

A Three-Dimensional Model of Enlarging the Mnemonic Conflict: The Case of Poland Under Second Law and Justice Government

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CONTEXTUAL INTRODUCTION: MEMORY IN POST-TRANSITIONAL SOCIETIES

Establishing a community entirely free of disputes over its collective memory is an impossible goal. Both from an empirical and theoretical point of view, no collective assembly of human beings can exist without a certain degree of dispute over how its history, cultural practices, and identity should be preserved and remembered. As argued by Durkheim,¹ Halbwachs,² and, more recently, Olick,³ collective memory is ‘inherently plural.’ Establishing a universal, unopposed mnemonic regime is impossible, as ‘[different] groups provide the definitions, as well as the divisions, by which particular events are subjectively defined as consequential. These definitions then trigger, or result in, different interpretative phenomena. Collectivities have memories, just like they have identities.’⁴ A mnemonic dispute is, therefore, an unavoidable societal condition.⁵ It can, however, take on a variety of different forms and, most of all, differ in its scope. This richness of possible configurations is best exemplified in the universe of post-transitional countries, with particular emphasis on the Central and Eastern European states which moved towards democracy from various forms of single-party socialist state.⁶ Within this

¹ Barbara A. Misztal, ‘Durkheim On Collective Memory,’ *Journal Of Classical Sociology*, 3.2 (2003), p.124

² Maurice Halbwachs and Lewis A Coser, *On Collective Memory* (Chicago [1992.]: University of Chicago Press).

³ Jeffrey K. Olick, ‘Collective Memory: The Two Cultures,’ *Sociological Theory*, 17.3 (1999), 333-348

⁴ Olick, ‘Collective Memory,’ p.341.

⁵ Loïc J. D. Wacquant, Paul Connerton and Loïc J. D. Wacquant, ‘How Societies Remember,’ *Revue Française De Sociologie*, 32.4 (1991), p.634.

⁶ For purposes of conceptual clarity, when referring to the final stages of non-democratic regimes from which the countries of the region moved towards democracy, I avoid the use of the term ‘communist,’ as at least in the cases of Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Romania the regime in place was a hybrid form of economic dictatorship and single-party autocracy with socialist orientation, rather than an actual communist state. Moreover, this is also dictated to avoid a widespread use of the term ‘post-communism’ with reference to these countries, as it is a concept wrongly perceived to have universalising potential. There were, in fact, many different ‘post-communisms,’ as rightly pointed out by Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik in ‘Collective Protest In Post-Communist Poland, 1989–1993: A Research Report,’ *Communist And Post-Communist*

universe, a vast array of different approaches to transitional justice was employed, resulting in the implementation of a number of different mnemonic regimes. Among them, Poland constitutes a particularly compelling case study. Despite a globally recognised, non-violent protracted transition, followed by the establishment of a stable, steadily growing economy and avoidance of any existential threats to the irreversibility of democracy, the country's approach to settlement of its non-democratic past has been somewhat troubling.⁷ According to Kubik and Bernhard, authors of the most comprehensive taxonomy of memory regimes and mnemonic actors in post-transitional countries, Poland constitutes a flagship example of a fractured mnemonic regime.⁸ After the 1989 democratic transition, the subsequent governments failed to establish an uncontested collective memory narrative. Despite many of the key political actors originating from a common root of 'Solidarność' trade union activism,⁹ they fell short of willingness and capacity to agree upon both measures of settling the non-democratic past and a coherent, relatively undisputed mnemonic narrative. Instead, they became 'enemies, not rivals, accusing each other of lacking legitimacy to participate in the political process and of holding illegitimate views.'¹⁰ For most of the post-transitional period Poland has been governed by political formations that practiced memory policymaking to an extremely limited degree, deeming this dimension highly risky and politically unrewarding, especially within the short-term perspective of a single electoral cycle.

This abnegation created space for the emergence of actors with a much more conflictual approach to collective memory. Kubik and Bernhard label them as *mnemonic warriors* - that is, actors that see no ground for compromise in mnemonic conflict, being only concerned with making other members of the polity subscribe to their narrative.¹¹ In fact, a strong causal link is in place here. Kubik and Bernhard go as far as to argue that fractured memory regimes emerge precisely due to the actions of a mnemonic warrior.¹² The warrior is a precondition leading to a lack of compromise-oriented collective memory

Studies, 31.2 (1998). Nonetheless, I adhere to the use of the term 'communist regime' with regard to the authorities established in the immediate aftermath of World War II, as these were of a much more unitary nature within the entire region and carried on a distinctive communist orientation and nature.

⁷ Paweł Śpiewak, *Pamięć po komunizmie (Memory of Communism)*. (Warszawa: Słowo/Obraz Terytoria, 2005), p.7

⁸ Michael Bernhard and Jan Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), p.26.

⁹ Antoni Dudek, *Historia Polityczna Polski 1989-2012 (Political History of Poland 1989-2012)* (Kraków: Znaki 106), p.145.

