

Anamnesis of Poland's Mnemonic Determinism: Are Historical Narratives Misused to Support Conservative Political Agenda?

By
Darja Babović

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Abstract

Collective memory studies have been a central catalyst in understanding the dark legacies of Europe's twentieth century. The debates associated with the asymmetry of historical experience between Eastern and Western Europe have been generated with the purpose of deeper understanding of the predicament surrounding the competing narratives of Nazism and Communism. This piece of research positions itself within the ongoing discussion regarding the underlying causes of the eruption of mnemonic determinism in Poland. Applying case study analysis, I observe the actions on behalf of the Polish government through the prism of its brand of conservatism. The assessment shows that the hostile rhetoric of the incumbent Polish Law and Justice party (PiS), with abundant support from the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), is mobilized through the use of the most potent memory vectors in Poland: The Katyn Massacre, and the Holocaust. Passing of the Holocaust Law regarding the use of misnomer 'Polish death camps' has questioned the political legitimacy of Law and Justice Party in many ways. I find that the historical narratives are misused to support Conservative political agenda. The PiS party appeals to both domestic and international audience to align and complement the growing strain of discontent among domestic and international allies, for the ideas of preserving Polish sovereignty. I contribute to the research by presenting the audience how the competing narratives of the Holocaust and Communism – through the use of the configurative re-enactment of the aforementioned memory vectors – are utilized by the Polish government for the purposes of promoting conservative nationalism.

Key Words: Poland, Memory Politics, Holocaust, Communism, Mnemonic determinism, World War II, Collective Memory, Law and Justice party, Institute of National Remembrance

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Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Abstract..... | i |
| Acknowledgements | ii |
| Table of Contents..... | iii |
| 1. Introduction..... | 1 |
| 1.1 Current Memory Politics in Central and Eastern Europe Within Broader European Context | 1 |
| 1.3 Methodology and Case Study Justification | 6 |
| 1.4 Contributions to the Literature..... | 8 |
| 1.5 Thesis Structure..... | 8 |
| 2. Theoretical Framework | 9 |
| 2.1 Memory Studies Literature..... | 10 |
| 2.2 Point of Contention: Divided Europe, Divided Memories | 12 |
| 2.3 Contrasting Interpretations of CEE Memory Politics..... | 15 |
| 3. Case Study: Assessing the Underlying Causes of Poland's Mnemonic Determinism..... | 21 |
| 3.1 Case Study Structure | 21 |
| 3.2 The Institute of National Remembrance | 21 |
| 3.3 The Law and Justice Party..... | 24 |
| 3.4 The Polish Memory Vectors..... | 27 |
| 3.5 The Katyn Massacre..... | 28 |
| 3.6 The Polish Death Camps controversy & Jedwabne | 35 |
| 3.7 What is going on?..... | 39 |
| 4. Conclusion | 41 |
| Bibliography | 44 |

1. Introduction

1.1 Current Memory Politics in Central and Eastern Europe Within Broader European Context

Memories of the Holocaust pioneered the formation of transnational memory cultures, which have become civilizational cornerstones of collective memory and remembrance policies in universal terms. In becoming “the cultural foundation for global human right politics,”¹ the underlying motives for the internationalization of the Holocaust were eloquently articulated on behalf of the director of the US Holocaust Memorial in Washington: “to tell a story of the Holocaust in such a way that it would resonate not only with the survivor in New York and his children in San Francisco, but with a black leader from Atlanta, a Midwestern farmer, or a Northeastern industrialist...”² The memory of Shoah has thus been ingrained in institutions through the morality practices of different political and supranational agents in never allowing the history to repeat.³ In 2000, declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust resulted in the creation of the ‘Stockholm Declaration’ in which the participants, among other agreements, pledged to unite the forces in educating the world about the horrendousness of the Holocaust.⁴ One of the ways to do this, was the implementation of the Holocaust day in respective member countries. January the 27th was chosen to mark such a day.

On European level, the process of developing a transnational European memory has been widely referred to as the “Europeanization of the Holocaust memory”⁵ Thus, morality of collective remembrance practices, has, in general terms, been cemented in, and erected from the

¹ Daniel Levi and Natan Sznaider. “Memory Unbound.” *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (2002): 87–106.

² Ibid. (p. 88)

³ Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, “The Institutionalization of Cosmopolitan Morality: The Holocaust and Human Rights,” *Journal of Human Rights* 3, no. 2 (June 1, 2004): 143–57.

⁴ “Stockholm Declaration,” IHRA, accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.holocaustremembrance.com/stockholm-declaration>.

⁵ Marek Kucia. “The Europeanization Of Holocaust Memory And Eastern Europe.” *East European Politics & Societies* 30 (2016): 97–119.

West-centric perspective, as a direct aftermath of the modern tragedies caused by World War II totalitarian regimes, with the Holocaust as a mnemonic groundstone for remembrance, political ammunition, and a catalyst for coming to terms with the past.⁶ Furthermore, one of the informal criteria for joining the European Union, as exemplified in Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs Heather Conley's remarks at the Stockholm Security Conference on April 24th, 2002, is the implementation of the Holocaust memorial day in the national commemoration schedule.⁷

The accession of Central and Eastern European states in the EU has complicated the process of the Holocaust remembrance. The reason is, while frozen behind the Iron curtain, their own histories, memories and experiences have been interlinked with the Holocaust. Under communist regime, which as many have argued has been equally cruel, Eastern European states were often unaware of the extent of the atrocity of the Holocaust. Some have even seen the Nazis as liberators from the Soviet occupants.⁸ Eastern Europe geographically held the prosecution camps where Jews had been murdered. Poland, for example, was a home to tangible sites of mass genocide, while at the same time being scrutinized and occupied by the communist regimes. Hence, the intellectual distance imposed by the Iron Curtain, resulted in the Eastern European countries not being confronted with the Holocaust memory that had already been developed, and Europeanized by the Western co-states.⁹ At the accession process, they were asked to implement the Holocaust memorial day in their commemoration schedules and further, to quote Kucia, "although the European Parliament did not explicitly call on other East European countries to publically apologize for the Holocaust and to recognize their

⁶ Jan-Werner Müller, *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge University Press, 2002); Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, "Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory," *European Journal of Social Theory* 5, no. 1 (February 1, 2002): 87–106; Aleida Assmann, "Europe: A Community of Memory?," *Ghi Bulletin* 40, no. 1 (2007): 12–25.

⁷ Heather Conley in Stevick, Doyle. *The Politics of the Holocaust in Estonia: historical memory and social divisions in Estonian education*. (New York: 2007): 217–244.

⁸ Ibid. (p.238)

⁹ Marek Kucia. "The Europeanization Of Holocaust Memory And Eastern Europe."

responsibilities for the crimes against the Jews, the parliament's expectations in these regards was evident.”¹⁰

In 2008, the EU established a remembrance day for the victims of Communist and Nazi regimes, however not without acrimonious appeals on behalf of post-Communist Eastern Europe. The Prague declaration set an important precedent in acknowledging the criminality of Communism on behalf of the Western European elites. Also referred to as the Prague Declaration of European Conscience and Communism, it was implemented to uphold the continuance in seeking justice for communist crimes and their embedding in collective memory in general.¹¹ The Declaration, in respect with European conscience and communism was signed by prominent European politicians, such as former Czech president Vaclav Havel and former German president Joachim Guack.¹² The most visible progress of the Prague declaration was the establishment of the European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism adopted by the European Union and the OSCE, marked on August 23rd.

The EU, however, did not fully engage in the revision of its policies to complement the mnemonic needs of its Eastern co-states.¹³ Dujisin has noted that “the reaction to this challenge from the East on the part of Brussels has been ambiguous and hesitant.”¹⁴ Furthermore, it has been said the ‘[c]ommemoration of Communism’s victims is necessary in the western world, where an unhealthy amnesia had settled over the crimes of Communism to a degree unthinkable for the victims of the Holocaust.’¹⁵ Although it was acknowledged, some have argued that “Rather than reflecting societal consensus, this narrative, loosely based on theories of totalitarianism, has achieved a high degree of institutionalization thanks to considerable political

¹⁰ Ibid. (p. 101)

¹¹ Zoltan Dujisin. 2013. Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance. *Annual Doctoral Conference in Budapest, Hungary*, pp.1-18 (p.17)

¹² "Prague Declaration - List Of Signatories". 2016. *Praguedclaration.Eu*. <http://www.praguedclaration.eu/sig/>.

¹³ Laure Neumayer. “Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: The Mobilizations Around the ‘Crimes of Communism’ in the European Parliament.” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*. (2015): 344-363.

¹⁴ Zoltan Dujisin. “Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance.” 2013. (p.3)

¹⁵ James Mark. *Unfinished revolution*. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2011).

investment in interest alignment by the post-communist right.”¹⁶ This criticism took a diplomatically dangerous turn and was significantly used on behalf of the CEE countries in shaping their national narratives. To date, “[t]he EU council framework decision on combating racism and xenophobia does not cover crimes directed group of persons defined by reference to criteria other than race, colour, religion, descent, or national or ethnic origin, such as social status or political convictions.”¹⁷

The memory of the Holocaust has been implemented in the national schedules of Eastern European member states, whereas the memory of Communism is still, to some extent, being ‘strained’ between the search for recognition versus and political instrumentalism. Even if significant progress has been achieved, the latest being consolidation of the work of eight EU member states, the Council for investigation of Crimes of Communist Regimes,¹⁸ it is seen as a protocol fulfillment common for diplomatic ‘politeness’.

While arguments have been that the memories of the Holocaust and Communism should not be compared the imbalance between remembrance practices has received attention of many theoretical ‘heavyweights’ thus to quote Mäklsoo “If law is a medium of collective remembrance, what role is allocated to international legal rulings by states fighting for the wider recognition of their central mnemonic narratives.”¹⁹ Refraining from insinuations and distinguishing memory from an argument, Margaret Buber Neumann, a double survivor, for she survived Stalin’s prison before being handed over to the Nazi camps, posed a puzzling, rhetorical question: “I asked myself which is really worse: the lice-infested corn-cob-walled cabins in Birma [Kazakhstan] or the nightmare-order of Ravensbruck...It is hard to decide which is the least

¹⁶ Zoltan Dujisin. “Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance.” 2013. (p.3)

¹⁷ Maria Mäklsoo. “Criminalizing Communism: Transnational Mnemopolitics In Europe”. *International Political Sociology* 8 no 1: (2014): 82-99. p. 82

¹⁸ “Platform Greets Work Of Eight EU Member States On CICROC, The Council For Investigation Of Crimes Of Communist Regimes | Platform Of European Memory And Conscience”. 2017. *Memoryandconscience.Eu*.
<https://www.memoryandconscience.eu/2017/08/24/platform-greets-work-of-eight-eu-member-states-on-cicroc-the-council-for-investigation-of-crimes-of-communist-regimes/>.

