

**Patrycja Baldys, Polish Naval Academy in Gdynia
Katarzyna Piątek, University of Bielsko-Biala**

Memory politicized. Polish media and politics of memory - case studies

ABSTRAKT

Pamięć upolityczniona. Polskie media a polityka pamięci – analiza przypadków

W ostatnich latach obserwujemy na świecie, w tym także w Polsce, wzrost zainteresowania problematyką pamięci zbiorowej, tym, jak ona powstaje, funkcjonuje, ale również, jakim przemianom podlega i jak jest przetwarzana i analizowana. W społeczeństwach informacyjnych media są jednym z istotniejszych źródeł wiedzy jednostek i zbiorowości o przeszłości. Artykuł ma na celu przedstawienie roli mediów w kształtowaniu pamięci zbiorowej Polaków i prowadzonej przez państwo polityce pamięci. Analizowana jest kwestia wyboru wydarzeń, postaci historycznych, wokół których buduje się narrację historyczną, a przede wszystkim to, jakie wydarzenia stają się kluczowe w procesach tworzenia i podtrzymywania tożsamości narodowej Polaków.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: pamięć zbiorowa, tożsamość zbiorowa, upamiętnianie, polityka pamięci, polityka historyczna, media

Historical memory – introductory remarks

We live in the times when on the one hand memory and past have become an increasingly less important source of knowledge about the world around us and on the other hand the role of past events and our memory about them begins to play a more important role on the cultural level¹. As Lech Nijakowski points out:

„We are what we remember. Our childhood memories, the emotions we experienced in childhood form the basis for our identity, enable us to settle in the world, are the source of images we refer to throughout our life – making us happy or traumatizing us. (...) The belief that we have been the same person since our first memories emerged - and even before that time, since the day we were born which has disappeared from our memory - until now creates our ego. Although the buildings and objects “become smaller” when you grow up, scents and colors change, emotions shift – you are still

¹ R. Teridman, *Present Past. Modernity and Memory Crisis*, Cornell University Press, New York 1993, p. 3.

the same person. In our internal dialogue we constantly improve ourselves, put our memories in order, struggle with our sins and misdeeds, enjoy our success, and rationalize our actions. If it were not for our constant work on our memory, we would not exist. The disintegration of the order of memory leads to the hell of madness”².

The memory of wider communities and their identity can be described in a similar way. Memory constitutes the basis of their identity, builds the sense of collectivity, unites people, and draws borders which distinguish one community from other groups. Memory about the past becomes the source of collective pride and sometimes the source of shame. As Paul Ricoeur noted in one of his works, contemporary processes of reconstructing the past are a strange combination of memory and oblivion³. We only remember what we want to remember, what we are proud of. The events we are for some reason ashamed of or we wish not to remember are forgotten.

Still we have to bear in mind that collective memory is completely different than history. The former is based on emotions and it is subject to constant changes. It is not a set of objective, non-judgmental facts from the past but rather a set of events subjectively selected by members of community which were for some reason preserved in their memory. In addition to that, this memory is not uniform as the same events can be remembered in a completely different way by different members of the same community. Moreover, they are conveyed to other people and consequently the message itself can be different than the original version of events. It can be remembered in a different way by its recipients who convey it to others in the shape they remembered it. With time the events will change or take on different meanings. What is more, some of them will become controversial, lead to arguments and discussions among the members of community. History in turn should be unbiased and should reveal things that have passed without prejudices and objectively. It should focus on proven facts, whether the members of community like them or not. Pierre Nora describes the relations between memory and history in the following way:

“Memory and history, far from being synonymous, appear now to be in fundamental opposition. Memory is life, borne by living societies founded in its name. It remains in permanent evolution, open to the dialectic of remembering and forgetting, unconscious of its successive deformations, vulnerable to manipulation and appropriation, susceptible to being long dormant and periodically revived. History, on the other hand, is the reconstruction, always problematic and incomplete, of what is no longer. Memory is a perpetually actual phenomenon, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past. Memory, insofar as it is affective and magical, only accommodates those facts that suit it; it nourishes recollections that may be out of focus or telescopic, global or detached, particular or symbolic – responsive to each avenue of conveyance or phenomenal screen, to

² L. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008, p. 18.

