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WARSAW RISING THROUGH HISTORY

A study of the commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising in Poland

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Introduction

Poland's capital was the site of not one, but two of the major insurrections against German power during World War II. In 1943, the Jews of German-occupied Warsaw rose within the ghetto to resist the Nazi's final effort to transport the remaining population to the extermination camp of Treblinka, after which the ghetto was leveled. What remained of the city was destroyed in 1944 in a second insurrection, the largest single military effort by a European resistance movement in World War II. The 1944 Warsaw Uprising was an undertaking of the armed forces of the Polish underground state loyal to the government of the Republic of Poland in exile in London: the *Armia krajowa* or Polish Home Army (AK). Combat began on the 1st of August 1944 as part of a nationwide plan to assist the larger fight against Nazi Germany as the Soviet Union's Red Army approached from the East. These two central examples of resistance and mass death have been repeatedly confused in the mass media and popular discourse; the most notorious blunder was made by German President Roman Herzog in 1994 shortly before he appeared in Warsaw for the uprising's first public commemorative anniversary.¹

Popular analysis of the mix-up concludes that Westerners lack a fundamental awareness of the impact of the Second World War, the German occupation of its European neighbors, and the Holocaust, particularly the consequences for the inhabitants of the region that experienced them as a historical moment. Historian Timothy Snyder argues in *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* that the West has a severe deficiency of any real knowledge of how the eastern half of

¹ Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer, "The search for acceptable perspectives: German President Roman Herzog commemorates the Warsaw Uprising," in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 57-94.

Europe experienced the 20th century.² British-Polish historian Norman Davies writes in the foreword to Stanisław Likiernik's memoir of the Warsaw Uprising:

Sixty years after the Second World War, the British and American public remains poorly informed about many aspects of the conflict which moulded developments in Europe for the rest of the twentieth century. We tend to possess small, selective islands of knowledge, which serve to reinforce our own rather parochial view of the war as seen from the West. In particular, we tend to believe that all the evil of the war emanated from our enemy, the Nazi Reich, and that all the occupied countries were, in the end, 'liberated.'³

Poland's years as a Soviet satellite and founding member of the Warsaw Pact have solidified many misconceptions of the Polish experience during Second World War. The West views Poland through the prism of the Cold War as an enemy state. Knowledge of the Polish contributions to the Allied coalition are fragmentary, superseded by the country's position as the locus of German concentration camps. From a great distance in time and space, the West has the luxury of engaging with the atrocities of World War II on a theoretical basis. The particulars of Central and Eastern European history are not widely studied, and the contributions of lesser members of the Allied coalition are largely forgotten outside the strict domain of military history.

However, the tendency of historians to limit the significance of the Polish struggle under occupation to the wartime and immediate postwar years is to succumb to the same fallacy of a distinction of "before" and "after" liberation. The final thrust for independence during the Warsaw Uprising has not only been overlooked by simplistic assumptions of the West; the fate of insurgents was intentionally buried by the Soviet totalitarianism that succeeded Nazi fascism. After 1945, Stalin ensured that mention of the Uprising was suppressed. Many survivors of the conflict were jailed, deported or killed for "anti-state activities," and even after the icy grip of Stalinization

² Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe Between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).

³ Norman Davies, "Foreword," in *By Devil's Luck: A Tale of Resistance in Wartime Warsaw*, ed. Stanisław Likiernik (Edinburgh and London: Mainstream Publishing, 2001), 7.

“thawed” after 1956, the Polish Communist authorities denigrated the Uprising as the invention of a treacherous London government. The liberation for which the Warsaw insurgents fought—and the Polish approach towards independence—can only be fully realized taking into consideration the developments of the postwar world.

Ultimately, the deep confusion of the two wartime insurrections in Warsaw results from the fact that the Ghetto Uprising had been commemorated, while the Communist regime consistently refused to erect a monument to the Warsaw Uprising for more than forty years. The belated wave of interest in the Holocaust that arose in the 1960s magnified the false impression that the one and only uprising in wartime Warsaw had occurred in the Jewish ghetto. From right after the war’s conclusion in 1948, foreign visitors could see the monument dedicated to the ghetto fighters designed by Nathan Rapoport, but there was no central point or symbolic object in Warsaw on which the memory of the 1944 Uprising could focus.⁴ The inscriptions on the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier did not have a single line about the Home Army.⁵ The destruction of Warsaw was one of the great tragedies of the Second World War, yet the Polish capital’s ordeal virtually disappeared from history until, in claiming the Polish nation, the Solidarity movement made the Warsaw Uprising a point around which Poles should rally.

This thesis explores the forty-five year absence of commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising in order to understand the event’s invocation and institutionalization after the fall of Communism, once memorialization of the rebels’ heroism and the city’s losses became not only an option, but a moral necessity for the Polish people. Chapter 1 outlines popular scholarship on commemoration, providing context for the transformational bearing of World War II upon the practice and

⁴ James E. Young, “The Biography of a Memorial Icon: Nathan Rapoport’s Warsaw Ghetto Monument,” *Representations*, no. 26 (1989): 69-106.

⁵ Norman Davies, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw* (London: Macmillan, 2003), 518.

describing the influence of the Communist regime upon the function of commemoration in Poland. Chapter 2 provides a framework of the military and political history of the Uprising, setting the scene of Warsaw under occupation, delineating the players involved in the insurrection, and explaining the immediate effects of the battle. Chapter 3 describes the phases and shifting tactics of Poland's Communist authorities as they first villainized the Uprising before integrating a partial account of history into the party line. The cooptation of the Uprising by anti-Communist factions such as the Solidarity movement closes off this chapter. Finally, Chapter 4 details the embrace of the Warsaw Uprising by the Polish public after the collapse of Communism and how the story of the insurrection factored into Poland's efforts to integrate into the European continent. Addressing the insurrection through the lens of the sixty years that follow the event furthers a previously limited understanding of the long-term impact of the event on both Polish politics and the Polish national psyche.

Public attitudes toward the Warsaw Uprising operate as a barometer for the power of the Communist establishment (or, alternatively, the vigor of the opposition). Three main periods can be identified. The policy of the immediate postwar took great care to conceal history, vilifying the insurgency of the Home Army as a provocation of the treacherous "fascists." From 1956 onwards, as the foundations of the Communist grip were eroding, it became acceptable to praise the heroism of the insurgents, although the criminal tendencies of the Uprising's instigators continued to define the official scenario. This artificial vow of silence imposed on the Uprising in Poland changed dramatically with the collapse of Communism in 1989. In the 1990s, provoked by the actions of Solidarity in the previous decade, it became increasingly possible to engage in reasoned discussion about the "London camp" and its followers, and many blind spots in the existing factual information were filled by scholars. In a major reversal from the Communist period, the history of

the Uprising has become a focal point of Warsaw. Still, very few have traced the history of the event's remembrance or attempted to unpack how the Uprising's postwar treatment has influenced its portrayal, as is the object of this thesis.

Historiography

The Warsaw Uprising is not an easy topic to study. Printed sources on the insurrection and its failure are numerous, but mostly in Polish. In addition, many documents were lost or destroyed during the insurrection, so a very small percentage of eyewitness reports were actually written during or immediately after the Uprising. Furthermore, problems created by the availability of materials are further aggravated by the emotional nature of the subject, necessitating a reasonable degree of skepticism when considering firsthand reports. Lastly, the censorship of the forty-five year Communist regime has distorted some accounts, mostly those concerning the role of the Soviet Union.

Although this thesis does not directly draw from his writings, credit must be given to Adam Borkiewicz, whose monumental 1957 publication in the Polish language was the first thorough, scientific work comprehensively describing the course of the insurrection.⁶ The subsequent wave of English language scholarship spearheaded in the early 1970s by Jan Ciechanowski and George Bruce, which not only traces the sequence of events but examines the political and ideological background of the Uprising, is indebted to Borkiewicz's hard-won efforts. Most scholarship attempts to analyze the causes of the Uprising, the political and strategic concerns, international ramifications, or the validity of the Soviet refusal to assist the struggling Polish insurgents. Appraisals of the Uprising can generally be divided into two schools: one as an act of unparalleled bravery and sacrifice, the other as a collective folly typical of Poland's torturous history. The collapse of Communism in Poland in 1989 gave a boost to the former argument, as the Solidarity movement owed much of their success to their invocation of memories of the Uprising.

⁶ "Powstańcze Biogramy – Adam Józef Borkiewicz," *Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego*, 2016, <http://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/adam-borkiewicz,3985.html>.

Ultimately Norman Davies, regarded as one of the preeminent scholars on Polish history, was the one to contemporize Poland's most tragic and controversial event with his 2003 book *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw*.⁷ Davies' unflinching account of the slaughter of Polish fighters and the destruction of their capital acts as an indictment of the Western powers, assigning responsibility for Poland's oppression under Stalin to the failures of Churchill and Roosevelt. He reiterates the "romantic" position, a mythology from the 19th century through which Poland is endowed with a mission to break free of tyranny. The Polish edition was published in conjunction with the opening of the Warsaw Rising Museum that echoes this narrative of abandonment by the Allies, marking a moment of pride for former Home Army members whose recognition was long overdue.⁸

However, the elevation of the moral dignity of the Uprising may have overreached in recent years. Packed with interactive displays, photographs, video footage and miscellaneous exhibitions, the overwhelming volume of material in the Warsaw Rising Museum makes it difficult to follow the chronology of the Uprising. Instead of targeting a content-oriented takeaway, the museum chooses to instill visitors with the desperation of the rebels and the dark consequences for the city, including the creation of a Soviet puppet state. In doing so, the curators of the museum support this "romantic" stance through a high-impact experience.

Of course, the counter-tendency to romanticism abhorred insurgencies that had no chance of success. In 2001, Włodzimierz Borodziej published a "realist" history of the 1944 insurrection, drawing attention to the false pretenses under which people had been led to believe that the Uprising had a chance of success. Many testimonies document the popular support for the Uprising

⁷ Davies, *Rising '44: The Battle for Warsaw*.

⁸ Joanna Niżyńska, *The Kingdom of Significance: Miron Białoszewski and the Quotidian, the Queer, and the Traumatic* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2013), 53.

that figures in Davies' account, but the haunting reality that resisters were denied basic information often goes unsaid.

The "realist" attitude is far less prevalent, both in scholarship and in the public. This thesis seeks to demonstrate how this "realist" outlook has been delegitimized in popular opinion by its connection to the Communist regime following the Second World War. From 1944 on, the Communist authorities portrayed the insurgency as the work of irresponsible opportunists, and the realist position can venture uncomfortably close to the Communist one. It is the Communist condemnation of the Uprising that has moved Davies—and the Polish public—to embrace the insurrection so romantically. Allusion to the Warsaw Uprising has translated into an opportunity to highlight Polish virtues and downplay Polish misdeeds. A patriotic depiction of the Nazi occupation is one that reveals a time of heroic Polish resistance; any other is seen as an effective betrayal of the suffering of hundreds of thousands of Poles.

Chapter 1: Commemoration

What is commemoration?

For once, historians are in agreement: our postmodern age is obsessed with memory. Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche even propose that to be modern is to be conscious of one's own historicity, suggesting that memory has become a modern tool through which people explain the world (and themselves) in historical terms.⁹ Scholarship on commemoration focuses to a large extent on the interaction between the rise of formal schemas of remembrance and the post-Enlightenment era, as the self-evident authority of tradition was thrown into question and replaced by a self-conscious historical sensibility.

Some historians establish the rise of commemoration with a shift in public mourning practices, while others associate the new forms of representation with the development of nationalism. In his work on memory and the Great War, Jay Winter interprets the “memory boom” of the 20th century through a cultural history of mourning.¹⁰ Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann support Winter's emphasis on the cultural importance of bereavement in “Violence, Normality, and the Construction of Postwar Europe,” going so far as to declare that “the twentieth century revolves around mass death.”¹¹ Daniel Sherman traces the modern nation-state's deep connection to memory even earlier in his book, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*.¹² Sherman begins his account with Ernest Renan's 1882 identification of memory as one of the two

⁹ Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, “Introduction: Noises of the Past,” in *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, ed. Confino and Fritzsche (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 8.

¹⁰ Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2006).

¹¹ Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann, “Introduction: Violence, Normality, and the Construction of Postwar Europe,” in *Life after Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe during the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. Bessel and Schumann (Washington, D.C and Cambridge: German Historical Institute and Cambridge University Press, 2003), 1.

¹² Daniel J. Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999).

constitutive elements of the nation, and then invokes Benedict Anderson's exploration of how "selective forgetting" assists the molding and perpetuation of a nation's "imagined community." Scholars who concentrate on the rise of the modern nation-state tend to utilize a philosophical and psychological lens, whereas those who connect commemoration and death often draw from statistical reasoning.

