

Poland

Culture of remembrance

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Poland, my country, we know it as it looks now. But for the last 220 years we could not easily find the liberated Polish state on the map. Why? Let's go back to the year 1918, to the end of the WWI. This year signifies something special to the Poles; in 1918 the country of Poland 'came back'. It came back on the map after 123 years of being occupied and under the dominion of three empires: the Austrian, the Prussian and the Russian Empire. The price of this victory was of course steep. A total of 2 million Polish troops fought with the armies of the three occupying powers, 450,000 died and close to one million were wounded. Several hundred thousand Polish civilians were moved to labour camps in Germany and 800,000 were deported by the Czarist forces to the East. The remembrance of a country that didn't exist was one of the most important topics of the cultural arts, specifically literature and music. Many books were written and many a piece were composed in which one could find references to freedom or liberation. We call these examples works "in order to keep the polish the spirit and soul".

The liberated state was dreamed of for many years. When it appeared, the happiness didn't last for a long time. Poland had at the time very serious inside conflicts and when building its own governmental system it was too romantic to think that in an environment of growing powers, like the Third Reich and Soviet Russia, the country would be left untouched. German philosopher Edmund Husserl would say that Poland was so deep within the Lifeworld (Lebenswelt) -sometimes defined as a bubble- that it is hard to put on an equal rule with the others. In his "Crisis of the European Science and Transcendental Phenomenology (published in 1936) he wrote: "In whatever way we may be conscious of the world as universal horizon, as coherent universe of existing objects, we, each "I-the-man" and all of us together, belong to

the world as living with one another in the world; and the world is the world, valid for our consciousness as existing precisely through this 'living together'”¹.

World War II started on the 1st of September, 1939 with an attack on the Polish harbour in Gdańsk and with the bombing of the city of Wieluń in central Poland.

Poland was invaded by Nazi Germany from the West and on the 17th of September by the Soviet Russia from the East. The second date, after The War ended, would be forbidden to mention due to Soviet propaganda. For those who were fighting in a Home or Partisan Army during WWII, the Soviet Government would organise fake trials where a lot of them would be sentenced to jail and others just killed as they were wishing for liberation, not yet another dominion by Soviet Russia. So there were two wars. One from above, in which Polish troops worked together with the Soviet Army to defeat Nazi Germany, and one from below, to kill any resistance against the arriving communism. The year 1945 is the backdrop of a very important event: the Yalta conference. And thus, the great resettlement in Europe began.

The forced migration of Poles between 1944-1946, also known as 'the Expulsion of Poles', from Kresy (previous Eastern Borderland regions of Poland) was an official Soviet policy which targeted over a million Polish citizens. They were removed from the Polish areas annexed by the Soviet Union into Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania.

The displacement of the ethnic Poles and Germans from the eastern part of Germany was agreed upon by the Allied Forces' leaders Franklin D. Roosevelt (U.S.A.), Winston Churchill (U.K.) and Joseph Stalin (USSR) during the conferences at Tehran and Yalta. In effect, it became one of the largest of several post-war expulsions in Central and Eastern Europe which displaced a total of about twenty million people. According to official data during the state-controlled expulsions between 1945 and 1946 roughly 1,167,000 Poles were allowed to leave the westernmost republics of the Soviet Union, less than 50% of those who registered for population transfer².

1 Husserl, Edmund, *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, 1936/1970, pp. 108-109.

2 Włodzimierz Borodziej; Ingo Eser; Stanisław Jankowiak; Jerzy Kochanowski; Claudia Kraft; Witold Stankowski; Katrin Steffen (1999). Stanisław Ciesielski, ed. *Przesiedlenie ludności polskiej z Kresów Wschodnich do Polski 1944-1947* (in Polish). Warsaw: Neriton. p. 468. ISBN 83-86842-56-3.

The process is variously known as expulsion, deportation, or repatriation depending on the context. The latter term, while used officially in both communist-controlled Poland and the USSR, might be misleading, as in most cases the people leaving the area were leaving their homeland rather than returning to it. It is also sometimes referred to as the First Repatriation, in contrast with the Second Repatriation in the years 1955-1959. In a wider context, it is sometimes described as a culmination of a process of 'de-Polonisation' of the areas during and after the Second World War. The process was planned and carried out by the communist regimes of the USSR and that of post-war Poland. Many of the repatriated Poles were settled in formerly German eastern provinces after 1945, in the so-called "Recovered Territories" of the People's Republic of Poland (territories like Lower Silesia where is also the community of Oleśnica)³.

In Poland the Polish-Ukrainian conflict is still a painful memory; 1943-1948, one of the bloodiest and most brutal ethnic conflicts of the twentieth century took place. Memory of this tripartite conflict between the Polish Home Army, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA) and the communist apparatus of oppression requires many an analysis due to how difficult it was as a period.

The 'ethnic cleansing' operation against the Poles began on a large scale in Volhynia in late February, or the beginning of spring. Estimates of the number of Poles killed by the UPA in Volhynia and Galicia range from 60,000 to 100,000⁴.

At the root of the conflict lay a phenomenon that brought disastrous consequences to Poland; the identification of the cultural heritage of the Republic of Poland and of the Polish nation. Before partitioned, the word 'Poland' had meaning similar to 'United Kingdom' in which the English, Scots, Welsh and Irish co-habitate.