³ J. Żakowski, *Rewanż pamięci*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 2002, p. 46-47.

every censorship or projection. History, because it is an intellectual and secular production, calls for analysis and criticism. Memory installs remembrance within the sacred; history, always prosaic, releases it again"⁴.

Disputes over the past are nothing new in human history, nevertheless for some time both individuals and groups of people seem to be more interested in this topic. This is due to several factors. According to Paul Ricoeur this eruption of interest in the past is caused by the collapse of ideologies of the 20th century, namely Nazism and Bolshevism. They both claimed a right to creating new memory and new humanity which involved deleting past events, omitting events which were inconvenient to the authorities or which undermined their vision of the past. They both created their own myths and legends in order to legitimate their power. Christopher Flood analyzing political myths describes them in the following way:

"They relate stories which have been applied to the myths of traditional societies - such as stories of origins and founding, stories of the exploits of cultural heroes, stories of rebirth of renewal, and eschatological stories. In general, political myths do not have sacred status in secular societies, but they need to be accepted as a fundamentally true by an identifiable group, whatever its size or constituency"⁵.

This description can be ideally applied to the myths which underlay the Third Reich and the Soviet Union. In both cases there was a founding myth (in the case of 3rd Reich referring to the Holy Roman Empire and overthrowing of the Weimar Republic, in the case of Soviet Union –the October Revolution), cult of the individual (in Germany – Adolf Hitler, in Soviet Russia – first Vladimir Lenin, then Joseph Stalin), vision of a new society (in 3rd Reich the society of Aryans, supermen, and in the Soviet Union – proletariat). Their collapse left a vacuum which had not been filled in until 1990's when Central-European societies began to restore the past erased from the memory of individuals and communities⁶. Pierre Nora, besides the political changes which took place over the past thirty years, indicates two other factors which in his opinion contributed to the rise of interest in the past. The first one is the acceleration of life which is a sign of our times. Another one are the diversified processes of international de-colonialization.

The rise of interest in the past is also related to the changed approach to it which can be observed in most societies. In Poland, like in most Central-European countries, the wave of memory spilt after 1989. Its appearance heralded a turnaround in the politics of memory, and it particularly changed the approach towards the shared past, history or tradition. The issues related to vetting, changing names of streets, bringing back memories about heroes and events from the close and

⁴ P. Nora, *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, [w:] Representations, Vol. 26, University of California Press, Spring 1989, p. 8-9.

⁵ Ch. G. Flood, *Political myth*, Routledge, New York 2002, p. 41

⁶ J. Żakowski, *Rewanż pamięci*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 2002, p. 45.

distant past, establishing holidays often became a basis for discussions about Polish history and what kind of politics of memory we need. Should we pursue the conservative model of politics of memory which perceives nation as a homogenous whole, shaping our national pride and referring to the tradition of Polish romanticism? Or maybe it should be politics of memory based on pluralism of Polish communities of memory?

This article will not answer all the questions and it cannot be treated as a comprehensive study. It is rather a sketch on Polish policy of memory, the ways in which past events were commemorated and used for shaping our national identity. It is based on the qualitative analysis of chosen media cases.

Collective memory, politics of memory and the media

Recently the media have begun to play a key role in the transfer of historical knowledge and collective memory. In the past our memory was based on memories remembered by individuals which were then passed to the others, on keepsakes of the past passed down in the family. The memory about the past was elusive, based on personal feelings and emotions. Nowadays, thanks to the new media, we have a possibility to store and to transfer the memory about the past intact, in its original shape. What is more, the number of people who have access to past keepsakes is increasing and the new media constitute the main source of knowledge about the past. According to Jill Edy:

“In a modern mass society, it is the mass media that are primarily responsible for disseminating shared stories to a public that is demographically diverse and geographically scattered. The news media have a special responsibility for creating and disseminating stories of “real” events, and in their role as monitors of the social world, they not only tell their own stories but report on the cultural products and stories created by other individuals and institutions that deal in public memory: from the speeches of public officials, to the reminiscences of eyewitnesses, to the content of movies and museums”⁷.