¹⁰ Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism*, p.46.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

¹² *Ibid.*, p.12.

narrative. This, in turn, poses a threat to democracy as fractured mnemonic regimes foster the exacerbation of the polarisation of existing political and cultural cleavages.¹³ In sum, a careful examination of mnemonic regimes is fundamental for any study of democratisation, especially in post-transitional realms.¹⁴

This contextual framework is necessary to fully grasp the current mnemonic revolution taking place in Poland under the second Law and Justice (hereafter PiS) government. In power since October 2015, following an all-out parliamentary victory by which it became the first party in the country's post-transitional realm to rule without a coalition partner,¹⁵ it has successfully re-introduced politics of memory atop the policymaking agenda. The enormous quantity of antagonistic mnemonic references and legal acts devoted to this topic constitutes much more than just a revival of historical awareness. For PiS, the mnemonic conflict is a key instrument of building partisan support and consolidating power. Not only did the role of politics of memory change, but also the way in which it has been implemented. PiS has consciously expanded the scope of mnemonic conflict in Poland, engaging new events, policymaking dimensions, and levels of societal relations into the interpretative debate over collective narratives.

When PiS first assumed power, forming a government in the years 2005-2007,¹⁶ it constituted a flagship example of a mnemonic warrior. The party established itself as the main protagonist in a discourse it constructed about the past, drawing 'a sharp line between themselves - proprietors of the true vision of the past - and those who cultivate wrong, or even false, versions of history.'¹⁷ For a mnemonic warrior, past, present, and future blur into one. The present is construed as permeated by the 'spirit' of the past, and if this spirit is defective, then the foundations of the polity are corrupted. Eventually, its actions are inseparably linked with historical revisionism. For a mnemonic warrior:

the problems of the present and the future cannot be effectively addressed unless the whole polity is set on the proper foundations constructed according to the true vision of history. The alternative ones need

¹³ Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism*, p.293.

¹⁴ Robert Legvold, Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, 'Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest And Democratic Consolidation In Poland, 1989-1993,' *Foreign Affairs*, 79.3 (2000), 160.

¹⁵ Wirtualna Polska, 'PiS Pierwszą Po 1989 Roku Partią, Która Będzie Samodzielnie Rządzić,' *Wiadomości.Wp.Pl*, 2017 <<https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/pis-pierwsza-po-1989-roku-partia-ktora-będzie-samodzielnie-rzadzic-6027735990178945a>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

¹⁶ Dudek, *Historia Polityczna Polski*, p.529.

¹⁷ Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism*, p. 9.

*to be destroyed or delegitimised.*¹⁸

The second PiS government took the mnemonic game a step further. For the first time within the universe of post-transitional actors, a mnemonic actor has emerged which uses memory policies as a vehicle of exclusionary politics. A careful analysis of the wording and rhetoric used by Poland's incumbent party evidences that those who refuse to subscribe to the government's narrative over collective memory are not only to be disallowed from advocating against it in the public space, but are deprived of their place within the Polish nation. Thus the mnemonic conflict becomes not only a determinant of the quality of democracy, but also an issue of nationhood. Such an approach, as assumed by PiS, creates, therefore, a need to establish a new analytical category. By using examples of memory politics implemented in the years 2015-2017, this paper aims to prove that Poland's current government is to be classified as a *memory excluder*. A detailed analysis of available evidence will demonstrate that the said exclusion is taking place on various different policy levels. In order to fully grasp the extent to which the memory excluder is deepening the existing cleavages in the Polish collective memory, and to provide a tangible explanatory tool to identify historical revisionism, this paper introduces an innovative, three-dimensional model of enlarging the mnemonic conflict.

The expansion of the Polish memory dispute since 2015 has taken place in three dimensions. The first one, the horizontal dimension, refers to the widening of its time frame. Historical revisionism, as practiced by PiS, has begun to cover more chapters from Poland's recent history, especially those that until now enjoyed a relatively undisputed public interpretation or simply have not been present in the public debate on collective memory. The second dimension is the vertical one: that is, the one by which the mnemonic conflict has covered new dimensions of policymaking, such as foreign policy. Not only has foreign policy become determined primarily by mnemonic issues, but also the milestones of Polish achievements in this dimension have been reinterpreted to now be seen as either symbols of submission to foreign dominance or the singular achievements of particular individuals. The third dimension concerns the depth of mnemonic conflict. Memory excluders reach deeper into collective memory creation, touching upon more detailed elements, not just the fundamental, large-scale processes. Events and narratives subject to revisionism are of a more local dimension, while

¹⁸ Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism*, p. 11.

reinterpretations are more frequently focused on the individual protagonists of historical processes.

CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Prior to presenting this paper's analysis, it is indispensable to make a number of preliminary conceptual comments. Collective memory is understood here in a classical, Durkheimian approach as 'shared social frameworks of individual recollections.'¹⁹ Emphasis in this definition is placed on the impact that the collective has upon the individual. Explained in a less parsimonious manner, it is

*not just historical knowledge as it is the experience mediated by representation of the past that enacts and gives substance to the group's identity. Memory helps in construction of collective identities and boundaries whether these are national, cultural, ethnic or religious.*²⁰

Collective memory is thus understood as more than merely the sum of singular experiences and recollections of all individuals within a community. Drawing from the works of Jeffrey Olick, who opposes such an atomising framework, this paper distinguishes between the psychological and interpretative approaches to defining collective memory. Olick argues that, contrary to 'collected memory,' that is, the aggregate sum of memories of the community members,²¹ collective memory is largely shaped by the group in which it operates. These definitions trigger, or result in, different interpretative phenomena. Collectivities have memories, just like they have identities.²²

The second crucial theoretical framework used in this analysis is the so-called *alternative* approach to the use of memory politics. In line with it, numerous scholars have argued that political parties have a perennial tendency to use politics of memory as a replacement for present-day issues.²³ Thus politics of the past are employed *instead* of politics of the present, not *as* its component. A particularly illustrative definition of this process is provided by Helga Welsh, who writes that in the mnemonic policies of post-

¹⁹ Misztal, 'Durkheim on Collective Memory,' p.135.

