militarisation of Domestic Violence”, *Violence Against Women*, Vol. 9, Issue 9, 2003; Schofield, J., *Militarization and War*. 1st ed. Initiatives in Strategic Studies – Issues and Policies, New York 2007; Klare, M., “Militarism: the issues today”, *Bulletin of Peace Proposals*, Vol. 9, Issue 2, 1978.
 - 3 Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020.

and masculinity. Through these examples it is possible to deconstruct how some Azerbaijani men employed these concepts to force and justify militarisation in social media discourse. Within the first example, Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinity was frequently employed to belittle and humiliate perceived 'alternative' masculinities on social networks, directly influencing the tensions and dynamics of the war. Secondly, some Azerbaijani men justified war crimes (committed by Azerbaijan during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War) on social networks, which helped to trigger the normalisation of violence in Azerbaijani society. Lastly, the issue of martyrdom became a very problematic issue, with many Azerbaijani men justifying the death of soldiers as necessary sacrifices to protect Azerbaijan from the enemy.

This paper builds on the limited (but growing) research on masculinities in Azerbaijan and therefore explores hegemonic masculinity in Azerbaijan with a new perspective on the problems of militarisation, war and violence.⁴ This paper therefore contributes not only to the fields of masculinity and gender but also their relation to the military and conflicts of countries not often discussed in Western academia.

Revisiting Azerbaijan and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Azerbaijan gained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1991 and has grown into a demographically homogenous majority Muslim country located close to the Caspian Sea.⁵

According to a report by the Democracy Index in 2021, Azerbaijan was ranked 141st of 165 independent states, identifying it as an authoritarian regime.⁶ In 2016, Azerbaijan was ranked eleventh in the global militarisation index, which refers to the level of state military spending versus spending other sectors (relative to GDP).⁷ The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the source for most of this spending, is an ongoing territorial and ethnic conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. The dispute has led to

4 Mahmudova, L., *Azeri Masculinities and Making Men in Azerbaijan*, Chicago 2017; Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020.

5 Waal, T., *Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War*, New York 2005, 10–30.

6 *The Economist Intelligence Unit. Democracy Index 2021*, New York 2021, 16.

7 Mutschler, M., "2016 Global Militarisation Index", *Bonn International Center for Conversion*, Bonn 2016.

war, displacement, trauma and continuing animosities.⁸ Nagorno-Karabakh was established as an oblast in 1923 within the Azerbaijan Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR).⁹ Azerbaijan claims that until the end of the 19th Century, Armenians and Christians made up only 10% of the entire population in Karabakh.¹⁰ In 1988, deputies of Armenia in the local Soviet Assembly of Nagorno-Karabakh voted for uniting the Nagorno-Karabakh with Soviet Armenia.¹¹ The First Nagorno Karabakh War lasted from 1988 to 1994 when a ceasefire agreement was signed by both Armenia and Azerbaijan.¹² Despite both sides investing in the following peacebuilding efforts, animosity and conflict remained prevalent in the region.

In June 2020 (during the COVID-19 pandemic) war preparations in both states began once again and, as a consequence, both armies broke the ceasefire. On the 27th of September 2020, the second Nagorno-Karabakh conflict began. Initially, the Azerbaijani army liberated its territories occupied by Armenia¹³ and then continued beyond the occupied territories into the unrecognised Republic of Artsakh.¹⁴ In order to stop the war, Russian president Vladimir Putin invited both sides to sign a declaration of peace and the war ended on 10th November 2020 with victory given to Azerbaijan. The status of Nagorno Karabakh has, however, not been fully resolved with regards to the co-living of Armenians and Azerbaijanis in the territories of Nagorno Karabakh.

The Role of Hegemonic Masculinities in Azerbaijani Society

Before introducing the role of militarisation and war in the lives of Azerbaijani masculinities, it is important to familiarise ourselves with the context of hegemonic masculinities in Azerbaijani society. It is essential to first

8 Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding...*, 15–20.

9 The oblast was a type of administrative division in the former Soviet Union.

10 Ahmadov, E., *Armenia's aggression against Azerbaijan: analysis chronology (1987–2011)*, Baku 2011.

11 Waal, T., *Black Garden...*, 15–20.

12 Ibidem.

13 The Armenian side occupied seven territories of Azerbaijan (which surround the Nagorno-Karabakh region) with protecting Nagorno-Karabakh from the Azerbaijani attacks (Waal 2005); Grzybowski, J. et al., “Fault Lines of a War Foretold”, *Eurozine*, 2020, 1–8.

14 The Republic of Artsakh is the official name of the unrecognised state in Nagorno Karabakh.

understand the context of ‘being a man’ in Azerbaijan.¹⁵ ‘Being a man’ is considered a vital part of the Azerbaijani identity which is also reflected in the superior position of men in society and in the family.¹⁶ Historically, Azerbaijan has been under the authority of several different cultures, including Persian, Arabic, Mongolian, Ottoman and Russian. This diversity of beliefs surrounding hegemonic masculinities have therefore shaped and re-shaped the understanding of what ‘being a man’ is in Azerbaijani culture.

The concept of ‘hegemonic masculinities’ refers to Raewyn Connell’s definition of “a practice which allows for men’s central position in culture, rationalising and justifying the subordination of the common male population and of women, as well as other marginalised masculinities”.¹⁷

Applying the concept to the Azerbaijani context, Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities similarly retain power and justify the subordination of others in society.¹⁸ Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinity does not refer to a fixed group of people since they represent different social classes, ethnicities and regions. This fact suggests that upper-class Bakuvian hegemonic men have more power over family, society, work and even public spaces. Meanwhile, working-class men from impoverished areas of Azerbaijan, such as Barda and Neftchala, hold this authority only over their own families and neighbourhoods. Even though these hegemonic masculinities have differences, one element remains the same for all: power. Under the rules of patriarchal Azerbaijani society, the hegemonic masculine ideal is accepted as superior to women and other marginalised masculinities.¹⁹ Therefore, the term ‘Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinity’ does not mean that all Azerbaijani men in the ‘hegemonic’ sense represent the same ethnic identity and class.

15 In this paper, the concepts of masculinity and man are analysed in biological terms since Azerbaijani society has a strong understanding of the segregation of biological and social roles of men and women.

16 See: Aslanova, A. et al., “Under the Rainbow Flags: LGBTI Rights in The South Caucasus”, *Caucasus Edition–Journal of Conflict Transformation*, 2016; Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020; Militz, E., “Killing the Joy, Feeling the Cruelty: Feminist Geographies of Nationalism in Azerbaijan”, *Environment and Planning C: Politics and Space*, Vol. 38, Issue 7–8, 2020.

17 Connell, R., *Masculinities* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, California 2005.

18 See: Militz, E., *Affective Nationalism. Bodies, Materials and Encounters with the Nation in Azerbaijan*, Zürich 2019; Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020.

19 Selimovic, M. et al., “Equal power – lasting peace: obstacles for women’s participation in peace processes”, *Kvinna till kvinna*, Johannesshov 2012.

The concept of Azerbaijani masculinity has been most recently influenced by colonial experiences with Tsarist Russia (1828–1918) and the Soviet Union (1918–1991).²⁰ Both of these experiences of Russian of colonisation forced Azerbaijan to fully integrate Russian values into society.²¹ The most significant difference between Soviet and post-Soviet Azerbaijan was the Soviet preoccupation with eradicating violence and aggressiveness under a different form of hegemonic masculinity. According to Sherry Hamby, a specific definition of violence involves four behavioural elements: intentional, unwanted, nonessential, and harmful.²² The concept of violence can therefore be understood on multiple levels.²³

In the Soviet context, socialist policies regarding violence had a positive impact on Azerbaijani men; encouraging the eradication of domestic violence and to respect women's choices.²⁴ However, with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, these virtues changed drastically. According to the Azerbaijan State Statistics Committee, 915 women fell victim to domestic violence in 2018 with 42 fatalities.²⁵ It is likely that most domestic violence cases go unreported and therefore these numbers do not reflect the realities of domestic violence in Azerbaijani society. The statistic above is an excellent example of how the concept of the masculine Azerbaijani man became violent and aggressive in the newly built nation-state of Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani researcher Lala Mahmudova also argued that mothers are proud when their young sons become angrier as it is considered to be one of the signs of becoming a man in Azerbaijani culture.²⁶ Thus, raising children in violent environments and with respect for violence contributes to the brutal acts and militarisation within Azerbaijani society which have re-formed masculinity in the post-Soviet society. In the end, the primary characteristic of the hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinity is violence, which contributes to the promotion of militarisation. Violence, as one of the strong identity makers of Azerbaijani masculinities, shapes their understanding of conflict through the promotion of

20 Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding...*, 10–15.

21 Ibidem.

22 Hamby, S., "On Defining Violence, and Why It Matters", *Psychology of Violence*, Vol. 7, Issue 2, 2017, 168.

23 Bufacchi, V., "Two Concepts of Violence", *Political Studies Review*, No. 3, 2005.

24 Chernyak, E., *A Comparative Study of Intimate Partner Violence in Post-Soviet Countries: Evidence from National Surveys*, Windsor 2016.

25 Geybulla, A., "The Killing of Women in Azerbaijan Is a Product of Our Society," *OC Media*, December, 2019.

26 Mahmudova, L., *Azeri Masculinities and Making Men in Azerbaijan*, Chicago 2017.

militarisation. It also means such violence can be used in extreme conflict situations, such as in the Second Nagorno Karabakh War.

Secondly, since Azerbaijan is recognised as an authoritarian regime, it is vital to highlight the role of the president – the ultimate male figure – in society. Azerbaijani society values only presidents who represent the strong hegemonic masculinities needed to control society. Valerie Sperling argues Putin's machoism has similarly become a symbol of Russian society and a representation of Russian masculinities.²⁷ Since Azerbaijan was under the influence of Russian culture for a long time, the figure of the president also came to embody hegemonic masculinity in Azerbaijani society. The Azerbaijani president reflects all the gender expectations of the hegemonic Azerbaijani men: a leader who is decisive, strong and physically fit. Applying this to the bigger picture, Mahmudova states that when it comes to social life and gender relations in Azerbaijan, there is a great degree of segregation between men's and women's activities.²⁸ This conservative mentality restricts women's freedom: all decisions have to be made by the 'head of the family' and this figure is always a man.²⁹

Finally, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has also strengthened the role of hegemonic and strong male figures in Azerbaijani society.³⁰ Since 1991, military service has been an obligatory duty for men in the Republic of Azerbaijan because Azerbaijani men are seen as the saviours of the nation.³¹ Not only was militarisation solely under male control, but the peace process was also conducted only by men who were considered to be the only rational actors capable of conducting such affairs in Azerbaijani culture. A common Azerbaijani idiom reflects this: 'Do not behave so cowardly like a woman! Be a man!'. This fact suggests that Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities distinguish themselves as courageous and superior to others in society. In other words, Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities possess a power that is not given to women or queer communities, creating and reinforcing a specific 'strong male' image. Their ideal of a man is associated with power and decision-making. It also suggests the third important characteristic of Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities which is the male monopoly of power over decision-making. This sole decision-making pow-

27 Sperling, V., *Sex, Politics, and Putin: Political Legitimacy in Russia*, Oxford 2015.

28 Mahmudova, L., *Azeri Masculinities...*

29 Tskhvarishvili, S., *Gender Implications of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Alternative Feminist Perspectives*, Tbilisi 2018.

30 Miltitz, E., *Affective Nationalism. Bodies, Materials and Encounters with the Nation in Azerbaijan*, Zürich 2019.

31 Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020.

er contributes to the promotion of militarisation in two directions: first, decision-makers (hegemonically typical males) can enact extreme conflict solutions without consulting with women, queer people and other groups of society; second, the decision-makers have sole authority to invest and develop militarisation by increasing expenditure on the military budget. As a result, Azerbaijan's 17 percent increase in military spending was the most significant relative increase among countries in Eastern Europe in 2020.³² Therefore, the monopoly over decision-making is one of the factors which brought Azerbaijan to the extreme circumstances of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Methodology

The following findings are based on data collected from social networks including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn. Feminist critical discourse analysis has been utilised along with a fieldwork visit to Baku during May to June in 2021. The social networks mentioned have been specifically chosen because Azerbaijani hegemonic and queer masculinities were actively engaged on these social media channels. Facebook was chosen because of its wider audience and because in the Azerbaijani context, it is considered by users to be a modern version of a 'roundtable discussion'.³³ Activists, teachers, politicians, lawyers, pensioners and other groups are actively engaged on Facebook because people discuss irregularities, challenges and solutions in Azerbaijan. Regarding Twitter, this platform was chosen because of its emerging popularity and power in Azerbaijani society since the outbreak of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.³⁴ The Azerbaijani president and other officials have used Twitter as the official source of information to deliver news directly to the Azerbaijani

32 Lopes da Silva, D. et al., "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2020", *SIPRI Fact Sheet 2020*.

33 Facebook was founded in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg and became popular in the 2010s in Azerbaijan. Facebook is still a powerful social media platform in Azerbaijan because it gives space to share more materials such as opinions, videos, pictures, and even longer notes. Most importantly, all public figures actively debate and criticise systematic problems on Facebook. Therefore, during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Facebook was one of the hot spots of these ongoing debates.

34 Reports from the Global Stats Statistics Center show that as of the 1st of April 2021, Twitter's share in the social media market of Azerbaijan made up 33.6% (20.8% more versus March 2020) (ABC 2021). Twitter was founded in 2006, and until 2015, it was not very popular in Azerbaijan, unlike in the neighbouring countries of Turkey and Russia. However, the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War made this social platform extremely important for the Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities. Firstly, this social platform was a prompt and official way of receiving

population. As a result, Twitter has been recently adopted by thousands of Azerbaijanis who created accounts on Twitter specifically for this purpose and are actively engaging in debates about the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Instagram was not used as a platform for particularly serious discussions however it was used to target the Kardashian family and their ‘pro-Armenian propaganda’.³⁵ Instagram has therefore been included as a single case study in this research. Finally, LinkedIn is a business platform where business-related issues are primarily the topic of discussions.³⁶ However, during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, many senior officers and CEOs managed to bring this topic to the newsfeed of LinkedIn. They aimed to raise awareness about international law and the actions of the Azerbaijani side in order to prove that the Azerbaijani side complied with all the regulations of international law.

In addition to social media analysis, I visited Baku during May to June of 2021, almost seven months after the end of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. I did not conduct any interviews however I visited several vital locations including the city centre, 28 May (a metro station) and the Military Trophy Park. While walking through the city centre and 28 May, hundreds of Azerbaijani flags were observed on the balconies of ordinary citizens, offices, banks, state authorities and restaurants. This behaviour was a sign of continuing nationalist sentiments from the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in Baku. However, this nationalism was not limited to flags: war trophies taken from the Armenian side were prominently displayed in the newly established ‘Military Trophy Park’. The Military Trophy Park was located in a newly built area of Baku which is now considered the new city centre (White City). Tens of tanks, guns, heavy artillery, military cars and other weaponry used during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War were observed on display. This ‘museum’ also

news from the state agencies and the president, and secondly, it allowed hegemonic Azerbaijani men to directly debate with Armenians.

- 35 Instagram was founded in 2010 and became popular in 2012 in Azerbaijan. Unlike Facebook and Twitter, Instagram was not a serious platform to discuss important issues during the war. However, Azerbaijani hegemonically typical men mainly used it, and made others (subordinated women and marginalised masculinities) use it to comment on the pro-Armenian posts of celebrities such as Kim Kardashian and Cardi B.
- 36 Among all these social networks, LinkedIn was the most irrelevant platform to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. LinkedIn was founded in 2002 and became famous around the 2010s in Azerbaijan. Most of the hegemonic Azerbaijani men who used to work at higher positions at international and local corporations used this platform as a professional way of uncovering the ‘Armenian lies’ against Azerbaijan. In other words, LinkedIn was used as a more serious tool to spread information about the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict to an international business community by hegemonic Azerbaijani men.

displayed wax figures of Armenian soldiers designed to produce a more 'authentic' atmosphere. During my visit, a child of approximately seven years old approached the wax figure of an Armenian soldier, spat on it and then ran back to hug his father. Many people were also observed taking selfies and family pictures in a relaxed and friendly manner. These observations offer some examples of how the Azerbaijani nationalism restrengthened after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and how it still influences the daily lives of ordinary citizens. These observations have been integrated into the social media analysis in order to understand the broader social picture.

Regarding the discursive method, feminist theory refers to gender as the primary analytical category, seeking to analyse and challenge social inequality.³⁷ Feminist critical discourse analysis, as a political perspective on gender, is concerned with demystifying the interwoven relations of gender, power, and ideology in the discourse, which applies to the study of various texts.³⁸ In other words, feminist critical discourse analysis allows the researcher to bring different categories (such as gender, ethnicity, class, ableism, sexuality and others) to an analysis by rethinking the given texts.³⁹ For the social media analysis during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the written opinions of Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities have been specifically chosen for analysis. Feminist critical discourse analysis is therefore the most suitable method for analysing their opinions in order to uncover issues of gender, masculinity, ethnicity, and class relations in this particular context. Through the lens of feminist discourse analysis, posts on social networks through which the Azerbaijani men gave meaning to their experiences were examined as well as how they perceived and interpreted these experiences.

In this qualitative research, more than one hundred comments and posts on social networks were analysed. Through feminist critical discourse methodology, eight different types of posts and comments from social media channels were selected. While choosing these accounts, the development of everyday militarist discourse on social media was considered. The chosen examples therefore represent not only the discourses

37 Taylor, V., "Feminist methodology in social movements research", *Qualitative Sociology*, Vol. 21, Issue 4, 1998, 358.

38 Lazar, M., "Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis: Articulating a Feminist Discourse Praxis1", *Critical Discourse Studies*, Vol. 4, Issue 2, 2007.

39 Lebold, M. – MacDonnell, J., "A Critical Feminist Discursive Analysis of Dynamics Shaping Abortion in Canada: Implications for Nursing", *Witness: The Canadian Journal of Critical Nursing Discourse*, Vol. 2, Issue 2, 2020.

of these eight accounts but also the discourses of other Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities on social media. These accounts were selected by using unique keywords with which were found on multiple social media channels. ‘Nagorno Karabakh’, ‘Karabakh is Azerbaijan’, ‘Justice to Karabakh’, ‘Don’t Believe Armenia’, ‘Stop Armenian Lies’, ‘Armenia Supports Terrorism’, and ‘Stop Armenian Occupation’ were the main hashtags used to filter social media posts on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and LinkedIn.⁴⁰ The opinions collected were posted on social networks between the 26th of September and the 10th of November 2020, when the ceasefire agreement was officially signed.⁴¹

The research subjects also represented different social classes, including working class, working-middle class, middle class and upper class. The names of all the research subjects were replaced with their pseudo-names. In terms of citizenship, all the participants were from Azerbaijan and were based in the cities of Baku, Sumgayit, Ganja, Sabirabad, Nakhchivan and other small cities. Diverse age groups were represented in the analysis: young (approximately 18–26), young adult (approximately 26–45) and middle-aged (over 45). There was no data collected regarding the ethnic identities/ethnicities of the research subjects. Conducting interviews with them was impossible since the internet was not accessible in Azerbaijan until November 2020. As an Azerbaijani researcher working in Europe, it was also not safe to communicate directly with commentors as they would expect me to serve in the military, not to stay in Europe.

Social media became extremely important to study during this war. Firstly, the information war between Armenians and Azerbaijanis became as crucial as the war happening on the battlefield. Secondly, staying home and having free time because of the COVID-19 pandemic allowed Azerbaijanis on social networks to actively engage in the information war. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was not possible to conduct this research in person in Azerbaijan. In addition, the Azerbaijani government shut the internet down from the 27th of September until the 12th of November 2020.⁴² Employing cyber ethnography was therefore the most appropriate methodology for this research.

40 As an alternative, I used Nagorny Karabakh and Dağlıq Qarabağ (in Azerbaijani).

41 Grzybowski, J. et al., “Fault Lines of a War Foretold”, *Eurozine*, 2020, 1–8.

42 Even though the internet was inaccessible, many people attempted to access the internet via VPNs. However, the internet connections were not good enough to conduct video or audio calls to interview the research subjects.

Cyber ethnography,⁴³ is an online research method which employs ethnographic methods to examine the communities and cultures presented through computer-mediated social interactions.⁴⁴ Acknowledging the power of the internet to unite people, regardless of place or time, and adopting a virtual form of ethnography is becoming a significant new approach in the social sciences.⁴⁵ Digital ethnography allows researchers to actively engage with research participants in force majeure cases such as the COVID-19 pandemic. According to Robinson and Schulz, it is not clear whether identity performances in e-settings should be thought of as disjointed from offline identities or if they are continuations of offline identities.⁴⁶ Once researchers feel that comprehending the relationship between online and offline identities of members is required, researchers may then request to meet with their informants face to face.⁴⁷ In my research, however, it was impossible practically to meet with the individuals who wrote those comments from September to November 2020.

The position of the researcher also plays an essential role in gender studies.⁴⁸ As a queer young Azerbaijani migrant, the topic of hegemonic masculinities and the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War was chosen by me specifically. This sensitive topic, especially focused on war, loss and conflict is challenging to analyse in detail, especially considering the current nationalism and Armenophobia in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, as an individual and independent researcher, I aimed to cover the issue of hegemonic masculinities and their direct influence on the dynamics of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Mainly, conducting this research aimed to uncover the unknown and unseen cultural elements of patriarchy and nationalism within Azerbaijani society.

Findings

43 Also known as virtual ethnography, digital ethnography and online ethnography.

44 Boellstroff, T. – Nardi, B. – Pearce, C. – Taylor, T. L., *Ethnography and Virtual Worlds: A Handbook of Method*, Princeton 2012.

45 Crichton, S. – Shelley K., “Virtual Ethnography: Interactive Interviewing Online as Method”, *Canadian Journal of Learning and Technology*, Vol. 29, Issue 2, 2003.

46 Robinson, L. – Schulz, L., “New Fieldsites, New Methods: New Ethnographic Opportunities”, in: S. N. Hesse-Biber (ed.), *The Handbook of Emergent Technologies in Social Research*, Oxford 2011.

47 Hine, C., *Virtual Ethnography*, London 2000.

48 Gunaratnam, Y., *Researching Race and Ethnicity Methods, Knowledge and Power*, London 2003.

The findings I describe here are the most common issues discussed by socially dominant Azerbaijani men on social networks during the war. These findings are therefore the sum of socially expected behaviours, expectations and motivations as articulated through the hegemonic perspective which in turn is accepted and taken for granted by wider society. They demonstrate the different opinions present within hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities, which then shape societal conventions in Azerbaijan.

The Real Man vs the Betrayer: Hegemonic Azerbaijani Masculinities Against Belittled Armenian Masculinities

An old Turkic proverb states ‘At, avrat, silah ödünç verilmez’, which can be translated to: ‘Horse, wife and weapon is not borrowed’⁴⁹. Hegemonic Azerbaijani men commonly used this proverb, especially during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. The proverb reiterates and reinforces the value of a horse/land, a woman/wife and a weapon/military. In other words, these elements should be kept under the control of men, and thus, they need to protect these valuables from ‘the enemy’.

“Azerbaijani men will never lose the war because we are real men! We have never betrayed our friends, neighbours, wife and land! With the support of all the real men – our soldiers –, we will liberate our lands from the treacherous Armenian men! Armenians are hopeless, and they even do not have normal military supplies to fight against us. They should stop this meaningless resistance!” – Zeynal, a middle-aged man.

This excerpt from Facebook, which was written on the 2nd of October 2020 in Azerbaijani on the page of BBC News Azerbaijani. The comment clearly explains the position of the commenter and demonstrates his understanding of what constitutes ‘real Azerbaijani men’. The discussion of the war on social media was the only space where groups of hegemonic Azerbaijani and Armenian men could debate due to the fact that most of these men have never talked to an Armenian or Azerbaijani in real life. A real man is considered to be loyal to his friends, neighbours, and wife; therefore, all Azerbaijani soldiers are ‘real men’.

49 Cosan, L. – Karabag, I., “The Relationship Between Proverbs and Language Economy in the Light of German and Turkish Proverbs”, *The Journal of Social Sciences Institute of Ataturk University*, Vol. 19, Issue 2, 2015, 263.