The only concern that can be raised in relation to the role of the media in the process of commemoration is the fact that they are made responsible for our memorizing. Enabling them to be in charge of the past memory we agree that it will be subject to some kind of processing involving selection of material, giving particular meanings, adding comments. Obviously such selection has to be done as nobody is able to share all preserved and remembered stories with others. Somebody has to choose the stories which will be in some way significant to the community as a whole. And this means that memory about some events or even memory of some groups will be omitted or presented in a different light than it

⁷ J. A. Edy, *Troubled Past. News and the Collective Memory of Social Unrest*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2006, p. 5

would be presented by these groups themselves. Selection as such can be controversial especially when it leads to the attempts of appropriation of history and using it to one's own advantage. We can quote George Orwell here who wrote in his most popular book: "who controls the past controls the future"⁸. This problem is related to the politics of memory pursued consciously by the governments of countries, politicians and state media.

It cannot be denied that the media became one of the most important institutions shaping collective memory of Poles. The role of the media in organizing, hierarchization and disseminating of information important for creating and maintaining national identity has been highlighted by communication researchers for many years. The examples of "daily order", "spiral of silence" or propaganda⁹, although in most cases present in the first half of the 20th century, illustrate the role of the media in the ranking of contents presented in them, including defining and describing the essence and importance of different elements of history.

Nowadays, however, the selection of events, figures and facts mainly results from the adopted in Poland model of homogenous national identity which originates from romantic tradition. There is a lack of objective discussion over Polish history, certain events (especially the ones we are less proud of or the ambiguous ones) and their interpretation. The majority of content presented by the media is of tabloid nature. Because of that there is a high risk of combining facts with their interpretations which are often stigmatized with political preferences. It directly influences the way of presenting these elements of history whose evaluation is ambiguous and stirs emotions. At the same time we have to be aware of the fact that messages conveyed by the media to a great extent shape our picture of the past influencing the way of our present and future thinking about history, identity and memory.

Discussing the politics of memory, just at the very beginning we have to tackle the problem of the lack of definition of this concept. Lech Nijakowski claims that: "there is no recognized definition of this phenomenon, moreover it is defined in various different conceptual and research networks"¹⁰. The term "politics of memory" is often used interchangeably with terms "historical politics" and "historical memory". The latter is used, among others, by Dorota Malczewska-Pawelec and Tomasz Pawelec in their book *„Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej. Porównawcze studia nad praktykami manipulacji zbiorową pamięcią Polaków w czasach stalinowskich”*. The politics of historical memory is defined by them as:

"measures taken by authorities to intentionally shape collective historical memory and to be able to control it; in other words, to manage it in order to realize certain ideological and political aims (most

⁸ G. Orwell, *Rok 1984*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1989, p. 46

⁹ B. Dobek-Ostrowska, *Podstaw komunikowania społecznego*, Wyd. Astrum, Wrocław 1999, p. 60-73.

¹⁰ L. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008, p. 41.

often related to the intention of legitimizing their leadership and the model of social order they support). In practice such measures take the form of conscious creation, transformation and deconstruction of certain areas of memory”¹¹.

According to Lech Nijakowski we can distinguish three basic ways of understanding politics of memory. In the first approach the politics of memory encompasses “all activities – conscious and unconscious, intentional and accidental – which lead to the reinforcement and consolidation of collective memory of Poles or to its change”¹². This approach towards politics of memory is taken by all of us. The second approach reduces politics of memory to activities undertaken consciously in public in order to change or maintain the existing collective memory. As Nijakowski points out this approach is definitely narrower than the first one as it does not take into consideration all unintentional and unconscious activities, and furthermore it only relates to the behaviors which are aimed at the whole community¹³. Another approach reduces the definition even more as it only encompasses the activities which are legitimized by the public. In such approach politics of memory is nothing else but “all kinds of intentional activities of politicians and officials which have been formally legitimized and whose main aim is to consolidate, delete or re-define certain contents of social memory”¹⁴.

