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Undead Memory. Reading Kazimierz Wyka in Poland in 2016

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How does the relationship between history and memory change today? In what way do the phenomena of “false memory” and “false witness” figure in history? When does oral history lose its emancipatory role, and instead turns into political ventriloquism? Under what circumstances individual memory conforms to the collective one, conceding to the further loss of representation in the social world? Is the sphere of memory inhabited by its own *walking dead* and what can be done to stop them? These are but a handful of questions that have accompanied my latest reading of Kazimierz Wyka’s *Życie na niby* [Make-belief life].

Wyka on Goebbels

In the essay “Goebbels, Hitler i Kato” [Goebbels, Hitler and Kato] written after the Third Reich attacked the USSR in 1941, the writer is amazed by the effectiveness of Joseph Goebbels’s propagandist machine:

It was enough to throw a bunch of pseudo-statements and pseudo-documents, for a whole nation [German, in this case – J. T. B.] to accept a new situation of unforeseen

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significance as if it were an additional clothing coupon. This baffling leap, this incredible realignment from silence and murmurs of friendship to getting at one another's throats with howls of hysterical animosity! The truth that starts when a new assertion is made does not reach back. And it fades away just as a new statement begins.¹

Wyka's essay analyses the epistemology of propaganda, preceding in this regard Hannah Arendt's "Truth and Politics"² by over a decade. The Polish author states that inflated or deprecated facts – through intentional hypertrophy of meaning introduced into a minor fact – shatter from within. "Cause and effect is being found and new wholes are being formed where previously there were none. In turn, the dependencies that truly do exist, are being blocked and culled."³ Facts created by propaganda cast no shadow. They cannot be scrutinized from another point of view; put under a different light, they simply disappear.

That propaganda creates facts is not its only demonic aspect. It is even worse that

individuals, societies, or nations that permanently and consequently have certain experiences removed from memory and others forced in their stead, come in the end, by the principle of psychological exhaustion, to the conclusion that the displaced facts do not exist and have never done so. Conversely, by the principles of habit and familiarization, forced and emphasized facts start to act as if they were real. Therefore, one should truly worry that after losing the war German society will still disbelieve the existence of concentration camps and instead believe in its calling as the defender of Europe.⁴

In order to explain this effect – and it was in the year 1942 when these words were written – Wyka turns to Gustave Le Bon's enduring theory, thus demonstrating what a diligent pupil the French thinker found in the author of *Mein Kampf*. Even though, from the current perspective, a better reading could be given by Klaus Theweleit than by Le Bon, it is worth quoting, after Wyka, the relevant passage from Hitler's work: "The receptivity of the great masses is very limited, their intelligence is small, but their power of forgetting is

1 Kazimierz Wyka, "Goebbels, Hitler i Kato" [Goebbels, Hitler and Kato], in *Życie na niby* (Kraków: Universitas, 2010 [1957]), 166 (hereafter cited in text as ŻnN).

2 Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics," *New Yorker*, February 25, 1967.

3 ŻnN, 184.

4 ŻnN, 178.

enormous.”⁵ The function of propaganda, and of the art on which it is modelled, is therefore to work in such a way that “everyone will be convinced that the fact is real, the process necessary, the necessity correct,”⁶ irrespective of whether it truly is so.

Theweleit on the Language of Propaganda

This is how the German leader rationalized the need for manufacturing reality, in which his critic, Kurt Theweleit, sees the essence of fascism.⁷ In Theweleit’s view fascism is not founded on seduction or misapprehension, but rather exactly on the manufacturing of reality, in the course of which that what really is becomes suppressed by a well-argued nothingness – that which does not exist but what constitutes the object of desire. Fascist speech becomes the means of production, stripping of their qualities those parts of reality that become ingested by language.

Except for a few French scholars in the 1970s, nearly no one investigated the language of fascism. The middle class did not scrutinize the meanings it conveyed, so as not to reveal its own complacency. In turn, the communists cancelled it “set[ting] their faces in the woodcut mold of strongman Stalin, who at least could have been depended upon to wipe out these kinds of nuisances” (1:70). In consequence of this, the “glibness of formulations” in whose “cyclopean thought constructions” Walter Benjamin saw the essence of fascism (2:128) itself became a glib formulation.

