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Murals make (Our) history: paintings on the wall as media of cultural memory. Interpreting the current state of Warsaw's commemorative murals[1]

Abstract The aim of this paper is to closely examine the ways in which the outdoor mural as a form of art has been used for commemorative purposes in the context of the Polish capital. Drawing on content analysis this paper will argue that regardless of their democratic potential and potential to act subversively in the public domain, the commemorative murals in the case of Warsaw are predominantly reflecting the official narrations/representations of the past and thus reproducing the state-supported, nation-centered, male-dominated perspective of history. Referring to Wulf Kansteiner methodological instructions, the paper introduces the notion of "secondary" memory makers in order to describe the position the mural makers are occupying in the field of Warsaw's cultural memory. It will also be argued that mural makers, by adapting their works to the demands of the cultural institutions responsible for the memory production and dominant discourses of memory from mainly pragmatic reasons, are forgoing a fair portion of the democratic and subversive potential of the murals. As such, the paintings on the walls are, intentionally or not, further involved in more complex state-sponsored strategies of nationalizing the public space.

Słowa kluczowe cultural memory, street art, memory makers, Polish history, Warsaw

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Introducing the subject

The cityscape is surely one of the most exploited contexts for research on collective memory. The urban landscape – its changing image, structure and cultural meanings – has been regularly approached as a site that reflects (and thus exposes for study): social tensions and public debates concerning the past (Hayden 1997; Crang and Travlou 2001; Azaryahu and Foote 2007; Foote 2008; Palonen 2008; Maus 2015), dominant discourses of memory and vernacular voices of their contestation (Herzfeld 1991; Dwyer 2000; Stangl 2008), the dialectic relations between remembering and forgetting (Crinson 2005; Bevan 2006; Legg 2007), transformations in the remembering paradigms (Foote et al. 2000; Forest and Johnson 2002; Vukov 2013; Yanushkevich 2014), as well as complex relations between various forms of commemoration (Boyer 1994; Till 1999; Huyssen 2003).

Drawing upon this tradition in the research of collective memory the following paper will intend to provide a comprehensive analysis of the current state of commemorative use of murals in Warsaw. Painting outdoor murals in the Polish capital has been part of a series of complex nation-wide processes of cultural re-branding of the post-socialist landscape since the 1990's. Warsaw's image and its present political and cultural landscape are continuously undergoing resolute changes, initiated and reinforced by newly established institutions and mechanisms. A whole new set of institutions and social actors has also been actively involved in the implementation of new policies and practices aimed not only at redefining and reinterpreting the national and local past, but also at finding novel forms in which this past will be narrated, represented, or visualized. Traditional institutions and forms of commemoration of the local/national past (museums, monuments, rituals, street names, etc.) have been largely influenced and supplemented by images, messages and practices drawn from popular culture (Edensor 2002). Among them painting outdoor murals has become one of the most exploited ways of reimagining, re-visualizing, and redistributing local and national history within the urban fabric.

The aim of this paper is to closely interpret the ways in which this form of art has been used for commemorative purposes in the context of the Polish capital. Empirical studies (mainly of descriptive nature) from different parts of the world have been informing our knowledge on the commemorative use of murals in contemporary societies (Jarman 1998; Golden et al 2002; Rolston 2004; Eubanks 2002; Forker and McCormick 2009; Heidenry 2014). The following paper not only introduces a new case study to the existing literature, but also aims to go beyond the mere description of the visualizations of history in murals and reconsider the notions of commemorative mural and commemorative mural makers, as well as their positions and roles in the overall field of cultural memory. Drawing upon the research's findings it will argue that mural due to its formal characteristics and limitations can be conveniently used in the visualization and redistribution of hegemonic, state-supported representations and

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[1] The title is inspired from a radio program from 29/08/2013 dedicated to, at that time, newly painted murals in Muranów district. The program on the national Polish radio *Trójka* was called "Murale tworzą historię Muranowa"/ "Murals make history of Muranow."

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imaginations of local and national past. It will also argue that the mural makers, who work in highly centralized fields of memory, are left with very limited space to act innovatively or subversively within them, and often have to adapt their work to the needs and objectives of the public institutions responsible for the memory production. In the following I will first introduce the theoretical background of this paper and try to locate the study of murals in global, national and theoretical contexts. I will then explain the choice of data and describe in detail the methodological procedure of content analysis used in their interpretation. In the last two sections I will present and discuss the findings, and finally I will offer some possible directions in which publicly funded commemorative murals in Warsaw may develop.