Problems with Polish politics of memory

All debates over the past in Poland are very difficult¹⁵. This is, among other things, due to our complicated and muddled past. The loss of independence, short period of enjoying freedom after the First World War and another loss of freedom after World War II were probably not without significance. The loss of independence and attempts to regain it did definitely not provide a good background for conducting a substantive debate over the past of Poland. Such discussion did not take place after 1989 either and all attempts to present versions of events which are alternative to the accepted ones in most cases eventuate in conflicts. As the result the politics of memory created by subsequent governments is not always based on historical truth, it overlooks the inconvenient facts which raise controversies. Politics of memory poses a problem in Poland, it divides the society and becomes the breeding ground for conflicts. This is mainly due to the fact that history and memory about it are always present in politics. Almost every

¹¹ D. Malczewska-Pawelec, T. Pawelec, *Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej. Porównawcze studia nad praktykami manipulacji zbiorową pamięcią Polaków w czasach stalinowskich*, Wydawnictwo Universitas, Kraków 2011, p. 18.

¹² L. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci*. op. cit., p. 43.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 44

¹⁴ Ibidem, p. 45.

¹⁵ See: Bałdys P., K. Piątek (ed.), *Alternative memory – alternative history. Reconstruction of the past in the Central and Eastern Europe*, Gdynia – Bielsko-Biała 2015; Bałdys P., K. Piątek (ed.), *Society under construction - opportunities and risks*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Techniczno-Humanistycznej w Bielsku-Białej, Bielsko-Biała 2015.

problem that politicians work on is placed in historical context. Mariusz Janicki and Wiesław Władyka describe this problem in the following way:

“History is constantly present in Polish politics, for instance it could be seen in the recent debate over immigrants when some right-wing politician mentioned Polish contribution to fighting off Muslims in the battle of Vienna by the forces led by John III Sobieski, and in the history of our emigration in different periods of time. Each of the numerous anniversaries, such as March 1968, the 1st and 3rd of May, the 4th of July, the 1st and 31st of August, the 1st and 17th of September, the 11th of November, 13th of December and many others result in discussions over purely contemporary issues with strong political and ideological strands. This Polish immersion in history makes it a very important aspect of public life”¹⁶.

One of the most visible and controversial elements of contemporary Polish politics of memory is the memory of the cursed soldiers. At the beginning this term was used in relation to soldiers and members of the Polish post-war underground who after the end of World War II did not lay down arms and began to combat the new communist government in Poland. This term has now become blurred. Among the cursed soldiers we can find very controversial, ambiguous personages who divide the society. This will be the case of Józef Kuraś alias “Ogień” (“Fire”) who is hailed by Polish right-wing supporters as a “hero of Polish resistance movement who fought against Germans during World War II and after the war against communists”. His achievements are judged in a completely different way by the Slovaks. The general-secretary of the Association of Slovaks Living in Poland, Ludomir Molitoris remarked during the meeting of the Ethnic and National Minorities Committee in the Polish parliament on the 25th of April 2007:

“In the post-war period this person’s reputation among Slovaks but also Poles, Jews and Lemkos was very bad. There was no communist government there like in the whole Podhale region. A small group of communists, members of the Polish Workers’ Party (PPR) arrived only in Nowy Targ and Zakopane. [...] We highlighted many specific events: killing people in Nowa Biala, Niedzica, Kacwina and Gronkow. These events have not been explained until now. [...] Right now we have passed a resolution and we demand that IPN (the Institute of National Remembrance) open an investigation and explain this case”¹⁷.

Later during the same meeting Molitoris said:

“Without any doubt Kuraś was not a hero. I have seen with my own eyes blank death warrants signed by him! It is not possible that in a post-war country, when Poland was recognized by most countries of the anti-German coalition, the criminal code was not used. Kuraś sentenced more than 90 people to death, single-handedly – without a prosecutor, without an advocate, breaching all norms concerning civilians. The people of Spisz were robbed – this has been revealed quite recently, since we got access to some of the IPN documentation. [...] Despite the chairwoman’s claims, but you might not be well informed madam, in Waksmund – Kuraś’s home village – he is not a hero either.