The fascist speech is dangerous because retreat from reality can be proclaimed at any time and any place. It is enough to initiate “the language of occupation” (1:215), which “does not enter into the kind of relations to its represented objects that would allow them to be fairly represented” (1:87). Such language does not want to know anything about its subject. From the multiplicity of information it takes very little and, what is more, always the same elements, so that “their ‘choice’ appears as compulsion” (1:88). It seems as if this language had but one fictitious author, who writes a ledger of the appropriation of reality.

5 Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, introd. D.C. Watt, trans. Ralph Manheim (London: Hutchinson, 1982), 165.

6 Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, 164.

7 Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, vol. 1: *Women, Floods, Bodies, History*, trans. Stephen Conway (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 88; vol. 2: *Male Bodies: Psychoanalyzing the White Terror*, trans. Erica Carter and Chris Turner (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). All subsequent references to this book are indicated in the main text by volume and page number alone in parentheses.

The violence which this language exacts and of which it readily speaks, never appears as the object of choice or affinity, but rather styles itself as moral and patriotic responsibility. The weleit objects to defining the mechanism of delusion that underlies this violence as projection. "What is called 'projection' is anything but mere delusion. It would be easy enough to apply the scapegoat theory here, except that the connection between the real object of aggressive intent and the substituted object is more than just arbitrary" (1:155). The scapegoat theory is also according to Theweleit somewhat of an oversimplification in explaining the target of fascist aggression. He would rather call it "a hallucinatory substitution of the object." The victim of this substitution shares certain traits with the original object, but the blows that it receives actually relate to the personal hallucination of the aggressor, to the object of his desire.⁸

The speech delivered by the leader is a basic instrument of fascist propaganda. Its external form functions as part of body-armor: it offers him evidence of his own solidity (2:128). "Although the rhetorical stance of the fascist orator is one of substantiated argument, he makes no explicit effort to substantiate anything, he simply makes assertions," says Theweleit (2:128). The fascist speech, delivered in an authoritative voice, the voice of "the master of speech," is the instrument that creates reality. Here, speech is conception, and this is not a random metaphor in this case: the community listening to the leader's speech is in the most fundamental sense homosocial, joined through the ties of forbidden eroticism within which the feminine way of giving birth is substituted by the masculine one.

When the leader speaks and the audience moves into formation; when both speaker and audience have assumed the correct form and can anticipate mutual contact which cannot, must not be expressed as actual male love, since this is strictly forbidden, then the man [...] is permitted to cry [...]. This is the orgasm of oratory – surpassed only by the orgasm of killing.

In the fascist context, persuasion is an exclusively male procreative process; what is found instead is a cerebral parthogenesis (the masculine form of the virgin birth⁹) that has little to do with any manifestation of male love, the "upper

8 Gérard Bonnet writes about hallucinations as the underlying cause of murder in his book *Le remords. Psychoanalyse d'un meurtier* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2000).

9 The difference between feminine and masculine birth can be further broadened by the aspect referred to during the conference "Polska pamięć" [Polish memory] by Katarzyna Bojarska, who pointed to this passage from Susan Buck-Morss: "There is another aspect of violence, that of the historical event of insurrection itself. Hegel was quite comfortable thinking human progress and human violence as necessarily correlated. So were, for dif-

level” of a murdering machine – a machine designed specifically to annihilate its “lower levels” in the copulatory act of state-formation.

What then of the man who does not cry, who refuses to consider himself blessed by the form emerging from the mouth of the Führer, who resists unification with the towering form that reaches up toward him? He is instantly expelled, for he is the “other” way inclined; an eavesdropper, a potential informer. (2:127)

The ones listening to a fascist speech are not merely the recipients of certain concepts – especially as they are already well-known and agreeable to them – but

Their contact with the speech-as-form constitutes them as active agents; they play a greater part in the ritual than do iron filings in the magnetic field, simply because they assume their own place in the pattern, fuse themselves into the whole. It is the participant himself who says to his neighbor, “Comrade, we must stand together.” (2:129)

There are two movements that occur perpetually within a fascist community: joining in a hierarchical structure of those who have been deemed worthy of unification, and the elimination of all those who cannot be included. That is why Jean-Pierre Faye characterized totalitarian speech as “a language of abortion”¹⁰: these “all” in whose name the leader speaks, are only those who are recognized as possessors of “a German soul.” Here, “the soldierly male body is a ‘unified nation’ at one with itself after hard-fought battles to dam its own flows” (2:84). Violence, according to Theweleit, is a substitute of failed sexual acts and of the quelled hope of socialization.

