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and Justice Party (PiS):
Constructing Narratives of Heroism and
Victimhood Using a Case Study of Three
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Memory Politics in Poland Under the Law and Justice Party (PiS):

Constructing Narratives of Heroism and Victimhood Using a Case Study of Three Polish Museums

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Abstract

This thesis examines how and why Poland's current ruling party, the Law and Justice (PiS), implements its memory politics in the following three memorial museums: the Warsaw Uprising Museum, the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II, and the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, based on theories of collective memory and populism. Core elements of PiS's memory politics such as martyrdom romanticism, Christian loyalty, conservative values and patriotism, and PiS's populist discourse emphasizing the moralistic dichotomy of the good we and bad others are reflected in these museums. There are two common narrative paradigms of these museums. First, Poles are innocent victims who suffered from Nazism and Soviet totalitarianism. Second, Poles are heroes fighting for the freedom of Poland and Europe. By constructing narratives of victimhood and heroism, PiS tries to not only rejuvenate patriotic pride and solidify the national identity based on Christian allegiance, martyrdom and heroism, but alleviate Poland's inferiority complex resulting from always being marginalized in Europe and gain more autonomy from Brussels. These narratives are one-dimensional and don't invite critical reflections, which poses a question about the justification of political power's instrumentalization of history.

Key words: collective memory, memory politics, populism, Polish memorial museums

Introduction

The publication of *Neighbours*, a book written by Jan Tomasz Gross arguing that the 1941 massacre of Jews in Jedwabne (a small town in Poland) was committed by Poles,¹ triggered what Joanna Michlic described as "the most profound battle" over Polish culpability during the Second World War and challenged the official narrative that Poles are pure heroes and innocent victims.² As a backlash against *Neighbours*, the Law and Justice Party (Polish: Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS, Poland's right-

¹ Whether German paramilitary forces played a role in the Jedwabne massacre of Polish Jews is still in dispute, but Gross argued that it is Poles who rounded up and killed the Jews. See more in A. Polonsky, Joanna B. Michlic, [The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy Over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland](#), (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 40.

² J. B. Michlic, 'Coming to terms with the "dark past", The Polish debate about the Jedwabne massacre', [Acta. Analysis of Current Trends in Antisemitism](#), Vol. 49, No. 21 (2002), p. 7.

wing populist party currently in power since 2015) put politics of history (Polish: polityka historyczna) on its political agenda officially in 2004. Politics of history, i.e., politics of memory or memory politics, is a policy justifying state intervention in history research and the construction of collective memory.³ In PiS's case, its memory politics promotes "the pedagogy of pride" which emphasizes the heroic aspects of Polish history to boost national confidence and consolidate ingroup cohesion.⁴ One of the most important parts of PiS's politics of history is the memorial museum which, as described by Pierre Nora, is "a particular kind of public display – and lieu de mémoire – connected with collective memory and national identity."⁵ Compared with other history museums collecting and preserving cultural heritage, the memorial museum usually presents and interprets atrocities, traumatic experiences and heroic fighting of the past. Ideally speaking, the memorial museum should invite critical reflection. However, the exhibition and narratives of the past in the memorial museum are susceptible to dominant ideologies and political interests. In this sense, controversies about the interpretation of the past reflect the tension of current power struggles. Therefore, it is illustrative of how the memorial museum can be utilized as a battlefield for the dominance over interpretations of specific historical events to maintain mnemonic hegemony and construct desired national identity.⁶ In other words, examining how certain past is presented in the memorial museum is a good entry point to understand "who we are", "why we are what we are" and "where are we going".

This thesis is under the wider context of collective memory, with particular attention paid to power mechanisms and dominant discourses that prescribe and manipulate the national identity. PiS's populism and its implementation of memory politics in memorial museums are the research focus of this thesis. I choose the following three Polish memorial museums constructed by PiS to analyse how and why PiS's memory politics scripts the narrative frameworks, the representation of collective memory and the construction of national identity in those museums. The first one is the Warsaw Uprising Museum, starting from which "a significant connection between memory politics and museal

³ E. Ochman, *Post-Communist Poland: Contested Pasts and Future Identities*, (New York: Routledge, 2013), p. 22.

⁴ G. A. Ricciardi, 'Polish Collaboration and Contemporary Memory Polemics', *Verges: Germanic & Slavic Studies in Review*, Vol.3, No.1 (2020).

⁵ E. Fontana, 'Changing Presentations of Poland in the Context of New Museums', *Edukacja Humanistyczna*, Vol.1, No.26 (2012), pp. 79-88.

⁶ E. Stańczyk, 'Poland's Culture of Commemoration', in J. Harper (ed.) *Poland's Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018), p. 166.

projects has been observed.”⁷ The Warsaw Uprising Museum is also the first and perhaps the most famous implementation of PiS’s memory politics and affirmative patriotism with its theatricalized exhibition.⁸ The second one is the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II, the first museum in Poland devoted to the Righteous who risked their lives helping Jews in occupied Poland during the Holocaust. The last one is the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk which was established in 2008 by Civic Platform (Polish: Platforma Obywatelska, PO, a liberal-conservative party of “of reason, moderation and centre”⁹) but later taken over by PiS after PiS’s electoral victory in 2015. Therefore, the dominant perspective of this museum transforms from European and multi-dimensional to Poland-centric and romantic-martyred. The disputes over its exhibition also reflect two opposing approaches towards history in Poland.

All the three museums function in transmitting the “authoritative truth” aimed at cementing the officially stamped national identity rather than eliciting critical reflection by adopting a neutral narrative tone and presenting divergent aspects of pertinent histories. Therefore, this thesis aims to discern and analyse what motif and master narratives PiS attempts to convey in these museums, how collective memory and specific national identities are reinforced through exhibition strategies, what the intended meaning of curators is and why PiS attaches importance to promoting these narrative paradigms.

The first chapter contains the theoretical framework of my thesis, including key concepts and some fundamental information about PiS and PO. The second chapter introduces how I conducted my qualitative study of the three museums. In the third chapter about the Warsaw Uprising Museum, I analyse how the uprising is mythologized as a heroic and worthwhile endeavour to pursue freedom and keep the Polish Christian identity intact. I also discuss the problem of the museum’s unreflective deification of the uprising. In the fourth chapter about the Ulma Family Museum, I analyse how its narrative generalizes the heroic martyrdom of some righteous Poles towards the whole Polish nation, discuss the museum exhibitions’ implicit competitive victimhood the PiS’s mnemonic revisionism in

⁷ M. Kobielska, ‘The Touchstone of Polishness? Suffering Exhibited in “New Museums” in Poland’, *The Polish Review*, Vol.64, No.2 (2019), pp. 121-131.

⁸ P. Forecki, *Reconstructing Memory: The Holocaust in Polish Public Debates*, (Berlin: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2013), p. 247.

⁹ Platforma Obywatelska website, <https://platforma.org/o-nas>, consulted on 22.7.21

respect of Polish-Jewish relations shown by the 2018 Holocaust law and 2006 “Lex Gross”. In the fifth chapter of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, I introduce controversies around its perspective, how narratives of heroism and martyrdom are promoted in the exhibitions and how the representation of the past in memorial museums can be easily influenced or manipulated by political agendas.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Populism

1.1.1. Background information about Poland's main political parties: PiS and PO

There are two dominant political parties in contemporary Poland, one of which is the Civic Platform (PO) incumbent from 2007 to 2015.¹⁰ PO is a centrist, modernist and pragmatic party. For example, when Donald Tusk, the head of PO, was the prime minister of Poland from 2007 to 2014, he adopted a “pro-European, economically liberal, elitist vision of modernization” way of governance.¹¹ In terms of Poland's history in the Second World War, PO prefers a multi-dimensional and civilian-cantered perspective and tries to merge Polish history into a broader European narrative block.

The other is the Law and Justice Party (PiS), a right-wing populist party that had a short reign from 2005-2007 and has been in power since its victory in both parliamentary and presidential elections in 2015. PiS features aggressive xenophobia, anti-liberalism and Eurosceptics.¹² Kaczyński brothers, i.e., Lech Kaczyński and Jarosław Kaczyński,¹³ co-founders and the most important leaders of PiS, skilfully seized and manipulated the social majority's grudge against self-serving elites, Eurosceptic sentiment and ontological requisition of geopolitical security, transitional justice, affirmation of national martyrdom and boosting of national confidence.¹⁴ Founded in 2001, PiS was constituted of a group of elites who thought they were marginalized during the 1989 Round Table negotiations and referred to themselves as “the only legitimate democrats” in contemporary Poland.¹⁵ PiS proclaimed in the 2001 founding manifesto that it would lustrate corrupt politicians, mostly an “old-new elite” consisting of “post-communist and liberal post-Solidarity forces”¹⁶ who benefited from cronyism and

¹⁰ A. Zdravkovski, ‘Polish Politics, April 1989–October 2015’, in S. P. Ramet, K. Ringdal, and K. Doświad-Borysiak (ed.) Civic and Uncivic Values in Poland: Value Transformation, Education, and Culture, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2019), p. 25.

¹¹ J. Średnicka, p. 120.

¹² Here I understand PiS's Euroscepticism as the criticism of some EU policies, normative values and the way EU is integrated, not the rejection of the EU membership. See more in H. Reinhard, M. Emanuele Massetti, and M. Oscar, ‘Introduction: European party-based populism and territory’, in H. Reinhard, M. Emanuele, and M. Oscar (ed.) The People and the Nation: Populism and Ethno-Territorial Politics in Europe, (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2020), p. 9.

¹³ Lech headed PiS from 2001 to 2003, then Jarosław took over. Lech died in an airplane crash in 2010 as the president of Poland (2005–2010). See Britannica website, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Jaroslaw-Kaczynski>, consulted on 22.7.21

¹⁴ dziennik.pl website, <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/218760.polski-spor-o-modernizacje.html>, consulted on 22.5.10

¹⁵ F. Raimundo, ‘Dealing with the Past in Central and Southern European Democracies: Comparing Spain and Poland’, in G. Mink, and L. Neumayer (ed.) History, memory and politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory games, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 139.

¹⁶ B. Stanley, ‘Counter-elite populism and civil society in Poland: PiS's strategies of elite replacement’, East European Politics and Societies, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2022), pp. 118-140.

were involved in organized crime.¹⁷ From the perspective of PiS, it is those elites that blemished and encroached on the traditional Polish values and national identity. The accession to the EU further provides PiS with a corpus of populist propaganda. As Reinhard Heinisch et al. said, Eurosceptic populists usually adopt the discourse that cosmopolitan elites are catering to “Brussels’s centralizing tendencies” at the expense of national sovereignty and people’s will.¹⁸ In the 2015 election, PiS promoted the “Poland in ruins” narrative in which “the alienating liberal elite”, especially PO was to blame for the massive poverty in Poland.¹⁹ Jarosław Kaczyński and other PiS partisans boded ill for the de facto recolonization-to-be of Poland and responded to Donald Tusk’s foreign policy with a blistering attack that he was fawning and servile vis-à-vis the puissant West, especially Germany.²⁰ Therefore, PiS promised to overturn the “debilitating and politically-correct liberalism” imposed by the Third Republic’s metropolitan elites.²¹ In PiS’s opinion, a pluralistic model of society with alienated ethnic, religious and cultural minorities is detrimental to the homogeneity and cohesion of the nation. By the same token, a supranational organization like the EU looms as an enormous threat to national identity and cultural affinity.²² To be clear, PiS’s Euroscepticism is not against Poland’s EU membership per se. It is more of an opposition to the EU’s normative values, policies and the transfer of the sovereign.

1.1.2. Conceptualization of Populism

The definition of the term “populism” seems slippery and ambiguous. The most classical one might be Cas Mudde’s “minimal definition” that populism is “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.”²³ Therefore, it can be said that populism is people-centric and anti-elites.²⁴ In

¹⁷ A. Folvarčny, L. Kopeček, ‘Which conservatism? The identity of the Polish Law and Justice party’, *Politics in Central Europe*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2020), pp. 159-188.

¹⁸ R. Heinisch, M. Emanuele, and M. Oscar (ed.) *The People and the Nation: Populism and Ethno-Territorial Politics in Europe*, (Abingdon Oxon: Routledge, 2020), p. 10.

¹⁹ D. Cadier, K. Szulecki, ‘Populism, historical discourse and foreign policy: the case of Poland’s Law and Justice government’, *International Politics*, Vol. 57, No. 6 (2020), pp. 990-1011.

²⁰ PiS website, Jarosław Kaczyński, interview by Jacek Karnowski and Michał Karnowski, <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/jako-narod-mamy-potezne-zasoby-potezne-mozliwosci>, consulted on 22.4.15

²¹ J. Darasz, ‘The History Men’, in J. Harper (ed.) *Poland’s Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018), p. 131.

²² H. G. Betz, C. Johnson, ‘Against the current—stemming the tide: the nostalgic ideology of the contemporary radical populist right’, *Journal of Political Ideologies*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (2004), pp. 311-327.

²³ C. Mudde, ‘The populist zeitgeist’, *Government and opposition*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (2004), pp. 541-563.

²⁴ M. Rooduijn, T. Pauwels, ‘Measuring populism: Comparing two methods of content analysis’, *West European Politics*, Vol. 34, No.

Mudde's opinion, populism is a "distinct" but "thin-centered" ideology that is versatile enough to be coalesced with other ideological orientations.²⁵

In contrast, Michael Freeden denied that populism can be a "thin" ideology, let alone "a distinct stand-alone" one.²⁶ Ding, Slater, and Zengin further argued that populism is not an ideology because it "lacks the kind of substantive, specific, and systematic commingling of political ideas internal to an ideological belief system".²⁷ Populism is rather an "empty signifier" that the meaning of "the people" fluctuates according to different target constituencies and is subject to the interpretation of populist leaders allows populists.²⁸ Kirk A Hawkins held the view that populism is a Manichaeian discourse that "assigns a moral dimension to everything" and postulates a struggle between the good i.e., "the will of the people", and the evil i.e., "a conspiring elite that has subverted the will of the people".²⁹ Similar to an ideology, populism establishes a simplified worldview appealing to its fellows, but it "lacks significant exposition" and "is usually low on policy specifics".³⁰ Likewise, Jan-Werner Müller argued that populism is a kind of moralized identity politics that separates the "morally pure and united people" from "morally inferior elites".³¹ The core claim of populism is that only some people are the true people and only populist leaders are the exclusive representation of the true people as a whole, even though these leaders just manoeuvre and instrumentalize people's resentment with liberal elites' unfulfilled promises.

Other scholars argued that populism is a frame, a strategy of political mobilization,³² a mass movement arising outside the political system aiming to take or maintain power,³³ or a "style of political rhetoric" which appeals to its electorate for an overthrowal of the existing power order and

6 (2011), pp. 1272-1283.

²⁵ C. Mudde (ed.) The populist radical right: A reader, (London & New York: Taylor & Francis, 2016), p. 4.

²⁶ M. Freeden, 'After the Brexit referendum: revisiting populism as an ideology', Journal of Political Ideologies, Vol.22, No.1 (2017), pp. 1-11.

²⁷ A. Varshney, 'Populism and Nationalism: An Overview of Similarities and Differences', Studies in Comparative International Development, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2021), pp. 131-147.