¹⁶ M. Janicki, W. Władyka, *Władcy historii*, [w:] *Polityka* N° 39 of 22 September 1915 r.

¹⁷ L. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci*. op. cit., p. 170.

Most people who lived there suffered because of him. He took the opportunity to resolve all arguments between the neighbors – he was that kind of person”¹⁸.

In 2002 Grzegorz Królikiewicz made a film devoted to Kuraś which had a very revealing title “And then they called him a bandit” (“A potem nazwali go bandyta”). On the 13th of August 2006 in Zakopane the first monument to him was unveiled in the presence of Polish President Lech Kaczyński. The unveiling of the monument met with a very negative reaction and Slovaks strongly opposed commemorating “Ogień”. Ústav Pamäti Národa in Bratislava decided to investigate this case. Slovak historians studied the documentation gathered by IPN, recorded the accounts of the witnesses who were still alive, and in 2009 a Slovak film crew was sent to Poland to make a film titled “Corners forgotten by God” („Zakątki zapomniane przez Pana Boga”). The film was broadcast by Slovak television, but was never acquired by Polish television and it could only be seen in August 2010 in the Polish Institute in Bratislava.

“Ogień” raises controversies not only among Slovaks but also among Lemkos and Jews. Furthermore, former soldiers of the Home Army in Nowy Targ also protest against commemorating him and his deeds. The website of World Association of Home Army Soldiers in Nowy Targ¹⁹ presents the official position on Kuraś’s activity, interviews with witnesses, articles. In most of the gathered documents the Association opposes the glorification of “Ogień”, reminds readers about his desertion from the Home Army and his active cooperation with UB (secret political police in communist Poland), and above all about his victims – civilians. In 1990 the Association released the following statement: “we have nothing in common with “Ogień” and his epigones. We think that instead of participating in commemorative celebrations in memory of “Ogień” people should hold a funeral service to honor the memory of his victims and there were as many of them as 630”²⁰.

The case of “Ogień” is not unique. Similar problems occur in the cases of Romulad Rajs alias “Bury” or, for instance, buried with full honors Zygmunt Szyndzielorz alias “Łupaszka”. Rafał Wnuk indicates the following problem related to the creation of narratives devoted to the cursed soldiers:

“The problem is that the narrative about cursed soldiers is created in such a way that it marginalizes all other important phenomena of war and post-war periods. I mean the phenomena which we can and should deliberately include in the traditions of a democratic country. I have already mentioned the WiN Association, but also very little has been written and said about the post-war PSL (Polish People’s Party) which had a million of members while all fighting groups of resistance had about 100 thousand people. The figure of “the cursed soldiers” has almost

¹⁸ Ibidem, p. 171.

¹⁹ <http://partyzanciakpodhale.pl/> [retrieved: 1.11.2015].

²⁰ *Polityka* N° 52/1990.

completely “outshone” the phenomenon of the Polish Underground State in the times of war which was in fact a very unique case on a global scale”²¹.

The problem does not only lie in the marginalization of the other events and heroes but also in the adopted narrative. The message is explicit, focused on the heroic fight during World War II, conspiratorial activities, fight against communism after the war. This narrative overlooks the inconvenient facts, the narrative of the victims. We are thus dealing with a deliberate selection of events, omission of inconvenient facts which could change the image of the cursed soldiers and make them controversial figures, and maybe could prevent from erecting monuments in their memory. What we can observe in the case of regaining memory about the cursed soldiers has been described by Rafał Wnuk as a kind of some incline:

“what is of military nature attracts more attention and is more valued than what relates to politics and citizens. I do not agree with the opinion that the only legally valid strategy against communists was to shoot to people. Even nowadays such “militarized” version of memory about those days is adopted by various groups of extremists who are, to say the least, skeptical and who consider a contemporary country to be a community of soldiers subordinated to orders of one leader”²².