A victory achieved on this front results in characteristic moral stupor. Sensibility is hardened and cut off. It is just as in W. R. Bion’s classic study

ferent reasons, Dessalines, Karl Marx, Frantz Fanon, and Ernest Renan. From the standpoint of universal history, however, the issue is not so clear. To argue that the birth of a new idea of humanity – whether by slave revolution, class revolution, or national liberation – must be bloody, makes a first principle out of violence, a cult of blood-letting that grants too much legitimacy to the masculinist culture of the warrior. Fanon’s psychology of violence as a purging of colonial consciousness is compelling in theory, but problematic as a principle of practice. Is the blood that stains the midwife of a different order? Surely, helping to bring life into the world is qualitatively different, from a human point of view, from the blood that stains by taking life away.” Susan Buck-Morss, “Universal History Upside Down. Reflections on Hegel and Haiti: A Response to the Critics” (unpublished manuscript, 2013). I am grateful to Katarzyna Bojarska for sharing this citation with me.

10 Jean-Pierre Faye, *Théorie du récit. Introduction aux “langage totalitaires”* (Paris: Hermann, 1972), quoted after Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2:125.

“On Arrogance,” where self-care dominated by the death drive turns into arrogance.¹¹ Empathy, the feelings associated with pain, fear, and mutual care constitute too great a threat for the body armor behind which, according to Theweleit, boys that were taken prematurely from their mothers try to hide.

“The more lifeless, regimented, and monumental reality appears to be, the more secure the men feel” (1:218). In light of Theweleit’s analysis the monumentalism that is characteristic for all totalitarian regimes can be understood as “a safety mechanism against the bewildering multiplicity of the living.” He goes on to say that “empires can be built only on, and out of, dead matter” (1:218); treating dead life as building block that can be freely apportioned for the construction of the monumental future.

Traverso: The Coming of Memory

Even if in every quarter of the globe ruling powers force people to inhabit their propagandist visions, the individual versions differ significantly from one another. Among other things, they vary in “how broadly or narrowly the power is based: is it centered in one person, or is it spread out among many different centers that exercise checks on one another? And are its subjects merely subjects or are they also citizens?”¹² There is a fundamental rift between Rwanda’s history before and after the genocide, Great Britain’s history before and after Eric Hobsbawm, France’s history before and after Michel Foucault, and in Poland’s history before and after Jan Tomasz Gross. “Gross’s book – Przemysław Czapliński has said about *Neighbors* – hampered the autoerotic mourning of Polish literature over the exterminated Jewish community.”¹³

Enzo Traverso claims that the political breakthrough of 1989 is the event that has modified the ways of thinking and writing about twentieth-century history to the greatest extent. Among the changes it provoked, Traverso lists

11 W. R. Bion, “On Arrogance,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 82 (2) (2013). Originally published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* 39 (1958).

12 Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed with Our Families. Stories from Rwanda* (New York: Picador, 1999), 181.

13 “*Neighbors* present as a lethal paraphrase of the literature of little motherlands – as its deadly serious pastiche. [...] after the publication of *Neighbors* Polish literature of little motherlands turned grey overnight.” Przemysław Czapliński, “Prześladowcy, pomocnicy, świadkowie. Zagłada i polska literatura późnej nowoczesności” [Persecutors, helpers, witnesses. The Holocaust and Polish literature of late modernity], in *Zagłada. Współczesne problemy rozumienia i przedstawiania*, ed. Przemysław Czapliński and Ewa Domańska (Poznań: Poznańskie Studia Polonistyczne, 2009), 164.

the emergence of memory: “the ossified time of the Cold War has waned and many reminiscences previously censored, classified, or repressed could be unveiled.”¹⁴ Although, a converse process begun at the same time – that of freezing, solidification, and collapse of notions that have suddenly lost their significance. That is how “memory placed in a new paradigm has cast into the background the notion of society, which seemed to dominate historical studies from the 1960s till the late 1980s.”¹⁵ Traverso’s book *Histoire comme champ de bataille: interpréter les violences du XXe siècle* [History as battlefield. Interpretation of twentieth-century violence] is a suggestive tale of the consequences of this event, which by capturing the emancipatory energy of small-scale narratives has managed to stifle many large-scale ones, bringing *damnatio memoriae* on still other subjects.”

There is a fundamental difference between the “memory turn” of Eastern and that of Western Europe, as Traverso points out. In Eastern Europe the return to the past is almost always performed under the banner of nationalism. The scholar exemplifies this by referring to the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej), whose mission statement since 1998 was to preserve the memory of “Communist and Nazi atrocities carried out between September 1, 1939 and December 31, 1989.”¹⁶ Twentieth-century history is celebrated here, according to Traverso, “as a long totalitarian night and one colossal national martyrdom,” which impedes the development of a critically sound stance towards the past.