²⁰ Barbara A. Misztal, 'Collective Memory In A Global Age,' *Current Sociology*, 58.1 (2010), p.28.

²¹ Olick, 'Collective Memory,' p.337.

²² *Ibid.*, p.341.

²³ Helga A. Welsh, 'Political Transition Processes In Central And Eastern Europe,' *Comparative Politics*, 26.4 (1994), p.379.

communist countries ‘the weight of the past is being replaced by its current political burden.’²⁴ Such an approach is too reductionist in nature, because it assumes a loyal and total replacement of one by the other. It implies that the meaning that citizens attribute to the events from a community’s history is being used only as a tool for building partisan support. This stipulation renders such a framework an insufficient explanatory tool to fully grasp the current memory landscape in Poland.²⁵ PiS’s mnemonic policy strategy is of a much more holistic nature. It extends beyond the areas of historical policy and commemorative initiatives. It acts as a driving force and explanatory power behind the vast majority of the party’s legislative initiatives, and determines the entire approach the party has developed towards governing Poland.

Such a paramount role of mnemonic policy stems from the founding myth of the PiS worldview, that is, the perception of the 1989 Round Table agreement as a betrayal of national sovereignty rather than the foundation of democratic transition.²⁶ Sławomir Cenckiewicz, one of the most influential Polish right-wing writers and historians, assesses the Round Table talks in the following manner:

*Usurpatory representatives of Solidarność sealed a deal with the Communists over the heads of the nation. This deal gave birth to PRL [Polish People’s Republic]-bis”. (...) The problem of the Round Table betrayal can be presented through various measures and dimensions. It can, most of all, as I have done it many times, be presented through the optics of a final pact of elites (...) which led to a theatre of negotiations, mock and fake debates over trade union pluralism which Poles, fooled, followed with passion.*²⁷

As the Round Table is re-narrated to be a betrayal, the regime that emerged as its consequence - the Polish Third Republic - became a non-democratic puppet state.²⁸ According to the narrative of PiS, Poland regained democratic sovereignty only in 2015,

²⁴ Welsh, ‘Political Transition Processes,’ p.421.

²⁵ Aleks Szczerbiak, ‘Dealing With The Communist Past Or The Politics Of The Present? Lustration In Post-Communist Poland,’ *Europe-Asia Studies*, 54.4 (2002), p.557.

²⁶ Jarosław Kaczyński, *Porozumienie Przeciw Monopłacy* (An agreement against Monopower) (Poznan: Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, 2016), p.67.

²⁷ Sławomir Cenckiewicz, ‘Cenckiewicz O Zdradzie Okrągłego Stołu! Pełna Wersja Tekstu! • Sławomir Cenckiewicz,’ [slawomircenckiewicz.pl](http://www.slawomircenckiewicz.pl), 2017
<<http://www.slawomircenckiewicz.pl/aktualnosci/cenckiewicz-o-zdradzie-okraglego-stolu-pelna-wersja-tekstu>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

²⁸ Paweł Szałamacha, *IV Rzeczpospolita, Pierwsza Odłona (The Fourth Republic - First Chapter)* (Poznan: Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, 2009), p.34.

with the party taking over power from the liberal and post-communist elites, architects of the 1989 compromise.²⁹ This implies, consequently, that all the structures that existed in between these two events are to be redefined as non-democratic. It was best reflected in the words of Poland's current president and former PiS member Andrzej Duda from 15 December 2015, on commemorating the victims of the December 1970 anti-communist protests, when he confessed to being 'ashamed for the entire Polish Third Republic.'³⁰

This modality shows, therefore, that in the PiS worldview, memory politics have not strictly and solely replaced politics of the present, but have become an integral part of it. Therefore, in the analysis that follows, a *cumulative* approach to studying the politics of memory will be employed, one which locates politics of the past as one of the fundamental elements of the present-day partisan agenda, and not just as a mere replacement of it.

PI S AS A NEW TYPE OF MNEMONIC ACTOR

The exclusionary nature of politics of memory ushered in by PiS since 2015 calls for the establishment of a new analytical category within the existing typology of mnemonic actors. Kubik and Bernhard singled out four basic types of mnemonic actors: warriors, abnegators, prospectivists, and pluralists.³¹ For the purposes of this paper, only the two former categories are relevant; thus, the prospectivists and pluralists will be left out of the forthcoming analysis.

For memory abnegators, the politics of memory constitutes a politically unrewarding area; thus, it is entirely absent from the policymaking agenda. It results from the fact that abnegators see no direct political gain from mnemonic initiatives, thus new commemorative actions and legal initiatives are impeded, while the existing ones have their importance and scope reduced. As rightly observed by Kubik in his analysis of commemorative strategies towards the 20th anniversary of the 1989 Round Table Agreements, one of the flagship examples of a memory abnegator was Poland's Platforma

²⁹ Kaczyński, *Porozumienie Przeciw Monotadzy*, p.143.

³⁰ Duda Wstydz Się Za III RP, Wałęsa Wstydz Się Za Dudę - Oglądaj Wideo TVN24", TVN24.PL, 2017 <https://www.tvn24.pl/wideo/z-anteny/duda-wstydz-sie-za-iii-rp-walesa-wstydz-sie-za-dude,1491770.html?playlist_id=23975> [accessed 5 December 2017].