¹⁹ Maria Mäklsoo. “Kononov v. Latvia as an Ontological Security Struggle over Remembering the Second World War.” In *Law and Memory: Towards Legal Governance of History*, edited by Uladzislau Belavusau and Aleksandra Gliszczynska-Grabias, 91–108. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017). (p.91)

humane—to gas people in five minutes, or to strangle them slowly, over the course of three months, by hunger?”²⁰

Additionally, the urge for a specific manner in which political elites from Central and Eastern Europe have been communicating with the international arena in presenting their dark chapters of history is further embedded in the rise of the right leaning populism that has subdued Europe to a pre-war like predicament. The fragmentation of the party systems opened the doors for interest alignment of the groups who oppose immigration and more importantly cultural liberalization.²¹ Economic demise of some CEE countries has served as a strong argument for the influx of conservative rhetoric who accuse the EU of questioning the integrity of their national sovereignties.²² The cultural factors play an important role here, given post-communist societies that have accepted the notion of liberal democracy are known to have a fragmented left-over party system which levitate between the Western notion of liberal democracy that has not been deeply rooted, the European Union and their national ‘selves’.

The aim of this thesis is to assess whether these rival approaches, the competing narratives, constitute memory Politics in Central Eastern Europe in search for recognition, or for the instrumental/national purposes.

1.2 The Argument

The cultural misbalance between the EU and Central-East Europe, in which the prior does not ‘complement’ the ethno-nationalism of Central East Europe, is visible from the political discourse of the CEE countries. This creates a predicament, and it remains pertinent to understand whether this predicament stems from a genuine search for recognition, on behalf of CEE agents,

²⁰ Conley Heather in Stevick, Doyle. *The Politics of the Holocaust in Estonia: historical memory and social divisions in Estonian education*. (p.238)

²¹William Galston. "The Rise Of European Populism And The Collapse Of The Center-Left". *Brookings*. (2018). <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/08/the-rise-of-european-populism-and-the-collapse-of-the-center-left/>.

²² Ibid.

or does it mostly bear nationalist agenda, as it is frequently argued. If we contrast the Europeanization of the Holocaust, to the Europeanization of Communism, as two totalitarian regimes, in this intersection and union, we observe that for Central and Eastern Europe the memory intensity of the Holocaust has been impatiently handled, whereas the memory of Communism has not yet reached its peak. Thus, the anamnesis of the mnemonic determinism of CEE countries, show that historical narratives are also misused to support Conservative political agenda, under the pretext of ‘searching justice,’ via appealing to European institutions, and international audience, for the purposes of interest alignment.

1.3 Methodology and Case Study Justification

In my analysis, I will apply a case study by the means of qualitative research, with the purpose of assessing what the incumbent Polish government, in combination with the Institute of National Remembrance, considers to be ‘Western misrepresentation of Polish history.’ To be more precise, I specifically adopted an analytical approach to process tracing of the interaction of the Katyn massacre, with the ‘Polish death camp’ controversy, channelled through vision of the incumbent political party, and the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). How their narrative, and for which purposes, is delivered to the international arena, shall too be assessed. The reason why I am using this interaction between the two memory vectors is because they represent the most significant historical pieces, their potency very much used in formulating public policies and

Furthermore, I will demonstrate to the broader audience, how Katyn was reintroduced in the public political sphere of Poland, at the moment when the controversy of the law criminalizing the use of ‘Polish death camps’ was infamously diffused by the Western media. I will present how this symbiotic relationship between the two memory vectors are used in the international forum in aim of presenting and emphasizing what the Law and Justice Party and IPN believe to be Western misinterpretation of Polish history. My analysis will, therefore employ the following

arguments: “deteritorialized and temporal phenomena that initiate a new moment in time by endowing the past with new life in the future”²³, in a dialogue with Mälksoos “seeking recognition”²⁴ argument juxtaposed to Dujisin et al. that the Europeanization of the communist remembrance has ulterior motives, which are adeptly concealed in seeking recognition via using opportunity structures related to European Union integration. Moreover, that this resulted to unifications of similar agendas of political elites across national borders who wish to engage in evading complicity in the Holocaust while at the same time furthering their political will.²⁵

The purpose of this is to assess if the Law and Justice party aligned with IPN is using historical left-overs for the purposes of seeking ‘justice’ recognition or promoting Conservative self-interest. The limitations to my research are many. First of all, my inability to read Polish has disabled me from engagement with the secondary material, such as the Polish newspapers, broader audience comments, and general online content of produced by state individuals. Majority of secondary material in English, published by Polish media is monocausal, and for these reasons I had to rely on the work of few authors who present the situation in a different light. Consequently, my secondary research was also confined to Western media outlets. This has certainly influenced the outcome of my findings, and as Vennesson has said, “process tracing applied to a case study does not guarantee an empirical observation will be successfully conducted.”²⁶ Additionally, many puzzles had arisen to my initial research, however, in the conclusive chapter, they shall offer the questions for further examination.

²³ Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives* (Berghahn Books, 2015).

²⁴ Maria Mälksoo, “The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns and the Collective Memory of Europe,” *European Journal of International Relations* 15, no. 4 (December 1, 2009): 653–80.

²⁵ Zoltan Dujisin. *Post-Communist Europe*. (2013); Efraim Zuroff, “Why Joachim Gauck Is Wrong for Germany.” (2018). <http://www.timesofisrael.com/why-joachim-gauck-is-wrong-for-germany/>; Michael Shafir, “Between Denial and ‘Comparative Trivialization’: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe” (January 1, 2002).

²⁶ Pascal Vennesson. “Case Studies and Process Tracing: Theories and Practices.” In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, ed. Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating, (Cambridge University Press, 2008): 223–39. p.230

1.4 Contributions to the Literature

Having reintegrated the arguments on behalf of academic scholars with respect to the scepticism in the genuine search for recognition versus the interest alignment, I contribute to the research by presenting the audience how the competing narratives of the Holocaust and Communism – through the use of the configurative re-enactment of the aforementioned memory vectors – are utilized by the Polish government for the purposes of promoting conservative nationalism. In the aim of consolidating my findings, I offered the examples employed by other governments, thus creating a more stable interpretation of the said argument.

1.5 Thesis Structure

The thesis shall proceed in the following way: Prior to engaging in the case study, I will offer a brief theoretical background on the study of collective memory, and its rich volumes and interpretations. I shall then offer literature devoted to competing collective memories of Nazism and Communism, synonymously as the concepts of totalitarianism. Furthermore, the literature review will be used in knotting the referential point for the subsequent empirical argumentation. The contrasting theoretical framework will be utilized to highlight the train of thought of another end of the spectrum, in the aim of offering a more nuanced vision of my findings. Finally, I set the argument in a broader context for a more accurate vision of the current debate. Then, I will empirically examine the argument using a case study of Polish mnemonic determinism with a specific focus on the interactive use of the memory vectors outlined in the introduction. The conclusion will offer the summary of main insights, target audience expectations, while acknowledging the limitations of the research, and raising questions to be further examined in the future.

2. Theoretical Framework

The first section of this chapter will give the audience a brief insight into the cultural sphere of collective memory. The second section of this chapter will be devoted to the examination of the existing literature with a focus on the contextual differences of Western and Eastern collective memories and how the competing mnemonic narratives position themselves in the cultural discontinuity of two memory dimensions. My goal is to explore, and assess whether Maria Mälksoo's vision on 'The Memory Politics of Becoming European'²⁷ and 'Transnational Mnemopolitics in Europe'²⁸ can be reintegrated in motivating factors in the memory justice seeking on behalf of the CEECs. Moreover, the argument made by James Mark in his seminal piece 'The Unfinished Revolution'²⁹ which offers a detailed account of the Post-Communist countries in coming to terms with their pasts, will be utilized in assessing the use of competing narratives.

Alternatively, if we juxtapose the debate to the work of Dujisin, we observe another end of the spectrum, in which he argues that while having no coherent stand point to build their political consensus on, the right wing leaders of post-communist societies latch on to the initiative to institutionalize a crimes related narrative of communism as to morally rise above their left wing counterparts, in an effort to gain political advantage and spur a divisive movement, which would re-shape the domestic vision of history from the status quo to mythological victimhood.³⁰ This view is also shared by Efraim Zuroff who claims that the Prague Declaration, for example, robs Holocaust of its uniqueness, as it hopes to "shift the focus from the mass murder of Jews during the Holocaust to the suffering of East Europeans under the yoke of Communism, thereby transforming perpetrator-nations into countries of victims."³¹ For the purposes in conceptually

²⁷ Maria Mälksoo. "The Memory Politics of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns And The Collective Memory Of Europe."

²⁸ Maria Mälksoo. "Criminalizing Communism: Transnational Mnemopolitics In Europe."

²⁹ Mark James, *The Unfinished Revolution*

³⁰ Dujisin, Zoltan. "Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance."

³¹ Efraim Zuroff, "Why Joachim Gauck Is Wrong for Germany," accessed May 20th, 2018, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/why-joachim-gauck-is-wrong-for-germany/>.

refining this two opposing spectrums, I also employ the cultural factor in the examination of the the conflicting collective memories, as that will allow the audience to obtain a more nuanced vision of the argument which shall be applied as the core referential question in the case study application.

2.1 Memory Studies Literature

The memory studies literature is very rich with authors and interpretations, and as such it is often a subject to revision, and at times, poor understanding. It is almost common knowledge that the collective memory discourse has been developing from the seminal work of Maurice Halbwach, who argued that the recollection of memory and process associated to it is dependent on how the social sphere conditions such memory, shaped by the social circle to which the recollecting individual belongs.³² Olick, extending his thoughts on the work of Halbwach, argued that groups can produce memories in individuals or events that they never experienced.³³ This is particularly true if memory is bound to an understanding of a specific culture who share some similar point of reference. Cultural sphere is thus a very potent element in the memory studies. By analysing the wide array of social-cultural products, we can extract the collective consciousness of a social group belonging to a particular culture.

With further particular interest to culture have been the works of Pierre Nora, who has developed the concept of *lieux de mémoire* in which he elaborates that “any significant entity, whether material or non-material in nature, which by dint of human will or the work of time has become a symbolic element of the memorial heritage of any community.”³⁴ Furthermore, through cultural lenses, Assmann also offers analysis of such memory, in which he states that “it is organized not around the poles of remembering and forgetting, but inserts a third category which is the combination of remembering and forgetting. This third category refers to the cultural

³² Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory, The Heritage of Sociology*, Trans. Lewis Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992); Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory*, (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang D, n.d.) accessed May 10, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.3726/978-3-653-02441-8>

³³ Jeffrey K. Olick, “Collective Memory: The Two Cultures,” *Sociological Theory* 17, no. 3 (1999): 333–48.