Of course, historians also grapple intensively with the precise vocabulary selected for their carefully constructed arguments. Winter extensively criticizes the term "collective memory" ("States do not remember; individuals do"), and argues that the phrase only applies in collective acts of remembrance—groups acting in public to evoke the past.¹³ Sherman takes an alternate approach in his creation of the term "social memory," exploring the relationship between memory's individual and collective dimensions. He defines "commemoration" as the organization of discourses and practices into a representation of an event. For Sherman, commemoration must "subsume individual memories and other cultural manifestations into a larger narrative about the commemorated event" in order for commemoration to possess political and social resonance.¹⁴ Hence, the construction of memory is both a political and social process: the political dimension being a process by which commemoration channels mourning or pride in order to serve a particular interest.

Conversely, Jane Tompkins details the "cultural work" through which commemoration carves the social order: "providing society ways of thinking about itself" and offering methods and discourse for transformation.¹⁵ Her concept of cultural work manifests in the similarity of text

¹³ Winter, *Remembering War*, 4-5.

¹⁴ Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*, 6-7.

¹⁵ Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs: The Cultural Work of American Fiction, 1790-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

(commemorative speeches, legislative debates, novels, memoirs, and guidebooks), offering a conduit into the problems such texts grapple with and the solutions they propose.

Commemoration strives to reinforce the solidarity of a particular community by forging a “consensus” version of an event that has disrupted (or threatened to disrupt) the stability of the community. The decided-upon version cannot be claimed as a consensus outright, as this chosen narrative usually reflects the interests of the community’s most prominent social and political groups. A commemorative representation is a social and cultural vision, establishing its authority by providing social meaning to otherwise scattered individual experiences. Commemorative success largely depends upon its ability to supersede its particularities and become a generally inherent construct of memory. In order to be effective, the selected version becomes considered integral to the memory of the commemorated event. Whereas elites label narratives “memory” to assert the intrinsic nature of their construction, scholars have come to use the term “dominant memory” for a set of narrative explanations to emphasize its impartation by dominant groups.¹⁶

Constructions of the past have long been mobilized and contested within the realms of philosophy and politics, but professional historians have only begun to explore the role of official and unofficial interests’ contributions to the keeping and sharing of memory. When Sherman was writing in 1999, the “materials, operation, purposes, and consequences” of commemorative practice had just begun to receive historical attention.¹⁷ Confino and Fritzsche likewise date the “valorization of memory” by professional historians in the last decade of the 20th century, as the past has been made increasingly more accessible via contemporary archeological and historiographical techniques and technologies.¹⁸

¹⁶ Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*, 7.

¹⁷ Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France*, 1.

¹⁸ Confino and Fritzsche, “Noises of the Past,” 1.

Historians themselves contribute to a commemorative atmosphere when they involve themselves in topics of “public history.” The memorialization of key moments in national histories allows historians to examine notions of national identity. Mark Connelly’s work on the role of Trafalgar’s heroism to bolster national identification with Britain’s maritime past strikes a skeptical note on the long-term impact of historical awareness, reminding historians to balance their professional awareness with the public demand for “a repository of national triumphs and tragedies.”¹⁹ Such a mandate for patriotic tools would explain why, as Jay Winter notes, the subject of war has dominated the memory boom.

Commemoration and the Second World War

The Second World War and the Holocaust drew upon and transformed the character of remembrance in striking and enduring ways—both symbolically and substantively. World War II not only burdened civilians with a total war, but made whole populations the targets of military destruction. The physical devastation of the European landscape following two world wars disseminated antiwar sentiment across the continent; Paul Betts, Alon Confino, and Dirk Schumann indicate in their essay “Death and Twentieth Century Germany” that “the wartime myth of heroism and brotherhood at the front was in many ways one of the casualties of the Second World War.”²⁰ Instead, a new sensibility of victimhood replaced the old rhetoric of valor.

Jay Winter describes how even the traditional narrators of tales of modern warfare have been replaced during the memory boom: “it is no longer the generals and admirals, or even soldiers

¹⁹ Mark Connelly, “Trafalgar: Back on the Map of British Popular Culture? Assessing the 2005 Bicentenary,” in *History, Commemoration, and National Preoccupation: Trafalgar 1805-2005*, ed. Holger Hock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 83-102.

²⁰ Paul Betts, Alon Confino, and Dirk Schumann, “Death and Twentieth Century Germany” in *Between Mass Death and Individual Loss: The Place of the Dead in Twentieth Century Germany*, ed. Betts, Confino and Schumann (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2008), 10.

and sailors, who dominate the story of war.”²¹ Winter argues that the memory boom has focused increasingly on victims as war has “moved out of the battlefield and into every corner of civilian life.” This hypothesis undermines the assertion that commemoration mobilizes representations on behalf of the dominant memory of the war transmitted by elites. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann maintain that the Second World War did not generate a literary movement in the same manner as the First, but their claim only applies to the soldier experience, surely challenged by the poignant tales of Holocaust survivors such as Primo Levi and Elie Wiesel.²² Winter also recognizes the desire to confront the Nazi destruction by capturing the testimony of Holocaust survivors as a major agenda fueling the contemporary memory boom.²³

Still, the process of commemoration over the course of the 20th century has not been an easy one; European society has often struggled to face to its own past. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann propose that since mastery of such a horrific 20th century could never be achieved, the shock of war and mass death made it necessary to flee from the disturbing and rebuild a “normal” life.²⁴ The public arena was kept silent, while millions grieved privately.

The issue of explaining and historicizing the extremes of war and mass death has localized in modern-day Germany. A significant body of German scholarship has made confrontation with their state’s past a unique civic responsibility for present-day German nationals through a processes called *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or “coming to terms with the past.”²⁵ Along with the study of alienation and victimization in the social and political life of Germany in the 1930s and 1940s, the recognition of the different abilities of victims and perpetrators to remember, to forget,

²¹ Winter, *Remembering War*, 6-7.

²² Bessel and Schumann, “Violence, Normality, and the Construction of Postwar Europe,” 2.

²³ Winter, *Remembering War*, 9.

²⁴ Bessel and Schumann, “Violence, Normality, and the Construction of Postwar Europe,” 3.

²⁵ Confino and Fritzsche, “Noises of the Past,” 2.

and to weave experiences into larger national narratives in the 1950s and 1960s has formed a model for how the past can be organized and reshaped.²⁶ Scholarship on Germany serves as a paradigm for the investigation of collective remembering and forgetting.

The most common approach to the study of the work on memory in Germany has been to explore how the German past was represented in distinct cultural artifacts such as museums, monuments, films, novels, poems, and memoirs. The compilation of essays, *The Work of Memory*, edited by Alon Confino and Peter Fritzsche, notably broadens the range of topics beyond commemorative sites to the fields of political, economic and social relations.²⁷ This thesis will apply the latter approach to the context of Poland and the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, exploring memory not as a manifestation of culture, but as an active sculptor of culture, beliefs, and values as exemplified by institutional and individual decisions.

Commemoration in Poland

Western and Central Europe are generally overrepresented in historical research, whereas Eastern Europe is underrepresented. The decrease in state control over scholarship and pedagogy have only just offered new possibilities for research on the history of the Second World War and its legacy in Poland.²⁸ Discourse of the national and ideological elements of public memory in most Eastern European countries has been complicated by the fact that Communism was experienced by the majority of the population as a form of foreign occupation; this was not only the case in those countries that became a part of the Soviet Union itself, but in Poland as well. Hence, the historical culture became highly complex within these countries, as is shown by

²⁶ Confino and Fritzsche, "Noises of the Past," 2.

²⁷ Confino and Fritzsche, *The Work of Memory*.

²⁸ Jonathan Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 1-2.

Michael Steinlauf in his well-researched and nuanced work on the complicated and difficult struggle of Poles with the memory of the Nazi murder of three million fellow countrymen.²⁹ Poland's particularly tangled prewar and wartime history complicated the twin postwar tasks of Polish reconstruction and the commemoration of the country's huge wartime damages. The recent storm of controversy about Polish complicity in the crimes of the Holocaust following the release of Jan Gross's *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* has challenged common assumptions in Poland, as the popular narrative of Polish victimhood is often conveyed with a minimization of Jewish suffering.³⁰ This victim mentality is based, of course, in the historical reality of Poland's devastating wartime losses—psychological and material. The attitude of victimhood was also cultivated, institutionalized, and mythologized in Polish postwar culture and commemoration.

Like other European nations, Poland constructed commemorative sites for the purpose of building a postwar Polish identity and nationhood. Jonathan Huener's *Auschwitz, Poland, and the Politics of Commemoration, 1945-1979* explores Polish issues of collective memory, public historical consciousness, and representations of the past manifested at the Auschwitz concentration camp. Huener's account explains how the institutionalization of an Auschwitz narrative in postwar Poland was subject to the demands of Polish culture and its "martyrological traditions," as well as the ideological constraints of the Communist state. Auschwitz was thus presented as a site of Polish national martyrdom, elevating the plight and struggle of the political prisoner (often stylized as a socialist hero to honor the ideological demands of the Soviet colonizing power) over the fate of the genocide victim.³¹ Through the exhibitions and events of the museum, the memorial site was

²⁹ Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1997).

³⁰ Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland and the Politics of Commemoration*, 2.

³¹ Huener, *Auschwitz, Poland and the Politics of Commemoration*, 28-31.

often used by the Polish state as a stage for political puffery. The complex became a focal point for the traumatic history of wartime Poland—and also a model for Poland’s larger commemorative agenda.

According to the official interpretation of events, the Jews of Poland had been victims of the “convulsions of capitalism,” as fascism and Nazism were characterized. The 1943 uprising in the Warsaw ghetto was regarded as a heroic episode in the history of class struggle in Poland, and an impressive monument was erected in commemoration immediately after the war. However, Soviet war memorials were perceived as sites for the supporters of Communism, divided from the rest of the nation. The majority of non-Communist—and non-Jewish—Poles cherished the historical event whose memory was actively suppressed by the regime: the nationalist uprising of the capital in 1944. The officially-promoted commemoration of the Ghetto Uprising was viewed as a Jewish-Communist plot against the “real” Poland.³² Many Poles accepted the Nazi-propagated view of Jews as enthusiastic supporters of Bolshevism. Communism was made out to be a Jewish movement, and the trauma of the Nazi persecution of the Jews was repressed and denied by Polish popular opinion, converted into an openly expressed antisemitism reinforced by the equalizing of Polish and Catholic identities. The story of the Holocaust was hence transformed into a German-Jewish conspiracy against Poles and their history.³³

It should come as no surprise that Polish commemoration has undergone many major changes the wake of the collapse of Polish Communism. Controversy arose in the late 1980s and has continued to the present day over the governance of memorial sites in their “post-Communist” iteration. Scholars such as Ewa Ochman investigate Soviet war memorials and the use of these

³² Frank van Vree, “The politics of public memory: The commemoration of the Second World War in a historical and comparative perspective,” in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 222-41.

³³ John Connelly, “Those Streets Over There,” *London Review of Books* 26, no. 12 (2004): 19-20.

public spaces in the process of post-Communist identity formation, demonstrating how the reorganization of public memory contests the Soviet past by affirming independence traditions.³⁴ Still, a binary opposition between the banished and embraced past is insufficient to articulate new narratives about the country's past and future. This study will explore the careful balance of such developments through an examination of the commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944. The following chapters will attempt to reconstruct the events of the rebellion and address the omission of the Uprising among historians, politicians, and popular memory over the past half century.

³⁴ Ewa Ochman, "Soviet war memorials and the re-construction of national and local identities in post-communist Poland," *The Journal of Nationalism and Ethnicity* 38, no. 4 (2010): 509-30.

Chapter 2: The Battle for Warsaw

Build-up: Poland under Occupation

In many ways, World War II was just another bloody episode in Poland's centuries-long struggle to solidify a national identity inspired by its indigenous language and culture. The memory of an independent Polish Kingdom and a predominant cultural heritage sustained the Polish people through a hundred and twenty years of political and armed struggles.³⁵ The President of the Polish Republic, Ignace Moscicki, declared upon fleeing Warsaw in 1939 that the capital should be surrendered as an "open city."³⁶ Yet the city's citizens, conditioned by a historical struggle for national survival and still hopeful that their British and French allies would launch a decisive counterattack, decided to resist. Nevertheless, Poland was quickly overwhelmed by the Nazi's new blitzkrieg tactics and the September 17th Soviet invasion of the undefended eastern border prescribed by the Nazi-Soviet Pact. The Polish defense was doomed from the start by a stark lack of supplies, and Warsaw finally surrendered on October 1st, a month after Germany's invasion.³⁷ Poland was overrun and divided between its two traditional enemies, and the simultaneous Nazi and Soviet regimes of terror began.

The Nazis correctly identified Warsaw as a locus of Polish resistance; Hans Frank, the German Governor-General of the General-Government asserted in a speech to Luftwaffe officers on December 14th, 1943 that "We have in this country one point from which all evil drives: namely Warsaw...Warsaw is and will remain the focal point of disturbance from which restlessness is being spread all over the country."³⁸ Indeed, Warsaw had occupied a crucial role in the historical fight for Polish independence, beginning with the Kosciuszko Insurrection of 1794, and most

³⁵ Michael Alfred Peszke, *Battle for Warsaw: 1939-1944* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).