However, Armenian men are considered to be ‘treacherous’ and not ‘real men’, at least according to Zeynal. In Zeynal’s opinion, Armenian masculinity has a ‘treacherous’ character compared to Azerbaijani masculinity which he then uses to justify the militarisation of Azerbaijan. Zeynal’s comment was an embodiment of Armenophobic sentiments. Through social media, men like Zeynal popularised strong messages of hatred towards Armenia which contributed to the war in two ways. First, it re-shaped the mainstream thinking of Azerbaijani society against Armenian men (in a humiliating way); and second, such standpoints justified the war by fighting against the ‘inferiority’ of Armenian masculinity. Zeynal’s opinion was a common narrative amongst hundreds of social media discourses which aimed for the extreme humiliation of Armenian masculinity during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Such online bullying of Azerbaijani men therefore indirectly contributed to the escalation of the war in a number of ways.

Another example was a comment on the Instagram post of Kim Kardashian,⁵⁰ which was posted in Azerbaijani by a young male student, Elshan: “Armenian men only know how to produce a porn star... Do not mess up with our men! Our army will liberate Karabakh!” This comment



Figure 1: Humiliation of the Armenian flag tied to the trunk of a random car in the city centre of Baku. Photo: the author

50 Kim Kardashian is a famous American celebrity with Armenian heritage. In Azerbaijan, Kardashian is considered, on the societal level, to be a pornographic celebrity.

also associated Armenian men with the notion that they are ‘betrayers of their women’. In Caucasian societies, women are often expected to obey male authority; therefore, when a woman becomes more independent, the man is blamed for losing his authority over that woman.⁵¹ As Mahmudova argued, Azerbaijani men develop their identities using binary thinking: ‘us’ – Azerbaijanis and ‘them’ – Armenians.⁵² In the context of this comment, Elshan distinguished Azerbaijani masculinities as morally superior in comparison to the nation of Kim Kardashian. Azerbaijani Society re-produces the idea that if women are celebrities like Kardashian, they must be perverted. Hence, Elshan assumed that Armenian masculinities did not know how to protect their lands. To put it differently, Elshan supported militarisation because he believed Azerbaijani soldiers would win this war because Armenian men did not have the capacity to protect their lands.

Narratives (and ways of thinking) like Elshan’s greatly reinforced the militarised mood of Azerbaijani hegemonic men, and through social media, the ‘victorious’ identity was established to further promote militarisation during the war. On social media, militaristic ideas and posts like Elshan’s aimed to belittle the potency of Armenian masculinity and to reunite Azerbaijani men around the idea of superiority. As Connell discussed regarding hegemonic masculinities, a particular group of men is controlling society through gender processes and such societies are being reproduced themselves by that power.⁵³

In the Azerbaijani context, men such as Elshan and Zeynal, were encouraged to humiliate Armenian men and their position in the war through presidential speeches. The Azerbaijani president, Ilham Aliyev, used statements to humiliate Armenian men and the prime minister of Armenia: “We chased Armenians from Karabakh like chasing a dog”; “What now, Pashinyan? The status of Nagorno-Karabakh became damned!” and “Pashinyan will cowardly sign this document in a basement far from the cameras!”⁵⁴ The strongman image of Ilham Aliyev also reinforced the notion of militarisation and humiliation against Armenian masculinity. Doing so increased his ‘manly’ reputation within Azerbaijani society and gained him massive support from the hegemonic and non-hegemonic Azerbaijani male population. During my fieldwork in May–June 2021, I found pictures of Aliyev on the windows and doors of

51 Shahnazarian, N. – Ziemer, U., “Young Soldiers Tales of War in Nagorno- Karabakh”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, Issue 9, 2012.

52 Mahmudova, L., *Azeri Masculinities and Making Men in Azerbaijan*, Chicago 2017, 53.

53 Connell, R., *Masculinities* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, California 2005.

54 Nikol Pashinyan has been the Prime Minister of Armenia since 2018.

all state buildings, restaurants, and big shopping malls in Baku. Under Connell's theory, these activities would represent the "masculinity politics" of the system in Azerbaijan.⁵⁵ A 'strongman figure' forces his ideals and aims on society and consequently, other members of this hegemonic male club start to support his militaristic policies. Through such politics, Azerbaijani society developed binary thinking, regarding Azerbaijani men as 'real men' and Armenian men as 'traitors'. Therefore, the humiliation of Armenian masculinity in the hundreds of social media discourses I examined directly contributed to the promotion of militarisation.

Analysing these two accounts together, the commenters' support towards militarisation celebrates the Azerbaijani soldier's manhood and devalues the Armenian militarisation. Azerbaijani male identity constructs itself by belittling the Armenian male identity and this becomes the first commonly problematic issue.⁵⁶ Zeynal and Elshan (and the discourses of Azerbaijani hegemonic men on social media) believe that Armenia is poor and helpless, and therefore it cannot resist Azerbaijan. In other words, Azerbaijani men were seen as strategically and morally superior while Armenian men were belittled and made vulnerable in these accounts. This can be associated with the historical background of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.⁵⁷ Since Azerbaijani men lost these territories in the 1990s, they became 'losers' of the First Nagorno-Karabakh War.⁵⁸ In response, the propaganda of the superiority of Azerbaijani men was spread on an official level in Azerbaijan during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. However, during the war the Armenian military bombed the second Azerbaijani city of Ganja and as well as other cities.⁵⁹ This fact contradicts the powerful and invincible image of Azerbaijani men and the weakness of Armenian men and their military which was portrayed on Azerbaijani social media channels. It also suggests that such representations promoted the idea of militarisation and justified the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War as the only solution to end this conflict.

55 Connell, R., *Masculinities* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, California 2005.

56 See: Akhundov, J., "Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Azerbaijan: An Analytic Review", *Caucasus Edition—Journal of Conflict Transformation*, 2017; Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020.

57 See: Jumayeva, L., "Discourses of War and Peace within the Context of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Case of Azerbaijan", *Caucasus Edition—Journal of Conflict Transformation*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2018; Miltz, E., *Affective Nationalism. Bodies, Materials and Encounters with the Nation in Azerbaijan*, Zürich 2019.

58 Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding...*

59 "Nagorno-Karabakh: Azerbaijan Says 12 Civilians Killed by Shelling in Ganja", *The Guardian*, October, 2020.

This finding implies that social media discourses had a significant role in promoting the humiliation of Armenian men in order to motivate Azerbaijani men during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Directly and indirectly, these discourses on social media contributed to a better organisation and unification of Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinity regarding the promotion of militarisation, which was never an option during the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. The humiliation of Armenian masculinity was one of the strongest tools used by hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinity.

“Karabakh is Azerbaijan!”

#KarabakhisAzerbaijan was the most commonly used hashtag on social networks during the war. Different members of Azerbaijani society used this hashtag advocated for the legal recognition of Nagorno-Karabakh and the seven surrounding territories as belonging to Azerbaijan. During my fieldwork in May 2021, in many shops and restaurants hung signs that read “Karabakh is Azerbaijan!”; this phrase was even printed on many of their receipts.

However, the scope of this hashtag went beyond its initial aim into supporting war crimes. According to Alexander Schwarz, a war crime is any action or omission committed in an armed conflict or war that establishes a severe violation of the laws and customs of international humanitarian law and has been criminalised by international treaty or regular law.⁶⁰ A broader methodology describes war crimes as all acts creating a violation of the laws or customs of war, regardless of whether the conduct is criminal.⁶¹ In this context, many hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities directly or indirectly buttressed these crimes committed in the II Nagorno-Karabakh War. For instance, Alim wrote several comments in Azerbaijani on Twitter by using the hashtag #KarabakhisAzerbaijan.

“We should kill all of their men to protect our future! Otherwise, this dirty blood will attack us again! Azerbaijani army should destroy each and every Armenian soldier. #KarabakhisAzerbaijan’ AND We have a well-organised military to attack and destroy those Armenian bandits! #KarabakhisAzerbaijan” Alim, middle-aged man.

60 Schwarz, A., “War Crimes”, in: *Max Planck Encyclopaedia of Public International Law*, Oxford 2014, 2.
61 Ibidem.



Figure 2: The picture from the Trophies Park. “Karabakh is Azerbaijan”. The Armenian car plates behind this motto were brought from Karabakh to demonstrate the victory of Azerbaijani soldiers. Photo: the author

Alim’s comments demonstrate how civic protest on the social network became a tool to express support for war crimes. In this context, Armenian men are seen as a potential danger to the very existence of Azerbaijanis, even in the future. Thus, Alim expressed his sympathy towards such war crimes.⁶² This opinion also suggests Azerbaijani men became supporters of war crimes through discourse on social networks and their involvement also encouraged the soldiers who committed the war crimes. As Connell argued, hegemonic masculinities encourage other individuals to willingly participate in their extreme projects, containing extreme violence.⁶³ In this context, by using ‘rational’ arguments, Alim encouraged Azerbaijanis to protect Azerbaijanis and, thus, to kill Armenian men. Consequently, on social networks, Azerbaijanis accepted war crimes as a normal process of war. While analysing the historical background of this conflict, it is possible to conclude that hegemonic Azerbaijani men normalised the war crimes in order to take revenge on Armenians for the past (the First Nagorno-Karabakh War).⁶⁴ Such an approach normalised war crime and worsened opinions about Armenians in Azerbaijani society. Social media discourse helped to promote many narratives similar to Alim’s in order to normalise war crimes and there-

62 Amnesty International analysed 22 videos and concluded that both sides committed war crimes during the war (Amnesty International, 2020).

63 Connell, R., *Masculinities* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, California 2005.

64 See: Jumayeva, L., “Discourses of War and Peace within the Context of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Case of Azerbaijan”, *Caucasus Edition – Journal of Conflict Transformation*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2018; Akhundov, J., “Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Azerbaijan: An Analytic Review”, *Caucasus Edition – Journal of Conflict Transformation*, 2017; Abilov, S. – Isayev, I., “The Consequences of the Nagorno-Karabakh War for Azerbaijan and the Undeniable Reality of Khojaly Massacre: A View from Azerbaijan”, *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 45, 2016.

fore kill more Armenian soldiers. Such discourses on online platforms were used as tools to strengthen and promote the idea of war crimes as a normalised concept amongst men such as Alim. In other words, these discourses contributed to the direct and prompt endorsement of the militarist actions of Azerbaijani soldiers with the support of Azerbaijani hegemonic men. Another example that normalised war crimes was written in Azerbaijani by Rashad on LinkedIn.⁶⁵

“Everyone became humanist now, but we cannot forget what Armenians have done to us in the past! They killed our women, elderly, children and soldiers in the 1990s. We should kill these Armenians before they kill us! This is logical, and you cannot know more than our military! People who are against this war have no idea about the governance! #KarabakhisAzerbaijan.” – Rashad, a middle-aged man (senior manager at a clothing brand).

Rashad’s comments bring us back to Connell’s concept of “rationalised hegemonic masculinity”.⁶⁶ Hegemonic men consider themselves rationally superior to women, children, queers or any other group who disagrees with them. It also implies how these masculinities oppress others’ ideals and terrorise these ‘others’.⁶⁷ In this context, Rashad clearly states that people against the war or killing Armenians are ‘irrational’. He reasons that an Azerbaijani should not forget the past, and hence, Azerbaijanis should support the killing of Armenians because of their historical conflicts. This approach suggests that hegemonic Azerbaijani men perceive the concept of war and killing as the rational solution to this conflict.⁶⁸ Peace is not an option for hegemonic Azerbaijani men because they believe that violence is always the immediate solution. Therefore, social media discourse becomes the primary tool for men like Rashad and Alim to promote militarisation by justifying the war crimes and historical challenges that Azerbaijanis have faced. This finding implies that social media platforms have a direct impact on the everyday lives of humans in the 21st century.⁶⁹ Therefore, the Azerbaijani hegemony have employed

65 Even though LinkedIn is a platform to promote businesses and develop new partnerships (Kohljenovic, 2019), Azerbaijani and Armenian hegemonic masculinities broke the ethics of LinkedIn by bringing the non-business-related political conflict to the newsfeed of LinkedIn.

66 Connell, R., *Masculinities* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, California 2005.

67 Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020, 20.

68 Ibidem.

69 See: Yaron, A. – Avidar, R., “Information, Interactivity, and Social Media”, *Atlantic Journal of Communication*, Vol. 23, Issue 1, 2015; Hea, A., “Social Media in Technical Communication”, *Technical Communication Quarterly*, Vol. 23, Issue 1, 2014.

such platforms to better organise and endorse the ideas of war crimes and historical injustices in order to motivate Azerbaijani soldiers fighting on the frontlines. Consequently, hegemonic men like Rashad and Alim justify and promote the concept of war among different groups of Azerbaijanis as the ‘rational’ solution through the militaristic discourse on social media. Since hegemonic masculinities are the sole decision-makers of the nation, other groups and sub-groups are forced to obey their decisions, as well. Thus, militaristic discourse on social media played a significant role as the ‘messenger’ of these expressions of masculinity.

Considering these two accounts together, Alim and Rashad both justified militarisation and promoted war as the only rational solution to conflict. Through such encouragement, war crimes become reasonable violent acts within Azerbaijani society, and society then becomes militarised through social networks. Similar to Mahmudova’s analysis, it is therefore argued that Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities force their ideals on to Azerbaijani society, and therefore, such militarised discourses become vital in Azerbaijan. Accordingly, the idea of militarisation becomes an essential element of Azerbaijani society. Attitudes towards war crimes and the justification of violence suggests that discourses on social media can be used as a tool to manipulate the masses in order to construct the realities supported by hegemonic male perspectives. In the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, all events of the war were announced by the state officials, including the Azerbaijani president, through social media platforms.⁷⁰ Thus, by endorsing war crimes and justifying violence on social media, hegemonic Azerbaijani men had a bigger group of targets to manipulate, including women and LGBTQI+ people from Azerbaijan and also within the international community. Overall, this finding contributes to the literature in two ways: first, this demonstrates the power of social media discourse in the normalisation of war crimes by hegemonic Azerbaijani men and second, it explains how the Azerbaijani historical agenda is enacted through social media by justifying the emergence of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

“2783: Not Dead, but Martyrs!”

In the Azerbaijani context, it is believed that a soldier’s death cannot be equal to an ordinary death, and thus a soldier who dies protecting the

70 Pearce, K., “Analysis | While Armenia and Azerbaijan Fought over Nagorno-Karabakh, Their Citizens Battled on Social Media”, *Washington Post*, 2020.

lands of Azerbaijan becomes the holy *şahid* – “martyr”.⁷¹ According to Reuven Firestone, martyrdom is an act that is both political and religious and, like organised violence, martyrdom can be a tool for promoting change.⁷² In Azerbaijan, the concept of martyrdom became significant after the First Nagorno-Karabakh War. Even though the Azerbaijani government kept the numbers secret until December, it was finally announced that 2,783 soldiers became ‘martyrs’.

With that announcement, Azerbaijani hegemonic masculinities became more patriotic and defensive on the social networks. They started to promote this concept of martyrdom as a respected and holy process for Azerbaijani soldiers. Since the families of some martyrs criticised the war and the loss of their sons, these narratives became even more defensive. As noted during fieldwork in the Old Town of Baku, many families of ‘martyrs’ had put a ‘relief’ on their doors dedicated to their son to remember and appreciate his courage and martyrdom. Although they had lost their sons, these martyr families aimed to keep their son’s memory inside their houses. In the example of Najaf, I discovered militaristic and ‘patriotic’ attacks on these ‘complaining’ families of martyrs. Najaf wrote this comment in Azerbaijani on Facebook.

“Martyrs never die; they only become holy. You should be happy your sons became holy. I always wanted to become a martyr, but it never happened... Our state will take care of you, and you did not lose your son! You gave your son to your country to protect these lands! Your son died like a real Azerbaijani man!” – Najaf, a middle-aged Azerbaijani man.

In Najaf’s understanding, all men of Azerbaijan should protect these lands as ‘true sons’ of this country. Thus, war, militarisation, and the killing of Armenians is justified to protect Azerbaijan even though Azerbaijani men will be sacrificed. As Connell argued, hegemonic masculinities develop the notions of ‘need’, ‘protection’ and ‘guns’ to keep the whole society under the myth of danger.⁷³ Hegemonic masculinities develop further this myth to strengthen their power and authority in society. Najaf’s comment

71 See: Abilov, S. – Isayev, I., “The Consequences of the Nagorno–Karabakh War for Azerbaijan and the Undeniable Reality of Khojaly Massacre: A View from Azerbaijan”, *Polish Political Science Yearbook* 45, 2016; Miltz, E., *Affective Nationalism. Bodies, Materials and Encounters with the Nation in Azerbaijan*, Zürich 2019.

72 Firestone, R., “Martyrdom in Islam”, in: R. M. Fields, *Martyrdom: The Psychology, Theology, and Politics of Self-sacrifice*, London 2004, 137.

73 Connell, R., *Masculinities* (2nd ed.), Berkeley, California: University of California Press, 2005.

implies how Azerbaijani masculinities need to protect these lands and other members of society from danger. In this context, the danger is Armenia and Armenian men. To annihilate this danger, sacrificing Azerbaijani men is inevitable. Martyrdom became holy in response to the danger posed by Armenian men.⁷⁴ Therefore, hegemonic Azerbaijani men empowered such nationalist discourses together with the concept of martyrdom to maintain their power and sole decision-making authority in Azerbaijan. By offering the image of a national hero, the discourses of hegemonic Azerbaijani men ignored the traumas of Azerbaijani families who had lost their sons. Instead, their discourses on social media actively promoted the death of more Armenian soldiers because Azerbaijani soldiers were also killed in this process. Discourses like Najaf's, which promoted martyrdom as a holy sacrifice, also contributed to spreading such ideas on social media. Following Najaf's comment, Aydin's comment on Twitter also contributed to this discourse

“Armenian terrorists will never be holy for killing our martyrs. Our martyrs fought to liberate our lands like true sons of Azerbaijan, but Armenians fought to kill us! Even using the word ‘died’ is too much for those terrorists.” – Aydin, a young Azerbaijani man.

Aydin does not consider Armenian martyrs as martyrs; he believes that they are “terrorists”. Such approaches are derived from nationalist propaganda which was spread by the government officials, hegemonic masculinity and propagandist media outlets in Azerbaijan.⁷⁵ In other words, Armenian men were portrayed as terrorists because they did not obey the rules of international law. As Mahmudova argued, TV channels endorse patriotism through patriotic programs from military service areas and air exceptional military-patriotic news programs and films every Remembrance Day for martyrs.⁷⁶ Therefore, Armenian men are portrayed as enemies and for that reason cannot become martyrs because they attack the innocent Azerbaijan. Thus, Armenian men are seen not only as enemies but also as “kafir” – “infidels” because they fight against ‘innocent’ hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities. The characteristics of hegemonic Azerbaijani men allow us to understand why they do not

74 Mahmudova, L., *Azeri Masculinities and Making Men in Azerbaijan*, Chicago 2017.

75 Akhundov, J., “Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Azerbaijan: An Analytic Review”, *Caucasus Edition – Journal of Conflict Transformation*, 2017.

76 See: Mahmudova, L., *Azeri Masculinities and Making Men in Azerbaijan*, Chicago 2017; Miltz, E., *Affective Nationalism. Bodies, Materials and Encounters with the Nation in Azerbaijan*, Zürich 2019.

accept disobedience. As mentioned, Azerbaijani men belittle Armenian men and therefore expect obedience from them. Discourse such as Aydin's justified and promoted the idea that Armenian soldiers deserve to be killed. This concept is also connected to the previous argument related to the justification of war crimes by hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities. It suggests that discourses on social media were interconnected. As a consequence, the discourses claimed that Armenian soldiers were not martyrs, they deserve to be dead, which in turn triggered and normalised the concept of war crimes among hegemonic men.



Figure 3: Helmets of dead Armenian soldiers at the Trophy Park. Photo: the author

To summarise these two accounts, martyrdom is the highest and holiest level in Azerbaijan's 'manly' discourse, and therefore, Aydin, Najaf and other discourses endorsed it on social media. By promoting such a belief, they encouraged both the nationalist and religious discourse towards normalising the concept of martyrdom in Azerbaijani society. This belief was produced through the agenda of hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinity, and thus it was believed to be the only solution in this war.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, these masculinities refused to call Armenian men martyrs instead considering them to be terrorists. In their understanding, only Azerbaijani soldiers can be considered innocent since Armenians were the conquerors of Nagorno-Karabakh.

⁷⁷ Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020.

It has therefore been demonstrated that there exists a conceptual framework of martyrdom within militarisation and the escalation of war. Hegemonic Azerbaijani men's discourses on social media platforms therefore developed the notions of martyrdom in two specific directions. First, those discourses endorsed the reductionist standpoint by considering only Azerbaijani soldiers as the real martyrs, meaning hegemonic Azerbaijani men did not accept Armenian martyrs as 'deserving ones'. Second, they embraced and promoted the idea of a holy sacrifice in order to kill more Armenian soldiers by purposefully sacrificing more Azerbaijani soldiers. These findings suggest that the concept and discourses of martyrdom were firmly stipulated by hegemonic men on social media platforms, which directly helped the militarisation and escalation of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War.

Conclusion

Drawing upon the growing research on masculinity studies, this paper explores the responses of hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities to the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War on social media channels. These attempts by masculinities to enhance Azerbaijani nationalism and support militarisation on social media were examined by focusing on their various discourses. Their active involvement led them to transform experienced and virtual expressions of militarisation and nationalism. Socially expected behaviours taken for granted by the hegemonic perceptions in Azerbaijani society have here been described and constitute essential elements of the anthropological and retrospective framework of this research.

This paper directly contributes to the current theoretical approaches of and on Azerbaijani masculinities. It focuses on hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities by analysing nationalistic and militaristic discourses on social media, which is otherwise an unstudied medium by local and international scholars. Three anthropologically noteworthy topics have been noted within this process: belittling Armenian masculinity, supporting war crimes, and justifying martyrdom as a holy act. The belittlement of Armenian masculinities by Azerbaijani men became an essential element of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War. Azerbaijani hegemonic men did not stop such humiliations, which were spread all over social media channels, until the end of the war. Thus, hegemonic men became the 'generals' of the war on social media and whom many

other groups of Azerbaijani society also supported.⁷⁸ These findings demonstrate the position of hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities and the discourses surrounding them during the war. In addition, hegemonic Azerbaijani men supported war crimes and carried on their propaganda for spreading these war crimes as a common war situation on social media channels. Such propaganda re-shaped understandings of war crimes causing even non-hegemonic men and women to become supporters of acts. In other words, hegemonic Azerbaijani masculinities highly influenced others' opinions about war crimes by using their power and sole decision-making authority.⁷⁹ This helps to understand how hegemonic men produced hegemonic perceptions in online Azerbaijani society and how it influenced societal convention. Lastly, hegemonic Azerbaijani men justified martyrdom as a holy act by ignoring the pains and traumas of Azerbaijani people who had lost their children, husbands and brothers in the war. In contrast, Azerbaijani men refused to acknowledge the 'martyrdom' of Armenian soldiers because they labelled Armenian soldiers as terrorists. This final finding uncovers two sub-issues: the power authority of hegemonic men in the Azerbaijani society, which directly shapes the concept of martyrdom, and how Azerbaijani men apply double standards to Armenian soldiers who became martyrs in Armenian society.

Still, in the Azerbaijani context and beyond, there is a need for more research on emerging militarised masculinities. Especially of interest are hegemonic men-only groups and how they understand and produce social knowledge and hegemonic perceptions within historically and socially situated concepts of gender, militarisation, masculinity, nationalism and moralities. I argue that anthropological research on current practices of masculinities must focus on how these are individually and collectively experienced, exchanged, and confronted in the context of current militarised masculinities.

78 See: Akhundov, J., "Rise of Militaristic Sentiment and Patriotic Discourses in Azerbaijan: An Analytic Review", *Caucasus Edition—Journal of Conflict Transformation*, 2017; Mahmudova, L., *Azeri Masculinities and Making Men in Azerbaijan*, Chicago 2017; Zamanov, R., *Gender, Ethnicity and Peacebuilding in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict*, Prague 2020.

79 See: Tskhvariashvili, S., *Gender Implications of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Alternative Feminist Perspectives*, Tbilisi 2018; Jumayeva, L., "Discourses of War and Peace within the Context of the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: The Case of Azerbaijan", *Caucasus Edition—Journal of Conflict Transformation*, Vol. 3, Issue 2, 2018; Militz, E., *Affective Nationalism. Bodies, Materials and Encounters with the Nation in Azerbaijan*, Zürich 2019.