³⁴ Pierre Nora, *Les Lieux de Memoire, Bibliotheque Illustree Des Histoires* (Paris: Gallimard, c1984-c1986).

function of storing extensive information in libraries, museums, and archives which far exceed the capacities of human memory.”³⁵ How memory is communicated and with which aim, on the other hand is undeniably dependent on the political leaning of a state actor. Given so, James E. Young has observed, “[m]emory was never shaped in a vacuum, the motives of memory are never pure.”³⁶ The cultural sphere is thus very important in a deeper understanding of the European mnemonic disunity. It remains pertinent to understand and examine the cultural maturity of Central-East Europe contrasted to the West, for a more genuine understanding of their public narrative.

Additionally, a conceptual innovation was recently welcomed in the memory studies.³⁷ This innovation argues the existence of a category of a memory event: “deteritorialized and temporal phenomena that initiate a new moment in time by endowing the past with new life in the future.”³⁸ This conceptual framework has been developed to exemplify how recycled memory vectors are used with the transnational agenda and the media society for the purposes of political instrumentalism. The recirculation of memory events is thus necessary for the preservation of the wished self-identity, and, as Mälksoo has observed “it is invoked to constitute the central narrative of a state about its past in order to form a core part of its consistent sense of the self in the present.”³⁹ Even so, the acquired memory palette of a state throughout its contemporary history is never homogenous, and it cannot be precisely accounted for. Furthermore, it does not unanimously reflect the societal consensus, given the population itself is usually deeply divided in the quest for acceptance of the past, in other words, the cultural maturity of a nation can either be imbedded in acknowledging democratic practises and the acceptance of consequences they will have on a specific culture, alternatively, they can result in the consolidation of authoritarianism with all its side-effects in terms of media-censorship, the individual liberties in general, and the

³⁵ Aleida Assmann, “Memory, Individual and Collective,” *The Oxford Handbook of Contextual Political Analysis*. (March 16, 2006).

³⁶ James E. Young in Hansen-Glucklich, Jennifer. *Holocaust Memory Reframed*. (New Jersey, Rutgers University Press: 2014). p.10

³⁷ Pakier and Wawrzyniak, *Memory and Change in Europe*.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Maria Mälksoo. “Memory Must Be Defended’: Beyond The Politics Of Mnemonical Security”. *Security Dialogue* 46 no 3. (2015): 221-237. (p.227).

rule of law.⁴⁰ Cultural maturity of a nation is thus very much obvious from the way its collective memory is communicated.

2.2 Point of Contention: Divided Europe, Divided Memories

The post-Communist context bears excruciating complexities in memory practices for multifarious reasons. Extending Levy and Sznajder's argument, whereas the Holocaust had exclusive moments in time for its iconographic formation and cyclical representation – in the post-war years, during the Cold War era and in the post-Cold War period, where each period recycled and compounded the reception and institutionalization of the Holocaust memory, it is mostly after the fall of the Berlin wall and the de jure subsiding Cold War Sentiment (the democratization of Eastern Europe) the memory of communism started gasping for air in intellectual circles.⁴¹ Thus, the lack of academic attention attributed to the criminality of communist totalitarianism, can be explained via the existence of historical 'ice age' of Eastern Europe, hence its temporal discontinuity from intellectual development of memory by a Western grade-scale.

To date, in the period between 1989 and 2014, the European Parliament adopted twelve documents that constituted "the Europeanization of Holocaust memory."⁴² The influx of collective memories of the East-European member states, on the other hand, by bringing communist baggage, posed a conundrum of whether such differing memories can co-exist, and whether they are in fact empirically plausible.⁴³ The conflicting collective memories of the West and East have complicated the European forum on different levels. In the differing perceptions of the Eastern member states, World War II did not end at the fall of Berlin Wall, but in fact in

⁴⁰ William Galston. "The Rise Of European Populism And The Collapse Of The Center-Left". *Brookings*. (2018.) <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/03/08/the-rise-of-european-populism-and-the-collapse-of-the-center-left/>.

⁴¹ Daniel Levi and Natan Sznajder. "Memory Unbound."

⁴² Marek Kucia. "The Europeanization Of Holocaust Memory And Eastern Europe."

⁴³ Jan-Werner Müller. "On 'European Memory' Some Conceptual and Normative Remarks." In M. Pakier and B. Strath, ed., *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, (Berghahn Books 2010): 26-37.

the initial stages of the democratization process.⁴⁴ The regional reupholstering of the national identity was initiated in hopes of regaining the independent entities of the nation states. The revolutionary movements across Europe, namely the Round Table Talks, which had given a momentum to the fall of Eastern European communist block, have unfrozen, and initiated a mining into a vast amount of mnemonic space.⁴⁵ Post accession, and with the use of the extracts from the liberated mnemonic space, “mobilizations of memory entrepreneurs”⁴⁶ faced a battle in the European Institutions -- the European Parliament and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe -- in search of mnemonic justice and status recognition.⁴⁷

According to James Mark, this has additionally been made complex by the internal divisions of historical accounts of Central and Eastern Europe and the nuances of the political stance of the post-communist elite, or internal division on how to come to terms with such past. He has named this phenomenon the ‘Unfinished Revolution’⁴⁸. Alternatively, it is also very difficult to grasp the frame of memory among the CEECs. Very distinct, cross-cultural experiences had occurred among the Central and Eastern European Countries. Poland is particularly important in this case because Poland was attacked, occupied and annexed by both the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany as a result of Molotov Ribbentrop pact, whereas Hungary for example, was a member of the Axis Alliance and assisted the attack on the Soviet Union, thus the difference in the war roles has accounted for the difference in central narratives.

The fall of communism brought the demand for new memories, new emphasis, and a re-evaluation of what had been the narrative during communism, which has, about the Holocaust, been absolutely different from the Western narrative. Randolph Braham has in fact noted that one of the communist narratives portrayed communists as the first victims of the Holocaust, and Jews

⁴⁴ Mark James, “The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe.”

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Laure Neumayer, “Integrating the Central European Past into a Common Narrative: The Mobilizations Around the ‘Crimes of Communism’ in the European Parliament”

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Mark James, “The Unfinished Revolution: Making Sense of the Communist Past in Central-Eastern Europe.”

as secondary victims of the Holocaust.⁴⁹ This was exemplary from the fact once communists assumed power in 1949, their government terminated the physical maltreatment of the Jews, and alternatively began an assault on the memory of the Holocaust.⁵⁰ Thus the difference in war experiences, interlinked with competing forces of Nazism and Communism certainly complicate the quest for post historical ‘justice.’

Nevertheless, when the repressed memory permeated the European public discourse, it became obvious that “[t]he ‘hot memory’ of eastern European history is not the persecution of the Jews, it is primarily the consequences of the Soviet occupation, followed by the contribution to the Communist regime made by those states themselves.”⁵¹ Furthermore, as Lowe and Joel have argued, the Cold War re-accentuated the victim-survivor survivor cult of politicized memory⁵². This is when the strong mnemonic determinism of the Eastern European states rooted itself in the national context. The etiquette for remembering communism beyond its political trivialization, on behalf of the Western parts of European Union, is thus quite reduced to symbolism, as strong identifications are only produced when (intellectually) distant events have a local resonance.⁵³

The notions of ‘double occupation’ and ‘totalitarian evils’ referring to crimes perpetrated by Nazism and Stalinism became a household name of the EU. The diffusion of the concept for criminalizing Communism, and equalizing it to Nazism, has on one hand united the narrative of the former Soviet occupants in seeking of mnemonic justice, and on the other it has shown the perspective of the European agents in dealing with such narratives.⁵⁴ As Mäliksoo has noted, post accession, Central and Eastern member states had expected the European Union to bear the moral obligation, and adequately relate to the ideological wrongdoings of the communist totalitarian regime.⁵⁵ That, however, did not happen. It seems that a turn at the discourse of some countries

⁴⁹ Andras Kovacs, Randolph L. Braham, *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later* (New York: Central European University Press, 2016).

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Conny Mithander, John Sundholm, and Adrian Velicu, *European Cultural Memory Post-89*, vol. 30 (Rodopi, 2013). (p. 59).

⁵² David Lowe and Tony Joel. *Remembering the Cold War*. Florence: (Taylor and Francis, 2014): 3-19

⁵³ Daniel Levi and Natan Sznaider. “Memory Unbound.”

⁵⁴ Maria Mäliksoo. “Criminalizing Communism: Transnational Mnemopolitics In Europe.” (p. 82).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

in Eastern Europe has been influenced by the Western notion practices towards collective remembrance. Give so, it remains vital to present the readers with the contrasting interpretations of memory politics in Central Eastern Europe, tied to important historical points and rhetorical observations.

2.3 Contrasting Interpretations of CEE Memory Politics

In the recent years, significant shifts in the memory studies have contributed to the formulation of modern memory. As has been noted by Pakier, and there is greater extent of sensitivity attached to the study of Eastern European memory that there has been in the past.⁵⁶ This is partially due to the fact that in seeking mnemonic justice East European states have started exporting their mnemonic apparatus internationally, thus the academic writings in relation to it have transcended national borders.⁵⁷ So, international academics have considered the Eastern European perspective on memory from a more neutral lenses. This mellowing vision has brought to the fore the work of Mälksoo, Mark and Montero, who have been very important in their significant contributions to understanding the East-European narratives from a non-West perspective. Mälksoo and Montero in particular see Eastern European memory formation through the prism of seeking recognition and mnemonic justice. Mark sees it as a quest at completing the unfinished revolution of the past. It is exactly for this reason that Montero has observed that “when subjects claim the recognition of their subjective memories, they are demanding from the policy their full consideration as individuals by accepting personal experiences that determines deeply their subjectivity.”⁵⁸

Consequently, arguments have been made on one side of academic spectrum, leaning towards the aforementioned ‘Europeanization’, that “European enlargement can succeed

⁵⁶ Pakier and Wawrzyniak, *Memory and Change in Europe*.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Carlos Closa Montero, “Negotiating the past: claims for recognition and policies of memory in the EU,” *Instituto de Políticas y Bienes Públicos (IPP)*. Working Paper, Number 8. (2010).

culturally and existentially only when our memories have been shared and brought together as one.⁵⁹”In other words, the argument is that “[t]he realities of the war in Eastern Europe have generally been concealed in the Western public consciousness and formed the byways rather than institutionalized parts of the European account of World War Two”⁶⁰ remains very much present in the collective memory arena.

In 2012 the European leaders marked the anniversary of Nazi Wannsee conference. Seventy members of European Parliament had signed a declaration defying the “attempts to obfuscate the Holocaust by diminishing its uniqueness and deeming it to be equal, similar or equivalent to Communism.”⁶¹ Further, it also disregarded the attempt to rewrite European school history books, thus *explicitly* rejecting the notion of double genocide. The aforementioned concept of ‘Double Genocide’ had come to the public fore in the 2008 Prague Declaration⁶², which had set a precedent for commemoration of the victims of Nazi and Soviet crimes, and in 2009 the European Parliament passed a resolution on European conscience and totalitarianism, marking August 23rd as its commemorative day. From the Eastern perspective, this has shown ethnic favourism towards commemoration of the Holocaust as a unique historical experience. As Müller has remarked, it is simply ‘unprofitable’ to replace self-congratulatory national histories (referring to the Holocaust), “[w]ith what paradoxically could be called self-congratulatory, self-critical national histories.”⁶³

In that respect, and on many occasions, initiations on behalf of the nations seeking for a wider acknowledgement have been underpinned as ‘Suffering Olympics’⁶⁴. By way of the literature concerning obfuscation of the Holocaust by CEECs, Michael Shafir has developed the concepts

⁵⁹ Jan-Werner Müller. “On ‘European Memory’ Some Conceptual and Normative Remarks.” In M. Pakier and B. Strath, ed. *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*. (Berghahn Books, 2010). pp.26-37.