³⁶ George Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising: 1 August – 2 October 1944* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis Ltd, 1972), 13.

³⁷ Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 14.

³⁸ Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 16.

recently in the anti-Russian uprising of 1904-7.³⁹ Correspondingly, Hans Frank's first efforts to crush Polish resistance were directed against Warsaw and its citizens.

Already, resistance was stirring. By the end of the year, the secret underground state had taken form in the Political Liaison Committee, which drew up an agreement on general aims between the political and military underground.⁴⁰ Its *Statute of the Service for Polish Victory* proclaimed that "The struggle for the independence of Poland against the Germans and the Russians continues. It will continue until our final victory is achieved." In declaring that Polish "enemies are all totalitarian ideologies, and, today, in the first place, Hitlerism and Bolshevism," and promising that the structural foundation of the Polish state will be decided on a "democratic basis," the statement demanded uncompromising hostility toward both Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, with no hint of a willingness to compromise for the sake of national survival. Written independently from the government in exile, this statute was known as the "two enemies doctrine," and the leaders of the Polish underground would cling to it till the very end.

However, the Political Liaison Committee, which later subscribed to direction from the government in exile, was not the only Polish underground movement. While virtually the entire Polish Communist party (KPP)—which never had many committed supporters—was executed during Stalin's purges of the late 1930s,⁴¹ Communist groups began to organize themselves in an underground military unit almost immediately after Poland's 1939 partition.⁴² The Communists combined plans for liberation from the Nazis with schemes for a Marxist social system brought about with the aid of the Red Army. Collaborating closely with Moscow and reacting to the swift advance of the Red Army in the late months of 1943, the Polish Communists formed a secret

³⁹ Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 16.

⁴⁰ Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 22.

⁴¹ Davies, *Rising '44*, 35.

⁴² Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 25.

underground state in opposition to the one loyal to the government in exile. Jan Ciechanowski contends that while Poland's leaders in London expected their public rejection of the Communists to be echoed among the population as a whole—and thus condemn their rival to impotence—the government in exile made a serious political mistake by refusing to come to a compromise that might have allowed them to influence party policy or encourage the party to stand more independent from Moscow.⁴³ In May 1944, Stalin recognized the National Home Council of Poland as the nucleus of the new Polish government. Predictions of Russian influence over Eastern Europe frightened the bourgeoisie and intelligentsia, and anti-Russian feeling was strong enough to preclude wide support for the Communists,⁴⁴ but those who simply hoped for the war's end were ready to compromise with the USSR, and resigned themselves to the inevitable.⁴⁵

Many Players Maneuvering: AK, USSR, UK and Nazi Germany

Poland's contribution to the Allied war effort is often minimized or glossed over in books dealing with the Second World War. However, as Michael Alfred Peszke successfully demonstrates, the Poles constituted a significant force in the war against the Axis powers.⁴⁶ The Polish home effort in particular, waged against their German occupiers, held a special significance to the Poles; after all, “the strategic arena for the Poles was obviously not the Middle East, the Italian peninsula or even France – it was Poland.”⁴⁷ The five-year endeavor on the part of the Polish government in exile to organize and sustain a clandestine army in occupied Poland was fueled by a singular long-term goal: to establish a legitimate sovereign authority in postwar Poland.

⁴³ Jan M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1974), 98.

⁴⁴ Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 114.

⁴⁵ Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 99.

⁴⁶ Michael Alfred Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity in World War II*.

⁴⁷ Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity*, 6.

The plan was to “liberate” as much Polish territory as possible through the effort of Polish forces trained and aided by the west.⁴⁸

However, after the German 1941 attack on the Soviet Union, the Poles found themselves in a peculiar situation: they were now intended to fight alongside the nation which had, only a few years previously, invaded and annexed half of their country, deported over a million of its citizens, and murdered thousands of others. The leadership of the Polish government in exile and of the underground had different views of possible collaboration with the Soviets. The advent of a Soviet-German conflict seemed to indicate a potential alliance with the USSR, but with the Soviet occupation of Poland still a likely possibility, long-term plans and hopes for Poland ultimately rested upon perceived support from Churchill and the United Kingdom.⁴⁹ The majority of the Polish armed forces were aware of how attempts of Home Army (AK) units to collaborate with the Red Army often ended with imprisonment in gulags, and remained vehemently opposed to the territorial concession a Polish-Soviet alliance demanded.⁵⁰ The underground state did not comprehend that their only ally had, in concession to the Red Army’s crucial role in the struggle against Germany, already effectively given up on ensuring the establishment of a Polish government in postwar Warsaw.

On July 20th, 1944, Soviet forces broke through German defenses on the Bug River and, racing for Warsaw, began to broadcast appeals to the citizens of Warsaw to rise up against the German occupation and help the Red Army cross the Vistula River. Militarily, it was unlikely for the retreating Nazis to prevent the Soviet armies from entering Warsaw in the near future. Therefore, a decision had to be made. The Home Army’s attempt to free Warsaw before the entry

⁴⁸ Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity*, 5.

⁴⁹ Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity*, 153.

⁵⁰ Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity*, 154.

of the Red Army was prompted by a two fundamental assumptions: that the Russians were on the cusp of taking the capital, and that an independent Russian (or Polish Communist) redemption of the Polish capital would be exploited to the political detriment of the Home Army. The leaders of the insurrection decided to act because they were convinced that, in order for the government in exile to maintain its claim to represent Poland, Warsaw must be liberated by forces loyal to that government.⁵¹ A demonstration for independence was especially important to combat Stalin's claims that the Home Army was aiding the Germans in taking too little a part in the war.⁵² Only in taking a decisive stand against the Germans for the Allied cause would Poland be entitled to a voice among the victorious powers. The Poles knew they could not count on any substantive help from Britain,⁵³ but assumed that the Russian entry into the city was imminent, as Russian tanks were already entering the Warsaw suburb of Praga.⁵⁴

Apart from political and military considerations, a pressing psychological component must be taken into account. The Home Army—and the Polish nation as a whole—desired revenge on the Nazis who had terrorized them for the past five years. The population of Warsaw, with its tradition of struggle for independence and role as the center of Poland's underground, must have felt this particularly keenly. The troops were eager for a fight. With the Soviet advance only a few kilometers northeast of Warsaw, the Home Army moved on August 1st to wrest the city from the Germans.

Immediate Effects: Warsaw Razed

⁵¹ Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 243.

⁵² Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 75.

⁵³ Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 87.

⁵⁴ Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 244.

Without access to Soviet records, it is impossible to say with any degree of certainty whether the Soviet failure to take Warsaw during the insurrection was due to military causes, political considerations, or a combination of both. There are indications that the Red Army's failure to take Warsaw at the beginning of August 1944 was chiefly due to military causes.⁵⁵ However, the consensus of Polish, Russian and German opinions on the Russian military failure to capture Warsaw in early August does not explain why Stalin did not act upon Soviet General Rokossovsky's suggestion to renew a major offensive on Warsaw in late August. It is possible that he was preoccupied with the offensive in the Balkans, which had begun on August 20th, or it is possible (as is often believed) that Stalin decided to abandon Warsaw to be crushed by the Germans in order to avoid a direct confrontation with the Polish government in London; instead, his two enemies would eliminate each other.⁵⁶ Without access to Soviet archives, attempts to explain Stalin's behavior can be nothing more than conjecture.

The absence of a simultaneous Soviet attack sealed Warsaw's fate, and turned the insurrection into an absurd and cruel tragedy for Poland. Warsaw was left devastated, and its population overwhelmed by suffering. Between two hundred and two hundred and fifty thousand of the city's inhabitants were killed during the fighting, plus fifteen thousand insurgents.⁵⁷ Between October 3rd and 6th, 1944, the Germans expelled Warsaw's remaining eight hundred thousand from their city, evacuating the survivors by rail and road to nearby Pruszków.⁵⁸ In accordance with Hitler's command, the destruction of Warsaw began immediately with frightful efficiency. When the Soviet forces finally captured what remained of the city on January 17th, 1945, they found a vast ruin.

⁵⁵ Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 250-1.

⁵⁶ Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 251.

⁵⁷ Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 206.

⁵⁸ Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 203.



Figure 1: Warsaw's Old Town, 1945.

In May 1945, when hostilities ceased, Poland was occupied by one of its two aggressors from 1939. Poland, in its war against Germany, had at least enjoyed symbolic support from its allies; vis-à-vis the Soviets, this was absolutely lacking.⁵⁹ The Poles lost their last campaign not merely from a failure of military cooperation between the Polish and Soviet forces, but because Western Allies lacked the ability to uphold their original treaty of August 1939. Despite the Soviet Union's original collusion with Germany, all was forgotten as the Soviets fought the vaunted German army. The Poles would become the victims of a mass media blitz as the Soviets perverted Polish political goals and history to match the official party line.⁶⁰

For the Polish government in London, the failure of the Warsaw Uprising was a political, military and psychological defeat from which they never recovered. After the fall of Warsaw, the underground state and exiled government began to disintegrate rapidly. In this way, the insurrection and its aftermath helped, rather than frustrated, the Communist assumption of power

⁵⁹ Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity*, 7.

⁶⁰ Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity*, 7.

in Poland. The Poles who had fought so hard for their freedom did not regain it. One dictatorship was replaced by another, and Stalin ensured that mention of the Uprising was suppressed. With the Stalinist era, the whole episode would become little more than an uncomfortable footnote in history.

Chapter 3: Suppression, then Integration

The Myth of Slavic Unity

In the early postwar years, the Communists rallied around a myth of a Slavic front united against the German fascists in order to respect the deep emotions many connected with the anniversary of the Uprising. The focus of the official celebrations was the “common fight” of a united Slavic resistance against the German occupiers. Polish Communist propaganda disseminated the message that the Polish place was to fight alongside the Poles’ “Slavic brethren” in the Red Army, reminiscent of the Russian-centric Slavophilism encouraged among Polish elites during the First Partition of Poland.⁶¹ The notion of Slavic brethren was a remnant of the war, included in the Soviet radio appeal to the people of Warsaw for “direct, active struggle in the streets of Warsaw” against the “Hitlerites.”⁶² This idea was promulgated in the Polish diaspora as well; professor, and Polish refugee, Manfred Kridl received a letter in 1945 from the American Institute of Slavonic History requesting that he submit a piece centered around his “very painful story” of escape from the General Government in order to “unite all the Slavs together in a huge cultural front.”⁶³ Conversely, when Władysław Szpilman’s now-famous memoir, *The Pianist*, was first published in Poland in 1946 under the title *Death of a City*, it was quickly withdrawn from circulation; Stalinist Polish leadership could not tolerate his account.⁶⁴ Directly after the war, it was impossible to publish a book in Poland that presented a German officer as a brave and helpful man.

⁶¹ Guntram H. Herb and David H. Kaplan, *Nations and Nationalism: A Global Historical Overview* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, 2008), 213.

⁶² J. K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour: The Story of the Warsaw Uprising, 1944* (London: Macmillan London Ltd., 1978), 232.

⁶³ Slavka Vesela, *Slavka Vesela to Manfred Kridl*. Letter. From Columbia University Rare Book & Manuscript Library, *The Manfred Kridl Papers*.

⁶⁴ Wolf Biermann, “Epilogue” in *The Pianist*, ed. Władysław Szpilman (New York: Picador, 1999), 211.

The years 1945-1955 were marked by an aggressive attempt of the pro-Soviet authorities to shape Warsaw's social cultural memory. The strategy was two-fold: build memorials to the glory and victory of Soviet rule, and block any effort to commemorate the Warsaw Uprising. As early as the 18th of November, 1945, a memorial christened "Monument to Brotherhood in Arms" was erected in Warsaw's Praga district. Its inscription read, "Glory to the Soviet army heroes, brothers in arms, who laid down their lives for the freedom and independence of the Polish nation."⁶⁵ The Poles, for their part, did not buy into the myth of pan-Slavic ideals. Resistance fighter Leokadia Rowinski reported in her memoir that:

True, on some of [the streets] there stood monuments honoring Soviet heroes or memorializing Polish-Soviet friendship, but it did not matter, people were making fun of them all the time...And the four Russian soldiers standing with their heads down and leaning on their rifles (battle fatigue!) on each pedestal corner of the "Friendship" monument were promptly named "The Four Sad Ones," and that term had stuck as the quasi-official name for the whole structure. Such was the spirit of the Polish people!⁶⁶

As one of the first monuments to be raised after the Soviet Union's grip tightened over Polish territory, the statue represented an approaching second occupation. The monument became an unpopular symbol of the hated Communist political system and a forced friendship with Moscow. Stefan Korboński, Chief of the Polish Wartime Underground, was struck by how 1947 Kraków appeared

distinctly similar to something [he] had noticed at an earlier period; it occurred to [him] that people in Warsaw had looked exactly like this during the first few months of the German occupation...This look more than anything else was eloquent testimony that we had passed from one occupation to another.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ Krystyna Ewa Siellawa-Kolbowska, "War after war: Second World War memorials as memory sites – the case of Warsaw," in *Collective Memories in War: Studies in European Sociology*, ed. Elena Rozhdestvenskaya, Victoria Semenova, Irina Tartakovskaya, and Krzysztof Kosela (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015).