Theoretical framework of the study

The main departure point for the analysis was the assumption that the multidimensional character of art "where the semantic, aesthetic, affective and purposive dimensions all apply to the same object or event" (Morphy and Perkins 2006:16) may contribute to our understanding of the complex notion of memory in contemporary societies. Forms of art (including murals) objectify ideas and discourses (both hegemonic and vernacular), and may serve as "technologies of memory" (Sturken 2008), allowing the past to be visualized, shared, and instrumentalized, as well as challenged and contested. The concept of cultural memory, initially introduced by Jan Assmann (2008; Assmann and Czaplicka 1995) and later developed by other scholars (Assmann 2008a; 2008b; Erll 2008) has proven to be suitable for this

study as it unites the discursive, institutional, and cultural aspects of collective remembering. Assmann's cultural memory refers to the realm of culture where memory is de-personalized, objectified, and stored in stable formations—texts, rites, monuments, landscapes – which are enclosing the group's past in so called "figures of memory." Figures of memory are those socially constructed and continuously negotiated shared representations of the past that constitute a group's historical horizon. Once being objectified in cultural artifacts and transmitted through cultural media, the memory radically exceeds the duration and limitations of the recollections sustained through interpersonal communication. It functions as a normative principle, as it is imposed on a group as an acceptable vision of the past that frames the group's self-image (identity). It is situation-transcendent, as it comprises a total body of knowledge out of which a group derives its feeling of belonging, unity and peculiarity (concretion of identity)—that is to say it delineates *Our* past in opposition to the past of the *Others*.

While Assmann's theory emphasizes the institutionalized character of cultural memory, other authors have been calling for a more relational approach, or such that will take into account the alternative forms of remembering, as well as the "privatized" perceptions of past events together with their treatment in public discourse (Sarkar 2006). One of the most profound critiques of the theory that reduces the concept of collective memory to collectively shared recollections has been offered by the German cultural historian Wulf Kainsteiner. According to Kainsteiner (2002) the shared representations of the past are not essential to the group. Moreover, what

makes memory collective is the fact that these representations, while being framed by certain cultural traditions, are part of a larger communicational situation which involves at least two types of interacting social actors: *memory makers*, who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions and *memory consumers*, who use, transform, or ignore the cultural products of the makers according to their present interests. Still, as the following paper will intend to show, the communicational schema in which memory operates can be further complicated. Within a democratized context the state's institutional monopoly over the cultural memory production can be weakened, which opens a space for other social actors to become involved with the process of memory-making. However, in order to become publicly visible or recognized these "secondary" memory makers (mural painters being one of them) are often required to accept the constraints of the dominant discourses, which leaves them with very limited space to act tactically or innovatively within them. The state on the other hand can develop different mechanisms to control memory production and secure the naturalized historical horizon from subversive contents. These mechanisms can include, for example, financing or co-financing some public, bottom-up initiatives (such as street-art festivals as was the case in this study).

Murals can bring a new kind of visual identity to cities that are undergoing vivid transformations and tend to redefine/re-imagine/reposition themselves within the new global networks and cultural markets. On the other hand, murals have potential, and even a tendency, to express local values and "supply" the local (imagined) communities with new

cultural contents for identification (Jarman 1998). The latter is in line with the findings of the research on nationalism which have demonstrated that the popular culture is frequently exploited in the signification, reproduction, and re-imagination of the national identities and nationalization of public spaces (Edensor 2002). And yet another important feature that murals share with street-art in general is that they can visualize various kinds of cultural resistance towards the dominant tastes, cultural mainstreams, or ideological meta-narratives (Lewisohn 2008). Murals do "make" history in a sense that they can make certain figures of memory immediately visible in the public domain. The proliferation of various representations of the past across the city's murals can be of crucial value for the social actors (public institutions, neighborhoods, individuals, subculture groups, etc.) who compete over the visual/cultural identity of the city.

This paper adapts Assmann's concept of cultural memory to the methodological instructions offered by Kainsteiner, and from this theoretical perspective aims to obtain a full scan of the current state of Warsaw's commemorative murals. Of particular interest for the analysis will be the representations of the past contained in Warsaw's commemorative murals, as well as the social actors who control the historical contents the murals emit in the city's public domain. The Polish capital, whose present visual identity reflects a continuous negotiation (or even competition) between the demands of the global cultural/tourist markets, national symbolism and the practices and needs of the local communities, is an excellent site for this kind of research.

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Murals in global, national, and theoretical context—research questions and hypothesis

The beginnings of the mural's modern history are associated mainly with the work of Mexican painters: Diego Rivera, José Clemente Orozco and David Alfaro Siqueiros. The murals of "los tres grandes" group have been playing a crucial role in the construction and imagination of the new cultural and political Mexican landscape since the revolution in 1910-1917 (Anreus et al. 2012). Murals have become more and more popular visual tools for communicating social and political meanings in Northern Ireland as well (Rolston 2004; Forker and McCormic 2009). Since the 1970's this artistic form has been an integral part of the country's vibrant cultural landscape depicting its past and present religious and political divisions. The outdoor murals in the Polish context appeared in the previous political system mainly as a part of the advertisement strategies of the state-owned enterprises. However, it is in the last two decades when Polish culture experienced a huge "come-back" of this form of art in the public space. There are several possible explanations for this situation. On one hand it can be explained with the changes in the ideological/political field that followed the transformation and allowed different social actors to be involved in the creation of the newly democratized public space. On the other hand, a more structural explanation would be that the inflation of the professional artists has resulted in a situation in which a fair portion of them has decided to look for new forms and spaces for self-promotion and work – painting murals being one of them. Finally, the increased popularity of the murals can be interpreted as a segment of a more complex process of cultural re-branding of the Polish post-socialist landscape since the 1990's.