²⁸ A. Gwiazda, 'Right-wing populism and feminist politics: The case of Law and Justice in Poland', International Political Science Review, Vol. 42, No.5 (2021), pp. 580-595.

²⁹ Kirk A. Hawkins, 'Is Chávez populist? Measuring populist discourse in comparative perspective', Comparative Political Studies, Vol. 42, No.8 (2009), pp. 1040-1067.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ J.W. Müller, What is Populism? (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), p. 20.

³² P. Sztompka, 'The "Demand Side" of Populism: The Case of Poland', in A. Martinelli, P. Magri (ed.) Beyond Trump: Populism on the Rise, (Milano: Edizioni Epoké ISPI, 2016), p. 74.

³³ D. Kasproicz, A Hess, 'Populism in Poland – between Demagoguery and Demophilia', Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne, No. 2 (2017), pp. 201-214.

the cultural hegemony of the establishment.³⁴ To some extent, these points of view are convincing, but it's unnecessary to explicate them.

In sum, the existing literature on populism reveals that it has an obvious feature of simplifying sophisticated socio-cultural schisms and the undue polarization of wealth to the dichotomies between the people and the elites, between nativism and cosmopolitanism.³⁵ Since this thesis is mainly about context analysis, I define populism as a discourse that extols “the true and virtuous people” while demonizing “the hypocritical and corrupt elites”, trying to persuade electorates to believe that there is an intense, (though usually fictitious), antagonism between the people and the elites who are usually accused by populists of being in collusion with or succumbing to external powers to compromise the people's interest. The image of the elites, or generally, enemies, is constructed to solidify the people,³⁶ even though the connotations of the people and the enemy can be flexibly redefined on the basis of political needs. In this sense, populism is essentially a form of identity politics.

1.2.3. PiS's Populism

As mentioned before, populism can be associated with other ideological orientations. In PiS's case, although Lech Kaczyński clarified in a *Polityka* interview that “I don't think I'm a populist. I am not a nationalist. I have nothing in common with nationalism. I am a patriot. If I feel connected with a historical political tradition, it is a tradition of the national camp, Piłsudski. Certainly not with the Endek camp.”³⁷ PiS is actually a right-wing populist party absorbing nationalism and conservatism, with a propensity for state paternalism or even authoritarianism.³⁸ More accurately, as Radosław Markowski, Smilov and Krastev observed, PiS shifted from a conservative position to a “hard populist-nationalist stance” during and after its 2005-2007 reign.³⁹ For instance, it gives priority to executive powers and tries to cripple the legislature and judicial system, which resembles the authoritarian

³⁴ H.G. Betz, C. Johnson, pp. 311-327.

³⁵ K. Bluhm, M. Varga, ‘Conservative developmental statism in east central Europe and Russia’, *New Political Economy*, Vol. 25, No.4 (2020), pp. 642-659.

³⁶ Kirk A. Hawkins, pp. 1040-1067.

³⁷ *Polityka* website, <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kraj/1688906.1.lech-kaczynski-nie-jestem-populista.read>, consulted on 22.7.23. Some basic information of Piłsudski and the Endek: Józef Piłsudski (1867–1935) a Polish statesman who viewed the nation as a product of history with ethnic and cultural variety. The Endek, also known as the Endecja or National Democracy, was a Polish political party created by Roman Dmowski in 1897. See more in N. Davies, *Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁸ R. Pankowski, *The Populist Radical Right in Poland: The Patriots*, (New York; Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2010), p. 153.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 159.

regime, “the Sanation” established by Piłsudski in 1926.⁴⁰ Besides, PiS’s emphasis on the Polish-Catholic identity and cultural heritage is strongly reminiscent of Roman Dmowski’s (founder of the Endek) nationalistic version.⁴¹ Kaczyński’s denial needs to be considered in the Polish language context where nationalism has a derogatory connotation of extremism, let alone populism. That’s why what PiS has been branding about itself is patriotism, a word which will never relate to anything pejorative.⁴²

To win or maintain power legitimacy, populist politicians need to create rhetoric styles and discursive strategies that fit in a specific socio-cultural background and resonate with target voters.⁴³ Usually, their rhetoric is simple but provocative, emphasizing the existence of enemies and using catchy slogans to incite their followers.⁴⁴ In PiS’s populist discursive mechanisms, the Polish nation is a homogenous ethnocultural community adherent to patriotism, tradition and Christian values,⁴⁵ divided into “better and worse sort of Poles”;⁴⁶ only PiS speaks in the name of the true people and is dedicated to promoting the Polish national interests, therefore anyone who does not identify themselves with this Polishness or any political competitors opposing to PiS are enemies, being excluded from “true Poles”, or of “lower sort”.⁴⁷ Besides, PiS’s populism, as Bill Stanley explains, “is (...) not hostile to elites per se”, but against “the wrong elite” while regards itself as “the true (counter-)elite”.⁴⁸ When charging presumed dissident elites, PiS usually refers to their historical and ethnic background to undermine their patriotic credibility and question their loyalty and belongingness to the nation-state. For instance, Tusk was assailed by PiS in the election campaign because of his German ethnic minority identity.⁴⁹ Similarly, PiS argues that association with Communism is an

⁴⁰ D. Bunikowski, ‘The constitutional crisis in Poland, Schmittian questions and Kaczyński’s political and legal philosophy’, Journal of Contemporary European Studies, Vol. 26, No. 3 (2018), pp. 285-307.

⁴¹ Roman Dmowski is one of the most eminent politicians who played a decisive role in the reconstruction of Polish independence in the 20th century. The nation he envisioned was firstly a biological race and ethnolinguistically homogeneous. Dmowski also attached great importance to Catholicism in terms of the essence of real Polishness. See more in A. Walicki, ‘The Troubling Legacy of Roman Dmowski’, Dialogue and Universalism, Vol. 21, No. 4 (2011), pp. 91-119.

⁴² K. Jaskułowski, The Everyday Politics of Migration Crisis in Poland: Between Nationalism, Fear and Empathy, (Heidelberg & New York & Dordrecht & London: Springer Cham, 2019), p. 62.

⁴³ M. Kotwas, J. Kubik, ‘Symbolic thickening of public culture and the rise of right-wing populism in Poland’, East European Politics and Societies, Vol. 33, No.2 (2019), pp. 435-471.

⁴⁴ T. Lähdesmäki, ‘European culture, history, and heritage as political tools in the rhetoric of the Finns Party’. in C. De Cesari, A. Kaya (ed.) European memory in populism: Representations of self and other, (London & New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 192.

⁴⁵ K. Jasiewicz, ‘The new populism in Poland: The usual suspects?’, Problems of Post-communism, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2008), pp. 7-25.

⁴⁶ M. Mazzini, ‘A Three-Dimensional Model of Enlarging the Mnemonic Conflict: The Case of Poland Under Second Law and Justice Government’, Słowo, Vol.31, No.1 (2018), pp. 45-67.

⁴⁷ P. Sztompka, p. 88.

⁴⁸ B. Stanley, pp. 118-140.

⁴⁹ R. Pankowski, p. 159.

indelible stain contaminating their competitors' moral purity and political integrity. In summary, PiS labels those "corrupt elites" who are metropolitan and pro-West, having connections to Communism or not ethnically pure Poles as traitors who cater to and are complicit with the West at the expense of Poland's pride and authentic interests. Such a moralization discourse making an issue of competitors' ethnic origin and communist past has been proved to be effective. PiS's populist rhetoric style, as well as its utilization of consequential historical events and Catholic symbols as mnemonic codes are reflected in the three museums analysed in this thesis.

1.2. Collective memory

1.2.1. Halbwachs On Collective Memory

The concept of collective memory has a pedigree going back to the French philosopher and sociologist Maurice Halbwachs' masterpiece, *The Collective Memory*.⁵⁰ According to Halbwachs, collective memory is a socially constructed notion that refers to "a sum of convergent recollections, beliefs, feelings and judgements on the past that has been deposited in contemporaries' minds."⁵¹ It is located, collected, framed, and enunciated within the social milieus that demarcates the space and time of a specific community. In other words, collective memory is not the simple or indiscriminate sum of individual memories. Rather, it's the standardized narrative on which individual memories rely.⁵² Therefore, what and how an individual remembers are determined by the context and mechanism (such as commemorative rituals) of collective memory. Halbwachs' conceptualization of collective memory is influenced by his teacher, Durkheim, for whom, collective memory is essentially social, embodied in legislations and practices, functioning as an anchor of historical continuity that reaffirms shared identity and bolsters in-group solidarity.⁵³ Besides, Halbwachs made a strict distinction between collective memory from history. For one thing, history is discontinuous, separating historical fact "from what precedes or follows" with detachment, while collective memory is the resemblances to and repetitive successions of the past, thus ensuring group members their identity continuity.⁵⁴ For another, history is a unitary and summary presentation of the past while collective memory is plural and a reconstruction of the past based on contemporary social motifs and ideological needs mainly shaped by political powers.⁵⁵

1.2.2. Three Characteristics of Collective Memory

In general, I discern three characteristics of collective memory. First, collective memory can be understood as "shared social frameworks of individual recollections".⁵⁶ However, it is not the mere aggregate sum of individual memories. Second, collective memory is distinguished from history.

⁵⁰ S. Olga, 'Securitization of Past: Analysis of the Katyn Issue in the Context of EU Integration', *Polish Political Science*, Vol. 45, No. 1 (2016), pp. 45-59.

⁵¹ J. Jedlicki, 'East-European Historical Bequest en Route to an Integrated Europe', in E. Klaus, W. Spohn (ed.) *Collective Memory and European Identity: The Effects of Integration and Enlargement*, (London&New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 37.

⁵² M. Halbwachs, *The collective memory*, (New York: harper & row, 1980), p. 51.

⁵³ B. A. Misztal, 'Durkheim on Collective Memory', *Journal of Classical Sociology : JCS*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (2003), pp. 123-143.

⁵⁴ M. Halbwachs, p. 86.

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 66.

⁵⁶ B. A. Misztal, pp. 123-143.

History should cling to the truth, while collective memory does not have to be accurate since it is not a simple retrieval of the past or the mechanical reproduction of historical accumulation. Wertsch disagreed that the difference between history and collective memory is accuracy, but he agreed that collective memory has a special function for establishing a common community based on a prescribed perspective on the past.⁵⁷ Similar to Halbwachs, Nora argued that collective memory and history are “in fundamental opposition” since memory is dynamic and susceptible to manipulation while history requires “analysis and criticism”.⁵⁸

Based on the second distinction, it is clear that although collective memory always appears as the indisputable truth, it does not necessarily consist of objective historical facts. What is chosen to be remembered and how it is remembered are far more important than what exactly happens or how much the collective memory reflects the real past. As Piotr Forecki said, collective memory can even be “a national imagination (...) [with] a complex system of signs and symbols that is comprehensible only for the community members.”⁵⁹ Snyder and Müller further argued that the process of the construction and commemoration of the collective memory is regulated by a “set of myths”.⁶⁰ In the Polish case, the messianic Romantism as the “Christ of the Nations”—developed from Poland’s partition in the 18th and 19th centuries - has become a mythical foundation for the Polish nation and leaves an indelible mark on the Polish collective memory. Later a series of bloody insurrections against totalitarianisms for independence and freedom in the Second World War and the Stalinist period are also incorporated into the Polish collective memory as founding myths of the reborn Poland after 1989.

Since what should be remembered is determined by present interests and the past can be simplified to mythic archetypes, this thesis defines the third characteristic of collective memory as always being subordinated to “the constant process of (re) interpretation”.⁶¹ However, this is not to say that collective memory is fluid or incoherent. Rather, every regime tries to make its version of collective

⁵⁷ J.V. Wertsch, Voices of collective remembering, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 66.

⁵⁸ P. Nora, ‘Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire’, Representations, Vol.26, No.26 (1989), pp. 7-24.

⁵⁹ P. Forecki, Reconstructing Memory: The Holocaust in Polish Public Debates, (Berlin: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2013), p. 14.

⁶⁰ T. Snyder, ‘Memory of sovereignty and sovereignty over memory: Poland, Lithuania and Ukraine, 1939–1999’, in J.W. Müller (ed.) Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 47.

⁶¹ K. Kaźmierska, ‘Biographical and Collective Memory’, in M. Pakier, J. Wawrzyniak (ed.) Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), p. 100.

memory permanent. The selected collective memory is usually institutionalized in the constitution, continuously displayed in public, and promulgated in educational systems, functioning in a subtle way to discipline individuals' private memory and reinforce the preferred national identity.⁶² Memorial museums, as I will elaborate on later, are also an important institutionalization of the collective memory.

1.2.3. Collective Memory, National Identity and Political Powers

As Habermas and Derrida said, history can't automatically shape our identity unless we consciously appropriate its meaning.⁶³ In other words, it is the interpretation of selected histories or the construction of corresponding collective memory that sets the tone for the national identity. Here national identity is understood as essentially a sense of belonging, dependence and loyalty to a community as well as the recognition and approval of the national history and culture. It serves not only as a spiritual bond to unite the nation and promote national development, but also as an ideology to validate and defend the legitimacy of a certain regime. Like collective memory, national identity is not a predetermined, static or fixed existential reality. Rather, it is a dynamic, ductile and variable mnemonic consciousness that continually changes by selective remembering and deliberate forgetting, which promotes desirable memories and suppresses those that cannot be tailored into "hegemonic discourses".⁶⁴ That is to say, only admirable elements of the nation regarded as the intrinsic constitution of a homogenous "good we" are preserved while skeletons in the closet are covered up or expunged from collective memory. What should be accentuated as pride and what should be condemned as shame are usually determined by political powers. The discreditable past of the nation is usually attributed to external coercion and instigation or explained as a justified retaliation against former suffering inflicted by others.⁶⁵ Therefore, the contextualization of national identity is actually a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, or to put it in another way, the construction of national identity entails "the construction of the Other", which delineates the boundaries of Self and the Other.⁶⁶

⁶² C.F. Dobre, 'Uses and Misuses of Memory', in M. Pakier, J. Wawrzyniak (ed.) Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), p. 301.

⁶³ J. Habermas, J. Derrida, 'February 15, or what binds Europeans together: A plea for a common foreign policy, beginning in the core of Europe', Constellations, Vol. 10, No. 3 (2003), pp. 291-297.

⁶⁴ K. Jaskułowski, P. Majewski, A. Surmiak. 'Teaching the Nation: History and Nationalism in Polish School History Education', British Journal of Sociology of Education, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2018), pp. 77-91.

⁶⁵ R.F. Baumeister, S. Hastings, 'How Groups Flatter and Deceive Themselves', in J.W. Pennebaker, D. Páez and B. Rimé (ed.) Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Publisher, 1997), pp. 277-293.

⁶⁶ M. Wijermars, 'Memory Politics Beyond the Political Domain: Historical Legitimation of the Power Vertical in Contemporary Russian Television', Problems of Post-Communism, vol. 63, No. 2 (2016), pp. 84-93.