⁶⁰ Maria Mälksoo, “The Memory Politics of Becoming European.”

⁶¹ Roger Cohen. “Opinion | ‘The Suffering Olympics’”. *New York Times*. (2012).
<https://www.nytimes.com/2012/01/31/opinion/the-suffering-olympics.html>.

⁶² Danna Harman. “European Leaders to Mark 70th Anniversary of Nazi Wannsee Conference.” *Haaretz*. (January 19, 2012).
<https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/1.5168172>.

⁶³ Jan-Werner Müller. “On ‘European Memory’ Some Conceptual and Normative Remarks.”

⁶⁴ Roger Cohen. “Opinion | ‘The Suffering Olympics’”

of “deflective negationism” and “comparative trivialization.”⁶⁵ Deflective negationism is an element of a syndrome he refers to as “externalization of guilt” by ways of focusing on the historic national enemies, disregarding whether they are within or out of the national borders. Anti-Semitism, has, according to Sharif, found the perfect solace in guilt externalization.⁶⁶ Comparative trivialization, more elaborately, is an element also symptomatic to the Holocaust, and its underlying principle is in the intentional misrepresentation of the record, by downplaying the importance of the Holocaust. Furthermore, he elaborates how this is done through competing record of the Holocaust itself with “experiences of massive suffering endured by local populations or by mankind at large at one point or another in recorded history.”⁶⁷ Thus, the Holocaust – and this is applicable to the Polish case in particular who geographically held the concentration camps – according to Shafir, is frequently used as a buffer against complicity. Droit furthers this, by referring to the attempts at recognition as an initiative to set a ‘Gulag memory’ in contrast to the ‘Shoah memory’⁶⁸ Dujisin joins this narrative by saying that the mutual assistance of CEECs a regional block of deflective negationism is created, in avoiding responsibility first, and second consolidating the self-righteous narrative in domestic politics. The point of this is in pushing out political competition and legitimizing the actors’ actions at home and in the international scope. Additionally, instilling a political pattern of associating left wing politics with totalitarian and criminal demeanour.⁶⁹

On the other hand, question remains, could the trivialization of the Communist totalitarianism be perceived as comparative trivialization, and guilt evasion on behalf of the West? As Timothy Snyder has observed, “[t]he seemingly distant traumas of fascism, Nazism and communism seemed to be receding into irrelevance. We allowed ourselves to accept the ‘politics

⁶⁵ Michael Shafir. “Between Denial and ‘Comparative Trivialization’: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe.” (January 1, 2002): 1-59. (p.13)

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Ibid, p.37

⁶⁸ Emmanuel Droit. “Le Goulag contre la Shoah. Mémoires officielles et cultures mémorielles dans l’Europe élargie [The Gulag versus the Shoah. Official memories and remembrance cultures in the enlarged Europe].” (Vingtième siècle 2007): 101–120.

⁶⁹ Zoltan Dujisin. “Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance.”

of inevitability’, the sense that history could move in only one direction: toward liberal democracy. After communism in Eastern Europe came to an end in 1989-9, we imbibed the myth of ‘end of history’. In doing so, we lowered our defences, constrained our imagination, and opened the way for precisely the kinds of regimes we told ourselves could never return.”⁷⁰ The cultural discontinuity between West and East is hence obvious from Snyder’s observation. The Western perspective was simply not applicable in framing the post-historical evolution of the East, and given so, it has paved the path towards future disunity to a great extent catalysed in the competing narratives.

On that note, Levy and Sznajder argued the official and symbolic repertoire of national self-understanding occur in stages, as it has been the case with Germany, and, they are dominated by the commemorative expressions of the Holocaust.⁷¹ They see a pattern of a “generational transition from social to historical memories”; “a growing historicization of the event”; “the broadcast of the media representations”⁷², all of the patterns embedded in the Post-War years, and the Post-Cold War period. If we go back to the acknowledged argument, that the War had roughly ended for Poland after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and its subsequent accession to the EU, it can be delineated that this is another pattern of post-historical representation stemming from different social dimension of the same era, in the already existent, predetermined, mnemonic establishment.

It also be noticed that in comparison to its Western counterparts, the CEECs have not historically matured given lack of historical distance, hence the handicap in temporally dissolving their historical experiences. Thus, in coming to terms with a past, as countries of deeply rooted issues of pre-war nationalism, sovereignty crisis, the double occupation narrative, all underpinned with the communist filter, they were to some extent deprived of a ‘clean’ mechanism in coming to terms with their pasts.

⁷⁰Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, (Tim Duggan Books, 2017): 117-118. (p. 117).

⁷¹ Daniel Levi and Natan Sznajder. “Memory Unbound.”

⁷² Ibid.

Regardless, some of the CEECs have economically, and diplomatically been welcomed to European Union with great enthusiasm. Among them Poland, that has even prospered, became a more economically developed country and a NATO member.⁷³ This signifies its status as an acknowledged European agent. That seems to be puzzling on different levels. Put simply, the Eastern European countries were impatient to distance themselves from the former occupant, they ached for democratization process to start, democracy had been achieved, and now nationalism is on the rise? While this question is beyond the scope of this thesis, a deeper understanding the past remains extremely important in understanding the competing differing historical narratives of the present. Although it is, mildly put, difficult to mutually reinterpret history, the West imposed homogeneity hampers the historical honesty associated to the memory of war. Thus, it lessens the public of a genuine need for multi-dimensional representation of history for it bears the narrative of ‘complicity’ additionally spurring the myth making rhetoric.⁷⁴ Self-determination in communicating the ‘victimhood’ narrative is thus re-affirmed on behalf of the CEECs. The extract is thus the essence, for it partially explains why diverging and competing historical narratives remain imprisoned in the nationalist agenda.

Snyder has additionally noted “In the politics of eternity, the seduction by a mythicized past prevents us from thinking about possible futures. The habit of dwelling on victimhood dulls the impulse of self-correction. Since the nation is defined by its inherent virtue rather than by its future potential, politics becomes a discussion of good and evil rather than a discussion of possible solutions to real problems. The danger we now face is of a passage from the politics of inevitability to the politics of eternity, from a naïve and flawed sort of democratic republic to a confused and cynical sort of fascist oligarchy.”⁷⁵ If dwelling on victimhood dulls the impulse of self-correction, how can the self-correction be achieved if the aforementioned temporal and even more cultural

⁷³ Polina Gerasimova. "Poland, The EU And NATO: Competitors Or Partners?". *Saisjournal.Org*. (2004). <http://www.saisjournal.org/posts/poland-the-eu-and-nato-competitors-or-partners>.

⁷⁴ Frank Furedi. *Populism And The European Culture Wars The Conflict Of Values Between Hungary And The EU*. (Routledge, 2017).

⁷⁵ Timothy Snyder, *On Tyranny: Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*.

discontinuity between West and East exists? Self-correction requires coming to terms with past, and the immediate reference for coming to terms with the past is deeper cultural understanding, and maturity of the nation-state itself. Choosing to be represented by Conservative-nationalists, speaks that the public audience is not ready to abandon the 'victimhood' narrative.

3. Case Study: Assessing the Underlying Causes of Poland's Mnemonic Determinism

3.1 Case Study Structure

The purpose of this case study is to demonstrate the underlying causes of contemporary mnemonic determinism in Poland. The way in which it will proceed is the following: I shall present the audience with a brief background of the formation of the Institute of National Remembrance in Poland, along with their contemporary engagement with the Law and Justice party in respect to the competing narratives of the Communism and the Holocaust. Then, I will briefly discuss the political rhetoric of the Law and Justice party, as well as the circumstances under which they had assumed the power. In the succeeding subchapter, a concise overview of the most potent memory vectors in Poland will be outlined, combined with their significance in the development of conceptual innovations in the world of memory studies. The consequent focus will shift in the direction of the debates of the Katyn massacre and the Holocaust law. I will give an outline of the events, controversies around them and the discussions associated to the use of the aforesaid memory vectors. By employing the literature consulted in this research, I will present my case and answer the research question: what is the purpose of Polish government-sponsored historical narratives? Are historical narratives misused to support Conservative political agenda?

3.2 The Institute of National Remembrance

The Round Table Talks which were seminal to the fall of Eastern European communist bloc set the ground for initial process of assessing the way in which the Communist past should permeate the public discourse on a twofold rationale.⁷⁶ First, in what way should the development of institutions devoted to framing the totalitarianism of the Communist era proceed, and second,

⁷⁶ James Mark, "*The Unfinished Revolution.*"

how the remaining hold of the communist ethos should be dealt with.⁷⁷ The rhetorical justification of the National Memory Institute in Poland, had, to paraphrase Mark, channelled itself in the radical anti-Communism, achieved through the elimination of the former nomenclature from the political elite and bureaucracy.⁷⁸ The unfavourable political circumstances for the establishment of a ‘communist’ Nuremberg trial further provoked the need for the construction of memorials and museums at sites of former communist terror, turning them into the most poignant representatives of the criminality of communist history (in Hungary this was done with the House of Terror).⁷⁹

The development of the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), devoted to the memory, was conceived in a fractious post-Communist political spectrum, with different opinions on how best to come to terms with the painful past. As Mark has noted, “[t]his was partly owing to the fact that Communist regimes had formerly legitimized themselves through appeals to anti-Fascist ideology.”⁸⁰ Therefore, this complicated the initial vision of the institute, due to the circumstances under which it was created. Poland’s mounting victim narrative, in coming to terms with its past, was obvious in the initial formation of the Institute. The different elements of the institute show us that in the zeitgeist, the Polish themselves were not entirely certain of the scope of its history – as exemplified with a scandalous eruption of mixed feelings after the revelation of the massacre of Jews in Jedwabne on behalf of the Polish nationals – or how to come to terms with it, given lack of historical distance for the acquirement of historical truth.

Their firm belief in the injustice imposed upon them, accentuated their need for presenting their innocence, but also heroic endurance of the double occupation. The Institutes name – “Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation”⁸¹ exemplary of the

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 94.