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The Experiences of Female Ethnic Prisoners in Soviet Camps: Between Collective Memory and the Historiographical Debate

Iuliia Iashchenko

Introduction

The historical discourse about the wars of the 20th Century still does not include the voices of the women and children who were prisoners of concentration camps. This not only includes those who were imprisoned in Nazi Germany but also those who were prisoners of the Soviet Gulag camps. The presence of such voids in modern historiography supports continuing gender discrimination but it also silences the voices of people who faced the horrors of war away from the frontline. The collective experience of World War II is therefore exclusively described from the perspective or narrative of an armed man.

When considering the problems within the narrative dynamics of mass repression, it is important to stress that the diversity in the experiences of victims of political and ethnic persecution in the Soviet Union was wide enough that it is impossible to fully assess the damage done to individuals, their families as well as ethnic groups without a thorough examination of archival documents and learning the victims' stories. Therefore, it is essential to work with victims and their memories. Their evidence allows us to speak not just about the 'repressed' but also about the men, women and children in the camps thereby giving a human face to the blurred interpretation. It should also be mentioned that relatively little attention has been paid to the history of ethnic cleansing in the USSR because of classified archives and a lack of information. Thus, for a long, time research priority was given to large-scale events rather than local tragedies as these local events affected fewer people.¹

1 Ricoeur, P., *Memory, History, Forgetting*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago 2004, 68–79.

In this semantic space a research question arises: how does the strategy of silence change the narrative of women's experiences in the context of political repression, ethnic cleansing and war?

Sources for these events are still (or rather once again) unavailable. As a new far-right historical policy comes into its own, historical studies have been marked by a whole complex of laws focused on classifying archives and representing a new image of the Soviet past. Historical politics influences not only the formation of national historical discourse, but also creates quite tangible boundaries of what is permissible for professional historians to investigate. In other words, the historical laws that exist in Russia today censor several problems, among which are the problems of ethnic cleansing in the Soviet Union.

Investigations of such historical plots are possible only when referring to oral sources and sources of a personal origin. This is because available archival documents do not have in-depth information about these events and local sources represent a fundamentally new picture of the Soviet past.² This research is based on oral and written sources received from victims and witnesses of political repression, as well as from representatives of different generations whose family history includes the experience of soviet repression. The research focuses on the informative potential of the interview since such details of the everyday life of deportation cannot be found anywhere else.

In total, over 250 interviews were conducted. Some oral sources were collected during field research between 2018 and 2020 in the territory of the Perm region (Russia) and other parts were taken from the archives of the International Organization Memorial (Perm). This article is based on an analysis of interviews which could underline certain important aspect of the female prisoners' discussions of their experiences. The sample was predominantly drawn from the narratives of repressed Russian Germans, Baltic peoples and Ukrainians. The predominance of German and Baltic peoples' representatives is primarily due to the geography of the interviews. The Ural region (the Molotov region, later the Perm region) was home to predominantly ethnically German prison camps and deportation camps for people from the Baltics. In addition, special settlements for the labour army (one example of a variety of camp regimes in the USSR) were initiated in the Urals. The labour army was predominantly made up of ethnic prisoners. Thus, the sample of interviews was

2 Iashchenko, I., "Discourse in memory of the deportation of the Volga Germans to the USSR in the 1940s in the context of modern museum technologies", *Materials of the International Youth Scientific Forum "LOMONOSOV-2019"*, Moscow 2019, 1–3.

conditioned by the geography of the ethnographic expeditions. Among the Baltic peoples and German peoples, a large percentage were sent to the Urals, therefore the results of the analysis can be extrapolated to the general experience of ethnic minorities in the USSR.

Historiographical Debates and Transitional Justice

When starting a conversation about the Soviet system of concentration camps and the politics of memory in Russia, one should first clarify the origins of the localisation and oblivious attitudes towards the tragedy of the Volga Germans and Russian Germans. This is especially important within the context of the tradition of talking about political repression in the territory of the USSR. However, within the framework of Russia's official commemorative policy, silence becomes a frequent tactic in relation to ethnic cleansing.³

In this sense, the current policy on memory looks like an attempt to unite national minorities but also not to talk about the past. On the one hand, there is a desire to differentiate between the national socialist and the national communist regimes from the point of view of "otherness", undoubtedly demonstrating political reverence for the totalitarian regime of the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the search for compromises in resolving the problems of misunderstanding between national minorities led to amendments to the Strategy of State Ethnic Policy. Now the priority area is "preserving the ethno-cultural and linguistic diversity of the Russian Federation".⁴ This creates a certain amount of 'indulgence' for removing those historical plots which could split modern Russian society at a time when the government is trying to construct a common identity for Russians.⁵ Those factors, when taken together, lead to the creation of a monolithic single image of the past which should unite everyone around the myth of the Great Victory. With this approach, all

3 Iashchenko, I., "Hostages of the past. Russia's historical policy as a new round of ethnic repression in the post-Soviet space (2010–2020s)", *Transitional Justice in Central and Eastern Europe Coping with the Communist Past*, Berlin 2021, 73–80.

4 *The strategy of the state cultural policy for the period up to 2030 Approved by the order of the Government of the Russian Federation* dated February 29, 2016, No. 326-r., URL: <http://base.garant.ru/71343400/> [accessed 18.02.2022].

5 Iashchenko, I., *Evidence and Memory. Memories about the repressions of the 1940s against the Volga Germans on the materials of the Perm Region*, Master's Thesis, Perm State University, Perm 2020, 5; Brandenberger, D., *National Bolshevism. Stalinist mass culture and the formation of Russian national identity (1931–1956)*, St. Petersburg 2009, 19–20.

subjects that do not meet the interests of the general policy are excluded from the public narrative.

Public political discourse puts forward the argument that today there is no longer an urgent need to look at the difficult past so closely; there were special conditions at the time that forced the USSR government to make sacrifices. Repeatedly, politicians and pro-state historians have voiced the idea that the benefits of the Gulag prisoners and labour army (in Russian *trudovaya armiya*) workers were so great that this should justify the measures taken. But the main argument in favour of silence is that national hatred should not be stirred up on the basis of memories which divide Russian society. In this context, activists, historians, politicians, and individual members of national minorities are being politically persecuted and charged with violating Article 280 of the Russian Criminal Code “Public calls for extremist activities”.⁶ In particular, the above article applies to people who are accused of “inciting hatred on grounds of nationality” or “inciting hatred against Russians” as well as to people who conduct “extremist activities to incite separatism in Russia”.⁷ Note that separatist crimes include the non-recognition of the annexed peninsula Crimea as Russian, as well as the advocacy of Russian Germans for the return of the Volga territory and autonomous republic which was alienated and abolished during the Stalinist repressions of the 1940s.⁸

Consequently, all local tragedies and micro-plots related to the Great Patriotic War (1941–1945) have been deleted from the official discourse, aiding the construction of a monumental history for the victorious country.⁹ Ethnic diversity in the historical perspective is currently considered an example of separatism. The victory in the war therefore seems to be the only point of consolidation for a multinational society to these modern political actors. As a result, there is a deliberate avoidance of complex conversations about political repression and ethnic cleansing in the public space.¹⁰

6 Art. 280. “Public calls for extremist activities” of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation, URL: <http://www.ukrf.net/s280.html> [accessed: 06.05.2022].

7 Ibidem.

8 Pohl, J. O., “The Deportation and Destruction of the German Minority in the USSR”, 2001, URL: http://www.norkarussia.info/uploads/3/7/7/9/37792067/deportation_and_destruction_soviet_germans.pdf [accessed: 06.05.2022].

9 Onken, E., “The Baltic states and Moscow’s 9 May commemoration: Analysing memory politics in Europe”, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, Issue 1, 2007, 23–46.

10 Malinova, O., “The Great Patriotic War as a symbolic resource: the evolution of display in the official rhetoric of 2000–2010”, *Russia and the modern world*, Vol. 2, Issue 87, 2015, 6–29.

Amidst the development of a new wave of ethnic oppression in contemporary Russia, historiographical debates lag significantly behind due to the avoidance of straightforward discussions of human rights violations by the Soviet Union.¹¹ Only occasional studies have addressed the issue of regime responsibility for crimes against humanity. Historically, this was because the archives were still classified, no qualitative criticism of Soviet historiography had been made and oral sources had never been used to study the history of totalitarianism in the USSR.¹² A thorough study of the Gulag and government decisions in the USSR demonstrates the unsightly side of the totalitarian regime: mass killings, torture and multiple crimes against individuals based on both political and ethnic motives.¹³ For example, it is extremely difficult to rely on research by Sheila Fitzpatrick's school of social history because, when talking about the 'repressions' (which were actually ethnic cleansing), these historians argue that they were caused by background ideologies and not by the concept of a national racial supremacy.¹⁴ John Chang describes one major shortcoming of such ideas:

Yet when it came to the Soviet diaspora peoples and the "nationalities deportations" from 1937 to 1950, both Suny and Fitzpatrick held that these cases of ethnic cleansing were not racial but ideological in nature, in which both elites and ordinary people could be targeted as "enemies of the people".¹⁵

Terry Martin used the same approach to explain the sources of repression but focused mostly on an idea of ideological nationalism that was closer to the situation that can be observed today: the idea of political unity prevailed over the idea of ethnic superiority.¹⁶ It is worth noting that Martin reflected on the fact that the Soviet Union never empha-

11 Pohl, J., "Socialist racism: Ethnic cleansing and racial exclusion in the USSR and Israel", *Human Rights Review*, Vol. 7, Issue 3, 2006, 75.

12 Khlevniuk, O., *The History of the Gulag: From Collectivization to the Great Terror*, Yale University Press, New Haven 2004, 2; Fitzpatrick, S., *A Spy in the Archives: A Memoir of Cold War Russia*, I.B. Tauris, London 2015, 85–87.

13 Iashchenko, I., "Evidence and Memory. Memories about the repressions of the 1940s against the Volga Germans on the materials of the Perm Region", 8.

14 Weitz, E., "Racial Politics Without the Concept of Race: Re-Evaluating Soviet Ethnic and National Purges", *Slavic Review*, Vol. 61, Issue 1, 2002, 1–29; Weitz, E., *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2003.

15 Chang, J. K., "Ethnic Cleansing and Revisionist Russian and Soviet History", *Academic Questions*, Vol. 32, Issue 2, 2019, 265.

16 Martin, T., *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2001, 3–5.

sised the ethnic side of repression.¹⁷ But can one rely on the totalitarian regime's assessment of actions which are, by definition, violations of human rights? Here a semantic gap arises which creates space for criticisms of this historiographical field. These criticisms are in terms of both the idea of transitional justice, which requires a demonstration of diverse historical experience in a post-totalitarian space, and in the context of the availability of new historical sources of personal origin. Chang strictly emphasised that historians should not play with moral estimates of anti-humanity actions of Soviet regime:

It would be hard for any member of the Soviet diaspora or deported peoples to see these revisionist writings as anything other than a cover for Soviet ethnic and racial bigotry.¹⁸

However, it is also crucial to underline that representatives of the school emphasised many times the fact that national politics in the USSR seemed to be the first step of institutionalised nationalistic discrimination even though they make no statement that in the USSR ethnic cleansing was commonly implemented.¹⁹

The persistent defence of the idea that the regime was innocent of crimes against civilians can be considered a manifestation of domestic racism.²⁰ Below is a brief overview of the evolution of Soviet nationality policy from ethnic diversity to radical Russocentrism.²¹ It is the appeal to the titular nation, as the most full-fledged group of citizens, that makes possible the subsequent destruction of other peoples (Russian Germans, Crimean Tatars, Ingush, etc.). Although the extensive repression of Stalinism affected absolutely all ethnic groups living in the USSR, some ethnic groups were 'enemies of the USSR' and were under greater threat of extinction than the more 'reliable' peoples. For example, the Russian German ethnic group was practically brought to the brink of extinction by the end of World War II.

17 Martin, T., "The Origins of Soviet Ethnic Cleansing", *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 70, Issue 4, 1998, 813–861.

18 Chang, J. K., "Ethnic Cleansing and Revisionist Russian and Soviet History", 268.

19 Suny, R.G., *The Revenge of the Past, Nationalism, Revolution, and the Collapse of the Soviet Union*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1993, 20.

20 Gudkov, L. – Pipia, K., "Parameters of xenophobia, racism, and anti-Semitism in modern Russia", *Bulletin of public opinion. Data. Analysis. Discussions*, Moscow. Vol. 127, Issue 3–4, 2018, 33–35.

21 Brandenberger, D., *National Bolshevism. Stalinist mass culture and the formation of Russian national identity (1931–1956)*, 116.

The second half of the 1930s was the time when national policy suddenly became a priority for the USSR, since at that moment it was becoming more rigid and discriminatory. The concept of ‘unreliable peoples’ appeared which generally consisted of the peoples of the border areas. In 1936, the Soviet government began the process of evicting unreliable groups of the population from the border strip. Francine Hirsch explained the turn in national policy as an evolutionary stage in building a socialist society in the spirit of Marxist-Leninist ideology. In this sense, the nationalisation of culture and language became a prerequisite for the creation of a state system and identity where the strength of unification was proportional to the speed of building socialism.²² Repression was a means to an end in the process of building a socialist state and terror was one of the instruments of this stage.²³

Precisely it was the events of the 1930s that have made it possible to talk about the deportation of the Volga Germans in 1941 as an early planned act of intimidation. Attempts were made to eliminate an ethnic group which was considered potentially dangerous to the socialist state. While political repression and massacres of Russian Germans began long before World War II, the war became an excuse to do this quickly and without further explanation for such measures. Given this background of repression, the justifications made for deportation as a preventive measure against separatism during wartime, loses all credibility since the original motive for such measures was not the war. The first wave of ethnic cleansing against Russian Germans, Ukrainians, Jews, Tatars, and other minorities took place in the 1930s, long before the war began.

Nevertheless, in 1941, hundreds of thousands of Russian Germans became hostages of the Stalinist regime, and who were recorded as “enemies of the people”.²⁴ The history of ethnic repression in the USSR is often poorly understood by the international academic community. At one time the attention of Russian historians was focused on the mass repressions of the Stalinist regime, while the interest of European and American specialists mainly concerned the problems of the concentration camps of Nazi Germany.²⁵ This bias, due primarily to the secrecy of

22 Venelinova, Z., *Marxism-Leninism and the Future of Marxist Thought in Post-Socialist Bulgaria*, Ph.D. dissertation. in Rhetoric, University of California, Berkeley 2011, 42–44.

23 Hirsch, F., *Empire of Nations: Ethnographic Knowledge and the Making of the Soviet Union. (Culture and Society after Socialism.)*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2005, 100; 146–149; 294–295.

24 Pleve, I., – Lobacheva, G., – Parfenov, V., *The Volga Germans fault – a political myth*, Saratov 2011, 251–255.

25 Dmitriev, T., *“This is not an army”: national military construction in the USSR in the context of the Soviet cultural and national policy (1920–1930s)*, Moscow 2013, 115, 127–130.

the Soviet and Russian archives, has led to a lack of discussion amongst international scholars of history and culture about the crimes against humanity committed by the national communist regime under the pretext of confronting the Nazi threat.²⁶

However, meticulous attention to historiographical and accessible archival sources, as well as to oral and written memoirs confirms the ethnic cleansing of the 1930s and 1940s in the USSR. In both political and academic circles, the idea has long prevailed that the people condemned to deportation during the war were accused of collaborating with the armed forces of Nazi Germany.

In addition, the mass repressions which took place under the black banner of mass starvation were distinctly ethnic in nature; the deadliest famines struck regions that were not ethnically Russian. For example, the extreme mortality in Ukraine in the mid-1930s was not due to poor harvests but to the confiscation of property and food, as well as the introduction of the concept of “black villages”, which were common only in Ukraine.²⁷ The essence of such villages was that representatives of the punitive bodies (the Extraordinary Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union) confiscated all foodstuffs in these villages if they did not deliver the quantities of bread and dairy products required as tax within the specified deadline. Periods of poor harvests and famine resulted in mass deaths and the proportion of ethnic victims during these years, as well as the national orientation of the measures, demonstrate that these factors were part of supreme measures taken towards institutionalised nationalism in the USSR. Historical sources confirm that such measures led to many millions of deaths in Ukraine in the pre-war period²⁸. These examples precisely illustrate the nationalist tendencies of the Soviet regime as early as the pre-war period and nullify any attempts to justify the ethnic cleansing of the later period as a “forced necessity” to maintain security during the war period.²⁹

26 Iashchenko, I., *Evidence and Memory. Memories about the repressions of the 1940s against the Volga Germans on the materials of the Perm Region*, 29–33; 38–39.

27 Timothy, S., *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*, Basic Books, New York 2010.

28 Yefimenko, H., “The Holodomor as a result of the Kremlin’s national policy”, *Holodomor of 1932–1933 in Ukraine: Causes, Demographic Impact, Legal Evaluation, Matters of the International Scientific Conference*, Kyiv, 2009, 109–119.

29 Yefimenko, H., “The Soviet Nationalities Policy Change of 1933, or Why ‘Ukrainian Nationalism’ Became the Main Threat to Stalin in Ukraine”, *Holodomor Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1, 2009, 27–50; Yefimenko, H., “Coronisation, Ukrainization, nationalism. The Holodomor as a targeted result of Kremlin policy”, *Modernity*, Vol. 6, Issue 11, 2008, 46–52.

Indeed, this brief overview underlines the undeniable truth of ethnically motivated violence within the Soviet Union during different periods and legitimises the labelling of individual examples of repression as being part of an ethnic cleansing. This allows questions to be raised above all about localised genocides in the USSR against Russian Germans and Crimean Tatars.

Furthermore, this review illustrates not only the lack of substantive discussion about ethnic cleansing and ethnically motivated violence in the USSR, but also the complete silence on the representation of the experiences of children, women and men who survived imprisonment in Soviet concentration camps. Although this is primarily a consequence of the classified archives, a shift in semantic emphasis has also played an important role: the Soviet Union was one of the victors in World War II and for a long time this was a convincing argument for protecting the totalitarian past from critical scrutiny.

Living Conditions in Soviet Concentration Camps: The Experience of Female Ethnic Minority Prisoners

An inclusive approach to talking about the experiences of women prisoners is necessary in order to showcase specific aspects of oppression which have been silenced for the last 80 years. Specifically in public policy spaces and the academic community, a number of ‘women’s issues’ were seen as something marginal.

To date, many studies of repression have been presented which are specifically based on evidence from Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia. These studies pay attention to the ethnic factor of mass repressions,³⁰ deportations³¹ and massacres,³² including a substantial focus on the history of

30 Naimark, N., “Ethnic cleansing between war and peace”, in: A. Weiner, *Landscaping the Human Garden. Twentieth-Century Population Management in a Comparative Framework*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 2003, 233–235.

31 Aigi, R., “Homeless for Ever: the Contents of Home and Homelessness on the Example of Deportees from Estonia”, in: V. Davoliute, T. Balkelis, *Narratives of Exile and Identity in Soviet Deportation Memoirs from the Baltic States*, CEU Press, Budapest-New York 2018, 65–89; Aigi, R., “Forced Migration of Estonian Citizens to the East 1941–1951: Some Similarities with the Accounts of People Who Fled to the West”, in: M. Saueauk – T. Hiio, *Proceedings of the Estonian Institute of Historical Memory*, Eesti Mälu Instituudi toimetised, University of Tartu Press, Tartu 2018, 271–304.

32 Aigi, R., “Doubly Marginalized People: The Hidden Stories of Estonian Society (1940–1960)”, in: L. Fleishman – A. Weiner, *War, Revolution, and Governance: The Baltic Countries in the Twentieth Century*, Stanford University: Academic Studies Press, Boston 2018, 239–265.

women in repressive situations³³ and the history of childhood and education.³⁴ This seems important for the Baltic States for two reasons. Firstly, the initial occupation of the Baltic States by the Soviets in 1939 resulted in mass deportations and shootings. However, with the USSR's entry into the war against Nazi Germany, the Soviets left these countries. When they again returned during the second occupation at the end of the Second World War, the Soviets progressed to committing mass rapes and murders, deporting women and children separately from their families. Thus, this part of history is very important for Latvian, Lithuanian and Estonian societies, as it is a part of their collective trauma which needs to be commemorated.

Ethnically repressed people were exiled to places of detention together with their closest relatives (children, parents). This is crucial in discussing women's experiences. Most often, the family was subjected to gender division: the father was sent to one camp, and the mother with the children to another, which led to the responsibility for the children being completely shifted on to the woman.³⁵ Women experienced great psychological pressure and were forced to eat less than the men because of the need to share their rations with their children since no additional allowance was allocated to them in the Soviet camps.

The problem of poor nutrition is directly related to the mental and physical health of prisoners and their children. However, when it comes to organizing meals in Soviet camps, it is necessary to clarify the standards that were established during the Second World War. An adult was supposed to receive 350 grams of bread per day (it was bread made from cheap rye flour mixed with waste products and sawdust). Hot food was not always given however, if it was included in the lunch menu, it was a kind soup made from food waste or porridge made with water.³⁶

Food in Soviet camps for workers of the labour army (representatives of ethnic minorities) was not an unconditional part of detention for pris-

33 Lazda, M., "Women, nation and survival: Latvian women in Siberia", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 1, 2005 1–12; Aigi, R., "Women's experiences of repression in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 51, Issue 1, 2020; Kirss, T., "Survivorship and the Eastern exile: Estonian women's life narratives of the 1941 and 1949 Siberian deportations", *Journal of Baltic Studies*, Vol. 36, Issue 1, 13–38.

34 Aigi, R. – Saleniece, I., "Re-educating teachers: ways and consequences of Sovietization in Estonia and Latvia (1940–1960) from the biographical perspective", in: E. Kõresaar, *Baltic Socialism Remembered. Memory and Life Story since 1989*, Routledge, London 2017.

35 Iashchenko, I., *Evidence and Memory. Memories about the repressions of the 1940s against the Volga Germans on the materials of the Perm Region*, 45.

36 *Ibid.*, 100.

oners: bread had to be earned. If a prisoner did not fulfil the assigned work plan (an insufficient number of trees were cut down, an insufficient number of bricks were transferred, an insufficient number of parts were produced, etc.), then this person was sent to a punishment cell for a day with food consisting of 100 grams per day. After this, the prisoner was returned to the workplace but if the person did not fulfil the plan again, then a punishment cell awaited him. This continued until the prisoner either fulfilled the plan or died.³⁷

For female prisoners, this discipline was an immediate threat to life, since, having given half of the ration to her children, on average, a woman lived on 150–200 grams of bread a day. Death due to prolonged starvation was only a matter of time. In some camps, the death rate in the early 1940s reached 60–70% per year based on official statistics, however these statistics never included children or other incompetent relatives who were imprisoned with the repressed (old parents, people with disabilities, etc.).³⁸

Remarkably, the respondents had difficulty talking about the hunger they had experienced because for many years they would be risking death to do so. Children of repressed women also demonstrated emotional involvement in the experiences of their relatives and focused on the extreme hardships faced by their mothers and older relatives.³⁹ Many who survived deportations, even as young children, still remembered how their mothers gave their last bread to their children but their younger brothers and sisters died anyway.

Between 1941 and 1944, some camps and special settlements on the territory of the Urals (Nyroblag, Karlag, etc.) contained practically no graves of young children. One reason for this is that during this period there was no food provided for the prisoners of the Gulag and the labour army, resulting in prisoners eating the bodies of those babies and young children who died of hunger or the cold⁴⁰. It should be emphasized that acts of cannibalism, and especially child cannibalism, are not represented in Russian or foreign studies in the context of the life of deported people mostly because of the lack of historical sources. As a result, the importance of oral sources cannot be overestimated for investigating certain aspects of the Soviet past.

37 *Interview with Emilia Schaefer*, Perm, 22.01.2020, author's archive – I. Iashchenko.

38 *Interview with Erma N.*, Nyrob, 08.10.2018, author's archive – I. Iashchenko; *Interview with Irma N.*, Nyrob, 08.10.2018, author's archive – I. Iashchenko.

39 Iashchenko, I., *Evidence and Memory. Memories about the repressions of the 1940s against the Volga Germans on the materials of the Perm Region*, 10.

40 *Interview with Emilia Ivanovna N.*, Perm, 22.01.2020, author's archive – I. Iashchenko.