In sum, collective memory and national identity are subject to political agendas and power struggles. For instance, with the collapse of the Iron Curtain, there emerged memories of Soviet crimes that were suppressed before, and anti-Communism became justified rhetoric and an appealing tool for nationalist political elites in the formation of national identity. The Revolutions of 1989 were accompanied by the enthusiasm of “returning to Europe”, a dominant official narrative that Poland should establish a western-oriented civil society based on a renewed national identity that discarded its inopportune obsolete Romanticism and incorporated self-critical past such as the Polish complicity in the Holocaust.⁶⁷ However, when the populist right-wing party PiS took power in 2005, the motif of the Second World War was restricted to Polish suffering, martyrdom, heroism and anti-totalitarianism; the emphasis of national identity also shifted from modern Europeans to Polish suffering and heroism.

1.2.4. Conclusion of this chapter

In conclusion, this thesis defines collective memory as a prescriptive collection, projection and representations of the past, including feelings, judgements and beliefs that are created and elaborated by political elites according to the present memory imperative, inherited by and imparted through generations of members within a specific community, and functions as a reference point to designate “where we come from”, “who we are” and even “where we are going”, therefore orienting individuals and providing them with a sense of soothing continuity and symbolic belonging. Specific to the case of Poland, it can be said that contemporary Polish collective memory is significantly shaped by the 19th martyrdom romanticism and a series of historical uprisings in the 20th century, especially those in the Second World War. It features unreflective interpretations and mythological moralization of the past. The Polish national identity is fundamentally based on common cultural-linguistics and shared historical experiences. Previous literature has repetitively pointed out the role of Roman Catholicism as the hallmark forming and consolidating Polish national identity when Poles encountered apostates such as Islamic Turks and Orthodox Russians or the gradually secularized West. There are also many articles analysing Poles’ entrenched self-image of freedom fighters against invasion and totalitarianism, accompanied by an obsession with innocent victimhood. These will be explained in detail in later

⁶⁷ J. Średnicka, ‘The New Romantics’, in J. Harper (ed.) *Poland’s Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism*, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018), p. 124.

chapters.

1.3. The Politics of Memory

1.3.1. Conceptualization of the Politics of Memory

As analysed in previous sections, historical events are remembered or forgotten selectively and are subject to diverse and sometimes contradictory interpretations, which means it is difficult to create an unchallenged mnemonic regime.⁶⁸ However, this difficulty, in turn, prompts politicians to actively participate in the construction and reinforcement of desired collective memory through the politics of memory, or in a similar term, memory politics.

The definition of the politics of memory is divergent but generally alike. From a macroscopic perspective, it relates to memorial activities carried out or sponsored by state authorities. A case in point is the “totalitarianization of history or historiography” that relegates the dynamic and multi-dimensional history to ideological instruments for silencing and eliminating competitive dissents and maintaining political legitimacy.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, the politics of memory can also contribute to a democratic and open process in which divergent interests, social groups and citizens with historical consciousness can engage in the construction of collective memory and project their interpretations of certain consequential histories into the public debate free from state authorities’ interference.

From these two understandings of the politics of memory, it is clear that collective memory is not doomed to be manipulated by political powers. Whether the state should be involved in or interfere with the construction of collective memory is not of this thesis’ concern. What we should attach importance to is how memory politics can refrain from eroding the reliability of history so that the collective memory is self-reflective rather than self-serving. However, since collective memory can be utilized as a “powerful instrument of social mobilization, identity construction and political competition”,⁷⁰ those in power usually attempt to control the interpretations of specific histories, inculcate what they have constructed as the “true past” into the people, and make people as emotionally charged as they are. Therefore, the definition of the politics of memory is usually associated with a negative meaning, like the one of PiS’s.

⁶⁸ M. Mazzini, pp. 45-67.

⁶⁹ R. Stobiecki, ‘Historians Facing Politics of History: The Case of Poland’, in M. Kopecek (ed.) Past in the making: historical revisionism in Central Europe after 1989, (Budapest; New York: Central European University Press, 2008), p. 180.

⁷⁰ P. Wawrzyński, ‘The Government’s Remembrance Policy’, Polish Political Science Yearbook, Vol. 46, No.1 (2017), pp. 294-312.

In this thesis, the politics of memory refers to political programs that prioritize, mythologize and institutionalize specific histories to the realm of collective memory and make them “a socio-cultural mode of action”.⁷¹ It creates a narrative framework under which certain historical events are utilized as symbolic capital and certain groups are approved as “the people”. Specific to PiS’s case, it means a form of “legal governance of history”⁷² which demonstrates Polish martyrdom and heroism with a focus on the Second World War and the ensuing Soviet-occupied period, and promotes traditional cultures and values to strengthen and defend the good reputation of Poland domestically and internationally.⁷³

1.3.2. PiS’s Memory Politics

The concept of memory politics was first popularized by intellectuals having a connection to the Warsaw Club of Political Criticism in late 1990s, then it developed into the bedrock and hallmark of PiS.⁷⁴ In the early 2000s, there emerged a “historical reinvention” trend where conservative anti-communist politicians appropriated the history to legitimate the power and shape the national identity.⁷⁵

PiS’s memory politics can be said as a stress reaction triggered by Germany’s right-wing politician Erika Steinbach’s proposition in 2000 of establishing the Centre Against Expulsions in Berlin to commemorate Germans who suffered from expulsions and ethnic cleansing during and after the Second World War. Steinbach attempted to commemorate Germans as victims by establishing the Centre Against Expulsions. Poland worried that this museum would marginalize German atrocities and elevate the German suffering to a status on a par with that of Poles. Although at that time, Poland was still in the process of joining the EU and PiS was not in office, the Kaczyński brothers had already

⁷¹ A. Confino, ‘Collective memory and cultural history: Problems of method’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 5, (1997), pp. 1386-1403.

⁷² M. Bucholc, ‘The Polish “Holocaust Law” revisited: The Devastating Effects of Prejudice-Mongering’, *Cultures of History Forum*, (2019), <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/politics/the-polish-holocaust-law-revisited>, consulted on 22.1.16

⁷³ J. Rzepa, ‘Translation, conflict and the politics of memory: Jan Karski’s Story of a Secret State’, *Translation Studies*, Vol.11, No.3 (2018), pp. 315-332.

⁷⁴ M. Łuczewski, ‘A counterrevolutionary concept: The “politics of history” in Poland’, *Revue d’études comparatives Est-Ouest*, Vol.1, No. 1 (2020), pp. 27-71.

⁷⁵ E. Stańczyk, *Commemorating the Children of World War II in Poland: Combative Remembrance*, (Heidelberg & New York & Dordrecht & London: Springer Cham, 2019), p. 12.

outlined their memory politics aiming to cultivate an engaged patriotism with the praise of Polish martyrdom and resistance for liberty and independence.⁷⁶ The publication of Gross's *Neighbours* prompted PiS to put memory politics on its political agenda officially in 2004. The later unsatisfactory social-economic transformation and the accommodation of EU's normative values further gave PiS a convenient excuse for promoting their memory politics to overturn the value templates imposed by the West.⁷⁷ PiS's 2005 election manifesto (Program 2005) viewed the corrosion of traditional values, the debilitation of national solidarity and the dwindling patriotism as the most negative consequences after the 1989 transition. For one thing, PiS and its partisans are dissatisfied with the "collective amnesia" and slack elites of the Third Republic for paying little attention to the crafting of a renewed Polish identity based on recent history.⁷⁸ For another, they condemn the communist propaganda for distorting Poles' self-perception and blemishing their international reputation.⁷⁹ The role of the communist experience played here is interesting and will be explained more in later chapters. On the one hand, it is negative historical residues that should be lustrated to establish a proud national image that can unite, inspire and motivate the people. For another, it is the mainstay to shape the romantic and "idiosyncratic" "Polish patriotism: exultation through pain".⁸⁰

To gain moral superiority and enhance political legitimization, PiS has made the past a battlefield of political struggle.⁸¹ Compared to PO, PiS is more absorbed in recycling particular historical experiences, packing them into grandiose national commemorations, and incorporating them into Polish identity.⁸² PiS is also more and successful in mobilizing mnemonic resources by promoting the narratives of victimhood and heroism which achieve a deep echo in Poles and make them feel appreciated. Its memory politics is so penetrating that even the intellectual circle, as Ireneusz Krzemiński pointed out long before in 2008, was "excessively saturated with a narrow political context and scholars' and authors' party political bias".⁸³

⁷⁶ E. Ochman, p. 23.

⁷⁷ J. Darasz, p. 158.

⁷⁸ R. Stobiecki, p. 182.

⁷⁹ M. Kopecek, p. 86.

⁸⁰ J. Nizyńska, 'The Politics of Mourning and the Crisis of Poland's Symbolic Language after April 10', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2010), pp. 467-479.

⁸¹ Tygodnikprzeгляд website, <https://www.tygodnikprzeгляд.pl/wojna-o-rzad-dusz>, consulted on 22.5.15

⁸² E. Stańczyk, p. 162.

⁸³ E. Ochman, p. 13.

After PiS returned to Power in 2015, memory politics has become its top priority on the policymaking agenda. Aiming for a reconstruction of the national identity with strong national consciousness and trying to renovate the Polish society according to “Christian principles, with an obvious messianic dimension”,⁸⁴ PiS has not only accentuated patriotic education based on allegiance to Catholicism and Polish romanticism, but also propagated traditional values, patriotism and glorious Polish culture in the mainstream media.⁸⁵ In PiS’s opinion, martyrdom Romanticism, Christian heritage, traditional values and cultural-ethnic homogeneity are intrinsic essentials, of the first importance, constituting the national identity that should be highlighted and bulwarked.⁸⁶ Therefore, this Polish identity designed by PiS is usually described by scholars as “socially conservative, proudly Catholic (not in a religious sense, but as an identity marker distinguishing Poles from Muslims), nationalistic, inward-looking, averse to self-criticism, filled with notions of moral superiority, and wary of foreigners, especially those from other civilizations and cultures.”⁸⁷

Bernhard and Kubik categorized PiS and its disciples as “mnemonic warriors” who distinguish themselves (the proprietors and guardians of the truth) from others who hold the wrong view of the past.⁸⁸ There is no negotiable room in the mnemonic struggles because only “we” represent the true version of history. Therefore, any other different interpretations of the past should be reprobated and excluded, and anyone who does not approve of the official historical narratives should be muted and expelled from the national community.⁸⁹ Fellow-travellers just need to subscribe to “our” monolithic version of history, otherwise, the foundations of the present polity will be corrupted.⁹⁰

1.3.3. Two Objectives of PiS’s Historical Policy

Firstly, PiS seeks to rejuvenate patriotic pride and strengthen national belonging by reconstructing the national identity based on Christian allegiance, martyrdom and heroism. This objective is in view of

⁸⁴ A. Folvarčný, L. Kopeček, pp. 159-188.

⁸⁵ E. Ochman, p. 21.

⁸⁶ A. Balcer, P. Buras, G. Gromadzki, & E. Smolar, ‘Change in Poland, but what change? Assumptions of Law and Justice party foreign policy’, report of Stefan Batory Foundation, (2016), pp. 1-18.

⁸⁷ R. Adekoya, ‘An Identity Reset’, in J. Harper (ed.) Poland’s Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018), p. 209.

⁸⁸ M. Bernhard, J. Kubik, Twenty Years After Communism: The Politics of Memory and Commemoration, (New York, Oxford University Press, 2014), p. 13.

⁸⁹ M. Mazzini, pp. 45-67.

⁹⁰ M. Bernhard, J. Kubik, p. 13.

contemporary Polish society's "moral permissiveness" and the young generation's deficient recognition of Poland's glorious past.⁹¹ Therefore, the first thing Poles should discard is the "pedagogy of shame" proposed by liberal elites which vilified the moral purity of and brought disgrace on the Polish nation by associating Poles with atrocities against other ethnic groups, thus suggesting that Poles should feel ashamed and guilty of their history.⁹² For PiS, historical events such as the Jedwabne program are contentious, exaggerated or even fabricated by traitorous Polish liberals and "anti-Polish" foreign enemies.⁹³ To counterattack the "pedagogy of shame", PiS adopts two discourse strategies. Firstly, PiS promotes a "muscular kind of Polish patriotism" mixed with romantic tradition, Catholic faith and military heroism to boost national pride.⁹⁴ In this process, Germany and Russia are usually arranged as perpetrators whose crimes against Poland serve as a foil to Poles' heroic resistance. By appropriating the moralistic dichotomy between the people/nation and the establishment elites to the binary of innocent victims (Poland) and perpetrators (Germany and Russia), PiS not only creates a sense of comfortable moral ascendancy and a spirit-satisfied victory, but also once again draws a clear line of demarcation between "good we" and "bad others". Secondly, PiS takes advantage of Poles' general affinity with martyrdom to connect "Polishness" with suffering and emphasizes the narrative of victimhood to defend the innocence of the Polish nation and compensate for the humiliation of defeat.⁹⁵ By identifying the Polish nation as the pure victim, PiS tries to suppress strident voices about Polish crimes or pre-war anti-Semitism, or at least to legitimate those historical wrongdoings as justifiable defence and righteous vengeance. As Chiara De Cesari and Ayhan said, in the narratives of heroism and victimhood, "the arbitrarily defined and homogenously imagined" "we" can only be admirable heroes or infallible victims.⁹⁶ Any other negative identity ascribed to the Polish nation is a malicious plot to defame and divide united Poles. As a result, the Holocaust is either instrumentalized as a broad background showing Polish suffering and martyrdom or excised from the Polish collective memory. Besides, in PiS's victimhood narrative, Jewish suffering is either excluded or attributed partly to their own cowardice, passivity and complicity with the German authorities, thus alleviating the moral anxiety of Poles who used to be indifferent bystanders.⁹⁷

⁹¹ E. Fontana, Erica, p. 79-88.

⁹² D. Cadier, K. Szulecki, pp. 990-1011.

⁹³ R. Adekoya, p. 204.

⁹⁴ J. Darasz, p. 136.

⁹⁵ M. Kobielska, pp. 121-131.

⁹⁶ C. De Cesari, A. Kaya (ed.) *European memory in populism: Representations of self and other*, (New York: Routledge, 2019), p. 280.

⁹⁷ P. Forecki, p. 56.

The second objective, using Jo Harper's words, is to wean "Poles from their long-held emotional attachment to the West".⁹⁸ PiS is not only unsatisfied with Poland's marginalized or, to put it in a better way, supplementary position in the construction of European memory, but criticizes Poles' mentality striving to match up to the West's normative standards. Therefore, PiS tries to achieve the second objective by emphasizing the uniqueness of Poland's historical experiences and establishing a moral superiority over the West which has been portrayed by PiS as morally compromised, philistine and hypocritical.⁹⁹ Ryszard Legutko, a PiS member and the co-chair of the European Conservatives and Reformists Group, declared that "Poland is indeed in a position to make a difference in Europe. Whether in the long-term this will alter the European political landscape remains to be seen, but for the time being, we are a stronghold of Christianity in Europe."¹⁰⁰ The motivation behind this rhetoric that Poland will achieve western Europe's moral redemption and catharsis is actually derived from a national inferiority complex and the grievance of being marginalized in the EU. PiS is contemptuous of and bristles at western political-correctness and moral relativism, warning that those western ideologies are encroaching on the existence of Pole's traditional values and claiming that it is high time for political elites to safeguard essentials of the Polishness.¹⁰¹

To achieve the above two aims, PiS has skilfully used memorial museums as a core part of its strategy to institutionalize its memory politics and popularize its version of Polish experiences in the Second World War as mythologized historical events, which I will elaborate on later.