A similar vision guides the national history inspired by the Budapest House of Terror or certain legislation passed by the Ukrainian Parliament.¹⁷

By presenting themselves as “victims,” Eastern European nations leave very little space for commemorating the Holocaust. Here the memory of Shoah does not play the same communal role as it does in the West. It is perceived as a kind of competing memory, as an obstacle to the complete acknowledgement of suffering experienced by other national communities in the twentieth century. This contrast is paradoxical as Eastern Europe was the space of the atrocities inflicted upon Jews: this is where the great majority of victims who perished in the Shoah have lived and where Nazism first created the ghettos and then, with the start of the war

14 Enzo Traverso, *Historia jako pole bitwy. Interpretacja przemocy w XX wieku* [History as battlefield. Interpretation of twentieth-century violence], trans. Ś. F. Nowicki (Warszawa: Książka i Prasa, 2014), 13.

15 *Ibid.*, 17.

16 *Ibid.*, 315.

17 *Ibid.*, 316.

with the Soviet Union, began perpetrating the massacres that have culminated in the conglomerate of death camps.¹⁸

A shocking – because it played out in left-leaning circles – example of the rivalry produced by the formula of nationalistic memory was the recent discussion that occurred on the pages of *Krytyka Polityczna* [Political critique]. It was started by Irena Grudzińska-Gross, who in her review of Marcin Napiórkowski's book *Powstanie umarłych. Historia pamięci 1944–2014* [Uprising of the dead. A history of memory 1944–2014] asked the author “Where are the Jews?” She was surprised that “in 2016 it is possible to write a 430-page book on memory of wartime Warsaw without the presence of Jews.”¹⁹ And an erudite book at that, one referring to Walter Benjamin but approaching the memory of the Holocaust in terms of ethnic studies. A book dedicated to the memory of wartime Warsaw, which fails to find the space for three hundred thousand of its inhabitants.

The response to Grudzińska-Gross came from Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz, former minister of internal affairs. He outright accused the inquisitive scholar of a rivalry of suffering, making a statement reminiscent of Traverso's argument. “Competition in the commemoration of victims only feeds our traumas,” he warned.²⁰ An even more somberly feeling was sparked by Marcin Napiórkowski's piece in the same paper, which was titled “Czy wolno napisać książkę, która nie jest o Żydach?” [Are you allowed to write a book that is not about Jews?].²¹

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 316.

¹⁹ Irena Grudzińska-Gross, “Powrót niepamięci” [The return of non-memory], *Krytyka Polityczna*, September 11, 2016, accessed May 4, 2023, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/historia/20160909/grudzinska-gross-powrot-niepamieci>.

²⁰ Bartłomiej Sienkiewicz, “Jak emancypować zombie?” [How to emancipate zombies?], *Krytyka Polityczna*, September 14, 2016, accessed May 4, 2023, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/historia/20160914/sienkiewicz-jak-emancypowac-zombie>.

²¹ Marcin Napiórkowski, “Czy wolno napisać książkę, która nie jest o Żydach? [polemika]” [Are you allowed to write a book that is not about Jews?], *Krytyka Polityczna*, September 13, 2016, accessed May 4, 2023, <http://www.krytykapolityczna.pl/artykuly/historia/20160912/czy-wolno-napisac-ksiazke-ktora-nie-jest-o-zydach-polemika>. It is worth mentioning that during the 2014 Schulz Festival, as the author of a study on Jewish themes in the work of Gustaw Herling-Grudziński (Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Gustaw Herling-Grudziński i legenda o krwi, czyli czy istnieje obowiązek bycia pisarzem żydowskim” [Gustaw Herling-Grudziński and the legend of blood, or is there an obligation to be a Jewish writer], *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 3/4 [2014/2015]: 312–334, accessed May 8, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.11649/Slh.2015.014>). I took part in a discussion on the difficulty of combining the status of a Polish writer with Herling's Jewish identity. The name of our panel

Because Marcin Napiórkowski identifies as a semiotician, I hope that he will take under consideration the following quote: “meaning lies in the manner in which semiotic objects are systematically positioned in relation to one another.”²²

The dramatism of this discussion comes from the fact that the interlocutors of Irena Grudzińska-Gross are neither nationalists nor negationists and it is obviously not their intention to question the suffering of Jews. Nonetheless, repeating the exclusionary gesture of the Polish interwar national democratic party *Endecja*, they assume that this is suffering associated with ethnicity and not citizenship or Polish nationality.²³ This is how the rivalry of suffering that is incomprehensible to Western Europeans, and which puzzled Enzo Traverso, comes to life.