Notably, in interviews, the victims of the repression against the Russian Germans tell frightening details of the first years of their stay in places of deportation, associated mainly with hunger and high mortality. One person described how they collected scraps and bones from the garbage dumps of the soldiers' barracks and made soup with them; frying the bones on iron stoves and making bone meal in order to survive.⁴¹ Others described how they were separated from a field of beets by barbed wire and an armed convoy but still at night they dug the frozen ground with their bare hands to eat at least something after a week of starvation.⁴²

The respondents noted that they ate human flesh but mainly only the bodies of dead children. Everyone who mentioned the acts of cannibalism emphasized that they, or the people who were in the same camp with them, ate the bodies of children but never killed them themselves: babies died of hunger very quickly, since their mothers' breast milk disappeared completely from lack of food. One woman recalls:

"I went into their dugout and saw her eating meat. I didn't see the baby; she had a baby. It immediately became scary. Others said the child had died. So, nothing remained of him. Not one bone. Even the skull ... It was still soft."⁴³

Each interview taken confirmed the fact that the prisoners were exhausted. One of the daughters of the repressed, who passed her childhood under the difficult conditions of deportation, told the story of her father:

"... my father told me that he once chopped off a finger with a shovel ... And most of all he was surprised that his blood did not flow. There was no blood at all, that's how they starved."⁴⁴

It must be stressed that within the collective memory of the ethnic communities, there are permanent memories of the transportation of

41 *Interview with Emiliya Henrikhovna Yefimova*, Perm, 1998, Perm Memorial Archive, Fond 5, Section 423, File 1; *Interview with Caroline Reinartovna Mosman*, Valay settlement, Perm region, 2005, Archives of Perm "Memorial", Fond 5, Section 61, Case1; *Interview with Kazantseva Lydia Andreevna/ Henrikhovna*, Alexandrovsk, Perm region, 2007, Archives of Perm "Memorial", Fond 5, Section 42, Case1.

42 *Interview with Vladimir Aleksandrovich N*, Perm, 15.01.2020, author's archive – I. Iashchenko; Diary entries "Memory of the Volga Germans in the Perm region", field research materials October–December 2018, author's archive – I. Iashchenko, 7.

43 *Interview with Emilia Ivanovna N*, Perm, 22.01.2020, author's archive – I. Iashchenko.

44 Diary entries "Memory of the Volga Germans in the Perm region", field research materials October–December 2018, author's archive – I. Iashchenko, 4.

prisoners. Not only the victims themselves but also representatives of subsequent generations spoke about the horrors of the “cattle cars”⁴⁵. It is extremely difficult to find information about the conditions of transportation of the repressed today: some of the transfer lists are not available and many cattle car transportations were not documented at all. In this sense, interviews and written memoirs of victims remain some of the few convincing pieces of evidence for conducting research in this area.

Moving on to detailing an important story in the memorial narrative of the affected community, it is important first to draw attention to the fact that the transportation was carried out in freight wagons adapted for the transport of livestock (one iron wood-burning stove was installed to heat a wagon of 17 square meters). Based on the data received from the respondents, there were between 30 to 50 people in one carriage. In several interviews the following picture was mentioned in various formulations:

“People stood back-to-back or sat on the floor, it was impossible to walk or lie down – we were so tight friend.”⁴⁶

After performing mathematical calculations and calculating how many adults could fit in this position, it became apparent that in a carriage 6.4 meters long and 2.7 meters wide, there were about 40–45 people on average.⁴⁷

On the subject of living conditions, it is important to note that although there were certain standards for keeping prisoners in the Gulag, such as giving out clothes and shoes to new arrivals and providing heated barracks, none of this was actually implemented in relation to the ethnically repressed prisoners.

All respondents noted that none of them received warm clothes and shoes during their first years in the places they were deported to. Here it is fundamentally important to emphasize that the majority of Russian Germans were exiled from the Volga region to the Northern Urals and

45 Pohl, J., *Ethnic Erasure: The Role of Border Changes in Soviet Ethnic Cleansing and Return Migration*, 2001, URL: https://www.academia.edu/10450533/Ethnic_Erasure_The_Role_of_Border_Changes_in_Soviet_Ethnic_Cleansing_and_Return_Migration [accessed 10.02.2021].

46 *Interview with Natalya S. N.*, Perm, 18.01.2020; *Interview with Lydia N.*, Kungur, 11.05.2019, author's archive - I. Iashchenko; *Interview with Tatiana N.*, Perm, 12.12.2019, author's archive - I. Iashchenko; *Interview with Emilia N.*, Perm, 2020, author's archive - I. Iashchenko.

47 *Specifications Cargo railroad car – “teplushka”. USSR*, URL: <https://victorymuseum.ru/encyclopedia/technic/zheleznodorozhnye-voyska-i-sooruzheniya/gruzovoy-krytyy-zheleznodorozhnyy-dvukhosnyy-vagon-teplushka-sssr/> [accessed: 06.05.2022].

Siberia, where the weather conditions in winter are deadly (without exaggeration) in the absence of warm clothing and heated housing.⁴⁸

The victims describe some of the ways to combat massive frostbite, which they themselves came up with:

“In winter, the feet in the shoes were completely freezing, so we made galoshes from canvas with wooden soles ... we wound at least some footcloths on our feet ...”⁴⁹

Based on analysis of the interviews, there were two main options for the residence of the Russian Germans: barracks and dugouts. Common barracks for several dozen people had one iron stove in the middle of the room with the beds against the walls, doing almost nothing to save people from hypothermia at night. In interviews, they often mention how they woke up with their hair frozen to the pillow. However, this was not the worst option available. Often prisoners had to build barracks themselves and until they had, lived out in the open.

Life in the dugouts was more difficult. Firstly, the dugouts were also originally built by the prisoners themselves, spending the nights out on the street until the construction was completed. According to the respondents, in winter it was comparatively warm in such a house; it was possible to dry clothes and warm up. However, the following reveals another reality:

“... in the evening 13 people enter the dugout, and in the morning, they leave it already 7–9.”⁵⁰

This example does not illustrate actual daily mortality but emphasizes that the scale of deaths was extremely large. In general, the inmates died of hunger and pneumonia as they froze during work due to the lack of seasonal clothing. Secondly, it is also very dangerous to live in such dwellings in the northern regions in the spring when the snow begins to melt. Once again, the testimonies obtained illustrated how from the be-

48 Iashchenko, I., “Remember How: The Place of Visualization in Preserving the Memory of Repressions of the USSR Against the Volga Germans”, *Digital Humanities Conference-2019 (9–12 July 2019, Utrecht)*, Utrecht University Press, Utrecht 2019.

49 *Interview with Emilia N.*, Perm, 22.01.2020, author’s archive – I. Iashchenko.

50 Diary entries “Memory of the Volga Germans in the Perm region”, field research materials October–December 2018, author’s archive. – I. Iashchenko, 4; *Interview with Emilia N.*, Perm, 22.01.2020, author’s archive – I. Iashchenko.

ginning of spring until summer, prisoners walked knee-deep in ice water and mud inside their dugouts. It was impossible for people to sleep on the ground-level beds during this time.

In conditions of constant hypothermia and extremely hard physical work along with the lack of basic personal hygiene products and the opportunity to wash meant that many female prisoners faced diseases of the genitourinary system and the kidneys. It was also not possible for them to receive medical assistance.⁵¹ Moreover, the inmates did not have access to washing facilities except for rare 'mass baths'. In addition, they did not have free access to clean sanitary materials during menstruation which significantly worsened the general hygienic situation for female prisoners.

In response to the question posed in the first part of the text, it is important to note that the discussion of women's experiences significantly changes our understanding of living conditions in Soviet concentration camps. Doing so brings new details to our awareness of the extent of the damage done to individual ethnic groups by condemning entire families to prolonged starvation. By ignoring oral sources, it is impossible to raise these kinds of questions in the discourse on the totalitarian past, as the archival documents that are available today do not provide insight into the situations of the women, children, and other members of these deported families. Sources of a personal origin can shed light not only on the problems of the living conditions of the prisoners but also on sensitive aspects of the gendered experience in history. The findings highlight the need for an inclusive approach to working with collective memory in order to represent not only the collective experience of the community but also the diversity of personal experiences of its members.

It is pertinent here to make a brief comment on how the general narrative of ethnic cleansing changes if the female experience is included: it underlines the need for an inclusive approach to the study of oral history, paying close attention to the gender and ethnic dimensions of the experience.

Conclusion

The need for a detailed analysis of the history of repressions and ethnic cleansings in the USSR is associated with the importance of articulating

51 Iashchenko, I., *Evidence and Memory. Memories about the repressions of the 1940s against the Volga Germans on the materials of the Perm Region*, 127.

gender history and ethnic minorities history in the modern discourse on the tragedies of the 20th Century. Research into the system of concentration camps in the USSR also touches on the problem of the responsibility of the Soviet regime for crimes against humanity which were on a par with the crimes of the National Socialist regime in Germany. The coveted illusion of the victors' sinlessness threatens to make the unforgivable mistake of a total devaluation of the tragic experience of millions of victims in the Soviet camp system. The reasons for this reticence are both contemporary historical politics in Russia and peculiarities in the development of historiography, both in Russia and abroad, where explanatory models for such measures were based on an ideological concept rather than on the idea of racial superiority.

Nevertheless, these few studies and the historical sources mentioned demonstrated that the validity of certain measures of oppression and repression were ethnically based and highlighted the nationalist tendencies in the USSR. However, the current agenda of political repression depends on the vector of historical policy, controlled directly by state institutions, in connection with which there is a silence about both the massacres and ethnic cleansing in the USSR. The main reason for these symptoms is the attempt to reshape Soviet history to suit political interests by forgetting the crimes of the totalitarian regime and focusing only on victories, in particular victory in World War II. In the opinion of the Russian political elite, such a coup of the past will allow for a consolidation of Russia's multinational society. Being the heir to the all-powerful Soviet Union is considered prestigious and such a patriotic motivation can be used to legitimise many human rights violations today.

Turning to women's experiences when studying the history of totalitarian regimes is important not only from the point of view of representing a gender-equal narrative, but also with the aim of detailing the crimes of the Soviet Union, which is impossible without referring to the personal stories of victims. The honest stories of German Russian women who survived imprisonment in Soviet concentration camps reveals the ugly face of totalitarianism. It allows the voices of the oppressed to finally share their experiences despite previous attempts to marginalise this narrative by spreading ideas about the 'deservedness of repression' and the entrenched concept of a 'people's enemy'. As has become apparent, women still find it highly inappropriate to talk about sexual violence and hygiene, preferring to talk about experiences that may have been shared by either gender. However, even in such contexts, the differences in women's experiences are evident, as they

were responsible for taking care of the families. Therefore, the silencing of women's experiences thus leads to the stigmatisation of those experiences and the marginalisation of the suffering of the inmates of the Soviet camps.

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A Lightning Flash on the Sky of Memory: Walter Benjamin's Late Theory of History

Marek Kettner

1.

Nothing seems to give itself up to cognition more surely than that which has happened during the course of history: it has been already closed and has become immobile, arrested in its rigidity. Everything that used to move as a part of the present moment collides now with the past and lies in front of the cognizing insight like a corpse on the table of an anatomist. However, Benjamin's reflexions about the historical object suggest that nothing is farther from being closed than that which has already happened.

– Hermann Schweppenhäuser, *Praesentia praeteritorum*¹

Any reader of Benjamin's theses *On the Concept of History* should remember: history doesn't take place anywhere else than in memory. If the theses are to be fully understandable then one is obliged to maintain that this idea constituted one of Benjamin's main presuppositions in his approach to history. It will also serve as a basis for this very inquiry into them. To get a better grasp of the role of memory in Benjamin's take on history one must, first of all, do away with the idea of history as an already given object.²

For Benjamin, history doesn't amount to a continuum consisting of series of events that have already happened and have causally influenced one another. More importantly, the simple fact that an event, albeit a great and causally important one, has already happened or that a person has already lived and influenced the future doesn't mean that they are to be regarded as a historical event or a historical figure yet. Benjamin doesn't view history as an object that has already been fixed and whose former presence is to be causally felt in the present moment. Although it may seem that, by its very definition, history should be always already given

1 Schweppenhäuser, H., "Praesentia praeteritorum", in: P. Bulthaup, *Materialien zu Benjamins Thesen >Über den Begriff Der Geschichte<*, Frankfurt am Main 2016, 7.

2 "Historicism contents itself with establishing a causal nexus among various moments in history. But no state affairs having causal significance is for that very reason historical. It became historical posthumously, as it were, through events that may be separated from it by thousands of years." Benjamin, W., "On the Concept of History", in: idem, *Selected Writings Volume 4: 1938–1940*, transl. Harry Zohn, Cambridge, London 2006, 397.

since it consists solely of events that have already happened, for Benjamin, history is something that is always yet to be constituted. More precisely: something that is always yet to be constituted in memory. Thus the aim of a Benjaminian historian is not to describe and preserve an already existing object but to bring a historical object about. In other words: “Articulating the past historically does not mean recognizing it ‘the way it really was’”.³ Rather it means comprehending it the way it is now being recollected, perhaps thousands of years after its real occurrence. History doesn’t delineate a domain of that which has already been but a domain of that which can be now. The present moment doesn’t matter to history as a place of its inquiry; it matters rather as a place of its birth.⁴

2.

The problem that Benjamin diagnosed in regard to the academic approaches to history that were dominant in his time (and most of all in historicism) can be also articulated in this way: they conceive of history as a chain of present moments that are no longer actual.⁵ Benjamin calls the time of historicism homogenous because it knows nothing but the present. A present that actually exists now and innumerable presents that have actually existed before. These ancient present moments that have already seen the light of day and passed are the objects of a historicist’s inquiry. The past is examined as something that has been present.

To understand Benjamin’s position more clearly one has to take into account that the past has never been present.⁶ There is a stronger

3 Ibid., 391.

4 “How history ‘really’ took place is not the point here. Even if we accepted a positivist idea of a purely ‘physical’ stream of happening, historical facts still wouldn’t amount to such a process. They rather *arise* historically, in a constellation with the present. Strictly speaking, one cannot say that they have already happened; they are rather happening right now. In this sense, they are a given: a given of memory.” Ritter, M., *Poznáním osvobodovat budoucí*, Prague 2018, 170.

5 The term “actual” will be used here as an equivalent of the German *aktuell* that is notoriously hard to translate into English as it has both the meanings of something that exists in the very present moment and is happening right now, and of something that is topical, contemporarily relevant, even pressing.

6 In this aspect our essay will be heavily influenced by Gilles Deleuze whose thoughts can provide some illuminating perspectives on Benjamin’s own theory. Deleuze understands the past not as a mirror image of the present, not as a simple copy. He grants the past its own way of being. Perhaps the most important passage is to be found in *Proust and Signs*. Deleuze describes Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*: “Combray does not rise up as it was once present; Combray rises up as past, but this past is no longer relative to the present that it has been, it is no longer relative to the present in relation to which it is now past. This is no longer the Combray of perception nor of voluntary memory. Combray appears as it could not be experienced: not in reality, but in its truth; not in its external and contingent relations, but

difference between the past and the present than a difference of location on the line of chronology. A formal difference exists here. One cannot understand the past by founding it in the same form of existence (actual presence) as the present. The past isn't an actual presence that just happens to have already happened; it is rather fundamentally past. It comes in the form of memory. As ancient actual presents, former events no longer exist and it makes no sense to wish to know them as such and examine them historically. They exist only as past, as memory, and it thus makes no sense either to ask whether these memories correspond to the past the way it really was. The fact that memory is all that a present thinker of history can rely on pushes the question of precision and correspondence to the side and to the spotlight it brings a question of ethical responsibility as will be shown below.

Meanwhile, there's a clear consequence to be drawn from these preliminary remarks: history is not a fact. As something that is happening right now, it cannot be said to be conserved by documents, academic treatises and factual evidence. For, as the present changes, history changes with it.⁷ There is no such thing as an autonomous history that is independent of the present and identical with itself as a *factum brutum*,⁸ a history that is just waiting to be discovered. In Benjamin's conception, history doesn't stay still for more than an instant. It passes away as quickly as the present moment.⁹

“The truth will not run away from us”: this statement by Gottfried Keller indicates exactly the point in historicism's image of history where the image is pierced by historical materialism. For it is an irretrievable image of the past which threatens to disappear in any present that does not recognize itself as intended in that image.¹⁰

in its internalized difference, in its essence. Combray rises up in a pure past, coexisting with the two presents, but out of their reach, out of reach of the present voluntary memory and of the past conscious perception.” Deleuze, G., *Proust and Signs*, transl. R. Howard, London 2000, 60–61.

7 “Because the past always changes in relation to the present, [its] image flits by, [it] cannot be seized. It can only flash up, *flash up* in the *present instance*. ... The past is no *depositum*, it does not exist apart from the relation toward it, apart from the present instance of its knowability.” Taubes, J., “Seminar Notes on Walter Benjamin's ‘Theses on the Philosophy of History’”, in: C. Dickinson – S. Symons, *Walter Benjamin and Theology*, New York 2016, 196.

8 The term *factum brutum* is used by S. Sousedík. See Sousedík, S., *Dějiny, dějepís a filosofie dějin*, Prague 2019.

9 Benjamin, W., “On the Concept of History”, 390.

10 *Ibid.*, 391.

3.

For the reader to get a better grasp of these introductory ideas, let us visualise them by a metaphor of a cinematic tape. For historicism understands history as a film: there's a plethora of perfectly homogenous images on the tape, images that differ only by their content. All of them are present moments that take turns in being actually projected on the screen. Among those that have already been presented are the ones that constitute history. They are present moments that have lost their actuality but keep all their qualities and contours. It is as such that they are confronted by the historicist thinker: as fully formed, fixed images that have sunk into obscurity because the light of actuality is no longer being shed on them. The whole tape is potentially at the disposal of the historian whose task is now to deal with their darkness and delineate precisely their features by shedding some light on them retrospectively.

However, this is not how history is constituted. It is not the present minus its actuality. While in the perspective of historicist thinkers, non-actuality amounted to one of the defining traits of history, for Benjamin it was rather the opposite. His formula of history would perhaps rather sound: actuality minus presence.¹¹ History cannot be present the same way present reality is. Nevertheless, it can be actual in the sense that it is coming to be right now. Even more precisely: in Benjamin's theory, history is strictly *aktuelle* since it cannot come to be as a pure flash but right now.

4.

Walter Benjamin knew that the break in tradition and the loss of authority which occurred in his lifetime were irreparable, and he concluded that he had to discover new ways of dealing with the past.

– Hannah Arendt, Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940¹²

One of the main reasons for Benjamin's stark criticism of historicist and neo-Kantian thinkers was their *acedia*. Since history, as a static object that has been already fixed, changed no more, the attitude towards it could (and should) be calm, relaxed and contemplative, according to

11 In the framework of the currently developed metaphor this would mean a pure act of projection on the screen. History would be this sudden flash of light that doesn't come in the form of presence in the sense of the presence of real objects.

12 Arendt, H., "Walter Benjamin: 1892–1940", in: W. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, New York 2007, 38.

historicism.¹³ In historicist conception, each present moment examines the same object as all the preceding and following moments did and will do. The object remains identical with itself. In Benjamin's account, each new instant can grasp a new image of history. In the next instant, this image will be irretrievably gone because history will have, meanwhile, already changed. If the present thinker won't capture the very image of history that comes to him nobody will. Hence a sense of urgency is inseparable from writing history in the Benjaminian way.

However, history's dynamism isn't limited to the constant transformations it performs. His theses also claims that it is history itself, in a form of a memory-image, that reaches the thinker. It is not that the present penetrates the past by moving backwards in time towards it. The past rather penetrates the present as a flash of lightning.¹⁴ Benjamin describes history with one of the most dynamic metaphors that exist.¹⁵

Such an experience of the past was something rather alien to the society of Benjamin's time and one of the main causes for this was the now much emphasised break with tradition that came hand in hand with the establishment of modernity. "Modernity itself is characterized in part, of course, by a changed sense of *time* in which the 'modern', the present, is set against the ancient, the past—and past loses its authority, power, and value."¹⁶ In other words: modernity compared itself to the past. For a comparison to be possible, the two compared elements cannot be completely heterogenous. The present can compare itself only to another present. By opposing itself to the past, modernity reduced the past to a form of a former present. By wanting to differentiate itself from the past, it paradoxically assimilated the past to itself. A complementary phenomenon to this assimilation was the disappearance of rituals, festivals

13 The contemplative attitude was something that Benjamin wanted to do away with in his later writings, as he found it not adequate in the historic situation of modern human beings. Modern phenomena were to be perceived in other attitudes than the contemplative one. In modern times, history should be approached in an active rather than contemplative attitude, according to Benjamin. Norbert Bolz, as quoted by his teacher Jacob Taubes, formulated this fact in clear terms: "If the past is approached with a contemplative attitude, the images of the past are *false* images." Taubes, J., "Seminar Notes on Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History", 196.

14 "...Benjamin's recollection is not a memory in the common sense; it is rather constructed *inversely* in a Copernican manner: it is not the present's recollection of the past, but rather the past's *reminder* of itself whose addressee is the present." Ritter, M., *Poznáním...*, 168.

15 Benjamin probably adopted the metaphor from Porust. See Pensky, M., "Tactics of Remembrance: Proust, Surrealism, and the Origin of the *Passagenwerk*", in: M. P. Steinberg, *Walter Benjamin and the Demands of History*, Ithaca, London 1996, 173–174.

16 Handelman, S. A., *Fragments of Redemption*, Bloomington, Indianapolis 1991, 153.

and holidays as days of remembrance.¹⁷ Traditionally, it was during these days that the past penetrated the present; it was summoned by ritual action and appeared on its own.¹⁸ The past possessed a dynamic of its own and remained in a constant interplay with the present. In modernity, all dynamic has been reserved for the present. The modern human being is no longer capable of ritual behaviour. The past as past, as dynamic, completely escapes her or him.

5.

The recollection on which the work of a Benjaminian historian is based is quite specific and not to be comprehended as a voluntary and intentional activity. It bears much more affinity to Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, for the very reason that Benjamin seemed to be concerned with past as past the same way Proust was. They both understood that no voluntary action could attain the domain of the past as such.¹⁹

In other words, Benjamin founded history on pure memory. He studied Bergson's *Matière et mémoire* and although he kept some reservations towards Bergson's text and agreed rather with Proust's criticism and transformation of Bergson's concept of pure memory into *mémoire involontaire*, considered the concept of pure memory to be a legitimate way of approaching the past.²⁰ Pure memories contain the past as past. They are not representations of a former present.

As such, they cannot stand as objects of the human will. An explanation of this fact can be proposed based on the difference between the modes of being of the past and the present. The past as past is by definition not present. Thus it cannot enter into relation to a voluntary and intentional activity whose prime example is concentration. By concentrating, a present thinker wants to draw an object into the sphere of presence and make it present in front of her or his eyes. She or he wants to force her or his 'mode of being' on the object. However, one can never concentrate on the past as past, for it precisely never enters into the

17 See: *Thesis XV* that alludes to this phenomenon. Benjamin, W., "On the Concept of History," 395.

18 See: *Thesis XV* and *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire*, section II.

19 "It is obvious that something essential escapes voluntary memory: the past's being *as past*." Deleuze, G., *Proust and Signs*, 57.

20 "[Bergson's theory] leads us to believe that turning to the contemplative realization of the stream of life is a matter of free choice. From the start, Proust indicates his divergent view in his choice of terms. In his work the *mémoire pure* of Bergson's theory becomes a *mémoire involontaire*." Benjamin, W., "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire", in: idem, *Selected Writings Volume 4*, transl. Harry Zohn, 315.

sphere of presence.²¹ In experiencing a memory in its purity, it is rather the thinker that is drawn outside of the sphere of presence and into the depths of the past.²² Such a transgression is not to be accomplished voluntarily; the thinker cannot exit his or her own present at will. Concentrated recollection thus never aims at the past as such. In voluntary recollection, memories serve as mediators between a former present and the actual one.

6.

In Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, Benjamin found an effective way of disrupting concentration and its sphere of presence. The sudden irruption of the past—as experienced by Proust whilst tasting the infamous madeleine—produces a shock in the human being, creating a rupture in his or her habitual manner of thinking.²³ Something new can now be experienced. This new object of experience lies outside of the domain of presence. Thanks to *mémoire involontaire*, the past can be experienced as something new.²⁴ At a time when a former present is already old, perhaps even ancient, the past is still only coming to be.

Nevertheless, there are at least two major modifications of the concept of *mémoire involontaire* that happen once it is transposed into the context of Benjamin's theses: it is no longer limited to an individual life of a human being and the moment of its irruption is not being decided by chance anymore. Benjamin's involuntary memory is collective and appears in moments of danger.

21 Bergson himself stated repeatedly that pure memories have no psychological existence and cannot be experienced as something present. See e.g. Bergson, H., *Matter and Memory*, transl. N. M. Paul, W. S. Palmer, New York 1991, 132–136.

