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HISTORY AND MEMORY:
THE SOCIAL FRAMES OF CONTEMPORARY POLISH
HISTORIOGRAPHY*

I
SOCIOLOGISTS ON THE COLLECTIVE MEMORY
OF THE POLISH PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC

Post-communist *Ostalgie* has recently become a widely discussed topic in international literature.¹ Also in Poland, sociologists have already devoted a lot of attention to the collective memory of the period of the Polish People's Republic (PRL). Their studies show that while few Poles display any sympathy for the political symbols of the era, a significant part of society looks back with nostalgia to the daily life of those times.

In the memory of Poles today, the PRL is sketched out as a bad state, which nevertheless took care of its ordinary citizens, providing them with a standard of living that, while mediocre, was predictable, stable and unhurried. Their good memories of that period are drawn from their reminiscences of everyday life, of that cosy stability, of the little joys of their private lives, and of a sense of a job well done – from a fabric that will do to generate a haze of nostalgia, but is too flimsy for a symbol

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¹ Above all Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York, 2002), Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (eds.), *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York 2010). See also Paul Betts, 'The Twilight of the Idols: East German Memory and Material Culture', *The Journal of Modern History*, lxxii, 3 (2000), 731–65; Dominic Boyer, 'Ostalgie and the Politics of the Future in Eastern Germany', *Public Culture*, xviii, 2 (2006), 361–81; Paul Cooke, *Representing East Germany since Unification: From Colonization to Nostalgia* (Oxford, 2005); Jeremy Brooke Straughn, 'Culture, Memory, and Structural Change: Explaining Support for "Socialism" in a Post-Socialist Society', *Theory and Society*, xxxviii, 5 (2009), 485–525.

– writes Piotr T. Kwiatkowski, discussing the state of research.² The psychologist Monika Prusik talks directly of the effect of ‘paradise lost’: over 64 per cent of those questioned by her positively evaluated various aspects of their lives before 1989.³ In her work on commemoration in the public sphere, Elżbieta Hałas has noted that the removal of street, square, bridge names associated with communism has not been accompanied by their mass replacement by names associated with positively viewed events from the post 1945 period. Rather, recourse has been made to the independence symbolism of the Second Republic and the times of the Second World War.⁴ Finally researchers into the regional, family and autobiographical accounts of the past emphasise that their content is often divergent from the national symbolism, historical policy and school education. That content relates, above all, to the experiences of World War Two rather than to life in the Polish People’s Republic.⁵

² Piotr T. Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie transformacji*, (Warsaw, 2008), 348. The results of detailed sociological analyses do not surprise: younger age, higher education and social position favour the critical evaluation of the PRL; also political views influence opinions about the past, see Kazimierz M. Słomczyński and Katarzyna M. Wilk, ‘Who Still Likes Socialism and Why? Time Variation of Political Opinions in Poland’, *International Journal of Sociology*, xxxii, 3 (2002), 64–77; as well as Mirosława Grabowska and Tadeusz Szawiel, *Budowanie demokracji. Podziały społeczne, partie polityczne i społeczeństwo obywatelskie w postkomunistycznej Polsce* (Warsaw, 2001), 245 f. For an overview of literature from various academic disciplines on memory of the PRL see Dobrochna Kałwa, ‘Pamięć zbiorowa o PRL. Między polityką historyczną a prywatnym doświadczeniem’, in Zdzisław Noga and Martin Schulze Wessel (eds.), *Pamięć polska, pamięć niemiecka. Od XIX do XXI wieku. Wybrane problemy* (Toruń, 2009), 197–222.

³ Research from 2010 on a representative sample of 600 Poles over 40 years old. See Monika Prusik, ‘Raj utracony? Nostalgia za PRL-em – rola mechanizmów pamięci kolektywnej’, unpublished PhD thesis (2011), Department of Psychology, University of Warsaw.

⁴ Elżbieta Hałas, ‘Polityka symboliczna i pamięć zbiorowa. Zmiany nazw ulic po komunizmie’, in Mirosława Marody (ed.), *Zmiana czy stagnacja? Społeczeństwo polskie po czterech latach transformacji* (Warsaw, 2004), 128–51. The research conducted on a sample of 254 towns covers the years 1988–98.

⁵ See i.a. Piotr T. Kwiatkowski, Lech M. Nijakowski, Barbara Szacka and Andrzej Szpociński, *Między codziennością a wielką historią. Druga wojna światowa w pamięci zbiorowej społeczeństwa polskiego* (Warsaw, 2010), 81–132, 200–39. Despite the fall in interest in World War II as a topic for family conversations, in 2003, still twice the number of people declared that they talked about war (28%) than did about the times of PRL (14%). Pentor, 2003, cit. from Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, 188.