⁶⁶ Leokadia Rowinski, *That the Nightingale Return: Memoir of the Polish Resistance, the Warsaw Uprising and Geran P.O.W. Camps* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 1999), 153-4.

⁶⁷ Stefan Korboński, *Fighting Warsaw: The Story of the Polish Underground State, 1939-1945* (Chicago: Funk & Wagnalls, 1956), 495.



Figure 2: Monument to Brotherhood in Arms, Warsaw, 2010.

Demonization of the Home Army

The Home Army failed to recover from the shock and devastating consequences of its defeat in Warsaw. The destruction of the Warsaw-based AK removed the last, most patriotic segment of the Polish population—one group most likely to have resisted the Communist takeover. Many of its best soldiers were captured or killed in the fighting. Granted the rights of combatants, the survivors were taken to prisoner of war camps in Germany, where they were subsequently liberated by the Western Allies.⁶⁸ Most never returned to Poland. After being freed from German captivity, most Home Army officers went into exile, particularly to London.⁶⁹

Since the Polish armed forces were a political and diplomatic weapon of the Polish government in exile, the forces opposed to a Polish interest sought to discredit and eliminate the

⁶⁸ Bruce, *The Warsaw Uprising*, 202.

⁶⁹ Włodzimierz Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 143.

Polish military, either by myths or by silence. Even in the reconciliatory mood of 1945, the Communist leadership accused the “bourgeois” AK of passivity with regard to the Germans. The main charge was formulated in February of 1945: the “bloody traitor” Home Army General Bór-Komorowski had ignored the opportunity to evacuate his troops to the right bank of the Vistula.⁷⁰ The anti-Soviet “representative of the London clique” had preferred “to turn over thousands of soldiers to German capture than to allow them to go over to their brothers fighting along with the Red Army.” In the Communist takeover phase from 1945 to 1948, official propaganda emphasized this distinction between the “traitors” in the leadership of the underground state, the innocent people of Warsaw, and the “simple soldiers” of the AK. Yet on August 1st, representatives of the highest national authorities still participated in the memorials and requiem masses.⁷¹

In March 1945, the Soviets invited sixteen Polish underground leaders to a meeting at Pruszków, near Warsaw, arrested them and flew them to Moscow to place them on trial for anti-Soviet activities.⁷² Their security had been guaranteed by the United States and Britain, but three were still executed.⁷³ After the war, Churchill wrote, “This was in fact the judicial liquidation of the leadership of the Polish Underground which had fought so heroically against Hitler. The rank and file had already died in the ruins of Warsaw.”⁷⁴ Churchill’s insinuation that Home Army soldiers’ reticence resulted from their massacre in battle is not entirely accurate. Stalin silenced tens of thousands of AK members in the years immediately following the Uprising.⁷⁵

⁷⁰ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 142.

⁷¹ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 143.

⁷² Peszke, *The Polish Underground Army, the Western Allies, and the Failure of Strategic Unity*, 182.

⁷³ Alexandra Richie, *Warsaw 1944: The Fateful Uprising* (London: William Collins, 2013), 649.

⁷⁴ Winston Churchill, *Triumph and Tragedy* (Boston, MA: Mariner Books, 1986), 435.

⁷⁵ Richie, *Warsaw 1944*, 16.

During the process of Stalinization of Eastern Europe after 1948, the principles of the national policy of remembrance changed, rhetoric becoming even harsher against the Home Army.

It was clear to Rowinski that:

Poland was under Russian-controlled communist rule, and former freedom fighters were the enemies of the People's Republic. They were arrested, tortured, even executed, and there was some dark logic behind it. Whoever fought against the Germans would surely be against the communist regime, and against the Soviet Union whose armed soldiers could be seen everywhere in great numbers. Neither of us was sure that, after divulging any connection with the Polish Home Army of the forties, she wouldn't be taken off the train at the nearest station and imprisoned. Nobody could be trusted.⁷⁶

The growing psychosis of conspiracy reigned supreme, as the fundamental mechanism of Stalinist terror was the creation of fictional enemies. 1948-1956 was dominated by, in political trials against the prewar elites, defamation and criminalization of the Home Army in Poland.⁷⁷ Stanisław Likiernik described how a friend, upon being recognized as a former member of the Home Army, was "severely beaten by well-known local thugs, now miraculously transformed into 'militiamen' of the new communist regime."⁷⁸ Aleksandra Ziolkowska-Boehm remembered that in the immediate postwar decades, when she would go to the military cemetery to light an oil lamp on the graves of insurgents, she had to lie about her destination.⁷⁹ Peter Badmajew nicely summarized the sentiments of the Home Army soldiers in his memoir, *The History of a Warsaw Insurgent*: "I'd fought in the Warsaw Uprising and starved in a German prison camp, but that was never appreciated by the Polish Communist government. On the contrary I was treated as a suspect."⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Rowinski, *That the Nightingale Return*, 157.

⁷⁷ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 11.

⁷⁸ Likiernik, *By Devil's Luck*, 153.

⁷⁹ Aleksandra Ziolkowska-Boehm, *Kaia, Heroine of the 1944 Warsaw Rising* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), 122.

⁸⁰ Peter Badmajew, *The History of a Warsaw Insurgent* (Bloomington, Indiana: iUniverse, Inc., 2013), 124.

In the first postwar decade, belonging to the AK thwarted any chance for education or professional advancement.⁸¹ Many were transported east and never heard from again.

The only heroes were now the people of Warsaw; only “the left” had managed a genuine resistance. By August 1st, 1949, mention of the AK had disappeared from the anniversary article of the central journal of the Polish United Workers’ Party. The alleged plot of the highest AK circles against “Poland’s most loyal allies—the Soviet soldiers” was described as a conspiracy staged by the “bourgeois” resistance in conjunction with German information, a collaboration with the Third Reich for anti-Sovietism.⁸² Likiernik recalled the onslaught of Communist propaganda that was disseminated from 1945 onward:

Every piece of wall still standing in Warsaw was now covered with huge posters showing a magnificent Soviet warrior, a Russian sub-machine gun across his chest, with a Polish Home Army soldier in the shape of a hunchbacked dwarf cowering at his feet. To add realism to this portrayal the Pole was depicted with globs of spit on his face, while the words: ‘The Spit-covered Dwarf of Capitalism’ underlined the meaning for those with no imagination. Was this to be the free and independent Poland we had fought so hard for?⁸³

The depiction of the Home Army soldier as a “dwarf” was a well-known reference to a speech given by Socialist leader Jozef Pilsudski in 1923 deriding the Polish nationalist ideology.

⁸¹ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 143.

⁸² Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 143.

⁸³ Likiernik, *By Devil’s Luck*, 154.



Figure 3: “Zapluty karzeł reakcji” poster, 1945.

The Warsaw Uprising was given its first cinematic reference in Jerzy Zarzycki’s 1950 *Nieujarzmione (Unvanquished City)*, with a script modeled on the withdrawn memoir of pianist Władysław Szpilman.⁸⁴ Szpilman’s intended plot is eclipsed, however, by a propagandist fantasy revolving around the members of the communist Polish Worker’s Party, who work together with the Soviet Army in their offensive against the Germans. The film begins once the Uprising has already ended, and an opening voiceover squarely lays the blame for the city’s destruction on representatives of the AK.⁸⁵ In 1950, for the first time, the anniversary of the Uprising was not

⁸⁴ Matilda Mroz, “The Monument and the Sewer: Memory and Death in Wajda’s *Kanal* (1957),” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television* 34, no. 4 (2014), 528-45.

⁸⁵ *Unvanquished City*, directed by Jerzy Zarzycki (1950: Film Polski).

mentioned at all. August 1st was completely overlooked as a memorial day by the Polish People's Republic.

The Soviets also glossed over the Uprising in their literature. This is far from surprising; after the war, Stalin imposed a ban on any but approved accounts of the insurrection.⁸⁶ The small flow of articles from 1945-46—mainly individual memoirs of battles and events of the summer of 1944—broke off in 1947; this corresponded to an ongoing cultural campaign to impose a Communist monopoly over cultural institutions.⁸⁷ The military historian Adam Borkiewicz, who tried to write a treatise on the Uprising between 1948 and 1950, incurred the disfavor of the authorities, and his documents were confiscated by the police. His daughter, Anna Borkiewicz, also a former member of the AK, was sentenced to seven years in prison for “collecting and preserving material that glorifies the AK and disparages the AL [Communist People's Army].”⁸⁸ The result was a repeated claim that the Uprising was a reckless endeavor inspired by the British and the irresponsible AK. Red Army commanders Zhukov and Rokossovsky briefly mention Warsaw in their memoirs, but Zhukov is careful to chide Home Army General Bór-Komorowski for not having contacted the Soviets before calling for the rising, and Rokossovsky claims that the Soviet forces were too exhausted and ill-supplied to carry on the fight in the summer of 1944.⁸⁹ Both almost ignore the insurrection itself, hastening on to the conquest of Berlin. The only scholarly volumes and memoirs defending the non-Communist resistance appeared in exile.

⁸⁶ Richie, *Warsaw 1944*, 17.

⁸⁷ Krystyna Kersten, “The Terror, 1949-1954” in *Stalinism in Poland, 1944-1956: Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies*, Warsaw, 1995, ed. A. Kemp-Welch (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999).

⁸⁸ “Powstańcze Biogramy – Anna Borkiewicz,” *Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego*, 2016, <http://www.1944.pl/powstancze-biogramy/anna-borkiewicz,3987.html>.

⁸⁹ Boris Sokolov, “The Warsaw Tragedy” in *Marshal K.K. Rokossovsky*, ed. Stuart Britton (Solihull, West Midlands: Helion and Company Limited, 2015).

Kazimierz Wyka, a literary historian and essayist from Kraków, formulated the thesis in 1946 that the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 had revealed a repeated, basic failure “from the top.”⁹⁰ Disappointment with the old elites to whom political decisions were entrusted during the period of occupation benefitted the Communists; AK General Bór-Komorowski recounted in an interview in May of 1965 that the most painful criticism he received came from “people who lived in Poland under German occupation and should know what things were like then.”⁹¹ Thus, whereas the fifth anniversary of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising was commemorated with a monument by Nathan Rapoport⁹², no memorial was erected to the fighters and victims of 1944. In the 1950s, the hostile silencing of the Uprising and its victims dominated public opinion.

Resurrection of the Uprising during De-Stalinization

Stalin’s death in 1953 sparked a series of cautious and evolutionary modifications to the existing Communist system in Poland. This new course initiated by the ruling group was influenced by the threat of social outbursts in East Germany and Berlin in 1953⁹³, aiming to diffuse social discontent and reduce hardships accumulated during the Stalinist period. Communist leaders, aware of the social context of their actions, turned nervously sensitive about the state of public opinion⁹⁴ that the censored media so strenuously concealed. In its initial stages, de-Stalinization in Poland did not bring any immediate political relaxation or liberalization, but social turmoil over Polish responsibility for Stalin’s crimes (and the larger state of Polish-Soviet

⁹⁰ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 11.

⁹¹ J. K. Zawodny, *Nothing but Honour*, 215.

⁹² Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 143.

⁹³ Pawel Machcewicz, “Social Protest and Political Crisis in 1956” in *Stalinism in Poland, 1944-1956: Selected Papers from the Fifth World Congress of Central and East European Studies*, Warsaw, 1995, ed. A. Kemp-Welch (London: Macmillan Press Ltd, 1999).

⁹⁴ Machcewicz, “Social Protest and Political Crisis in 1956.”

relations) provoked widespread consequences.⁹⁵ The wave of meetings and riots of the Polish October of 1956 shifted the balance of power within the Communist party's leadership and—less discussed—the relationship between Poland and the Soviet Union.

