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ISSUES IN RESEARCH ON THE COMMUNIST MEMORY POLITICS IN THE COUNTRIES OF EAST-CENTRAL EUROPE

Abstract

The authors discuss possibilities and limits for applying a research model of the study of memory politics, originally developed by them with the aim to research the Polish case only, to other countries of East Central Europe which after the WW II formed the sphere of the Soviet domination. They pose a question whether it should be appropriate to combine it with the so called transnational approach.

Keywords: memory politics, politics of history, East Central Europe, communism, transnational approach

This paper aims to analyze the possibilities and limitations related to the application of the model of research on the so-called memory politics in East-Central Europe (ECE) to the epoch of “real socialism”. The model in question was originally developed by the authors solely with the Polish case in mind and was empirically tested on it¹. The experience gained became the basis for further conceptual reflection on the subject matter. The hypothesis of the model’s usefulness in research, the scope of which goes beyond the historical experience

¹ Dorota Malczewska-Pawelec, Tomasz Pawelec, *Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej. Porównawcze studia nad praktykami manipulacji zbiorową pamięcią Polaków w czasach stalinowskich* (Kraków: Universitas, 2012).

of Poles, was first formulated (and tentatively substantiated) in the authors' programmatic article *A Study of Memory Politics as a Research Program for the Transnational History of Communism in East-Central Europe*². This time, with the most updated and systematized version of the model, the authors aim to attempt to develop this issue further and present a certain cognitive dilemma involved.

As a way of introduction, some basic assumptions of the model will be presented in the context of the essential characteristics of the field of research in which it is (or may be) applied. In general, the model provides a basis for systematizing investigation of the activities undertaken by the representatives of the state authorities in terms of managing and controlling a collective memory in modern (and postmodern) mass society. What is understood by the term "collective memory", following the definition proposed by Andrzej Szpociński, are beliefs and ideas about past events, figures, and processes (including value determinants) shared within a given society and (as a rule) regarded by its members as highly significant³. This issue is most often analyzed against the background of the so-called "history politics", which is a direct translation of the German word *Geschichtspolitik*. The term "memory politics" was used in this paper as an intentional contrast to the above-mentioned concept. The authors (as well as some other researchers⁴) observe that it is not so much about history and the past, as the current beliefs concerning it – namely, what (as well as how and why exactly) is socially assimilated and remembered⁵.

² Dorota Malczewska-Pawelec, Tomasz Pawelec, "A Study of Memory Politics as a Research Program for a Transnational History of Communism in East-Central Europe," in *New Perspectives in Transnational History of Communism in East Central Europe*, ed. by Krzysztof Brzechczyn (Berlin: Peter Lang, 2019), 327–339.

³ Andrzej Szpociński, "Kanon historyczny. Pamięć zbiorowa a pamięć indywidualna. Trzy wymiary pamięci zbiorowej," *Studia Socjologiczne* 4 (1983): 129–130; Andrzej Szpociński, "Społeczne funkcjonowanie symboli," in *Symbol i poznanie. W poszukiwaniu koncepcji integrującej*, ed. by Teresa Kostyrko (Warszawa: PWN, 1987), 13–14. Cf.: Barbara Szacka, *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", 2006), 32–45. Years of reflection on this specific component of social consciousness (**collective** memory consists of beliefs present in **individual** memories/consciousnesses due to the fact that given individuals belong to particular collective groups), by scholars in humanities from various countries, has led to a whole range of different theoretical approaches that attempt to grasp the phenomenon in question in its complex structure, as well as its complicated and dynamic relations with passing time and the (real) past. A concise introduction to the most important theories in this regard can be found in Joanna Wawrzyniak, "Pamięć zbiorowa," in *Modi Memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, ed. by Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Robert Traba (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe "Scholar", 2014), 346–351.

⁴ A similar approach to the phenomenon is proposed by such scholars as Lech Nijakowski or Andrzej Czyżewski.