22 “We place ourselves at once in the past; we leap into the past as into a proper element. In the same way that we do not perceive things in ourselves, but at the place where they are, we only grasp the past at the place where it is in itself, and not in ourselves, in our present. ... According to Bergson, we first put ourselves back into the past in general. ... We really leap into being, into being-in-itself, into the being in itself of the past.” Deleuze, G., *Bergsonism*, transl. H. Tomlinson, B. Habberjam, New York 1991, 56–57. A crucial difference: Bergson considered the leap into the past to be a voluntary action that targets primarily the virtual and not an actual image; Proust and Benjamin thought that such a leap can only happen involuntarily and that it is an actual image that is its aim. The conceptions of the leap are thus almost inverse. Bergson leaps into a non-concrete past; Benjamin leaps towards an image. That Benjamin was aware of such leaping is documented in *Thesis XIV* and its “tiger’s leap into the past”.

23 See: Pensky, M., “Tactics of Remembrance...”, 173.

24 “But upon this invocation [by *mémoire involontaire*], Combray rises up in a form that is absolutely new.” Deleuze, G., *Proust and Signs*, 60.

Historical materialism wishes to hold fast that image of the past which unexpectedly appears to the historical subject in a moment of danger. The danger threatens both the content of the tradition and those who inherit it. For both, it is one and the same thing: the danger of becoming a tool of the ruling class. Every age must strive to wrest tradition away from the conformism that is working to overpower it.²⁵

The danger Benjamin is writing about seems to have something to do with the fixation and objectification of history. For this is what the ruling class wants to achieve: to provide only one 'eternal' image of history that serves to keep the ruling class in charge. The image of history is not to be changed because a new interpretation could initiate a subversion of the present status quo. Benjamin, on the other hand, wishes to break the status quo in each and every present instant.²⁶ Should history not lose its own dynamic, its life, so to speak, then it has to be wrested away from the tendency to objectify it. As past the dead are still alive and dynamic, and the danger is that they will be decapitated once more by conformism. Tradition is never definitively there; it must be always constituted anew.

7.

The subject of historical knowledge is the struggling, oppressed class itself.

– Walter Benjamin, *On the Concept of History* (Thesis XII)²⁷

A peculiar paradox arises: how can the historian obtain a memory-image of history of events that he or she didn't experience? How could Benjamin himself claim to have a memory-image of Baudelaire who died long before he was even born?²⁸ The key to this riddle lies in the word experience. When Benjamin states that a historian should present nothing but a unique experience with the past,²⁹ he lets the reader know that an interpenetration of private and collective memory is taking place. "Where there is experience in the strict sense of the word, certain contents of the individual past combine in the memory with material from the collective

25 Benjamin, W., "On the Concept of History", 391.

26 "[Truth] is possible [in history], but only negatively, so to say, only as a constant negation or, more concretely, as a constant averting of a catastrophe which presupposes, in a positive sense, a constant presence of mind." Ritter, M., *Poznáním...*, 172.

27 *Ibid.*, 394.

28 See: Benjamin, W., "Central Park", in: idem, *Selected Writings Volume 4*, transl. E. Jephcott, H. Eiland, 183.

29 Benjamin, W., "On the Concept of History", 396.

past.”³⁰ Even though he doesn’t mention it explicitly in the *Theses*, Benjamin is working with the concept of collective memory.³¹ As a strictly private person, a human being cannot experience history. Only as a member of a collective can one do so. More precisely: as a member of that part of the collective that doesn’t want to keep the status quo intact.

For centuries, rituals had been the events where private and collective pasts fused.³² In modern times, this way of acceding collective memory has been lost and Benjamin strives to present a new approach to collective past. It is now in political action that collective memory irrupts into the present moment. The decisive trait of Benjamin’s concept of political action is the stoppage of history’s homogenous flow. *Theses XV* and *XVI* speak of exploding the continuum of history as a task of both the historian as a single person³³ and the revolutionary class as a collective.³⁴ In such moments of action, the dynamic between the past and the present changes altogether. The continuum is blasted open and the present “takes a stand and has come to a standstill.”³⁵ No longer is the present seen as a dynamic moment that moves forward in time and expands history into the future; the situation is rather inverse. Once the present has stopped moving, it can be targeted by the dynamic past. Such a shift in dynamics between the present and the past cannot be achieved if the present is moving towards a certain future. It is precisely this movement of progress that has to stop, according to Benjamin’s interpretation of Marx’s concept of revolution.³⁶

The Social Democrats preferred to cast the working class in the role of a redeemer of future generations, in this way cutting the sinews of its greatest strength. This indoctrination made the working class forget both its hatred and its spirit of sacrifice, for both are nourished by the image of enslaved ancestors rather than by ideal of liberated grandchildren.³⁷

30 Benjamin, W., “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, 316.

31 “...the kind of memory Benjamin evokes here is no simplistic nostalgia but a memory which reaches to an archaic, almost transpersonal level. He refers to it as Proust’s *mémoire involontaire*, which is distinct from any subjective, conscious *mémoire volontaire*. In other words, it is a nonsubjective memory, emanating from a realm other than active personal cognition or chronological narrations of past events.” Handelman, S. A., *Fragments...*, 152.

32 Benjamin, W., “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire”, 316.

33 Benjamin, W., “On the Concept of History”, 396.

34 Ibidem.

35 Ibidem.

36 Benjamin, W., “Paralipomena to On the Concept of History”, in: idem, *Selected Writings Volume 4*, transl. E. Jephcott, H. Eiland, 402.

37 Benjamin, W., “On the Concept of History”, 394.

8.

To say that Benjamin's interpretation of history as exclusively a matter of memory and therefore is not conserved in documents, facts and expert academic treatises doesn't mean to imply that Benjamin didn't care for historical data. In fact, he was almost obsessed about factual evidence of the epochs he was studying. During the later period of his life he collected quotes from 19th century authors and his "greatest ambition was to produce a work consisting entirely of quotations".³⁸ The famous unfinished *Arcades Project* was to consist almost purely of factual evidence. "At any rate, nothing was more characteristic of [Benjamin] in the thirties than the little notebooks with black covers which he always carried with him and in which he tirelessly entered in the form of quotations what daily living and reading netted him in the way of "pearls and "coral".³⁹ Regarding Benjamin's essay on Baudelaire, Adorno even criticized the author for depending too much on facts and leaving out almost all theoretical reflection of them. Benjamin's "wide-eyed presentation of mere facticity"⁴⁰ was no *autotelos* however. It was founded on the assumption that memories of the epoch could be summoned through the experience of the collected objects. And that is also how the *Arcades Project* should be read: its aim is not to simply overflow the reader with a tidal wave of facticity. Instead, it strives to inspire a memory of the 19th Century through the experience of actual citations from the epoch. Facts don't contain history as information; they bring it about as memory. They don't inform the reader; they enable him or her to form an experience.

However, there is a profound transformation that a present object undergoes once it is constituted in memory.⁴¹ Memories are not simple copies of present objects. As memory, the object is unique, incomparable to any former or actually present one. It is in this sense that Benjamin describes the Penelope work of Proustian memory:

For the important thing to the remembering author is not what [Proust] experienced, but the weaving of his memory, the Penelope work of recollection. Or should one call it, rather, a Penelope work of forgetting? Is not the invo-

38 Arendt, H., "Walter Benjamin: 1892-1940", 4.

39 Ibid., 45.

40 Benjamin, W., "Exchange with Adorno on Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire", in: idem, *Selected Writings Volume 4*, transl. E. Jephcott, M. Jennings, 102.

41 "...the philosopher, then, practices the art of memory as a way of transforming objects." Handelman, S. A., *Fragments....*, 150.

luntary recollection, Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, much closer to forgetting than what is usually called memory?⁴²

Since what is usually called remembering amounts to an effort to keep a copy-image of a former present in mind, the true transformative work of memory is somehow provocatively called forgetting by Benjamin. Forgotten objects can be seen in new light once they reappear as purely past. What was finite as present can appear in memory as having no limit;⁴³ what used to be imperfect can, as past, reveal its inner perfection; what manifested itself in its empirical contours and qualities can rise up in its truth.

9.

Once the reader ascribes a tacit supposition to Benjamin, namely that beings and events reveal themselves in their truth only as memory and as past,⁴⁴ then the specific ethics of the *Theses* becomes comprehensible. For it is an inter-generational ethics Benjamin is targeting. From the standpoint of the present moment, only the future will be able to see it in its truth, to seize a true memory-image of it. Thus the present makes an implicit claim on the future to recognize it as pure past. It is the responsibility of future generations to not let this opportunity slip away. The point of Benjamin's ideas seems to be that the present generation should understand itself precisely as such a future with regards to the past. From the standpoint of past generations, the future is right now. However, modernity seems to understand itself rather as a present that is moving towards a future; as a present that, by definition, is not the future.

Doesn't a breath of the air that pervaded earlier days caress us as well? In the voices we hear, isn't there an echo of now silent ones? Don't the women we court have sister they no longer recognize? If so, then there is a secret agreement between past generations and the present one. Then our coming was expected on earth. Then, like every generation that preceded us, we have been endowed with a weak messianic power, a power on which the past has a claim.⁴⁵

42 Benjamin, W., "On the Image of Proust", in: idem, *Selected Writings Volume 2: 1927–1930*, tranl. H. Zohn, Cambridge, London 2006, 237–238.

43 "For an experienced event is finite—at any rate, confined to one sphere of experience; a remembered event is infinite, because it is merely a key to everything that happened before it and after it." Benjamin, W., "On the Image of Proust", 238.

44 "[For Benjamin] the happening of truth is ... the happening of perfection. ... The specificity of Benjamin's late conception consists then in the fact that the possibility of actualizing perfection is ascribed to the present in relation to the past." Ritter, M., *Poznáním...*, 156, 162.

45 Benjamin, W., "On the Concept of History", 390.

Benjamin suggests that the past speaks to human beings in almost any everyday experience. In hearing a person's voice, one can experience a flash of memory of the voices of a generation hundreds of years past. However, as it is the case also in Proust's *mémoire involontaire*, these flashes of true memory-images seem to occur rather rarely. A human being's messianic power is weak because there is a stupendous overflow of beings and events that one cannot redeem along with a minute and limited number of those whose true image actually appears to one. In the redeemed object all the non-redeemed objects echo; in the human messianic power its own weakness sounds forth. Each act of humanly redemption thus points implicitly towards the definitive one that will be, or rather will have been, brought about by the messiah.

10.

It is not evident by any means that the past as past, i.e., pure memory, should come in the form of an image. Bergson, as mentioned, considered all memory-images to be merely deformations of pure memories. For him, pure memory contained pure past that couldn't be re-presented in any way. As representations of the past, memory-images reduce the past to a form of presence. Paradoxically, the past contained in pure memories cannot be recollected, according to Bergson. Not even the tip of its iceberg appears in the present. In Bergson, pure memory figures as a dark sky under which the imaginative memory creates its fireworks. In Benjamin, the sky itself is lit up by a stroke of lightning. For this brief moment, the darkness seems to concentrate into the flash of light.

In other words: Benjamin, as well as Proust, wanted to maintain that human beings can experience the past whilst being fully aware of the deficiency of images vis-à-vis pure memory.⁴⁶ His solution consisted perhaps mainly in the fact that his images weren't separable from the specific mode of experience in which they only manifested themselves. Since they appear in a moment when continuity of chronological time is suspended, an experience of them differs radically from the usual viewing of images as objects present in time. Benjamin's solution consisted of the fact that he didn't ap-

46 "It is true that, starting from this point, the problem is not the same in Proust as in Bergson: it is enough for Bergson to know that the past is preserved in itself. Despite his profound pages on dreams or on paramnesia, Bergson does not ask essentially how the past, as it is in itself, could also be saved for us. Even the deepest dream implies, according to Bergson, a corruption of pure memory, a descent from memory into an image that distorts it. While Proust's problem is, indeed: how to save for ourselves the past as it is preserved in itself, as it survives in itself?" Deleuze, G., *Proust and Signs*, 58–59.

proach images as psychological representations of the past; he understood them rather as a medium in which the past as such could be experienced.

[A historical materialist] blast[s] a specific era out of the homogenous course of history; thus, he blasts a specific life out of the era, a specific work out of the lifework. As a result of this method, the lifework is both preserved and sublated in the work, the era in the lifework, and the entire course of history in the era.⁴⁷

What Benjamin is trying to say by describing the image as a monad is that memory is able to compress the whole historical time into a concrete single image.⁴⁸ In the image, the subject of historical knowledge experiences the whole history in a compressed form. In this sense the image is redemptive. It shows the object, for example Baudelaire, not as a part of history but displays history as a part of the object. In images, history ceases to dominate over objects. Beings are no longer to be reduced to a series of moments that should constitute their history. They are no longer to be identified with the sum of pictures on the already projected film tape, i.e., with something definitively not actual. They are rather abruptly experienced as something without bounds, something that escapes the domain of history whilst conserving it at the same time. The dialectic within history which tries to encompass a certain being and this being that opposes being reduced to history comes to a standstill in the image; these two are now inseparably interwoven. The being is neither reduced to nor separated from history. Neither a chess piece in the game of history, nor an a-historical essence. The essence of beings is not to be lost in history; it is history, rather, that is to be found in the essence of beings.

11.

Giorgio Agamben suggests taking Benjamin literally when it comes to images of history as monads.⁴⁹ As in Leibniz, the monad ‘has no windows’ and it bears no relation to an outside. There’s nothing outside the image that the image could refer to. The question of the image’s correspondence to a formerly present reality does not even come up. If Baudelaire is pictured as a monad, then there’s no point in asking whether this image accurately describes the Baudelaire that had actually walked the streets

47 Benjamin, W., “On the Concept of History”, 396.

48 “Memory, like Benjamin’s dialectical image or historical monad, is an act of *compression* which releases an otherwise unavailable meaning.” Handelman, S., A., *fragments...*, 150.

49 Agamben, G., “On Benjamin’s *Baudelaire*”, in: *Walter Benjamin and Theology*, 228.

of Paris during his *flâneries*. It is precisely the real Baudelaire that is being irredeemably lost. And the sole thing that survives is his image.

The point of Benjamin's take on history is precisely that the present generation has nothing but images. These are not images of history, though. History is these images. It is not that the present generation keeps history alive through images as mediators. The very images are to be kept alive and carried over to the next generation.

Memory is the way forward.

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Part 3:
Memory and History-telling

Trauma, Silence, and Memory: Waiting for Godot and Shoah

Seval Merve Sarihan

I use the words you taught me. If they don't mean anything anymore, teach me others. Or let me be silent.

Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*

We had the experience but missed the meaning

T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages"

To juxtapose Samuel Beckett's play *Waiting for Godot* with Claude Lanzmann's film *Shoah* may strike one as an unusual decision. While the former is a two-act play which follows two uneventful days in the life of tramps, Vladimir and Estragon, who expect to meet a mysterious 'Godot', the latter is a nine-and-a-half-hour-long film about the death camps in Poland, composed of interviews with survivors, perpetrators and bystanders of the Holocaust in various locations around the world. By putting *Godot* and *Shoah* in dialogue, I seek to show that the widespread sense of trauma ensures a fundamental connection between this unlikely pair. The memory of the Second World War and the trauma of the Holocaust were deeply engrained in Lanzmann's *Shoah*. For Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, on the other hand, this remains rather obscure and latent. I argue that, on the whole, the play offers a rather traumatic tableau. Although it remains unmentioned, the war trauma is quietly omnipresent and looms large in the play's text. This trauma can therefore be held accountable for the opacity of language.

Trauma studies gained popularity during the 1990s. After the Vietnam War, in 1980, with the indispensable introduction of the term 'post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)' in the Diagnostic Manual by the American Psychiatric Association, the effects of trauma were officially recognised. PTSD was described as "a disorder of memory".¹ As a result of experiencing a sudden and unexpected terror, "the mind is split or dissociated: it is unable to register the wound to the psyche because the

1 Leys, R., *Trauma: A Genealogy*, Chicago 2000, 266–297, 2, URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kcl/detail.action?docID=648142&pq-origsite=primo> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

ordinary mechanisms of awareness and cognition are destroyed”.² The theoretical and medical approach to the inner workings of trauma and its consequences on memory began in the late nineteenth century when Sigmund Freud developed the concept of ‘traumatic neuroses’. With his theories, such as the belatedness of trauma and the break between experience and meaning, Freud was an influential and inevitable name within the conceptualisation and expansion of the trauma and memory studies. Since then, the term trauma is mainly used to signify “the wound of the mind” and memory, and not the physical wound on the skin.³

It can be said that approaching literature and cinema in the context of trauma studies is a relatively recent development. With postmodernist, deconstructive and psychoanalytical insights, contemporary trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dori Laub pointed out a crucial aspect of trauma: its relationship with language and representation. They argued that trauma is, above all things, a crisis of language. It breaks down the referential function of language and leaves the victim’s speech with a lack of cohesion. They maintained the view that the experience is ineffable, and therefore it is impossible to fully understand and represent a traumatic event, especially the Holocaust, which is considered as “the pivot around which much of the trauma studies have revolved”.⁴ Trauma called for expression but came against a perceived limit regarding what could and could not adequately be rendered in words and images. While the conventional representational strategies were not sufficient for expressing the traumatic experience, the intrinsic ineffable nature of trauma suffused linguistic and artistic boundaries and demanded an aesthetic reconsideration. With his much-quoted controversial statement about art after Auschwitz, Theodor Adorno suggested that an unforeseen event such as the Holocaust required an unforeseen representational approach “which is stylistically and thematically awkward” and which internalises a sense of futility in pursuing meaning, communicating through a non-language in order to reflect the underlying trauma.⁵ He privileged silence as a stylistic choice

2 Ibid, 2.

3 Caruth, C., *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Baltimore 1996, 3–4.

4 Herrero, D. – Baelo-Allué, S., *Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond*, Amsterdam, New York 2011, xi., URL: <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kcl/detail.action?docID=3008295> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

5 Rowland, A., “Re-reading ‘Impossibility’ and ‘Barbarism’: Adorno and Post-Holocaust Poetics”, *Critical Survey*, Vol. 9, Issue 1, 1997, 57–69, 58, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41556053> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

in artistic representations because he believed that only proximity to silence could responsibly convey the trauma of that age.

In Claude Lanzmann and Samuel Beckett's works, we see a similar search for delivering what was initially unspeakable by ensuring a visual and linguistic silence. What Lanzmann's much-discussed choice of omitting any archival footage of the camps and Beckett's careful and deliberate avoidance of using words like war, resistance, occupation have in common is that they resist taking overused paths to approach the traumatic memory of war to reduce the risk of rendering the experience to a mere cliché. Moreover, the very absence of such words and images provides both Beckett's text and Lanzmann's film with a compelling way of ensuring the prominence of war trauma without concretising and reproducing the violent events. The visual and linguistic absence points to a broad problem of memory in the sense that for those who underwent such horrors, it is difficult to remember and verbalise their traumatic past. In that respect, *Waiting for Godot's* concern with the complexities and uncertainties of both memory and language indicates that "silent, unformed, distorted in its representation, "the thing that is not over", remains and governs the way these characters speak and act."⁶

Written in the immediate aftermath of the war, in the early 1950s, and in a period in which the realities about the Nazi genocide started to unravel, the linguistic minimalism of *Waiting for Godot* has been interpreted in various ways, provoking endless discussion and ambiguity about the meaning of the play. Thus, when reading or watching it, we find ourselves not so much as a spectator/reader but more as an analyst who tries to attribute meaning between the fragmented dialogues that seem to have no apparent connection. Nevertheless, it is true that "Even as early as 1937, long before his post-war revelation, Beckett has registered his dissatisfaction with language, his desire to find expressiveness in the spaces in between words".⁷ However, especially after his first-hand experience of the war as a member of the French Resistance cell called Gloria SMH, his take on the language in his plays and novels took a drastic turn. Being part of a team whose mission was to translate encrypted documents and transmit secret messages profoundly informed and shaped Beckett's view on language.⁸

6 Beer, G., "Introduction", in: *The Wolfman' and Other Cases*, London 2002, vii–xxvii, vii.

7 McDonald, R., *The Cambridge Introduction to Samuel Beckett*, Cambridge, UK, New York 2006, 36, URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kcl/detail.action?docID=321093> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

8 Knowlson, J., *Damned to Fame: The Life of Samuel Beckett*, New York 1996, 280, URL: <https://archive.org/stream/damnedtofamelife00know#mode/2up> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

Looking at the play against such a backdrop, it is clear that with lines such as “To all mankind they were addressed, those cries for help still ringing in our ears!”, it is hinted that these characters came face to face with death and witnessed great destruction.⁹ The effect of this unknown traumatic past primarily manifests itself in Estragon, who constantly struggles with his memory and feels tormented upon and forced to remember an incident either from a distant or recent past. For example, he cannot remember the place they spent the previous night, he cannot recognise his own boots and he responds to Vladimir, who asks whether he already forgot having met Pozzo and Lucky, by saying that “That’s the way I am. Either I forget immediately or I never forget”.¹⁰ Most importantly, Estragon’s persistent forgetfulness creates the occasion for us to be frequently reminded of the supposed arrival of the absent character of Godot. Similarly, Pozzo appears to suffer from amnesia as he acknowledges that his “memory is defective”¹¹ and later says: “I don’t remember having met anyone yesterday. But tomorrow I won’t remember having met anyone today” declaring that he quickly forgets, like Estragon.¹² According to Cathy Caruth’s definition, trauma is “the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world”, and she stresses that experiencing a violent event remains unknown to the conscious.¹³ It is true that traumatic memories are “registered and encoded in the brain in a different way from ordinary memory” and thus disturb its usual functioning.¹⁴ However, in this case, these characters not only forget their painful memories but also have difficulty in recalling simple events from their very recent past, which is an indication of the profundity of their trauma, that constantly and subconsciously preoccupies and shatters their sense of time.

While it becomes difficult to consciously recall incidents from a traumatic past, Caruth and Anne Whitehead agree on the fact that such memories tend to surface at unexpected moments such as in “bodily sensations, behavioural re-enactments, nightmares, and flashbacks.”¹⁵ Having said that, it is worth noting that throughout the play, stage directions occupy as much space as the dialogues. The language is mostly

9 Beckett, S., *Waiting for Godot*, London 2006, 72.

10 *Ibid.*, 52.

11 *Ibid.*, 31.

12 *Ibid.*, 81.

13 Caruth, C., *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, 4.

14 Whitehead, A., *Memory*, Abingdon 2009, 115.

15 *Ibidem.*

replaced by repetitive and collective actions, such as Vladimir's taking off his hat and Estragon's removing his boots, that are interspersed throughout the text, disrupting the unity both visually and semantically. While the function of language is minimised, physicality is taken to an extreme level. It is as if they no longer communicate through verbal exchanges but with manifold physical gestures. In other words, the play's fixation on the physicality of characters reinforces the absence of verbal communication.

The most notable example of this occurs during Pozzo's speech in Act I, which is constantly interrupted by square brackets to denote Lucky's actions such as "[Lucky puts down the bag, advances, gives the coat, goes back to his place, takes up the bag.]", which is repeated in various reformulations.¹⁶ On the other hand, it also asserts that these characters have lost control over their body. It seems that Vladimir and Estragon's illogical preoccupation with their hat and boots developed into an obsessive routine, in which they involuntarily repeat these gestures at unforeseen moments in their conversation. We can say that their "postures and gestures are enigmatic signs whose meanings are not spoken but acted out, and which seem to belong elsewhere, to another scene", to the origin of their trauma.¹⁷ Just like their physicality, their dreams are worth mentioning as well. Throughout the play, because of Vladimir's firm refusal, Estragon never reveals the content of his dreams. His speech is cut short by Vladimir's aggressive exclamatory sentences; "DON'T TELL ME!".¹⁸ His refusal evokes Freud's approach to dreams, which states that unsettling and repressed memory appears in distorted forms in dreams.¹⁹ This further implies that in refusing to hear, Vladimir wants to escape from "the unconscious testimony of the dream", which contains the risk of making them remember and relive the traumatic experience.²⁰

In a similar way of avoiding dreams, they avoid falling into silence because it appears that suppressed memories can resurface uncontrollably in the absence of voice:

16 Beckett, S., *Waiting for Godot*, 17.

17 Fletcher, J., *Freud and the Scene of Trauma*, New York 2013, 4, URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kcl/detail.action?docID=3239839> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

18 Beckett, S., *Waiting for Godot*, 8.

19 Freud, S., *Dreams*, London 2018, 58.

20 Felman, S., "Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching", in: *Téstimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York, London 1992, 1–56, 16.