⁹⁸ R. Adekoya, p. 207.

⁹⁹ PiS website, <http://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/nie-chodzi-o-to-by-opozycja-przestala-byc-opozycja>, consulted on 22.7.23

¹⁰⁰ T. D. Lusch, 'A Demon Haunted Europe: Democracy's Totalitarian Impulse', *New Oxford Review*, Vol. 84 (2017), pp. 24-33. <https://www.newoxfordreview.org/documents/a-demon-haunted-europe-democracys-totalitarian-impulse/>, consulted on 22.1.15

¹⁰¹ R. Pankowski, p. 153.

2. Methodology

To illustrate how PiS instrumentalizes memorial museums to institutionalize its memory politics, or in other words, how museums become a battlefield for the monopoly of the interpretation of the past and the authentic Polishness, this thesis adopts a qualitative methodology for in-depth studies on the following museums: the Warsaw Uprising Museum, the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II and the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk. This thesis does not address people's emotional fluctuations and psychological changes during or after visiting these museums. Rather, this thesis aims to analyze the motivations, missions and contestations behind the construction and exhibition of these museums based on sources mainly from museums' websites, archives, and exhibition content such as illustrative texts, photographs and leaflets. PiS's political discourses are also included to explain how master narratives in these museums are influenced by the current political agenda.

2.1. Why These Three Memorial Museums?

As mentioned before, the memorial museum can be understood as an institutionalized form of collective memory, usually the authoritative interpretation of the past for the creation of the so-called imagined community. It might be the best *lieux de mémoire* to preserve, affirm and reinforce collective memory, and in most cases, to provide a preconceived simplified past that arouses attachments and affiliation to a nation or a political party while marginalizing or eliminating those memories incongruous in the official artery narrative, thus deliberately or unintentionally demarcating the boundary between "us" and others.¹⁰² In this sense, the historical narratives in memorial museums are tailored to political needs. Examining how the past is presented in memorial museums is conducive to our understanding of contemporary society.

The reasons for choosing the above three WWII-related museums are as follows. First, the Second World War is such a valuable and abundant memory reservoir that not only Polish civilians regard it as one of the most momentous events in Polish history and an indispensable element of the Polish collective memory, but also politicians can select heroic deeds, unyielding fights, indomitable spirit

¹⁰² S. Anderson, 'Unsettling National Narratives and Multiplying Voices: The Art Museum as Renewed Space for Social Advocacy and Decolonization - a Canadian Case Study', *Museum Management and Curatorship* (1990), Vol. 35, No. 5 (2020), pp. 488-531.

and glorious sacrifice that demonstrate the noble virtue of the Polish nation and denounce those that imply Polish wrongdoings against other ethnic groups as distorted and untrue. For instance, after PiS came to power in 2015, it has implemented many patriotic educational programs¹⁰³ stressing the contribution of the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile, heroic fighting of the Home Army and the Polish Armed Forces, and atrocities committed by the Soviet Union in Poland.¹⁰⁴ Second, Poles think that their experience in the Second World War is overlooked by the West. Ever since Poland's accession to the EU, there are increasingly vehement political discourses from nationalists about the threat derived from this supranational organization to Polish national identity. The formation and consolidation of the EU entail the construction of a united European identity based on an EU-dominant presentation of the past, which in the perspective of populist politicians, is detrimental to Poland's national identity and may suppress its distinct historical experiences since there are certain memory discrepancies between Western Europe and Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁵ For instance, the year 1945 denotes another form of enslavement and occupation by the Soviet Union for Eastern Europe rather than liberation like it is for Western Europe. Therefore, Polish politicians, on the EU level, have enthusiastically claimed for the acknowledgement of Poland's obliterated history and tried to incorporate that into the European historical legitimacy; on the domestic level, they have adopted "legally and normatively framed 'memory policies'" to reinforce certain collective memory and canvass for votes.¹⁰⁶ Third, the scripted narratives in these three museums are in tune with the discourse paradigm of PiS's memory politics. PiS has an obvious tendency to establish "an authoritative narrative of national history"¹⁰⁷ that the Polish nation, on the one hand, is the first and innocent victim who suffered from Nazism and Soviet totalitarianism yet still stayed in solidarity with other victims; on the other hand, Poles are patriotic heroes who fought "for our freedom and yours" sturdily.¹⁰⁸ Such a perspective of Poland's role in the second world war is demonstrated in the three

¹⁰³ E.g., introducing patriotic education to school subject and promoting educational projects like "History in Colors". See more in P. Zuk, 'Nation, National Remembrance, and Education — Polish Schools as Factories of Nationalism and Prejudice', Nationalities Papers, Vol. 46, No. 6, (2018), pp. 1046-1062.

¹⁰⁴ P.T. Kwiatkowski, 'The Second World War in the Memory of Contemporary Polish Society', in M. Pakier, J. Wawrzyniak (ed.) Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), p. 232.

¹⁰⁵ G. Mink, and L. Neumayer (ed.) History, memory and politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory games, (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), p. 3.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, p. 2.

¹⁰⁷ J. Hackmann, 'Defending the "Good Name" of the Polish Nation: Politics of History as a Battlefield in Poland, 2015-18', Journal of Genocide Research, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2018), pp. 587-606.

¹⁰⁸ A. Orla-Bukowska, 'New Threads on an Old Loom', in R.N. Lebow, W. Kansteiner, & C. Fogu (ed.) The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), p. 204.

museums. Therefore, having a close look at their exhibitions can help us better understand the relationship between memory politics and national identity.

2.2. Previous Literature on The Three Museums And My Research Process

2.2.1. Previous Literature

In previous literature on these three museums, most scholars expressed the view that they play an important role in PiS's memory politics and the way the history is presented in these museums is biased and uncritical, with an overarching emphasis on Polish heroism and victimhood, which forebodes the possibility that museums will fall into political traps in a less and less democratic society.¹⁰⁹(more details will be introduced in the following separate museum chapters). However, there are discernible different focuses of the literature. For example, due to the theatricalization of the exhibition, when discussing how the Warsaw Uprising Museum promotes collective memory and consolidates national identity, some scholars such as Monika Żychlińska and Erica Fontana, paid attention to its innovative technologies such as immersive experiential equipment that can elicit visitors' emotions effectively to examine the interaction between the museum and visitors to see how curators' intentions are transmitted to visitors and how visitors interpret the exhibition by their own sociocultural backgrounds, personal experiences, education levels and so on.¹¹⁰ Some scholars like Steffi de Jong even elaborated how sounds such as the heartbeat, the fighting sound and other ambient music promote a sentimental education in imparting museum's historical knowledge.¹¹¹ In terms of the Ulma Family Museum, most scholars such as Florian Peters¹¹² and Zofia Wóycicka¹¹³ criticized the museum for not providing an objective context of the Polish-Jewish historical relationship and concluded that it is not appropriate to generalize the righteous deeds of the Ulma Family to the whole Polish nation. As for the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, scholars usually concentrated on the controversies arising from the museum exhibition and how PiS's memory politics influence the master narratives of the museum.

¹⁰⁹ A. Krakus, 'What Does it Mean to be Polish? Europe and Identity in Two Museums in Poland', *Curator*, Vol.63, No.4 (2020), pp. 619-636.

¹¹⁰ M. Żychlińska, E. Fontana, 'Museal Games and Emotional Truths: Creating Polish National Identity at the Warsaw Rising Museum', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (2016), pp.235-69.

¹¹¹ S. De Jong, 'Sentimental Education. Sound and Silence at History Museums', *Museum and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2018), pp. 88-106.

¹¹² F. Peters, 'Towards a Balanced Tribute to the Polish Righteous? The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in Markowa', *Cultures of History Forum* (2016), <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/towards-a-balanced-tribute-to-the-polish-righteous>, consulted on 21.12.20

¹¹³ Z. Wóycicka, 'Global Patterns, Local Interpretations: New Polish Museums Dedicated to the Rescue of Jews during the Holocaust', *Holocaust Studies*, Vol. 25, No. 3, (2019), pp. 248-272.

For instance, David Clarke and Paweł Duber took the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk as a case study to examine PiS's mobilization of historical memory as a means of Polish cultural diplomacy and soft power resource to make Poland's experience and contribution in the Second World War more acknowledged in the EU, but PiS's illiberal tendency prevents its memory politics from achieving the desired effect internationally.¹¹⁴ In her analysis of the Warsaw Uprising Museum and the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, Ljiljana Radonić referred to PiS as mnemonic warriors who believe they are the only legitimate spokesman of the true history while others must subscribe to their version of history. Therefore, Radonić concluded that PiS's implementation of its memory politics jeopardizes democracy.¹¹⁵

2.2.2. My Research Processes

After reading some relevant literature on these three museums and familiarizing myself with their histories, missions, governing boards, curator teams, and so on by these museums' websites, I conducted my research processes as follows:

On December 22, 2021, I visited the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II and spent about 4-5 hours there. The museum is located in a village of Markowa, Subcarpathia Province, south-eastern Poland. Opened on March 17, 2016, the Ulma Family Museum aims to show Poles' righteousness of helping Jews, with the Ulma Family as a case in point. The snow was heavy that day, so I did not explore "the Orchard of Remembrance" behind the museum.¹¹⁶ My main analysis material was from the internal exhibition of the museum, such as texts on digital screens and display boards, video clips, historical photos and relics of the Ulma Family. The museum is small, so I looked through almost all the exhibition information.

On January 10, 2022, I visited the Warsaw Uprising Museum and spent about 5 hours there. The

¹¹⁴ D. Clarke, P. Duber, 'Polish Cultural Diplomacy and Historical Memory: The Case of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (2018), pp. 49-66.

¹¹⁵ L. Radonic, "'our" Vs. "Inherited" Museums - PiS and Fidesz as Mnemonic Warriors', *Teksty Drugie*, Vol. 68. No.1. (2020), pp. 44-78.

¹¹⁶ A Orchard at the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews with a Monument of the Ulma Family and plaques with "names of cities, towns and villages located in the territory of Poland in 1939, where Poles risked their own lives to save Jews during the German occupation." see in the Ulma Family Museum website, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/en/museum/the-orchard-of-remembrance/>, consulted on 21.12.10

establishment of the museum was proposed by the Mayor of Warsaw, Lech Kaczyński. Opened in 2004, this museum is in the old trolley power station in Warsaw, covering an area over 3000 square meters with 800 exhibition objects. There were visiting routes like “continue this way” signs guiding visitors in the sequence of different stages of the Warsaw Uprising. There were also calendar pages depicting the developments of the Uprising that visitors could collect. Unfortunately, these calendar pages were in massive numbers and without English translation, so I did not take them into account. I collected enough materials from display boards, photos, leaflets and exhibition relics of Uprising soldiers and civilians.

On January 16, 2022, I visited the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk which was inaugurated on 23 March 2017. I looked through the temporary exhibition “Fighting and Suffering. Polish Citizens During World War II” and the main exhibition consisting of “The Road to War”, “The Terror of War” and “The Long Shadow of War”. The museum’s first chief curator, Paweł Machcewicz, appointed on September 1, 2008, aimed to incorporate the Polish experience during the Second World War into the broad European context. However, in 2017, Machcewicz was replaced with Karol Nawrocki, a pro-PiS historian who changed the dominant perspective of the museum to Poland-centric and placed more importance on Polish heroism and suffering. Therefore, at the time when I visited the museum, the exhibition content had been modified according to PiS’s demands. The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk is the biggest of the three museums with its copious collections, immersive stimuli, multimedia installations and emotion-impacting scenography. I spent about 6 hours in the museum but there saw still some exhibition content such as audio material and background music that I did not explore due to the limited time and my insufficient knowledge of Polish music.

In summary, my research method is mainly collecting relevant information from these museums’ websites, exhibitions, leaflets and so on, then I analysed what I had collected with the review of the literature. I did not choose a questionnaire because firstly, my research is not concerned with visitors’ thoughts or impressions. Rather, it is more about what these museums show and why they present the past in certain ways. Secondly, the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II is not as popular as the other two. On the day I visited this museum, I was the only visitor there. Besides, I did not choose interviews, either. Frankly speaking, I was not in a position to invite chief curators to

interviews. And I could get relevant information such as their design purpose and founding mission from museums' websites and press releases. Another pity of my research is that I did not analyse enough audio materials such as background music and recordings of oral accounts. If I had had enough time or if I had been fluent in Polish, there would have been more paragraphs explaining the role of the multisensory exhibition on visitors' perception and understanding of the past, especially in terms of the Warsaw Uprising Museum and the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk which are typical "narrative scenographic museums" equipped with abundant stimuli and interactive installations.¹¹⁷

This thesis mainly addresses the following questions: what arch myths or narrative paradigms are constructed in these museums and how do exhibitions unfold around those myths? What are the recurring motifs(themes) and protagonists of these narratives? What is omitted, concealed or distorted? How the Polish nation is being presented and how the Polishness is defined (what are the key symbols of Polishness) according to those narratives? What is the role of these museum narratives in sustaining and reinforcing the collective memory and national identity prescribed by PiS? Why does PiS promote the narratives of heroism and victimhood? What contemporary political interests and social contestations are embedded in these museums?

In the following chapters dealing with each museum, I will first introduce some background information about the location, construction and missions of these museums. Then I will describe details of their exhibitions, such as the representations of historical events, the application of multimedia technologies and dramatic effects, the perspective of telling a story, and the repetitive themes, to elaborate on why the exhibition is designed in a specific way, what kind of narratives are emphasized, and how the reinforced narratives contribute to the construction of certain collective memory and national identity desired by PiS. Texts quoted from museum exhibitions are indicated in italic letters.

¹¹⁷ A. Etges, I. Zündorf, & P. Machcewicz, 'History and Politics and the Politics of History: Poland and Its Museums of Contemporary History', *International Public History*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (2018), pp. 1-12.

3. Case Study of The Warsaw Uprising Museum

3.1. Introduction

The Warsaw Uprising Museum is directly subordinated to the Mayor of Warsaw and is under the supervision of the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.¹¹⁸ The initiation of constructing a museum commemorating the failed yet glorious anti-Nazi insurrection of the Polish Underground State in August-September 1944 was first proposed by Lech Kaczyński in 2003, who at that time was the mayor of the capital city of Warsaw. Political factors occupied a decisive position in the determination of the location, content presentation, architectural design, and the appointment of the curator.¹¹⁹ As a result, the museum was inaugurated solemnly in 2004, on the sixtieth anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, as “a tribute of Warsaw’s residents to those who fought and died for independent Poland and its free capital.”¹²⁰ The uprising is defined by the founding documents of the museum as “a moral phenomenon on a great scale”,¹²¹ and has been incorporated into the national identity of the later Polish generations.¹²² It is not exaggerating to say that the Warsaw Uprising Museum is the first and one of the most successful reifications of PiS’s nationalistic memory politics to promote the narrative of Polish heroism and romantic martyrdom.¹²³ The success and popularity of the museum also demonstrate that the Polish society is still a fertile soil of romantic martyrdom and resurrection which are regarded by Poles as their most distinctive cultural identity and constantly brought up and popularized by politicians.¹²⁴ On the one hand, it’s wise of PiS to establish the museum to promote its “pedagogy of pride” and inject “a timely antidote to the post-Jedwabne malaise”¹²⁵ since the Warsaw uprising can be regarded as the epitome of Polish heroic resistance, bravery and patriotism.¹²⁶ It also exemplifies how a regional historical event is mythologized into a universal resistance against foreign occupation and totalitarian ideology. On the other hand, the museum’s one-sided beautification of the uprising has generated controversies and criticism. As Anna Krakus said, “the uprising was a failure,

¹¹⁸ M. Lorenc, ‘The Museum of (Non) Remembrance. A Horse and the Warsaw Uprising Museum’, *Przegląd Politologiczny*, No.2 (2017), pp. 205-215.

