

THE HISTORY MEN

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In Poland's culture wars, history has been weaponized. How the governing PiS and its supporters look at Poland's history is the subject of this chapter. It will look at why PiS feels it needs a historical policy and give a brief overview of the history that has shaped Poland's views of its own past. Then it will shine a spotlight on some of the aspects of daily and political life where history matters, especially in political discourse but more often in conflicts between PiS and its enemy, the postcommunist liberal chatterati at home and abroad.

The struggle between liberals and conservatives over history is not a contest of competing truths. PiS is no proponent of historical relativism. This is a battle for the truth, which will end in the establishment of a narrative of events and opinion about Polish history to be advocated at home and defended abroad.

Peter Geyl, writing in *Napoleon For and Against*, the classic work on historiography, neatly encapsulates the ethereal nature of the historical discourse: nothing is certain, every argument is up for review sooner or later, and no conclusions are totally safe from the next generation of historians. "To expect from history those final conclusions which may perhaps be obtained in other disciplines is in my opinion to misunderstand its nature."¹ Yet, seeking to establish finality and using it to discredit enemies often seems to be precisely the point.

The PiS government came to power in 2015 with a mission. This was to overturn the so-called Third Republic, the political and social order shaped by what it regards as a metropolitan, liberal elite that has foisted a debilitating and politically-correct liberalism onto Poland. In

¹ Peter Geyl, *Napoleon: For and Against* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), 15.

its view, a supine attitude towards the European Union; values undermining the rigor of Roman Catholicism, and an inferiority complex regarding the past characterized past Polish governments, especially that of PO and PSL from 2007 to 2015. With the fervor of a revolutionary, it is seeking to overturn the version of Polish history as it evolved since the 1990s. In short, it seeks to return to Poland some dignity and pride in its achievements. Governments have a social policy and an economic policy, and they should also have a historical policy, so runs the argument.²

It is the popular press, media, radio, television, and the internet which form the battleground, and “infotainment” is the style. The language is not that of senior boardrooms but that of the street. History still matters in Poland and the conflicts that it engenders are visceral rather than cerebral—a fact overlooked by a Western-trained historian accustomed perhaps to more detachment.³

POLAND'S VIEW OF ITSELF

It is banal to say that history and geography have shaped Poland, but when it crops up in casual conversation, the impression is used to reinforce an “exceptionalist” view of Poland’s history, which is not readily understandable to outsiders. Like the Russian soul, Polish history is jealously guarded, and in conversation, the point is often comes when the Polish interlocutor will reach for the ace with the phrase, “Ah, but you just don’t understand.”⁴

² For a cogent expose of PiS’s historical policies, see the interview with Jarosław Sellin, Vice-Minister of Culture and National Heritage. “J. Sellin o Polityce Historycznej Polski: Mamy Potężne Zadanie do Odrobienia,” *Radio Maryja*, August 21, 2016: <http://www.radiomaryja.pl/informacje/j-sellin-o-polityce-historycznej-polski-potezne-zadanie-odrobienia>. See also See Piotr Litka, “Próba zrzucenia odpowiedzialności za zbrodnię,” *Wprost: Jak Niemcy Zmieniają Historię*, no. 32, August 7, 2016, for the Polish reaction to German historical policy, or in other words, counter-historical policy.

³ See “Plus Minus, Wojna o Pamięć,” *Rzeczpospolita*, July 18, 2016 for more information on on Poland’s historical policy, especially its relations with Ukraine.

⁴ Below are some of the classic texts in English that outline the way in which Poland views itself and its past: Norman Davies, *God’s Playground: A History of Poland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Norman Davies, *Europe, A History* (London: Pimlico, 1997); Adam Zamoyski, *The Polish Way* (New York: Hippocrene Books, 1997); Neal Ascherson, *The Struggles for Poland* (London: Pan Books in association with Channel

**CONTRA MUNDUM: CHRIST OF NATIONS
AND NATIONAL FAILURE—A SHORT SECTION ON THE LONG VIEW**

Modern Polish historical consciousness has been shaped by nineteenth-century European Romanticism set against the decline, fall, and occupation of Poland as a state. Poland's foremost romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, caught the mood and created a new one, co-opting the Judaic concept of the "chosen people" to attempt to make sense of a string of political and national catastrophes that stemmed from the decay of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the eighteenth century: three partitions by more ruthless and militarily efficient neighbors, a brief attempt at resurrection during the Napoleonic period, and then a further slide into the abyss of seeming permanent Austrification, Prussification, or Russification. Poland, for Mickiewicz, was "*Chrystus Narodów*," the Christ of Nations condemned to suffer for the greater good of Europe. The rest of Europe did not seem to get the message, and despite individual sympathy, existed without Poland. Poland ceased to matter.

Furthermore, at the very moment when the craft or art of history was being shaped by the use of primary sources and the material manifestations of statehood; Polish archives, crown jewels, art, and even language were unavailable for study. Generations of historians saw European history as the rise of a top tier of powers that excluded Poland. Polish historians since have had to shout louder to be heard, in order to make their point. One history of Europe, H.A.L. Fisher's, first published in 1935 and covering the period "from the earliest times to 1713," only mentioned Poland twice, and this was a history covering the time when it was the largest country in Europe.

The reappearance of the Polish state in 1918 saw a brief period of independence extinguished by German and later Soviet occupation. The Second Republic (1918–39) did begin a process of reclaiming Polish history, especially in Warsaw where the urban topography was modified, changed, and re-arranged to extinguish any traces of the centuries-old Russian presence. The manipulation of the city's physical

Four Television, 1988); Norman Davies, "The Tenacity of Culture," interview by Andrew Kureth, in *Poland Today*, no. 8 (Sept./Nov. 2014): 18–21; Norman Davies, "Poland's Dream of Past Glory," *History Today* 32, no. 11 (November 1982).

space to serve an ideological imperative is perhaps outside the scope of this essay. However, it should be noted that the process was alive throughout the nineteenth century. By 1939, Polish history was again being written by external agents.

PATRIOTISM IS ENOUGH

The loss of state independence coupled with the national resistance to it became the gold standard by which all actions were, and indeed, still are judged (this lies at the heart of the PiS view). There seemed to be too much at stake. The life of the nation rather than the state was threatened with extinction in the nineteenth century, and therefore art, literature, and history should be subordinated to serve the cause of national survival and dignity. Heroes and villains are made by their contributions to patriotic service; any nuance came second. Fryderyk Chopin, for instance, was not just a universally renowned artist but a Polish patriot (despite performing for the Tsar when he was eight years old) who suffered abroad while Poland was crushed during the 1831 rising. Romuald Traugutt, the last commander of the 1863 Rising against the Russians, had been a Tsarist army officer with assimilated German ancestry. In his case, does this mean he should be regarded as a traitor for serving the Tsar or a hero for breaking his oath and considering himself to be a true Pole and, therefore, rebelling against him? The leaders of the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 may have made an insane decision, but they acted out of patriotic motives and, thus, are honored by having streets and public spaces named after them. Polish culture like Scottish, was one based on defeat and the national romance that went with it.