Jameson: History Is What Hurts

There is one definition of history which while correcting this or that kind of abuse of memory could restore it for society and, at the same time, bar the return of dangerous utopias. It can be found in Frederic Jameson's *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*:

History is what hurts, it is what refuses desire and sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis, which its “ruses” turn into grisly and ironic reversals of their overt intention.²⁴

In this definition of critical history we face – as its antithesis – the memory of desire, which cannot come to terms with the limits that have been set out for it. Confronted with it in Poland of 2016 we perceive it as a new phenomenon, while Jameson denounced it already in 1981 as a delusion of the American left.

twisted this problem in exactly the same way as Napiórkowski's title did, it said “Is there an obligation to be a Jewish writer?”

22 Eviatar Zerubavel, *Time Maps. Collective Memory and the Social Shape of the Past* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 7.

23 I have written on how this exclusion was represented in the social sphere in the paper “Incognito ergo sum. O wytwarzaniu obojętności” [Incognito ergo sum. On the production of indifference], *Studia Litteraria et Historica* 2 (2013): 394–411, <http://dx.doi.org/10.11649/slh.2013.016>.

24 Frederic Jameson, *The Political Unconscious. Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1981), 88.

Paul Ricoeur also wrote about this kind of memory in *Memory, History, Forgetting*, though he surely had not only the political left on his mind. He spoke of repetition-memory, manipulated memory, like the one from Wyka's essay.

The resource of narrative then becomes the trap, when higher powers take over this emplotment and impose a canonical narrative by means of intimidation or seduction, fear or flattery. A devious form of forgetting is at work here, resulting from stripping the social actors of their original power to recount their actions themselves. But this dispossession is not without a secret complicity, which makes forgetting a semi-passive, semi-active behavior, as is seen in forgetting by avoidance (*fuite*), the expression of bad faith and its strategy of evasion motivated by an obscure will not to inform oneself, not to investigate the harm done by the citizen's environment, in short by a wanting-not-to-know.²⁵

Undead Memory – The Case of the Kielce Pogrom

A particular variety of Ricoeur's repetition-memory comes to the fore in contemporary Poland, which is swept by a memorial frenzy, in consequence of the historical policy of the two previous decades. Alluding to the title of Jeffrey Cohen's paper "Undead. A Zombie Oriented Ontology,"²⁶ it could be called undead memory. It introduces a correction to Ricoeur's optimistic classifications, fracturing the triad: blocked memory – repetition-memory – obligated memory. He also goes on to prove, which might be of interest to Dominick LaCapra,²⁷ that erecting tombstones not only does not appease but rather stimulates certain kinds of memory.

Undead, this extremely negated noun, designates a negativity that "is not the same as alive, nor does it allow for the quiescence of mortality."²⁸ It detaches from reality and time, because it serves purposes other than those of cognition or mourning. That is also why, despite sometimes repetitive burials, it cannot achieve the state which Paul Ricoeur describes as happy forgetting.²⁹ This memory remains in metastasis, without the perspective of termination,

25 Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 448–449.

26 Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Undead. A Zombie Oriented Ontology," *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 23 (3) (2012): 397–412.

27 It could also be useful to Marcin Napiórkowski, who attaches so much significance to the name-bearing headstone.

28 Cohen, "Undead," 398.

29 Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 449.

and for this reason it can be likened to the phenomenon of the *undead*. As a side effect of permanent vigilance it is an aberration that was criticized by Friedrich Nietzsche in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life."³⁰

I have stumbled upon this kind of memory while working on the book *Cursed. A Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom*.³¹ This study provides a detailed analysis of the careers of the functionaries of the Provincial Office of Public Security (Wojewódzki Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego) and of the Citizen's Militia (Milicja Obywatelska), as well as the genealogy of the victims of the Kielce pogrom, their family and financial circumstances, organizational affiliations, and their war and post-war histories. After Roberta Senechal de la Roche,³² I adopt the notion of *pogrom* as a form of self-help by a group, which is performed by a society dissatisfied in its expectations that the state will put an end to the "raucousness" of the deviant Jewish population. One could say that in the course of the Kielce pogrom this "raucousness" was halted and transposed into the form of forty-two bloody, mutilated corpses.³³

I will list the most important principles of memory that I have identified during the query and writing of the abovementioned book.