⁵ Malczewska-Pawelec, Pawelec, *Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej*, 18. An extensive (albeit not very convincing, in the authors' view) critique of the stance presented by the authors can be found in Michał Łuczewski, *Kapitał moralny. Polityki historyczne w późnej nowoczesności* (Kraków: Znak, 2017), 80–82. For a synthetic analysis of the

The key point of reference for the authors' reflection was the thesis (formulated by several researchers of collective memory) that in the processes of formation and transformations of this phenomenon the key role is played by the so-called "actors" or "agents" of memory, which are various entities that in many ways strive to establish and strengthen in a given community the interpretation and vision of the past (either in its entirety or, more often, only in relation to selected fragments/aspects of this past) that corresponds to their interests⁶. Such a role may be played by influential individuals and various groups, as well as institutions or other collective entities, while the terms "the interpretation and vision that corresponds to their interest" in this context shall be understood in political, legal, economic, and public image-related terms. Agents of memory may appear spontaneously (they may be a group of people who share some particular historical experience of great significance and communicate it to others) or may be created intentionally or even as a result of top-down processes. A great number of institutions in contemporary society have the potential to – either intentionally or unintentionally – act as agents of memory. Such activity may become quite significant for these institutions (it may even "overshadow" other significant areas of their function) and – what is more – as a factor co-creating the current state of collective memory it may turn out to be quite influential and effective⁷. It should be emphasized that the state almost always participates in the "memory game" played by the agents of memory. Sometimes it does so incidentally: when the ruling elites do not have any clearly formed program in this respect and only sporadically – to a limited extent – react to actions of other active agents. Nevertheless, more often than not, the actions of the state in this regard are conscious and intentional (especially if such a program has been formulated by the elites). The state is evidently an agent of memory with great potential, even when the "memory game" takes place in an empowered, democratic, and pluralistic society⁸. The asymmetry of

relationship between "history politics" and "memory politics" see Joanna Kalicka, Piotr Witek, "Polityka historyczna," in *Modi Memorandi*, 378-385.

⁶ E.g. Jay Winter, Emmanuel Sivan, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge–New York: Cambridge University Press 1999); Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge–New York: CUP, 2000); Harold Marcuse, *Legacies of Dachau: The Uses and Abuses of a Concentration Camp* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001); Zofia Wójcicka, *Przerwana żaloba. Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady 1944–1950* (Warszawa: Trio, 2009).

⁷ It is sometimes said that together they constitute the so-called "historical apparatus" of a given society or nation. See more on this issue in – "Popular Memory. Theory, Politics, Method," in *The Oral History Reader*, ed. by Robert Perks, Alistair Thompson (London–New York: Routledge, 1998), 73–92.

⁸ The example of Poland can be mentioned here, where the conservative government, first since 2005 and then since 2015, has been able to consistently implement its preferred direction of memory politics despite fierce opposition from a number of influential liberal or left-wing intellectuals and the political circles supporting them. Another obvious example is the role that the state, rebuilt on democratic foundations, played in the German confrontation (both the actual and the apparent one) with the Nazi past and the memory of it – see

the impact of the authorities in relation to other agents of memory increases sharply in the case of non-democratic systems, especially those with totalitarian features. The clear domination of the state agent of memory in such cases raises the possibility of (and temptation for) a far-reaching control over the social imagery of the past. There have been cases in history that state authorities genuinely strove to “rule” (in the literal sense of the word) over the collective memory of the citizens of a given country, usually in order to achieve various ideological and political goals (most often driven by the desire to legitimize their dominant position and the imposed social order). In this context, one can say that the research model presented here serves as a tool for the comprehensive analysis of the actions of the state agent of memory against the background of the social “game” of collective memory, in particular (but not exclusively) in non-democratic systems.

The memory itself – the object of the aforementioned “game” – has been conceptualized here with reference to the categories of “historical canon” and “realm of memory”/“memory site”. The latter, which is of key importance for the reflections presented here, is used in its broad, metaphorical sense (in line with Pierre Nora’s idea of *les lieux de mémoire*), encompassing not only geographically defined places but also events, processes, figures, and artefacts that – although not clearly bound to a given space – embody national heritage⁹. Within the memory discourse, they are present as proper names of objectified cultural products, historical events and heroes that are of great significance to members of a given community¹⁰. In this way “historical canon” (a set of ideas about events, figures and artefacts from the past, which is expected or even required to be well-known by the members of a given community) can be understood as a set of realms of memory important to a given community¹¹. This, in turn, allows one to effectively operationalize the issue of the structure and dynamics of collective memory. The authors distinguish between “the forefront of the canon” (the set of memory sites considered to be the most important and most widely recognized) vs. secondary and tertiary realms of memory. Such an approach has made it possible to follow the transformation of the canon over time in terms of a combination of four processes: the “upward” migration of

especialy Anna Wolff-Powęska, *Pamięć – brzemień i uwolnienie. Niemcy wobec nazistowskiej przeszłości (1945–2010)* (Poznań: Zys i S-ka, 2011).