THE LEGACY OF PRL: THE SEARCH FOR CERTITUDE

It is not only the romantic imperative that shapes Polish historiography; also important is the medium-term historical impact of the Peoples' Republic of Poland (*Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa*, PRL). The official ideology required the correct historical policy, and the

Soviet Union became the eternal ally and Germany the eternal enemy. The AK (Home Army) also became enemies, and the “Accursed Soldiers” (see below)—including individual heroes like Captain Pilecki⁵ or General Fieldorf—were destined to become heroes in time. Massacres against the Polish nation like the one in Katyń forest were ascribed to the Germans well into the 1970s (even in the West), and had the basic factual elements were manipulated. Those massacres perpetrated by Poles themselves like Jedwabne and Kielce (see below) were taboo.⁶

A micro case may serve as an good example of these dynamics. Dotted around Warsaw are commemorative plaques (160 in all) marking the places where street executions took place in late 1943–44; these were put up during the late 1940s and 1950s. On them are inscribed the number of victims together with the date; they were killed by “Hitlerites” and all of them died for Polish freedom. Well did they? How do we know this? Perhaps they were just unlucky for having been caught up in one of the many street dragnets. Perhaps they wanted to live rather than die? We do not know, but the government of the time ascribed their deaths to some more elevated reason than may have been the case.

THE TRANSFORMATION: PANDORA'S BOX

The fall of communism was not just an event that enabled Polish themes to be debated openly; it became a theme in itself. The usual actions took (and are taking place) place in the public space: changing street names, dismantling or moving statues. The planned decommunization legislation is busy with these adjustments, changing the *Trasa*

⁵ Captain Witold Pilecki, a remarkable officer who contrived to get himself arrested and sent to Auschwitz in 1940. He reported on the conditions and started an intelligence network there. He later fought in the Warsaw Uprising and was imprisoned and executed by the communists in 1948. He is the patron of many schools and organizations and has become the *beau ideal* in the PiS pantheon. General Emil Fieldorf earned recognition as the head of the Home Army’s special forces during the occupation, and he became deputy C-in-C of the Home Army after 1944. He was executed in 1953.

⁶ See Artur Becker, “Bardzo Zła Zmiana, *Rzeczpospolita*, April 7, 2016 for more on the poisonous legacy of PRL historical policy.

Armii Ludowej, which commemorated the Communist People's Army of the Second World War, to one named after the late president Lech Kaczyński.

In the intellectual space, new faces were added to the pantheon. But like the economic sphere, there was no Western man, fully formed and waiting to break free to fill the space communism had supposedly vacated. Rather it was “homo-post-Sovieticus” in all his complexity, and with all his complexes.

The transformation and the Solidarity phenomenon caused as many problems as they solved. The narrative surrounding events concerning the trade union and its leaders, which was indelibly fixed in the imagination as a popular bottom-up workers movement led by a charismatic Lech Wałęsa, is being effectively challenged (see section below). How has PiS changed the legend and reality of Wałęsa? Wałęsa is being downgraded, while the late President Lech Kaczyński, who according to liberal orthodoxy was a very minor player in the Solidarity drama, is replacing him at the helm.

More than their predecessors in PO, the personnel of the PiS government is encouraging a particularly muscular kind of Polish patriotism, one that draws on the strengths of the romantic tradition: its stress on the individual military brilliance of heroes against the background of national catastrophe; the identification of national identity with Roman Catholicism; an oversensitivity to criticism, especially from abroad. Thus, the term “Polish concentration camp,” which may be understood as a lazy *lapsus lingua* by those that use it, is now likely to be punishable even abroad. The Polish Anti-Defamation League has even sued the German ZTV over its portrayal of the AK in the television series *Our Mothers, Our Fathers*. In one of the episodes, the AK was portrayed as an anti-Semitic, Jew-killing organization. Presumably, as soon as Polish television screens a wartime series with a cartoonish sadistic German, we can expect the lawsuits to fly from the other side.

Things only start to make sense if we regard themes in Polish history as battlegrounds between the right and left, conservative and liberal, Sarmatian and Western. Below, we examine some of the current themes shaping the field.

THE ACCURSED SOLDIERS: THE NEW COOL

If there is one example that would encapsulate the party's view and use of modern Polish history, it would probably be that of the Accursed Soldiers, the new cool and indeed cult. This is one of the best examples of the breakdown of what Norman Davies called the "western historical triumphalist" school of history.⁷

Western perceptions of the Second World War generally stop at the peace conferences of Yalta and Potsdam where the lines of the new Europe were drawn. Britain, France, and the US could contain the USSR in Europe and concentrate on colonial expansion or retreat. The periodization is neat: 1939–45. On the ground in Poland, the dust was far from settled in 1945, and the conflict looked very different from their perspective.⁸ The war and occupation was not the simple affair that is often portrayed in the West. The clash of titans in Eastern Europe played against a background of local animosities between political factions and ethnic groups. This was a three- or four-sided war.

Each political grouping that reflected the prewar Polish political spectrum had its own armed wing. The communists had the *Guardia Ludowa* (People's Guard); the Peasant's Party's was the BCh (Peasants' Battalions); the right-wing camp, the ONR (National Radical Camp), had their own armed force: the NSZ (National Armed Forces). The broad-based national grouping with its allegiance to the London government-in-exile was the AK. The AK was effectively destroyed in the Warsaw Uprising and was either dissolved in January 1945 or merged with the NSZ and other groups. The NSZ made the operationally correct decision (from its perspective) neither to join the Uprising in a major way, nor dissolve, and instead maintained its forces.⁹

For Poland, the war had not ended, and although new borders had been redrawn, they were regarded as temporary. A war fever swept the country as Poland expected the Western powers and the USSR to

⁷ Davies, *Europe: A History*, 19.

⁸ Marcin Zaremba, *Wielka Trwoga. Polska 1944–1947* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo. Znak, 2012). A classic analysis of the demoralization of Polish society after hostilities "ended," which sets the context for much of the debate on post-1945 Polish history.

⁹ Rafał Wnuk, "Brygada Świętokrzyska. Zakłamana legenda," *Wyborcza.pl, Ale Historia* supplement, January 25, 2016. An article on the complexities of resistance to two equally savage enemies, Germany and Russia.

fight with each other. The NSZ acted on this belief, and it made sense to wait for the new war to emerge with its forces intact. This was a reasonable assumption, but it underestimated the permanency of the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. Thus, the NSZ units raided local party institutions and functionaries, especially in the south of the country. The communist authorities mounted counterinsurgency operations of varying scales. It was a war characterized by great brutality on both sides, with civilians caught in the middle as usual, and it lasted until the 1950s, when it became obvious that Poland's situation was not temporary.

Condemned as bandits, fascists, or reactionaries, the study of the subject only became possible in the late 1990s. The name "Accursed Soldiers" (*żołnierze wyklęci*) was taken from a book by Jerzy Śląski, and the name stuck and is now worn and exhibited as a badge of honor. The late President Lech Kaczyński (PiS) propagated the cult, and in 2011, Accursed Soldiers were awarded their own day of commemoration by President Bronisław Komorowski (PO).