1. Remembering (recalling = *hypomnesis*) has its own economy, variable and nonlinear in case of different actors.
2. Remembering depends upon the agency of particular persons and institutions. This means that the memory of perpetrators and victims is different. The former, after achieving release through violence, calm down and gradually gain some perspective towards the event, whose details easily fade from their memory. The latter find themselves in the compulsion of repletion or/and fall into ritualized lamentation.³⁴
3. A different process occurs at the collective level, where in spite of the passage of almost three decades between the two Kielce pogroms, that

30 "Forgetting is essential to action of any kind, just as not only light but darkness too is essential for the life of everything organic." Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations*, ed. Daniel Breazeale, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

31 Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Cursed. A Social Portrait of the Kielce Pogrom*, trans. Ewa Wam-puszyc (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 2023).

32 Roberta Senechal de la Roche, "Collective Violence as Social Control," *Sociological Forum* 11 (1) (1996): 97–128.

33 Here I turn to the expression of Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 1:83.

34 Stanley J. Tambiah, *Levelling Crowds. Ethnonationalist Conflicts and Collective Violence in South Asia* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 194.

of 1918³⁵ and that of 1946, an uncanny resemblance can be observed both in the unfolding of the violence and in the method of dealing with that event. In both instances one of the factors galvanizing the already ongoing pogrom was hearsay about the death of a Polish officer.³⁶ In both cases the violence erupted after disarming the Jews.³⁷ Another disquieting idiosyncrasy is the fact that likewise among the victims and the perpetrators in both pogroms there were people bearing similar surnames (e.g. Grynbaum, Furman).

4. Despite seemingly simmering down, under the influence of social factors (propaganda, authority) even memory that presented as properly resolved is susceptible to reawakening and regression. When this happens it is accompanied by what Klaus Theweleit dubbed “learned denial” – *versierten Verleugnung* – a denial that is well understood by the subject to be a smokescreen for the actual turn of events.³⁸ This is structurally identical to the propaganda-fueled process of producing undead memory.

35 The first pogrom of the Jews of Kielce occurred on November 11, 1918. The political rally during which the Jews of Kielce were to choose delegates to the state-level Jewish self-government was organized in Teatr Polski [Polish Theatre] in Kielce. The gathering was opened with a prayer of gratitude for regaining independence. After counsellor Frajzynger took the stage the public demanded that he speak in Yiddish, though he did not even know the language; that is when the news broke on the city streets that “the Jews denounce Poland.” A gossip was started that a Polish legionary was stabbed in front of the theatre. When the mob broke into the building, Chaim Jeger, a seventeen-year-old scout, was killed in a fistfight. Szmul Owsiany was murdered in front of the theatre. In the streets, the mob pilfered Jewish shops and smashed storefront windows. Four Jews lost their lives in the pogrom and a hundred were injured. The Polish authorities were slow in their efforts to bring justice, and it was only in 1922 when five people were sentenced to several months of imprisonment. See Jadwiga Karolczak, “Koncert na cztery epoki” [A concert for four eras], *Przemiany* 1 (1989); Marek Maciągowski, *Przewodnik po żydowskich Kielcach. Śladami cieni* [Guide to Jewish Kielce. In the footsteps of shadows] (Kraków: Austeria, 2008), 37; Krzysztof Urbański and Rafał Blumenfeld, *Słownik historii kieleckich Żydów* [Dictionary of the history of Kielce Jews] (Kielce: Kieleckie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 1995), 105.

36 The motif of the presumed “murder of a Polish officer” also surfaces in numerous accounts of the 1946 Kielce pogrom.

37 Piotr Wróbel, *Listopadowe dni – 1918. Kalendarium narodzin II Rzeczypospolitej* [November days – 1918. Calendar of the birth of the Second Polish Republic] (Warszawa: PAX, 1988), 82.

38 Klaus Theweleit, *Śmiech morderców. Breivik i inni. Psychogram przyjemności zabijania* [The laughter of murderers. Breivik and others. Psychogram of the pleasure of killing], trans. Piotr Stronciwilk (Warszawa: PWN, 2016).

If one were to attempt a systematic segmentation of post-pogrom Kielce memory, it would reveal not so much a five-phase structure, but an archipelago of free-floating anachronous islands of memory, where elements of repression and anamnesis intertwine.