Thereby we can say that we are dealing with usurpation of history, using it to one’s own political aims. Joanna Kurczewska wrote about it in 2002 in her analysis of the awareness of Polish politicians in the 1990s²³. Historical truth, presenting past events in a broad context is not important in such situation, what really matters is the election results. The usurpation of collective memory was also discussed by Robert Traba who analyzed new politics of memory in the years 2005-200: “Developing memory discourse based on the belief in your superiority, in the advantage of your country’s potential over other countries poses a risk of appropriation of memory”²⁴. We can say that history runs its course. After the 2015 elections the new government emphasized the role of politics of memory in the shaping of national identity of Poles. The role of the media in this process was also mentioned. After a series of documentaries and feature films („Nil”, „History of Roj”, „Pilecki”), ceremonies commemorating the cursed soldiers there arose a problem of usurpation of history by extreme nationalist parties such as ONR (National Radical Camp), Młodzież Wszechpolska (All-Polish Youth). After services

²¹ <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/zolnierze-wykleci-czyni-niegodne-byly-marginesem-i-opowiesc-ktora-przykryla-wszystkie/8l3p6d> [retrieved: 1.04.2016].

²² <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/zolnierze-wykleci-czyni-niegodne-byly-marginesem-i-opowiesc-ktora-przykryla-wszystkie/8l3p6d> [retrieved: 1.04.2016].

²³ See: J. Kurczewska, *Patriotyzm(y) polskich polityków. Z badań nad świadomością liderów partyjnych lat dziegódziesiątych*, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2002.

²⁴ http://rcin.org.pl/Content/48995/WA248_66069_P-I-2524_traba-polityka.pdf [retrieved: 1.02.2016].

held in churches and marches through the streets of Białystok, Toruń, and Łódź the granddaughter of Captain Witold Pilecki spoke out. In her open letter she wrote:

“I find it outrageous that recently the political and national groups use the profile and biography of my grandfather to their own individual aims and games. Captain Witold Pilecki did not serve divided Poland but Poland which was free of prejudices, divisions and hatred. Witold did not categorize people based on their worldview and religion, he did not exclude anybody. He was a man of great faith in God and human. (...) Patriotism and nationalism are the opposites! A patriot wants all the best for his country while a nationalist wants all the best for himself...”²⁵.

This letter was published on Facebook and it triggered a new national discussion about Polish past, about what Polishness is and who can be a Pole. This was probably the last recorded discussion on this topic because as long as we do not settle our past we will not be able to conduct a debate over the controversial issues, we will not be able to identify the most significant events to form the basis of Polish collective memory.

What kind of politics of memory?

We do not have to convince anybody in Poland that politics of memory is an indispensable tool for shaping and maintaining the identity of a nation. For a country which regained its independence after 123 years the role of collective memory or memory in general seems to be obvious. Lech Nijakowski describing Polish politics of memory in the period of partitions points out that:

“From the perspective of the occupying country there were two aspects of it – legal one and illegal one. One could influence the memory of one’s compatriots – depending on the period and sector – through the activities of music and gymnastic societies, schools for minorities, public education, publishing activities and press, etc. Furthermore, people printed and distributed (and often smuggled) illegal publications, organized confidential patriotic meetings, painted forbidden words and slogans on walls. Very often the line between those activities was very fine and blurred. Sometimes the partitionist approved or disapproved some publication depending on his actual needs – and it happened even in such a law-abiding country like Germany. The politics of memory in both these aspects was different than the plots which aimed at regaining independence through a military overthrow. While the former were guided by the rule of public visibility of often anonymous compatriots, the latter was based on the rule of conspiracy. Conspiring Poles whispered “let my thoughts sink in the depths of my soul”, while in relation to politics of memory publicity was greatly desired”²⁶.

A good example here can be literature which was written “to cheer the hearts”, to remind people the important events from the past which showed the power

²⁵ <http://fakty.interia.pl/polska/news-wnuczka-rotmistrza-pileckiego-oburzona-po-marszu-onr,nId,2209454> [retrieved: 27.05.2016].