Much changed with the intense de-Stalinization of 1956, which restored the Uprising along with a few other national icons to semiofficial cultural memory. The insurrection did not yet receive a memorial dedicated to it, but from then on, August 1st was to be a day of remembrance for 1944. The leadership in London was still allegedly criminally selfish—though not traitorous—but the heroism of the soldiers, even those from the “bourgeois camp,” was lauded along with that of the civilian population.⁹⁶

In the cultural sphere, Roman Bratny published the novel *Kolumbowie. Rocznik 20* (*Columbus, Volume 20*) in 1957, expounding the fate of the AK youth in the crucial years between 1943 and 1947. Fifteen editions of this novel were printed before 1976 in Poland. Likiernik described the effects of the publication on both a public and private scale:

This was the first publication which dared to present the non-communist Underground in Poland as a positive force. It ended the calumny of the ‘Dwarfs of Reaction’. The book proved a great success, and sold a million and a half copies in the next few years. On a more personal level, it made me feel like a ‘somebody’ and after ten years of being the greyest of men on top of the Paris omnibus it was a good feeling.⁹⁷

In addition to the immediate impact delineated by Likiernik, Bratny's novel coined the term “pokolenie Kolumbów” (“Generation of Columbuses”) to denote the generation of Poles whose adolescence was marked by World War II, describing this “lost generation” as the ones who “discovered Poland” through their fight against the foreign occupation. Another classic, *Kamienie rzucone na szaniec* (*Stones thrown on the rampart*), was devoted to the youthful Warsaw resistance

⁹⁵ Machcewicz, “Social Protest and Political Crisis in 1956.”

⁹⁶ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 144.

⁹⁷ Likiernik, *By Devil's Luck*, 196.

fighters, and in 1956 was included on the list of obligatory readings for grammar school students.⁹⁸ De-Stalinization also created the framework for the research of the country's immediate military history. Hundreds of publications followed the works of Adam Borkiewicz and Jerzy Kirchmayer (1957 and 1959 respectively).⁹⁹

The post-Stalinist "thaw" spread to cinema as well. On April 29, 1957, Andrzej Wajda's *Kanal* (*Sewer*) showcased the very first portrayal of the Warsaw Uprising on screen. Censors probably permitted the film's dissemination because its acute depiction of tragedy was thought to imply the futility of the young rebels' sacrifice; there was very little glory in the patriots' immersion in the Warsaw sewage system. However, *Kanal* quickly became the most important media event in connection with the insurrection. The Uprising was such a small focus in popular culture at the time of its release that screenwriter Jerzy Stefan Stawinski was erroneously praised by the press for his ingenuity in inventing a story so sensational that many believed it to be fiction. Yet metaphors for the Soviet failure to help, such as a concluding scene when desperate survivors wading through the sewers find their exit blocked by bars, evoked controversial reviews. The director was accused of defiling the national pantheon.¹⁰⁰ Still, the work received the most important of all Polish film prizes in 1957, and its quickly attained status solidified the transmission of the Uprising to the next generations of Poles.

⁹⁸ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 12.

⁹⁹ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 12.

¹⁰⁰ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 12.

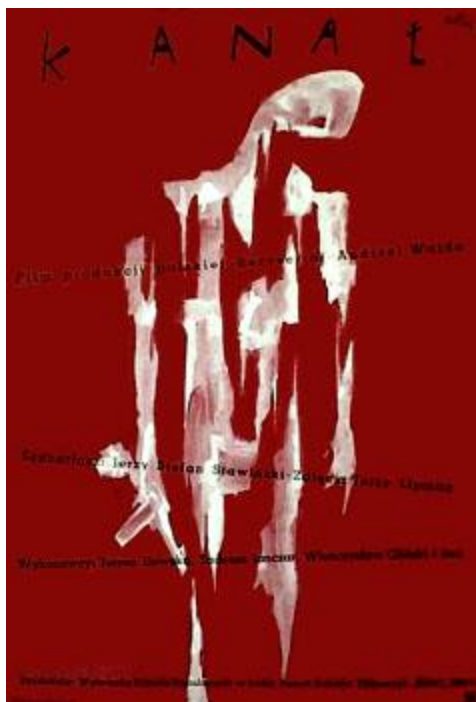


Figure 4: Film poster for *Kanał*, 1957. Copyright belongs to the distributor of the film.

The 1960s also witnessed a limited but prominent boom in material on the Uprising: several fictional and documentary films released on television, the erection of three hundred small memorial tablets in the city commemorating events and losses, and the publication of more than a dozen memoirs from combatants.¹⁰¹ Borodziej details how in 1964, Zenon Kliszko, a former officer in the Communist AL in 1944 and the author of a recently published book on the Uprising, claimed that despite the “antidemocratic policy of the London camp” and the “lunacy and political diversion” of the AK leadership, the “common sacrifice” of all Warsaw residents led to the conclusion that “the page of the former distinctions is closed. We, who fought at the barricades under the banners of various groups, against Poland’s deadly enemy, are no longer separate.”¹⁰² The explanation for the reversal is simple; in the 1960s, the Communist party began to officially recognize the Uprising in an attempt to win over the masses. The Communist regime was entering

¹⁰¹ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 144.

¹⁰² Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 144.

a deepening crisis: its politicians were discredited; its economic strategy was failing; its standing was in freefall.¹⁰³

On the 25th anniversary of the Uprising, the Embassy of the Polish People's Republic in Washington, D.C. released a statement hailing the heroism of those who fought in Warsaw.¹⁰⁴ It was an anniversary the Polish Communist government could no longer ignore—a failure to pay homage to the event would condemn them even further in the eyes of the Polish people. However, the statement pointedly concealed the role of the Soviet Union, instead portraying the insurrection as an attempt by the “émigré political forces in London” to “forestall the Red Army's entry into Warsaw” and prevent the liberation of the city.

In the 1970s, government-organized remembrances of the Uprising continued, emphasizing total national unity by means of an integrative policy of history. The Party journal *Trybuna Ludu* explained the difficult legacy of the insurrection: the Uprising could not be a success because it was “against the most vital interests of the nation.”¹⁰⁵ Anyone who read carefully between the lines could hardly misunderstand; the old elites had been unable to compromise with Moscow, and only the Communists accepted by Moscow could protect today's society from the rage of the Soviet Union.

Solidarity as the Legacy of the Rising

The government-sponsored integration of the Warsaw Uprising into the Communist narrative was soon overcast by an emerging counter opinion that, in underground publications and

¹⁰³ Davies, *Rising '44*, 598.

¹⁰⁴ U.S. Congress, Committee on the Judiciary, Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, *The Warsaw Insurrection: The Communist Version Versus The Facts*, report prepared by Thomas J. Dodd, 91st Cong., 1st sess., 1969, Committee Print 34-895.

¹⁰⁵ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 145.

discussions in the second half of the 1970s, demanded more from the tale of the Uprising—especially about the Soviet share in the catastrophe. Pope John Paul II, the highest moral authority for Poles, alluded to this in June of 1979 in his sermon at the Warsaw Victory Square, acting as a catalyst to turn discontent into a focused body of opposition.¹⁰⁶ The suppressed truth about the position of the Red Army in the summer of 1944 turned out to be an argument against the People’s Republic of Poland. August 1st, the anniversary of the Uprising, remained a difficult day for the Communist party, even after the party finally agreed in 1984 to erect a monument honoring the insurrection.¹⁰⁷ The commissioning of the monument became a subject of political conflict and bad feeling; authorities, cautious of an outright endorsement of the Uprising, insisted that the monument be dedicated to “heroes of the uprising,” leaving no ambiguity in their rejection of the doomed rebellion itself.¹⁰⁸

Though the official censorship was still in control in 1981, the first year of the revived social movement Solidarity, Poland enjoyed its first period of relative free speech since joining the Soviet bloc.¹⁰⁹ Warsaw could publicly celebrate the anniversary of the Uprising. Though they resolutely chose the path of non-violence, the supporters of Solidarity saw themselves as the heirs of the Home Army. Works related to the insurrection poured out of the movement’s unofficial press. The trade union distributed a leaflet declaring that:

Today, we perceive the Warsaw Uprising in the historical perspective as an important stage on the difficult road of the nation, from the end of the 18th century, to the Kościuszko Insurrection, to Dąbrowski’s Legions, to the November Uprising, the Spring of the Nations, the January Uprising, the 1905 fights, the effort of the First World War, to forging Western and Eastern borderlines of the Republic of

¹⁰⁶ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 145.

¹⁰⁷ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 146.

¹⁰⁸ Jackson Diehl, “Poles Honor Victims of 1944 Uprising,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 3, 1986.

¹⁰⁹ Davies, *Rising '44*, 599.

Poland in the years 1919-1921, as one more loud Polish ‘no’ said to occupants and invaders.¹¹⁰

Months of free speech broke the official taboos about the Uprising; the insurrection could finally be spoken about in admiration. The Warsaw Uprising, conflated with other politically-charged displays of heroism, was adopted in the minds of Poles as a lesson to match the contemporary political currents.

Supporters of the anti-Communist movement seized the national event as an opportunity to demonstrate. In 1982, Warsaw Uprising commemorations were officially merged with pro-Solidarity rallies. This was the first year that authorities had allowed the anniversary prominent media coverage in an effort to “demonstrate the regime’s good will in seeking a ‘national accord’” in the face of political and economic crisis.¹¹¹ Crowds capitalized upon this moment to fight for the release of political internees such as leader Lech Wałęsa; a few veterans were disturbed that the day was exploited for the movement’s ends, but most joined in the cheers.¹¹² When the Communist establishment refused to patronize the 40th anniversary of the Uprising, peaceful Solidarity marched through central Warsaw to lay wreaths at the tomb of Poland’s Unknown Soldier.¹¹³ The union responded to a commentary in the Communist party newspaper claiming that the Uprising was an unnecessary tragedy as a personal assault, releasing a statement that “The Communists want the national memory to be scarred with the mark of hopeless resistance and political stupidity. They want to see us downtrodden, broken in contemplation of defeat and deprived of hope.”¹¹⁴ The Washington Post added two years later that the linking of the Solidarity

¹¹⁰ Władysław Bartoszewski, *Abandoned Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising* (Krakow: Warsaw Rising Museum, 2008), 18.

¹¹¹ Dan Fisher, “Warsaw WWII Rites Become Solidarity Rally,” *Los Angeles Times*, Aug. 2, 1982.

¹¹² Serge Schmemmann, “Poles Chant ‘Free Lech’ At Warsaw Ceremonies,” *New York Times*, Aug. 2, 1982.

¹¹³ “Around the World: Poles Lay Wreath at Soldier’s Tomb,” *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 1, 1984.

¹¹⁴ “Polish Crowds Recall Victims of Uprising,” *Globe and Mail*, Aug. 2, 1984.

movement with the Warsaw Uprising was completed in 1986 “when many of those singing [at an Uprising anniversary gathering] raised their hands in a ‘V’ sign, the symbol of the suppressed, independent trade union Solidarity.”¹¹⁵

The selective presence of the Warsaw Uprising in the public arena and its selective integration into society’s commemorative practices and institutional memory was reinforced by the tendency of Communist propaganda to conflate it under the larger category of the heroism and courage of the Polish soldier. While it was acceptable to address the Uprising’s immediate goal of liberating the capital from German occupation, the Uprising’s origins and political dimensions were either silenced or presented as the irresponsible decision of a treacherous London government. What remained intact, even after the repressive Stalinist period, was the military valor and patriotic devotion of the Polish nation. This vocabulary was to have a profound impact on the configuration of the Uprising in communal memory and its symbolic reverberations following the fall of the Communist system.

¹¹⁵ Diehl, “Poles Honor Victims of 1944 Uprising.”

Chapter 4: The Warsaw Uprising in a New Poland

Poland Finally Reorients West

Włodzimierz Borodziej, one of the few who remark on the legacy of the Warsaw Uprising, writes in his 2001 book *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944* that “In the Third Polish Republic, commemoration of the Uprising has degenerated into a holiday ritual with dwindling political significance.”¹¹⁶ Borodziej posits that, while the memory of the Uprising had been a constant thorn in the side of the old Party government (and their censoring sensibilities), the Soviets no longer had any defenders after the collapse of the old regime, causing the political message of the Uprising to weaken and the tale to fade from the national discourse.

Further research, however, finds this hypothesis to be false. A public opinion poll of May 1994 shows that the Warsaw Uprising ranked relatively high on the list of most important events in the history of Poland (number 8) and was considered an important event by 86% surveyed. Only a third of those polled believed that the attack aimed primarily for the quick liberation from German occupation; exactly half, on the other hand, consider it a means against a Communist takeover.¹¹⁷ Instead of political discussion of the Warsaw Uprising waning in the Third Polish Republic, the central political message shifted from denouncing the German criminals to indicting the treason of Communist Moscow, understood along with the murder of Polish officers in Katyń as one of the most important steps in Stalin’s strategy to destroy the leaders of anti-Communist Poland.

To a large extent, this persistence of the Uprising’s position in Polish communal memory may be a reaction to the fact that, under the Communist regime, its losses were neither properly mourned, nor was the multiplicity of its political and symbolic dimensions openly acknowledged

¹¹⁶ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 146.

¹¹⁷ Borodziej, *The Warsaw Uprising of 1944*, 146-7.

and discussed. The communal memory of the Uprising was only partly institutionalized, due to the role the Soviet Union played in the event and postwar Poland's situation as a Soviet satellite country. The decades of suppression reinforced what Joanna Nizyńska describes as a "double censorship" of the Uprising: one from the Communist state, which censored its political dimension, and the other from the citizenry, whose unspoken agreement was to preserve the heroic memory of the event through allusions to the Uprising's *raison d'être*.¹¹⁸ Such censorship from the inside manifested faithfulness to the dead and translated to loyalty for the event itself.