One may presume that the experience of the PRL – apart from the brutality of the first post-war decade (though even this was far less brutal than the war years) – was not sufficiently strong for Polish society to provide widespread, common and deeply rooted symbolism. This hypothesis applies equally to the sorrow of authoritarianism and to the joy of regaining freedom. In 2003 just 19 per cent of Poles indicated the events surrounding the transformations of 1989 as a source of pride, and a mere 4 per cent applied this judgement to the events connected with ‘Solidarność’ in the years 1980–1.⁶ Martial law is remembered by those who lived through it, but over 50 per cent of young Poles do not know when it was declared; many of them do not have any clear associations with this period.⁷ Specialists on history education point out that these young Poles did not have an opportunity to learn about martial law at school;⁸ nevertheless, it is clear that since they do not know about this date, they have not heard about it at home or in their social circle either. In 2009 76 per cent of those surveyed were of the opinion that the time had come to stop the reckoning with the PRL,⁹ in this way rejecting one of the most important demands of the Polish right wing. ‘The PRL just was there...’ – Kwiatkowski wrote.¹⁰

These vague judgements of the PRL are in sharp contrast to unequivocal evaluations of the period to which politicians and journalists are inclined in public debates.¹¹ The voice of professional historians is often to be heard within such debates in contemporary Poland. They frequently speak out as academic experts in institutional fields other than their own, for instance, as specialists in the media or as expert witnesses in court proceedings. Historians involve themselves, too,

⁶ Pentor, 2003, cit. from: Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, 269.

⁷ *Ibidem*, 412.

⁸ Agnieszka Grotek, ‘Brak czasu na lekcje o stanie wojennym’, *Rzeczpospolita*, 12 Dec. 2007.

⁹ CBOS, 2009; <http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2009/K_093_09.PDF > [Accessed 12 June 2011].

¹⁰ Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, 346.

¹¹ Paweł Śpiewak, *Pamięć po komunizmie* (Gdańsk, 2005), 161. See also Nina Kraśko, ‘Polska Ludowa w programach partyjnych i działaniu politycznym w III Rzeczypospolitej’, in Joanna Kurczewska (ed.), *Kultura narodowa i polityka* (Warsaw, 2000), 325–40; Cezary Trutkowski, ‘Społeczne reprezentacje historii PRL, in Jacek Raciborski (ed.), *Elity rządowe III RP, 1997–2004. Portret socjologiczny* (Warsaw, 2006), 183–214.

in the popularising of history and in education acting in the most obvious area of overlap between history and memory. In this way the social role of historians is not limited to the mere codification of the past; at least some of them try to ensure that history does not remain history by keeping it 'alive' in the domain of collective memory.

We may suppose that the content of public history will have increasing influence over the collective memory, when the communicative memory of the PRL fades away in the so-called floating gap.¹² Although according to oral history experts it takes three generations, let us notice that already today the attitudes towards the PRL are to a large degree dependant on the age. In the research of CBOS (Public Opinion Research Centre) conducted in 2009, individuals 35 years or older were more likely to positively evaluate the PRL (54%) than those under 34 (only 24%). The data show the growing importance of the mediated image of the period, which slowly displaces memories of personal experience. Against such a backdrop this article will firstly present arguments for the need to conduct a sociology of contemporary history within the framework of sociological research on collective memory, and secondly will reconstruct the state of dominant historiography of contemporary times, which may have growing influence on the lay understanding of history. This undertaking would be extremely difficult if it were not for the debates and disagreements ongoing in historical publications and academic periodicals – these are the main sources of this text.¹³

¹² Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Madison, 1985). Discussed in Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* (Munich, 1992). I have made use of Polish edition *Pamięć kulturowa. Pismo, zapamiętywanie i polityczna tożsamość w cywilizacjach starożytnych*, trans. Anna Kryczyńska-Pham (Warsaw, 2008), 64 f. For contemporary societies, see Lutz Niethammer, 'Diesseits des "Floating Gap". Das kollektive Gedächtnis und die Konstruktion von Identität im wissenschaftlichen Diskurs', in Kristin Platt and Mihran Dabag (eds.), *Generation und Gedächtnis. Erinnerungen und Kollektive Identitäten* (Opladen, 1995), 25–50.

¹³ Including Błażej Brzostek and Marcin Zaremba, 'Polska 1956–1976. W poszukiwaniu paradygmatu', *Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość*, 10, 2 (2006), 25–37; Maciej Górny, 'From the Splendid Past into the Unknown Future: Historical Studies in Poland after 1989', in Sorin Antohi, Balázs Trencsényi and Péter Apor (eds.), *Narratives Unbound: Historical Studies in Post-communist Eastern Europe* (Budapest, 2007), 101–72; Pdraic Kenney, 'After the Blank Spots are Filled: Recent Perspectives on Modern Poland', *The Journal of Modern History*, lxxix, 1 (2007), 134–61; Krzysztof

II

SOCIOLOGISTS AND HISTORIANS ON MEMORY AND HISTORY

The division into history and memory famously used by Maurice Halbwachs¹⁴ is unsustainable in the contemporary academic discourse for many reasons that have been enumerated on various occasions in the specialist literature.¹⁵ Thus, the lack of significant references in Polish sociology of collective memory to the contemporary historiography does not seem to be theoretically grounded anymore.¹⁶ In addition to the general knowledge on the overlaps between memory and history, one may distinguish four specific arguments, relevant in the Polish context.

Firstly, the very specificity of sociological findings on collective memory of the communist times challenges Halbwachs's functionalist propositions. For Halbwachs, the collective memory fulfilled the fundamental function of social bonding. (I would even suggest that it was the equivalent of religious bonds that were to have disappeared during modernisation and whose substitutes were searched for by Émile Durkheim, Halbwachs's mentor.) Halbwachs's collective memory was

Brzechczyn (ed.), *Obrazy PRL. O konceptualizacji realnego socjalizmu w Polsce* (Poznań, 2008); *Polska 1944/45–1989: studia i materiały*, vol. 8: *Historycy o badaniach dziejów Polski Ludowej: ankieta* (Warsaw, 2008); Paweł Skibiński et al. (eds.), *Spojrzenie w przeszłość. Konferencja Muzeum Historii Polski, Jadwisin, 25–26 października 2007*, vol. 2: *Wiek XIX, XX* (Materiały pokonferencyjne, Warsaw, 2009); Andrzej Paczkowski, *Od sfalszowanego zwycięstwa do prawdziwej klęski. Szkice do portretu PRL* (Cracow, 1999); Henryk Ślabek, *O społecznej historii Polski 1945–1989* (Warsaw, 2009); Rafał Stobiecki, *Historiografia PRL. Ani dobra, ani mądra, ani piękna... ale skomplikowana. Studia i szkice* (Warsaw, 2007).