²⁶ L. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci*. op. cit., p. 75-76.

of Poland and created role models for Poles to follow. Such function was fulfilled by the "The Trylogy" by Henryk Sienkiewicz, the works of Mickiewicz, Słowacki, historical paintings by Jan Matejko or Grottger's series, monuments, plaques commemorating people and events, or last but not least patriotic songs. Until the interwar period people already could:

"pursue the politics of memory by means which were "normal" for a nation state. At the beginning of the sovereignty many hated symbols of occupation were overthrown. (...) National ceremonies and political rituals, public education, colors and symbols became the stem of collective memory. There was no need to manifest one's Polishness through the subtle signs such as the color of clothes when everybody was allowed to take part in national demonstrations. Nevertheless, there appeared some completely new ways of pursuing the politics of memory resulting mainly from progressing modernization"²⁷.

In Poland there has been a lack of substantial debate over Polish history after 1989, especially over the most controversial events and how the politics memory should be shaped. Lech Nijakowski asking about the shape of the politics of memory indicates several crucial in his opinion rules. The first rule says that such politics should not be created only and exclusively by politicians who use it as a means to target new voters. Politics of memory should not be adjusted to political agendas, it should lead to social integration. Looking after collective memory of a society we must not forget about various communities of memory living in Poland. Politics of memory should not be "megalomaniacal or used as a propaganda synonym for boastfulness"²⁸.

History should obviously be told in an attractive way. This demand has been understood by people and institutions responsible for the spread of historical knowledge in our country. The best evidence for such understanding can be recently founded museums which present the history of events, communities or processes taking place in our society in a very modern, often interactive way. It would be enough to mention, among others, the Warsaw Uprising Museum, Museum of the History of Polish Jews POLIN or Emigration Museum in Gdynia. Such attractive, especially for the youngest audience form can also be found in comics of historical contents and in books. A good example can be a book titled "Teraz 44" ("Now 44") by Marcin Dziedzic and Michał Wójcik which presents the history of the Warsaw Uprising in 44 photographs and through stories about the events, places and people related to them. The pictures included in the book are photo-montages of the original images of the city streets in the times of the Uprising with the images of the same places taken contemporarily. As a result the reader living in Warsaw can see the streets he walks through every day from the perspective of the young people who fought there in 1944. One of the authors

²⁷ Ibidem, p. 96.

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 257.

of the book said: "I think it is cool that this book will stay with the residents of Warsaw and may change something in their heads. That the Uprising will be closer to us but still far away – because it happened a long time ago and our reality is completely different than the reality of 1944"²⁹.

We should definitely revise the codes of the Polish culture. Nowadays it is based on romantic traditions whose main characteristic is

"perceiving nation and society as a homogenous whole. Individuals are first of all members and representatives of various social strata. Any departures from the ideal type are perceived as undesirable deviations, not as alternative lifestyles or legitimate communities of memory. (...) Strong emphasis is placed on the shaping of national pride which often leads to expressing – even unintentionally – chauvinistic and xenophobic statements"³⁰.

Last but not least politics of memory should involve a rational debate over the past of Poland. Polish problem lies in the lack of discussion about history, particular historical events from the past and attempts of their objective evaluation. History is never black and white. Presenting just one version of events, omitting inconvenient facts, failing to evaluate them does not help to build the community. What is more, it is distorting history. This debate has never taken place and it will never do because the past is more and more often used by politicians who, by referring to some figures or symbols, attempt to create the sense of national identity while overlooking the inconvenient facts.

Historical memory is the factor which when rejected makes it impossible for a nation to survive. Therefore, human knowledge forms the basis for the awareness of national community, the community which identifies with its past, its present and participates in the appropriate shaping of the future"³¹.

The role of the media in the process of knowledge transfer is significant, however it can only be maintained on one condition – history presented by the media cannot be changed and made more beautiful than it really is, it cannot be subject to tabloidization but it must be based on facts derived from in-depth analysis and historical research. The memory content should not be determined by politicians who treat it as an opportunity to attract their electorate, it should have nothing to do with megalomania or messianism. To enable the media to play their role properly we also have to consider the regional and group diversity of the memory of Poles.