The idea and reality of these soldiers as die-hard patriots fighting on when perhaps reason would have dictated another course resonates with the romantic tradition as expressed in pop and youth culture. T-shirts and fashion accessories are very visible on Warsaw's streets, worn by teenagers and twenty-somethings who are the same age as the Accursed Soldiers themselves, and thus exhibit a high degree of association.¹⁰

The Accursed Soldiers still cause controversy. On the liberal left, they are associated with the far right and especially the pre-war ONR organization, a fascist and anti-Semitic body banned in the 1930s and revived in the 1990s. Their demonstration in Białystok in April 2016 sent a shiver through the liberal media. The debate opened up the old conflict over the nature of the war and the methods used, specifically the killing of innocent civilians caught up in the fighting. On the one hand, they were officially rehabilitated on August 15, 2016 in the ceremony to commemorate the Battle of Warsaw in 1920, during which

¹⁰ *Newsweek*, Czas Patriotów, O co walczą Polskę walczać?, Małgorzata Świąchowicz/Ewelina Lis, nr 33 8.8.2016, patriotic clothing. *Polityka*, Co w sercu to na piersi, Joanna Cieśla, nr 33, patriotic clothing.

President Duda added their plaque to the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Warsaw. Iconic figures of the movement Zygmunt Szenzielarz “Łupaszkó,” Danuta Siędzikówna “Inka,” and Feliks Selmanowicz “Zagończyk” have been rehabilitated, and their remains have been buried with full military honors.¹¹ On the other hand, the right has vilified Professor Zygmunt Baumann, a world-famous sociologist who fought against the anticommunist resistance as a zealous Polish People’s Army officer. It must be said that Baumann never regretted his involvement, and his explanations of his youthful adherence to the communist cause and action are somewhat awkward, to say the least.

The Accursed Soldiers have also stepped into the mainstream with the recent feature film *Historia Roya* (The History of Roy), which told the story of just one of a number of such recalcitrants. The film was successful with 300,000 viewers. However, the Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Piotr Gliński, expressed his worrying reaction when the film was not admitted to the Gdynia Film Festival. Apparently, artistic merit was not enough, and he issued a statement about consequences. His ministry is very active in promoting a version of Polish history, and in 2016 he announced a competition for a Hollywood-style blockbuster film script about an aspect of Polish history. Here is the crux of the matter: Poland has to compete. Other countries, especially Germany and Russia (not to mention the United States), have their own historical policy, which is often expressed through film, and they can reach out to the world using this medium. Poland is being left behind and has to catch up, because if it does not, then in a few years’ time, Germany will have been invaded by Poland in 1939, Poland was responsible for the Holocaust, and Russia was a democratic anti-fascist power.

During his eulogy at the funerals of “Inka” and “Zagończyk,” President Duda said that Poland had recovered its dignity after twenty-

¹¹ To get the full flavor of the emotions generated by the Accursed Soldiers, see the following downloads from the funerals of Inka and ZagonczykZ: “Okrzyki do L.Wałęsy: Bolek! Judasz! po mszy pogrzebowej ‘Inki’ i ‘Zagończyka’ - 28.08.16,” YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CDLKpXkZixQ>; President Wałęsa jeering: “Prowokacja KOD-u na uroczystościach pogrzebowych ‘INKI’ i ‘ZAGOŃCZYKA’ - Gdańsk 28.08.16,” YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pE7PKtc2f4>- KOD/; Mateusz Kijowski jostled, “Minister Macierewicz’s speech,” Youtube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afkMiIbo>; and “President Duda’s speech,” Youtube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9NhNx2_tls.

seven years, and lumped their executioners together with the post-1989 settlement. In 2013, General Jaruzelski, the architect of martial law in Poland who regarded by many as nothing but a Russian placeholder, was also given a state funeral by the PO government. No doubt, in honoring the Accursed Soldiers, many feel that redress is being made at last. However, scuffles allegedly broke out between the ONR and KOD activists, with the former questioning the latter's rights to be present at the funeral. The search for patriots and villains is a complex and fascinating subject neglected and worthy of study in its own right.

POPULAR HISTORY, POPULAR FRONT

We can say that Poland is certainly not a “post-historical” country, judging by the number and quality of historical publications on offer from the popular press, and a visit to newsstands presents a fascinating array from which to choose. The major newspapers, the conservative *Rzeczpospolita* and the liberal *Gazeta Wyborcza*, each have their weekly historical section, *Rzecz o Historii* and *Ale Historia* respectively. The liberal weeklies *Newsweek* and *Polityka* also have separate magazines as well. What is interesting is that the conservative magazines have taken the lead, and the publications that are the most visible on the shelves are *Do Rzeczy Historia*, *w Sieci Historii*, and *Uważam Rze Historia*. Reasons for such a plethora put forward by some observers is the failure of schools to properly teach the Polish historical narrative, and the abnegation of the liberal elites (and the parties they represent) to present their narrative to society. Historical curiosity is present; the question is, where it will lead? It is certainly guided more by the right.¹²

These publications are not superficial simplifications; they are popularizing difficult, hidden, or neglected themes in Polish history. They blend well-written and lively articles with commentaries by

¹² See for example the following issues of the *Historia Do Rzeczy* supplement: “Polskie Termopile: Wizna 39,” *Historia Do Rzeczy*, no. 9 (September 2016); “Lato 1941: Masakra na Kresach,” *Historia Do Rzeczy*, no. 7 (July 2016); “Chaim Rumkowski: Dyktator getta,” *Historia Do Rzeczy*, no. 6 (June 2016); “Cenckiewicz ujawnia ofiary ‘Bolka,’” *Historia Do Rzeczy*, no. 5 (May 2016). For a review of the graphic style see www.google.pl and search *historia+dorzeczy+okładki*.

current conservative thinkers and journalists.¹³ To appeal to a younger audience, there are comic strips, and *Do Rzeczy* in particular uses comic-style illustrated covers, often featuring lurid images of German or Russian killers spattered with Polish blood, or controversial interpretations such as one showing General Franco as the hero of anti-communism or Jan Sobieski as the savior of Europe against militant Islam. Subjects (studied between April and June 2016) range from the great Polish victories of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to the Second World War and the PRL.

The cover of the July 2016 issue deals with the massacre of the Polish population of the Kresy (the eastern borderlands) by Soviet forces retreating from the Germans in 1941. June's cover featured a report on Chaim Rumkowski, the often-maligned leader of the Łódź ghetto, and examined the nuances of life under the German occupation. Rumkowski is a controversial figure since he is often accused of collaboration with the German authorities in Łódź. However, he nearly managed to pull off the impossible: saving Jewish lives. The Łódź Ghetto was liquidated in the summer of 1944, six months shy of the city's liberation by the Soviets. Rumkowski and the Łódź ghetto lasted over a year longer than his compatriots in Warsaw and elsewhere. So, is he a hero or villain?

When does collaboration become active collusion? May's issue carried a series of articles by Prof. Sławomir Cenckiewicz on the case against "Bolek" (see below). September's issue dealt with the "Polish Thermopylae" of 1939, a doomed last stand during the campaign, and one that ticks all the romantic boxes.

On the whole, the tone is masculine: battles, wars, derring-do espionage, and commando stuff, the military—a robust affirmation of mainly Polish history. And it is mainly Polish history that is being treated. But this does not mean that these stories are lightweight. *DoRzeczyHistoria* wants to get Polish schools to subscribe to the magazine. Also, all these types of magazines carry advertising for mail order patriotic clothing t-shirts and accessories.¹⁴

¹³ Sławomir Zajączkowski, "Sławomir Zajączkowski: Czeka nas boom na komiks historyczny," interviewed by Łukasz Chmielewski, *www.alejakomiksu.com*, May 9, 2011.