⁸¹ "Institute of National Remembrance – Commission For The Prosecution Of Crimes Against The Polish Nation". *Institute Of National Remembrance*. (2018). <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-ipn/2,Institute-of-National-Remembrance-Commission-for-the-Prosecution-of-Crimes-again.html>.

repulsion towards the perpetrators, and the equivalent narratives for the acquisitions of justice had attributed to the birth of a “highly atypical institution with its hybrid structure and multiple purposes”⁸² with differing attitudes, and deliberations on behalf of historians, how the new democratic regime should acclimate their representation of victims and executioners.⁸³

Here we can observe that the IPNs has been an instrumental pillar of the Polish post-communist political establishment. Regardless of the formational uncertainties, consensus was reached, and the 18th December 1998 marked the day when the “Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej)”⁸⁴ was finally established by the Polish Parliament.⁸⁵ The first President of the Institute, Leon Kieres, a lawyer and a professor, also a judge of the constitution tribunal, held this post from 2000-2005, given the very reasons for the foundation of the institute were pillared in “lustration prerogatives” and “prosecution powers.”⁸⁶

The Presidential position was frequently mandated to intellectuals of different branches of social sciences, who aligned the interests of the institute to the personal preferences of institutes’ intellectual evolution.⁸⁷ Regardless of the leadership changes, the essential purpose of the Institute never changed its initial mission, a mission based on the following four principles:

“The first principle is preserving the remembrance about a great number of victims, losses and damages suffered by the Polish Nation during World War II and afterwards; The second refers to the patriotic traditions of the Polish Nation’s struggles with occupants, Nazism and Communism; Another draws attention to the obligation of prosecuting crimes against peace, mankind and war crimes. Equally important for the legislators was the obligation to compensate all oppressed by the state which had violated human rights.”⁸⁸

⁸² Georges Mink. "Is There A New Institutional Response To The Crimes Of Communism? National Memory Agencies In Post-Communist Countries: The Polish Case (1998–2014), With References To East Germany." *Nationalities Papers* 45 no. 6. (2017): 1013-1027. (p. 1015.)

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ "Institute of National Remembrance – Commission For The Prosecution Of Crimes Against The Polish Nation."

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Georges Mink. "Is There A New Institutional Response To The Crimes Of Communism? National Memory Agencies In Post-Communist Countries: The Polish Case (1998–2014), With References To East Germany."

⁸⁸ “Institute of National Remembrance – Mission”. 2018. <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/about-the-ipn/mission/875,Mission.html>

The acting President of the institute, at the moment, is Dr Jaroslaw Szarek who gained prominence as a historian, journalist and a writer. Prior to his directorial position, Szarek was awarded the Golden Cross of Merit for his achievements in documenting the truth about the recent history of Poland.⁸⁹ In 2016, he was unanimously recommended to the Sejm by the College of the IPN, and his rhetorical justification is symmetrical to the one PiS has.⁹⁰

Cooperation between the IPN and PiS is thus seminal in delivering the rhetoric to the public. The close communication between Szarek and the spokesmen of the PiS unites their vision in accumulating the arguments against or for a specific action on behalf of the Polish government. Furthermore, their unification resembles that of the Hungarian Prime Minister Victor Orbán with allegiance to Conservative Fidesz party, whose president is the Prime Minister himself, and Maria Schmidt the director of the House of Terror museum.⁹¹ The museum is among most popular in CEE and it exhibits the despicable traumas Hungary has endured under the double occupation. Although criticized on many occasions on behalf of Brussels for serving self-profession, conservatism and presenting Hungary as a sinless nation, Schmidt's responses have been "We are Hungarians, and we want to preserve our culture."⁹² This comparison is significant for a deeper understanding of the interest alignment which is visible in a broader European perspective.

3.3 The Law and Justice Party

Many Polish nationals were dismayed when the Law and Justice party came to power in 2015. This can be attributed to the conservative nature of the party. On behalf of the European Union, and the Western media in general, severe criticism was directed towards the PiS. Their

⁸⁹ "Kim Jest I Jakie Poglądy Ma Jarosław Szarek? Sejm Powołał Go Właśnie Na Prezesa IPN". [Who Is And What Views Does Jarosław Szarek Have? The Sejm Appointed Him As The President Of The Institute of National Remembrance]. *Polityka.Pl*. (2016). <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1669444,1,kim-jest-i-jakie-poglady-ma-jaroslaw-szarek-sejm-powolal-go-wlasnie-na-prezesa-ipn.read>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ Philip Oltermann. "Can Europe's New Xenophobes Reshape The Continent?." *The Guardian*. (2018).

⁹² Ibid.; Hedvig Turai. "Past Unmastered: Hot and Cold Memory in Hungary." *Third Text*, 23: (2009): 97 – 106.

ideological narrative, primarily embedded in Polish nationalism has channelled to shore up the public support through the successful implementation of economic nationalism, with a special focus on social spending pledges.⁹³ The chairman of the Law and Justice party, Jarosław Kaczyński, the brother of the late president Lech Kaczyński, is known for questioning democratic norms which is best exemplified in his attitude towards the migration crisis. Kaczyński suggested that “migrants could bring epidemics to Europe”⁹⁴, thus explicitly provoking xenophobia and spurring negative attitudes towards the influx of refugees in general.

The migration crisis, according to the narrative of the Law and Justice party, is very different to the liberal approach characteristic for the Western notion of democracy. For JiS, the migration crisis is an issue of symbolic importance, and as such they are related to the questions of sovereignty and identity. This is also very visible in Hungary who has openly shown animosity towards the migration crisis in 2015. In Poland, such narrative resulted in 70% of Poles being against accepting refugees.⁹⁵

The opposition in Poland is weak. Their weakness is mostly exhibited through their inability to combat the conservative narrative, by being too focused on issues “too abstract for most Poles.”⁹⁶ Given so, they have been disabled from articulating their concerns in a public pleasing manner thus are perceived as insignificant in comparison to the loud populist voice of the Law and Justice party. The xenophobic momentum took a different turn when the Law and Justice party passed the bill which criminalizes the use of the term ‘Polish death camps’ commonly referred to as the Holocaust Law. This was not the first attempt on behalf of the JiS in passing the law. In 2006,

⁹³ Aleks Szczerbiak. "Explaining The Popularity Of Poland'S Law And Justice Government". *EUROPP*. (2017). <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/euoppblog/2017/10/26/explaining-the-popularity-of-polands-law-and-justice-government/>.

⁹⁴ Remi Adekoya. "Why Poland's Law And Justice Party Remains So Popular". *Foreign Affairs*. (2017). <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/central-europe/2017-11-03/why-polands-law-and-justice-party-remains-so-popular>.

⁹⁵ Aleks Szczerbiak. "Explaining The Popularity Of Poland'S Law And Justice Government".

⁹⁶ Ibid.

when they had no control over the Constitutional Tribunal, they passed the law in Poland's Sejm, however it was rejected from going into effect.⁹⁷ In 2018 the law was passed with no amendments.⁹⁸

This has been by far the most scandalized debate empowered by the JiS attitude. Attracting support for their position on the Holocaust Law has been seen as a part of the agenda of Polish conservatives to find allies for their ideas of preserving Polish sovereignty that they see as being under attack, and also it is a part of efforts to prevent possible deepening of the EU. Jarosław Szarek for example, denies the Polish complicity in Jedwabne, and he is the head of the IPN who has vocally supported the passing of the law.⁹⁹

Many questions are raised in respect to the cooperation of the IPN and PiS. Prior to Andrzej Duda's presidency the director of the institute was elected by the pluralist IPN Council through an internal contest. At the present moment, the aforementioned Council has been replaced by a nine-member College¹⁰⁰, exclusively composed of those who have pledged their allegiance to PiS. The rhetorical justification for the mnemonic envisionment of PiS, and political discourse extracted from it, has to a great extent been derived from the interdependency of the institute and the ruling political party.

The issue is, under the pretext of seeking justice for the suffering of the Polish nation throughout the WWII, and a call for acknowledging the fallacy in using the phrase 'Polish death camps', the Law and Justice party has passed the law seen by many as an attempt at historical revisionism.¹⁰¹ At the same time, the Katyn massacre controversy was reintegrated, as a counter measure, into the public sphere of Poland, and at the international level as well. The case study

⁹⁷ Stefan Zgliczyński. "Poland's Legislated Antisemitism". *Jacobinmag.Com*. (2018).

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Maya Vinokour. "90% Of Polish Jews Died In The Holocaust. So Why Are Poland's Nationalists Chanting 'Get The Jews Out Of Power?'". *Haaretz.Com*. 2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/holocaust-remembrance-day/why-polish-nationalists-chant-get-the-jews-out-of-power-1.5465106>.

¹⁰⁰ Georges Mink. "Is There A New Institutional Response To The Crimes Of Communism? National Memory Agencies In Post-Communist Countries: The Polish Case (1998–2014), With References To East Germany."

¹⁰¹ Nikolay Koposov. "Memory Laws And Nationalist Lies. *Project Syndicate*. (2018). https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/poland-holocaust-law-nationalist-tool-by-nikolay-koposov-2018-03?la=english&a_d=5a9feb9578b6c72560950fe9&a_m=&a_a=click&a_s=&a_p=%2Fcommentary%2Fpoland-pis-memory-law-by-slawomir-sierakowski-2018-03&a_li=poland-holocaust-law-nationalist-tool-by-nikolay-koposov-2018-03&a_pa=handpicked&a_ps=

shall proceed to assess whether the JiS party in combination with IPN is in fact seeking to come to terms with Poland's painful historical legacy asking for international acknowledgement, or are they alternatively, using historical pretext as an excuse for misrepresentation of history for the purpose of promoting its nationalist conservative agenda?

3.4 The Polish Memory Vectors

The Polish presidential plane crash in Smolensk, in which the former president Lech Kaczynski lost his life, and the screening of Andrzej Wajda's film *Katyn* have been utilized in discerning a new wave of memory vectors, and as such they have brought to the fore a conceptual innovation in the memory studies.¹⁰² This has been explained in the literature part of the thesis, however, a slight recap is at this point welcome "deteritorialized and temporal phenomena that initiate a new moment in time by endowing the past with new life in the future."¹⁰³ Thus, by restating the powerful and energized piece of history, which the public sphere vividly remembers, and at mention reinterprets its legacy, a rebirth of the situation occurs.

It is not surprising then, to observe that the competing narratives of such events have been an integral part of memory communication both home, and abroad. To be more specific, since the incumbent President Andrzej Duda assumed the office in 2015, a vocal representation of the presumed collective memory of Poland, channelled through the narrative of the right-wing Law and Justice Party, has yielded unprecedented attention, both domestic, and international.¹⁰⁴

The two most potent memory vectors of the Polish collective memory to date are the Auschwitz and the Katyn massacre. Auschwitz is considered as a "global symbol of the German Nazi Genocide of European Jewry...Katyn has recently become a transnational icon of the Soviet

¹⁰² Pakier and Wawrzyniak, *Memory and Change in Europe*.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Wiktor Szary. "Poland's New President Andrzej Duda Heralds Shift To The Right". *The Independent*. (2015). <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/polands-new-president-andrzej-duda-heralds-shift-to-the-right-10273812.html>.

war atrocities.”¹⁰⁵ The third, and extremely significant, is the book *Neighbors*, written by Jan Tomasz Gross, a Polish-American Sociologist, in which he offered an elaborate account of how Poles had killed 1,600 of their Jewish neighbors in Jedwabne in 1941.¹⁰⁶ It is important to note that the book was a shocking revelation for the Polish public, and the Institute of National Remembrance.¹⁰⁷ The book had a domino effect of uncovering alternative pieces of Polish history less known to the public, and even most Polish themselves.