⁹ Malczewska-Pawelec, Pawelec, *Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej*, 17; Pierre Nora, “Między pamięcią a historią: *les lieux de memoire*”, *Didaskalia* 105 (2011): 20–27; Pierre Nora, “From «Lieux de mémoire» to Realms of Memory”, in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. 1, ed. by Pierre Nora (New York: CUP, 1994), XV–XVII; Kornelia Kończal, “Miejsca pamięci: O niebywałej karierze pewnej koncepcji badawczej,” in *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, vol. 4, ed. by Robert Traba, Hans Henning Hahn (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe SCHOLAR, 2013), 77–100; Kornelia Kończal, “Miejsce pamięci,” in *Modi Memorandi*, 229–234; Andrzej Szpociński, “Miejsca pamięci”, *Borussia* 29 (2003): 16–27.

¹⁰ See: Szpociński, *Kanon historyczny*, 134 i 135.

¹¹ Szpociński, *Kanon historyczny*, 134 i 135, Cf. Andrzej Szpociński, Michał P. Markowski, “Kanon,” in *Modi Memorandi*, 182–185.

memory sites (from a position further down the list to the “top” of the canon) or its “downward” migration (from the top to a position further down the list), creation of new realms of memory (transformation of the so far potential memory sites into real ones, which results in the enrichment of the canon), as well as deconstruction/liquidation of realms of memory (leading to the depletion of the canon). Another aspect of the dynamics of perceptions of the past that can be analyzed from this perspective is the process of rebuilding/reconstructing a given realm of memory. Like the Freudian “screen memory”, it always remains a dynamic, and thus unstable, product of compromise¹². As a rule, its shape, content, and axiology (i.e. the values it carries) are subject to an endless (at least potentially) process of social negotiation by way of which – through the promotion of a specific historical or commemorative message of a given memory site – possible alternative messages and related meanings that it could carry are “suppressed”. Naturally, the state agent of memory usually participates in this process by initiating, supporting or even forcing a particular direction of transformation of a given realm of memory (in the latter case, however, participation turns into domination).

The consistent modelling of the image of the past in the direction desired by the power elites consists, therefore, in the reconfiguration and rebuilding of the set of memory sites forming the canon (adding new sites to it and removing some of the old ones). Such an operation obviously requires a whole range of various actions, meticulously implemented and “orchestrated” in various areas (and on various levels) of social life. For this reason, the authors of this article chose to analyze memory politics as a specific form of social practice¹³ – to be precise, as a state regulated practice of commemoration. This allowed identification of three basic areas of inquiry for the adopted model; each of them should be considered at two separate levels of analysis. The mentioned areas include:

a) governing assumptions shared by those who – as part of the broadly understood structures of the ruling camp – formulated and/or implemented the memory politics;

b) specific actions carried out in the social domain as well as their products, which served to create new memory sites/realms of memory or to modify, deconstruct, or annihilate those existing in the collective memory of a given society;

c) the target (desired from the point of view of the ruling elites) structure and content of collective memory, as the intended effect of the practices under consideration.

¹² Tomasz Pawelec, “Pamięć historyczna jako screen memory,” in *Pamięć i polityka historyczna. Doświadczenia Polski i jej sąsiadów*, ed. by Sławomir M. Nowinowski, Jan Pomorski, Rafał Stobiecki (Łódź: IPN, 2008), 141–156.

¹³ In the sense proposed by Jerzy Kmita – see e.g. Jerzy Kmita, Grzegorz Banaszak, *Spoleczno-regulacyjna koncepcja kultury* (Warszawa: Instytut Kultury, 1994). Cf.: Łuczewski, *Kapitał moralny*, 82–86.