³¹ Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism*, p.9.

Obywatelska, which ruled the country for two consecutive terms (2007-2015) and systematically ignored memory politics as a policymaking dimension.³²

Memory warriors (such as the first PiS government) are, in turn, actors believing themselves to have an ultimate monopoly on shaping a community's collective memory. When involved in a mnemonic conflict, their stance allows no room for compromise, as the only acceptable interpretation of collective memory for them is the one they project themselves. The only aim of memory warriors in such a debate is to persuade other entrepreneurs and community members to subscribe to their rhetoric - any differing approach is deemed unacceptable in the public space.³³

The fundamental difference between the current Polish government and the party's previous framework (2005-2007) lies in the fact that the memory excluder reaches far deeper into politically motivated historical revisionism than the memory warrior. The former's narrative in memory policy is entirely exclusionary. Subscribing to a rival interpretation of collective memory, not only by expressing it publicly, but even by practicing it in one's private environment, is synonymous with being excluded from the community. As briefly outlined in this paper's introductory section, a memory warrior excludes opposed mnemonic rhetoric from public life, the excluder - from the nationhood. This exclusionary modality was best exemplified by Jarosław Kaczyński in a widely commented-on interview given to TV Republika on December 11, 2015, when he famously divided the nation into the so-called 'better and worse sort of Poles.' In the context of this paper's analysis, however, most important are the words that followed:

*We in Poland had a strong tradition of a national betrayal. And this [the worst type of Poles] is a reference to that. It is in the genes of some people, of those of the worst sort. And they are particularly active at the moment, because they feel threatened. Let us notice - first the war, then communism, then the transition - through the way it has been conducted - it all promoted this kind of people, gave them chances.*³⁴

These sentiments were echoed in statements made by other PiS politicians, such as MP Dominik Tarczyński, who said in an interview for wpolityce.pl, an online news outlet,

³² Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, 'Myths And Realities Of Civil Society,' Journal Of Democracy, 25.1 (2014), p. 54

³³ Bernhard and Kubik, *Twenty Years After Communism*, p.11.

³⁴ 'Kaczyński Krytykuje Donosicieli. Gorszy Sort Polaków' (Kaczyński criticises the collaborators. The worst sort of Poles), Youtube, 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SKFgVD2KGXw>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

that the conflict between the current government and opposition parties is practically a reflection, if not a continuation, of the fight between the 1980s democratic opposition and the communist regime.

Clashes on Krakowskie Przedmieście [the main street in Warsaw] and provocations on behalf of opposition are no different from the secret service actions during Motherland Masses during Martial Law. The officers of SB were no different from those who are attacking us now. (...) What is being done towards us is no different from the repressions during Martial Law [1981] and after 1945 with regard to the Cursed Soldiers. What is happening now is an effect of history. These people need to pay. Those who manipulate and attack us are people who inherited the political practices of SB [the Communist Secret Services].³⁵

The two statements illustrate the most prominent features of the mnemonic excluder. First, the excluder takes a quasi-Darwinist approach to describing the social structure, drawing the dividing cleavages along the lines of interpretations of recent history. In describing the excluder's vision of collective memory narratives, Kaczyński goes as far as to create an artificial ethnic division within the Polish nation, suggesting a direct link between one's biological features and their approach to collective memory. Secondly, the excluder systematically enlarges the scope of the mnemonic conflict through mechanisms of horizontal and vertical expansion, as well as the deepening of the dispute.

HORIZONTAL EXPANSION OF THE MNEMONIC CONFLICT

The horizontal expansion is perhaps easiest to capture. As argued before, within the exclusionary approach to collective memory, there is no room in public space for competing interpretations of history. This, in turn, signifies that there is only one narrative that is deemed acceptable: one which covers the entirety of collective memory and recent history. Such a phenomenon, known in the literature as *memory layering*,³⁶ refers to a mnemonic strategy which imposes a consequential interpretation of all the most

³⁵ 'TRZY PYTANIA DO... Dominika Tarczyńskiego' (Three questions to Dominik Tarczyński), *Wpolityce.Pl*, 2017 <<https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/339701-trzy-pytania-do-dominika-tarczynskiego-platforma-obywatelska-zdechnie-tak-samo-jak-zdechla-unia-wolnosci>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

³⁶ Rafi Nets-Zehngut, 'Palestinian Autobiographical Memory Regarding The 1948 Palestinian Exodus,' *Political Psychology*, 32.2 (2011), p.286.