The Katyn massacre and the ‘Polish death camp’ controversies, although very present in the preceding political establishments, have passionately been reintegrated in the public political forum through the extensive work of the conservative Law and Justice party currently in power. The *Neighbors* debate, on the other hand, seem to be left out from the political discourse of the Law and Justice party and Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), at least, if observed superficially. The first two are selectively reintegrated in the public sphere, and questionably so, as it will be assessed in the analysis part of this case study.

It is important to reflect on these events and their use in offering the broader audience a general insight in what seem to be the most diffused collective memories in Poland. Their influx in the international arena is essential for the reasons of assessing whether historical narratives are misused to support Conservative political agenda. This will be examined in detail, for I intend to answer the inherent question of this piece research.

3.5 The Katyn Massacre

The Katyn Massacre, synonymously, the Katyn forest massacre, is one of the most memorable aspects of Poland’s WWII history.¹⁰⁸ An approximation of twenty-two thousand of

¹⁰⁵ Jacek Chrobaczynski and Piotr Trojanski. *Memory And Change In Europe*. (New York, NY: Berghahn, 2016).

¹⁰⁶ Ewa Wolentarska-Ochman. "Collective Remembrance In Jedwabne: Unsettled Memory Of World War II In Postcommunist Poland". (2006).

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ "Katyn Massacre Epitaph Unveiled." *Polskie Radio Dla Zagranicy*. (2014). <http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/181850,Katyn-massacre-epitaph-unveiled>.

Polish citizens, among whom were ethnic Jews, succumbed their lives to Soviet NKVD guns.¹⁰⁹ To date, Katyn massacre remains a contested historical leftover, although the perpetrators of the massacre have acknowledged their complicity and commemorated it accordingly in both Poland and Russia. One of the reasons for this is that the Katyn was a subject to a sixty year cover up.¹¹⁰

The US propaganda, throughout the Cold War was, mildly put, untruthful. The Voice of American had constantly been publicizing the Soviet government's claims that the Katyn massacre had been perpetrated by Germans.¹¹¹ Furthermore, The Madden committee which was set up on behalf of the USA in acquiring the truth about the Katyn massacre made an attempt by asking the UN to bring it to the International Court of Justice, however, as the CIA had noted "political will to do so was lacking... Stalin's death, the rise of a new leadership, and the end of the Korean war seemed to auger a thaw in US-Soviet relations."¹¹² Thus, the truth of the Katyn massacre was ignored for decades, to be more precise until the 1990s, when Gorbachev acknowledged that it was the NKVD to blame, after fifty years of dishonestly.¹¹³

In 2008, four media outlets had revived the untruthful narrative that it was the Nazis who are responsible.¹¹⁴ Two years later, Vladimir Putin and the former Prime Minister of Poland, Donald Tusk, placed a wreath at a Katyn memorial, thus making a historical turn at the event.¹¹⁵ On April the 10th, just about when the euphoria associated to coming to terms with the Katyn massacre had diffused, a plane crashed over the Katyn woods with the Polish President Kaczynski, including the supportive commemorative crew, comprised of bishops and government officials, who had been attributed as the main responsible for the communism demise in Poland. This was a huge step-

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ John Hudson. "The Most Damning Evidence Of A U.S. Coverup Of Soviet War Crimes". *The Atlantic*. (2012). <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/09/most-damning-evidence-us-coverup-soviet-war-crimes/323805/>.

¹¹¹ Michael Brendan Dougherty. "Katyn Monument In Jersey City Should Stay." *National Review*. (2018). <https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/05/katyn-monument-jersey-city-should-stay/>.

¹¹² Benjamin B. Fischer. "The Katyn Controversy: Stalin's Killing Field." *Central Intelligence Agency*. (1990). <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter99-00/art6.html#rft12>.

¹¹³ Tom Parfitt. "Russian Parliament Admits Guilt Over Polish Massacre". *The Guardian*. (2010). <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/nov/26/russian-parliament-guilt-katyn-massacre>.

¹¹⁴ "In Denial." *The Economist*. (2008). https://www.economist.com/node/10639983?story_id=10639983.

¹¹⁵ Bartosz Dudek. "Opinion: Putin's Visit To Katyn Is Itself An Historic Event." *DW.COM*. 07.04.2010. <http://www.dw.com/en/opinion-putins-visit-to-katyn-is-itself-an-historic-event/a-5440737>.

back for the Polish nation, as “for decades, the cries of Polish families who want to know what happened to their loved ones have fallen on deaf ears. Kaczynski was their voice”¹¹⁶ The important diplomatic progress of Katyn had been marginalized due to the plane crash.

Even so, the Katyn museum in Warsaw has seen to its commemoration, the extensive literature of the IPN have offered documentations of it, exhibitions such as “They Were Shot In The Back Of The Head”¹¹⁷ was offered to the public with very explicit and powerful material proving the massacre. Commemorative events were set up on behalf of the Institute and the preceding Polish government, in general terms, the Katyn massacre has been given the attention it undeniably deserves. Nevertheless, a recent scandal escalated, heavily followed up by the Polish mainstream media, translated in English, when bronze statue exhibiting the Katyn massacre located in the USA, was to be removed and stored for the purposes of renovation of the site at which it is located.

This initiated a diplomatic clash between Stanislaw Karczewski, member of the Law and Justice party, who criticized the removal of the statute was and Mayor Fulop who responded to the critique by way of referring to him as a “known anti-Semite, white nationalist and Holocaust denier.”¹¹⁸ The action on behalf of Mayor Fulop in dealing with such an important issue, although it does not represent the entire nation view, is exemplary of deep ignorance for the reasons that that any respected politician who happens to be an erudite would make no such comment to the justified appeal.

Even so, the result was fruitful, for it reinforced of importance of the Katyn massacre statue in Poland’s historical self-representation. On May 17th President Andrzej Duda placed a wreath at the Katyn memorial and has presented Fulop with a book in English that described the

¹¹⁶ Alex Storozyński. "Why Poland's Grief Is Doubled." (2010). *Edition.Cnn.Com*.
<http://edition.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/04/11/storozynski.poland.crash.katyn/index.html>.

¹¹⁷ “They Were Shot In The Back Of The Head” - The Katyn Massacre Exhibition". *Institute Of National Remembrance*. (2018).
<https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/900,They-were-shot-in-the-back-of-the-head-The-Katyn-Massacre-exhibition.html>.

¹¹⁸ Michael Brendan Dougherty. "Katyn Monument In Jersey City Should Stay | National Review". *Nationalreview.Com*. (2018).
<https://www.nationalreview.com/2018/05/katyn-monument-jersey-city-should-stay/>

monuments history.¹¹⁹ The IPN, however, seems to give credit to any pejorative mention of Katyn regardless of the legitimacy or competency of the individual who is making such claim. In other words, the IPN is practicing melodramatic attitude in hopes of shoring up public support with the intentions of interest alignment, however under the pretext of seeking justice. The following example will help clarify my observation.

In 2013, an academic article was published on behalf of Professor Grover Furr, named *“The ‘Official’ Version of the Katyn Massacre Disproven?”*¹²⁰ which questioned the truth in the known public version of the Katyn Massacre. He engaged in an explanation how there were inconsistencies in the official documents supporting the public version, using evidence of recent archaeological excavations.¹²¹ When a Polish-Ukrainian archaeological team found new shell cases in a burial pit, including the badges of two members of the Polish police that had been pronounced victims of the Katyn massacre, the discoveries, according to, Furr “cast serious doubt”¹²² on what had happened in Katyn.¹²³ The issue was, the evidence was found in the town of Volodymyr-Volyns’kiy in Ukraine, which is why the inconsistencies had arisen in the first place. His overall argument is that the Nazi Germany was responsible for the executions in Katyn. Professor Grover Furr is with the Montclair state university, located in the USA, Jersey City.

A response to the academic article, which has elements of conspiracy theory in it, followed five years later, on behalf of the President of the IPN, Dr Jaroslaw Szarek, in light of President Duda’s visit to Jersey City. On May 18th 2018, a day after the visit of the Szarek wrote an open letter to the Mayor Fulop, with official documents recorded by a stenograph at court hearing included. Dr Jaroslaw Szarek also addressed the Montclair State University in the letter which read:

“After the Second World War many attempts were made in order to establish the details of this massacre. To this end, in 1952 the United States Congress formed a special committee whose

¹¹⁹ Davis Porter. "Poland's President Meets With US Mayor On Hudson River Statue Removal Dispute." *Timesofisrael.Com*. (2018). <https://www.timesofisrael.com/polands-president-meets-with-us-mayor-on-hudson-river-statue-removal-dispute/>.

¹²⁰ Grover Furr. "The ‘Official’ Version Of The Katyn Massacre Disproven?". *Socialism And Democracy* 27 no. 2 (2013): 96-129.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Ibid.

findings unequivocally indicated the identity of the perpetrators. I have attached its report...The view that Nazi Germany carried out the executions in Katyn, similarly to the negation of the crime in general, was for years an element of communist propaganda in all of the countries of the former Soviet bloc, including Poland. For Poles, the theses presented by Professor Grover Furr remain not only an insult to national memory, but also a symbol of enslavement. In analogy to the scandalous manifestations of Holocaust denial, the concept of the "Katyn lie" was formed."

While being right to protect the national heritage of this horrible event, using the Holocaust denial argument was, mildly put, unwise, given Polish education minister Anna Zelewska indirectly denied Polish complicity in the Jedwabne pogrom by stating that:

"The dramatic situation which took place in Jedwabne is controversial. Many historians, distinguished professors, paint a completely different picture."¹²⁴

Returning to the Katyn massacre for the moment, it is important to mention another aspect of the controversy of the Katyn. As Chrobaczyński and Trojański have noted:

The Katyn massacre and the Auschwitz were functions of Nazism and Communism...Compared to Auschwitz, Katyn was a far more distant place, uncommon and sometimes even unbelievable, though equally painful and dramatic, particularly when being publicized by German propaganda. During the war Katyn was 'only' a scene of a war crime, a particular moment in history. From the very beginning the memory of the Katyn massacre was instrumentalized and became the instrument of untruth"¹²⁵

Here we can relate back to the argument that the Holocaust debates have been handled impatiently. The fact Katyn was more 'distant' given it was geographically not on Polish land, has accounted for its 'idealization.' Being discontinued and preserved from acknowledgement by the communists, in the interwar and post-war period, it was perceived as a new memory to the Polish public. Therefore, its continuous re-integration largely stems from its discontinuance in the past. Nevertheless, the acknowledgement of the Katyn lie came from many sides. The USA has acknowledged it, Russia as well, and the international arena in general. Why was it reintegrated in the official narrative of the Law and Justice party? The Katyn debate was reproduced after the

¹²⁴ "Jewish Group Calls On Polish Minister To Apologize Over Pogrom Remarks". *Reuters*. (2016). <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-politics-wjc/jewish-group-calls-on-polish-minister-to-apologize-over-pogrom-remarks-idUSKCN101228>.