Correspondingly, commemorative celebrations seemed to express the Polish need for an international audience to recognize the staggering impact of the event more than to serve as a reminder of what happened for the benefit of Polish society. The 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising on August 1st, 1994 opened new avenues to coming to terms with the past, held on a large international scale yet to be equaled by other international commemorative activities. Polish president Lech Wałęsa invited heads of state from the Allies, Germany, and Russia to the anniversary celebration. There was no danger that the Uprising would be forgotten at home; for that reason, organizers elaborated a cross-national character of commemoration.

As the first to speak, Wałęsa set the scene, constructing the Uprising as an event in mythological terms. For him, the significance of the Uprising hinged on the magnitude of the crimes committed: "A Battle that was not just an ordinary combat of enemy armies, fought according to the rules of war."¹¹⁹ Wałęsa also stressed the event's association with the tradition of insurgencies from the 19th century. Although Polish troops combatted German opponents,

¹¹⁸ Nizyńska, *The Kingdom of Significance*, 58.

¹¹⁹ Lech Wałęsa, "Address by President Lech Wałęsa," trans. Dariusz Galasiński, in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 53-6.

Germany was never explicitly positioned as the enemy. Instead, Poland was shown in opposition to the Soviet Union:

A decision taken at the time when Poland had to choose, even though, as we now know, she had no choice. A risky decision, yet not a suicidal one. It turned out to be suicidal later, when, to insurgents' reasoning, Stalin responded by agreeing on the destruction of the city. He spoke in the language of an emperor. He was cynically responding to the Allies: "There are only riots in Warsaw," when he persistently refused American fortresses the right to land.¹²⁰

Wałęsa attempts to address debates about the Uprising's sensibility by making Stalin responsible for the Uprising's suicidal outcome. The Uprising might have had a slim chance of success, but that chance was reduced to zero by the Soviets' apathy.

Veterans of the Warsaw Uprising and other Polish people had criticized Wałęsa for his invitation of the German and Russian presidents.¹²¹ Presumably in reaction to these critics, Wałęsa explicitly addressed their representatives in successive passages, in order to make Polish feelings, sensitivities and expectations clear. Since the invited guests were mainly representatives of the Great Alliance, who supported the Warsaw Uprising, German president Roman Herzog and envoy of Russian president Boris Yeltsin, Sergey Filatov, had a special position. There was no natural, unproblematic place for the former enemy of Germany at that moment in Warsaw, an aspect discussed extensively in both Polish and German mass media.¹²² A representative of a new democratic Germany who regretted the crimes of the ancestors was the only acceptable response. During the ceremony, Herzog paid homage to the tragedy of Warsaw without reservation, asking "forgiveness for what has been done to you by Germans."¹²³ As for the Russian participant, the

¹²⁰ Wałęsa, "Address by President Lech Wałęsa."

¹²¹ Ensink and Sauer, "The search for acceptable perspectives."

¹²² Ensink and Sauer, "The search for acceptable perspectives."

¹²³ Roman Herzog, "Herzog's address," trans. *Press und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung*, in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 60-3.

situation was rather delicate because of what Klaus Steinke describes as a “double” representation.¹²⁴ On one hand, Filatov was representing the former Soviet Union, which most Poles perceived as the main opponent of a democratic Poland for the past fifty years. The USSR’s behavior during the Uprising was considered blatant treason by many Poles. On the other, after the collapse of Communism and the Soviet empire allowed Filatov to represent a new democratic Russia that was leaving behind the old system.

Wałęsa’s invitation thus indicated a turning point in the history of the impact of the Uprising. Prior to 1989, the justification of an anti-Western position derived from an anti-German sentiment of the lessons of the past.¹²⁵ Now, the president of a new Poland held out his hand to both enemies of 1944, both Russia and Germany. His address spoke of building bridges. The celebration of the 50th anniversary served to clear the air in order to lift the longstanding burden of national resentment from future prospects.

Wałęsa finished the historical summary section of his speech with a representation of Warsaw alone, with no friends or allies. Dariusz Galasiński’s essay “The Messianic Warsaw” describes how 19th century Polish romanticism invokes a pure love for the country and a readiness to give one’s life for it.¹²⁶ The Poland constructed by Wałęsa paralleled this Polish romanticist hero who acts unaided:

After the Warsaw Uprising, none of the powerful of this world stood for the cause for which Warsaw died. None called out “I am a Varsovian,” afforded a moment of

¹²⁴ Klaus Steinke, “How the Russians handled a problem: The Warsaw Uprising in Sergey Filatov’s address,” in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 179-180.

¹²⁵ Klaus Steinke speculates in his essay “How the Russians handled a problem” that Russian president Boris Yeltsin did not want to attend the ceremony for precisely this reason, a point hinted by chosen envoy Sergey Filatov when he declared that “the actual public opinion in Russia does not allow the recognition of a responsibility in part, or complicity with the Germans.”

¹²⁶ Dariusz Galasiński, “The Messianic Warsaw: Mythological framings of political discourse in the address by Lech Wałęsa,” in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 41-56.

reflection, did not ask: “Where are you going Europe? Is it towards freedom?” In full harmony, Poland’s sovereignty was violated.¹²⁷

The allusion to J. F. Kennedy’s famous *Ich bin ein Berliner* statement is used to reinforce the image of a deserted Poland: the Germans, although perpetrators, got their share of sympathy, whereas the Poles did not. What Poland got, in contrast, was Yalta—a deal it had no share in, and that sealed its future as a satellite of the Soviet Union. In a mantra repeated in the context of Poland’s efforts to be accepted into NATO, Wałęsa admonished the Western nations that a betrayal of Poland would not serve the West in the long run.

In doing so, the tale of the Warsaw Uprising expanded beyond Polish history to the realms of European and world history. The ideals of freedom and independence were frequently mentioned, and the Polish struggle for those ideals, against totalitarianism (i.e., against Stalinism and communism), were recognized as worthwhile. A letter from Pope John Paul II, read before the assembled crowds, attributed to Poland a key position in the transformations that took place in Eastern Europe with the fall of the Soviet empire. Stating that “that generation from 50 years before paid for the independence,” he made a direct connection between the Uprising of 1944 and the events of 1989.¹²⁸ From this resulted a new, positive evaluation of the whole Uprising and its appreciation as an important contribution to advancing democracy in the world.

The commemorative event was therefore a public examination of Poland’s aspirations to obtain as much public attention as possible with respect to its place in Europe—especially considering the context of the newly formed European Union. The Uprising’s 50th anniversary was marked by a new enthusiasm about freedom and democracy, a recognition of non-Communist

¹²⁷ Wałęsa, “Address by President Lech Wałęsa.”

¹²⁸ Pope John Paul II, “A letter from Pope John Paul II,” in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 211-3.

resistance so that Poland's national character could be reestablished without reference to the Communist period. After the disintegration of the Communist bloc from 1988 to 1990, Poland faced a new economic and political situation. While it had been forced to look to the East for almost five decades, Poland now sought to orient itself economically and politically to the West. At this point, Poland's clear political goals were to become a member of both NATO and the European Union. The Warsaw Uprising commemoration was an overt political demonstration of Polish efforts toward establishing a new identity.

For this reason, Wałęsa could end his 50th anniversary speech with the declaration, "Warsaw, you have won after all!"¹²⁹ As Steinke explains, commemoration of a defeat only makes sense if it can be interpreted as an important step toward a final victory.¹³⁰ Under the previous Communist regime, the victory of the Uprising was restricted to the triumph over Hitler and Nazism. After 1989, the Poles preferred to conceive the victory more generally, as a victory over all totalitarian systems—including the victory over the Communist system introduced into Poland by the Soviets in 1945. The phrase "after all" is an explicit inclusion of the five decades of the Communist regime. The 50th anniversary ceremony in 1994 marked the first time that the forces of the *Armia krajowa* could officially appear in public, sitting in the first rows wearing their old armbands with the letters "AK." Therefore, this celebration signified for them, as it did for President Wałęsa, the final victory of a free and democratic Poland over *two* dictatorships. The Poles emphasized the historical and moral aspects of the Uprising rather than a narrow military one. The end result of the Uprising was victory through this new life; the sacrifice has paid off.

¹²⁹ Wałęsa, "Address by President Lech Wałęsa."

¹³⁰ Klaus Steinke, "Pope John Paul II as a Polish Patriot: The Pope's letter in commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising," in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 211-221.

This is shown in an explicit reference to the rebirth of Poland: “Poland, born from the sacrifice of Warsaw, looks into the future with hope.”¹³¹

Changing Generations, Changing Needs

Fifty years after its conclusion, the Second World War was still recognized as one of the defining experiences of the century, but methods of commemoration were undergoing a major shift. The turn of the century introduced the challenge of what Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer describe as “the change of generations from the generation of the witnesses – victims, perpetrators, and bystanders – to the generations of the children and grandchildren.”¹³² As long as the older generation dominated the collective memory concerning the Second World War, commemorations were contributions to a memory. Inevitable omissions in literature, speeches, and media presentations could be easily filled in without a substantial loss of information by members of that generation on their own. Subtle allusions to the topic were sufficient under Communist suppression due to this automatic reconstruction. However, the advent of a new generation necessitated the invention of novel acceptable and persuasive formulations for the commemorative task. Since the new generations could not directly access historical events on the basis of personal remembrance, they needed other indirect sources, such as educators, mass media, films, literature, and memorials.

The first step was a monument. In 1989, President Wojciech Jaruzelski and Cardinal Jozef Glemp jointly unveiled a tableau of massive bronze soldiers emerging from wall fragments in a square near Warsaw’s Old Town before a crowd of thousands and a live television audience.¹³³

¹³¹ Wałęsa, Lech, “Address by President Lech Wałęsa.”

¹³² Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer, “Facing the past: The commemoration of the Warsaw Uprising on the occasion of its fiftieth anniversary,” in *The Art of Commemoration: Fifty years after the Warsaw Uprising*, ed. Titus Ensink and Christoph Sauer (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2003), 10.

¹³³ A.D. Horne, “Poles Commemorate Warsaw Uprising,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 6, 1989.

The official anniversary poster featured the long-banned symbol of the Home Army: the letter “P” with its bottom branching out into an anchor. These gestures were a major departure from the Communist government, when survivors of the Home Army lived under suspicion of treason.

Rowinski recalled in her memoir:

My sister took me to see the recently erected monument to the soldiers of the Warsaw Uprising. Unbelievable! A monument to honor the erstwhile reactionaries? Hirelings of western powers? Traitors? Arsonists of Warsaw? To believe it did exist, I had to see it with my own eyes.¹³⁴

The supportive presence of the Catholic clergy—in contrast to the hostile relationship between Pope Jean Paul II and Poland’s Communist government—also marked a significant change. After World War II, the Catholic Church served as a symbol of the nation’s continuity and a form of resistance to Communist indoctrination. Jaruzelski’s efforts in commemorating the Uprising were hence perceived as an effort by the government to shed its Communist ideology and align itself with Polish patriotic traditions.

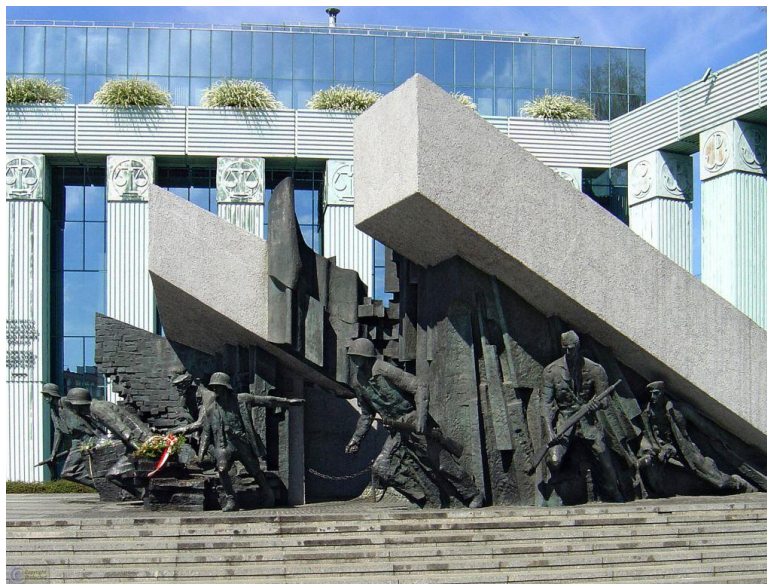


Figure 5: Warsaw Uprising Monument, Warsaw, 2010.

¹³⁴ Rowinski, *That the Nightingale Return*, 161.