important events and processes of a community's history in line with one single narrative, even if the said events are mutually unrelated and a unitary interpretation of them is contradictory. In more parsimonious terms, memory layering occurs when all the different layers of memory are to be interpreted according to the same principle.³⁷ An example of this is the memory of the Round Table talks. Since the mnemonic strategy of PiS presents it as a betrayal, consequently the phenomenon that followed, the Third Republic, becomes a non-democratic semi-sovereign state. PiS, however, expands the area of collective memory under dispute by adding to this equation older, historically more distant events. The flagship area of implementing horizontal expansion became the memory of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising. Though debate continues to take place among historians about whether the Uprising itself was necessary,³⁸ the commemoration of the victims had been kept outside the mnemonic conflict, as a cross-partisan, nationwide consensus existed on the matter. Independent of the political orientation of the government at any given moment, all of the parties in power attributed enormous importance to the presence of their leaders during commemorative events. In 2016, PiS decided to amend the prevailing framework of commemorations and merge two historically unrelated events, adding a roll-call dedicated to the victims of the Smolensk presidential plane crash of 10 April 2010 to the celebrations of the Uprising's anniversary. According to the party's initial plan, the names of the crash victims were to be read aloud at Warsaw's military cemetery right after the names of the most important commanders of the Uprising, thus giving them equal mnemonic importance, despite the fact that the Uprising's victims died mostly in battle and were not identified as agents of any particular ideological camp, while the crash victims died as the result of an accident, and for most Poles their primary identity was equal to their partisan affiliation. The move triggered a wave of controversy, not only within public opinion, but especially among the Uprising's veterans, who have traditionally been given much respect and gravitas by politicians of all ideological provenances.³⁹ Since the 1989 democratic transition, the memory of the Uprising has been free from present-day political agendas,⁴⁰ yet in 2016 it had a new component integrated into it. Thus, in line with this paper's conceptual framework, politics of the past became integrated both into the politics of the present and the partisan manifestos.

³⁷ Nets-Zehngut, 'Palestinian Autobiographical Memory,' p.288.

³⁸ Marcin Napiórkowski, *Powstanie Umarłych (The Uprising of the Dead)*, (Warszawa: Krytyka Polityczna, 2015), p.124.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.67.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p.320.

Furthermore, the memory of civic anti-communist resistance saw significant amendments under the second PiS government. In October 2017, the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) released a video presenting the history of Poland from 1939 until the present. In a 4 minute-long animation called ‘The Unconquered,’⁴¹ released with both English and Polish narration, the Institute presented the Poles as a nation whose faith has been perennially marked by a fight for freedom against oppressive foreign powers and totalitarian regimes.

At this point, it is necessary to enlarge the context of the institutional and mnemonic landscape in Poland, as the IPN is a key element of both. Established in 1999, it was supposed to become an independent body tasked with ‘filling the gaps’ in Poland’s collective memory narratives. Its initial mission was to be that of safeguarding the archives of the Polish People’s Republic, conducting educational activities aimed at popularising historical knowledge of this period of time, and to assist in the process of lustration.⁴² Its flawed institutional design, however, as well as the second lustration law, enacted by the first PiS government in 2006, turned IPN into a tool of partisan support-building.⁴³ Its head is elected by the Parliament for a 5-year term,⁴⁴ which in practice transforms it into another governmental agency, dependent on the decisions of the incumbent authorities. This partisan dependency, in turn, makes it impossible to classify IPN as a judicial institution either, even though it is equipped with considerable prosecutorial powers and has an investigative department.⁴⁵

‘The Unconquered’ begins with a scene of a Polish soldier being trapped between two rapidly approaching steel walls, aiming to squeeze him to death. This metaphor is supposed to reflect the nearly simultaneous invasion of Poland by the Third Reich and the Soviet Union in September 1939. During this scene, the narrator of the movie says that ‘for Poland, the war and its consequences lasted for over half a century.’ Thus the collective memory narrative of the film equalises the Nazi and Soviet occupation with the communist regime installed in Poland afterwards. The memory layer of the civic anti-communist movements needs therefore to be interpreted in the same manner as the Polish wartime resistance and the underground state - as a manifestation of heroism and

⁴¹ ‘IPNtv: The Unconquered,’ *Youtube*, 2017 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q88AkN1hNYM>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

⁴² Antoni Dudek, *Instytut* (Warszawa: Czerwone i Czarne, 2011), p.23.

⁴³ Aleks Szczerbiak, ‘Deepening Democratisation? Exploring The Declared Motives For “Late” Lustration In Poland,’ *East European Politics*, 32.4 (2016), p. 434.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 438.

bravery, readiness for sacrifice in protecting the country's freedom. Differences between the nature, scope, and degree of oppression in these different historical periods are successfully blurred. Later, the film moves to present the birth of the anti-communist opposition. The violent clashes of workers with the PRL authorities of 1956, 1970, and 1976 are presented in the same sequence of events as the first pilgrimage of Pope John Paul II to Poland in 1979, despite radically different social and historical characteristics. Although the papal visits should not be stripped of political importance, or his contribution to the strengthening of the opposition denied, the pilgrimages were primarily events of a religious character and, most importantly, did not constitute instances of direct confrontation with authorities. Interestingly, the film presents the Pope's visit as the last milestone on the Polish trail to overthrow communism. The next image that appears is the fall of the Berlin Wall. Thus 'The Unconquered' makes no single mention of the Solidarność trade union, the Gdańsk Shipyard protests of August 1980, the Martial Law, or the Round Table - all instances of the collective memory that manifest the pluralistic, heterogenous nature of the anti-PRL opposition. The film omits entirely the figure of Lech Wałęsa, Solidarność's leader and Nobel Peace Prize laureate. The historical narrative concerning post-war Poland under the second PiS government has become strictly reductionist in nature. It has been considerably expanded in terms of its time span, covering more chronologically distant historical events, but they have been reduced to be seen through a single, monopolist optic, despite their complexity and frequent lack of any causal dependence between them.