¹²⁵ Jacek Chrobaczyński and Piotr Trojański. "Auschwitz and Katyn in Bondage of Politics: The Process of Shaping Memory in Communist Poland," in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives*, eds. Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak (New York: Berghahn, 2016).

President's death in a plane crash. Although the official investigation had shown that it the plane had crash for the reasons of technicalities, the Law and Justice part and the brother of the deceased president Jarosław Kaczyński in particular have been accusing Russia for the plane crash. Thus, the PiS, who was opposition at the time, had created a conspiracy theory atmosphere at home by arguing they were not given the access to investigation. Moreover, Putin has been accused of masterminding the attack. The misfortunate event has also been named as the Katyn II.¹²⁶

The fact that the plane had crashed above the Katyn woods and in light of the commemorative event in Russia, was seen as a massive diplomatic step-backward, as it raised suspicions for the chances of that such misfortunate event were minimal. On the other had, for exactly the same reason, it would have been too obvious to organize the plane crash as to conceal historical truth. Furthermore, as has been noted by Fredheim, the plane crash controversy and the Katyn massacre were given attention mostly during the anniversary and election period.¹²⁷ In the election period, and while they were the opposition to the Civic Platform, the Katyn plane crash was used as a mechanism for acquiring a larger follower base. Furthermore, The PiS has been monopolizing the use of Katyn in unprecedented ways in comparison to the previous governments.¹²⁸

For example, in 2005 former president of Poland attended the commemorative events in Russia hoping to lure international attention to the complexity of the aftermath of the World War II, thus, while seeking recognition in a diplomatically polite manner, the former President had made a clear point.¹²⁹ The unfortunate part is this diplomatic move is seen as too abstract by the majority of those who support the ongoing eruption of conservative nationalism in Poland, as it

¹²⁶ Rolf Fredheim. "The Memory of Katyn in Polish Political Discourse: A Quantitative Study," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 66 no. 7 (2014): 1165-1187.

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Maria Mälksoo. "The Memory Politics Of Becoming European: The East European Subalterns And The Collective Memory Of Europe". *European Journal Of International Relations* 15 no 4. (2009): 653-680.

has been mentioned in the introductory part of this chapter.

If we reconsider the removal of the statue in Jersey, now it is logical to observe that it ended in a highly publicized diplomatic clash. On the other hand, the internationalisation of this event, as I see it, is to connect with (substantial) Polish diaspora in the USA. The diaspora is present in Britain and elsewhere, and it remains important for PiS to address this audience as well. Additionally, the ideas on Polish sovereignty and identity are close to “America First”¹³⁰ slogans of the current US president and of the Tea Party agenda, and could therefore attract support in the USA. Political ideas focused on sovereignty are a part of current institutional crisis of the EU and are increasingly popular throughout Europe in countries like France, Hungary, Austria Greece and even in Britain.¹³¹ Moreover, this is linked to the debate on the Holocaust law as a part of efforts to legitimize national sovereignty against international actors and organizations. Therefore, conservative segments of both EU and international political elites may be sympathetic with the position of the Polish conservatives. At home, and abroad.

The actions on behalf of the PiS and IPN, as I have shown, complement each other in setting the conservative narrative. Given the president of the institute was chosen by the PiS, we can envision how they would join their forces in communicating ‘setting the record straight’ account. If we consider the dramatized attempts to present the plane crash as a conspiracy theory, followed by the scandalous eruption of the Jersey statue controversy in the Polish mainstream media, and the use of Katyn controversy throughout the election period and as a means of shoring up public support, we can conclude that the current cultural sphere of Polish public is more open to accepting the reintegrated use of historical left-overs rather than dealing with the deeply rooted societal problems. Thus, if we reintegrate Zoltan Dujisin vision of the path to regional regime of remembrance, we can observe how, the political investment in interest alignment has found its

¹³⁰ Ryan Teagu Beckwith. *Time*. 2016. <http://time.com/4309786/read-donald-trumps-america-first-foreign-policy-speech/>.

¹³¹Steven Erlanger. "In Eastern Europe, Populism Lives, Widening A Split In The E.U.". *Nytimes.Com*. (2017). <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/28/world/europe/populism-eastern-europe.html>.

home in populism infested Europe, and Poland in particular.¹³²

3.6 The Polish Death Camps controversy & Jedwabne

Obama's referral to 'Polish death camps' in May 2012, and the Former Polish Prime Minister, Donald Tusks comment that the use of this term ignorance, has raised concerns in Poland about how their history is perceived internationally.¹³³ The 'Polish death camps' misnomer been heavily criticized in a 2005 interview, when the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Poland, Adam Daniel Rotfeld, a Holocaust survivor himself, has presented his attitude towards the use of such language by arguing the referral of the Nazi concentration camps as Polish death camps under the pretext it is "only a geographic reference...the attempts had been made to distort history and conceal the truth. Surely, no one would describe Auschwitz as a "Jewish concentration camp" because Jews were murdered in the camps."¹³⁴ In 2006 Yad Vashem "supported the request of the Polish Government to clarify the reference of the official name of Auschwitz-Birkenau for the UNESCO registry."¹³⁵ It is therefore understandable that Obama was denounced for using the term on behalf of Donald Tusk.

Snyder has argued that Auschwitz is in fact a metonym for the Holocaust.¹³⁶ He further notes that "Auschwitz was a convenient symbol in the post-war Soviet Union and today in Post-Communist Russia. If the Holocaust is reduced to Auschwitz, then it can easily be forgotten that the German mass killing of Jews began in places that the Soviet Union had just conquered... The

¹³² Zoltan Dujisin. "Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance."

¹³³ Rick Noack. "Obama Once Referred to A 'Polish Death Camp.' In Poland, That Could Soon Be Punishable By 3 Years In Prison." *The Washington Post*. (2018). https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/08/17/obama-once-referred-to-a-polish-death-camp-in-poland-that-could-soon-be-punishable-by-3-years-in-prison/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.8b919edfe46f.

¹³⁴ Adam Daniel Rotfeld. Interview with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, by Piotr Zychowicz. In person. Poland. (2008). <http://archive.li/ucejL>

¹³⁵ Amanda Borschel-Dan. "Is New Polish Law An Attempt To Whitewash Its Citizens' Roles In The Holocaust?". *Timesofisrael.Com*. (2016). <https://www.timesofisrael.com/is-new-polish-law-an-attempt-to-whitewash-its-citizens-roles-in-the-holocaust/>.

¹³⁶ Timothy Snyder. *Black Earth: The Holocaust as History and Warning*. (London: The Bodley Head. 2015). (p. 208).

Germans left, but their death pits remained.” By way of critique to the use of the term ‘Polish death camps’ the American Jewish Committee stepped in and stated:

“to remind those who are either unaware of the facts of careless in their choice of words, as has been the case with some media outlets, that Auschwitz-Birkenau and the other death camps, including Belzec, Chelmno, Majdanek, Sobibor and Treblinka, were conceived, built and operated by Nazi Germany and its allies. The camps were located in German-occupied Poland, the European country with by far the largest Jewish population, but they were most empathetically not “Polish camps.” This is not a mere semantic matter. Historical integrity and accuracy hangs in the balance.... It should also never be forgotten that, in addition to Polish Jews, who were targeted for total annihilation by the Nazi Final Solution, other Poles...were also seized by the Nazis and incarcerated in concentration camps. Any misrepresentation of Poland’s role in the Second World War, whether intentional or accidental, would be most regrettable and therefore should not be left unchallenged.¹³⁷

So, this too has been acknowledged. Previous Polish governments have shown their patriotism in denouncing the use of the aforementioned terminology. The world has to some extent acknowledged the Polish history of WWII. Why did then, the Polish president Andrej Dzuda, sign a bill which penalized people who question Poland’s complicity in the Holocaust? While there is general consensus that the use of Polish death camps is essentially wrong, criminalizing such use brings to light different questions. Who is this law appealing to? The people who will be prosecuted according to the new law are Poles, not Westerners. The question is who exactly is this directed to? Who are the ‘traitors’ of Poland?

Here, the Gross debate¹³⁸ can account for some of the answers. While offering undisputable, extensive and grotesque insight into how the Polish compatriots were massacred, the book did not employ different depositions for a more honest description, further, it did not consult records or archives and most importantly, it relied on a testimony obtained during Stalinist communism.¹³⁹ This controversy has been utilized to shore up public support in Poland. The period in which the Jedwabne debates were extensively circulated in the academic circles and the

¹³⁷ Genevieve Zubrzycki. *The Crosses Of Auschwitz: Nationalism And Religion In Post-Communist Poland*. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006.)

¹³⁸ Jan T. Gross. *Neighbors: The Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland*. (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2001). (p. 216.)

¹³⁹ Samuel Crowell. "The Debate About 'Neighbors' (Review)". *Ihr.Org*. (2018). http://www.ihr.org/ihr/v20/v20n3p41_Gross.html.

media had been described as “a booming theatre of memory of Jews and the Holocaust.”¹⁴⁰ This inconsistent acknowledgement of the complicity has been interpreted as a childish inability to own up to the guilt.¹⁴¹ A prominent Polish sociologist has noted that PiS in particular has been “running away from shame and responsibility”¹⁴² in this quest for “national pedagogy of pride”¹⁴³ in order to present Poland as a “sinless nation.”¹⁴⁴

By way of critique to the Law, a point many critics make, is the fact that a democratically-elected government should try enforce an official narrative with legal sanctions is in itself bizarre. However, Poland is no pioneer in this. Turkey had enacted the law which forbids the talk about the Armenian genocide. This political trend, embedded in a dictatorial system, of punishing civil right liberties has also been present in Russia.¹⁴⁵ In Hungary, a similar controversy had occurred, when Fidesz’s election victory saw the construction of highly controversial monument.¹⁴⁶ The monument portrayed German occupation in Hungary, representing Hungary as an innocent state, and the inscription of the monument had been lost in translation for word ‘victims’ was translated as ‘sacrificial animals’ (referring to the Jewish population in Hungary).¹⁴⁷ Regardless, Orbán has claimed that the monument is “morally precise and immaculate.”¹⁴⁸

This similarity between the two governments is best explained by Slawomir Sierakowski who claims “the Polish government’s wholesale refusal to admit any guilt or own up to mistakes speaks to a deep-seated immaturity...Recently, when the US secretary of state called president

¹⁴⁰ Joanna Beata Michlic. “The Path of Bringing the Dark to Light: Memory of the Holocaust in Post communist Europe.” in *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives*, eds. Malgorzata Pakier and Joanna Wawrzyniak. (New York: Berghahn, 2016).