The popularity of the mural in reality, however, is not reflected in the status it has in theory. While remaining outside the artistic canon or sporadically recognized by the discourses of the history of art, the mural is most commonly perceived as a form of street or public art (Duchowski and Sekuła 2011). This commonsense classification, however, requires a brief reconsideration. Mural is indeed an art that "happens" on the streets and as such it shares strong democratic potential with the street-art and graffiti being most commonly defined as hybrid art movements that encompass unsanctioned, decentralized, subversive and (although not exclusively) socially engaged artistic practices in the public space (Lewisohn 2008). Still, there are significant differences between these artistic practices stemming from murals' formal limitations. Mural is mainly a time-consuming practice of applying big-format pictures on city walls. Due to the former it is, in most cases, legal and presupposes an agreement between the artist and the appropriate public institution and/or the owner of the wall. As such, unlike street-art, in order to become publicly visible, murals often adapt to the needs and constraints of the urban policies, dominant tastes, aesthetic norms and institutional frameworks.

However, possessing a place-making potential (Taborska 1996) and being commonly used as a visualization of different, often conflicting, social meanings and values the mural is especially interesting among the urban and cultural anthropologists and sociologists. They have all recognized several important functions the murals can serve in the contemporary world. While being regularly used in advertising, paintings on the walls can also be involved in other complex social practices, such as: aestheticization of public spaces (for example, in the case of Warsaw's Praga district, even being a part of the strategies of urban gentrification), ideologization of the public space (being used as a means of reproduction of different cultural and political identities as empirical research in Northern Ireland has demonstrated) and also, closely linked with the latter, commemoration of the past (being used as a visual medium of social memories important for the local community). The field of mural production in Poland shows great similarities with global tendencies including the relatively poor theoretical interest. It was only a few months ago when the first systematic analysis of this field was published in the form of a research report by the Public Space Research Institute in Warsaw (PSRI). According to this report (*Mury. Diagnoza dynamiki…*, 2016), the field of mural production in Poland is characterized by good cooperation between the private and public institutions; relatively high levels of control the latter has over the former in the process of mural-making; the lack of subversive elements in the social meanings murals emit in the public space and gradual domination of the commemorative murals. The research I had conducted a few months before the PSRI report was published, resulted in similar findings although it was concentrated on a concrete sub-section of mural production – the one of commemorative murals – in the context of the Polish capital city. The following paper being the final outcome of this research aims to describe the context of commemorative mural-production in Warsaw in the last 10 years and interpret the most important tendencies and features that appear in it. In order to do so it will ask the following research questions:

1. What kind of history do Warsaw's commemorative murals make? What cultural contents from the past appear among them, how often and in which form?

2. Are they reproducing the historical horizon of the nation or are they creating space for visualization of *Others'* history? Are Warsaw's commemorative murals only reflecting the official/dominant narratives/representations of the past, or may they function as media of new, alternative, publicly unrecognized cultural contents as theory of street-art often suggests (see: Irvine 2012, Lewisohn 2008)?

3. What position do they occupy in the broader field of commemoration, that is, what is their place in the context of other commemorative forms and practices?

4. How is it that a form of art which is characterized by its transience (as it usually loses the battle against time) has become a more and more popular form of commemorating the past?

The main hypothesis around which the analysis is organized in this research is that regardless of their democratic potential and potential to act subversively in the public domain, the commemorative murals in the case of Warsaw are predominantly reflecting the official narrations/representations of

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the past and thus reproducing the state-supported, nation-centered, male-dominated perspective of history. By adapting their works to the demands of the public cultural institutions and dominant discourses of memory, from mainly pragmatic reasons, commemorative mural makers are forgoing a fair portion of the democratic and subversive potential of the murals. As such, the paintings on the walls are, intentionally or not, involved in more complex state-sponsored strategies of nationalizing the public space.

Data description. Murals between the materiality and the virtual

The main source of data for this research was the web page Puszka.waw.pl which functions as a virtual database of Warsaw street art, public art, and graffiti. This choice of data is supported by theory that emphasizes the fact that street-art possesses a kind of double ontological status: "the practices of street art, as well as the works themselves vacillate between the specific materiality of urban space, street locations, local contexts, and the exhibition, distribution, and communication platform of the Internet and Web" (Irvine 2012:236). The popularization of street-art actually went hand in hand with its documentation and archiving in the Internet. Puszka.waw.pl offers basic information for 469 murals in Warsaw. This total body of documented murals has provided the research with a general context of mural production in Warsaw, something which was of great importance for the interpretation. Out of the Puszka database another sample has been created, containing only Warsaw commemorative murals. For the purposes of this