In turn, among the postulated levels of analysis (A) the “central” one and (B) the “local” one were discerned – on the basis of their territorial/spatial range and the nature of state’s commemorative practices adopted in a given case.

The first area of inquiry is mainly perceived as the sphere of perceptions constituting the “philosophy of history”, i.e., the vision of the historical process favored by the ruling elites of a given state, including, in particular the vision of the position, role, and mission of the community living in that state, as well as the historical role of the political parties/movements being active within it, including (first and foremost) that one the current elites emerged from¹⁴. However, it includes many other components, as well: from the basic commemorative guidelines formulated at the highest levels of power, through their more specific elaboration, formulated further down in the apparatus of power, to the “technical” directives and orders in this regard. The latter are designed and put into practice “at the very bottom”, by specific entities within the widely understood power structures. Actually, it is only at that point that the specific historical message to be conveyed in a given context, as well as the tools of communication for that purpose (and their method of use) are determined. Since memory politics is as much about constructing as it is about deconstructing, the directives always include “positive” (i.e., what should be commemorated) and “negative” ones (i.e., what commemoration practices should be opposed). When reconstructed and analyzed together, they allow to follow and reveal the multi-stage decision-making process regarding commemorative practices exercised by those in power. This process not only has an ideological and political dimension to it, but also a pragmatic and bureaucratic one – thus having its internal contradictions, inconsistencies, etc. This makes it possible not only to trace its complicated twists and meanders, but also identify and show the role (sometimes autonomous, even quasi-independent¹⁵) played in it by the above-mentioned “specific entities”.

With regards to the second area of inquiry, the authors refer to the “sphere of commemorative activities”. A number of such spheres have been identified. They are generally linked to fundamental types of social praxis and/or domains of social reality¹⁶, including: education, public rituals and festivals, public

¹⁴ The image of the historical role mentioned here takes on the shape of a collection of events from the history of this community (and this movement/party) interpreted and evaluated in a specific way, as well as a list of distinguished, eminent figures who took part in them.

¹⁵ And almost never reducible to a simple top-down, one-way transmission of decisions.

¹⁶ This reveals a certain fundamental characteristic of the practice of commemoration in question, which is in a way “dispersed” and at the same time “embedded” in other forms and types of social practice. In other words, it is sometimes implemented not through discrete actions, but through actions that are simultaneously (if not primarily) part of other types of practice. To give an example, initiatives to commemorate certain figures and events carried out at schools (mostly during history lessons) have a primarily educational nature – to disseminate knowledge about a certain period from the past (they remain a component of social educational practice). Similarly a thread in a novel or a movie intended to commemorate someone or something will primarily be an expression of artistic creativity. The important cognitive consequences of this will be discussed further.

space, artistic creativity, mass media, museums, etc. It has also been assumed that within each of these spheres there is a certain – smaller or larger – set of “memory carriers”/“memory transmitters”, namely tools and media of commemorative communication used most frequently within a given sphere. The initial research task was, therefore, to identify the major carrier/transmitter in a given sphere to be the main (or even the sole) focus of further in-depth analyses of specific commemorative actions and their results in the context of creating, modifying, removing, or promoting certain realms of memory.

The third area of inquiry is connected with the categories of “postulated”, “popularized”, and “official” memory¹⁷. After all, the object of the research is not the image of the past actually existing in the consciousness of citizens, but the image that those in power tried (with not easily measurable results) to instill, disseminate, and consolidate in it. Such an image was intended to form the historical canon in an altered and renewed version (the only “correct” one according to those in power). Thus the main research task is to unveil this new canon understood as a model or ideal to be established by the commemorative activities of the authorities, in the form of a catalogue of memory sites, along with their hierarchical arrangement and mutual relations. What should be subjected to reconstruction are the metaphors contained in these renewed and/or reconfigured memory sites, their content, and axiology. The adopted understanding of the term “canon” (discussed earlier) allows one to grasp the dynamics of transformations taking place within it, both in relation to the change in its “general message” and to detailed transformations at the level of specific realms of memory. Importantly, these dynamics can be traced on two separate planes – the “external” and the “internal” one. The first one – the object of reflection that is somewhat more standard and obvious – refers to the relationship between the “new canon” and the old one, promoted by the predecessors of those in power and to some extent already “fixed” in the minds of the citizens. Obviously, the “old canon” functions at this moment only as a negative point of reference in relation to the currently undertaken commemorative practices – it is a reflection of “false memory” that needs to be “opposed” and “suppressed”. Analyses focused on this relationship should therefore aim to show the scope of this “opposition” and “suppression” and to reconstruct the applied patterns of transforming memory¹⁸.