¹⁴ In his posthumously published *La mémoire collective* (Paris, 1950), 45–8; <http://classiques.uqac.ca/classiques/Halbwachs_maurice/memoire_collective/memoire_collective.pdf> [Accessed 15 March 2011].

¹⁵ Assmann, *Pamięć kulturowa*, 58–61, Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory*, (Hanover, 1993), 73–90; Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago, 2006), 393–7.

¹⁶ In the studies I am familiar with sociologists limit themselves to short references to historians' involvement in public debates, e.g. Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, 312 f. On the opposition of history and memory in Polish sociology see Barbara Szacka, 'Historia i pamięć zbiorowa', *Kultura i Społeczeństwo*, xlvii, 4 (2003), 3–15. The critical review essay on Polish memory studies Kornelia Kończal, 'Les études sur la mémoire en sociologie et en histoire: traditions, conceptions et (dis) continuités. Le cas de la Pologne', *Transeuropéennes. Revue internationale de pensée critique*. (I would like to thank the author for sharing this article before its publication.)

a reservoir of coherent values and norms which allowed individuals to organise into a community and to function socially. When shared ideas about the past disappear, the community disintegrates, and the individuals enter other groups, (or, if one consistently applies Durkheim's analogy, they find themselves in a state of anomie, devoid of moral directives). However, sociologists, researching the nationwide collective memory of the PRL, have shown that it is varied, often nostalgic, that it at times constitutes a bone of contention, while at times is simply irrelevant. Therefore, perhaps it is safer – instead of claiming the existence of a collective memory of PRL – to talk about activities of various social agents who attempt to make the memory of PRL happen and to fulfil social functions. Among those agents, there are some historians.

Secondly, the untenably rigorous positivistic view of history by Halbwachs. He claimed that while emotions control memory, history is ruled by a researcher's critical distance. While there are as many collective memories as there are social groups, 'history is unitary' and 'there is only one history'. While the image of the past created by historians is constant, the image of the past existing in the collective memory transforms, subject to the influences of the present circumstances. According to Halbwachs, history was able to preserve only facts, ordering their form and sequence. Stories written down by historians belong no more to living world:

Undoubtedly, history is a collection of the most notable facts in the memory of man. ... General history starts only when tradition ends and the social memory is fading or breaking up.¹⁷

Hence Halbwachs's comparison of history to an immense crowded cemetery, and of memory – to a reservoir of living ideas.¹⁸

Halbwachs's understanding of history has been often contested. It has been accused of positivism in a version so naive that hardly any positivist historian would have ascribed himself to such a conception of historiography.¹⁹ Nonetheless, while in the last thirty

¹⁷ Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York, 1980), 78.

¹⁸ Hutton, *History*, 76.

¹⁹ Somewhat maliciously Hutton emphasises that Halbwachs did not notice the breakthrough in historiography brought about by the *Annales* school, with

years historiography has been affected by the debate initiated by the cultural turn in the humanities, which negated the privileged role of academic history over other narratives about the past, it is not obvious that the postmodernists have come out of this debate victorious. Undeniably, there is now a greater theoretical awareness amongst post-postmodernist historians and the readiness to present alternative models for practising the discipline; such as the pragmatic perspective of Appleby *et al.*²⁰ or the ideal type of the so-called critical history by Krzysztof Pomian.²¹

We may note, however, that even these epistemologically and methodologically convenient perspectives on the craft of historians (in these views history writing still contributes to knowledge) in no way liberate us from considerations on the influence of social mechanisms on historiography. The new 'cohorts' of researchers are asking new questions which result from the specific experience of their generation, from the values professed by them, from the intellectual fashion, from political pressures, and finally from financial incentives. What is important is that Polish sociologists are familiar with all these debates within the humanities, which does not mean that they have incorporated historiography (particularly contemporary historiography, which is the most sensitive to social influences) to their research into memory.²² Moreover, it so happens that they introduce its results as an objective factor to their research – for example,

which he was closely connected as an academic colleague of Marc Bloch at the university in Strasburg and a member of the *Annales* journal committee; and what is more Halbwachs was a superb historian despite himself. His analysis of the imagination of the early Christianity described in *La topographie légendaire des Évangiles en Terre sainte* is a fantastic work, which today we would include within historical anthropology; see Hutton, *History*, 80 f.

²⁰ Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt and Margaret Jacob, *Telling the Truth about History* (New York and London, 1994). I have made use of the Polish translation: *Powiedzieć prawdę o historii*, trans. Stefan Amsterdamski (Poznań, 2000).

²¹ Krzysztof Pomian, *Sur l'Histoire* (Paris, 1999). I have made use of the Polish edition: 'Historia urzędowa, historia rewizjonistyczna, historia krytyczna', in *idem*, *Historia: nauka wobec pamięci* (Lublin, 2006), 188–98.

²² Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa*, 24–40; Barbara Szacka, *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit*, (Współczesne Społeczeństwo Polskie wobec Przeszłości, 3, Warsaw, 2006), 17–31; Andrzej Szpociński, 'Formy przeszłości a komunikacja społeczna', in *idem* and Piotr T. Kwiatkowski, *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu* (Współczesne Społeczeństwo Polskie wobec Przeszłości, 1, Warsaw, 2006), 9–26.

when they use a typical textbook periodisation in cyclical surveys of the attitudes of Poles to particular periods in the history of PRL.²³ In effect, sociologists, backed up by public history, interfere into subject of collective memory which they want to learn about.

Thirdly, more than any other category of history, recent history is susceptible to social influences because those who practise it are also bound up in communicative memory of the time they study. In consequence, historians of contemporary periods are more inclined than their colleagues whose work focuses on the distant past to draw their research questions and explanations from the common knowledge at their disposal than from the autonomous space of strictly scholarly debate; they tend to operate on the combined dimensions of lay and academic thinking. In a country which went through the experience of an authoritarian regime, it is likely that some part of this experience will be included into historical research agenda. In the Polish case, as I will point out later, the historical view at first held by the democratic opposition, gained the dominant status after the regime's collapse. As Dariusz Stola writes, historians' involvement in the public sphere lasts

for almost two decades after the fall of the PZPR [Polish United Workers' Party] and this involvement will rather only slowly disappear, for ...[it remains] in connection with the formative experiences of at least two generations of historians.²⁴

A fourth issue is that Polish historiography is burdened with the dispute between supporters of different objectives of historical profession. Shall the research be subordinated to questions and explanations that are purely academic? Or shall the historical research also refer to the needs of the non-academic community of which a historian claims membership? Although this dispute is a worldwide phenomenon and generally known to historians, in Poland it has a unique feature due to the political context in which historical scholarship operated, from the non-existence of the Polish state in the nineteenth century to the country's subjugation to Soviet influences after 1945.

²³ CBOS, 1987; Pentor, 2004, 2006.

²⁴ Dariusz Stola, 'O dalszy rozwój badań nad socjalistycznymi praktykami społecznymi. Uwagi o stanie i możliwościach refleksji nad charakterem PRL', in Brzechczyn (ed.), *Obrazy PRL*, 133.

Hence the voices about the specific mission of historians, who shall not only be researchers of the past but also society's educators in national values such as independence, freedom, motherland, patriotism, and even a uniquely Polish spirituality. Fully cataloguing and commenting on all these values is far beyond the scope of this article, but it is worth emphasising that to this day this intellectual involvement has created a tendency to think in terms of history as a mission, which is shown in, i.a., Rafał Stobiecki's analysis of the historiography of the PRL.²⁵

Stobiecki quotes one of the historians of the older generation, the mentor of many, who in the discussion *Jak pisać o komunizmie?* [How to write about communism?] said:

It is not enough to simply describe, one should warn, immunise, protect against this disease. These are the obligations of today's Polish historians, publicists, thinkers – and politicians.²⁶

Another historian, of the middle generation, emphasised that

the struggle for decommunisation was lost in all fields except for historical consciousness. ... I came to the IPN [The Institute of National Remembrance] because I consider that it is a chance for a partial change in the consciousness of, perhaps, not the whole of society (for the whole of society does not have a historical consciousness whatsoever), but its elite, with regard to the PRL and evaluating of the communist past.²⁷

In turn the adversaries of this sort of understanding of history emphasise the necessity to research history simply for its own sake and its demythologisation. One of the best known contemporary social historians remarks hereon:

I consider as one of the most important tasks facing authors of academic works on the history of the PRL to be combating myths, both those created by communist propaganda and anti-communist ones born out of various

²⁵ Stobiecki, *Historiografia PRL*, 299 f.

²⁶ Tomasz Strzembosz [a voice in the debate], 'Jak pisać o komunizmie? Jak pisać o PRL-u?', *Arcana*, 2 (32), (2000), 7, cit. from Stobiecki, *Historiografia PRL*, 302.

²⁷ Antoni Dudek [a voice in the debate], 'Jak pisać o komunizmie?', cit. *ut sup.*, 302.

brands of anti-communist thought. I do not think that the historians of the PRL should behave just like politicians.²⁸

Despite the difference, both sides are convinced that it is historians' task to fight against ideologised version of the past (although their interpretations of the concept of 'ideologised' differ), and also exert an influence on the collective memory, which, duly stripped of falsifications, would then become an accurate reflection of current historical knowledge.²⁹ Surveying the arguments of both sides of the debate, one notes that these Polish historians who still dominate the discussion on the contemporary historiography employ their old arguments, overlooking the cultural turn in the humanities.

For a sociologist, a surprising feature characteristic for Polish dominant history is its unwillingness to refer to social theories. There are either overt or tacit assumptions in historical studies that it is possible to recount 'how things actually were' (*wie es eigentlich gewesen*), only (or almost only) on the basis of critical reading of documents. In this thinking, historians recreate the past and do not interpret it or construct it. This research practice was strengthened by the opening of archives after 1989. Nevertheless, historians adopt some theories, even if not directly stated, while incorporating detailed descriptions into certain entities: these are most often theories of conflict, as we shall point out in the final part of this text.