Vladimir: Say something!

Estragon: I'm trying.

Long silence.

Vladimir (in anguish): Say anything at all!²¹

Vladimir's begging of Estragon to break the silence is a clear indication that they become ill at ease in the face of silence, so they force themselves to speak. Here, the act of speaking is crucial not only because it passes the time but primarily because it prevents them from thinking as Estragon claims; "It's so we won't think.", "It's so we won't hear.", "All the dead voices".²² Drawing on Elaine Scarry's reasoning we can say that it is not coincidental that the play abounds in seemingly meaningless dialogues. In her influential book *The Body in Pain*, she claims that "the voice becomes a final source of self-extension; so long as one is speaking, the self extends out beyond the boundaries of the body, occupies a space much larger than the body".²³ This is also evident in Lucky's speech, which appears to be an explosion of language. It seems that the language has been piled up in Lucky over the years of silence and once he is given permission to speak the words start to overflow. His long monologue is startling and aspirational at the same time. In other words, the act of speaking, even though it is formed of insignificant words or sounds, becomes crucial for them, especially as a mode of survival, as a reminder of the fact that they are still alive, and most importantly, as a protective veil that conceals and suppresses traumatic silence.

Nonetheless, speaking offers a restricted comfort. Vladimir and Estragon's speech is ruptured multiple times by the fragments of painful memories. They try to overcome the excruciating moments of silence by going through an accelerated exchange of words, or short sentences such as:

Vladimir: What do they say?

Estragon: They talk about their lives.

Vladimir: To have lived is not enough for them.

Estragon: To be dead is not enough for them.

Silence.

21 Beckett, S., *Waiting for Godot*, 54.

22 Ibidem.

23 Scarry, E., *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*, Oxford, New York 1985, 33.

Vladimir: They make a noise like feathers.

Estragon: Like leaves.

Vladimir: Like ashes.

Estragon: Like leaves.

*Long silence.*²⁴

In these instances, the rhythm of their speech changes and takes on overexcited cadence, which attests to a sense of tension. It is their short sentences that ensure a sense of abruptness. It denotes that the tension prevents them from any basic engagement with language and that they are incapable of enduring the laborious act of forming sentences. The sombre tone of their conversation, on the other hand, is dominated by “the enigmatic language of the untold stories”.²⁵ It lays bare that when they speak, they cannot prevent traumatic memories, ‘voices of the dead’, to intrude into their conversation. Thus, through language that is disrupted by obsessional repetitions, the play dramatises the paradoxical nature of traumatised speech, which is constricted between language and silence.

While *Waiting for Godot* overwhelms the audience/reader with its minimal use of language, *Shoah*, on the other hand, overwhelms with the multiplicity of language. As a consequence of filming across the world, from Poland to Israel, *Shoah* ended up being a polyphonic film. The narrative of this documentary includes six languages in total. However, the narrative of *Shoah* is firmly established on the discourse of testimony. Even though the interviewees’ stances and experiences of the event change, they speak through the language of trauma. To be sure, the hesitation to speak and the long gaps in their speech have different reasons. For the survivors, it indicates the difficulty of articulating and putting their painful experiences into words, while for the perpetrators, it remains a deliberate choice as a way of evading the horrors they caused. Lanzmann clarifies this difference by remarking that: “The testimonies of the Jews [are] testimonies under terror. [...] They lived under terror and what they remember is marked, stamped by terror”.²⁶

24 Beckett, S., *Waiting for Godot*, 54.

25 Caruth, C., *Unclaimed Experience...*, 56.

26 Lanzmann, C. – Larson, R. – Rodowick, D., “Seminar with Claude Lanzmann 11 April 1990”, *Yale French Studies*, Vol. 79, No. 79, 1991, 82–99, 93, URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2930247> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

The testimonies of a Polish witness, John Karski, and a former Nazi commissioner, Franz Gassler, perfectly embody this difference. It is visible that recalling and narrating their memories about the Warsaw ghetto are extremely difficult for both speakers. For Karski, it requires quite a lot of time to begin speaking and returning to his seat in front of the camera as he is apparently tense and agitated. He starts his testimony by saying that “Now... now I go back thirty-five years. No, I don’t go back... I come back. I am ready”.²⁷ Karski’s conflicting statement exposes his struggle with his memory. He implies that he has already been living in the past, but with Lanzmann’s question, he is urged to return to the present to narrate his experience.

As for Gassler, it appears that he is forced to return to the past under Lanzmann’s pestering questions: “You don’t remember those days?”, “I’ll help you remember. In Warsaw, you were Dr Auerswald’s deputy”.²⁸ Gassler appears to be surprised to learn the details about his own past as he says: “That’s the first time I’ve learned a date. May I take notes? After all, it interests me too. So in July I was already there!” and then pretends to write what he learned from Lanzmann.²⁹ The immediate juxtaposition of the two testimonies shows that Lanzmann is not only a filmmaker but also takes on the role of a psychoanalyst. With survivors, his questions offer a kind of talking therapy, as he guides and encourages them to carry on speaking, although making them relive their past has been seen and debated as an inconsiderate act.³⁰ With perpetrators, on the other hand, Lanzmann’s inquisitive attitude has an aggressive undertone, which aims to create the space for confrontation. Therefore, it is fair to claim that “Lanzmann endows the interlocutor with speech. It is in this way that he helps both the survivors and perpetrators to overcome their (very different kind of) silence”.³¹

The fact that the perpetrators and bystanders use their mother tongue whereas the majority of survivors speak in a foreign language is also

27 All references are to Lanzmann, C., dir., *Shoah*, New Yorker Films 2003, and to Lanzmann, C., *Shoah: An Oral History of the Holocaust: The Complete Text of the Film*, New York 1985, 167, URL: <https://archive.org/stream/shoahoralhistory00lanz#page/n5/mode/2up> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

28 Lanzmann, C., *Shoah*, 175.

29 *Ibid.*, 176.

30 Fuller, G., “Searching for the Stamp of Truth: Claude Lanzmann reflects on the making of “Shoah,” *Cinéaste*, Vol. 36, Issue 2, 2011, 16–19, 19, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/41690998> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

31 Felman, S., “In an Era of Testimony: Claude Lanzmann’s Shoah”, *Yale French Studies*, Vol. 97, 2000, 103–150, 131, URL: <http://www.jstor.com/stable/2903217> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

worth attention. The indication of an internal translation that the survivors have to endure is different from the kind of translation that is provided through the help of a professional interpreter. In this case, “The positions of speaker and translator are collapsed into one, as if to suggest that working through a trauma always involves some sort of translation”.³² Throughout the film, we see many Jewish survivors making an extra effort in carrying their answers with a broken English, French or German. Although they often seem competent enough in their second language, their struggle makes itself evident in the high volume of their voice and their grammatically flawed sentences. For instance, to compensate for his linguistic errors, to recover meaning in his defective speech, and to make himself understood despite his heavily accented English, the survivor of Treblinka, Abraham Bomba, speaks rather loudly, pronouncing each word distinctly.³³ It is clear that the natural flow of his speech is disrupted, and the pace of his narration is decelerated as he tries to find the right words and idioms that would be equivalent to his experience. Consequently, there is a sense of loss, a heavy presence of absent words pervading his speech. In effect, as Shoshana Felman explains, for traumatised people, testimony means speaking in a language that feels foreign, unfamiliar to them, even if they speak in their mother tongue.³⁴ Therefore, to communicate in a foreign language adds another barrier in verbalising the event and complicates the act of speaking.

Shoah is indeed a linguistically rich film, and yet it is a film that does not trust the referential function of language when it comes to representing traumatic memories. This is most visible in Lanzmann’s frequent employment of close-up shots of the faces of interviewees, which suggests that he prefers the language of the face to avoid the breaking down of the spoken word. Throughout the film, it has become a recurrent technique that whenever an interviewee struggles or hesitates to speak the camera slowly zooms in and remains in an extreme close-up to direct the audience’s attention to decipher the unsaid words in the microscopic movements of that face. With this filmic technique, Lanzmann seems to prioritise nonverbal communication through facial features because he knows that “The language of the face cannot be suppressed or con-

32 Stoicea, G., “The Difficulty of Verbalizing Trauma: Translation and the Economy of Loss in Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah*,” *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*, Vol. 39, Issue, 2, 2006, 43–53, 46, URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/20464186> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

33 Lanzmann, C., *Shoah*, 111–117.

34 Felman, S., “Education and Crisis, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching”, 1–56, 5.

trolled”.³⁵ In that sense, Shoah’s reliance on the close-up technique to make the language of face prominent reminds us of *Waiting for Godot’s* reliance on the gestural potential of the body to underpin the failure of verbal representation.

The church scene with Simon Srebnik, the survivor of Chelmno, is particularly significant to exemplify how the close-up works in *Shoah*.³⁶ At first, we see the Polish crowd saying kind words upon seeing Srebnik again, reminiscing and expressing their pity and sadness about his childhood. Then, as the crowd respond to Lanzmann’s off-screen voice, the camera slowly scrutinises each face surrounding Srebnik, shifting between long shot to locate Srebnik’s mute stance among the talkative crowd, to a medium close-up of faces and especially Srebnik’s face who listens and observes each speaker. The camera continuously returns to Srebnik’s face in the moments when the Poles started to give voice to the anti-Semitic stereotypes. The effect of this technique is to point out that “A certain noisiness about the Holocaust does not diffuse the silence but deepens it”.³⁷ Throughout this sequence, we witness the enthusiasm and loudness of the speakers as they shout to suppress each other’s voices to make their words be better heard than the rest, while Srebnik silently endures their indifference.

The sequence demonstrates that with a simple movement of the camera, the film aims to capture the moment of silence to make that silence speak and challenge that self-centred noise, which rendered the survivor speechless. In that respect, in *Shoah*, “The close-up mimicks the pointing finger, it requires no language and is not comparable to it”.³⁸ At the very end of this scene, the final close-up of Srebnik’s face unravels the grief and discomfort boiling under his mute smile. With bystanders and perpetrators, this technique serves to unfold their ignorance, complicity, and opinionated attitude. The employment of the close-up further undermines the loudness of the crowd, rendering it to mere background noise in the enlarging close-up of the survivor’s face.

Even though *Shoah* brings together multifarious testimonies, the experience and memories about the concentration camps in Poland are

35 Balázs, B., *Theory of the Film: (Character and Growth of a New Art)*, London 1952, 63.

36 Lanzmann, C., *Shoah*, 95–100.

37 Felman, S., “After the Apocalypse: Paul de Man and the Fall to Silence”, in: *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, New York, London 1992, 120–164, 123.

38 Doane, M. A., “The Close-up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema”, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, Vol. 14, Issue. 3, 2003, 89–111, 93, URL: <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/50602/pdf> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

mostly delivered through images, and in most cases, through the absence of images. The cinematic language is further permeated by the struggle of remembering and shaped by the unverballed words in the testimonies. The prolonged long shots of former camp buildings, that are now either buried under a pile of snow or covered with vegetation, are accompanied by calm, lingering, and disembodied off-screen voices of interviewees that testify their experience in these exact places. Instead of relying on footage from the past, *Shoah* juxtaposes the present state of empty camp sites over the voice of survivors. The cinematic time is approximated to the perception of time by trauma survivors; fragmentary and uncontrollable. By rupturing the linear flow of chronology, *Shoah* repeats traumatic experiences in which “the present and the past are collapsed into another”.³⁹ Most importantly, the camera’s continuous return to the eerie stillness of camp sites seems to be imitating the way the painful memories haunt the present as elusive flashbacks. Through such an unusual editing strategy, *Shoah* establishes an uneasy dream-like atmosphere and successfully conveys a sense of discrepancy between what is seen and told. While what the camera captures appears to be quiet and innocent, the testimonies depict a contrasting picture. It shows that what is verbally expressed cannot be visually captured and there remains a fundamental absence predominating the Holocaust discourse and memory.

Waiting for Godot and *Shoah* are two works that we are not accustomed to seeing together. Nevertheless, they are two works that unconventionally capture the feeling of absence. Probing these two works alongside each other despite their apparent dissimilarity carries the potential to open up new spaces of understanding of the complex nature of silence; especially silence caused by massive trauma and its relation to representational strategies. *Shoah*’s insistence on grounding its narrative in the present tense while pursuing the remnants of a crucial moment in history, and *Waiting for Godot*’s discreet rootlessness and bareness, even though it was the product of a highly tumultuous historical period, show that they reject previous artistic approaches by immersing their work in a certain kind of silence. The setting of these works side by side does serve to demonstrate that nothing exposes the ineffable and isolating nature of trauma so well as does the use of minimalism and immersion into a pervading sense of absence. Both Beckett and Lanzmann embarked upon

39 Hirsch, J., *Afterimage: Film, Trauma and the Holocaust*, Philadelphia 2004, 72, URL: <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/kcl/reader.action?docID=557339&ppg=1> [accessed: 30.04.2022].

a paradoxical quest for finding ways to incorporate the falling to silence and reminding the urgent necessity of overcoming it.

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Remembering and Forgetting in Monika Sznajderman's *Falszerze Pieprzu*

Lena Franziska Schraml

Introduction

Monika Sznajderman's 2022 novel, *Falszerze Pieprzu*, offers a contemporary example of the potential for fictional narratives to be infused and intertwined with collective memories and memory cultures.¹ This potential is revealed in the connection between remembering and narrating in the form of retrospective construction through which memory becomes observable in fictional texts. Acts of memory can be investigated by asking of the fictional narrative text what is being narrated within it and in which way. The development of the characteristics of a retrospective construction from the perspective of cultural studies, as well as narratology, results in an analytical toolkit. With its help, fictional narrative techniques can be identified and the text itself can be addressed within these frameworks.

The study of a fictional text should not intend to prove historical factuality or to check the extent to which the analysed texts have become part of the respective culture of memory. A text analysis with a theoretical filter blocks the view of the wholeness of the text; the analyser sees individual words, but no longer the connections between them. In addition, it is not possible to be analysed if the author has a certain intention (of commemoration). A reader has only access to the "textual configuration" (Mimesis II) and they alone can "consider the inner laws of the literary work of art" without "considering the before and after of the text".²

1 This paper is partly based on the already published dissertation thesis of Lena F. Schraml: *Kollektives Gedächtnis und literarische Erinnerungskultur. Erinnern und Vergessen in polnischen und persischen Texten der Gegenwart*, Berlin 2022, 225–255.

2 Ricœur, P., *Zeit und Erzählung*, München 1985, 88.

The question of what is remembered and told, as well as the ways in which this is done, in conjunction with narratological and cultural-scientific categories, offers the possibility of addressing the text alone. For this, cultural-scientific and narrative parameters must first be defined as analytical tools. These result from the connection between remembering and narration in the form of retrospective construction. Their characteristics such as selection, narrative voice and time(s) make remembering observable in fictional texts.

Those who remember and narrate must first make a selection. Things have to be sorted and discarded, depending on their importance for the individual or the collective. What is remembered, what is forgotten? How and in which order are the selected elements causally linked? Do they serve their self-image, their own victim and hero narrative?³ Memory is limited when something is deliberately concealed, for example due to trauma or repressive policies of history and remembrance.⁴ When certain events or personalities are not recounted, the memory of them fades. Sometimes a narrative of these events does not fit into the prevailing narrative and is therefore forgotten. The (collective) memory's narratives always define one's own and distinguish it from the other, from the foreign. This creation of meaning and identity is linked to victim and hero narratives that divide the world into black and white and are usually accompanied by national and religious myths.

The second question that can be asked of a text is: how is the story told and how is it presented? In the context of memory, the actor who remembers is important, as is the time from which and about which the story is told. In narratological terms, it is the narrative voice and the focalisation.⁵

In addition to the outcome of the story, the way a narrative is told depends on the narrator's present from which they remember. The further the temporal distance to the remembered event, the more the

3 Cf. Polkinghorne, D. E., "Narrative Psychologie und Geschichtsbewußtsein. Beziehungen und Perspektiven", in: J. Straub, *Erzählung, Identität und historisches Bewusstsein. Die psychologische Konstruktion von Zeit und Geschichte. Erinnerung, Geschichte, Identität 1*, Frankfurt a.M. 1998, 12–45.

4 Cf. Lehmann-Carli, G., "Empathie und Tabu bei Traumatisierungen und in Trauma-Erzählungen", in: G. Lehmann-Carli – B. Johannsmeyer – M. Schult, *Zerreißproben: Trauma – Tabu – EmpathieHürden*, Berlin 2017, 105–130 and Fricke, H., *Das hört nicht auf. Trauma, Literatur und Empathie*, Göttingen 2004.

5 Cf. Genette, G., *Die Erzählung*, Paderborn 2010 and Martínez, M. – Scheffel, M., *Einführung in die Erzähltheorie*, München 2007.

narrator's life circumstances and narratives have changed; situationally, different memories gain importance.

These are the parameters that are inherent in both remembering and narrating and which will be used to analyse memory in Monika Sznajderman's novel *Falszersze pieprzu*.

Monika Sznajderman's *Falszersze Pieprzu*

Monika Sznajderman was born in Warsaw in 1959. She holds a doctorate in anthropology and runs the publishing house Czarne with her husband Andrzej Stasiuk. With her 2016 published novel *Falszersze pieprzu Historia rodzinna*, she was a finalist for the Nike Prize for Literature.

Sznajderman writes not just about one family, but about two: the story of her Jewish-Polish family on her father's side and the story of her ethnic-Polish family on her mother's side. It is also the story of a dividing line between the inhabitants of a country that at times seems like two separate countries – maintaining business relations and otherwise avoiding each other. Only in the marriage of the narrator's parents do the two worlds connect; only there they become one.

At first glance, the arrangement of the novel seems clear: in the first chapter, the narrator reports on the past of the Jewish family and on the flourishing Jewish life before the war. In the second chapter, the narrator is in the city of Radom. Here she traces the Jewish community's life which she knows, not from her family's stories, but from the texts of other writers and contemporary witnesses. The third chapter is about the Shoah, the time of the Second World War, when almost all her Jewish family was killed in the camps and ghettos.

Then comes what feels like a radical cut: suddenly the reader is immersed in the story about the narrator's ethnic-Polish family, which was not mentioned in a single word before. The war and the Shoah are far away; she tells of the flourishing landscapes of her Polish landowning family, with whom she grew up.

The novel ends with the chapter about her father's stay in a Jewish children's home after the war; there the 'humanity' of the many Jewish children was restored to some extent after they had suffered unimaginable horrors and traumas in the years before.

Jumping in time and changing places between the Jewish and the Polish family within the chapters blur what at first glance seems to be an unambiguous order. This dissolution of unambiguity reveals the cut

that the Second World War meant for the order of the world: after that, nothing was the same as before. In the novel, this is very clearly visible in the Jewish living world that is bursting with life before and the nothingness after.

How does remembering function when there are no memories of one's own, all contemporary witnesses are dead or silent and no places of remembrance can be found? How does remembering work, when this story is difficult to tell, because nothing can be added and the motivation behind the events can hardly be fathomed?

It is considered difficult to tell a story if one cannot put the various events into a causal context. Sznajderman shows with her novel that it is possible. Although the events are told anachronistically, and although at times they are two different, at first glance unrelated stories, she closes the circle at the end with her parents and herself as the link between the worlds.

A causal connection cannot be found between the narrated events because in retrospect no one, and in this case the narrator herself, can grasp what has and, above all, why all this actually happened:

Jak uwierzyć, że takie rzeczy są możliwe?
[How to believe that such things are possible?]⁶

Against Forgetting

The narrator knows very little about her Jewish ancestors. All she has left are a few black and white photographs and the little she was told by her father. With the help of these photographs and many Jewish writers, eyewitness accounts, newspaper articles and advertisements, the narrator brings to life Jewish life in Poland in the 19th century until the outbreak of the Second World War. All the photographs, even the seemingly light-hearted ones, have in common a shadow hanging over them, a shadow connecting them all: it is the shadow of impending death, which only the narrator knows about, and which is the blood-red thread that runs through her story.⁷

She shows a lively, diverse, rich and joyful world, first through her great-grandparents' guesthouse, then through Radom, where most of

6 Sznajderman, M., *Falszersze pieprzu. Historia rodzinna*, Wołowiec 2016, 97.

7 Ibid., 55.

her family lived. Since she herself is not a contemporary witness, she lets others narrate who experienced these times and described them in their works either at the same time or ‘after’, i.e. after the Shoah and the Second World War.

Right on the first page it becomes clear what the novel is about:

Czym są miejsca, które straciły pamięć? Które ludzka pamięć omija, których przestaje dotykać? I co to za pamięć marnotrawna, która buja w obłokach, zamiast opowiadać, przywoływać historie? Miejsca, których pamięć nie otacza troską, umierają. Dziwaczej i dziczęją, porośnięte zieliskiem zapomnienia.

[What are the places that have lost their memory? Which human memory bypasses, which it stops touching? And what is this prodigal memory that wanders in the clouds, instead of telling, recalling stories? Places that are not cared for by memory die. They get weirder and weirder, overgrown with the weeds of forgetfulness.]⁸

The narrator describes remembering and forgetting very vividly. What are the places of memory that are forgotten? Why is a place forgotten, avoided, repressed? Forgetting is natural, and therefore remembering must be taken care of artificially, by man. That is why narration is necessary. Remembering through narration is the declared goal of the narrative voice, which it achieves in various ways explained below.

There are no “material traces of the past” to mark the present or existence of the deceased, “not something, but rather nothing – a void in place of the former Jewish quarter of Radom”.⁹ The narrator feels a *fantomowy ból* [phantom pain]: Something is no longer there, it no longer exists, and yet one still feels the wound; it is the pain of absence.¹⁰ Here, a trauma becomes apparent that was transferred to the descendant of the actual traumatised person.

The narrator thinks especially of her father’s trauma, who remains silent about his experiences, and in this silence one can drown, she says. That’s why she started remembering:

Przeciw temu milczeniu, przeciw zapomnieniu, przeciw nicości, która chciałaby to wszystko pochłonąć.

8 Ibid., 19.

9 Ibid., 109.

10 Ibidem.

[Against this silence, against oblivion, against the nothingness that would like to consume it all.]¹¹

Writing against forgetting is a special concern of the narrator: she emphasises this repeatedly in the course of the novel.

[N]iech stanie ona na drodze [...] agentom zapomnienia, niszczytkom dokumentów, mordercom pamięci, poprawiaczom encyklopedii, konspiratorom milczenia, [...] tym, którzy jak w pięknym epizodzie Kundery, mogą aerografem usunąć człowieka z fotografii tak, że zostaje z niego tylko kapelusz.

[Let it stand in the way of [...] the agents of oblivion, shredders of documents, murderers of memory, revisers of encyclopaedias, conspirators of silence, [...] those who, as in a beautiful episode by Kundera, can airbrush away a man from a photograph so that only his hat remains.]¹²

With the last paragraph, the narrator addresses those who want to suppress certain historical events from the collective memory and only allow certain narratives, so that other narratives are consigned to oblivion through their non-repetition.

The narrator repeatedly emphasises the difficulty of telling this story. She cannot add anything to it because her imagination is insufficient. She repeats the sentence: *Nie mogę sobie wyobrazić* [I cannot imagine] several times.¹³ Here, the limit of words and imagination inherent in the literary rendering of trauma become apparent.

At the same time, she doubts her right to tell this story and to add another one to the stories of the Shoah. She doesn't want to open up her father's old wounds, doesn't want to poke around in them. But she too is traumatised, and because she has lived in the "shadow of silence" for years, she now wants to emerge from it.¹⁴

Remembered and Remembering Time: Then and Now

Right at the beginning of the novel, the narrator's father explains why he keeps silent about his experiences:

11 Ibid., 113.

12 Ibid., 113f.

13 Ibid., 140f.

14 Ibid., 137f.

Po prostu musiałem zarzucić zasłonę na to, co było, żeby móc jakoś zaadaptować się do tego, co nastąpiło później. Te dwa światy były zupełnie niemożliwe do pogodzenia. A potem nie mogłem już do tego “wcześniej” wrócić. [...] Chyba po prostu zamknąłem, może podświadomie, drzwi do przeszłości. To był trochę taki mechanizm obronny. Potem już nie potrafiłem ich otworzyć.