The “internal” plane, on the other hand, refers to changes that this “new historical canon” promoted by the authorities undergoes over time. Such a perspective does not necessarily have to be included in every single study on the state’s memory politics. It may be adopted (and even treated as a separate sub-field of research) only when the ruling camp in question has remained in power for a sufficiently long period of time, counted not in years but decades. Only then modifications (or even further transformations) within the memory of the

¹⁷ Malczewska-Pawelec, Pawelec, *Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej*, 22 and 31.

¹⁸ See Malczewska-Pawelec, Pawelec, *Rewolucja w pamięci historycznej*, 31 (there the book lists basic strategies/patterns of distorting collective images of the past, which are identified by leading theorists of memory studies).

past propagated by the authorities may take place, either as a result of an evolution of internal relations within the state (social, economic, political¹⁹) and/or from changes and disruptions in relations with other states.

The distinction between the mentioned two separate levels in the analyses is just as important as the discussed identification of three areas of inquiry. This is due to the fact that the memory politics of the ruling elites (as well as the canon they promote) turns out to be varied – in a surprisingly complicated way – in terms of its territorial scope.

With a superficial approach to this issue, one may get the impression that the distinction “central” vs. “local” seems to correlate more or less with the hierarchical structure of the historical canon. From this point of view, it is – first and foremost – the “forefront of the canon” that focuses on the “central” memory politics – with memory sites that disseminate historical messages of essential importance on a nationwide scale. Only further on do we have sets of memory sites of a lower order, auxiliary – in a sense – with respect to these primary ones, that convey messages of supplementary or additional nature – and these do not necessarily apply (or are supposed to apply) all over the country. Finally, we have realms of memory that are important mainly (or even exclusively) for local groups of a given national community, which reflect the distinctiveness of their historical experience, regional differences and local identities. This is where a specific, “localized” memory politics would become visible, necessitating a separate, “local” level of analysis.

As a matter of fact, however, the problem is more complex. Only some parts of commemorative practices, with content and messages relevant to the whole nation, can be “centralized” and exercised in a relatively uniform way all over the whole country. Others must somehow take into account the specific nature of a given place in order to “anchor” certain historical content in the consciousness of local people as effectively as possible. An obvious example is a situation when a given historical figure – important nationwide – has established a special relationship with a given region and/or left a personal mark on its history. Usually, commemorative practices referring to such a person in the region in question “exploit” such aspects (i.e., these relations) and are at times even centered around them. It should be added here that, in general, many events or phenomena which, in the past, affected a particular community as a whole and are currently the object of commemoration at the central level, were in fact once experienced in a spatially dispersed and locally differentiated way. They are then commemorated in an analogous way (i.e., separately and not quite the same in different locations within the country)²⁰. Local memory politics goes far beyond “filling gaps and cracks” of the memory politics at the central level. When the ruling elites are able to skillfully exploit local aspects in order to successfully “anchor” their historical symbols and the whole commemorative

¹⁹ For example, an appearance/disappearance of the opposition with a particular ideological and political profile, internal feuds within the ruling camp resulting in changes in the faction “at the helm”, etc.

²⁰ In fact, it is even necessary for the commemorative practices to be clear and effective.

message in various local traditions, their chances of rebuilding the previously existing collective memory increase significantly. For this reason, the local level of analysis, focused on such phenomena, turns out to be no less important than the central one.