Collectively Remembrance should focus on the 'good examples', but there are moments that

3 Jan Czerniakiewicz (1992). *Stalinowska depolonizacja Kresów Wschodnich II Rzeczypospolitej (Stalinist de-Polonization of the Eastern Borderlands of the 2nd Republic) (in Polish)*. Warsaw: Centre for Eastern Studies, Warsaw University, p. 20.

4 Timothy Snyder, *The Reconstruction of Nations. Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, Belarus, 1569-1999*, Yale University Press. 2003. pp. 168-170, 176.

should not to be forgotten by the Nations. A great such example is the year 1968; many a country were in involved in the discussions about changing the attitude towards societies. Some were in the former Czechoslovakia. On the night of 20–21 August 1968, the Soviet Union and her main allies in the Warsaw Pact –Bulgaria, the German Democratic Republic (East Germany), Hungary and Poland – invaded the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in order to halt Alexander Dubček's Prague Spring political liberalization reforms.

In the operation, codenamed Danube, varying estimates of between 175,000 and 500,000 troops attacked Czechoslovakia; approximately 500 Czechs and Slovaks were wounded and 108 killed in the invasion. The invasion successfully stopped the liberalization reforms and strengthened the authority of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia (KSČ). The foreign policy of the Soviet Union during this era was known as the Brezhnev Doctrine⁵.

In 1989, a 'Round Table' by the Polish Government made by SOLIDARNOŚĆ (Solidarity) led Poland to liberty (First Liberation from the Soviet Block after World War II). In Europe though, the remembrance of the end of the Communist Regime is highly related to the collapsing of the Berlin Wall (Berliner Mauer) in 1989.

And nowadays, in 2015, 25 years since the transition we can speak loudly about the history and we do it so. We are organizing many projects that are related to memories of eye witnesses of The War, of the transition and of the communist period. Of those who survived the Death and Concentration Camps. Of those who came to the 'new lands', nowadays western Poland, from many different places, regions, and countries. Furthermore, within the Bridging Generations project, we have had the chance to speak also with the people that had to leave. In mean the thousands of Germans that were expelled from their houses and lands as the Poles were. Thus, those who had to leave could meet those, who had to come.

Maybe since I'm a graduate of Cultural Studies (Kulturwissenschaft) from Wrocław's University -which are related so much to the Neo-Kantianism of the Baden School (Südwestdeutsche

⁵Chafetz, Glenn (30 April 1993). Gorbachev, *Reform, and the Brezhnev Doctrine: Soviet Policy Toward Eastern Europe, 1985–1990*. Praeger Publishers. ISBN 0-275-94484-0. Retrieved 9 October 2009.

Schule) and its values (werten), so related to Rickert and Adorno- the idea of searching for values in all the Peoples' activities is so close to me. So we research the people that are close to us in Lower Silesia, Poland (Niederschlesien, Polen).

Memory is tightly related to time. Time makes one value more the 'object'. Memory is always a personal story as is the language one uses to describe the emotions related to the 'object'. That is why we switch from the collective narration about history to the personal testimonies. Relation between objects and people seems to be as old as the human race. This process is subjectively chained within all of us. That is why for some people an object would be containing values, while for some would be neutral. It's very well expressed in a Jean Francois Lyotard comment to Edmund Husserl's theory: "The importance of fundamental rules is rooted in a brain psychology organization, and a reason that we cannot prove those rules, is because they are already with us when we are born"⁶.

Mircea Eliade, the well-known historian of Religion, said that there is a specific historical time in each of our lives. In most of the cases it's the childhood. It is then that the person is building tight relations with others and the objects that are later reminding us of those who left us. That is how the even near mythical relations are build and then spoken with great emotion. Even if our childhood was during a war. All of the mind's processes then in contact with objects or photos are referring us to values. The most intimate moments of a person's life are in a relation to a precise historical moment. That is how we also build a sacrum in our environment, as Mircea Eliade would continue⁷.

Such an example is our Culture Centre/Institute in Oleśnica (former name Öls, 30 km from Wrocław/Breslau). We organised several projects about memories and life-stories and we created a proper place to house them: the Chamber of Memories. We had a chance to look back, speak with a people, create the Human Library and so share this knowledge with intergenerational and intercultural projects. The Chamber was opened on the 30th of January 2015 as it is also one of the added value results of the Bridging Generations Project.

⁶ Jean Francoise-Lyotard, *La Phénoménologie*, 1954, translated into Polish by Jacek Migasiński, Fenomenologia, Warsaw 2000, p. 15 [non-official translation from Polish – Piotr Michałowski].

⁷ Mircea Elide, *Traité d'histoire des religions*, 1949.

The stories enclosed in the objects, which the inhabitants eagerly began to share, served as the inspiration for the Community Culture Centre of Oleśnica. All together the inhabitants wrote an application to the Rural Development Program (EU Funds) for the transformation of the village's culture house into a Chamber of Memories of the Oleśnica Community in Boguszyce with the merit support of the of the Ethnographic Museum in Wrocław. Among the collections of dozens of small cars, gramophone records, old banknotes and books are also objects of everyday use, brought by resettled inhabitants from the former Eastern Polish Borderlands after 1945 (aftermath of the Yalta Conference). In the Chamber are also rural tools, old radios and sewing machines. The sense of community has increased significantly in the village of Boguszyce which for a long time was searching for its identity. The most important ingredient is of course the people, the Living Library, having shared the treasures of their memory.

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BRIDGING GENERATIONS

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