¹⁴ Aleksandra Niemojewska, "Boom Na Historię," *www.uwarzamrze.pl*, August 25, 2016.

The publications serve to assure the young that there is a Polish history beyond the one taught to their parents, who were spoon fed the communist version of Polish history and were encouraged not to question the official categorization of villains and heroes. How open will this version be? Time will tell if we are seeing one official version of history replaced by another.

Why no left-wing history? The Left has abdicated its historical role in favor of social issues, but it is also associated with communism. It may not be easy to write a history of the Polish workers movement because, ultimately, we see the Gulag and PRL. But we are a long way from that, just as investigating Polish anti-Semitism in the 1930s is a long way from Jedwabne and allegations of participation in the Holocaust.¹⁵

PATRIOTIC CLOTHING: IF YOU'VE GOT IT, FLAUNT IT

This is a recent phenomenon, particularly on Warsaw's streets, where it is possible to see teenagers and young people wearing T-shirts printed with the brassard and anchor symbols of the AK, the Accursed Soldiers, the *husaria* (the heavy cavalry of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), and the 303 Squadron (the famous Polish RAF squadron in the Battle of Britain). Even the arcane is represented: the coat of arms of the Republic of Three Nations—Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, which was the ideal for which the rebels of the 1863 Uprising fought. More ominous is the rallying cry “Śmierć Wrogom Narodu!” (Death to the enemies of the nation).¹⁶

August in Poland sees two major anniversaries: the Warsaw Uprising and the 1920 Battle of Warsaw. On both occasions, such clothing is highly visible, a uniting force, as one supporter put it, rather than a divisive one, as the liberal magazines *Polityka* and *Newsweek* would have it. The latter argue that because the Polish youth is deprived of adequate role models and the symbolism of a new Poland beguiled by the mate-

¹⁵ On why there is no left-wing history see, Radio interview with Prof. Adam Leszczyński PAN, *Światopogląd*, July 26, 2016.

¹⁶ To see a selection of patriotic t-shirts and accessories visit the following websites: www.surgepolonia.pl; www.redisbad.pl.

rialism that membership of EU seemed to promise, instead have turned to atavistic symbols of a much more militant (others would say self-confident) Poland. A Polish teenager can rightfully feel both proud and part of a lineage of military prowess stretching back to the medieval period.¹⁷ Of course, his or her choice of T-shirt is selective and cannot reflect the nuances of Polish history in a single image or slogan (which misses the point of wearing one). The debate is about drawing the line between healthy pride and ugly nationalism.¹⁸

Symbolism and dress are important and have been historically. It can be argued that this stretches back to the eighteenth century when Polish Sarmatian noblemen proudly displayed their eastern kafbans and punk hairstyles and, thus, their allegiance to the stubborn, proud, conservative, and eastward-looking strain of Polish consciousness. Progressives took their cue from France and wore wigs and frock coats. In an age when conservatives and liberals wear the same brand of sneakers and have the same smart phones, this difference in symbolism is significant.

POP-CULTURIZATION: BRANDING HISTORY

Every war becomes a war film eventually. The “pop-culturization” of Polish history is no recent phenomenon. Maybe we should not be too harsh, since this is happening everywhere, especially if we review the pop-cultural aspects of American or British cinema or television, namely the view of the Second World War not as a close-run slug-ging match redeemed by alliances as cynical as those of our enemies, but as a series of heroic, herculean commando raids.

Polish history has undergone such a process too.¹⁹ As with those of the West, the Polish versions are enjoyable, but must be taken with the same grain of salt. *Kolombowie* (a saga set during the Warsaw

¹⁷ On nostalgia for the war see, Adam Szostkiewicz, “Duch wojny krąży nad Europą: Czekanie na wojnę,” *Polityka*, no. 27, June 29, 2016.

¹⁸ See television report on misuse of the PW anchor symbol, *TVN Warszawa*, August 24, 2016. Regarding ‘s, see Z Antonim Ferencym “Odzyskać Polskę Walczącą,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 2016.

¹⁹ For example, see Dr. Marcin Zaremba, interviewed by Paweł Sulik, *Post Factum*, TOK FM, August 1, 2016.

Uprising charting the doom of the AK and its young fighters, the generation born after independence in 1918); *Czterej Pancerni i Pies* (a television series following the fortunes of a Polish T34 tank crew and their pet dog); *Stawka Większa niż Życie* (a Polish secret agent in the Wehrmacht working for Soviet intelligence); and currently *Miasto '44* (a war film about the Warsaw Rising) and *Czas Honoru* (a popular television series about secret agents who parachuted into occupied Poland), are all hugely entertaining, popular, and beguiling. Therein, lies their strength.

Companies are getting in on the action too. Bank PKO BP sponsored a huge billboard based on patriotic themes on Warsaw's main Rondo Dmowskiego at the prime location of the junction of Aleja Jerozolimskie and Ulica Marszałkowska. PGIING, the state energy producer, sponsored a commemorative walk to mark Józef Piłsudski's legions of 1914, pictures of which took up the inside cover of *Historia Do Rzeczy* with the tag-line "We warm Polish hearts!" One company even proposed an "Accursed Soldiers" energy drink aimed at the youth market, i.e., the very same young people who wear the T-shirts. Patriotism sells, especially in 2016.²⁰

JAN T. GROSS: COUNTING THE BODIES IN JEDWABNE

He is the *bête noire* of current Polish historiography. The great controversialist, he is either responsible for illuminating the darkest corners of Polish behavior during the German occupation or poisoning Polish self-image (a *nestbeschmutzer*), depending on your view.²¹

Arguably his most famous work is *Neighbors*, a controversial account of Polish inhabitants' massacre of their Jewish co-residents in the village of Jedwabne in eastern Poland in 1941, during the period between the retreat of Soviet occupation forces and the German es-

²⁰ On the commercialization of Accursed Soldiers "brand," see Marek Bartosiński, "Energia 'żołnierzy wyklętych' w puszcze," interviewed by Aleksander Gurgul, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 16, 2016.

²¹ For a critical overview of J.T. Gross, see Dr. Karolina Wigura, interview by Instytut Socjologii University of Warsaw Radio, *TOK FM*. A rare voice of moderation in the debate about the culture of remembrance can be found at the following link. <http://audycje.tokfm.pl/audycja/Prawda-Nas-Zaboli/87>

establishment of their authority in the region.²² This and subsequent works like *Fear* and *Golden Harvest* subverted, above all, the romantic notion of Poland as a heroic nation. And indeed, he has set out to confirm the notion of the Poles as inveterate and murderous anti-Semites. He has attracted much academic and general criticism and presses all the right buttons when it comes to puncturing Polish *amour-propre*.

President Aleksander Kwasniewski made a public apology to the victims in July 2001, which enraged patriotic (conservative, PiS supporting) sentiment further. Poles simply did not behave that way, look at Yad Vashem and the Righteous of Nations!; look at the Ulma family or Irena Sendler!²³ This type of response culminated in the absurd in July 2016, when the Minister of Education, Anna Zalewska, when pressed during an interview about Jedwabne, could not bring herself to say that Poles had ultimately committed the atrocity, but instead cited “anti-Semites,” and added that there were “historical complications” to the issue. The new director of the IPN, Jarosław Szarek, squarely blamed the Germans for the massacre during his televised interview for the job.²⁴

Gross’s critics cite the numbers involved and the unreliability of the witnesses. The critics though, have a point. Gross has a cavalier attitude to body counts (see below) and the debate frequently centers on whether there were 300–400 victims as the IPN investigators calculated or the much larger 1200–1400 victims as Gross maintains. Was it the Poles with German supervision, or the Germans with Polish assistance? The debate always seems to get stuck on the numbers.