research I have defined the commemorative murals as those which directly refer to a concrete figure of memory, or whose main function is to commemorate a specific person or event from history. Using these criteria, after the procedure of visual recognition, I have identified 115 commemorative murals within the total body of murals documented on Puszka.waw.pl. What makes this sample representative is the fact that each visitor of this site has an option to check its content and upload the document either for a newly created mural or for a mural that hasn't been documented yet. Each mural in Puszka.waw.pl is documented with photographs followed by a brief description containing information about the author and date of creation, as well as the content and style of the mural. The description parts contain also hyperlinks to authors' web pages and articles dedicated to the concrete work which were additionally analyzed and consulted during the interpretation. Under this part there is an active option to comment, which provides the visitors with the possibility to make remarks about specific works, and the researcher with the possibility to obtain some knowledge about the reception of the murals. Using all available information (including photographs and text) I have created 115 separate documents which were used as main units of analysis in this research. Each file actually referred to one of the 115 commemorative murals in reality. All data was collected in February 2016, meaning that the sample encompasses the state of Warsaw's commemorative murals up to this date. Any murals that have been created in the meantime were not taken into account. One important thing to note is that some of the murals in this sample do not exist anymore. As a result, it actually covers the field of

mural production in Warsaw in the last decade as the oldest commemorative mural documented on Puszka.waw.pl dates from 2005.

Explaining the content analysis—linking theory with research objectives

In order to interpret as comprehensively as possible the current state of Warsaw's commemorative murals the research has employed content analysis using MAXQDA software for qualitative research. The option to create a hierarchical code tree was used to organize the codes in accordance with the objectives of the research problem. In order to gain as clear information as possible each document of the sample (which refers to a particular mural in reality) was coded with only one sub-code ascribed to each of the previously defined main/parental codes. Or to put it simply, each code "asked" the sample for concrete information associated with the objectives of the research.

Initially a simple code tree of seven pre-defined codes and their sub-codes, deriving either from the research question or from the theory supporting it, was created and introduced to the program. The primary structure included the following parental codes: *Financing, Style, Gender, Place* along with three types of past to which the content of a given mural can refer *Local, National* and *Global Past*. The latter division of pasts was partly based on the typology proposed by Andrzej Szpociński. According to the polish sociologist (Szpociński 2006) a local cultural content, in different contexts and under different circumstances, can refer to (at least) three different (imagined) communities: *the locality* (in

this case it is defined as something that contains local-specific values), *the nation* (it embodies meanings and values important for the nation to which the local community belongs) and *region/Europe* (the local cultural content is defined as a part of a wider regional/European cultural landscape). However, the fact that the geographical context of this research is a capital city complicates things considerably. The "symbolic domain" (Nijakowski 2006a) of the capital represents the specific cultural/interpretative context in which these three levels are related and interconnected on the symbolic level. In fact, often the condition for the visibility and presence of a cultural content in the capital's public domains (and especially in its central parts possessing the highest symbolic potential) is to refer simultaneously to all of these levels. Hence, for example, the Warsaw Uprising from 1944 is an event of both high local and national importance, whereas the appearance in the public sphere of such figures of memory as Frederic Chopin is due to the fact that they refer simultaneously to each of these three types of past. In this research each document (meaning each mural in reality) was coded with only one of these codes. The choice which code was to be assigned to a certain document was often arbitrary and depended on external/contextual factors that need to be explained briefly. I will do that using concrete examples. The Warsaw Uprising, for instance, was coded with *Local past* due to three reasons. Firstly, because it is an event embedded deeply in the local habitus. It is frequently discussed, represented, and evoked not only in the public discourse/sphere, but also within the inter-generational family discourse of Warsaw's inhabitants. Secondly, it is by far the most commemorated event (most present figure of

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memory in Warsaw's memory landscape), the fact that gives a basis to assume that this practice emphasizes the *Warsaw-ness* of this figure more than its national value (*Polish-ness*). And finally, because of the fact that this figure of memory plays an instrumental role in the inter-regional, "backstage" rivalry for the dominant perspective in which national past should be presented/interpreted (see: Nijakowski 2006b; Traba 2006), for example: Warsaw-centered vs. Cracow-centered perspective. Accordingly, the Battle of Warsaw from 1920 was coded with *National past* as it is the figure of memory which has been gradually losing the relations with the local habitus, while securing its place in the national canon.

On the other hand, murals representing figures of memory such as Frederic Chopin or Maria Skłodowska Curie were coded with *National past*, although they could be easily labeled with any of these three codes. The *Warsaw-ness* of these figures is undoubtedly reason for their massive reproduction in the Warsaw public domain and at the same time they represent important symbolic capital actively articulated through the strategies of constructing a more representative image of the Polish culture for the international cultural/tourist market. However, the reason why they were coded with *National past* is that the commemorative boom related to these figures was initiated by the state-sponsored, nation-wide projects of commemoration. Eventually, the list of sub-codes deriving from the analyzed documents and referring to the concrete figures of memory was added to the predefined codes concerning the types of past.