When undertaking research on memory politics, the authors have assumed a limited range of the designed model. By focusing on a specific historical reality (i.e., the process of implementation and consolidation of the communist regime in Poland), it was supposed to enable a theoretical description of an important, one could even say crucial, aspect of social engineering applied in the country after World War II²¹. Polish communists, who at that time assumed power in the country at the behest of Moscow, decreed – following their Soviet protector – not only the construction of a new socio-political system and a new ideological and moral order, but also the creation of a “new socialist man”. Naturally, this “new man” needed a “new memory”. The idea of the communists was that this new memory should present a vision of the country’s past that would serve their needs: (1) provide a basis for their political-ideological aspirations, (2) justify their “historical rights” to rule, (3) affirm their preferred values, and (4) promote their personal ideals (a specific pantheon of communist heroes). The engineered transformation of collective memory thus became a necessary element of the “revolution from above” which “Stalin’s Poles brought on Soviet tanks” had been carrying out in the country since they became the new ruling elite. In this context, the category of the state agent of memory (referring exactly to this elite), as the leading, or one should rather say dominating entity in the “memory game”, gave the authors a really valuable insight. First and foremost, it allowed analyses of the causative force (agency) of the ruling camp in the examined area of social reality – understood not so much as the ability to actually create, in the collective consciousness, a specific comprehensive vision of the past (it would be difficult to measure or estimate the final effects of such practices in the minds of millions of Polish citizens), but as the ability to (1) develop a comprehensive vision of the past “to be remembered”, an alternative to what had been commonly remembered so far; (2) modify (in terms of form, content and social range) the existing commemorative practices, as well as generate new ones.

Soon, however, greater – in the temporal sense – possibilities of applying the discussed model became apparent. This was due to the fact that, as the arguments presented earlier demonstrate, the category of the state remains very important in the model’s theoretical framework. As a matter of fact, it deter-

²¹ An additional, and – in the authors’ opinion – very important, advantage of the described approach (which also applies for the areas of its application discussed below) is its potential to synthesize the multidimensional problem of the communist state and society. Due to the specific nature of social commemorative practices (see footnote 16), when studying memory and memory politics, it is possible to capture the phenomena and processes belonging to different spheres and aspects of the historical reality, as well as their mutual relations. All too often – to the detriment of the integrity of the understanding of history – these phenomena and processes are treated more or less separately, as not closely related.

mined the “horizon” for the authors to focus on when making a theoretical description of certain relations, processes and mechanisms that affect the dynamics of memory politics. This category defines the social and institutional dimension within which both the actual commemorative practices of the (real) state, as well as other main components of the social “game” of collective memory are taking place in a given society in a given period of time. Initially, the authors concentrated on a specific (and strictly limited) period of time in the history of the one specific country, being in fact a historical moment of sudden political upheaval and changes in many aspects of social life, which also involved the “replacement” of almost the entire power elite. However, as a result of the search for points of reference and/or planes of comparison for the authors’ empirical findings, it soon became clear that the hypotheses and research questions generated by the model are also applicable to other fragments of the history of the country in question, perhaps less turbulent in terms of the dynamics of its internal relations and (simultaneously) characterized by much less revolutionary (concerning intentions, at least) activity of the state agent of memory. Broadening the scope of the application of our model turned out to be necessary for a more comprehensive fulfilment of some of the research tasks of the project. A number of features of the “new canon” (in particular, its global scale “revolutionary” nature) became fully apparent only after confronting it with the old canon, just as certain properties specific for the commemorative practices used to consolidate it, were best demonstrated by comparing and contrasting them with practices developed at an earlier time, when the ruling camp of the country under consideration (i.e., the Second Republic of Poland) defined the aims of their memory politics in quite a different way (one can mention here the concept of the “external” dynamics characterizing the transformation of the sphere of commemorative activities introduced earlier in this paper). Naturally, the model could apply to the activity of the same (communist) state agent of memory during the subsequent decades of the Polish People’s Republic, under significantly less revolutionary conditions and relative stabilization of the “real socialism” system (“internal” dynamics characterizing the transformations of the sphere of commemoration). Similarly, it could be applied to the study of commemorative practices of the Polish state after the end of the communist era (the Third and the Fourth Republic of Poland), a period characterized by a markedly decreasing dominance²² of the state agent of memory in relation to the other actors playing the “memory game”.