The wider context is left unexplained. The pressures on Polish society applied by the Germans that led to the opening of age-old and recent fissures are rarely understood. The universal lesson that Jedwabne could teach us, namely just how thin “civilization” is and how

²² Jan T. Gross, *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001).

²³ The Ulma family of Markowa village near Rzeszów was executed by the Germans in 1944 as a reprisal for sheltering their Jewish neighbours. Irena Sendler was a member of the Jewish Support group Żegota in occupied Warsaw and has been credited with saving over 2500 Jewish children from certain death in the Warsaw Ghetto.

²⁴ Minister Zaleska on Jedwabne and Kielce. Anna Zalewska, interviewed by Monika Olejnik, *Kropka nad I*, TVN, July 12, 2016.

possible it is to release our inner demons, given the perfect storm of circumstances, whether too much authority or the absence of it. Jedwabne has become a totem. Poles could not even unify to applaud *Ida* the Oscar-winning film by Paweł Pawlikowski. Even though the issue dealt with the massacre of Jewish inhabitants in an eastern village by their Polish neighbors and was balanced by a Pole-hating Jewish judge as one of the main characters, the film was seen as anti-Polish. The nuances were forgotten and one dominant line of dispute emerged: the Poles as anti-Semites. Critics dubbed the film “*Gn-Ida*,” or rotten. The same reaction, or over-reaction, met the earlier *Pokłosie*, which dealt with a similar subject. The lead actor, Maciej Stuhr was on the receiving end of an avalanche of internet hate. For the moment, a large part of the Polish response to the events of the war is a response to Gross himself.²⁵

In June 2017, Adam Bodnar, the Commissioner for Human Rights (nominated to the job by Civic Platform, the leftist grouping in parliament), landed himself in hot water with the government and its supporters when commenting on Prime Minister Szydło’s speech at Auschwitz. On June 14, 2017, she raised a furore in liberal circles. Essentially her words advanced the idea that genocide emerges when a government cannot protect the security of its own, and was interpreted as an attack on the immigration policy of the West and a justification for PiS’s anti-immigration stance. These comments were met with scandal and shock from the liberal media as well as tweets from Donald Tusk. Bodnar’s response was to remind us that some Poles took an active part in the Holocaust. Shock and scandal then emerged from the right. Bodnar felt pressured to issue a public apology and clarification. Scandal and shock all round then. The first casualty of Poland’s culture wars is its thin skin.

²⁵ Jan T. Gross, “Oni Zlikwidowali Rzeczywistość,” interviewed by Aleksandra Pawlicka, *Newsweek Polska*, July 11, 2016.

MUSEUM OF THE SECOND WORLD WAR: GIVING WAR A CHANCE

The accepted narrative about the Second World War still hangs over our thinking. Its awkward nuances are buried under warm and safe notions of the “last good war.” Conservative Poland still operates on the basis of the narrative that it was the first country to resist Hitler, the nation that saved many of its Jewish citizens, and the nation that suffered the most. Amos Oz’s quip that Jews and Poles compete with each other over who suffered the most is apt: two chosen nations, but citizens of one republic; a family dispute over who took the most punishment. Poland’s place in the global conflict waxed and waned in importance, and ultimately it was the global context that mattered despite the blood, sweat, and tears. China, the US, and Japan in Asia and the clash between Germany and Russia in Europe (still unresolved) and the role of the US; these were the main theaters and themes of the war, and they are difficult to swallow. In this case Britain has an analogous narrative to Poland—an overestimation of its ultimate importance or, at least, the story of fading relevance from 1940–45.

The establishment of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, which opened in March 2017, has set the scene for friction between the global picture and the Polish experience in terms of getting the balance between the two right and placing the correct emphasis.²⁶ Indeed, the Minister of Culture Piotr Gliński had commissioned three reports from eminent pro-government historians and journalists charged with investigating the balance. Their findings were published, and although details given, especially to the press, were slim, the main thrust of their argument was that there was too much concentration on the pathos of war, the suffering of civilians, and not enough on the virtues that wartime calls forth and even demands: heroism, self-sacrifice, patriotism; in other words, not enough Poland. Dr. Piotr Niwiński summed up the evaluation with the statement, “war hardens.”²⁷

Professors Timothy Snyder and Norman Davies, both on the board of the museum at the time, protested the manipulation by the govern-

²⁶ Jacek Tomczuk, “Chichot Historii,” *Newsweek Polska*, May 9, 2016.

²⁷ Krzysztof Katka, “Odtajnione recenzje Muzeum II Wojny. Zgodnie z zamówieniem PiS są miażdżące. Bo wojna ma ‘hartować człowieka,’” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 12, 2016.

ment. Davies resigned citing that the affair smacked of “Bolshevism.” Snyder wrote up his protest in *The New York Review of Books*.

The museum is to be merged with the not-yet-built museum for the Battle of Westerplatte. The latter commemorates the German battle to take a Polish army supply station near Gdańsk harbor, which began on September 1, 1939 and lasted seven days. The stand was indeed a heroic one with the small garrison facing heavy naval gunfire at point blank range. They surrendered after all hope of relief evaporated. The general narrative is that Westerplatte is where the first shots of the Second World War were fired (rather than Spain or China) and is the site where commemorations are held at dawn each September 1. Here is Poland at the center of world events!

The move to merge the two may be seen as an attempt by the patriotic heroic supporters to muscle in on their liberal “pity of war” colleagues. A museum to the prosaic fact that the war was something that most people tried to get through as best they could and that only a minority was villainous or heroic may not attract many Poles.²⁸ However, Poles may be forced to acknowledge the fact that the British at Kohima or the Americans in the Pacific (or the Japanese for that matter) fought just as bravely as the Poles at Monte Cassino; that the fate of Russian POWs in German hands was every bit as difficult as Poles in Soviet camps; that Warsaw shared the fate of Nanking and was not unique; and that the Polish experience and the universal experience of the war are one and the same. The auction looks set to begin.

The dichotomy could be a false one, since not even liberal historians or publications doubt the heroism of those Poles who displayed it. All Poles are patriotic but the critic is dubbed as un-patriotic.

Since the opening of the museum, tempers have cooled somewhat, helped by the appointment of a new museum director. Perhaps attendance numbers will be the final arbiter. According to Polish media sources, over 150,000 have visited since the opening. In late 2017, the new board made alterations in emphasis by adding a film on Poland’s experience made by the IPN.²⁹ Moreover, it may be worth pointing out that it is not just conservatives who are prone to the demands of a

²⁸ Ryszarda Socha “Muzeum Wojny i Wojna Muzeów,” *Polityka*, no. 18 (April 27, 2016).

²⁹ Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7MSG4Q-4as>

historical policy in their museums; liberals also face these demands. Polish criticisms of the European Union's museum, the House of European History, may be justified on this point.³⁰

WOŁYŃ: TIT FOR TAT

In an example of what has been termed “conservative post-modernism”—relativizing truth—PiS historians have tackled the Wołyń massacres of July 1943. In this case, it is argued that while Poles could not possibly have committed a massacre such as Jedwabne because they were neighbours, *Ukrainian* neighbours committed violence that was much worse.