According to Jan Assmann (2008; Assmann and Czaplicka 1995) there are two main forces that secure the maintenance and control the transmission of the culture in literate societies: *the principle of cultural canon* (imposition of the normative framework defining what cultural content possesses the highest value for the group) and *the principle of variation* (the possibility to interpret, comment, and thus transform the cultural content in accordance with the present needs). In Assmann's view the canon refers to both the content and the form, it defines not only *what* is important, but also *how* it should be represented. Aleida Assmann (2008a), on the other hand, extends this definition by relating the concept of canon to the active dimension of memory in opposition to the concept of archive which refers to its static, storing aspect. According to her the cultural canon is defined by the principles of selection, value, and duration. In this research the labels *Canon* and *Deviation* as sub-codes of the parental code *Style* were used mainly to describe the formal characteristics of the murals. With *Canon* were coded those murals using "realistic"/"classical" visual language – such in which there is a direct, denotative relation between the image and the object represented. With *Deviation* were coded those murals containing such representations that either deviate from the "classical" ones or add some new artistic contexts or elements into them. This code was introduced in order to check what kind of visual language has been used among Warsaw murals in the reproduction of memory.

The code *Financing* together with its sub-codes *Public Money* and *Own Initiative* were created to obtain a general picture of how the field of mural-pro-

duction is regulated. The main idea behind these codes was that often the selection of the content, the style and the duration of the mural depend on those (institutions or individuals) who are responsible for the finances of the projects. It is unlikely that within a field highly regulated by public institutions the content and the style of the murals will considerably deviate from the ideological and aesthetic norms regulated by those same institutions.

The aspect of gender is almost completely neglected in Jan Asmmann's theoretical writings. However, the feminist perspective on collective remembering has made a considerable impact on the field of memory studies during the last decades. Inspired by some of these works (Jacobs 2008; 2010; Hershatter 2011) I introduced the code *Gender* with its sub-codes *Male*, *Female*, and *Other* to the research to check what is the frequency of male and female representations among Warsaw's commemorative murals.

The analysis has also introduced the code *Place* which is quite self-explanatory and its function was to show the distribution of the commemorative murals among particular districts and locations in the city of Warsaw.

Findings and discussion

Social geographers (Meusburber et al. 2011) have argued that visual forms such as murals or graffiti possess a double nature. On one hand, they have potential to create a global inter-cultural platform for communicating meanings and values as they can erode the barriers between the national cul-

tures defined by written languages. On the other hand, by asserting power to certain ideological narratives and interpretations, they can be used as visual tools for accomplishing something completely opposite, like demarcating territories and cultural differences, delineating social and spatial divisions and dividing cities. What do Warsaw's commemorative murals reveal from this perspective? The analysis of 469 murals documented on Puszka.waw.pl has shown that 115 murals, or almost ¼ of all documented there, are directly referring to some content from the past; that is, are commemorating some past event or person. This statistic, however, does not fully reflect the actual state of Warsaw's commemorative murals within the total body of murals. One thing that can be easily overlooked by the statistics is the factor of visibility. Warsaw's commemorative murals are often made in bigger dimensions than others and/or are located in places where the frequency of potential consumers is greater – big boulevards or surrounding walls of cultural institutions which are common tourist destinations (The Warsaw Uprising Museum, for example). These qualitative differences create the illusion, often repeated by both consumers and mural-makers, that the commemorative murals dominate the overall field of mural-production in Warsaw. Almost one third of all commemorative murals are located in the very central parts of the city.

The vast majority of all of Warsaw's commemorative murals are referring to the Polish past. The term "Polish" is used here to indicate both: the narrow, ethnic, and the broader civic or political definition of *Polish-ness*. It is important to note that

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the commemoration of those figures of memory which are non-Polish in the ethnic sense, but Polish in the political (or geographical) sense – various figures related with the history of the former Jewish community in Warsaw, for example – is also a part of the official discourses and policies (and hence of the canon in the understanding of Aleida Assmann), which promote tolerance and cultural inclusivity and encourage, in some circumstances, different, broader, non-ethnic understanding of the Polish identity. The increased presence of the "Jewish" figures of memory in the public discourse/space has yet another context, namely the commercialization of the Jewish heritage within the field of tourism which is prominently influencing the present cultural policies in the Polish capital. Warsaw's current cultural and tourist maps, to some extent, can represent a good example of what Ruth Gruber has called "virtual Jewishness." Gruber (2002) has coined this concept in order to designate the increased popularity of the cultural practices of different ways of engaging with the Jewish culture from an outsider position in post-Holocaust and post-communist societies. These practices, heavily influenced by the tourism industry, take place in contexts where a local Jewish population is often completely absent. Within the urban landscape of the Polish capital they are most common in the district of Muranów which was built on the ruins of the Warsaw Ghetto. The culmination of these practices was the construction and the opening of the POLIN museum, dedicated to the history of *Polish* Jews. The Muranów district now hosts murals commemorating Jewish persons like Emanuel Ringelblum the author of the "Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto," Ludwik Zamanehof – the creator

of Esperanto, or Mark Edelman – the last surviving leader of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. The latter has been created in cooperation with the POLIN museum – an institution which obviously intends to expand its cultural influence to the wider public space. Similar strategies of influencing the neighboring public space through painting murals have been employed by the Warsaw Uprising Museum. Murals representing Jewish figures of memory can also be found among those which are commemorating non-Polish past. Within this group they are represented by murals commemorating the Crystal Night from 1938 and Ravensbrück concentration camp. Worth emphasizing is that only 18 murals from this sample commemorate non-Polish past. This group of murals is most heterogeneous of all, as each mural is dedicated to a separate event or person.