So far we have not reached a consensus about Polish historical politics. What is undisputed however is the fact that the media will influence its shape and the nature of public discourse regarding this topic.

³⁰ L. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci*. op. cit., p. 242.

³¹ M. Krąpiec, *Rozważania o narodzie*, Toruń 2000, p. 50.

Bibliography

- Bałdys P., K. Piątek (ed.), *Alternative memory – alternative history. Reconstruction of the past in the Central and Eastern Europe*, Gdynia – Bielsko-Biała 2015.
- Bałdys P., K. Piątek (ed.), *Society under construction - opportunities and risks*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Akademii Techniczno-Humanistycznej w Bielsku-Białej, Bielsko-Biała 2015.
- Dobek-Ostrowska B., *Podstaw komunikowania społecznego*, Wyd. Astrum, Wrocław 1999.
- Edy J.A., *Troubled Pasts. News and the Collective Memory of Social Unrest*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia 2006.
- Flood Ch. G., *Political myth*, Routledge, New York 2002.
- Janicki M., W. Władyka, *Władcy historii*, [w:] *Polityka* nr 39 z 22 września 1915 r.
- Krąpiec M., *Rozważania o narodzie*, Toruń 2000.
- Kurczewska J., *Patriotyzm(y) polskich polityków. Z badań nad świadomością liderów partyjnych lat dziewięćdziesiątych*, Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, Warszawa 2002
- Malczewska-Pawelec D., T. Pawelec, *Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej. Porównawcze studia nad praktykami manipulacji zbiorową pamięcią Polaków w czasach stalinowskich*, Wydawnictwo Universitas, Kraków 2011.
- Nijakowski L., *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny*, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, Warszawa 2008.
- Nora P., *Between Memory and History: Les Lieux de Mémoire*, [w:] *Representations*, Vol. 26, University of California Press, Spring 1989.
- Orwell G., *Rok 1984*, Państwowy Instytut Wydawniczy, Warszawa 1989.
- „Polityka” nr 52/1990
- Teridman R., *Present Past. Modernity and Memory Crisis*, Cornell University Press, New York 1993.
- Żakowski J., *Rewanż pamięci*, Wydawnictwo Sic!, Warszawa 2002.

Online references

- <http://partyzanciakpodhale.pl/>
- <http://www.polskatimes.pl/arttykul/4784835,teraz-44-historie-sa-44-powody-dla-ktorych-warto-nanowo-sie-przyjrzec-warszawie-zdjecia,3,id,t,sa.html>
- <http://wiadomosci.onet.pl/tylko-w-onecie/zolnierze-wykleci-czyny-niegodne-byly-marginesem-i-opowiesc-ktora-przykryla-wszystkie/8l3p6d>
- http://rcin.org.pl/Content/48995/WA248_66069_P-I-2524_traba-polityka.pdf
- <http://fakty.interia.pl/polska/news-wnuczka-rotmistrza-pileckiego-oburzona-po-marszu-onr,nld,2209454>
- <http://www.polskatimes.pl/arttykul/4784835,teraz-44-historie-sa-44-powody-dla-ktorych-warto-nanowo-sie-przyjrzec-warszawie-zdjecia,3,id,t,sa.html>

Memory politicized. Polish media and politics of memory - case studies

Summary

Over the last few years we have been observing an increasing interest in the topic of collective memory, in the way it is created, the way it functions but also in the ways it changes and how it is processed and analyzed. In the information societies the media have become a significant source of knowledge about the past for individuals and communities. To a great extent they shape collective memory. The main purpose of this article is to present the role of the media in shaping Poles' collective

memory and in the politics of memory pursued by the state. We were particularly interested in the issues related to selection of events and historical figures included in historical narration, but above all in the events which become significant in the process of creation and maintaining the national identity of Poles.

Key words: collective memory, collective identity, commemorating, politics of memory, historical politics, media