VERTICAL EXPANSION OF THE MNEMONIC CONFLICT

Vertical expansion occurs when those policy areas that, from the memory angle, had been free from conflictive interpretations, are now incorporated into the mnemonic conflict. Previous international disputes, especially those that had already been settled and previously did not play a part in determining the general directions of foreign policy, have been reintroduced into the present-day agenda. Thus foreign policy itself has become largely retrospective. This is, again, consistent with the conceptual remarks that Kubik and Bernhard make towards a fractured memory regime:

*the problems of the present and the future cannot be effectively addressed unless the whole polity is set on the proper foundations constructed according to the true vision of history.*⁴⁶

As a result, not only do the milestones of the country's internal history and identity need to be set right, but also the position of Poland vis-a-vis other countries. Hence the mnemonic conflict is extended to encompass foreign policy. Primarily, this has been applied to the paramount episodes of Poland's presence on the international stage over the last three decades. Traditionally, since the 1989 transition, an overarching, supra-partisan consensus over the general course of foreign policy prevailed.⁴⁷ All of the governing political forces, ranging from the post-communist SLD to the liberal and centre-right governments of Unia Wolności and Platforma Obywatelska, agreed on the steps Warsaw had to undertake in order to become a recognised and significant player in the international community.⁴⁸ The main principles driving the post-transitional policy were economic stability and security, both internal and with regard to a potential Soviet/Russian attack.⁴⁹ Hence the first objectives set out for the Polish diplomacy were to achieve a reduction of the country's international debt, a quick commencement of the European Community accession process, and NATO membership. The latter was particularly important, due to the prolonged presence of Russian troops on Polish soil. A unanimous consensus prevailed over Poland needing to join the alliance as quickly as possible.⁵⁰ This consensus has now been deemed false by the country's incumbent government. When Warsaw hosted the NATO Summit in July 2016, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs opened a public exhibition held within the premises of the National Stadium, the summit's venue, devoted to the history of Polish NATO accession. According to the historical interpretation presented there, it was Jarosław Kaczyński himself, a functionary of the president's chancellery in early 1990s, as well as the current MFA chief of staff, Jan Parys, and former PM Jan Olszewski who were the architects of Poland joining the alliance. In turn, the then-dominant liberal political elite, headed by PM Tadeusz Mazowiecki and president Lech Wałęsa, were presented as vigorously opposing the idea of accession. The exhibition was initially composed of 14 posters set in

⁴⁶ Kubik and Bernhard, *Twenty Years After Communism*, p.11.

⁴⁷ Karolina Pomorska, 'The Impact Of Enlargement: Europeanization Of Polish Foreign Policy? Tracking Adaptation And Change In The Polish Ministry Of Foreign Affairs,' *The Hague Journal Of Diplomacy*, 2.1 (2007), p.34.

⁴⁸ Dudek, *Instytut*, p.234.

⁴⁹ Szczerbiak, 'Deepening Democratisation?' p.430.

⁵⁰ Dudek, *Instytut*, p.250.

chronological order, describing the subsequent stages of Poland's NATO accession process and presenting its protagonists. Before the opening of the event, however, two posters were removed - one presenting former foreign minister Bronisław Geremek, a liberal diplomat and member of the Unia Wolności government, who signed the accession protocol on March 12, 1999, and the other, featuring Platforma Obywatelska's Bronisław Komorowski (then president) and Tomasz Siemoniak (then deputy prime minister and defence minister) welcoming NATO troops onto Polish soil. The exhibition also failed to make any mention of Poles advocating for NATO accession outside the country, especially in the US, including World War II veterans Władysław Bartoszewski and Jan Nowak-Jeziorański, who were both known to be critics of Kaczyński. This revisionist narrative was later echoed by public media and presented to foreign officials as the 'story of Polish NATO accession.'⁵¹

Subsequent instances of including foreign policy into the mnemonic conflict relate to the preparation for the centennial anniversary of Poland regaining independence after World War I, which is to take place in 2018. In anticipation of it, the Ministry of Internal Affairs presented a new concept for the design of Polish passports. In order to supposedly commemorate the historical boundaries of the Polish state at the moment of regaining independence, the newly issued passports were to feature watermarks presenting the Gate of Dawn in Vilnius (currently the territory of Lithuania) and the Cemetery of the Defenders of Lviv (currently in Ukraine). The design triggered enormous backlash from Polish historians and diplomats, as well as from the representatives of Lithuania and Ukraine. The inclusion of historical sites presently located within the boundaries of other states would not only exacerbate the already tense bilateral relations between Poland, Ukraine, and Lithuania, but could also potentially be seen as resentment towards the territories lost as a result of World War II. Ultimately the ministry backtracked from the idea, replacing the watermarks with less controversial designs. No statement justifying this move was issued, while diplomatic protests from the neighbouring countries remained unanswered.

Poland's foreign policy towards its most important individual partner, Germany, has also become determined by principles of mnemonic conflict and historical revisionism. The PiS government in August 2017 advanced the idea that Poland ought to

⁵¹ Olszewski, Kaczyński i Duda, Czyli 'Polska W NATO' (Olszewski, Kaczyński and Duda, or Poland in NATO), *TVN24.Pl*, 2017 <<https://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/olszewski-kaczynski-i-duda-czyli-polska-w-nato,659606.html>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

claim financial compensation for war damages committed by Nazi Germany during World War II and that these claims should be paid for by the present-day German state. Despite having scarce legal basis to create a case within the framework of international law and actually making no efforts to produce one, the threat of reparations became an underlying issue of the entirety of Polish foreign policy towards Germany. Since Berlin has been one of the most vehement critics of PiS government within the European Union, accusing the Polish incumbent of systematically violating the rule of law and disregarding democratic institutions of oversight, PiS has responded to the criticism of its present-day agenda with arguments drawn from historical and memory politics. This modality confirms the paper's theoretical assumption, that under the current Polish government, the politics of the past have become an integral part of the politics of the present, with the two dimensions blurring into one interpretative policymaking tool.