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ the Warsaw Uprising Museum website, <https://www.1944.pl/en/article/the-warsaw-rising-museum,4516.html>, consulted on 21.12.25

¹²¹ M. Żychlińska, E. Fontana, pp. 235–69.

¹²² E. Wiącek, ‘In the labyrinth of memory. Images of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944’, *Journal of Urban Ethnology*, Vol. 11 (2013), pp. 85-103.

¹²³ J. Hackmann, pp. 587-606.

¹²⁴ J. Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory*, (Berlin, Germany: Peter Lang Verlag, 2015), p. 215.

¹²⁵ E. Stańczyk, p. 162.

¹²⁶J. Niżyńska, pp. 467-479.

(...) a military mistake paid for by generations to come. Yet the narrative is one of heroism.”¹²⁷

In the following subchapters, I will give a brief overview of its exhibitions and then, according to my visiting experience, elaborate on three main themes of the museum narratives: Polish heroism and victimhood, anti-Communism, and Catholicism. I will analyse how the museum is featured with romantic martyrdom, patriotism and militaria heroism, according to which the narrative of Warsaw’s wartime experience is dominated by “romantic discourse” and “Christian symbolism”.¹²⁸

3.2. Exhibition

The interior exhibitions, designed by Jarosław Kłaput, Dariusz Kunowski and Mirosław Nizio, feature multimedia effects and interactive devices such as films, sound recordings and other sensory innovations, succeeding in simulating the scenes and reconstructing the atmosphere of the uprising with great appeal to emotions. As Jan Ołdakowski pointed out, the Warsaw Uprising Museum is “not a 19th-century institution that requires the visitor to have an intellectual competence necessary for understanding the content – in the era of digitization, it is closer to film and art.”¹²⁹

The museum impresses visitors with over 800 original and artificial exhibition items. Before entering, visitors can see an inscription of Jan Stanisław Jankowski, the Government delegate to Poland from 1943 to 1945 who approved the decision to start the uprising in Warsaw, saying that “*We wanted to be free and owe this freedom to nobody*”.¹³⁰ There are three floors of exhibitions with controlled visitor routes directing visitors to exhibitions based on curators’ intentions. On every floor, there are “calendar pages” alongside the visitor routes describing the prelude and ongoing events of the uprising. However, they are all in Polish and kind of scattered, which bewilders visitors who don’t understand Polish or who have little knowledge about the chronology of the uprising. Besides, maybe it is for the sake of creating a solemn and brooding atmosphere, the exhibition rooms are a little dim, therefore the English versions of many Polish labels cannot be easily visible especially when they are written in grey words with a black background.

¹²⁷ A. Krakus, pp. 619-636.

¹²⁸ Z. Bogumił, The Enemy on Display: The Second World War in Eastern European Museums, (New York; Oxford: Berghahn, 2015), p. 134.

¹²⁹ M. Lorenc, pp. 205-215.

¹³⁰ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 1.

3.2.1. Polish Heroism and Victimhood

The ground floor presents the World War Two experience, the life of Poland (especially Warsaw under German occupation), and the outbreak of the Uprising - the “W” hour. The leaflet of “The Beginning of The War” describes the cruelty of the double occupation by Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia as exceeding “*everything that Poles have experienced over past centuries of Prussian and Russian servitude.*”¹³¹ This prelude portrays Poland as being marooned, thus setting a tragic tone for the uprising.

The visit starts with a cabinet of five telephones which visitors can pick up and listen to the insurgents’ stories. Three out of the five insurgents are female, indicating that the tone of the museum is not confined to the masculine fraternity. Rather, it impresses visitors that the Warsaw Uprising is such a deserving cause to which everyone would willingly devote themselves, especially with the exhibition of the little insurgent, which is at the right hand of the telephone cabinet. The little insurgent’s room, “the only one of its kind in Poland - bright and colourful, designed especially for children”, is filled with toy airplanes and teddy bears.¹³² Children can play the roles of scouts, post delivers, or nurses. There are pictures of those little insurgents and children’s paintings of the Uprising on the walls. The soundtrack of the room pulls at the heartstrings even more: a video of children singing melancholy war songs such as *Warszawo Ma* (Oh Warsaw Mine).¹³³ The most impressive exhibition is a duplicate statue of “the little insurgent” which stands at the entrance: an emaciated boy wearing an apparently oversized helmet and carrying a rifle. This is the epitome of the young insurgents of 1944, which shocks visitors by the incongruity between his young age at which time he should have enjoyed a blithe childhood and his large ill-fitting adult soldier’s uniform which bears the weight of the historical mission to liberate Poland. This little insurgent, as Ewa Stańczyk pointed out, serves as a role model whose dedication to the uprising far outpaced his age so that contemporary youth should follow his example.¹³⁴ A personal account of an Australian fighter in the Warsaw uprising says that

¹³¹ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 2.

¹³² Warsaw Uprising Museum website, [Warsaw Uprising Museum website, https://www.1944.pl/arttykul/ekspozycja.4500.html](https://www.1944.pl/arttykul/ekspozycja.4500.html), consulted on 22.7.23, consulted on 22.3.23

¹³³ A. Krakus, pp. 619-636.

¹³⁴ E. Stańczyk, p. 82.

*“You are fighting splendidly. No country in the world has youth like yours. In England, one would surely not find a 12-year-old boy decorated with the Cross of Valour for heroism, this is possible only in Poland.”*¹³⁵

This reinforces the master narrative of the museum again that the Warsaw uprising is an enchanting, duty-bound and civilian-supported national struggle, and the young Polish generations who have inherited the patriotism, freedom-loving nature, and dauntless fighting spirit with perseverance from the uprising martyrs should model themselves on the latter. As Anna Grzechnik, one of the curators of a recent exhibition in August 2020 expressed: “The affinity with the symbol of the Fighting Poland is like a skill badge worn on our patriotic ego – not a virtual or imagined ability, but almost a tangible proof that we potentially could become such heroes.”¹³⁶

Then the tour direction leads visitors to the second floor which presents the Uprising in August, including the Ochota and Wola Massacre and drastic plights faced by insurgents as well as civilians. In the section on the genocide in Ochota and Wola, visitors learn the tragic fate of civilians and the atrocity of the Germans. It is described that

*“The Germans [...] kill regardless of age or sex, slaughtering small children and pregnant women. Many people are burnt alive. The wounded are finished off by shots to the head. During assaults on insurgent barricades the Germans drive civilians in front of their tanks, using them as ‘human shields.’”*¹³⁷

Next, when visitors go through a dark tunnel-like passage, they are led to go downstairs to the ground floor which shows the failure of the uprising, the capitulation of the Home Army, the destruction of Warsaw and the deportation of Poles, and the establishment of the Polish Committee of National Liberation (Polish: Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, PKWN, a provisional government established by Stalin-backed Polish communists in Poland at the later stage of the Second World War). There is a Memorial Site with three insurgent graves on the cobblestone floor, which is visually shocking. Visitors can learn that in the first few days the coffins of sacrificed insurgents of the Home

¹³⁵ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 3

¹³⁶ Warsaw Uprising Museum website, <https://www.1944.pl/en/article/what-s-your-sign-warsaw-rising-and-fighting-p.5110.html>, consulted on 22.7.23

¹³⁷ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 4, Inscription “Civilians Fate”.

Army were taken to the burial ground very solemnly. However, with the increase in casualties, funerals became frequent and commonplace. Gradually, courtyards turned into cemeteries and in the end, the bombarded city became graves. It is stated that more than 18 thousand insurgents and 180 thousand civilians died, and 923 out of 987 historical architectures were ruined. A 3D movie named “The City of Ruins” presented the devastating destruction of Warsaw, “the past and the soul of Poland”.¹³⁸

The failure of the uprising is not explained thoroughly. The exhibition does mention that “*the Germans were very well armed — they had the air force, the artillery, tanks and armoured vehicles*”.¹³⁹ However, the narrative tone immediately shifts to that “*despite such overwhelming military advantage they did not manage to suppress the Rising.*”¹⁴⁰ Therefore, the fact that the German power had overwhelming superiority over the Polish Home Army is not presented as the Polish authority’s failure to take into account the huge disparity in strength, but serves as a foil to show the valiantness and martyrdom of the Polish nation. In this way, the Warsaw uprising is hailed as a “moral victory” for Poland, and accordingly, the museum exhibition attaches more importance to the heroism of the insurgents and their sufferings caused by the lack of assistance. In the leaflet “Insurgent failures”, visitors can learn that

*“The insurgents and civilians suffer from famine and the lack of effective help results in growing depression and hopelessness. Insurgents can count only on themselves...The remaining forces fighting in the Polish capital wait in vain for the main Soviet attack. The expected ‘ally’ acts as a bystander.”*¹⁴¹

Similarly, in the “The Big Three” inscription, visitors learn that the Allies paid little attention to the outbreak of the uprising. The British government neither supported the Home Army actively, nor was it willing to recognize the legitimacy of the Home Army as an allied force, as a result of which the Germans could persecute and murder the captured insurgents without abiding to the capitulation treaty. When the Soviet press smeared the Warsaw uprising, the British government also underestimated its significance for the purpose of currying favour with Stalin.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 5, Stanisław Mackiewicz’s words. Leaflet “Capitulation”.

¹³⁹ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 6, “Military Tactics of The Germans Nazi”.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 7, Leaflet “Insurgent failures”.

¹⁴² Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 8, Inscription “The Big Three”.

Since the tone of the museum narrative is conservative and nationalistic, it is not surprising that other nations are portrayed as “identity others”. For instance, Polish Jews who engaged in the uprising are not categorized as “our” but as “different nationalities”.¹⁴³ Besides, the deliberate substitution of the word “German” for “Nazi” also plays the ethnic card by equating Germany to the Nazis, as if the whole German nation was a villain as contrasted to Poles being innocent victims. Moreover, in the section on Wola genocide, the Reinefarth Combat Group is particularly introduced that “[it] was made up of collaboration units consisting of Russians Ukrainians, Azeri and Turkmen. Insubordinate and half-civilized they preferred to murder, rape and plunder.”¹⁴⁴

3.2.2. Anti-Communism

The museum exhibition has a propensity for anti-Communism. The Soviet Union is portrayed as evil as or even worse than the Nazis. In the leaflet of “The Beginning of The War”, the Soviet Union is defined as an “aggressor” who maliciously ignited antagonism and provoked conflicts between Ukrainians, Jews, Byelorussians and Poles who residing in the Soviet occupation areas. When Stanisław Mikołajczyk, the Prime Minister of the Polish government in exile appealed to the Soviet Union for support, Stalin procrastinated on helping Poland. On the contrary, he blamed the Home Army for failing to resist the Germans. Although in their second meeting, Stalin promised Mikołajczyk that weapons would be provided to insurgents as soon as possible, which unfortunately turned out to a lip-service.¹⁴⁵ After the outbreak of the Uprising, the Soviet Press remained silent at first, then downplayed the uprising as an immature fantasy of the Polish nation’s imagination that was doomed to be in vain and accused the Polish authorities of rushing into the Uprising. The museum exhibition explains the Soviet Union’s complete indifference to the uprising as ill-intentioned: Stalin wanted to play both ends against the middle in the hope that Hitler could destroy Warsaw and the underground state so that the Soviet Union could take over Poland and spread Communism. Besides, the exhibition implies strongly that the Soviet Union is to blame for the failure of the uprising. It repeatedly mentions how the Soviet Union began to disarm the Home Army soon after the implementation of Operation

¹⁴³ J. Hackmann, pp. 587-606.

¹⁴⁴ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 9, “Wola genocide”.

¹⁴⁵ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 10, “With Stalin About the Rising”.

Tempest.¹⁴⁶

Similarly, the Polish Committee of National Liberation (PKWN) is portrayed in a negative light. There is a visually appalling red exhibition room of the Lublin Poland. It is said that when the Uprising started, the PKWN hurried to *“destroy all traces of pre-war traditions (...) Expropriation, plundering, vandalizing and nationalization of residences are an everyday occurrence.”*¹⁴⁷ It established terror apparatus, arrested anti-communist underground and killed *“over 100 officers and soldiers of the Lublin District simply for their affiliation with the Home Army.”*¹⁴⁸ All this information function to trigger visitors’ aversion to the Soviet Union and Communism, which is in tune with PiS’s political stand.

3.2.3. Catholicism

The museum also expresses a strong sense of Catholicism and an inseparable connection between God and homeland. The uprising is generally described as an indispensable moral obligation prompted by the Christian faith. The inscription of “Shrines of the Insurgent Warsaw” shows John Paul II’s speech in Zwycięstwa Square (now Piłsudski Square) on June 2, 1979, which closely connected the Polish nation and the Warsaw uprising with Christ and the Holy Cross Church. It is also stated that

*“The Pope’s visit gives Poles faith and strength in the difficult times of Communism. His famous words ‘Do not fear’ become a moral signpost for Poles for subsequent years.”*¹⁴⁹

There are many relics, symbols, and metaphors of religious faith in the museum exhibition like the Statues of Christ and Shrines of the Insurgents. Visitors are informed how devout Poles continued their religious life from bombed-out churches to courtyards praying for their family and the insurgents, while the hymn “Boże, coś Polskę” (“God save Poland”) and the song “Serdeczna Matko” (“Beloved Mother”) could be heard between the walls.¹⁵⁰ These wartime religious rituals and practices strengthened the Poles-Catholicism bond. As Aleksander Smolar said: “A Polish-Catholic was now, as

¹⁴⁶ Operation Tempest is a series of Home Army’s anti-Nazi uprisings. See more in Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Tempest, consulted on 22.8.13

¹⁴⁷ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 11, “The Communists and The Aristocracy”.

¹⁴⁸ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 12, “The Lublin Poland and “PKWN in Lublin”.

¹⁴⁹ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 13, “John Paul II in Warsaw”.

¹⁵⁰ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 14, “Shrines of the Insurgent Warsaw”.

always, a defender of the fatherland.”¹⁵¹ And the Catholic faith is and will always be “an ethnonational marker” of Poles,¹⁵² like the Roman Catholic Church is and will always be the sanctuary of authentic Polishness, preserving Polish national identity and defending the dignity of Poles.