[I simply had to drop the veil on what was, so that I could somehow adapt to what came after. The two worlds were completely incompatible. And then I couldn't go back to that “before”. [...] I think I simply closed, perhaps subconsciously, the door to the past. It was a bit of a defence mechanism. Later, I couldn't open it anymore.]¹⁵

With these sentences he expresses his trauma, which he figuratively describes with the “curtain”, the “door” and the two “worlds” that cannot be crossed. He is aware of the self-protection mechanism and yet he can no longer deactivate it.

With this statement the father creates two time-levels: the time before and the time after. The World War and especially the Shoah represent a break in time: a border between two worlds. This motif of two such different times, the all and the nothing, runs through the novel as does the motif of forgetting and repressing which the father Marek Sznajderman also addresses here. As mentioned above, it is the narrator's self-declared intention and duty to remember and commemorate for him. The remembered time thereby corresponds to the before, the remembering time to the now.

The narrator, who is not a contemporary witness of the Second World War and therefore has no memories of her own, can only speak about that time from the present and in the present tense. Her second approach is to have other contemporary witnesses, writers, newspaper articles and advertisements narrate.

The narrative addressee is predominantly the narrator's father whom she addresses directly as ‘you’. She tells him about his own life from the present, placing certain events in a larger historical context. Through this entanglement of the individual fate in the ‘general’ Polish history she creates a special historical experience: history comes alive.

The narrator repeatedly switches between times thus making the contrast between then and now clear.

To wszystko będzie jednak potem. [That will all come later, however.]¹⁶

15 Ibid., 19f.

16 Ibid., 36.

Sentences like this, with the use of the future tense and the signal word *potem* [later, after], indicate that the narrative voice is recounting from a later time level and must also lace the events again and again during the process of telling.

Places of Memory and Forgetting

On the narrative level of the present the narrator is searching for traces of the places where her families lived before the war. She tells the story of her Jewish family by means of the guesthouse in Falenice whose property was returned to her father 70 years after the war. Since he was unable to “carry the burden of memory”, his daughter is now trying to “piece together a narrative” from the existing fragments.¹⁷ In the emptiness of the Warsaw suburb, she builds her father a “guesthouse of memory”.¹⁸ Her words and imagination fill it with life.

Proof of the guesthouse’s existence are advertisements in the Polish-Jewish newspaper *Nasz Przegląd* in which the various accommodations are advertised and the owners are also found by name. In a Polish listing of Falenice summer resorts from 1938, the guesthouse is not found, which astonishes the narrator because “the house did exist, just as your [the narrator’s father’s] grandparents and the rest of the numerous family existed [...]”.¹⁹ In the narrator’s present day, nothing remains of this villa, nor of the “numerous” Jewish family whose proof of existence are the photographs.²⁰

Two different worlds emerge in the memory of the flat of the ethnic-Polish grandmother Maria Rojowska, of whom the narrator still has childhood memories. Her grandmother’s flat was a “world of its own”, a “reflection of earlier worlds”.²¹ Here the narrator introduces us to another world that is different from the one ‘out there’: the socialist Poland of the 1960s.

Further levels are also opened up; outside and inside the flat, two different times and spaces prevail, which only come into contact with each other when visitors cross them by crossing the threshold. The reader learns nothing about the outside of the 1960s in Poland, a turbulent

17 Ibid., 102.

18 Ibidem.

19 Ibid., 20ff.

20 Ibidem.

21 Ibid., 166.

time for Polish Jews in particular. The remembered world takes place inside which conveys a feeling of safety and security but also represents a journey away from everyday life and the present into 'better' times before the war.

Own and Borrowed Memories

The frame narrative can be imagined as follows: the narrator sits in a room opposite to her father and tells him his own life story, as well as that of his Jewish family, against the background of Polish-Jewish history. She also tells him about her search for traces of the places of memory of her Jewish and her Polish ancestors.

On the one hand, the narrator is not directly involved in the intradiegetic events. She tells of the life of her father and all her Jewish ancestors, of whom she has never met anyone except her father, and of whom she only knows through photographs and stories told by surviving relatives. She is the narrator from the outside (extradiegetic), but she does not know everything and can sometimes only guess.²²

On the other hand, she is also a homodiegetic narrator. In the chapter about the ethnic-Polish family she participates directly in the events. In other chapters, she talks about how she relates to the events as a daughter and the link between the two worlds.

On the side of her Jewish family, texts have survived as little as the people behind them. Therefore the narrative voice also brings in more well-known authors to help such as Eli Wiesel, historians like Jan Błóński and the writer and author from Radom, Marcin Kępa. Jewish writers like Jehoszua Perle were also included as well as the Nobel Prize winner Isaac Bashevi Singer.²³

A trace of her grandfather in the ghetto has been preserved in memoirs by Aleksander Szejman, hero of the book *A jednak czasem miewam sny* [And yet it happens that sometimes I dream] by Joanna Wiszniewicz.²⁴ This is direct proof of how literature can serve memory: people, places and times are remembered in it of which no other evidence has survived.

The narrator doubts whether she is able to "give back their lost existence"²⁵ to the deceased through her narrative. The reason given is that

22 Ibid., 69, 112.

23 Ibid., 107ff., 216.

24 Ibid., 101f.

25 Ibid., 118ff.

there is a lack of evidence for this both in cemeteries and in the archival material such as *The Book of Radom: The Story of a Jewish Community in Poland* which was destroyed by the Nazis. This testimony to cultural memory, however, only lists more notable and important figures of the Jewish citizenry; the rest of the population consists only of numbers.

The only way the narrator sees is to write her own, very private book of Radom from the pitiful remains because literature is the ‘only possible form’ of memory. Thus, she mentions the names of her Jewish relatives whose existence is recalled from the cloud of oblivion simply by printing the black letters on white paper and by pronouncing them.²⁶

She uses wartime photographs and documents found in Radom archives, as well as the memoirs of her great-uncle Elias Sznajderman, which were recorded in the early 1990s for the Holocaust Museum in Washington. Elias was one of the few in her family who survived “and the only one of his siblings”.²⁷ He is supposed to talk about the past, he is supposed to fill the gaps in her memory with his story.

Two Worlds

The big question keeps coming up: why does no one say, do or write anything about the fate of the Jewish fellow residents and neighbours? After all, while the ethnic Polish landowning relatives follow the battles on the seas and in the air every day and live a life almost like before the war, the life of the Jews in the neighbouring village is vehemently restricted. For the narrator, it seems as if her ethnic Polish relatives are not paying any attention to what is happening right on their doorstep.²⁸

By inserting scenes of what happened at the same time to her Jewish relatives into the description of the ideal world of her ethnic Polish family, the narrator shows the two separate worlds that existed at that time. For example, she tells of that afternoon when a painter made portraits of her Polish grandparents Maria Rojowska and Kazimierz Rojowski. Then she thinks of her Jewish grandmother who was murdered in a pogrom nearby at about the same time.²⁹ With these interpolations she breaks with the ideal world of the landowning family.

26 Cf. *Ibid.*, 118ff.

27 *Ibid.*, 128.

28 *Ibid.*, 186f., 214f.

29 Cf. *Ibid.*, 167.

She addresses her Jewish ancestors directly and asks them what their relations with their ethnic Polish neighbours were like and whether they existed at all. She doubts the latter and at the same time hopes that it wasn't their acquaintances and neighbours who arrived in carts to loot in the ghettos after the liquidation. She hopes that these "*rozjuszona bestia w ludzkim ciele*" [unleashed beasts in human form] weren't the acquaintances of her relatives, with whom they kept friendly company, whether at the post office or in her uncle's doctor's office.³⁰

By making it clear that those animal-like 'beasts' were everyday acquaintances and neighbours of one's own relatives, she invalidates any argument of ignorance about them as well as the description of the culprits as 'exceptions with whom one had nothing to do.'

She shows the border between the two 'worlds':

Leżące po sąsiedzku Ciechanki i Łęczną zamieszkiwały dwa osobne, odrębne, nieznające się narody. Nieznające i niepragnące się poznać. Od wieków losy polski i żydowski toczyły swe wody oddalonymi od siebie korytami.

[Neighbouring Ciechanki and Łęczna were inhabited by two separate, distinct peoples who did not know each other. They did not know each other and did not want to get to know each other. For centuries, the Polish and Jewish fates had been treading water along separate channels.]³¹

She quotes the Polish journalist and writer Anna Bikont as 'proof' and an additional source for this finding. Bikont confirms that there was "no commonality of fate" and therefore also "no common memory", which is of great importance for the cohesion of a group.³²

This segregated life, of which nothing can be seen or heard today, is also described by the Jewish writer Ben-Zion Gold in *Silence Before the Storm. The Life of Polish Jews before the Holocaust*:

Większość z nich była religijna i mocno osadzona w tradycji. Na ulicy słyszało się głównie jidysz, dzieci uczyły się w chederach i jesziwach.

[Most of them were religious and firmly rooted in tradition. Yiddish was mainly heard on the street, children studied in cheders and yeshivas.]³³

30 Ibid., 35.

31 Ibid., 216.

32 Ibid., 216.

33 Ibid., 104.

These excerpts are only a small glimpse into the picture presented in the novel: Jews and Poles were strangers to each other. Jews were strange and alien: they were the unknown, the other. The two worlds and destinies ran side by side in separate tracks, separated by walls that were only sometimes broken through by business and feelings. The Polish Jews in their entirety embodied a strangeness “with which it was difficult to identify, which was not human, which is why it was difficult to sympathise with them”.³⁴

The many contradictions almost make the narrator despair: the everyday indifference, the horror in the face of the pogrom in the neighbouring town and then the political vision of a ‘Jew-free Poland’. On the one hand, there was a hatred of “real” Jews, but then exceptions were made for those whom one “liked” the “familiar” Jews, *swoi Żydzi*.³⁵

Jews had already ceased to exist for many Poles by the early 1940s. This is shown by the word *pożydowskie*, which translates as something like “that which was left behind after the Jews”.³⁶ Here, the temporal division into before and after appears compactly in one word. This example shows that language is not an insignificant, harmless thing whose effect and function can be downplayed:

[...] dokonano na nich symbolicznego mordu, jeszcze zanim zdążyli zamordować ich naziści.

[...] they were symbolically murdered before the Nazis even had time to kill them.]³⁷

Language can “*reify*” [totalnej reifikacji]³⁸, it can deny humanity. As a result, compassion becomes difficult, indifference sets in and physical violence is only the consequence.

Anti-Jewish Resentment and Pogroms

The pogrom against the Jewish grandmother Amelia in 1941 was not an isolated incident in Poland. Even before the Second World War, when Jewish communities existed in most towns and villages, there were an-

34 Ibid., 217.

35 Ibid., 227.

36 Ibid., 216.

37 Ibid., 231.

38 Ibid., 233.

ti-Semitic incidents and anti-Jewish resentment. In *Falszerze pieprzu* sources are cited to prove this. The narrator mainly recalls those anti-Jewish acts committed by Poles. She proves this with the voices of survivors, contemporary witnesses and archival sources such as newspaper articles.

It starts with words, first in anti-Jewish propaganda of nationalist newspapers, then with words like *pożydowskie* (see above). The newspapers and magazines of the national Polish press carried out intensive propaganda work from autumn 1941 onwards.

On several pages, the narrator shows how the Polish press wanted to solve the “Jewish question” even before the Second World War.³⁹ In articles, they dreamt of the vision of a Jew-free Poland. Jews were seen by the *Endacja* press as a “problem” that had to be solved by the Poles and not the Germans.⁴⁰

After the German invasion, great-uncle Eliaasz reports, Poles had to help the Germans identify Jews. The Germans recognised a Jewish Pole only if he wore a caftan; they did not recognise the majority which is why they needed the help of the ethnic Poles.

[...] chodzili z Niemcami i wskazywali palcem “To jest Żyd” – “Das ist ein Jude”. “Jude” było pierwszą rzeczą, jaką nauczyli się mówić po niemiecku.

[...] they would go around with the Germans and point with their finger “This is a Jew” – “Das ist ein Jude”. “Jude” was the first thing they learned to say in German.]⁴¹

Ethnic Poles were also involved in clearing out the ghettos; the novel cites the example of the town of Łęczna.

By listing the places in the Lublin region where similar ‘incidents’ occurred (*“w Szczepreszynie i w Piaskach, w Grabówce i w Józefowie, w Izbicy i w Siedliskach, w Burzcu, Milejowie i Zakrzówku”*), the narrative voice perpetuates the memory of those horrible acts.⁴²

In Radom, too, looting took place after the majority of the Radom Jews had been deported to Treblinka. The emphasis in the following quotation is on the word *chrześcijański* [Christian], whose moral conception corresponds to the exact opposite of what happened and what people did:

39 Cf. Sznajderman, M., *Falszersze pieprzu. Historia rodzinna*, 219.

40 Ibidem.

41 Ibid., 130.

42 Ibid., 226.

A na opustoszałe ulice getta wjechały furmanki. I ładowało się na nie wszystko, co tylko się zmieściło: meble i lustra, garnki i balie, dywany i pościel, ubrania i buty. Pojadą do nowych, chrześcijańskich domów, dostaną nowe, chrześcijańskie życie.

[And onto the deserted streets of the ghetto wagons drove. And everything that fit was loaded onto them: furniture and mirrors, pots and pans, carpets and bedding, clothes and shoes. They will go to new, Christian homes, they will get a new, Christian life.]⁴³

While it is difficult not to distinguish between victims and perpetrators in this story; a differentiation between conventional good and evil was no longer possible in the camps. According to Primo Levi, the space there became a “*szara strefa*” [grey zone]. The work in the Sonderkommando was the “final limit of this section of camp reality”:

[...] strefa, w której z punktu widzenia ontologii zła nic nie było oczywiste, w której, wykraczając poza znane nam i przyswojone kategorie dobra i zła, wykuwał się “nowy pierwiastek etyczny”, w której trudno było przeprowadzić rozróżnienie pomiędzy oprawcą a ofiarą.

[...] a zone in which, from the point of view of the ontology of evil, nothing was self-evident, in which, going beyond the categories of good and evil that we know and have assimilated, a “new ethical element” was forging, in which it was difficult to distinguish between perpetrator and victim.]⁴⁴

This confusion was intentional on the part of the Germans; when even their ‘own people’ helped, no one could blame the Nazis alone. The ‘new’ ethics in the Third Reich, the allocation of who was ‘bad’ and who was ‘good’, who was victim and who was perpetrator, had shifted or had been shifted. Things became possible that would have been unimaginable before.

This shift in moral boundaries did not simply end with the end of the war in 1945. After the war, eastern Poland around Lublin was still very unsafe for Jews. Murders, pogroms, anti-Jewish riots were the ‘order of the day’. In Lublin, from mid-1944 to the end of 1946, “over a hundred people lost their lives in anti-Jewish attacks”.⁴⁵

The narrator intersperses these anti-Jewish riots and pogroms throughout the novel. She does not narrate them in a linear fashion, they are

43 Ibid., 116.

44 Ibid., 156.

45 Ibid., 220.

chronologically unordered and sometimes presented in more, sometimes in less, detail. The focus is on those events that are less well-known than, for example, the pogroms in Jedwabne and Kielce. In doing so, it shows that the latter were not exceptions and that anti-Jewish violence by Poles is a fact that cannot be denied. The many different voices of contemporary witnesses and archival sources underpin what the narrative voice itself has no memories of and what it nevertheless wants to remember.

The big question that hangs over the novel and especially the chapter on the Polish family is:

Czy obojętność może być niewinna? [Can indifference be innocent?]⁴⁶

In order to find an answer to this question, the narrative voice has a dialogue with itself. The voices come from her Polish and her Jewish family. It is a discussion that can be transferred to Polish society and that makes a memory competition obvious:

Nie byliśmy przecież antysemitami. Mieliśmy swoich Żydów i lubiliśmy ich, a oni nadzwyczajnie przywiązani byli do nas. Nigdy nie zrobilibyśmy im krzywdy. [...] Wraz z ich światem nasz zresztą także uległ zagładzie. [...] Zmiotła go “prześniona rewolucja”, a nas dotknęły prześladowania. Straciliśmy wszystko, tak w sferze materialnej, jak i duchowej, i karmimy się resztkami minionego.

[After all, we were not anti-Semites. We had our Jews and we liked them, and they were extremely attached to us. We would never do them any harm. [...] Along with their world, ours was also destroyed. [...] It was swept away by the “overturned revolution”, and we suffered persecution. We have lost everything, both in the material and spiritual sphere, and we feed on the remnants of the past.]⁴⁷

The use of the first person plural and the pronouns we, our, they, us is striking. She appeals for empathy since they were also victims and had lost everything. How can one blame these people who are already lying on the ground? The Polish voice mentions their good deeds, their role as activists, helpers of the poor, generous builders of hospitals, schools and children’s homes.⁴⁸ Can such selfless people be guilty of anything?

This is followed by a brief observation and interjection by the narrator:

46 Ibid., 231.

47 Ibid., 234f.

48 Ibid., 235.

Jestem więc świadkiem podwójnego końca świata. Świadkiem Zagłady i zagłady. Z perspektywy historyka oba te słowa oznaczają kres, jak jednak porównać ich ciężar? Czy to zawsze tak musi być? Czy tylko dobrodziejstwo późnego urodzenia może z nas zdjąć ciężar historii i na powrót uczynić niewinnymi? [So I am a witness to the double end of the world. I am a witness to the Holocaust and extermination. From a historian's perspective, both words mean the end, but how do they compare in weight? Does it always have to be like this? Can only the blessing of late birth remove the burden of history from us and make us innocent again?]⁴⁹

She doubts the comparison of suffering here. How can it be avoided but at the same time how can suffering be distinguished from each other when the word in Polish is the same: *zagłady*. Annihilation. One word written in capital letters, the other in small letters. She leaves her own question unanswered: whether only those, including herself, who were born afterwards, can be truly innocent.

In the following paragraph, the two voices combine again to form that of the narrator, the child of both sides. In the first person singular, she speaks of the we, of both sides, and directly contrasts the two worlds with the help of anaphors:

Tylko dlaczego nie mogę przestać myśleć o nas jedzących w 1941 roku wystawny obiad i o nas głodujących w getcie? O nas grających na wyścigach i o nas oglądających śmierć? O nas planujących odbudowę Muranowa w państwie nareszcie wolnym od Żydów i o nas ulicami Muranowa idących na Umschlagplatz? O nas pozujących malarzowi w upalne letnie popołudnie i o nas pod tym samym słońcem konających z pragnienia w bydłych wagonach lub zabijanych strzałem w głowę na dziedzińcu zamku?

[Just why can't I stop thinking about us eating a sumptuous dinner in 1941 and us starving in the ghetto? Of us playing at the races and of us watching death? About us planning to rebuild Muranów in a state finally free of Jews and about us walking through the streets of Muranów to the Umschlagplatz? About us posing for a painter on a hot summer afternoon and about us dying of thirst under the same sun in cattle cars or being shot in the head in the courtyard of a castle?]⁵⁰

The ethnic Polish voice then asks whether they had not cried enough and what else they could have done? She emphasises the foreignness that

49 Ibid., 235.

50 Ibidem.

existed between the two ‘completely different worlds’ and that could not be bridged. Were they also to blame for the fact that some Jewish Poles simply could not integrate (“się spolonizowali”: polonise)⁵¹

She blames the others and then the education and upbringing that has fostered anti-Jewish resentment for centuries. Finally, she even blames the air they breathed:

Czy mogliśmy wybrać sobie powietrze? [Could we have chosen the air?]⁵²

With the last sentence the Polish voice finally places itself in the role of victim. The first-person narrator admits at the end that she has exactly such conversations ‘incessantly’ in her head, and that she herself does not know how to classify and make sense of it all.

Here she addresses a problem that arises as a result of ambiguous victim-perpetrator roles: without clear roles and without a real context of meaning, without a causal explanatory context, no coherent story can be told. Some events cannot be categorised into clear forms or templates, and one will never be able to classify the Shoah and extermination in particular; this is a reason for the difficulty of writing about it.

Conclusion

Two seemingly insurmountable borders are revealed in *Falszerze pieprzu*. First, there is the barrier between remembering and forgetting. The narrative voice wants to remember but the distance in time to what is remembered makes it difficult. The places where her relatives lived have been reclaimed by nature, overwritten by new generations with new stories or left to natural decay. By writing about them, she brings them back into memory and turns them into places of remembrance.

The silence of her traumatised father and the death of most of the contemporary witnesses of her Jewish family do not make her project any easier. By getting voices from other witnesses to help her, she fills in the gaps in her memory and adds piece by piece to the puzzle of her past. By describing the few photographs that have survived, she paints her relatives’ lives colourfully. She focuses not only on their deaths but above all on their humanity before the Shoah which is sometimes forgotten in

51 Ibid., 236.

52 Ibidem.

debates about the Second World War. She asks the people in the pictures many questions which makes the loss even more obvious because no one can answer them any longer.

Telling the story of her Jewish family is of particular concern to the narrator's voice for on this side most of those who could tell the story themselves were murdered. The contrast with her Polish family, her mother's family could not be greater and their heroic stories illuminate the past too one-sidedly.

This unmistakable border between Jewish and ethnic Poles runs through the entire novel. The narrative voice reveals two worlds whose paths crossed extremely rarely. The relationship was marked by strangeness, envy, hatred, but above all by indifference, which in the narrator's opinion weighed the heaviest.

Using the example of her ethnic Polish family, she shows this indifference towards their neighbours and fellow human beings and asks herself and her relatives the question of guilt. She describes and mentions concrete historical cases in which there were psychological and physical border crossings by ethnic Poles against Jewish Poles, which she considers tantamount to transgressing the narrative of innocent Poles. By telling of the personal fates of her relatives, no one can accuse her of generalisation.

The juxtaposition of the two worlds is not meant to bring about a comparison; on the contrary, the narrator herself notes how impossible it is to compare suffering. Her repeatedly expressed concern is to remember, to not look away, to tell against repression and concealment. By pointing out commonalities, she overcomes the seemingly insurmountable border between ethnic and Jewish Poles. She dedicates her narrative to her parents in whose marriage the two worlds symbolically shook hands. In a shared future and their child, the circle closes at the end and gives birth to hope for the tearing down of the high border walls and for a new relationship.

Using this text as an example, the potential of fictional literature for memory cultures could be demonstrated: it transcends the boundaries of memory, it enables more empathy by broadening perspectives. By showing boundaries, it reveals them and can thereby overcome them at the same time. In her text, Sznajderman writes "against forgetting, against nothingness"⁵³; she remembers people, historical events and occurrences in her own way. She tells her own story and makes them tangible by

53 Ibid., 113.

immortalising them on paper. She gives a voice to the silent and the silenced; she deals with taboo subjects and sheds light on them; with the help of differentiated perspectives and the inclusion of historical sources, she abstains from a direct voice and thus avoids the accusation of a lack of personal experience.

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Memories of Russia: Ekaterina Bakunina's Account of the Homeland

Veselina Dzhumbeva

Introduction

Memory is an integral part of both of Bakunina's novels. By using methods of association, the author manages to introduce the reminiscences in an authentic way to her stream of consciousness narratives. Remembering is aided by the use of language and contrast in order to convey the different images of the homeland in opposition to the host country. In utilising these techniques, Bakunina's characters aim to re-negotiate their national identities. They utilise their Russian heritage as a way of distancing themselves from the French 'others' and highlighting their connection to their home country. Memory is, therefore, fundamental as a tool of re-building national identity in emigration.

Contextualization

In 1917 two revolutions shook the Russian Empire, with the latter changing the course of its history. Millions of Russian citizens left (willingly or not) the newly formed Soviet Union and settled abroad for what they perceived to be a temporary sojourn.¹ This sense of impermanence meant the Russian diaspora was uninterested in engaging with their host societies and preferred to live in isolation waiting for their return home. By the mid-1920s it was evident that the new regime would not

1 In the introductory chapter of her book *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris*, Maria Rubins states that the diaspora outside of the Soviet Union reached millions with almost 50 000 of them situated in Paris. See Rubins, M., *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris*, Hampshire 2015, 1.

be overthrown and Russians abroad had to come to terms with their situation.² They were suddenly left without a nation and their main token of belonging, their ‘Russianness’, was losing its meaning due to the rise of a new identity: the Soviet one. Threatened with losing their mode of self-determination, they leaned even more on the Russian institutions abroad, such as churches, libraries, publishing houses, schools, and journals, for a sense of belonging. Thus, they created what Marc Raeff has dubbed “Russia abroad”.³ Filled with nostalgia, many émigrés continued to avoid contact with their host societies and found solace in their Russian communities. This attitude was mostly practised among the older generation of Russian writers who focused on preserving pre-revolutionary literature and criticised any involvement with foreign culture. Their younger counterparts, however, avoided this conservative stance and experimented with Russian and European literary traditions in an attempt to create a literature of their own. Nevertheless, their works were still preoccupied with the topic of the homeland, with most of them continuing to write in Russian and to explore topics of national belonging and life in emigration.⁴ Both groups were affected by the identity crisis caused by emigration. As national identity is based on a juxtaposition of insiders and outsiders (or ‘Us’ and ‘Them’), the émigrés’ idea of their own identity became problematic as they found themselves outside of the boundaries of their home country. This rupture is central to Greta Slobin’s book *Russians Abroad: Literary and Cultural Politics of Diaspora (1919–1939)*, in which the author states that “[t]he separation from the homeland forced the émigré community to try to formulate its identity as a national entity without a nation.”⁵ For this project – the creation of a diasporic self on foreign soil – the émigrés needed a common foundation which they found in their origin. Thus, memories of Russia (and for the younger authors even myths of Russia) became the fundament upon which the new national identity in exile was built.