THE DEEPENING OF THE MNEMONIC CONFLICT

The third dimension of enlarging the areas of memory under dispute refers to the deepening of the mnemonic conflict and the degree to which it penetrates society. In Poland post-1989 no dominant all-encompassing narrative of collective memory exists in the society, one that would accommodate all the conflictive interpretative demands. Previously, however, these disputes referred mostly to general, wider themes, such as the ongoing conflict between liberals and right-wing parties over the degree of concessions given to the outgoing regime in the Round Table agreements.⁵² Since 2015, the matter in question has become much more detailed. Historical revisionism is affecting particular events and singular notions and processes. This, again, is consistent with the approach of the mnemonic excluder, which sees no room for compromise over any disputed aspect of memory politics. The character of the memory narrative it imposes is total. Its version of collective memory needs to be firmly established on all levels of interaction between the members of a community and penetrates all instances of the polity. Hence in its efforts to redefine the totality of Polish collective memory, PiS has implemented initiatives of memory politics referring not only to the nation's grand narratives and paramount historical processes, but also to much more local and personalised areas. That is why the efforts to redefine the memory of anti-PRL opposition do not centre on discrediting the

⁵² Śpiewak, *Pamięć po komunizmie*, p.193.

entire Solidarność trade union and the opposition ecosystem, but instead focus decisively on the person of Lech Wałęsa. The reasons for that strategy are of a purely pragmatic nature. First, it is much easier to target the memory of individual protagonists than to discredit a movement as a whole, especially one of such profound symbolism and scope as the ‘original’ (1980-1981) Solidarność, which at its peak assembled as many as 10 million members.⁵³ Second, PiS is a political party which itself directly originates from Solidarność and the vast majority of its leading figures, including Jarosław Kaczyński, were active members of the trade union and were involved in the democratic opposition during the 1980s.⁵⁴ An attack on the entire movement would therefore lack credibility in the eyes of the public.⁵⁵ Wałęsa alone, however, due to being a conflictive, oftentimes self-contradicting politician, became a much easier target.⁵⁶ Hence PiS, immediately after assuming power in 2015, started to redefine the place of Lech Wałęsa in Polish collective memory. Educational materials produced by the IPN, including the already analysed ‘The Unconquered’ animation, erased the figure of Wałęsa from the most recent history of Poland. The history curriculum for primary and secondary education following PiS-designed 2017 educational reform makes no mention of the former president either.⁵⁷ Also, during the monthly marches commemorating the victims of the 2010 Smoleńsk crash, PiS supporters have regularly presented a banner advocating the renaming of the airport and the selection of Anna Walentynowicz, a victim of the crash, one of the original leaders of Solidarność and later a vigorous critic of Wałęsa, as the airport's new patron.

Another instance of the mnemonic conflict encompassing not just nameless groups of people but particular protagonists is exemplified by the strategy towards the ‘Cursed Soldiers.’ The term refers to Polish guerilla fighters who refused to acknowledge the establishment of a Soviet-designed communist state in Poland after World War II and continued their fighting in small groups, especially in the eastern and southern parts of Poland.⁵⁸ Although motivated by the principle of fighting a foreign power controlling their own state, they in fact operated in conflict with the official Polish wartime

⁵³ Dudek, *Instytut*, p.27.

⁵⁴ Lech Wałęsa, Andrzej Bober and Cezary Łazarewicz, *Ja (I)* (Warszawa: Grupa Wydawnicza Foksal/Wydawnictwo WAB, 2017), p.221.

⁵⁵ Śpiewak, *Pamięć po komunizmie*, p.198.

⁵⁶ Wałęsa, Bober and Łazarewicz, *Ja*, p.237.

⁵⁷ ‘History Curriculum, Polish Ministry Of Education,’ *Men.Gov.Pl*, 2017 <<https://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/podstawa-programowa-historia-klasy-iv-viii.pdf>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

⁵⁸ Dudek, *Instytut*, p.511.

underground state and the exile government. In practice, many of their formations constituted a self-appointed outlaw guerilla movement, which fought not just the communist authorities, but committed dozens of crimes and murders against the Jewish and Ukrainian population as well as lynchings of Poles who they perceived as collaborators with the communist regime.⁵⁹ The memory of the Cursed Soldiers was prohibited and erased from collective narratives during the PRL times, hence them being referred to as ‘cursed.’ But for years, the post-transitional authorities did not address this issue. The first legislative initiative to partly concern the commemoration of Cursed Soldiers was only prepared in 2001, under the centre-right AWS-Unia Wolności coalition government.⁶⁰ A full rehabilitation of them took place, however, only in 2010, when the then president Lech Kaczyński, Jarosław’s brother, established a national day of remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers (1st of March).⁶¹ Be that as it may, the issue of their place in Polish history and collective memory is a highly complex and dividing one, even among historians and experts on the topic.⁶² That is why, as in the case of addressing the memory of Solidarność, the PiS government did not address this mnemonic dimension as a whole, but instead began to reintroduce individual members of the Cursed Soldiers to mainstream mnemonic discourse. One way in which this was done was by the exhumation of particular prominent guerilla figures, such as Zygmunt Szendzielarz ‘Łupaszka’ and Danuta Siedzikówna ‘Inka.’ The agency of rehabilitation was also transferred from the nationwide level onto local authorities, such as in the case of Józef ‘Ogień’ Kuraś, a guerilla fighter from the Podhale region in the south of Poland. It was upon the initiative of the mayor of Zakopane, a mountain resort, that the monument of Ogień was commissioned, despite Kuraś being a figure of nationwide gravitas, much less a person strictly associated with the region. Only after rehabilitating individual members of the Cursed Soldiers, which was also done through the Ministry of National Defence awarding them post-mortem military appointments, did PiS begin to reintroduce them as a whole into the nationwide collective memory discourse. The culmination of this process took place in 2017, with the already mentioned educational reform, in which Cursed Soldiers were, for the first time, introduced into school history curricula. Since the