The event is little known.³¹ Set against a background of increasing Polish and Ukrainian tensions since the 1930s, matters came to a bloody head when the militants of the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army), the military wing of the OUN (Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists) headed by Stepan Bandera, were ordered to wipe out the Polish presence in Wołyń (Volhynia) Province, while the German occupiers observed. This was the ethnically mixed region of eastern Poland occupied first by the Soviets and then by the Germans. By 1943, the OUN ordered a policy of extermination, sensing that it was necessary to cleanse all the territory of a future Ukraine of its former enemies. Over 100,000 Poles died, as well as Ukrainians, Czechs, and Jews. For the OUN, the main showdown was the fight for Ukrainian statehood against the encroaching Red Army; consequently, they needed to purge the future, ethnically pure Ukraine of all undesirables. The chief weapons were the axe or knife and the intent to use it often against neighbors. Polish reprisals claimed over 20,000 Ukrai-

³⁰ See “Jak Mamy Myśleć o Dziejach Europy,” *Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus*, no. 40 (October 7–8, 2017).

³¹ Grzegorz Motyka, *Od rzezi wołyńskiej do Akcji “Wista” : konflikt polsko-ukraiński 1943–1947* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2011); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (London: Vintage, 2011); Władysław and Ewa Siemaszko, *Ludobójstwo dokonane przez nacjonalistów ukraińskich na ludności polskiej Wołynia 1939–1945*, Vols. 1 and 2 (Warszawa: Wydawn. von borowiecky 2000); and Wawrzyniec Konarski, “Wołyń—przemilczane ludobójstwo,” interviewed by Robert Walenciak, *Przegląd*, July 4, 2016.

nian lives. In a bloody war, this action reached Breughellesque levels of horror.

The PiS government has a point in calling this a genocide, going a level higher than the earlier IPN definition of “ethnic cleansing with the characteristics of genocide.” The Sejm almost unanimously ratified a declaration condemning the action as “genocide” and declared that July 11 was to be the commemoration of the victims of the massacre.³² The thrust is to make Ukrainians admit this and somehow make them disavow Bandera as their iconic leader. This directly subverts the Ukrainian creation myth places Bandera at the center (indeed, earlier Ukrainian authorities had renamed the Moscow Prospect in Kiev after Bandera). The Ukrainian IPN has other priorities, namely stressing that the OUN and UPA fought primarily against the Soviets. The Wołyń and eastern Galician massacres were, in effect, a secondary theater of operations for the Ukrainians, albeit a very bloody one. They are certainly reluctant to bow to Polish pressure and admit genocide. The Polish side shows no sign of compromise either. A couple of days after the Polish vote, a Ukrainian MP put forward a motion in the Ukrainian parliament condemning Polish genocide against Ukrainians in the 1930s.³³ It seems that this controversy is the reverse of the Jedwabne debate. The Ukrainians are the ones unable to come to terms with their role as perpetrators in Wołyń similar to the Poles in Jedwabne and Kielce.³⁴

President Poroschenko expressed his regret at the decision to commemorate the event, despite paying homage to the slaughtered when he was in Warsaw for the 2016 NATO summit. Defense Minister Macierewicz further inflamed the situation a few days later when he implicated Russia as the instigator of the atrocities behind the scenes.³⁵ The spat is still simmering. In November 2017, Foreign Minister Wi-

³² On the IPN and Ukraine, see Marek Kozubal, “Wołk pod lupą śledczych,” *Rzeczpospolita*, August 5, 2016. , see Andrzej Szeptycki, “Prawo do sądów i ocen,” *Rzeczpospolita*, August 2, 2016.

³³ , see Andrzej Szeptycki, “Dlaczego Polski Narodowiec nie lubi Ukraińców,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, July 11, 2016.

³⁴ See Łukasz Jasina, “Polskie ‘Bękarty Wojny,’” *Rzeczpospolita —Plus Minus*, October 1, 2016.

³⁵ Piotr Andrusieczko, “Ukraińcy o polskim ludobójstwie,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 5, 2016. For the report see “Kaczyński: Na Wołyniu było ludobójstwo,” *Rzeczpospolita*, July 12, 2016.

told Waszczykowski stated that he wished to bar any Ukrainian with overt anti-Polish convictions from entering the country. The director of the Ukrainian Institute of National Remembrance, Wołodymyr Wiatrowycz, countered by describing the newly-mounted plaque commemorating the Wołyn massacres on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Warsaw as one which memorializes “chekists.”³⁶

**BOLEK AND THE IPN: WHATEVER HAPPENED TO THE HEROES OR
*QUIS CUSTODIET IPSOS CUSTODIES?***

Who should be the custodian of national memory: individuals, historians with their jealousies and disputes, or state or quasi-state institutions?

In 1998, the Polish state formed the Instytut Pamięci Narodowej (Institute of National Remembrance, IPN) to be the repository of the national conscience and its sensitive archives. The Institute is a curious mix between an academic research body and court. According to statute, it is tasked with: preserving the memory of the victims, losses, and damage suffered by the Polish nation during World War Two and its aftermath (meaning 1939–89); preserving the patriotic traditions of the Polish nation’s struggles with its occupiers, both Nazi and communist; prosecuting crimes against peace and war crimes; and fighting to compensate all those oppressed by the state, which violated human rights. It has its branches nationwide, hosts international conferences, and co-operates with a range of international research institutions.

A walk round the bookshop in its education center on Warsaw’s Marszałkowska Street reveals the wealth of its publishing efforts. There are heavyweight volumes deal with recent Polish history, analyses of regional resistance movements during the war and beyond, as well as comic books about heroes of the resistance for all ages, and board games about, for example, 303 Squadron (see above). Pop culture competes with or complements serious history.

³⁶ <https://tvnwarszawa.tvn24.pl/informacje,news,nowe-tablice-na-grobie-nieznanego-zolnierza-upamietniaja-czekistow,245843.html>.

The IPN runs a full monthly educational program. June 2017 included a concert to commemorate the children of Warsaw during the Uprising of 1944, film recordings of PRL cuisine, an international conference on the Polish vision of and evaluations of communism post-1939, a lecture in a debate series entitled “Between Swastika and Red Star” on the subject of the Augustów operation in July 1945, a meeting on the hidden mass graves in Łączki, a documentary film on the Accursed Soldiers (see section above), and a film on the Radom demonstrations in June 1976.³⁷

WHAT IS ALL THIS FOR?