Most commemorated of all (both events and persons) is the Warsaw Uprising from 1944 with 41 murals dedicated to this event. This statistic is resonant with the fact that the Warsaw Uprising figure currently holds one of the central positions within the Polish national canon and historical horizon. It is also the most present figure of memory in Warsaw's public space in general, and as such it has been dominating the city's visual and cultural identity. It can also be said that Warsaw's commemorative murals reflect the dominant sentiments and attitudes towards this event present in the Polish society. The vast majority of murals representing this figure of memory are using visual language that combines the cultural codes of heroism, sacrifice and national pride (see for example Figure 1). However, the commemoration of this

event is not regularly distributed on the map of Warsaw's commemorative murals. Half of the Uprising murals can be found near or inside the Warsaw Uprising Museum complex. Also the majority of these murals have been created within projects initiated by this institution. Outside the Museum complex "Uprising murals" are most common in the Praga district which is an interesting fact since this district was the least involved in the uprising. I interpret this situation with the systematic attempts to incorporate this area not only into the overall cultural map of the city, but also into the official historical narrations. The analysis has shown that the Praga district is generally one of the most popular locations for painting murals. In the last few decades this district has been considered to be one of the most neglected, underdeveloped, criminogenic parts of the city. The practice of painting murals has been increasingly used by both public institutions and private developers as a part of complex, long-term strategies of rebranding this district into a more attractive tourist and real-estate destination.

Figure 1: Mural commemorating the Warsaw Uprising in the Praga district; photo by Julia Dziubecka (puszka.waw.pl)

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The analysis has also demonstrated that the majority of the murals from this sample are commemorating historical persons. Within this group at least three sub-groups can be distinguished: 1. murals commemorating persons of national importance; 2. murals commemorating persons of local importance; and 3. murals commemorating persons of global importance. As I have already mentioned the third group is the least represented of all. Murals commemorating persons of local and national importance participate in this sample with almost the same proportion. It can be said that there is a trend among the authorities of different city districts to invest in murals showing important persons from the local history of the district. In my opinion this is a good trend because it enables some "small," often forgotten or neglected, memories to become visible in the public/symbolic domain of the capital which is dominated by the representations of the "big" national past. However, the analysis of the murals' reception has revealed that the communication between the artists and the local population during the mural-making process is either on a very low level or is totally absent. In many cases the location and the content of the mural are decided outside the local context, which may result in discontent and even protests among the local population. Not always local communities accept the visions of the past which cultural policies' makers impose on them by applying commemorative murals on what they consider as *their* walls. Their definitions for the local and national past often diverge with the ones of the official memory makers. Such, more or less visible, protests, for example, appeared during the making of several

murals dedicated to Jewish figures of memory in Muranów district.

Among the murals commemorating persons of national importance the most frequent ones were those dedicated to Maria Skłodowska Curie and Frederic Chopin. These murals have been mainly created in the context of separate anniversary commemorations organized on a national level. The third most commemorated person of national importance among Warsaw's commemorative murals is Pope John Paul II with 3 murals dedicated to him. This statistic is also in line with general tendencies in Polish cultural memory where the figure of the Pope holds one of the highest positions and continuously possesses high group-making potential.

More than two-thirds of the commemorative murals that were analyzed in this case were funded by public money. They were either part of bigger projects run by some public institutions, or were additionally sponsored by them. Many of them were created for the period of street-art festivals funded by local public institutions. Among those authors who have been working independently the most active were the members of the group *WFS* (*Warsaw FanaticS*) which is a sub-group of supporters of the football club Legia. The works of *WFS* group (altogether eight murals) are mainly dedicated to the themes from the national past such as the Warsaw Uprising and Cursed Soldiers[2]. The appearance of the Cursed Soldiers fig-

ure on the *WFS* group works in the context of total domination of the Uprising theme in the Warsaw public domain, and in the time-period of this research, can be interpreted as using the visual language of the murals to make some less publicly recognized aspects of the national past more visible. However, the relation between these two figures of memory is more complex and requires some closer attention. The "explosion" of the Uprising theme in Warsaw's symbolic/public domain is connected with the first coming to power, on both the local and national levels, of the right-wing party Justice and Law (PiS) in the first half of the 2000's. The event that contributed the most to this situation was the opening of the Warsaw Uprising Museum in 2004. Ever since, this institution has been using murals to influence Warsaw's public space and spread the figure of the Warsaw Uprising across it. Although gradually becoming a part of the new canon from the 1990's, Cursed Soldiers remained in the shadow of the Warsaw Uprising that was continuously glorified by the official memory policies. The second coming to power of PiS from the autumn of 2015 is connected with yet another shift in the national canon, as the Cursed Soldiers are now furiously heading towards the center of the official narratives/representations of the past, often leaving the Uprising theme at the desacralized space of pop-culture.