III CONTEMPORARY HISTORIOGRAPHY IN ITS INSTITUTIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Historiography of the PRL obviously had its beginnings before 1989. In an outline, prior to that date, three general currents can be distinguished, with the reservation that different works by the same historians fall into different currents depending on when they were written and what functions they fulfilled. The dominant current was the official party line, which was sponsored by a vulgarised form of Marxism and the agenda of showcasing the achievements of the People's Poland, a current that, we would say today, was subordinated

²⁸ Dariusz Jarosz [a voice in the debate], 'Jak pisać o komunizmie?', cit. *ut sup.*, 301.

²⁹ Kałwa, 'Pamięć zbiorowa o PRL', 215.

to a historical policy.³⁰ The second was the academic current, which in terms of methodology was influenced by several, interpenetrating intellectual schools, among which I would number: neo-positivism, a traditional form of political historiography having its roots in the nineteenth century committed to building a sense of national community, and Marxism, but a Marxism that was open to the West, especially to the French *Annales*.³¹ The Marxist school of Polish historians accomplished a lot, especially in the areas of economic and social history of medieval and modern age.³² It has also influenced a number of historians who examined the social history of twentieth-century Poland.³³ Finally, there was a 'revisionist' current, developing both within the emigration and opposition circles. An important symbolic date is 1976, after which historians started to publish beyond the reach of the censor, in 'second circulation', with the main priorities of filling the blank spots and correcting the official political narrative; the majority of these publications came out in the 1980s.³⁴ Magdalena Mikołajczyk is the author of an interesting work on this historiography. She drew attention to the political nature of categories formulated in the underground and enumerated, i.a., the following topics of narrative in the 'second circulation':

1. the authorities versus society and within this narrative framework: the non-sovereignty of the state, the non-legitimised political authorities, the omnipotence of communist power, the ostensibility of

³⁰ There are many books of this current but let the numerous publications of Władysław Góra serve as an example, for instance *Polska Ludowa 1944–1984: zarys dziejów politycznych* (Lublin, 1985); *Polska Zjednoczona Partia Robotnicza: od I do VII Zjazdu: (1948–1978)* (Warsaw, 1978).

³¹ See Patryk Pleskot, *Intelektualni sąsiedzi. Kontakty historyków polskich ze środowiskiem 'Annales' 1945–1989* (Warsaw, 2010).

³² See Anna Sosnowska, *Zrozumieć zacofanie. Spory historyków o Europę Wschodnią (1947–1994)*, (Warsaw, 2004).

³³ As an example I would consider Franciszek Ryszka (ed.), *Polska Ludowa: 1944–1950. Przemiany społeczne* (Wrocław, 1974). I think that the authors of this volume – Hanna Jędruszczak, Krystyna Kersten, Franciszek Ryszka, Henryk Słabek and Tomasz Szarota – might be considered representatives of this eclectic current, although they obviously do not define themselves as such.

³⁴ Prominent examples are: Krystyna Kersten, *Historia polityczna Polski: 1944–1956* (many 'second circulation' editions); Andrzej Paczkowski, *Historia polityczna Polski: 1944–1948* (Warsaw, 1985); Jerzy Holzer, "*Solidarność*" 1980–1981: *geneza i historia* (Paris, 1984); Andrzej Albert [Wojciech Roszkowski], *Najnowsza historia Polski 1918–1980*, 4 vols. (Warsaw, 1983–7).

the structures of political life, the bipolarity and conflict, the growing social self-organisation;

2. the origins of the system of communist power, including the international situation and the balance of internal forces;

3. political conflicts and their significance for system change;

4. the opposition and its ethos.³⁵

After 1989 Poland witnessed an ‘archival revolution’, the beneficiaries of which are in many cases opposition historians (or their students). The canon of questions which were once formulated in the underground – above all questions on political history, the structures of the apparatus of power and the structures of the opposition as well as the scale of repression – now constitute the dominating canon. One may say, after Krzysztof Pomian, that ‘revisionist’ history takes on the status of the ‘official’ one. A significant turning point was the creating of the Institute of National Remembrance in 1998–2000: this was the moment of the institutionalising of the research field, earlier dispersed amongst various academic centres. The task of the Institute was to investigate communist and Nazi crimes against Polish citizens. Moreover, the IPN was put in charge of research and public education regarding the 1939–89. Finally, the IPN was made responsible for gathering, storing, and disclosing the records kept by Polish security agencies before 1989. The historians employed at the IPN were to have easy access to files and had been assured of generous financial resources for their research. The IPN won huge media coverage mainly because it was involved in lustration activities and declassified archive files of many prominent politicians, sometimes former members of the democratic opposition, at the same time accusing them of collaboration with the secret police before 1989. Some participants of the debate into the role of the Institute have rightly observed that the dissatisfaction of academic historians with the fact that the historians employed at the IPN are involved first and foremost in political history and the history of repressions, marginally treating other historical dimensions of social life, in a way misses the point.³⁶ For it was the

³⁵ Magdalena Mikołajczyk, *Jak się pisało o historii... Problemy polityczne powojennej Polski w publikacjach drugiego obiegu lat siedemdziesiątych i osiemdziesiątych* (Cracow, 1998).

³⁶ Cf. Stola, ‘O dalszy rozwój’, 135. A list of the IPN historical publications at <<http://www.ipn.gov.pl/portal/pl/229/Ksiazki.html>> [Accessed 10 Aug. 2011]. Worthy of note is *Katalog wystaw* published by the IPN in 2007. It shows analytical

legislator who obliged IPN to concentrate on the repression instigated by the communist state and on the documentation of resistance to this state.