3.3. Discussion and Conclusion

In summary, the Warsaw Uprising Museum adopts theatre scenography and cinematic presentations to sentimentalize the Polish sufferings and emphasize Poles’ fighting spirit and heroism. The exhibitions skilfully trigger visitors’ emotions and attachments, thus reinforcing a specific vivid and enduring collective memory. In its narrative, Poland, although abandoned by its western allies and marooned between two aggressive neighbours, is a nation with strong-will, staunch patriotism and tenacious fighting spirit, thus having the ability to be reborn and flourish from destruction. This is also shown by the online interactive exhibition of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944 which presents the enormous destruction caused by the German invasion and the brutal crimes committed by the Communist regime to murder insurgents.¹⁵³ The depictions of the fighting of the Home Army soldiers give visitors the impression that it is the bloodiest striving for freedom the price of which is willingly paid by indomitable Poles who neither yielded to nor flinched at repressive dominance, a divine and indispensable moral mission which is associated with the Polish Underground State and pushed forward by Christian faith, and a desperate but unavoidable endeavour to keep the Polish identity intact and liberate the Polish nation from humiliating occupation and double totalitarianisms. Therefore, the uprising has been deified as a founding myth of post-1989 Poland.

Further, in a more general way, the Warsaw Uprising is linked with previous Polish patriotic fighting for liberation with the motto “For Your Freedom and Ours”.¹⁵⁴ In other words, the Warsaw Uprising has been framed as not only a necessary endeavour of the Polish nation, but also an epitome of the supreme and noble cause dedicated to freedom and other universal values that should be pursued and safeguarded by all human beings. Referred as “the capital of freedom”, Warsaw embodies the dauntless

¹⁵¹ A. Smolar, ‘Jews as a Polish Problem’, *Daedalus* (Cambridge, Mass.), Vol. 116, No. 2(1987), pp. 31-73.

¹⁵² G. Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), p. 23.

¹⁵³ Warsaw Uprising Museum, <http://www.warsawrising.eu/>, consulted on 22.4.23

¹⁵⁴ M. Żychlińska, E. Fontana, pp. 235–69.

spirit of the Catholic Poles and their persistent resistance to occupation villains. Such a martyrdom and heroic narrative not only legitimizes the rebirth of Poland after 1989, but also enhances patriotic pride and national solidarity,¹⁵⁵ which alleviates the dissatisfaction and awkwardness of being marginalized in the EU.

However, the problem is that the Warsaw Uprising Museum attempts to inculcate its one-dimensional perspective of the uprising into visitors by immersing them with emotionally compelling exhibition and experiential razzmatazz, rather than providing space for eliciting open debate or cultivating critical reflection on the history. The gallant insurgents are definitely heroic and venerable, but the suffering of ordinary individuals and the controversies over the necessity of this uprising should not be belittled, marginalized or even omitted for the sake of showing insurgents' spirit. Otherwise, it will stymie the rational and critical examination of the uprising. Unfortunately, in the narrative of the Warsaw Uprising Museum, the absolute protagonists are the Home Army soldiers, therefore there is little room for civilians' ordinary experiences or individual tragedies which are not as attractive as war battles. In the whole exhibition, there are neither details about the severeness the mass casualty of civilians nor personal accounts of civilians who witnessed and survived the uprising.

Besides, no attention is paid to the question of whether this uprising is really unavoidable and necessary,¹⁵⁶ like there is no reflection on whether the Wola massacre committed by Nazis was provoked by the uprising. If visitors read the museum's leaflets carefully, they will learn that the Warsaw Uprising was staged by the Home Army who was loyal to the Government of the Republic of Poland in exile in London with the purpose to take control of the city before the Soviets installed its own communist regime.¹⁵⁷ However, the museum exhibition does not provide further critical reflection on the rationality or the necessity of this purpose. The inscription of "Views on the Rising" slightly mention that Jan Mieczysław Ciechanowski, a Polish historian and Warsaw insurgent raised *"a number of critical questions, mainly political, regarding the meaning of and the need for the*

¹⁵⁵ G.J. Ashworth, B.Graham, & J.E. Tunbridge, Pluralising Pasts: Heritage, Identity and Place in Multicultural Societies, (London: Pluto Press, 2007), p. 97.

¹⁵⁶ J. Szczepanski, 'Romanticising and Revising the Second World War in Polish Museums', Museum Management and Curatorship (1990), Vol. 27, No. 3 (2012), pp. 273-289.

¹⁵⁷ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 15, Leaflet "Before the 'W-hour'": "The development of the situation on the (Byelorussian) front and in the capital causes a change of the previous decision to exclude Warsaw from Operation 'Tempest'. The Home Army Staff considers attacking the Germans and liberating the city before the Soviets march in."

rising.”¹⁵⁸ However, it concludes that “in the opinion of most insurgents the outbreak of the Rising was a necessity and they do not regret their decision to join in the fighting.”¹⁵⁹ Ciechanowski’s criticism can be found in his book named *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*. In his opinion, although it seems that the uprising time was ripe when Germany sapped its strength due to the Battle of Stalingrad and the threat of Soviet occupation of Warsaw was approaching, it is hard to say that this uprising was strategically mature or worthwhile. On the contrary, it could be described as rushed and politically motivated. Pro-west Polish government-in-exile in London wanted to launch a military counterattack against Germany and enhance political opposition to the Soviet Union and Polish Communists, but it did not take into consideration that the Home Army was not a regular armed force; rather, it was “badly armed” and could not fulfill Bór-Komorowski’s and Jankowski’s ambitions.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, as Zuzanna Bogumił et al argued, “at a moment when the strategic goal of Polish society was its very survival, they ordered a battle which could only be lost. The uprising, which was supposed to defend the nation against Stalin, had actually made it defenceless.”¹⁶¹

In general, visitors only get the impression that although the price of the failed uprising paid by Polish soldiers and civilians is tremendous, the uprising is an obligatory and necessary mission to strive for taking control of Poland’s own destiny and defending supreme values like freedom and independence which were damaged by Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In essence, the museum just presents a self-congratulatory image of the uprising which is “a stereotyped canon of simplified romanticism” without encouraging visitors to reflect on it,¹⁶² which may lead to a hazardous fascination with wars and weapons. The controversies around the museum also inspire us to think about the proper distance between politics and history.

¹⁵⁸ Warsaw Uprising Museum, exhibition 15, Inscription “Views on the Rising”.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Jan. M. Ciechanowski, *The Warsaw Rising of 1944*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974), pp. 243-315.

¹⁶¹ Z. Bogumił, p. 67.

¹⁶² J. Jedlicki, ‘Holy Ideals and Prosaic Life, or the Devil’s Alternatives’, in G. Stanisław, A. Polonsky (ed.) *Polish Paradoxes*, (London: Routledge, 1990), pp. 40-62.

4. Case Study of The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II

4.1. Introduction

If the first institutionalisation of PiS's memory politics is the Warsaw Uprising Museum, then a full expression and “the culminating point”¹⁶³ of it is the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II which manifests the “two primary lines” of the Polish identity paradigm: suffering as an innocent victim and sacrificing as a noble hero.¹⁶⁴

The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II is located in a village of Markowa, Subcarpathia Province, south-eastern Poland. It is the first museum in Poland aiming to “show heroic stance of the Poles who helped the Jews during German occupation, risking their own lives and the lives of their families” in the Subcarpathia Province.¹⁶⁵ The Ulma family was honoured with the Righteous Among the Nations in 1995, a title bestowed by Yad Vashem, a world Holocaust remembrance centre, but they were not set up as an exceptional example at that time since there were other mainstream models of Poles rescuing Jews such as the Żegota, a Polish council to aid Jews. Besides, the initial project of the museum did not have the ambition to make it a national memorial institution demonstrating Polish heroism and righteousness until the intervention of the Institute of National Remembrance.¹⁶⁶ With the pervasive trend in Europe over the last two decades to initiate commemorations of their own Righteous which, to some extent, was prompted by the political purpose to play down ignominious past related to the Holocaust,¹⁶⁷ the Ulma Family gained more attention from PiS.

The creation of the museum was first envisaged in late 2007 and finally came into implementation from October 2013 to October 2015. It was opened on March 17, 2016, by Andrzej Duda, the President of Poland at that time. Later an independent Museum unit was established under the cooperation of both Subcarpathia Province and the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage in 2017.¹⁶⁸ The

¹⁶³ A. Ziębińska-Witek, pp. 67-85.

¹⁶⁴ M. Kobielska, pp. 121-131.

¹⁶⁵ The Ulma Family Museum Website, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/en/museum/about-museum/>, consulted on 22.3.3

¹⁶⁶ Z. Bogumił, M. Glowacka-Grajper, *Milieux de mémoire in late Modernity: Local communities, religion and historical politics*, (Bern: Peter Lang International Academic Publishers, 2019), p. 229.

¹⁶⁷ Z. Wóycicka, ‘A global label and its local appropriations. Representations of the Righteous Among the Nations in contemporary European museums’, *Memory Studies*, Vol.15, No.1(2022), pp. 20-36.

¹⁶⁸ The Ulma Family Museum Website, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/en/museum/about-museum/>, consulted on 22.2.13

dominant narrative of the Ulma Family Museum is that Poles are heroic and self-sacrificing rescuers to Jews, with the Ulma Family as the epitome of the Polish Righteous: Józef and Wiktoria Ulma along with their six children hid eight Jews from the Goldman, Grinfeld and Didner families. As punishment, the Nazis murdered the whole family, even the children, on 24 March 1944.

In all fairness, it gives no ground to blame the Ulma Family Museum which is in memory of Poles saving Jews for exhibiting much content about Polish heroism and suffering. However, the museum's description of the Polish-Jewish relationship and its intention to beautify the whole Polish nation as the Righteous have invited criticism. In the following subchapters, I will first give a brief overview of the exhibitions and then divide the main exhibitions into four thematic parts: the description of Polish-Jewish relations, the tremendous cost of Poles saving Jews and the museum's latent tendency for competitive victimhood, the tragic story of the Ulma Family, and other exhibitions about Poles saving Jews. Next, I will introduce the 2018 amendment and 2006 "Lex Gross" to elaborate on why the narrative of the "Righteous Polish nation" is important for PiS.

4.1. Main Exhibition

The design of the museum is minimalistic, with an exterior resembling "a primitive house" in harmony with the rural surroundings.¹⁶⁹ Outside the museum, there are illuminated plaques with names of Poles killed for saving Jews, a monument of Jewish victims of the Shoah and their anonymous Polish succourers as well as a wall full of nameplates of Subcarpathia residents who helped the Jews.¹⁷⁰

The interior permanent exhibition area is compact. The visit starts with the prologue that "*For us, Poles, this was war and occupation. For them, Jews-the end of the world*",¹⁷¹ which sets a tragic tone for the exhibition. The whole exhibition provides visitors with information on pre-1939 Polish-Jewish relationship and stories of Poles rescuing Jews and being killed by aiding Jews during the Holocaust in the Subcarpathia region. The content of exhibitions is prepared by researchers from the Polish Institute of National Remembrance (Polish: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN), a main government-

¹⁶⁹ The Ulma Family Museum Website, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/en/museum/the-museum-building/>, consulted on 22.1.2

¹⁷⁰ The Ulma Family Museum Website, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/en/museum/the-museum-building/>, consulted on 22.1.2

¹⁷¹ The The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 1

affiliated institution of memory politics that popularizes the heroic and martyrological narratives of Poles. The museum is curated by Mateusz Szpytma, the current deputy president of IPN, who organized the initial narrative of the Ulma family and proposed to establish this museum.¹⁷² Jan Żaryn, a historian and one of the most fanatic supporters of PiS's historical policy, also played a prominent part in the construction of museum narratives.¹⁷³ Almost all the exhibition boards and display cases are black with white inscriptions in Polish, English and Hebrew, as if imitating gravestones. Most of the content is presented from the Polish rescuers' perspective with just a few Jewish testimonies. The majority of the exhibition is based on photocopied documents and archival pictures. But there are a few authentic relics of the Ulma family which enhance the emotional intimacy.¹⁷⁴

4.1.1. Incomplete Description of Polish-Jewish Relations: Pre-War and During the Holocaust

There is an interactive screen detailing the various nationalities and religious denominations of the Rzeszow region in the interwar period, which introduces the normal life of Jews before the Nazi occupation and gives visitors the impression that Poles and Jews in Markowa were neither too intimate nor antagonistic to each other, they were just living in normal peace. As one of the museum's clips from Jolanta Dylewska's 2008 documentary "Po-lin. Fragments of memory" mentions:

*"The co-existence of Poles and Jews before the war was quite ordinary. The coat of arms of Kolbuszowa is the best example, as it shows a handshake, a cross and the Star of David."*¹⁷⁵

However, antisemitism existed in Poland long before the German occupation and did not disappear during the Holocaust. The Ulma Family Museum is inexplicit about Poles' antisemitism. For instance, visitors need to be patient and scroll through every chapter on the digital screen carefully to see this information that due to the economic crisis,

*"In the spring of 1919 anti-Jewish riots started in the Rzeszow region. Some of the local peasants plundered Jewish shops and apartments. Some Jews were beaten...and in Kolbuszowa peasants murdered eight local Jews."*¹⁷⁶

¹⁷² Z. Bogumił, M. Glowacka-Grajper, p. 189.

¹⁷³ Z. Wóycicka, pp. 248-272.

¹⁷⁴ Z. Bogumił, M. Glowacka-Grajper, p. 228.

¹⁷⁵ The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 2, the documentary "Po-lin. Fragments of memory" (2008) which is directed by Jolanta Dylewska.

¹⁷⁶ The The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 3.

Besides, during the interwar period, the anti-Semitic discourse was circulated in some nationalistic press such as *Mały Dziennik* (Small Diary). And when it was approaching the Second World War, some Poles looted and pillaged properties of their Jewish neighbours and committed violent crimes against Jews. Such violence happened repeatedly and antisemitism prospered “perfectly (...) in the street, (...) the underground press, political parties, and army forces” during and after the war.¹⁷⁷ Other historians have also criticized the Ulma Museum’s representation of Polish-Jewish relations as misleading. For instance, Jan Grabowski and Dariusz Libionka, co-founders of the Polish Centre for Research on the Extermination of Jews, pointed out that the Ulma Museum dwells too much on the harmonious perspective while deliberately avoids disgraceful historical facts that some residents in Markowa actually profited from the misfortune of Jews, denounced fugitive or hid Jews to the German police, and even played the role of perpetrators.¹⁷⁸

In sum, we cannot exclude the possibility that Poles and Jews in Markowa maintained some normal social contacts or lived harmoniously before the Second World War. However, the incomplete and misleading description of the Polish-Jewish relationship does suggest the curator’s intention to instrumentalize the righteous Poles as a shield protecting the good reputation of the Polish nation from being tarnished.

4.1.2. Competitive Victimhood

On the one hand, the Ulma Museum pays tribute to the Jewish victims and expresses its humanitarianism. For example, on the digital screen under the section “Jews in the Subcarpathia region”, visitors are introduced to some well-accomplished Jews, e.g., Henryk Rowid (1877-1944), an outstanding educator in Poland who was murdered by the Nazis in Auschwitz. Besides, there are displays of anti-Jewish laws introduced by German authorities and their implementation in Rzeszow and its surrounding localities during the Nazi occupation, including confiscation of property, liquidation of Jewish enterprises, forced labour and finally direct and massive extermination of the Jews.