Thus it is evident – as the authors clearly emphasized when presenting the assumptions and main components of the mature form of the model – that the temporal range of its application is very wide: in addition to moments/phases of radical (even revolutionary) transformations of the state and the society, it also encompasses periods of their relative stabilization and balanced functioning.

²² This by no means entails its complete disappearance – regardless of the existence of independent institutions of civil society and generally high level of freedom of organization and action.

Of course, it is necessary to stress that what we always have in mind is the modern/the postmodern state and society (19th – 21st century). The model's application to commemorative practices, characteristic of earlier epochs, would require far-reaching modifications, in part due to the radically different form of collective life and dissimilar patterns of collective communication.

It is obvious, then, that the described concept, originally developed specifically for the case of Poland in the early phase of communist rule, is also applicable to the study of commemorative practices of any other social-political entity that could be named a state (in the term's contemporary meaning²³) – whether it experienced the communist regime or other forms of totalitarian or authoritarian rule, or not. One may venture a claim that in this respect the model seems universal. The field of research based on its application may therefore also be extended to other countries of East-Central Europe. However, the question is whether it would be worthwhile to go beyond the traditional “national paradigm” and instead of (or in addition to) separately analyzing the phenomena occurring in individual countries in this part of Europe, simply treating them as a whole.

This problem is particularly pertinent in relation to the period after World War II, which was characterized by an obvious commonality of fate and historical experience of the communities living in those countries²⁴, forced – by the arrival of the Red Army and later by the fall of the Iron Curtain – to hastily adopt Soviet “socialism”. Each of them experienced similar phenomena and events as a result of attempts at building a new reality by local communist decision-makers, an indispensable element of which was the reconstruction of social imagery, including (or rather first and foremost) the collective memory. These similarities indeed “invite” comparative research in the area of memory politics – unveiling the recurring patterns and mechanisms related to commemorative phenomena in various countries, identifying areas of similarity and difference, along with attempts at an explanation for both²⁵. However, contemporary literature on the subject emphasizes that “the study of East [-Central – D. M.-P. and T. P.] European dictatorships is not solely a matter of comparative history.” Since the countries in question did not function as separate, isolated entities, but “as integral parts of the larger and increasingly integrated Soviet camp, their evolution was directly shaped by political transformations in Moscow, and heavily influenced by their interaction with other socialist coun-

²³ It mainly concerns the nation-state, but this does not exclude the possibility of using it when studying memory politics in ethnically diverse and/or systemically heterogeneous states – naturally, in such a case, one should take into account such aspects as coexistence/competition of equivalent collective memories of the main ethnic groups living on the territory of such a state, “dispersion” of the state agent of memory due to the existence of federation-type state structures, potentially in conflict or competition with one another, etc.

²⁴ Borderline cases of ultimately dissident states (Albania and Yugoslavia) were also included in the model, especially since their separate identity was by no means stabilized in late 1940s.

²⁵ For variants of the comparative method, see Theda Skocpol, Margaret Somers, “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry,” *Comparative Study of Society and History* 22, 2 (1980): 174–197.

tries and [general – D. M.-P. and T. P.] East-West relations.” Therefore – it is argued – “scholars need to go beyond the mechanical juxtaposition of national case studies in terms of differences and similarities among isolated, neatly differentiated, and internally stable national units”²⁶. It is this reasoning that was the basis for the formulation of the transnational approach directive in the study of East-Central European communism after World War II which the authors of this article support in their article *A Study of Memory Politics...*, mentioned at the beginning of the discussion.

It should be noted, however, that from the perspective of the field of study in question, the issue is complex and the “national idiosyncrasy” cannot be underestimated or disregarded in the course of research. The countries of the ECE region highly differed in terms of the starting point of their commemorative transformation, that is the characteristics of collective memories of their societies. The shape and content of these memories fixed in the minds of the citizens of Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Yugoslavia, Poland, Romania, or East Germany (which initially had the status of an occupied territory, but was soon transformed into new component of the “camp of Progress” – the German Democratic Republic), were substantially different. The ideas about the past and attitudes toward it that were present within the borders of each of these states resulted (a) from the previous historical experience of the national community in question²⁷ and the ways (and directions) this experience was worked through by the cultural elites of that community²⁸ and (b) from the “use” made of it by various actors active in the political sphere, aiming to exert influence on the society (or its individual strata) in the period between the two world wars²⁹. With regards to the latter, it is clear that the most important of these actors were the groups that were holding actual power, which – more or less deliberately and/or systematically – attempted to model the collective image of the past in the preferred direction. The dynamics of the communist memory politics was undoubtedly also influenced by the extent to which a given country was depen-

²⁶ Constantin Iordachi, Peter Apor, “Studying Communist Dictatorships: From Comparative to Transnational History,” *East Central Europe* 40 (2013): 3–4.