Why does this institution, which, on the face of it, performs a vital educational function in revealing hidden and shameful truths about the PRL, attract so much opprobrium from the liberal opposition? In October 2016, Grzegorz Schetyna, the leader of Civic Platform, called for its liquidation together with that of the CBA, the *Centralny Biuro Antykorupcyjny* (Central Anti-corruption Bureau) as part of a pre-manifesto declaration given at his party conference. Thus, he lumped the main anti-corruption agency, the Polish version of the FBI, together with an academic institution. One of the arguments about dismantling the CBA is that it is a “super” police force that will strike fear in and paralyze the governing party’s political opponents. By lumping the two together, Schetyna seemed to be equating the two bodies.³⁸

Joanna Mucha, a leading PO MP said that the CBA is no longer “reformable” (despite being established by PO). She heaped on the bile: “And that history as presented by the IPN was ‘falsified and mis-

³⁷ The “Augustów Sweep” occurred in the northeast region of Poland and was a joint Soviet-Polish Communist counterinsurgency operation against the anticommunist Home Army. Łączki refers to an area in the Powązki military cemetery in Warsaw where the bodies of victims who had been executed by the Communist authorities in the 1940s and 1950s were secretly buried. Archaeologists, including those from the IPN, are excavating the site. The industrial city of Radom was the scene of violent anti-government protests, which were bloodily quelled.

³⁸ <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/po-chce-zlikwidowac-cba-i-ipn-szef-instytutu-pamieci-narodowej-odpowiada-na-atak-grzegorza-schetyny-6043645156742273a>.

represented . . . What's happening with Lech Wałęsa, what's happening with research into so-called 'new' history, is unacceptable." Tellingly though, she added, "This is not to say that the country does not need some sort of policy of remembrance." Schetyna stated, the "manipulation of facts cannot serve historical research, neither can the unworthy exploitation of history and the ruling party's promotion of its own ideology. We cannot allow their destruction of heroes and legends." We are back to heroes and legends again.

The IPN's current director, Dr. Jarosław Szarek, riposted that Schetyna did not actually give any examples of such manipulation. After citing the educational work of the Institute, He added the the IPN is not connected with any party and that it wishes only to relate history to the next generation. "Today, the young generation demands true history, and we can't see this, for example, in the liquidation of history lessons in schools. No one has dictated the sympathies of the young, it's their need."

The example of a re-orientation in interpretation occurred when the present director was appointed. During a preliminary interview in a Sejm (Parliament) committee, he was asked who killed the Jewish inhabitants of Jedwabne (see section above). Adroitly, he replied the Germans, attributing overall responsibility for the atrocity to the occupying powers. The Polish inhabitants of Jedwabne were not to blame; someone else did it. Critics said that he said the right things to get the job. The IPN may have been tasked with holding up a mirror to Poland's recent past but it could be one from a funhouse.³⁹

The late Dr. Janusz Kurtyka, the director of the IPN from 2005 to 2010 played a key role in shaping the role of the IPN and historical policy, together with other historians such as Tomasz Wiścicki. A Western historian's blood may chill when they hear the phrase "historical policy": this smacks of the jackboot and blue pencil. Polish conservatives can present an argued case for such a policy since any debate has to be set against a context that has been never been experienced on Western university campuses.

For Kurtyka, what when on during the communist and postcommunist periods matters, and that was falsification, blatant cover-ups,

³⁹ <http://wyborcza.pl/10,82983,20434509,czy-pis-napisze-historie-od-nowa-jaroslaw-szarek-nowym-prezesem.html?disableRedirects=true>.

and manipulations, which must now to be redressed. We need to replace the missing pieces of the puzzle, and only then can we begin discussing the nuanced stuff that comprises historical debate. Filip Musiał, director of IPN Kraków, writes in his biographical essay: “The return to normality, according to him [Kurtyka], was therefore only possible after overcoming the ‘fluctuations of consciousness’ that characterize a post-totalitarian society. But national stabilization is only possible through the connection with the tradition of independence and the ditching of the post-communist heritage.” Thus, there is a “true” Polish history underneath the communist past and post-communist present. Is the latter, therefore, some sort of un-history to be airbrushed out of consciousness as merely some aberration?

Kurtyka was an opponent of the “pedagogics of shame,” i.e. criticizing previous ancestral decisions. “We need to build up in our country a sense of pride in our historical heritage. This is something that has been lacking or has been stifled by some opinion forming circles....” History is just one element in state building, not a separate independent way of thinking, and it can and should be taken from the national to the international level. “Historical policy is the legitimization of policy and national interest in the eyes of its own society and that of external opinion through historical argument.”

“Historical policy should be based on historical truth. It should draw on that great space that has been created by academic freedom, and this means academic conflict, debate, and the outlining of historical currents with which we disagree, and which have an obvious place in the debate.” So there is some allowance for dissent. But does this mean engaging in a debate with a Marxist or liberal?

The IPN is seen as an integral part of Poland’s culture wars. It is charged with knocking heroes off their pedestals and replacing them with new ones, all the while failing to realize that they all have feet of clay (see *Accursed Soldiers*, Bolek). Rather than fostering a healthy critical attitude towards history, which may be the hallmark of a mature society, it promotes a robust view of Polish history, especially to the young and especially those at university level.⁴⁰ Poland’s historians

⁴⁰ See the introductory page on website of the IPN: <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-ipn/2, Institute-of-National-Remembrance-Commission-for-the-Prosecution-of-Crimes-again.html>.

are ideological warriors too. Both postcommunists and conservatives (regarded as reactionaries) can at least agree on one thing: the need for heroes to lead the way.⁴¹

This is the background to the case of the role of President Lech Wałęsa. In this debate, his critics in the government and public are scoring palpable and convincing hits on his tenure as president of a free Poland and his leadership of the Solidarity trade union in the 1980s. If part of the historian's job is to redefine and reassess world-historical figures, then the problem with Wałęsa is that he is both a historic figure, and one that occupies the immediate and recent space of living memory, current affairs, and politics.⁴²

In April 2016, the widow of the former head of the intelligence services, General Waldemar Kiszczak, presented the IPN with documents that included the file marked "Bolek," the codename of Lech Wałęsa when he acted as a paid informant for the security services during the 1970s. The people he informed on were colleagues at the shipyard he designated as subversives; later they were hounded until they quit their jobs, victimized, and rendered unemployable. He obtained 6000 zlotys over the years, a tidy sum, which his wife attributed to lottery winnings. His services were dispensed with in 1976.

Although the gist of Wałęsa's service was known and exposed by historian Sławomir Cenckiewicz in 2008, the content of the file was devastating, especially to the idea and legacy of Solidarity and the "Polish August" as a romantic Polish uprising that actually succeeded.⁴³ The former president's rebuttal was inchoate and rambling, and his assertion that he cooperated in order to play the security service against each other sounded less and less convincing and more and more panic-stricken. He said the people on whom he informed were little and insignificant, and it was all part of his master plan.

⁴¹ Biuletyn IPN no 4 (137) April 2017 Pamięć a Polityka Historyczna. Essays on the philosophy of an historical policy as espoused by Dr. Janusz Kurtyka, Dr. Tomasz Merta, and President Lech Kaczyński. Biuletyn IPN no 3 March 2017 see essay Kajeta Rajski Pokolenie odzyskane? pp 62–67. Biuletyn IPN no 1–2 January 2017 Filip Musiał essay Wybór tradycji. Między Wolnością a Posttotalitaryzmem. Preface by Dr. Jaorsław Szarek with an overview of the current state of the political IPN mission. P 5. Essay by Filip Musiał on the postcommunist heritage, 7–19.

⁴² See Jan Lityński, "Zdrowy rdzeń mówi: 'Dość,'" *Rzeczpospolita*, July 12, 2016.

⁴³ Timothy Garton Ash, *The Polish Revolution: Solidarity*, (London: Coronet Books, 1985).