State-enforced suppression was not the only force paralyzing commemoration of the Uprising, but also a natural self-preserving tendency with regard to the repression of painful events. Anthropologist Rosalind Shaw explains how studies of memory and violence are frequently entangled with ideas of trauma and PTSD; according to the theory of trauma silence, trauma is more likely to generate amnesia than remembering.¹³⁵ Experiences of violence might be resistant to verbalization. Yet even silence can become a vehicle for intergenerational transmission of memory. Shaw, writing in the context of the Lost Generation of the Great War, suggests that “a charged silence may have brought the war into the lives of later generations in a compelling way, creating space for their imagination to fill and prompting or indeed forcing a vicarious relationship with that past.”¹³⁶

As the once-young fighters of the Uprising faced the corrosion of their parents’ generation during the 1980s and 1990s, it became increasingly important—often obligatory—to pass on family truths about the war. Bohdan Chester Hryniewicz, only a boy when Warsaw was under siege in 1944, claimed to have “never written anything” until his children began pestering him to write his memoirs.¹³⁷ Likiernik notes in his memoir:

...in November 1993 to be exact, when consulting a doctor made me suddenly and acutely aware of my mortality, I realised that if I meant to write about the dark time of my life it would have to be done now or never. That if, unlike my father, I was to share my experience with my children and with my grandchildren, I had to knuckle down and write not only about that difficult time in Poland during the Second World War which had made me what I am now, but also about the lesson that I have learned: that a slave’s life is not worth living, while freedom is worth fighting and dying for.”¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Rosalind Shaw, “Afterword: Violence and the Generation of Memory” in *Remembering Violence: Anthropological Perspectives on Intergenerational Transmission*, ed. Nicolas Argenti and Katharina Schramm (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 254.

¹³⁶ Shaw, *Remembering Violence*, 256.

¹³⁷ Susan Rife, “The Polish Resistance, through the boy’s eyes,” *Herald Tribune*, Oct. 18, 2015.

¹³⁸ Likiernik, *By Devil’s Luck*, 9.

The recovery of memory often takes on this sense of a moral sanction, an obligation of transmission that Elie Wiesel refers to as our "supreme duty towards memory."¹³⁹ Survivors like Jack Klajman were imbued with an awareness that "in less than a generation, there will be few, if any, people around who can provide first-hand accounts of what happened."¹⁴⁰ As Susan Sontag maintains, collective memory is "not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened."¹⁴¹

National identity forged in the process of historical traumas manifests in what Dominick LaCapra calls a conversion of "trauma into the occasion for sublimity, to transvalue it into a test of the self of the group and an entry into the extraordinary."¹⁴² The Warsaw Uprising was particularly susceptible to such compensation. Human and material losses translated into a symbolic, moral gain. Rhetoric transformed the political and military failure of the Uprising into a triumph by enshrining its young participants' patriotism, heroism, and sacrifice. Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger describe survivor memory as "both constitutively relative to mediating consciousness and psychically undeniable as the self-presenting truth of trauma."¹⁴³ To critique the event by questioning its significance or justification threatens the worth of such a sacrifice. Therefore, according to Ellen Fine, those outside of direct experience or memory "feel obliged to accept the burden of collective memory that has been passed to them and to assume the task of sustaining it."¹⁴⁴ Memory thus becomes synonymous with history, as formally exhibited by the dually functioning museum-monument that is the Warsaw Rising Museum.

¹³⁹ Elie Wiesel, "Hope, Despair, and Memory," The Nobel Foundation, Dec. 11, 1986.

¹⁴⁰ Jack Klajman, *Out of the Ghetto* (Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 2000), 154.

¹⁴¹ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003), 86.

¹⁴² Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001), 23.

¹⁴³ Victoria Aarons and Alan L. Berger, *Third-Generation Holocaust Representation: Trauma, History, and Memory* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2017), 44.

¹⁴⁴ Ellen Fine, "Transmission of Memory: The Post-Holocaust Generation," in *The Holocaust: Lessons for the Third Generation*, ed. Dominick A. Iorio, Richard L. Libowitz, and Marcia S. Littell (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1997), 126.

Institutionalization at Last: The Warsaw Rising Museum

Warsaw waited many decades for a museum dedicated to the Warsaw Uprising. The idea of opening a modern museum for the commemoration of the Uprising and for the education of the public—both Polish and abroad—was promoted by leading political and intellectual figures in Poland. The museum was particularly promoted by then-Mayor Lech Kaczyński and his brother President Jarosław Kaczyński, whose center-right party had campaigned on a platform that emphasized cleansing Poland from its the Communist past.¹⁴⁵ The museum aimed to be listed among large historical museum projects such as Terror Haza in Budapest and the Imperial War Museum in London, a cultural-historical method through which Poland sought to stand on-par with its fellows in the European Union.¹⁴⁶ Mayor Kaczyński inaugurated the institution the day before the 60th anniversary of the outbreak of the Uprising, in an international celebration reminiscent of the 50th anniversary; this time, Russian envoys were conspicuously absent.

The museum was likewise designed to export the memory of the Uprising to an international audience. World leaders ranging from Dutch King Willem-Alexander to Indian President Pratibha Patil have visited the museum in trips designed to strengthen diplomatic and economic ties.¹⁴⁷ The City of Warsaw, as a precursor to the museum’s opening, sponsored a traveling “Towards Freedom” exhibit, presenting “the long history of Poland’s struggle toward independence during WWII, the Warsaw Uprising in 1944 and the roots for the ‘Solidarity’

¹⁴⁵ John Radzilowski, “Remembrance and Recovery: The Museum of the Warsaw Rising and the Memory of World War II in Post-communist Poland,” *Public Historian* 31, no. 4 (Fall 2009), 143-158.

¹⁴⁶ Pawł Kowal, “How we built the museum” in *Guidebook to the Warsaw Rising Museum* (Warsaw: Warsaw Rising Museum, 2007), 7.

¹⁴⁷ “President Patil Visits Warsaw Museum,” *Asian News International*, Apr. 24, 2009. See also “Dutch royal couple visits Poland,” *President.PL News*, June 24, 2014, <http://www.president.pl/en/president-komorowski/news/art,654,dutch-royal-couple-visits-poland.html>.

movement that led to the changes in 1989-1990 in Central and Eastern Europe.”¹⁴⁸ The political reverberations of the exhibitions—particularly their anti-Russian overtones—overshadow the cultural significance of the displays; the Museum of the Warsaw Rising cannot be viewed as another simple tourist attraction.

Still, the technical innovations used to animate the historical imagination are obviously largely directed at youth. The first “modern” historical museum in Poland, the interactive displays popularize the Uprising through multimedia and reconstructions along with artifacts. Adhering to the structure of intergenerational transmission reported by Anna Duszak of “the Old” and “the Young,”¹⁴⁹ co-founder and politician Dr. Pawł Kowal described the concept of the museum as “for grandparents and grandchildren.”¹⁵⁰ The impressive museum store offers a range of patriotic memorabilia, including coloring books for children and models of Liberty planes, thus engaging the youngest generation of contemporary Poles in the recreation of the Uprising’s iconic images.¹⁵¹ The museum’s free entry also encourages young people to visit.

The museum, which explicitly aims to “commemorate the memory of each of the many who took part in the insurrection effort in the name of freedom and justice,” succeeds as a memorial, and this is its primary strength.¹⁵² The faces, names, and words of the young insurgents are immortalized through photographs, the Oral History Archive, and a 156-meter Memory Wall that surrounds the museum building, listing almost 11 thousand engraved names of insurgents who fell in the armed struggle. However, as John Radzilowski reports in his review of the museum, the

¹⁴⁸ “National-Louis University Hosts Exclusive American Showing of Warsaw’s ‘Towards Freedom’ Exhibit,” *PR Newswire*, May 1, 2007.

¹⁴⁹ Anna Duszak, “World War II in Discourses of National Identification in Poland: An Intergenerational Perspective,” in *The Use and Abuse of Memory: Interpreting World War II in Contemporary European Politics*, ed. Christian Karner and Bram Mertens (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 211-228.

¹⁵⁰ Kowal, “How we built the museum,” 7.

¹⁵¹ Niżyńska, *The Kingdom of Significance*, 59.

¹⁵² Bartoszewski, *Abandoned Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising*, 22.

educational aspects of the institution are less effective.¹⁵³ The design of the museum works against a chronological storyline for the events of the Uprising. Kowal defends this display by arguing that:

Modern museum exhibits should not resort to the recreation of history “that’s exactly how it was”. After all, how often does such a path lead to objective truths, how frequently is it possible to precisely recreate bygone realities? After all, an exhibit is not the same as a stage decoration. Nevertheless, the exhibit should put visitors in a certain mood, provide a context, facilitate an encounter with the momentous history, help interpret and understand them. The exhibition constitutes a setting for the personal memorabilia, for an exhibit.¹⁵⁴

Instead of aiming to add coherence to the large and complex event, the museum chooses to have history meet and affect the visitor through the evocation of strong emotions.



Figure 6: Memorial Wall honoring the victims of the Warsaw Uprising, Warsaw, 2017.

Rather than blending anguish with historical reflection, the idealization of the traumatic past is intended to trigger an automatic emotional response, creating a sense of continuity between the tradition of unconditional patriotism attributed to the young members of the Home Army and the youth of contemporary Poland. The museum alludes to the controversy over the purpose and results of the Uprising, but its main effect is to induce a sense of awe and admiration for the

¹⁵³ Radzilowski, “Remembrance and Recovery.”

¹⁵⁴ Kowal, “How we built the museum,” 10.

insurrectionists' sacrificial spirit. Such evocation of emotions makes the museum a personal place—"a real Warsaw pantheon," according to Kowal.¹⁵⁵ In the words of historian Władysław Bartoszewski, writing for the Warsaw Rising Museum, "the entire Museum is a symbol of [the Uprising as a] spiritual rebirth."¹⁵⁶ By brushing over the controversies which surround the Uprising by invoking the emotional impact of death and destruction, the museum romanticizes the insurrectionists' sacrifice and reinforces a vision of Polish history as a series of repeated sacrificial gestures whose sheer traumatic dimension silences any rational debate. In spite of its technological sophistication and its self-proclaimed educational mission, the museum fails to present the historical complexities of the Uprising, insisting on the reinforcement of the emotional presentation of the event.

The presentation of the Warsaw Rising Museum contributes to the emotional attitude toward their country's history that dominates among Polish youth. Duszak provides evidence that Poles subscribe to a patriotism centered around knowledge of the country's history and one's readiness to defend the country in case of war; the cultivation of religious traditions and customs is also highly valued, but, as mentioned above, Polish Catholic observance and patriotism became intrinsically linked in a joint resistance during the Communist period.¹⁵⁷ Duszak's examination reveals how youth endorse forms of patriotic education to learn about World War II itself.¹⁵⁸ "True" images of the war require empathizing with victims. National pride is seen first and foremost in Poles' battles, insurrections, and heroism during World War II. With the creation of the Warsaw Rising Museum, the "power plant became a kind of patriotic sanctuary."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Kowal, "How we built the museum," 8.

¹⁵⁶ Bartoszewski, *Abandoned Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising*, 41.

¹⁵⁷ Duszak, "World War II in Discourses of National Identification in Poland," 218.

¹⁵⁸ Duszak, "World War II in Discourses of National Identification in Poland," 220.

¹⁵⁹ Kowal, "How we built the museum," 9.

Moreover, the museum's culminating "Lublin Poland" exhibition, which illustrates the passage from the horrors of the German occupation to the horrors of the Soviet one, is highlighted in order to emphasize the image of Poland as the traditional Polish Romantic lone fighter. While the other rooms are set in the somber shades of black and gray, red noticeably dominates in this section, marking a sharp contrast with the regime change. Winston Churchill, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, and Joseph Stalin are pictured smiling during the Yalta Conference in 1945. The caption reads, "The heroic fight left behind heroes' tombs, the meeting in Yalta left the world divided into two blocs. It is well known what this deal meant for Poland: half a century of enslavement at the Soviet hands. The Allies were no longer there to help Poland, and even the memory of the real heroes was being erased, fortunately without success."¹⁶⁰ Bartoszewski writes for the museum:

We, the Poles, could not participate directly in this process of rebuilding Europe, which was undertaken in the West. We were left with the rubble of our own capital. Despite allies in the victorious coalition, we found ourselves the "underdogs," who were imposed the domination from the East for forty odd years, within the Soviet block. Thus, fighting has not ended for us in 1945. It had to be initiated again and again.¹⁶¹

Bartoszewski's statement places the Warsaw Uprising solidly within the Polish "uprising tradition" ("tradycja powstańcza"), the romantic model of the earlier failed uprisings against Russian rule in the 19th century. In doing so, Bartoszewski echoes Kowal's hope that, "in the coming years other museums will be set up in our country presenting the Polish path to freedom, great events in history of the XIX and XX century, transformations in the Western Lands."¹⁶² Such an interpretation of the Uprising shifted the weight from the event's political and military failure to the unquantifiable realm of ethics, another honorable repetition in the sacrificial pattern of

¹⁶⁰ Bartoszewski, *Abandoned Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising*, 122.