The establishing of the Institute of National Remembrance was a political act of the Polish parliament, as such in itself an example of historical policy, and at the same time – indeed perhaps above all – an expression of the values that won a majority vote in the democratically elected *Sejm*. In the preamble to the Act on the IPN there is a reference to the need to cultivate the memory ‘of the huge sacrifice, loss and damage suffered by the Polish Nation in the years of the Second World War and after its conclusion’, ‘the patriotic traditions of the struggle of the Polish Nation with occupiers, with Nazism and Communism’, ‘of the acts performed by citizens in the cause of the independence of the Polish State and in the defence of freedom and human dignity’. This shows clearly that the Institute was created as a guardian of national and community values, not as an institution ‘of critical history’. In so far as the subordination of history to a national mission is nothing new in the Polish tradition then it can hardly come as a surprise that also today the legislator has allocated history a supporting role in respect to objectives favouring the national community. One may presume that many Poles simply cannot imagine or do not realise that there exist other styles of pursuing history. Recently, the liberal government decided to change the Act on the IPN by giving more power to academic circles in envisaging the IPN’s research agenda; only time will tell if this decision will change the Institute’s public role.³⁷

When the IPN was launching and developing its activities, universities – always closer to a critical mode of history – were becoming

categories employed by the IPN in their research and educational activities. The authors of the catalogue divide it into the following parts: ‘war and occupation’, ‘the armed underground’, ‘PRL’, ‘the security services’, ‘the Church’, ‘the crises of PRL’, ‘martial law’, ‘opposition in PRL’, ‘others’. Having noted the domination of national-irredentist topics in the publications of the IPN, it follows to note that the Institute publishes sometimes on social history (first and foremost on everyday life in the PRL), it also involves itself in discussions on the history of historiography (e.g. Brzechczyn (ed.), *Obrazy PRL* cited here).

³⁷ Interesting, self critical reflections were presented at the conference ‘Bez taryfy ulgowej. Dorobek naukowy i edukacyjny Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej 2000–2010’, Lodz, 8–10 Dec. 2010, see <<http://ipn.gov.pl/porta1.php?serwis=pl&dzial=395&id=14601>> [Accessed 1 Sept. 2011].

increasingly networked with the West. This does not mean that earlier there had been no foreign contacts, but the chance to obtain grants and the ease in travelling is now incomparably greater, particularly after Poland accession to the European Union. At various seminars a new generation of researchers is coming to the fore. Their interest in social and cultural history is growing visibly, but the development of this field (unlike that of political history), and of its conceptual framework, is fairly accidental: it is the result of individual interests and not of institutional action.³⁸ An example could be the analytical categories used in the series 'W krainie PRL' [In the Land of PRL] published by TRIO, and comprising more than sixty works that together offer a fairly good overview of the interests of the younger generation of researchers. These categories are extremely varied, coming from different fields of the social sciences and the humanities. To clarify this: there are certain milieux where social and cultural history is practiced, especially at the historical departments of the University of Warsaw and the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, but there is nothing like a strong academic school, nothing that would be comparable to the strength and influence of the IPN. One could also argue that theoretical propositions of these milieux are less persuasive and visible than those formerly envisaged by Marxist historians.

The impact of Poland's rapprochement with Europe on the research agendas of Polish historians still remains limited, but it is likely to grow, given that in European centres there is strong tendency to transgress the national frameworks of Europe's history. To give one of many examples: the Internet website of the Department of History and Civilization of the European University Institute in Florence informs that its aim is 'to develop a distinctive programme of the transnational and comparative history of Europe, one that is conscious of the dangers of national models, of the need to study the construction of the boundaries of Europe and to insist on the variety of experiences within these boundaries'.³⁹ The EUI has been one of the most important funders of doctoral scholarships. One can only speculate about the future outcomes of this process on national

³⁸ Błażej Brzostek, 'Kultura duchowa', in Paweł Skibiński *et al.* (eds.), *Spojrzenie w przeszłość*, 180.

³⁹ Cit. from <<http://www.eui.eu/DepartmentsAndCentres/HistoryAndCivilization/Index.aspx>> [Accessed 10 Nov. 2009].

historiographies, but it is probable that disintegration among Polish historians will increase. While some of them will be inclined to go beyond national models, some other will oppose 'Europeanisation' deliberately, understanding this process as a threat to Polish identity.

The interest in social and cultural history is equally motivated by the growing demand for stories and information which have eluded political history. Throughout the world there is a clear rise of interest in micro-history, histories from below, oral history. Poland is no exception in this respect, and the PRL is moving into this dimension of interest in the past. Narratives of this type are developing at the intersections of academic and museum spaces, co-funded by local governments and NGOs.⁴⁰

A review as this one must not, of course, overlook the fact that the state of academic reflection on the PRL is not solely a product of research by historians. There are often mentioned the theoretical proposals of Polish sociologist and philosophers: of Jakub Karpiński, Mirosława Marody, Winicjusz Narojek, Leszek Nowak, Jadwiga Staniszkis, Hanna Świda-Ziemia, Jacek Tarkowski or Andrzej Walicki. Naturally, theoretical approaches used to describe the communist system have also been developed in the West. Perhaps those with the strongest status are American propositions, initially formulated by political scientists and Sovietologists, who were gradually superseded by sociologists, anthropologists and eventually historians.⁴¹