PiS had always maintained that the transformation was tainted, that it was a sordid set up between the Marxist elite and the security services at the Round Table talks. In footage taken of the talks shown on public television, the viewer saw a convivial banquet heavily spiked with alcohol, bonhomie, and mutual admiration. This was the tipping point, the moment when workers lost, and Poland was set on its breakneck rush to a free market economy in which fortunes were made very quickly.⁴⁴ Instead of an uprising, it was another partition.

It was during the 1970s when Wałęsa signed the loyalty agreement to cooperate with the security services (his critics may point out that many resisted and did not sign), but it is his presidency in 1992 that is compromised. When looked at in this light, his actions to destroy his secret files or approve transfers of wealth, and his part in the downfall of the Olszewski government in 1992 may betray a man still in the orbit, if not under the direct influence, of the security services. This may lead an observer to the unpalatable conclusion that it was not Wałęsa who was the central figure, but Kiszczak. Both the intellectuals and the spooks successfully manipulated Wałęsa, with his ego and lack of acumen. The thought is too much to bear. In this case, PiS contradicts the romantic notion of the Polish uprising.

For the left and perhaps worldwide, Wałęsa's position and iconic status are beyond criticism. He remains the central figure in the drama. The very notion of questioning his centrality is absurd. PiS maintains a different picture, which stresses the other personalities that have been airbrushed out of the picture, such as Anna Walentynowicz. Under Jarosław Kaczyński's leadership, the party has also made a concerted effort to place the late Lech Kaczyński in a more prominent position in the narrative of the 1980s, a time in which he was a very minor actor. Is this repositioning or revisionism, or is it a personal vendetta? Lech Kaczyński is gradually being moved up in importance; he figured large in the Solidarity exhibition at the 2016 NATO Summit, and Wałęsa was airbrushed out of the picture.

⁴⁴ Cezary Gmyz and Antoni Dudek, *Taśma z Magdalenki*, TVP, February 26, 2016. This is a televised documentary showing recordings of the discussions between the opposition and the government that forms the creation myth of PiS.

Supporters argued that Wałęsa's cooperation with the security apparatus was a price worth paying for a bloodless revolution. PiS argues that it was a set up. Perhaps the real unsung heroes of Solidarity are those "little and insignificant" people whom Wałęsa ruined, and after whom no airport has been named.

WARSAW, '44 AND '16

Commemorations of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising in 2016 were mired in controversy, and they illustrated the forging of a link between the Uprising and the Smoleńsk air crash of 2010. Defense Minister Macierwicz had earlier decreed that together with the memorialization of the person or persons specifically being honored, a roll call of the deceased of the air crash was to be held at every public ceremony at which there is an army honor guard present.⁴⁵

Macierwicz has made no secret about the fact that he regards the accident as an assassination. In spring 2015, he set up a committee to investigate the matter again, along with the shortcomings of the previous government's handling of the aftermath of the crash. This action was taken with one eye on likely prosecution. He has consistently used the word "*polegli*," meaning fallen in battle, to describe the deaths of those who did indeed die in the line of duty. This is a semantic usage but a clever and skillful one, as it conflates an air disaster that has not yet been fully explained, with the "glorious dead" of war.

The commemorations to honor the dead of Warsaw's most tragic episode normally have an honor guard present. The veterans' association protested this stipulation and wanted a roll call of only their own dead, arguing that it was fitting to honor Smoleńsk, but not at this particular ceremony. An uneasy stand off occurred, but some form of compromise was reached on July 25, 2016. Instead of the Smoleńsk roll call, the late president Lech Kaczyński and other significant individuals linked to the Warsaw Uprising Museum and similar institutions would be mentioned. The honor guard would stay. The mayor

⁴⁵ On PiS and Smoleńsk, see Paweł Wroński, "W szóstą rocznicę katastrofy smoleńskiej: Wojna PiS o duszę narodu," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 11, 2016; and on PiS and AK, see Marek Beylin, "Zawłaszczycy Tradycje," *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 2016.

of Warsaw, Hanna Gronkiewicz-Waltz, sent a letter to Macierewicz to ask for the name of the late Władysław Bartosiewicz to be included. Bartosiewicz, a popular media figure, the former foreign minister, and advisor to the PO government, is a figure of odium for the right. He is seen as having been too ecumenical with Germans and Jews, although he was an insurgent during the rising itself. It was feared his name would add “oil to the fire.” He and others from the previous PO regime had been roundly booed and whistled at earlier such events. Not all the veterans were pleased.⁴⁶

Macierewicz consciously placed the Smoleńsk tragedy in the same rank as the Warsaw Uprising: a peacetime accident with a wartime battle, and by implication with the tradition of Polish uprisings, which were tragic failures but moral victories. “*Gloria Victis*,” glory to the defeated, is inscribed on the monument in Warsaw’s Powązki Cemetery. Macierewicz’s message is clear: the nation may be beaten, but it cannot be conquered.

CONCLUSION: UNFINISHED BUSINESS

“When you dug up the bones of our heroes . . . you dug up the nation,” Defense Minister Macierewicz said to Professor Szwagrzyk, the head of the archaeological team that exhumed the bodies of Accursed Soldiers. It is the nation that pulls Poland through its difficulties, and this is a blood loyalty rather than a modern civic one. Historical policy is shaped in the light of a resurgent nation once again finding its feet after a quarter century of borrowed and failed liberal economic and social templates imported from the West.

In March 2016, Szydło returned from a resounding defeat in Brussels, where she failed to secure the re-nomination of Donald Tusk to the presidency of the European Commission. Poland was outvoted by twenty-seven to one, and was criticized for introducing personal

⁴⁶ Jerzy S Majewski, “Powstanie: obchody bez zgody,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 2016. See the report on the commemorations and veterans by Janina Blikowska, “Apel o Prawdę,” *Rzeczpospolita*, August 2, 2016. See also Jerzy S. Majewski and Tomasz Urzykowski, “Powstanie Warszawskie. Bez gwizdów, ale znów z wiecem. Na Powązkach zabrakło milczenia,” *Gazeta Wyborcza*, August 2, 2016.

animus against Tusk into the debate. Yet Szydło was greeted as a conquering hero upon her return to Poland. This was the point. She had won a moral victory, one of principle. Poland was standing firm against the shifting sands of Western European politics. Her appeals to Europe to rise from its knees regarding the Islamic threat and to Poland to leave behind the past twenty years of political conformism were in the same vein. She drew upon the deep romanticism in Polish thinking and the historical conflicts outlined above. The principled stand, even if defeated, is a victory, and in the end, it may even ultimately be vindicated.

In the light of German and Russian historical policies, both well financed and organized, Poland has to fight back even more aggressively with its own.⁴⁷ So PiS may have the last laugh. For the moment though, soft power is for softies.

⁴⁷ See “Czy Niemiecka Wizja Historii Musi Wygrać?” *Rzeczpospolita Plus Minus*, no. 40 (October 7–8, 2017); Patria Nostra/IPN historical conference “Prawda historyczna a odpowiedzialność prawna. Rozważania na gruncie zniekształcenia pamięci o niemieckich zbrodniach popełnionych podczas II Wojny Światowej,” held November 8, 2017, <http://patrianostra.org.pl/5/konferencje>. For the counterpoint, see Professor Andrzej Friszke, “Fałszerze historii,” *Newsweek* 47, November 6–12 2017.