1. The first period, that of strictly blocked memory,³⁹ begins in the year 1946, directly after the first July trial, and it lasts until the 1980s. The vast archives of Kielce are entirely off-limits to historians; publications relating to the pogrom are under unofficial moratorium, and part of the source material is destroyed. This gave rise to the proliferation of conspiracy theories, which attributed the initiation of events to respectively: “andersowcy”⁴⁰ (blamed by the communist government), the communist government (accused by the “andersowcy”), and also sporadically to Zionists (named in the reports of bishop Czesław Kaczmarek, and later in the book by Józef Orlicki).⁴¹
2. After the weakening of the communist regime in the 1980s a fracture appears in the abovementioned blockade in the form of “obligated memory,”⁴² whose manifestations can be observed in Marcel Łoziński’s film *Świadkowie* [Witnesses] and in Jerzy Sławomir Mac’s superb reportage “Kto to zrobił” [Who did this], published in *Kontrasty* (both works are from 1986). The finale of this phase came in October 2004, with the conclusion of the second Kielce investigation, when prosecutor Krzysztof Falkiewicz of the District Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation in Krakow concluded that none of the conspiracy theories can be substantiated.⁴³
3. After 1989 Kielce memory was unblocked and it overcompensated. In the documentation from the second investigation, which took place in the years 1994–2004, what draws attention is the large number of hearsay and false leads, the obsession with false memory, a deluge of

39 Paul Ricoeur’s term.

40 A designation of the soldiers of the Polish Armed Forces in the East, a fighting force that was incorporated in the territories of the USSR under the leadership of General Władysław Anders (1892–1970) and which was made up mostly of Polish prisoners of war released after the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941 – Trans.

41 Tadeusz Wiącek, ed., *Zabić Żyda! Kulisy i tajemnice pogromu kieleckiego 1946* [Kill the Jew! Behind the scenes and secrets of the 1946 Kielce pogrom] (Kraków: Temax, 1992).

42 Paul Ricoeur’s term.

43 Jan Żaryn and Łukasz Kamiński, eds., *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego* [Around the Kielce pogrom], vol. 1, ed. Jan Żaryn and Łukasz Kamiński (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2006).

psychotic cases and the fear culminating in denunciations and anonymous notes.⁴⁴ All these leads were scrupulously followed, first by prosecutor Zbigniew Mielecki and then by other prosecutors engaged in the second Kielce investigation.

4. Despite the public release of the investigation's outcomes, refuting the conspiratorial hypotheses, there was a return to conspiracy memory which can be understood as defensive mechanism sheltering from the feelings of guilt of the second phase. The hypotheses of provocation were gaining momentum since the article "Kielce, 4 lipca 1946," penned by Krystyna Kersten, was published in *Tygodnik Solidarność*,⁴⁵ and even more so after the book *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Anti-semitism* by Michał Chęciński came out.⁴⁶ A prominent role in the strengthening of the force of this phenomenon was played by the writer Krzysztof Kąkolewski.⁴⁷ In the second volume of *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego* [Around the Kielce pogrom] published in 2008 by the Institute of National Remembrance, the open return to the hypothesis of the NKVD conspiracy was a clear break with the results of the investigation carried out by the same institution.⁴⁸
5. The fifth stage figures here as a prognostication of post-conspiracy memory. The beginnings of such a critical local memory is associated with the activities of the Jan Karski Association in Kielce, which has

44 See, e.g., the letter: "4/7/1996 Komisja do Badania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu w Poznaniu. Regarding the announcement that the case of the so-called Kielce pogrom of 1946 is currently being investigated, please contact citizen [contact details here – J. T. B.], who was there and, probably, as an employee of the Security Service, shot at the Jews. I know this because he later bragged about it to my father. My father is dead and I do not know the details. What I remember from my father's account was that such a fact occurred. Unfortunately, I must remain anonymous, because this concerns my neighbor." Case files, document folder 6, Zs.S1/93, p. 1157. The next page contains notes from the interrogation of the person of interest named in the denunciation, who testified on August 1, 1996 that he "never resided in Kielce, nor even visited occasionally."

45 Krystyna Kersten, "Kielce, 4 lipca 1946" [Kielce, July 4, 1946], *Tygodnik Solidarność*, December 8, 1981.

46 Michał Chęciński, *Poland: Communism, Nationalism, Anti-Semitism* (New York: Kerz-Kohl, 1983).

47 See, e.g., Krzysztof Kąkolewski, "Umarły cmentarz" [Dead cemetery], *Tygodnik Solidarność*, December 16, 1994, as well as his book of the same title from 1996. Krzysztof Kąkolewski unearthed many valuable sources but the lack of scholarly competences meant that he was unable to approach them critically, and the book suffered because of this.