Given all these facts, an undeniable attribute of contemporary historical research is its multiparadigmatism without inter-paradigm references and even, often enough, with ignorance of the theories, categories and findings by others. For instance: Polish historians rarely cite findings by sociologists or Western scholars unless they have been published in Poland (one example is the bibliographies for popular editions of histories of Poland, another might be the majority of books

⁴⁰ For example: Brama Grodzka [the 'Grodzka Gate – NN Theatre' Centre], Ośrodek KARTA [the Karta Centre], Dom Spotkań z Historią [History Meeting House] in Warsaw or Dzieje Nowej Huty Muzeum Historycznego Miasta Krakowa [The History of Nowa Huta District, a branch of the Historical Museum of the City of Kraków]. See Dobrochna Kałwa, 'Historia mówiona w krajach postkomunistycznych. Rekonesans', *Kultura i Historia*, 18 (2010), <<http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/1887>> [Accessed 1 Sept. 2011].

⁴¹ Cf. Lynne Viola, 'The Cold War in American Soviet Historiography and the End of the Soviet Union', *The Russian Review*, 61, 1 (2002), 25–34.

published by the IPN). The converse is also true: it is rare to find good knowledge of the state of Polish historiography in works by Western scholars, or in sociological works in Poland. There is discontinuity in research questionnaires and absence of dialogue between scholars of various disciplines. We shall recall in this context that one of the arguments posited by Halbwachs in favour of separating memory and history was the assumed unity of the latter.

IV

CATEGORIES OF MAINSTREAM HISTORIOGRAPHY

In spite of the diversity of scholarly camps, historiography defined above as 'revisionist' has achieved the dominant status after 1989. Its narrative may be described by three categories (which are always important for researchers of social memory): time, space and agency. Below I refer to the classic article by Polish sociologist Nina Assorodobraj, who had rediscovered Maurice Halbwachs much earlier than it happened in the West, where the boom for memory studies began in the 1980s. Although Assorodobraj was probably a faithful pupil of Halbwachs in the sense that she would make a clear distinction between memory and professional history, currently her analytical proposals can serve historiography studies, too.

'Every kind of history – wrote Assorodobraj – is expressed first and foremost in categories of time'.⁴² Its successive episodes are tinted by values, often intensively. Crucial to understanding of the message of every story is to know where it begins and ends. In this respect, one telling aspect of Polish dominant historiography is the lack of a *longue durée* categories. Cut-off dates are the breakthrough years of 1944/5 (or sometimes 1939) and the year 1989. The hands of this clock are set to important 'hours', the moments of political upheavals and turmoils in 1956, 1968, 1970, 1976, 1980–1, which are the most documented events in contemporary history.⁴³ These are dates termed as crises of the system. Between these are placed sub-periods: Stalinist Poland, Gomułka's Poland, Gierek's Poland, the

⁴² Nina Assorodobraj, 'Żywa historia. Świadomość historyczna: symptomy i propozycje badawcze', *Studia Socjologiczne*, iii, 2 (1963), 5–45.

⁴³ See the bibliography of the most important works in Brzostek and Zaremba, *Polska 1956–1976*, 25–37.

time of the 'Solidarność' carnival, or the martial law. Such a conceptualisation means that there dominates *histoire événementielle*, a history of events, a political history. Using Fernand Braudel's metaphor, one can say that Polish historians concern themselves first and foremost with the 'foam of history', and not with what caused it. There are few studies, paradigms and methods that would facilitate connections between the scholarship of historians of various periods that are considered to be discrete. Andrzej Friszke has noted that 'historians of the interwar period and historians of PRL are *de facto* of two separate worlds'.⁴⁴ The domination of event-based time forces other modes of times – demographic, social, economic, intellectual – into the background. It is symptomatic that almost none of 42 historians participating in the very interesting survey on the state of the contemporary history, published as a separate edition of the periodical *Polska 1944/45–1989*, drew attention to the need to break down the barriers of those dates.⁴⁵

'Doctrines expressing historical consciousness also demonstrate certain spatial attributes'.⁴⁶ Space in the narrative of the mainstream historiography is limited to the post-war Polish borders, while the majority of events are played out in cities. The publications by IPN regional branches – one must admit – have broken the earlier domination of Warsaw. This in no way means that these publications take into consideration the local specificity. There have been few comparative studies with other countries of the region, or with Western Europe.⁴⁷

Finally, on the issue of structure and agency, Assorobraj noted:

Every ... historical work ... is structured around certain sociological categories ... Even when these are not articulated by the author, they tend to form a coherent system, a particular vision of the social world

⁴⁴ Andrzej Friszke [a voice in the debate], in Skibiński *et al.* (eds.), *Spojrzenie w przeszłość*, 253–4.

⁴⁵ *Polska 1944/45–1989*, vol. 8.

⁴⁶ Assorodobraj, 'Żywa historia', 43.