There can be several explanations for this sudden shift in the memory paradigm. One possible reason would be exactly the *Warsaw-ness* of the Uprising figure which limits its potential to resonate with various local and regional habitus which are interwoven into the national imagination. Another, more convenient, explanation for the increased importance of the Cursed Soldiers figure would be the fact that it resonates better with the traditionalist, nationalistic, anti-liberal, and anti-Russian sentiments reinforced in the current ideological/political field. At this point it is too early to say or predict whether the field of Warsaw's commemorative murals will reflect this shift.

As far as gender is concerned the analysis has shown that the vast majority of the murals are commemorating male historical persons or are representing males in the context of important events from the national history. Apart from five murals dedicated to Maria Curie only six others are commemorating women. 21 murals contain both male and female representations.

Some final remarks

Henry Jenkins has introduced to the field of media studies the concept of convergence (or participatory) culture in order to explain the current condition of the global cultural trends. According to him (Jenkins 2006) what is typical for the contemporary convergence culture is the fact that the differences between the producers and consumers of the cultural products are becoming highly blurred. Globalization, the democratization of urban spaces, and especially the Internet are social contexts in

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[2] *The Cursed Soldiers* (Polish: Żołnierze wyklęci) is an umbrella term that refers to a variety of Polish anti-communist resistance organizations and guerrilla units formed in the later stages of World War II and its aftermath by some members of the Polish Underground State. Officially forbidden during the communist rule, the memory of the people involved in these organizations survived thanks to informal channels such as inter-generational discourse of the family talks. In the beginning of 1990's, after the transformation, Polish society witnessed the transfer of this memory from communicative level to the realm of culture and national canon.

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Figure 2: Mural commemorating important women from Muranów district; photo by Julia Dziubecka (puszka.waw.pl)

which the cultural contents constantly circulate as a part of the global play of commenting, re-paraphrasing, reinterpreting, and reproducing. That is partly why, in the context of memory production, contemporary societies are now gradually replacing bronze and marble with such cultural forms that are easily reproducible and accessible for the consumers, but also which give them the freedom and possibility to express themselves. Different forms of visual representations of the past are certainly among them.

This fact may also partly explain the popularity of murals as media of cultural memory. Although

they are temporary forms, they are rather easily producible, they do not cost much, and they communicate with the consumer of the memory on a more profane level than monuments or "sacred" memory places do. (As such, they are included in much more complex processes of cultural or nation branding.) These qualities also make them a convenient form for expressing and reproducing the sudden changes in the discourses and paradigms of memory. They also give individuals the possibility to act as *memory makers* (Kansteiner 2002), to modify the official representations of the past, to make some local, neglected, or even alternative memories publicly visible.

Regardless of the fact that mural-making may constitute, at least in theory, a democratic cultural platform for potential memory makers (individuals, neighborhoods, minorities, marginalized groups, subalterns, etc.), commemorative murals in the context of the Polish capital do not occupy an autonomic position within the field of collective remembering. Moreover, they can be best described as a kind of auxiliary mnemonic device whose role is to accelerate the dissemination of the institutionalized memory narratives and hegemonic representations of history produced by the public institutions to which politics they are largely subordinated.

Public institutions responsible for the politics of memory are not the only ones who are engaged in the creation of commemorative murals in Warsaw. Murals have also become increasingly popular among the private developers who have additionally extended the use of these forms of art in Warsaw's public space. Commemorative murals in the context of the newly erected private residential and business areas do not only serve the needs of the institutions responsible for the dissemination of the hegemonic representations of the past in the public space, but primarily the needs of the market and private capital. Painting commemorative murals has become a part of the strategies of

Figure 3: Mural dedicated to the Polish painter Hilary Krzysztofiak in Żoliborz Artystyczny; photo by Magda Tywiesz (puszka.waw.pl)

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familiarization/authentication of these new spaces of capital which lack identity and cultural markers recognizable for the local communities. From private developers' perspectives, historical references contained in the murals should compensate for this lack of identity and "re-establish" the cultural links of the new spaces with the local, often invented, traditions. Developers, in these cases, exploit both the local memory resources and the place-making potential of the murals in the creation of the new urban places. In other words, they (re)invest the cultural and symbolic capital of the local/national memory in the production of the identity/authenticity of the new spaces of capital making them, in this way, more attractive for the potential consumers. A paradigmatic example for these processes is the new Warsaw's residential area called Żoliborz Artystyczny where painting murals which contain historical references to alleged bohemian tradition of the district of Żoliborz is used by the developer as a part of a well-developed advertisement strategy.