¹⁶¹ Bartoszewski, *Abandoned Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising*, 19.

¹⁶² Kowal, "How we built the museum," 11.

Poland's tragic history. In this way, the Warsaw Rising Museum is designed to simultaneously emphasize Poland's new standing within the international community, as well as to reinforce a traditionally romantic view of Poland's identity, reassuring Poles who feared that their imminent entrance into the European Union would weaken the national identity for which they had fought.



Figure 7: “Lublin Poland” exhibition, Warsaw, 2014.

Conclusion: Poland as a Fighting Nation

The 1944 Warsaw Uprising was one in a long series of revolts against foreign rule. Throughout Polish history, Poland has been the natural target for the expansionary goals of aggressive neighbors: most notably the Germans and the Russians during and following World War II. Poland's recurring state of partition—coupled with Poles' hunger for the recognition of their sufferings—may have left the impression that the Polish population has been passive through centuries of oppression. This is not true in the least, but most importantly, the narratives of Polish resistance popularized in the latter 20th and early 21st centuries, such as that of the Warsaw Uprising, specifically counteract this stereotype of Polish passivity.

Criticism of the Uprising from the lens of Polish-Soviet relations or denunciation of planning errors is dismissed as judging the fighters using modern knowledge or paternalistically underestimating Poles' rights to manage their own political affairs. Piotr Zychowicz caused a storm of outrage in with his book *The Madness of '44* for calling the Uprising “a gigantic, useless sacrifice.”¹⁶³ In an echo of the Communist view of the Uprising as a pointless act, Zychowicz criticized the leadership of the Home Army for an exercise of poor judgment that led to the death of thousands of people. Still, most historians do not accept this point of view.

It has become unthinkable for Polish contemporaries that the Polish citizens residing in Warsaw during World War II would remain passive throughout such a long period of occupation. Historian Władysław Bartoszewski maintains that for those who took part in the Warsaw Uprising:

Fighting for freedom was their life. They were brought up in the independent Republic of Poland with great respect for independence and uprising traditions, they felt an affinity with freedom and sovereignty as an obvious part of their personal life, personal existence. Therefore, they never accepted the fact of occupation itself.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ Rosalia Romaniec, “The Wounds of Warsaw,” *Deutsche Welle*, Aug. 1, 2014.

¹⁶⁴ Bartoszewski, *Abandoned Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising*, 14.

Bartoszewski then connects this value of freedom to Polish society's forty-year opposition to the Communist system, urging that the interests of the Uprising cannot be limited to "only a single generation."¹⁶⁵ The significance of the Uprising can only be properly appreciated when notions of sovereignty and independence can be consolidated in a long-term view.

This new post-Communist mode of thinking about the Polish Underground State has elevated protest in the hierarchy of Polish values. The Uprising is prominent as the last sovereign act of the old Republic of Poland, executed with the support of the Polish people in the interest in the survival of a Polish state. The launched insurrection was regarded as a fight for national honor, characterized in moral terms that whatever is "right" cannot be futile.¹⁶⁶ Furthermore, the rhetoric of politicians like Lech Wałęsa and Aleksander Kwaśniewski suggests that a sovereign democratic Poland, achieved through the pivotal Solidarity movement, never could have won without the precedent of the Uprising. "Warsaw fell, but it fell victorious" as an indestructible legend.¹⁶⁷ New Jersey Congressman Christopher Smith paid tribute to Polish democracy in the U.S. House of Representatives by contending that the fall of the eastern bloc was "made in Poland," beginning with the Warsaw Uprising.¹⁶⁸ Defense of the insurrection's pragmatism is fueled by a fierce feeling that the Home Army fighters were on the morally correct side of history.

¹⁶⁵ Bartoszewski, *Abandoned Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising*, 15.

¹⁶⁶ Polish President Lech Kaczyński commemorated the 64th anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising on the premises of the Warsaw Rising Museum in 2008 with a speech that stated, "We also need to say explicitly that [the Uprising] cost lives of many thousands of our enemies, since the battles were exceptionally fierce and the German army suffered heavy losses. Let us also remember that it was not both sides that were right. It was only one side – ours that was right." See Lech Kaczyński, "We are not celebrating anniversary of defeat," *President.PL Archive*, August 3, 2008, <http://www.president.pl/en/archive/news-archive/news-2008/art,128,we-are-not-celebrating-anniversary-of-defeat.html>.

¹⁶⁷ Aleksander Kwaśniewski, "Participation of the President of the Republic of Poland in the celebrations to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising," *President.PL Archive*, August 1, 2004, <http://www.president.pl/en/archive/news-archive/news-2004/art,30,participation-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-poland-in-the-celebrations-to-commemorate-the-60th-anniversary-of-the-.html>.

¹⁶⁸ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record—Extensions of Remarks*, E2311 (December 19, 2011), <https://www.congress.gov/crec/2011/12/19/CREC-2011-12-19-pt1-PgE2310-3.pdf>.

While the people of Warsaw should finally be able to commemorate the history of this terrible period on their own terms, the pendulum might have swung too far. Although Bartoszewski advised the planning of the museum, he has nothing to do with it today: “The people, who want to influence others, want to force their own interpretation of the uprising...in Poland there is no respect even for the dead.”¹⁶⁹ While Bartoszewski believes that the Uprising was a great national tragedy, he is also now of the opinion that the disappointment of the attempt was unavoidable—thus negating his earlier writings claiming that “the heroes [were] abandoned by allies in the moment of their greatest need.”¹⁷⁰ Instead, Bartoszewski claims that “today, with the archives open, with greater knowledge about Roosevelt, Churchill and Stalin, it is clear that the uprising was doomed to failure.” The romantic tendency of modern modes of commemoration emphasizing Warsaw’s abandonment by the Western Allies and Stalin does not paint a complete picture. Still, emphasis on the failure of the Allied coalition to render effective support acts as a useful tool to bolster security claims that as a member of NATO and the European Union, Poland “will never again be left alone” facing threats from the east.¹⁷¹

The use of history for national purposes also becomes difficult. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, Polish leaders such as Wałęsa and Lech Kaczyński utilized the narrative of the Warsaw Uprising as part of Poland’s effort to integrate further into the European continent. Polish President Kwaśniewski likewise referenced the Uprising in his promotion of European unity, particularly

¹⁶⁹ “Politicised Uprising,” *Polish News Bulletin*, Aug. 1, 2013.

¹⁷⁰ Bartoszewski, *Abandoned Heroes of the Warsaw Uprising*, 5.

¹⁷¹ “Meeting of the President of the Republic of Poland with US Secretary of State Colin Powell” *President.PL Archive*, August 1, 2004, <http://www.president.pl/en/archive/news-archive/news-2004/art,29,meeting-of-the-president-of-the-republic-of-poland-with-us-secretary-of-state-colin-powell.html>. See also Bronisław Komorowski, “Address by the President of the Republic of Poland at Westerplatte,” *President.PL News*, September 1, 2014, <http://www.president.pl/en/president-komorowski/news/art,684,address-by-the-president-of-the-republic-of-poland-at-westerplatte.html>.

Polish-German reconciliation.¹⁷² Yet Poland's skepticism of the European Union's common foreign and security policy also has roots in the tale of the Uprising. Polish fears that EU interference in foreign and security policy would violate Polish national interests and sovereignty is the product of a nation whose independence was hard-fought and newly won. Glorification of the resistance can also embolden political hawkishness. Praise of the Warsaw Uprising's heroism in the pursuit of democracy was used as a tactic by the United States to encourage Poland to join the "war against terror" and deploy troops in Operation Iraqi Freedom.¹⁷³ These "traditions of combat and heroism," as lauded by Kaczyński, are also a source of controversy since the Uprising is largely marketed toward youth.¹⁷⁴ The Warsaw Rising Museum is not the only method through which children learn about the insurrection; an Uprising children's game was recently released featuring figures of laughing resistance fighters with weapons.¹⁷⁵ The commercialization of the Polish national ethos is often criticized for toeing the line of tolerability.

Expansions upon this topic might also place the commemoration of the 1944 Uprising in dialogue with that of the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising. Traditionally, the liquidation of the Jewish ghetto and the destruction of the city of Warsaw have been treated as two entirely separate events. Jewish historians object to the idea that international historiography largely overlooks the suffering of non-Jewish Poles, arguing that such historical treatment of Nazi-occupied Poland minimizes the antisemitic nature of the genocide. Supporters contend that the war crimes perpetrated by both

¹⁷² Aleksander Kwaśniewski, "Veterans' Day celebrations at the Presidential Palace," *President.PL Archive*, September 1, 2003, <http://www.president.pl/en/archive/news-archive/news-2003/art,89,veterans-day-celebrations-at-the-presidential-palace.html>.

¹⁷³ U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record—Senate*, S8242 (July 15, 2004), <https://www.congress.gov/crec/2004/07/15/CREC-2004-07-15-pt1-PgS8240.pdf>. Also see U.S. Congress, *Congressional Record—Extensions of Remarks*, E1519 (July 22, 2004), <https://www.congress.gov/crec/2004/07/22/CREC-2004-07-22-pt2-PgE1519.pdf>.

¹⁷⁴ Lech Kaczyński, "The message of that generation," *President.PL Archive*, July 31, 2008, <http://www.president.pl/en/archive/news-archive/news-2008/art,127,the-message-of-that-generation.html>.

¹⁷⁵ Romaniec, "The Wounds of Warsaw."

Hitler and Stalin on Jews are given due attention. In order to comprehend the true enormity of Poland's wartime upheaval, a fuller picture must be constructed. Few besides Alexandra Richie examine the impact of the 1943 Jewish tragedy on the 1944 insurrection or outline the participation of ghetto survivors in the Warsaw Uprising.¹⁷⁶ The Polish national narrative is undoubtedly fortified by the heroism and suffering of hundreds of thousands of Poles—and a sense of outrage that their story is largely unknown—but an awareness that Polish heroism was accompanied by frequent callousness towards Jews must be acknowledged.

The heroic and primarily military narrative of the Uprising likewise comes at the price of minimizing the losses of Warsaw's civilian population, which paid the highest price for the insurrection. Additionally, while many men have become highly decorated and recognized, the stories of many female fighters have been swept under the rug. Warsaw Uprising P.O.W. Richard Cosby spoke upon receiving an award in July 2011 about the misconception that women were not courageous themselves, but simply assisted the heroism of the men.¹⁷⁷ For example, the acclaimed film *Kanał* only showcases two female characters, neither soldiers; one portrays a messenger, and other a guide, roles typically attributed to children.¹⁷⁸ Cosby disagrees with this popular portrayal: "A lot of women were heroes." A poster of women fighters in the Warsaw Rising Museum rose garden reads, "Tez Walczylyśmy" ("We Also Fought"), but one must wonder why this sign was relegated to a marginal position only accessible during the seasonable months.

The emphasis placed on Polish sovereignty also has the inadvertent effect of alienating large segments of the Polish population. As AK fighter Peter Badmajew recounts in his memoir *The History of a Warsaw Insurgent*:

¹⁷⁶ Richie, *Warsaw 1944*.

¹⁷⁷ Derek Crowe, "Quiet Hero – Warsaw Uprising 1944," *DerekCrowe.com*, 2011, <http://www.derekcrowe.com/post.aspx?id=117>

¹⁷⁸ *Kanał*, directed by Andrzej Wajda (1957: KADR).

Conservative President Lech Kaczyński (2005-10), who had a pathological hate for Russia and Communism, tried to change history according to his policy. He stated that Poland did not exist before year 1989; this statement deeply hurt the old generation of millions of Poles who had been brought up in Communist Poland and are still alive, but slowly fading away. When the last Pole from that era dies, maybe People will indeed believe that Poland started in 1989.¹⁷⁹

Kaczyński's divisive renouncement of the Communist period still fuels much hostility, particularly from the Polish political left. Memories of Communism might include long supply lines, restricted travel, and extreme censorship, but a nostalgia for the way things had been lingers in the Polish psyche. The older generation feels that it has lost its identity and been patronizingly left behind or even discriminated against in the transformation to capitalism and democracy. In particular, the economic downturn for Poland's retired citizens has created nostalgia for the Communist past.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the presence of a museum has inspired and supported valuable research. While emphasis in the field of has been shifting towards visitor engagement and marketing in recent years, research remains an important element of museum work. The establishment of the Warsaw Rising Museum has in turn created an archive of historical information on the topic. Museum practices have influences that can reach beyond national boundaries, and public knowledge follows curatorial expertise. The mere existence of the Warsaw Rising Museum encourages further investigation of the complex experience of the Warsaw Uprising and how the demise of Communism in Poland has led to its rebirth.

¹⁷⁹ Badmajew, *The History of a Warsaw Insurgent*, 155-6.

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