¹⁷⁷ P. Forecki. p. 27; p. 33.

¹⁷⁸ Z. Wóycicka, pp. 248-272.

On the other hand, there are more repetitive exhibitions of German authorities' brutal repression policies targeting Poles, such as ordering the Poles to volunteer for agricultural labour in the Reich, confiscation of grains, and harsh penalties that would be imposed on individuals who obstructed the work of minor officials appointed by the occupation authorities. The Ulma Museum also attaches particular importance to Germany's death threat to Poles for helping Jews. Many exhibition cases show information about the executions of Poles who helped Jews. For example,

“Announcement of February 23, 1944, that Antoni Majkut was executed as punishment for breaching German occupation orders, i.e., helping the Jews.”¹⁷⁹

Visitors are also informed that

“The cost of helping Jews in the German-occupied territories of Poland was incomparably greater than in Western Europe. Any act of kindness and compassion noticed by the Germans - be it pointing out an escape route, sharing food or providing clothing -brought down brutal retributions upon the Poles. (...) If the occupying forces discovered Poles that were hiding Jews, they usually just shot them all on the spot. Often a collective responsibility was applied whereby the entire family was murdered, sometimes extending even to onlookers. In the Rzeszow area the Germans killed at least 200 Poles for attempting to rescue Jews.”¹⁸⁰

These exhibitions not only make visitors register profound respect for the sacrificing spirit and righteous deeds of Poles who saved Jews, but also show the museum's latent tendency to juxtapose the Holocaust with Polish sufferings under the German occupation. For example, there is a map showing localities in the Subcarpathia region where the Germans carried out mass murders of Jews and Poles. Similarly, another map shows sites of extermination of the Polish and Jewish population in the years 1939-1944 in the present-day Subcarpathia region, saying that

“In the years 1939-1944, approximately 100 Jews from Markowa and around 30 local Poles died or were killed. Thanks to the efforts of eight Polish families from Markowa, 21 Jews survived.”¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁹ The The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 4.

¹⁸⁰ The The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 5.

¹⁸¹ The The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 6.

In sum, the tragedy of Jews is always paralleled with the suffering of Poles or the heroic deeds of Poles saving Jews. Fairly speaking, this is understandable since the contemplation and commemoration of war-time victims or martyrs are inevitably nation-centered. As one of the countries that suffered the most tremendous losses in the Second World War, Poland had so much dolour to lament on. Grieving over the Jewish genocide was obviously not a top priority for the post-war Polish political agenda. And in a museum dedicated to Poles saving Jews, emphasizing the Polish sufferings is reasonable.

However, it is worth considering why after so many decades, the Jews remain unmourned at the national level given the fact that Poland was where most of the Holocaust atrocities took place, and why Poles have not yet come to terms with their war-time wrongdoings against the Jews. I think there are at least three reasons explaining those questions. First, this has something to do with what Dorota Glowacka and Zylinska Joanna called “pathological amnesia”.¹⁸² Having no choice but to witness the Holocaust at a zero-distance leaves a profound cultural trauma on Poles, which makes it difficult to incorporate the Jewish suffering into Polish collective memory since the tragic fate of the Jews mainly reminds Poles of the dreadfulness of the war and renders Poles scourged by compunction for not coming to Jew’s rescue. Therefore, to ease the conscience and defend the purity of Polish righteousness, Poles discard the Holocaust memory in the historical corner and let it remain unlamented.

Second, scholars like Weinbaum also attribute Poles’ reluctance to brood over the dark side of Polish-Jewish history to their convulsion of “an extraordinary self-examination” reminiscent of the communist ideological control.¹⁸³ For Poles, acknowledging the historical wrongdoings in the Holocaust is similar to the imposed self-censoring of one’s mind and responsibility during the Soviet-occupation period.

The last reason which I regard as the most important is the long-lasting antisemitism and the competitive victimhood. As mentioned above, before the Second World War, there had already existed a long-held historical grudge against Jews in terms of their commercial monopoly, indifference to

¹⁸² E.P. Ziarek, ‘Melancholic nationalism and the pathologies of commemorating the Holocaust in Poland’, in D. Glowacka, J. Zylinska (ed.) *Imaginary Neighbors: Mediating Polish-Jewish Relations After the Holocaust*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007), p. 303.

¹⁸³ L. Weinbaum, ‘Penitence and Prejudice: The Roman Catholic Church and Jedwabne’, *Jewish Political Studies Review*, Vol. 14, No. 3/4 “Post-Holocaust Issues” (Fall 2002), pp. 131-154.

Polish independence or collusion with communist regimes. After the Holocaust, even though the Jewish population was almost eliminated from the Polish society, anti-Semitic propaganda did not disappear, and the role of Jews as Poles' identity Other and victimhood competitor remains unchanged. Firstly, in the late 1960s, with the deterioration of Poland-Israel relations, Jews were denigrated by the communist regime as enemies and traitors of Poland who calumniated Poles as an antisemitic accomplice of Nazi Germany.¹⁸⁴ Secondly, for ethno-nationalists, it is the opposition between Jews and Poles that affirms the essentials of Polishness and enhance the internal cohesion of the Polish nation.¹⁸⁵ Some scholars also mention that the necessary isolation between Poles and Jews required by ethnonationalists is due to their insecurities resulting from the relatively weak Polish identity vis-à-vis Jewish identity.¹⁸⁶ Besides, Poles' exclusivist ethnic nationalism perpetuates the notion that Jews are a threat to national purity and solidarity, and "Jewishness" synthesizes "unwanted ideological elements" which are contradictory to the ideal Polishness.¹⁸⁷ In the late 1980s, plenty of right-wing politicians and a significant section of the Catholic Church propagandized that Jews are "aliens" and "a menace to the Polish nation".¹⁸⁸ Thirdly, PiS has held the view for a long time that Jews are "potential competitors" to Poles' romantic martyrs status.¹⁸⁹ Shortly before 2004, when the Holocaust was integrated into the collective memory of Europe and ascended to a normative status as a founding myth of the European Union, which meant acknowledgement and commemoration of the Holocaust was a de facto "entrance ticket" for countries aspiring to be an EU member, Poland did some work to deal with the difficult holocaust legacy.¹⁹⁰ Nevertheless, PiS attached more importance to Polish victimhood rather than acknowledging Poles' historical wrongdoings at that time. Since PiS's returning to power in 2015, it has tried to emphasize the uniqueness of Polish victimhood while at the same time playing down the Holocaust and pushing it to the margin of public discourse. This is understandable since the insistence on Polish messianism inevitably results in the emphasis of the uniqueness of Polish suffering. If Jews' status as the sanctified victim receives more recognition than that of Poles in Poland,

¹⁸⁴ Z. Wóycicka, pp. 248-272.

¹⁸⁵ E. Prokop-Janiec, 'Jewish Intellectuals, National Suffering, Contemporary Poland', *The Polish Review*, Vol. 64, No.2 (2019), pp. 24-36.

¹⁸⁶ J. B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*, (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), p. 103.

¹⁸⁷ G. Zubrzycki, p. 211.

¹⁸⁸ J. B. Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present*, p. 262.

¹⁸⁹ J.R. Vollhardt, M. Bilewicz, & M. Olechowski, 'Victims under siege: Lessons for Polish-Jewish relations and beyond', in E. Halperin, K. Sharvit (ed.) *The social psychology of intractable conflicts*, (Heidelberg & New York & Dordrecht & London: Springer Cham, 2015), p.82.

¹⁹⁰ T. Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945*, (London: William Heinemann, 2005), p. 803.

it would destabilize PiS's martyrology narrative that Poles' double victimhood is incomparable, and Poles are pure martyrs who sacrificed their lives for saving Jews.

All in all, in the narrative of the Ulma Family Museum, the Holocaust is not unique, rather, it is subjected into a broad narrative of Polish suffering and martyrdom in the Second World War.

4.1.3. Tragic Story of The Ulma Family

There are many photographs showing the idyllic daily life such as planting potatoes, holding a wedding, and having a harvest festival in Markowa taken by the protagonist of the museum, the Józef Ulma. In the centre of the exhibition space, there is a reconstruction of the house of the Ulma family, displaying their family tree, furniture, carpentry workshop, bible belonging to Józef Ulma with the underlined title of the Parable of the Good Samaritan and photos taken by Józef Ulma. There are other Catholic symbols, like a wooden crucifix which belongs to a sister of Wiktoria Ulma, and a prayer book "let us follow the way of the cross" owned by Stanisława Kuzniar, a godmother of Władysław Ulma. This exhibition has a relatively strong flavour of life and genuine Catholic faith and portrays the Ulma family as just normal people trying to build a better life, yet who took the decision to risk their lives to save their Jewish neighbours. Therefore, this exhibition functions well at sparking deep empathy and genuine veneration in visitors.

The Ulma family's tragic experience is told in detail in a very respectful way by the museum:

*"[D]uring the war, most probably within the second half of 1942, the Ulma family, despite great poverty and threat to life, took eight Jews under their roof (...), the Ulma family expected the next child and surely were in hopes to survive to the end of the war. [Unfortunately,] ...on the night from 23rd to 24th of March 1944(...) Germans came to the house of the Ulma family... After shooting all the Jews they killed Józef and Wiktoria who was already in the ninth month of pregnancy."*¹⁹¹

A witness described this tragedy more sentimentally,

¹⁹¹ The The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 7.

“At the place of execution there were heard terrible cries, wailing of people, the children were calling the parents and the parents were already shot.”¹⁹²

These descriptions are shocking and heart-wrenching, making visitors pay respect to and sympathize with the Ulma family. Besides, the death of the Ulmas is portrayed according to the Catholic martyrdom that the martyrs i.e., the Ulmas willingly sacrificed for their conviction in God’s virtues of the ultimate good while the perpetrators i.e., the Germans and accomplices committed crimes against the martyrs out of hatred to their good faith.¹⁹³

4.1.4. “Poles Saving Jews Was Prevalent” and Discussions About It

In the middle of the museum, there are several scrolling screens displaying the following two pieces of information in a starry background: first, names of victimized Poles; second, help from the clergy and individuals. By clicking one of those names, for example, Aleksandra Pirga, visitors can see a detailed story of when and how he was killed by the Germans for helping Jews while the Jews being helped were not given names.

Pictures are showing the places where those victimized Poles were shot. Other righteous stories have the same pattern that the Jews who were hidden by Poles were anonymous while the names and other details of the Poles who helped Jewish people are well documented. Organisations which sought to rescue Jewish people from Nazi persecution are also well-documented in the Ulma Museum. One such organisation is, Żegota, a Council established on 4 December 1942 under the auspices of the Polish Government in Exile by the Government Delegation for Poland (Polish: Delegatura Rządu Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej na Kraj, an agency of the Polish Government in Exile), aiming to aid the Jewish population that had been slated for extermination by the Nazi regime. The Ulma Museum also documents the Polish soldiers, priests, nuns and representatives of the Polish underground state who also helped or tried to save Jews. There is even a wall of small concealed compartments showing photos of places from the very primitive to those painstakingly conceived and constructed where fleeing Jews were hidden by Poles in Markowa. These well-documented images convey the message

¹⁹² The The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 8.

¹⁹³ Z. Bogumił, M. Glowacka-Grajper, p. 215.

that the Ulma family was not an exception, rather, Poles saving Jews was prevalent in Rzeszow.

One interesting thing to mention is that the exhibition stresses the righteous deeds of Catholic Poles risking their lives to save Jews while help provided by other ethnic minorities such as the Greek Catholic population are marginalized or omitted. For example, there is a large map of Subcarpathia showing all the places where Poles rescued Jews: the dots are dense in where Poles lived while scarce or even none in the Ukrainian residence, which gives visitors an impression that it was mainly or only Poles who came to Jews' rescue while the Ukrainians contributed nothing.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, the minorities are depicted in a relatively negative way. For instance, in the biography of Włodzimierz Leś, a member of the Polish police who denounced the Ulma family, it is said that: *"He was Greek Catholic and therefore some considered him a Ukrainian."*¹⁹⁵

The overall exhibition impresses on visitors, who know little about Polish-Jewish history, that most Poles were noble and altruistic heroes who were in solidarity with their Jewish neighbours and sacrificed themselves to save the Jews despite German authority's harsh forbiddance and capital punishment. At the end of the exhibition, visitors can learn that *"More than 400 residents of this region were recognized as Righteous Among the Nations"*,¹⁹⁶ demonstrating the veracity of such a self-portrait.¹⁹⁷ Besides, the "rescuer" section of the museum website also writes that "Historians estimate that the number of Poles who aided Jews, risking their own lives, was much higher."¹⁹⁸ All these try to convince readers that rescuing Jews was prevalent among Poles and such distinguished merit has not been widely recognized.

There is no doubt that those Poles awarded the "Righteous among the Nations" are worthy of our respect and praise, and Poland sure can be proud that it has the largest number of people who have been declared this honourable title.¹⁹⁹ The problem with the museum narrative is that its biased beautification of the whole of Poland rescuing Jews prevents the introspection of the fact that some

¹⁹⁴ F. Peters, (2016). <https://cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/towards-a-balanced-tribute-to-the-polish-righteous>

¹⁹⁵ The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 9.

¹⁹⁶ The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 10.

¹⁹⁷ A. Orla-Bukowska, p. 190.

¹⁹⁸ Ulma Family Museum Website, <https://muzeumulmow.pl/en/rescuers/>, consulted on 22.1.5

¹⁹⁹ Yadvashem.Org Website, <https://www.yadvashem.org/righteous/statistics.html>, consulted on 22.2.16

Poles actually discriminated against Jews, reported to the secret police of Nazi Germany about Jews' hiding places and perpetrated the massacre of Jews. One display board does mention that some Poles were "morally weak" or "demoralised" under the German authorities' antisemitic propaganda and the temptation to divide up Jewish property.²⁰⁰ However, the exhibition concludes that most Poles were engaged in helping Jews in the Rzeszow region and a great majority of Jews were not reported to the German authorities.

Without rigorous historical research and reliable data support, I can't chime in with Jan Grabowski's assertion that the majority of Poles closed their eyes to the Holocaust,²⁰¹ neither can I arbitrarily conclude that Poles saving Jews is the most characteristic deed of the Polish nation during the Holocaust. Maybe the most natural and plausible reaction of Poles was "reluctant passivity and sympathetic indifference".²⁰² After all, most Poles experiencing the Second World War were just normal people gripped by fear. It would be naïve and unsympathetic of us to stand on the moral high ground and accuse them of not helping the Jews. Besides, it is understandable that PiS wants to improve Poland's self-image, but it is still questionable and problematic to generalize the heroic martyrdom of the Ulma Family towards the whole Polish nation. Like Robert Rozett, the Senior Historian in the International Institute for Holocaust Research, Yad Vashem said, "even were the number of those recognized as Righteous among the Nations to increase tenfold, the rescuers would still represent a small fraction of the Polish population."²⁰³

4.2. The 2018 Amendment and the 2006 "Lex Gross"

For PiS, the "Righteous Polish nation" is "the only acceptable interpretation of the past" regarding the roles of Poles in the Holocaust.²⁰⁴ The emphasis on the sufferings and martyrdom of Polish rescuers is crucial to the continuation and confirmation of Poles as pure victims and virtuous heroes. Any expression that some Poles took part in the extermination of the Jews or reacted to the Holocaust with indifference and passivity is penetrating and unpleasant, which slaps in the faces of those who perceive

²⁰⁰ The Ulma Family Museum, exhibition 11.