One neglected figure of the younger literary group is the poet and writer Ekaterina Bakunina. Born in 1889 in Petersburg, she emigrated to Paris in 1923, where she published a poem collection in 1931 and two novels: *Telo*

2 Slobin, G. N., *Russians Abroad: Literary and Cultural Politics of Diaspora (1919–1939)*, Boston 2013, 14.

3 Raeff, M., *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919–1939*, New York 1990, vii.

4 Examples for this trend can be found in Vladimir Nabokov’s works as well as Nina Berberova’s, Irina Odoevsteva’s, etc.

5 Slobin, G. N., *Russians Abroad: Literary and Cultural Politics of Diaspora (1919–1939)*, Boston 2013, 23.

[Body] in 1933 and *Lyubov' k Shesterym* [Love for Six] in 1935. Alongside these works, she was a frequent contributor to the modernist journal *Chisla* [Numbers] and other periodicals. Womanhood, motherhood, and identity as well as exile are central topics in her prose and poetry. Her works scandalised the Russian literary diaspora with their honest descriptions of physicality and sexuality and she managed to distinguish herself from other contemporary women writers by presenting the life of an exile, with all its banalities, and by focusing on the psychological struggles of her characters. The protagonists in both her novels left Russia as young girls and thus the books depicted an experience similar to the ordeals of the real-life women of the younger generation of émigrés.

Bakunina's first novel *Télo* depicts the life and struggles of a poor émigré who left Russia in the aftermath of the October Revolution. Married at a young age after an accidental pregnancy, the protagonist feels almost no positive feelings towards her family: she is repulsed by her husband and regrets having Vera, her daughter. Bakunina's second novel *Lyubov' k Shesterym* is significantly longer than the first and so the author can go into more detail when exploring the protagonist's sexuality, identity crisis and life story.⁶ A mother of three, the protagonist left Russia before the Revolution in order to live with her husband. As in *Télo*, the protagonist is not in love with her partner but unlike the first novel, she mostly enjoys his presence and his caring nature. Her feelings are shared between him, her three children, her lover, and her platonic love interest. This division fractures the protagonist's sense of self since she feels like a different person with every one of her six loved ones. She also criticises the roles of mother and wife which society has enforced on her and which thereby erase her individual identity. Both novels utilise a confessional manner of narration in the first-person and use a 'stream of consciousness' structure for the narrative; where the protagonist often jumps back in her memories and relays the events of her life in a non-linear manner. Thus, the memories of Russia are equally important as the protagonist lives abroad.

Russia in Memory

There are two distinct images of Russia in the novels: one as a place of luxury and comfort and another as a wild, untamed space embodying

6 In the Geleos edition, *Lyubov' k Shesterym* is 237 pages long, whereas *Télo* is 74 pages long. Bakunina, E., *Télo; Lyubov' k Shesterym*, Moscow 2001. [Translated by Veselina Dzhumbeva]

freedom. The former is more present in *Telo* where the protagonist is less materially secured. Her meagre surroundings and tedious everyday tasks often remind her of the glory days of her Russian past. For example, the everyday task of bathing reminds her of the comfortable bathroom she had in Russia:

Ни как не могу привыкнуть к неизбежному безобразию бедности, отсутствию ванны, заношенному белью, которое самой же надо отстирывать, к этой необходимости видеть друг друга полураздетыми. Сколько это рождает излишней неприязни и раздражения. [...] Но каждый раз, стоя в тазу, я вспоминаю то наслаждение, которое испытывается в ванне; теплые прикосновения воды, сладкое изнеможение расслабленных мышц, отдыхающую кожу, раскрывающиеся поры. [...] Та ванная комната, которая растворилась в петербургском прошлом, была большая, с окном из цветных стекол, соединенных в затейливом полуцерковном сюжете.

[I can't get used to the inevitable ugliness of poverty, the lack of a bath, the worn-out linen, which I have to wash myself, to this need to see each other half-naked. How much it gives rise to unnecessary hostility and irritation. [...] But every time I stand in the basin, I remember the pleasure of taking a bath; warm touches of water, sweet exhaustion of relaxed muscles, resting skin, opening pores. [...] The bathroom, which has dissolved in St. Petersburg's past, was large, with a stained-glass window connected in an intricate semi-church plot.]⁷

The association here is straightforward with a trigger in the present reminding the protagonist of an event or a subject in the past. The structure of the paragraph is also linear – beginning with a description of the association trigger (the missing bathroom) and the associated image concluding the flashback. The language between the two passages changes from expressions such as “bezobraziiu bednosti” [the ugliness of poverty], “zanoshennomu bel'iu” [worn out linen], “izlishnei nepriiazni i razdrzheniia” [unnecessary hostility and irritation] which create a feeling of uneasiness and unpleasantness to the more picturesque descriptions such as “sladkoe iznemozhnenie rasslavlennykh muskulov” [the sweet exhaustion of relaxed muscles] and “otdykhaiushchuiu kozhu” [resting skin] which produce a sense of pleasure and peace thus

7 Bakunina, E., *Telo; Lyubov' k Shesterym*, 264.

creating a smooth transition from the poor surroundings of her current life to the opulence of her days in Russia.

Unlike the straightforward manner of this association, there are often places where the protagonist remembers in fragments constantly switching between present and past:

Далеко позади остался Петербург с красивым ничегонеделанием или изобретением воображаемых ценностей. Революция обнаружила истинную цену вещей, но и она не научила меня не замечать того, что противно. Наоборот, всматриваться пристально в ощущение отвратительно. Меня мутит от вида скользкой, жирной, заплесанной раковины, но она и запах, идущий от короба с отбросами, по какому-то закону противоположностей напоминают мне томительный аромат, несшийся при заходе солнца от длинной пря мой аллеи, густо усаженной по обеим сторонам бар хатными белыми цветами табака.

... Грязные тарелки брякаются одна о другую, как на суетливом вокзале. ...Струйка воды, побежавшая от мокрой посуды, капает на ногу. Все съезживается во мне в скомканный комок лежавшего на стуле белья. Мне надо выстирать Верину и мою смены.

[St Petersburg is far behind with its beautiful idleness and the invention of imaginary values. The revolution revealed the true value of things, but it failed to teach me not to notice what is disgusting. On the contrary, it is disgusting to look intently at the sensation. The sight of a slippery, greasy, spitting shell makes me sick, but it and the smell coming from the waste bin, according to some law of opposites, remind me of the lingering aroma that wafted at sunset from a long straight avenue densely planted on both sides with velvety white flowers. tobacco.

... Dirty plates rattle against one another, like at a bustling train station. [...] ... A trickle of water, running from wet dishes, drips onto my leg. Everything shrinks in me into a crumpled ball of linen lying on a chair. I have to wash Vera's shift and mine.]⁸

This passage presents a non-linear mixture of past and present. The narrator even incorporates her current surroundings in the recollection when, for example, she mistakes the knives and forks she is washing for the cutlery in a dining car. This emersion in the memory draws an even stronger comparison between her Russian past and her Parisian present, where the latter is depicted as intruding in the dream-like motifs of

8 Ibid., 268.

the former. Once again language is used as a divider between the two associated timelines. The past is associated with poetic descriptions of senses such as hearing music or smelling an aroma, whereas the present situation is told with Bakunina's typical documentary style, with fewer adjectives and more active verbs.

An important image used here, which is present in both novels and underlines the importance of the protagonists' physicality, is water and especially its use for hygiene and housework. In *Telo* water is often associated with housework or taking care of one's body, whereas in *Lyubov' k Shesterym* it also has a comforting function. The novel starts with the protagonist alone at home finally having the time to take a bath in peace. During this time, she has a flashback, this time of sea waters, sand, and a Crimean beach; a hint at Bakunina's shifting nostalgia from the material security of pre-revolutionary Russia in Telo to longing for Russia's nature in *Lyubov' k Shesterym*.

Another memory trigger in the novel is music. We see an example in a passage where a street musician's song leads to a memory of Saint Petersburg. The protagonist exclaims:

“[м]узыка ли, голос ли – всегда ужасны, но достаточно одной случайной ноты – и передо мной предстают петергофские сыровато прохладные аллеи.”

[Whether it is the music or the voice – which are always terrible – but one random note is enough and Peterhof's greyish cool alleys appear before me.]⁹

This underlines the central role music plays in the process of remembering. Once again, we have a comparison between a miserable Parisian image with a tableau of opulence in Russia. The author once again uses language as a sign of the difference between homeland and host country with words of uneasiness and hardship such as “*uzhasny*” [horrible] and “*nadorvannyim*” [strained] depicting the scene in Paris and a more flattering vocabulary painting the picture of ease and wealth which is prevalent in the Petersburg memories¹⁰.

The second side of Russia Bakunina unveils to her readers is as a land of untamed nature and freedom. She uses this opposition between the ci-

9 Ibid., 312.

10 “[С]еребряные трубы императорского оркестра сливались с плеском брызжащих фонтанов, и медленно двигалась толпа” [“the silver trumpets of the imperial orchestra merged with the splashing of the splattering fountains, and the crowd moved slowly” – translated by Veselina Dzhumbeva]. Ibidem.

vilised Paris and the wild Russian steppes to create a distinction between a world of adult obligations and a world of carefree and mystical youth. In this, she follows in the steps of Leo Tolstoy and his myth of the “golden childhood” shaped in his first published work *Detstvo* [Childhood]¹¹. He is the first to thoroughly explore this time of a person’s life and he depicts it, as Andrew Wachtel describes, as a “happy period”, “one of joyous innocence”¹². For Bakunina’s protagonist in *Lyubov’ k Shesterym*, the most important aspect of the childhood was the unrestrained freedom she could enjoy:

“[...] я имела в России то преимущество, что могла свободно распоряжаться своим временем и всему, что меня не удовлетворяло, противопоставить ожидание будущего.”

[I had the advantage in Russia that I could freely manage my time and everything that didn’t satisfy me I could counter with the expectation of the future.]¹³

Her life in Paris is the complete opposite – she has no control over her time and is constantly at the disposal of her family:

“[к]огда все дома, я принадлежу всем, и считается в порядке вещей непрестанно требовать от меня разных больших и мелких забот и объяснений.”

[When everyone is at home, I belong to them, and it is considered in the order of things to constantly demand from me various big and small attentions and explanations.]¹⁴

This lack of freedom is not only reflected in the way the protagonist spends her time, but also in the depicted geography of both France and Russia. As the protagonist criticizes her garden for being too small, she then continues condemning the whole country, asking:

“[и] какая это страна, которую можно проехать в один день, а моя без конца и края, сынуля ненаглядная, под белым покрывалом разметавшаяся на двух материках.”

11 Tolstoy, L., *Detstvo. Adolescence. Youth*, Moscow 2017.

12 Wachtel, A. B., *The Battel for Childhood*, Stanford 1990, 44.

13 Bakunina, E. *Telo; Lyubov’ k Shesterym*, 102.

14 *Ibid.*, 11.

[What a country this is when you can cross it in one day, and my country is endless, my beloved son, scattered under a white veil on two.]¹⁵

She also underlines Russia's mystical status as a land of fairy tales and old-fashioned traditions in opposition to France's industrialised disillusionment:

“Лес, поля, глинистая дорога в колеях, жаворонок, неописуемый воздух России. И лошаденка в убогой сбруе, и мужичонка в архаическом одеянии с иконописным коричневым лицом. Загадочный исторический персонаж...

Воображенную тишь пререзает долгий, упорный заводской гудок.”

[The forest, the fields, the ruts in the clay road, the lark, the indescribable air of Russia. And a horse in a wretched harness, and a little man in archaic attire with an iconic brown face. Mysterious historical character...

The imaginary silence is interrupted by a long, stubborn factory whistle.]¹⁶

Nostalgia for a childhood spent in Russia was popular among the émigrés, most notably Bunin and Nabokov who explored the relationship between a happy childhood in Russia and a challenging life abroad. In Bakunina's works, the idealisation of childhood and the images of games and freedom often get intertwined with the Russian landscapes:

Я отчаянно дралась, царапалась и ела свои царапки, грызла ледяные сосульки, глотала снег, играла во множество игр с приговорами, сказками и припеваниями, яростно швырялась снежками и лепила огромных снежных баб, которых потом боялась сама [...] Весной убежала к морю смотреть, как оно надвигалось на сушу и разливалось по ней под вой ветра, ломавшего ветви деревьев и рвавшего концы платка, которым бывала укутана моя голова. [...] А как только начинали наливать еще незрелые, зеленоватые ягоды и появлялись грибы, я пропала вместе с ватагой грибников в полувырубленном и вытоптанном скотом ближнем лесу.

[I got into desperate fights, got scratched all over and ate my scabs, gnawed on icicles, swallowed snow, played many games with sayings and chants, furiously threw snowballs and sculpted huge snowmen, which I myself was afraid of later [...] In the spring, I ran to the sea to watch how it approached the land

15 Ibid., 10.

16 Ibid., 306.

and spilled over it under the howl of the wind, which broke the branches of trees and tore the ends of the scarf with which my head was wrapped. [...] And as soon as the still unripe, greenish berries began to pour and mushrooms appeared, I disappeared along with a gang of mushroom pickers in a nearby forest half-cut down and trampled down by cattle.]¹⁷

By depicting the temporal and spatial division in the protagonists' lives between Russia/childhood and France/adulthood, Bakunina also underlines an identity crisis created by emigration: the child who spent their time in the steppes of the homeland appears not to be the same person as the meek housewife in Paris. In order to return to this inborn identity, the protagonist needs to go back in the memories of her young life in Russia with the hope that she will be able to find herself. Another strategy she uses to cope with her identity crisis is to use her Russian heritage as a way to define herself. Thus, she uses her past as well as her difference from her adopted society as a self-affirmation. She describes herself as an heir to the Russian savage tribes in order to reaffirm her heritage and sees these familial relations as fundamental to the self she aims to regain.¹⁸

The image of Russia between the two novels may vary – mostly filled with luxuries and peace in *Télo* and mostly wild and mystical in *Lyubov' k Shesterym* – but the strategies of remembering are similar in both novels.

Strategies of Remembering

In her novels, Bakunina utilises an associational strategy to introduce the protagonists' memories of Russia. A sensation in the present reminds them either in its resemblance or opposition to another sensation in the past. For example, in the passage with the musician, just the similarity of one note is enough for the protagonist to remember or in the scene in the bathroom, her less than ideal lavatory arrangements in the present are contrasted to her luxurious home in the reminiscence. These strategies

17 Ibid., 85–86.

18 For example, in the parts when she describes herself as being an heir to this untamed nature as well as the winter: “А в моей стране есть медвежьи углы, где люди и до сей поры спят три четверти своей жизни. Проспали и войну и историю! Во мне же должен быть след и от дикости и от могучей зимней” [And in my country there are bear corners where people still sleep for three quarters of their lives. Overslept both war and history! In me, there should be a trace of both savagery and mighty winter – translated by Veselina Dzhumbeva] Bakunina, E., *Télo; Lyubov' k Shesterym*, 55.

are not uniquely Bakunina's. On the contrary, the first written evidence of such methods is found in Aristotle's works.¹⁹

In his tract, *De memoria et reminiscentia*, Aristotle formulates the notion of memory as the association of ideas, which is to say that in order to remember something from the past, a trigger in the present is needed. Then, based on one of the three laws of association (resemblance, contrariety, and contiguity), the trigger reminds the subject of the original idea.²⁰ For example, one dog can remind one of another, a dirty cell can be reminiscent of a cosy room and a grey cloud can recall a storm. Over the years, many philosophers have expanded on these ideas. Augustine elaborated on the role of will in the process of remembering yet he also underlined the irreplaceability of association when it comes to memory.²¹ John Locke distinguished between two directions: natural correspondence (similarity, contrast, cause, and effect) and chance correspondence (contiguity). The latter he divides into spatial (simultaneous) and temporal (successive).²² David Hume also includes cause and effect among the laws of association and expands contiguity to include contiguity of time and space.²³ He also removes contrast as being a sub-category of resemblance.²⁴ David Hartley recognised contiguity as the only law of association²⁵ since resemblance and contrast are only variations of contiguity, an idea also defended by James Mill.²⁶ On the other hand, Alexander Bain and Herbert Spencer saw similarity as the fundamental law with contiguity being impossible without it.²⁷

In the extensive history of associationism, the laws of association might be renegotiated, but they still remain a staple of each theory either

19 Burnham, W. H., "Memory, Historically and Experimentally Considered. I. An Historical Sketch of the Older Conceptions of Memory", *The American Journal of Psychology*, Vol. 2, no 1, 1888, 39–90, here 43–44.

20 See Buckingham, H. W. – Finger, S., "David Hartley's psychobiological associationism and the Legacy of Aristotle", *Journal of the History of the Neurosciences*, Vol. 6, no 1, 1997, 21–37, here 23. There might have been a fourth law of simultaneity and sequence, but it was not added in the text. See Burnham, W. H., "Memory, Historically and Experimentally Considered. I. An Historical Sketch of the Older Conceptions of Memory.", 49.

21 Burnham, W. H., 1888, 60.

22 Buckingham, H. W. – Finger, S., "David Hartley's psychobiological associationism and the Legacy of Aristotle", 25–26.

23 Burnham, W. H., "Memory, Historically and Experimentally Considered. I. An Historical Sketch of the Older Conceptions of Memory", 81.

24 Dacey, M., "Associationism in the Philosophy of Mind", *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, n.d., URL: <https://iep.utm.edu/associat/> [accessed: 23.04.2022].

25 Ibidem.

26 Ibidem.

27 Ibidem.

as either a basis for or an extension of each other. Therefore, associational memory needs to always be based on at least one of the three laws. Consequently, in Bakunina's novels, we see her utilising the laws of contrast and resemblance to associate her characters present circumstances with their previous life. Thus, she creates an authentic train of thought that follows the perception of one idea (trigger) which then recalls another idea (memory). This gives her the freedom to seamlessly introduce the nostalgia for the homeland the characters feel as well to masterfully depict the stark contrast between the carefree past in Russia and the sombre life in France.

Memory as a Way to Retain National Identity

Now that we have seen how the memory of Russia is presented, it is time to see why it was included so prominently in both novels. The revolutions and the subsequent processes which turned the Tsarist Empire into the Soviet Union completely changed what it meant to be Russian. Emigration also contributed to the destruction of what was, until then, known as Russian identity. The national identity is usually bound to the territory of the country and so leaving the motherland entirely derailed the self-defining processes of the diaspora. Many Russians abroad were forced to seek new ways of establishing and asserting their identity. One method, which Maria Rubins explores in her book *Russian Montparnasse*, is turning to a transnational identity that embraces their position as a diaspora at the same time incorporating traits from both their homeland and their host country. And in doing so: “[the Russian Parisian diaspora] undermined the master narrative of Russian nationalism without replacing it with an alternative, rather proposing an amalgam of native and foreign influences”.²⁸

Another coping mechanism for the loss of the previously established national identity, which Bakunina used in her novels, is backreferencing the pre-revolutionary identity. She achieves this by engaging in reminiscences of the homeland and including these memories as self-defining and identity building elements. In his book on national identity, Anthony D. Smith highlights the importance of memories for building national identities by stating: “One might almost say: no memory, no identity; no

28 Rubins, M., *Russian Montparnasse: Transnational Writing in Interwar Paris*, 235.

identity, no nation.”²⁹ Also, for Smith: “Memory, almost by definition is integral to cultural identity, and the cultivation of shared memories is essential to the survival and destiny of such collective identities.”³⁰

It was very important to renegotiate the self once abroad, especially to set boundaries between the émigrés and the Soviets as well as between the émigrés and the Europeans. According to Duncan S. A. Bell: “[t]his memory [referring to the memory of a shared history] acts as a powerful cohesive force, binding the disparate members of a nation together: it demarcates the boundary between Them and Us, delineating the national self from the foreign, alien Other.”³¹ This is a polar opposite of the strategy which Maria Rubins describes since instead of incorporating different fragments of the host and home identities, it uses the national (past) identity in order to distance the foreign self and the current Soviet identity.

Bakunina uses Russian origins and memories of the homeland as an identity anchor in both novels. Her characters’ nationality is often employed as a sign of belonging to a certain group – for example to the group of Russian women in emigration:

“[с]тандартная русская женщина в эмиграции. Та, которую революция и последовавшие за ней разрушительные годы, от юности враз принесли к преддверию старости и втиснули в однообразный, неизбежный уклад.”

[A standard Russian woman in exile. One that the revolution and the destructive years that followed it transported from youth to the threshold of old age and squeezed into a monotonous, inevitable way of life.]³²

Or to the people leaving in the countryside:

“Я от этого народа, ядреная.” [I am from this people, vigorous.]³³

Furthermore, she often utilizes ‘us’ when talking about her past indicating that this is not just her individual remembrance, but a collective memory as in her description of her village:

29 Smith, A. D., “Memory and Modernity: Reflections on Ernest Gellner’s Theory of Nationalism”, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 2, no. 3, 1996, 371–388, here 383.

30 Smith, A. D., *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, Oxford 1999, 10.

31 Bell, D. S., “Mythscape: Memory, Mythology, and National Identity”, *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 54, no. 1, 2003, 63–81, here 70.

32 Bakunina, E., *Télo; Lyubov’ k Shesterym*, 253.

33 *Ibid.*, 71.

“А как же у нас в деревнях – из жаркой бани, напарившись чуть не до крови, да в снег!”

[But what about in our villages – from a hot bath, having been steamed up almost to the point of blood, and into the snow!]³⁴

For Anthony Smith this collectiveness in both a similar destiny and shared memory is essential for the construction of a national identity.³⁵

In their everyday life abroad, the protagonists embrace self-definitions based on the Russian realm (both mystical and savage) as a way to distance themselves from the banality of their present existence. When describing her face to her imaginary lover, the protagonist of *Lyubov' k Shesterym* refers to her heritage:

“...что лицо мое вылупилось из всей смеси диких орд и племен, века зачинавших, умиравших и снова зачинавших на самой большой равнине, и потому оказалось таким, каким и надлежит быть ублюдку!

[...that my face hatched out of all the mixture of wild hordes and tribes that conceived centuries, died and conceived again on the largest plain, and therefore it turned out to be such as a bastard should be!]³⁶

She uses these Russian common traits to define not only her appearance but also herself:

“Во мне же должен быть след и от дикости и от могучей зимней русской спячки.”

[In me, there should be a trace of both savagery and mighty winter.]³⁷

Thus, she builds another bridge of belonging and distances herself from the tame and civilized life she leads abroad. Furthermore, she juxtaposes Russia as superior to France as another way to create distance between herself and her adoptive land. She also highlights her belonging to her homeland and not to her adopted country by using possessive pronouns when describing Russia:

“...[а] в моей стране есть медвежьи углы, где люди и до сей поры спят три четверти своей жизни.”

34 Ibid., 71.

35 Smith, A. D., *National Identity*, Reno 1992, 29.

36 Bakunina, E., *Telo; Lyubov' k Shesterym*, 237.

37 Ibid., 55.

[...in my country there are bear corners where people still sleep three quarters of their lives.]³⁸

Conclusion

Memory is an integral part of both of Bakunina's novels. By using methods of association, the author manages to introduce the reminiscences in an authentic way to her stream of consciousness narratives. Remembering is aided by the use of language and contrast in order to convey the different images of the homeland in opposition to the host country. In utilising these techniques, Bakunina's characters aim to re-negotiate their national identities. They utilise their Russian heritage as a way of distancing themselves from the French 'others' and highlighting their connection to their home country. Memory is, therefore, fundamental as a tool of re-building national identity in emigration.

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38 Ibidem.

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