²⁷ Or communities, when considering multinational and/or federal states like Yugoslavia and the CSR/CSSR.

²⁸ This is what, to the greatest extent, determines the separateness of all these collective memories, which does not necessarily mean that they were completely alien to one another. The historical distinctiveness of the ECE region goes back to the Middle Ages and manifested itself over the following centuries in various ways, often leading to certain (temporary or not) commonality of historical experience beyond intra-regional political, ethnic, national, cultural, and religious divisions. In certain periods of time, one can even talk about a “common past”, as was the case with the Balkan peoples living under Turkish rule until (for most cases) the mid-19th century, or the peoples under the Hapsburg sceptre before the First World War. For this reason, certain motifs and memory sites remained present in the collective memory of several different national communities in the region (albeit not necessarily perceived in exactly the same way). They may have had the “unifying” or – quite the opposite – “conflicting” nature (e.g. evoking the memory of past disputes or feuds).

²⁹ Their objectives ranged from a “mere” seizure of power to the implementation of variously conceived programs of social, political, and/or economic modernization of a given state.

dent on the USSR³⁰, as well as the specific nature of the process of establishing the communist rule, its further stabilization, including formal and legal legitimization.³¹

All this diversity of the existing (or inherited) memory – always considered “wrong” from the communist point of view – implied a great variety of efforts required to reconstruct it. This, in turn, meant that the target “new memory of the socialist citizenry” could be identical in all these countries in formal terms only. Alongside areas and elements of similarity/sameness, there were significant aspects of difference. Obviously, the “framework” and (axiological) assumptions were the same everywhere: the memory (a) with a vision of the past filled with communist heroes, (b) delegitimizing social classes and political forces previously ruling in a given country, and (c) placing communists (along with those figures of the national past which they “annexed” as their ancestors and precursors) in the center of the most highly valued national traditions. However, the set of communist heroes (except for these of Soviet origin, primarily Lenin and Stalin, who were in principle the most prominent and important) always had to be specific to a given nation. Similarly, messages delegitimizing the former ruling elites in a given country, as well as identifying local communists as keepers of the local tradition, had to allude to personages, events, and/or phenomena that often were part of that country’s own history only.

In light of the above, the question arises whether the transnational approach should be the starting point of research in the discussed area or rather its (possible rather than obvious) endpoint. The authors of this paper opt for the latter alternative. Taking into account the considerations presented here, the transnational nature of the communist memory politics implemented in the countries of East-Central Europe after World War II can only have the status of a research hypothesis, which should be verified with reference to more classically understood methods of comparative analysis.

³⁰ There is a striking difference between the case of Poland (an official participant in the Great Coalition, in whose defence the Western democracies had at one time declared war on Germany, but in the end had sacrificed that country’s sovereignty for the interests of their Soviet coalition partner) and the GDR (previously an integral part of the German Nazi “evil empire”, which had been defeated and was undergoing a process of “denazification”). The remaining cases of other states in the region were somewhere in between these two extremes; most had experienced an episode of a more or less forced alliance with the Third Reich, followed by (usually not quite successful) attempts to switch to the Allied side.

³¹ On the one hand, there is the case of Czechoslovakia, where the communists won and consolidated their rule legally and democratically (with the exception of the final overthrow of 1948), and on the other hand, a number of cases of the openly forced “installation” of a new government evidently brought straight from the USSR and then consolidated by means of practices that were at best a poor imitation of the required legal and political procedures. There were also cases when local communists, albeit by force, were able to guarantee their rule – to a great extent – autonomously or independently, obtaining (although not necessarily a legally and formally correct) a real popular mandate (e.g. J. B. Tito in Yugoslavia).

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