¹⁴¹ Slawomir Sierakowski. "Poland's Child-Like State | By Slawomir Sierakowski". *Project Syndicate*. (2018). <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/poland-pis-memory-law-by-slawomir-sierakowski-2018-03>.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Stefan Zgliczyński. "Poland's Legislated Antisemitism". *Jacobinmag.Com*. (2018). <https://www.jacobinmag.com/2018/03/poland-antisemitism-holocaust>.

¹⁴⁶ Daniel Nolan. "German Occupation Memorial Completed Under Cover Of Darkness". *The Budapest Beacon*. 2014. <https://budapestbeacon.com/german-occupation-memorial-completed-under-cover-of-darkness/>.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Andrzej Duda to oppose the government's controversial historical memory law, Duda wouldn't answer the phone, essentially sticking his fingers in his ears."¹⁴⁹

How can we interpret this? This quest for 'setting the record straight', on behalf of the incumbent party PiS, have brought to the fore many other controversies, since the memories of Nazism and Communism reinforce one another in bringing out different perspectives to light. The passing of the controversial proposal for a law which criminalizes the use of the term 'Polish death camps', on behalf of the ruling political establishment, has been regarded by the Western and Polish media, and Polish historians in particular, as absolutely undemocratic and overall ridiculous. This critiques on behalf of the Polish historians, have to a great extent helped combat the common narrative of the PiS that all real Poles support the law.¹⁵⁰ Even so, however, on behalf of the IPN, and PiS Poland has been presented as a country which is enduring a "huge number of attacks."¹⁵¹

Thus, by dwelling on victimhood, and presenting themselves as victims, the PiS and IPN communicates with the public in a well-known, alas primitive demeanour 'you are either with us, or against us'. By focusing on social spending programmes, and promising a better future, the PiS is intentionally luring in gullible audience who accept the spill-over narratives by focusing on the promised economic progress. It remains striking to perceive the extent to which the Conservative government is willing to go in aim of furthering its nationalist agenda. The undying willingness to distort diplomatic relations with the Jewish community, democratic states in general, and the internal public who oppose the passing of the Law, is shocking. It seems that while conservative nationalism was very much present in Poland even before the JiS assumed power, the rise of populism in general has given it the energy for sustainability. Further promoted by unification of the interest alignment, conservative nationalism is given more value by being validated by the rise of this narrative in Europe and the USA.

¹⁴⁹ Slawomir Sierakowski. "Poland's Child-Like State"

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

The Holocaust law on the other hand does not reflect societal consensus. What it does, however, is that it allures racism, xenophobia, free speech, and the rest of inherent values of liberal democracy. Thus, this cultural terror practiced on behalf of the JiS, with support from the IPN can in no way be interpreted as ‘seeking recognition in coming to terms with the past’.

3.7 What is going on?

As Snyder has observed in *Bloodlands* “It is easy to sanctify policies or identities by the deaths of victims. It is less appealing, but morally more urgent, to understand the actions of the perpetrators. The moral danger, after all, is never that one might become a victim but that one might be a perpetrator or a bystander.”¹⁵² Imposition of the predetermined categories which juggle between the status of victim, perpetrator, and bystander have reduced the semantic material for dissolving the stereotypes of the perceived Polish history. Poland’s achievement of national self-determination has faced a great challenge in representing itself, its pre-war culture, and tradition in the European Union.¹⁵³ The ongoing eruption of the mnemonic determinism that has been mounting for decades, is now presenting Poland in a new, idealized light. I find Frank Furedi’s assertion that the double standard of the international sensationalism “that allows Western European commentators to conveniently overlook their own society’s practice of myth-making, only to deplore their Eastern neighbour’s obsession with their dark past”¹⁵⁴ in fact applicable to the Polish case. For these reasons, I believe the presence of conservative nationalism shows Poland has difficulties in balancing between national pride, and at the same time being committed to the European Union, while in both cases wishing to be recognized a strong European agent who has “freely chosen project of shared sovereignty.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands : Europe Between Hitler and Stalin*. (New York: Basic Books. 2010.)

¹⁵³ Gerhard Wagner. "Nationalism and Cultural Memory In Poland: The European Union Turns East". *International Journal Of Politics, Culture, And Society* 17 no. 2. (2003): 191-212.

¹⁵⁴ Frank Furedi. *Populism And The European Culture Wars The Conflict Of Values Between Hungary And The EU*. (Routledge, 2017).

¹⁵⁵ Natalie Nougayrède. "The EU Should Rebrand Itself As The Protector Of Its Nations." *The Guardian*. (2018). <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/mar/24/eu-protector-member-nations-nationalism-europe>.

While undeniably populism and deeply rooted conservative nationalism are present in current political discourse of the Polish nation, it remains pertinent to further examine and assess the roots of this cultural immaturity. Even prior to its accession it has been observed that “while the post-communist social-democratic powers see the integration of Poland mainly as a means for socio-economic modernization, for the national and social Catholic powers it represents a threat to Polish culture.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, its fractious, post-communist political spectrum had different ‘uses’ of the Polish accession, and this threat to Polish national identity “stemmed from the lack of credible alternatives in the context of Soviet hegemony.”¹⁵⁷ Since Polish identity and its preservation is the top priority for Polish conservatives the debate on the Holocaust Law indicates that they would like to keep historical narratives under state-sponsored control which would in their opinion keep Polish identity unchanged.

The anamnesis of the Polish conservative nationalism in respect to collective memory, show us, that beyond the obvious political rhetoric, the quest of international recognition is also present given universal lessons of totalitarianism have not yet been adequately captured. To be more precise, while Poland’s conservatives are engaging in “deflective negationism”¹⁵⁸ and interest alignment for the purposes of shoring up public support, the central issue remains to what extent is the the Polish public ready to accept its dark legacies? For the moment, it seems it has not yet historically matured. Hence for the time being, I shall have to support Dujisin observation, with a slight cultural adjustment.

¹⁵⁶ Spohn Willfried in Wagner, Gerhard. "Nationalism and Cultural Memory In Poland: The European Union Turns East". *International Journal Of Politics, Culture, And Society* 17 no. 2 (2003): 191-212.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Michael Shafir, “Between Denial and ‘Comparative Trivialization’: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe,” (January 1, 2002).

4. Conclusion

Influenced by the existing academic debates in the International Relations arena which share a relationship with the collective memory studies, my research aimed to assess whether sudden eruptions of memory debates are misused in the purposes of attracting political support. Alternatively, are they used in a genuine quest for setting the record straight. With information obtained from the existing literature, and empirical analysis of the Law and Justice spokesmen case, I argued that the hostile rhetoric of the incumbent party, with abundant support from the Institute of National Remembrance, is misusing historical narratives to support Conservative political agenda.

Through the use of qualitative content analysis, and consulted by a nuanced debate frame from literature review, I have come to the conclusion which is better understood if observed through Dujisin framework which argues the apparatus of nationalist agenda is working towards a reversal in the flow of mnemonic substance between West and East.¹⁵⁹ Through the interactive use of potent memory vectors the Law and Justice party is attempting to cleanse its history through the insistence on Katyn, while at the same time engaging in “deflective negationism”¹⁶⁰ with respect to the Holocaust. The PiS is doing so to align the interests of the nationalist agenda with like-minded government for the purpose of power preservation and preserving Polish sovereignty.

On the other hand, there very many limitations to my research. The most significant limitation associated to my research stems from my inability to read the Polish language. Thus, I was unable to welcome extensive public sphere opinion, to engage in online research of individuals comment in newspaper articles, YouTube videos and alternative sources rich with ‘objectivity.’ The secondary data in Polish language was thus beyond my reach. Furthermore, the imbalance of

¹⁵⁹ Dujisin, Zoltan. “Post-Communist Europe: On the Path to a Regional Regime of Remembrance.”

¹⁶⁰ Michael Shafir, “Between Denial and ‘Comparative Trivialization’: Holocaust Negationism in Post-Communist East Central Europe,” (January 1, 2002).

literature devoted to the collective memories of West and East have narrowed my argumentative sphere. Being constrained by time and other resources, I was not able to travel to Poland for exploratory and observational purposes. All of the abovementioned would have greatly contributed to the quality of my work.

Regardless, in general terms, and with data presented, we can delineate puzzling observations which also lead to the questions for further examination. Although the Eastern Block has unfrozen, the courage of coming to terms with the past is yet to arrive. The stable interpretations of history that the leading and incumbent party PiS is exporting internationally show us that reflecting on different historical experiences in a more honest way remains pertinent for a common future. Certainly, broader education would yield a positive outlook on the future prospects.

The fundamental national myths of the Second World War in Poland and their reintegration in the public sphere after years of successful European Integration show us deep seated immaturity and repulsion towards abandoning the emotions associated to the national myths. What nevertheless seems hopeful, as Magdalena Gross has noticed, through analysis of the exploratory study she engaged in regarding the Holocaust preparation program in Poland, is that “the teachers were motivated to learn about the Holocaust, out of moral historical and professional obligations.”¹⁶¹

The Law and Justice Party spokesmen seem to fit with what Timothy Snyder called “eternity politicians” who in his opinion “bring us the past as a vast misty courtyard of illegible monument to national victimhood, all of them equally distant from the present, all of them equally accessible for manipulation. Every reference to the past seems to involve an attack by some external enemy upon the purity of the nation.”¹⁶²

¹⁶¹ Magdalena H. Gross. “No longer estranged: learning to teach the Holocaust in Poland.” *Holocaust Studies*, 24 no. 2 (2018): 131-149.

¹⁶² Timothy Snider, *On Tyranny. Twenty Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, (p. 112).

One of the questions that remain to be debated is how “eternity politics”¹⁶³ may affect supranational structures such as the EU that strive to develop inclusive definitions of citizenship that are above national borders? This brings related questions of can historical memory focused on victimhood and self-righteousness, that is promoted by conservative politicians in Poland, Central Europe and elsewhere, be compatible with membership in supranational structures at all? Is Polish case of remembering Holocaust simple an example of growing incompatibility between postmodernist and modernist notions of identity?

What had seemed ideal at first, a fresh European beginning, devoid of communist ethos, has devolved to a reestablishment of boundaries between the EU member states. The national representations of the competing narratives of post World War II European member states in respect to the differing historical experiences took a dangerous turn. In the present moment, 2018, the moto of the European Union "United in diversity"¹⁶⁴, so enthusiastically used in 2000, to signify how Europeans have come together, “in the form of the EU, to work for peace and prosperity, while at the same time being enriched by the continent's many different cultures, traditions and languages”¹⁶⁵ - with xenophobia and anti-Semitism on the rise, the slogan might be misunderstood for mockery.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ "The EU Motto - European Union - European Commission". 2018. *European Union*. https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/motto_en.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

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