Bearing the above in mind it can be concluded that neither the term *carriers of memory* (Assmann) nor the term *memory makers* (Kansteiner) can accurately describe the position commemorative mural makers occupy in Warsaw's field of cultural memory. Their participation in the cultural memory is not due to the special status they are given in the hierarchically structured field. Neither do they act as producers of social order, something that Kainsteiner has in mind when he speaks of *memory makers*. They can best be described as a kind of intermediate category that pragmatically and tactically positions itself in-between the producers and consumers of memory. From merely pragmatic reasons (increased popu-

larity, public recognition, financial benefits), they often adapt their works to the needs and demands of the public institutions and their dominant discourses and act as "secondary" memory makers who, whether intentionally or not, visually reproduce the official historical narrations and representations of the past. Public institutions (museums for example) on the other hand, by exploiting mural's formal limitations, tend to obtain full control over the field of mural-production. In effect, a city's visual identity expressed through murals is strongly influenced by the hegemonic representations of history, both local and national.

The primary function of Warsaw's murals is aestheticization of, or even (for example in the case of the Praga district) de-tabooization of the urban space. Commemorative murals participate with considerable proportion in the total number of murals in Warsaw. Nevertheless, their potential to be subversive towards the official representations of the past is highly limited. This is due to the fact that their production is often regulated and managed by the same institutions and centers of power which are responsible for the production of the official cultural memory. Or to put it simply, the production of Warsaw's commemorative murals is largely a part of a centralized, state-regulated enterprise. On the level of content, they are consistent with the other carriers of memory. This can simply be read from the fact that the most commemorated event among Warsaw's murals is the Warsaw Uprising. However, they can include some subversive elements on the level of form. A considerable number of murals have "translated" the classical (canonical) representations of the past into more contemporary visual language.

Figure 4: Mural representing the first elected Polish king Henryk Walezy in "hipster version"; photo by Monika Rybarczyk (puszka.waw.pl)

Overall, it can be said that Warsaw's commemorative murals are reflecting the official, nation-centered, masculine-dominated discourses on the Polish past to a large extent. Their main function, besides the aestheticization of the urban space, is to emphasize, and thus reproduce, the *Polish-ness* of the capital and its public domain. In some cases they are "doing" this in a very direct way. For example, the mural representing "Little Insurgent"—like figure, located on the wall of the elementary school in the Muranów district just next to the place where children are supposed to

have their outdoor classes, can be easily interpreted as a means of indoctrination into the national ideology.

Another important aspect of Warsaw's commemorative murals is that they are increasingly used in the commemoration of persons and events which are considered to be important or significant for the local communities in different districts. And in my view this is a positive tendency because of two reasons: firstly, because the mural should mainly communicate with the local community in which it appears

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and with which it is in close relation in the course of everyday life, and secondly because it puts local values in front of national ones, thus making the space more inclusive, interesting and intriguing for outsiders. This, paired with increased involvement of the local population in the process of mural-making, may be the direction in which publicly funded Warsaw commemorative murals should develop.

Figure 5: Mural representing the Little Insurgent greeting the viewer, located on the wall of the elementary school; photo by margaj (puszka.waw.pl)

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Murale tworzą (naszą) historię: Obrazy na ścianie jako nośniki pamięci kulturowej. Analiza obecnego stanu warszawskich murali upamiętniających

Abstrakt: Celem niniejszego artykułu jest analiza sposobów wykorzystania muralu jako formy artystycznej służącej upamiętnianiu (przypominaniu) wybranych historycznych narracji w stolicy Polski. W oparciu o analizę treści postaram się pokazać, że niezależnie od ich demokratycznego potencjału oraz potencjału wprowadzania treści subwersywnych w przestrzeni publicznej, murale upamiętniające – w przypadku Warszawy – przeważnie odzwierciedlają oficjalne narracje/wyobraźnie przeszłości, odtwarzając w ten sposób propagowaną przez instytucje publiczne, opartą na egoizmie narodowym męskocentryczną perspektywę historii narodowej. Odwołując się do instrukcji metodologicznych Wulfa Kansteina, wprowadzone zostanie pojęcie „drugorzędnych" twórców pamięci (*secondary memory makers*) w celu opisania pozycji, jaką twórcy murali zajmują w polu pamięci kulturowej Warszawy. Autorzy murali, z przyczyn głównie pragmatycznych, dostosowują swoje prace do wymagań instytucji publicznych odpowiedzialnych za produkcję pamięci oraz hegemonicznych dyskursów pamięci, rezygnując w ten sposób z możliwości bardziej demokratycznego działania w przestrzeni publicznej oraz w polu pamięci kulturowej. Obrazy na ścianach powstałe w ten sposób, celowo lub nie, stają się częścią bardziej złożonych, sponsorowanych przez państwo strategii „unarodowienia" przestrzeni publicznej.

Słowa kluczowe: pamięć kulturowa, street art / murale, twórcy pamięci, historia Polski, Warszawa