48 Jan Żaryn, Leszek Bukowski and Andrzej Jankowski, eds., *Wokół pogromu kieleckiego*, vol. 2 (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2008).

been overseen for over a decade by the psychologist and social activist Bogdan Białek.⁴⁹

The Future?

Kazimierz Wyka wrote in the essay “O porządkach historycznych” [On historical order]:

Historical logic is not a logic of suddenness. Experience, even if played out to its final form, almost never truly finds its way into the minds of those for whom it was destined on its first occurrence. [...] The logic of history is rather the logic of a returning wave. Twice, or even thrice must it break on the same surface to recede and carry away with itself the final conclusion.⁵⁰

The Jews of Kielce have directly experienced the logic of the “returning wave” two times, but it is still not clear what conclusions have been drawn by the citizens of Kielce. Today there are no longer any Jews in the city, but on the frontlines of the battle for memory this is obviously irrelevant. The newest development in this saga is the appeal to reopen the investigation of the Kielce pogrom, which has lately been filed with the Kielce field office of the Institute of National Remembrance.⁵¹ The signatories – among whom there is the Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny [National Radical Camp], the association Brygada Świętokrzyska NSZ, and a relative of Marian Sołtysiak, the commander of the Wybraniec battalion, which bears the taint of committing murder on the Jewish populace⁵² – demand the restitution of the “good name” of the inhabitants of Kielce accused of antisemitism.

49 Cf. Bogdan Białek’s profile in Michał Jaskulski’s 2016 film *Planty 7/9*.

50 ŻnN, 197–8.

51 <https://ekai.pl/diecezje/kielecka/x104220/kielce-apel-o-wznowienie-sledztwa-w-sprawie-pogromu>, accessed May 7, 2023. Signatories of the petition: Małgorzata Sołtysiak – vice-president of the association Ruch Społeczny im. Lecha Kaczyńskiego in Kielce, Wojciech Zapała – president of Grupa Rekonstrukcji Historycznej im. por. Stanisława Grabdy ps. “Bem,” Michał Sadko – president of the board of Odzyskajmy Naszą Historię association, Karolina Lebedowicz – secretary of the Okręg Świętokrzyski Narodowych Sił Zbrojnych, Karol Michalski – president of Kieleccy Patriotci association, and Filip Bator – secretary of Brygada Świętokrzyska Obozu Narodowo-Radykalnego.

52 See Alina Skibińska and Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, “Barabasz i Żydzi. Z historii oddziału AK ‘Wybraniec’” [Barabbas and the Jews. From the history of the Home Army unit “Wybraniecki”], in Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Okrzyki pogromowe. Szkice z antropologii historycznej Polski 1939–1946* (Wołowiec: Czarne, 2012), 170–219. See also <https://www.holocaust->

The role that art will play in this competition of memory is as yet undefined. For now, the Stefan Żeromski Theater in Kielce staged in the 2017 theatrical season a play written by Tomasz Śpiewak and directed by Remigiusz Brzyk, a pupil of Krystian Lupa, *1996*, which concerns the Kielce pogrom.⁵³ What will follow is, as always in this case, an open question.

Translated by Rafał Pawluk

Abstract

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Undead Memory: Reading Kazimierz Wyka in Poland 2016

In Western Europe, memory studies are marked by an effort to give voice to those silenced by dominant narratives. In Poland, meanwhile, the current 'memory turn' openly flirts with post-truth and paves the way for a new hegemony. This way of framing memory takes advantage of the poststructuralist humanities' defenseless position, and it gradually appropriates its tools and yokes them to the rhetoric of propaganda. The new project of collective memory breaks with Ricœur's triad of blocked memory – memory of repetition – obligated memory. It privileges blockage and repetition as modes of commemorating ("undead memory" – a paradoxical posthumanist realization of the category of the undead). Tokarska-Bakir demonstrates this tendency in a case study on the development of public discourse on the Kielce pogrom of 1946.

Keywords

undead, memory propaganda, fascist culture, Jameson's critical history, manipulated memory, memory of the Kielce pogrom of 4 July 1946

tresearch.pl/index.php?mod=news&show=310&template=print, accessed May 7, 2023.

53 See <https://dzieje.pl/kultura-i-sztuka/premiera-spektaku-1946-w-teatrze-im-zeromskie-go-w-kielcach>.