⁵⁹ Napiórkowski, *Powstanie Umarłych*, p.308.

⁶⁰ Dudek, *Instytut*, p.607

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p.615.

⁶² Kazimierz Krajewski and Tomasz Łabuszewski, *Żołnierze Wyklęci Mazowsza i Podlasia 1944-1952* (The Cursed Soldiers of the Mazowsze and Podlasie Region, 1944-1952), (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej - Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2011)

introduction of the educational reform in 2017, students in Poland begin learning about them from the age of 11 and Cursed Soldiers are, from that moment, present in every year of teaching until the final high school examinations at the age of 19.⁶³ No other political or military formation has been given this much space and importance in the revised history programs, while ‘Ogień,’ ‘Inka’ and ‘Łupaszka’ are now presented as figures of equal importance to Polish medieval kings, interwar leaders, independence heroes, and Nobel Prize winners.

CONCLUSION

The processes examined in this paper are still ongoing, which renders it impossible to fully predict their final outcome. Nonetheless, some possible consequences for Polish society can already be sketched out. The complex, overarching three-dimensional enlargement of the mnemonic conflict has not only increased the scope of collective memory under question, but perhaps most importantly, has begun to affect different factions and communities within Polish society, as well as its individual members. PiS has clearly and boldly stated that practicing a different narrative of collective memory is incompatible with Polish nationality, thus transforming collective memory into an issue of nationhood. The conflict has moved from a nationwide, more grand level to one with a much more local, personal dimension. It is perhaps the only way to establish a total monopoly over collective memory narratives. All of this, subsequently, has negatively impacted the critical features of a post-transitional society. Already Kubik and Bernhard, when writing about the memory warrior, a less radical mnemonic actor than the excluder, have noted that their presence always brings about a fractured memory regime, which then poses a threat to democracy. Thus, when memory politics are controlled by a mnemonic excluder, these dangers become ever more real and potentially have more negative results. It is certain they will further weaken social cohesion, reconciliation, and institutional trust in Poland, which have already been damaged by the implications of other policies of the PiS government. These negative consequences have already become visible in available polling data. The societal assessment of memory politics overlaps with political preferences, which in contemporary Poland are rigidly polarised. As of

⁶³ ‘History Curriculum, Polish Ministry Of Education,’ *Men.Gov.Pl*, 2017 <<https://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/podstawa-programowa-historia-klasy-iv-viii.pdf>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

September 2017, 47% of Poles positively assessed the existing collective memory politics, while 20% did so negatively. 74% of PiS voters were in favour of this policy, while 51% of liberal Nowoczesna party voters and 42% of Platforma Obywatelska supporters were critical of it.⁶⁴ Societal trust in IPN has reached an average of only 57.4% since its establishment, while the average distrust has reached 28%.⁶⁵ Assessment differs sharply also with regard to individual re-irruptions of mnemonic conflict. In February 2016, when IPN released controversial documents on Lech Wałęsa's alleged cooperation with PRL secret services, the decision was assessed positively by 72% of PiS voters, and negatively by only 18%. For the two opposition parties (PO and Nowoczesna), these figures were, respectively, 20-24% who supported the decision and 72% opposed.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, the exclusionary orientation and major enlargement of the conflict may both prove counterproductive. Fighting too many battles over collective memory can result in the excluder developing a chaotic narrative and losing control over the memory debate as a whole. It is impossible to fully predict the consequences of attempting to rewrite a community's entire collective memory. The community might well reject the newly implanted approach and strengthen a narrative that the memory excluder attempts to combat. Even that scenario, however unlikely, would exacerbate polarisation, thus ultimately evidencing that an expansion of mnemonic conflict in any form cannot have positive consequences for social cohesion or the quality or stability of democracy.

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⁶⁴ 'Zaufanie Wobec Instytucji Publicznych' (Trust towards State Institutions), *cbos.pl*, 2017 <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_048_16.PDF> [accessed 5 December 2017]

⁶⁵ 'Zaufanie Wobec Instytucji Publicznych' (Trust towards State Institutions), *cbos.pl*, 2017 <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_048_16.PDF> [accessed 5 December 2017]

⁶⁶ Wirtualna Polska, 'Polacy Ocenili Lecha Wałęsę. Sondaż CBOS' (Poles assessed Lech Wałęsa. A CBOS Poll), *Wiadomosci.Wp.Pl*, 2017 <<https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/polacy-ocenili-lecha-walesse-sondaz-cbos-6034823141368449a>> [accessed 5 December 2017].

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