⁴⁷ Notable exceptions: Łukasz Kamiński (ed.), *Wokół praskiej wiosny. Polska i Czechosłowacja w 1968 roku* (Warsaw, 2004); Krzysztof Persak and Łukasz Kamiński (eds.), *Handbook of the Communist Security Apparatus in East Central Europe 1944–1989*, trans. David L. Burnett *et al.* (Warsaw, 2005); Pleskot, *Intelektualni sąsiedzi*, Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949–1989* (Warsaw, 2010); Bożena Szaynok, *Z historią i Moskwą w tle. Polska a Izrael 1944–1968* (Warsaw, 2007).

and its mechanisms and it is they, alongside the above mentioned categories of time and space, that define the fundamental attributes of the doctrine.⁴⁸

The mainstream historiography of the PRL, as many of its observers have noted, is above all a story of conflict as the focal source of social dynamics and change. Firstly, there are conflicts between the elite of power and the opposition elite⁴⁹ and secondly, between the authorities and society which in this narrative is trapped in an oppressive shell, but which has sufficient strength for 'resistance' even if sometimes it 'conforms'.⁵⁰ In many studies, this society remains largely anonymous and unexplored, which results probably from the nature of the sources: fragmentary reports created for the needs of the party or security apparatus. Descriptions of the apparatus itself are becoming increasingly detailed with regard to its formal structures, but its social and psychological aspects are still eluding examination. Thirdly, we are dealing with the ideological conflict of the Polish nation with communists. This narrative is based on the concept of national and Catholic social bonding; while communists are amorphous, defying description; though undoubtedly hostile to the nation, and at the very least 'alien' to it. This version of history often becomes starkly normative.⁵¹ Historiography in this vein serves not only the historical delegitimisation of the apparatus of communist authority, but also the

⁴⁸ Assorodobraj, 'Żywa historia', 43.

⁴⁹ Padraic Kenney observes that this elite view is particularly visible in the studies on the second half of the 1980s, when the changes in social practices, standards of living, and mentality of that time are treated as epiphenomenal, see Kenney, 'After the Blank Spots', 160.

⁵⁰ The very terms 'resistance' and 'conformity' were initially used by Krystyna Kersten, *Między wyzwoleniem a zniewoleniem. Polska 1944–1956* (London, 1993), 14–15. Later, they became salient categories of describing the attitudes of society toward the communist system in Polish historiography, e.g. Andrzej Friszke, *Przystosowanie i opór. Studia z dziejów PRL* (Warsaw, 2007). While these authors built nuance interpretations, many others abuse these categories to paint the black and white picture of relations between society and authorities.

⁵¹ 'Native communists, in a similar way to the Targowica confederates of centuries ago, are symbols of national renegades and traitors, and their rule is one of the darkest moments in Polish history which we recall as a warning', this fragment advertises the book *Kronika komunizmu w Polsce* by Włodzimierz Bernacki et al., Wydawnictwo Kluszczyński (Cracow, 2009).

exclusion of former 'communists' from today's national community. One may find within stories of this type romantic nineteenth-century topoi, such as obsession with innocence and betrayal.⁵²

These consideration will be suspended in a void if we do not apply simple comparative measures. We will notice that categories of time and space are used differently by Western historians. Outsiders more often comprehend Poland as a fragment of the region of Central-Eastern Europe, which enables them to track processes that influenced the economic, social and mental structures of larger wholes.⁵³ They more often note phenomena well known to sociologists or anthropologists, for example that the regimes exploited cultural predispositions of societies, such as their peasant character and included the elements of the peasant ethos in the ideology and behaviours of elites. They also recognise structures of complicated networks in the shortage economy and the changes in the standard and styles of living; in their analyses ethnic divisions or gender history frequently take the place of political divides. Taking the lead from Western scholars, some representatives of non-dominating history in Poland propose research into social practices (referring to, i.a., the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and Anthony Giddens), research in the field of historical anthropology, *histoires croisées*, histories from below and micro-histories.⁵⁴ However, for the time being, Polish historiography is unable to propose a competing research paradigm of its own history on the global market of ideas. It seems that the times when Fernand Braudel could introduce a notable Polish Marxist historian as 'much more intelligent than I am' are gone together with the end of Marxist illusion.⁵⁵

⁵² E.g. Ryszard Terlecki, 'Lachowicz, mój ojciec', *Rzeczpospolita*, 6 Sept. 2003; Filip Musiał, 'Anatomia zdrady', *Dziennik Polski*, 28 June 2006.

⁵³ Such a book is, for example, Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations: Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569–1999* (New Haven and London, 2003), which in addition presents the history of the region in long time.

⁵⁴ Stola, 'O dalszy rozwój'; Brzostek and Zaremba, *Polska 1956–1976*.

⁵⁵ Braudel on Witold Kula, see Peter Burke, *The French Historical Revolution: The Annales School 1929–89* (Stanford, 1990), 95.

V
CLOSING REMARKS

It has been argued that researchers of collective memory of post-war Poland should pay closer attention to the Polish mainstream historiography. The gap between them will narrow and the historians' interpretations of the past will probably exert a growing influence over the memory of the PRL. In addition, the genealogy and some of the content of the mainstream historiography have been reconstructed. This overview of contemporary historiography has been mainly based on published opinions of historians regarding the work of their peers. Undoubtedly, this is a subject in need of further explorations by means of other methods which would help to test the hypotheses set forth here on interconnections of collective memory and history. One such method would be in addition to sociological quantitative studies – a detailed analysis of the publishing market and of the resources at the disposal of various institutions involved in public history. Another would be a research project with the aim of depicting the way that the three generations of historians alive today understand their discipline. Such a programme providing that it took into consideration biographical questions, would help to grasp the relationships of historical methods with generational experiences: the totalitarianisation, democratisation and, most recently, Poland's rapprochement with Europe. A programme of this type would connect the study of historiography very closely to the research into memory.

trans. Guy Torr