²⁰¹ L. Radonic, pp. 44-78.

²⁰² P. Forecki, p. 39

²⁰³ R. Rozett, 'Distorting the Holocaust and Whitewashing History: Toward a Typology', *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2019), pp. 23-36.

²⁰⁴ K. Kończal, 'Politics of Innocence: Holocaust Memory in Poland', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol. 24, No. 2 (2022), pp. 250-263.

Poles as innocent victims and messianic heroes, thus arousing and intensifying moral anxiety and identity crisis. Many Poles are still reluctant to confront their ignominious past such as the Jedwabne pogrom that severely questions and subverts their self-presumed lily-white morality and inherent righteousness. For them, blaming individual Poles in the past for historical wrongdoings is a slander of the whole Polish nation and the indignity that contemporary generations should not have suffered.²⁰⁵ As shown by a 2013 nationwide questionnaire, almost 60% of Poles felt irritated when people connected the Polish nation with its historical wrongdoings against the Jews.²⁰⁶ Another quantitative study also showed that more Poles believed that Poles suffered more than Jews during the Nazi occupation,²⁰⁷ which reflects a worrisome tendency in Poland that history is misused to construct self-satisfactory ethno-nationalist myths. Therefore, it came as no surprise that in January 2018, PiS amended the Act on the Institute of National Remembrance – Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, of which the Articles 55a is the most controversial. According to Articles 55a:²⁰⁸

1. Whoever claims, publicly and contrary to the facts, that the Polish Nation or the Republic of Poland is responsible or co-responsible for Nazi crimes committed by the Third Reich, (...) or for other felonies that constitute crimes against peace, crimes against humanity or war crimes, or whoever otherwise grossly diminishes the responsibility of the true perpetrators of said crimes— shall be liable to a fine or imprisonment for up to 3 years. The sentence shall be made public.
2. If the act specified in clause 1 is committed unintentionally, the perpetrator shall be liable to a fine or a restriction of liberty.

Although artistic and academic activities are exempt from concerned legal responsibilities, such a punitive law with its explicit aim to reconstruct and consolidate the Polish national identity as innocent victims and noble heroes protects the perpetrators from accusation and suppresses related unflattering dissenting voices alluding to Polish complicity in the Holocaust, which to some extent jeopardizes democracy and the freedom of speech. Another interesting example is that although the “Polish” in the term “Polish death camp” means the General Governorate for the Occupied Polish Region which

²⁰⁵ E J. Jedlicki, p. 40.

²⁰⁶ J.R. Vollhardt, M. Bilewicz, & M. Olechowski, pp. 75-87.

²⁰⁷ J.B. Michlic, ‘The Path of Bringing the Dark to Light’, in M. Pakier, J. Wawrzyniak (ed.) *Memory and Change in Europe: Eastern Perspectives*, (New York: Berghahn Books, 2015), p. 125.

²⁰⁸ Ordo Iuris Website, <https://en.ordoiuris.pl/institute-activity/report-article-55a-act-amending-act-institute-national-remembrance>, consulted on 22.4.12

simply is a geographical reference, from the perspective of PiS, it is name-calling and contains malicious ambiguity as if trying to attribute the responsibility of Jewish suffering to the Polish nation.²⁰⁹

As Nikolay Koposov pointed out, the 2018 Holocaust law “shows that a belligerent politics of history remains the party’s preferred instrument for consolidating electoral support.”²¹⁰ Before the 2018 amendment, there was similar legislation of the Penal Code in 2006 called “Lex Gross” which attempted to suppress the public expression of Polish responsibility for murdering Jews in the Second World War. This 2006 amendment was a result of Gross’s book *Neighbours*. Gross has been attacked for bringing shame on the Polish reputation, and PiS has instrumentalized the increasingly polarized public attitudes towards the Jedwabne crime into political capital and propaganda rhetoric. For example, Jarosław Kaczyński implied that the apologetic gesture of Aleksander Kwaśniewski, the President of Poland from 1995 to 2005, was fawning on the western superior and that Poland’s enemies were “trying to slander us, make us into Hitler’s associates”.²¹¹ Although the “Lex Gross” was abolished when the liberal side came into power in late 2007, it was gradually resurrected into the 2018 amendment after the 2015 Polish Constitutional Court crisis as a result of which the Constitutional Tribunal degenerated into a “governmental enabler”.²¹² And the controversy of Poles’ role in the Holocaust continues to be dominant in the political mainstream and public debate. So far, it is clear that the Ulma family has been used as a bullet-proof icon and a guardian of the “heroic-martyrological self-perception of Poles” to counterattack any accusations of Polish culpability in the Holocaust.²¹³

4.3. Conclusion of this chapter

The Ulma Family Museum succeeds in shifting visitors’ attention from the troubled part of Polish-Jewish relations to the remembrance of the Righteous among the Polish nation. The dominant narrative here is Polish romantic heroism and martyrdom, with the touching and tragic stories of Poles saving Jews as shown by the Ulma Family and other Catholic Polish residents in Markowa. The Ulma Family

²⁰⁹ J.R. Vollhardt, M. Bilewicz, & M. Olechowski, pp. 75-87.

²¹⁰ N. Koposov, ‘Populism and Memory: Legislation of the Past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia’, *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 36, No. 1 (2022), pp. 272-297.

²¹¹ K. Kończal, pp. 250-263.

²¹² M. Bucholc, (2019), <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/politics/the-polish-holocaust-law-revisited>

²¹³ F. Peters, (2016), <https://cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/towards-a-balanced-tribute-to-the-polish-righteous>

Museum, the 2018 amendment and the 2006 “Lex Gross” reveal the current tendency of PiS to discipline public discourses concerning controversial historical events and to shape collective memory in a semi-authoritarian legalized way.

Those Poles who sacrificed their lives for helping the Jews are admirable. But this does not mean we can generalize the heroic martyrdom of those righteous Poles towards the whole Polish nation or turn a blind eye to Poles’ historical crimes against their Jewish neighbours. As far as I am concerned, reflecting upon all the roles of Poles, be that rescuers, bystanders, accessories or perpetrators, is not what PiS had castigated as an alleged attempt by liberal elites trying to humiliate the Polish nation and make Poles get down on their knees before superior western powers.²¹⁴ Józef and Victoria Ulma are undoubtedly worthy of the title of the Righteous Among the Nations, however, as Florian Peters said, the general Polish heroism and martyrdom will not be convincing until the Ulma Family Museum gives up the simplistic national-catholic self-glorification.²¹⁵ It might be a painstaking mnemonic process to digest the troubled legacy of Polish-Jewish relations during the Holocaust, but otherwise it would be detrimental to the Polish mentality and the historical education of young generations, as Janion warned in the early 1990s.²¹⁶

²¹⁴ M. Bucholc, ‘Schengen and the Rosary: Catholic Religion and the Postcolonial Syndrome in Polish National Habitus’, Historical Social Research (Köln), Vol. 45, No. 1 (2020), pp. 153-181.

²¹⁵ F. Peters, (2016), <https://cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/towards-a-balanced-tribute-to-the-polish-righteous>

²¹⁶ D. Czaja, ‘Poland’s Theater of Death’, in J. Harper (ed.) Poland’s Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism, (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018), p. 178.

5. Case Study of The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk

5.1 Introduction

The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk is located in Władysław Bartoszewski Square, a historic place destroyed at the beginning of the Nazi invasion of Poland during the Second World War. The museum is near the Polish Post Office building in the Free City of Danzig, a monument commemorating the valiant resistance of the Polish Post Office employees against the German attack on September 1, 1939.²¹⁷ Gdańsk is also the birthplace of the Trade Union “Solidarity” which played a pivotal role in the collapse of Communism in Poland.²¹⁸ It thus resonates with Poles aspiring for democracy. It also manifests a transnational feature because firstly, Solidarity is deemed as an essential constitution of the founding myth of Europe, and secondly, Gdańsk is recognized as the starting point of the Second World War.²¹⁹ One interesting thing to mention is that regarding the location of the museum, Jan Żaryn, director of the Institute of National Remembrance, warned about the enforcement of European identity at the expense of the Polish one.²²⁰ Similar concerns persist in the construction of the museum.

The first director of the Museum of the Second World War (MSWW) in Gdańsk is Paweł Machcewicz, appointed on September 1, 2008. Machcewicz adopted a more European and critical perspective in main exhibitions. Starting from the First World War and ending with the Revolutions of 1989, the MSWW mainly intended to “raise visitors’ awareness of the East Central European and Polish experiences.”²²¹ In other words, the presentation of the wartime experiences was not limited to “Poles vs others” (Poles as being innocent victims or heroic martyrs) and grandiose military victories. Rather, its narrative incorporated the suffering of Jews and other nations, and presented a self-reflective and transnational perspective.²²² For example, the contentious and sensitive issues about Poles’ negative

²¹⁷ The National Institute of Cultural Heritage Website, <https://zabytek.pl/en/obiekty/gdansk-poczta-polska-w-wolnym-miescie-gdansku>, consulted on 22.4.17

²¹⁸ M.Siddi, B. Gaweda, ‘The National Agents of Transnational Memory and their Limits: The Case of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk’, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 2(2019), pp. 258-271.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ P. Machcewicz, *The War that never ends: The museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk*, (Munich: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG, 2019), p. 18.

²²¹ D. Logemann, ‘On ‘Polish History’: Disputes over the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk’, *Cultures of History Forum* (21.03.2017), <https://www.cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/debates/on-polish-history-disputes-over-the-museum-of-the-second-world-war>.

²²² A. Muller, D. Logemann, ‘War, Dialogue, and Overcoming the Past: The Second World War Museum in Gdansk, Poland’, *The Public Historian*, Vol. 39, No. 3 (2017), pp. 85-95.

role in the Holocaust are presented.²²³ One part of the exhibition even addressed the victimhood of Soviet soldiers being imprisoned and killed in Nazi captivity.²²⁴ Therefore, the former version of the MSWW was open to dialectical discussions of issues such as what Hannah Arendt calls the banality of evil, the fluidity and ambiguity between perpetrators and victims, and the complexity of human nature. Such a narrative strategy is consistent with the Civic Platform's intention to deeper integrate into European history and seek reconciliation with Germany and perhaps also, Russia.²²⁵

However, PiS criticized that the MSWW's international and civilian-centric perspective minimized Polish military heroism and deprives Poles of their unique suffering inflicted by two totalitarianisms.²²⁶ After winning the 2015 presidential election, Jarosław Kaczyński chastised the MSWW in one of his statements and argued that the MSWW should focus on "Polish truth" rather than on shame.²²⁷ PiS required the museum to show the Polish nation's dauntless perseverance, romantic martyrdom, heroic military fighting and other characteristics like "loving freedom, Catholicism [and] patriotism".²²⁸ Moreover, PiS condemned the MSWW for its implication that some Poles were complicit in the Holocaust, which, according to conservative arguments, would smear the Polish Righteous and tarnish the international reputation of Poland. Therefore, only two weeks after the opening, Machcewicz was replaced with Karol Nawrocki, a pro-PiS protégé dedicated to reorienting the narrative of the MSWW to a more romantic-martyred way to glorify the Polish history. Other members who engaged in the general framework and museum management were also dismissed by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage.²²⁹ There is an ongoing construction of the Museum of Westerplatte and the War of 1939 as a branch of the MSWW since April 2017, focusing on "the Polish attitudes during World War II and the beginning of this tragic conflict."²³⁰ The intention behind those adjustments is clear: to highlight the devastating but heroic military battles of Poland rather than the civilian sufferings and

²²³ M.Siddi, B. Gaweda, pp. 258-271.

²²⁴ A. Hoja, 'An Engaged Narrative: the Permanent Exhibition of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk', *Cultures of History Forum* (24.07.2017), <https://cultures-of-history.uni-jena.de/exhibitions/the-permanent-exhibition-of-the-museum-of-the-second-world-war>, consulted on 21.12.28

²²⁵ M.Siddi, B. Gaweda, pp. 258-271.

²²⁶ A. Etges, I. Zündorf, & P. Machcewicz, pp. 1-12.

²²⁷ L. Radonić, 'Introduction: The Holocaust/Genocide Template in Eastern Europe', *Journal of Genocide Research*, Vol.20, No. 4 (2018), pp. 483-489.

²²⁸ C. Ciobanu, 'Poland's WWII Museum under Political Bombardment', *Politico*, (2017), https://www.realclearworld.com/2017/05/17/polandrsquos_wwii_museum_under_political_bombardment_184942.html#!, consulted on 22.8.19

²²⁹ A. Hoja, 2017.

²³⁰ The Museum of The Second World War Website, <https://muzeum1939.pl/en/the-museum-of-westerplatte-and-the-war-of-1939-mission.html>, consulted on 22.5.12

the pro-European perspective. The new mission of the MSWW, as its director Karol Nawrocki said, is “to shape a narrative of history, in which the Second World War is presented in a modern way from the perspective of the unique experience of Poles.”²³¹

I didn't have the chance to visit the original version of the MSWW, so what I will present and analyse below is mainly based on the new exhibition approved by PiS. Second, it would be lengthy and diffuse if I describe the whole exhibition in detail chronologically, so I organize the exhibition content into the following parts: Polish suffering and heroism, the juxtaposition of Nazism and Communism, Russia as Poland's identity other, and the new movie “The Unconquered”.

5.1.Main Exhibition

The MSWW impresses visitors firstly with its architectural design which shows a symbolic connection of the past, the present, and the future. The tragic past is buried in the building's underground part, the vital present is presented by the surrounding open space and the future is symbolized by the rising protrusion building above the ground.²³² Almost 80% of the exhibition is at the underground part which is 4.5 metres below ground.

The interior exhibition brims with experiential scenes and interactive multimedia equipment, reminiscent of the theatrical stage that can produce intense visual impact and emotional arousal. The interior main exhibition consists of three narrative parts: “The Road to War”, “The Terror of War” and “The Long Shadow of War”, with eighteen thematic sections. The first part starts with the establishment and expansion of totalitarian states: Fascist Italy, Nazi Germany, Communist Soviet Union and Imperialistic Japan. Then after walking through an artificial street modelled on inter-war Poland, visitors see a panorama of the pre-war international situation, such as the Spanish Civil War (the so-called rehearsal of the World War II), the formation of the “Rome–Berlin Axis”, the appeasement policy of the West and the signing of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact.

“The Terror of War” focuses on the sufferings of civilians and the resistance movements in Europe,

²³¹ The Museum of The Second World War Website, <https://muzeum1939.pl/en/our-mission/4370.html>, consulted on 22.5.12

²³² The Museum of The Second World War Website, <https://muzeum1939.pl/en/museum-building/60.html>, consulted on 22.5.12

with particular attention paid to the German-Soviet perpetration and ruthless deportations, the Polish Underground State, the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and the Warsaw Uprising. Universal values such as democracy, freedom and patriotism are highlighted while critical reflection on the necessary or significance of certain uprisings is absent. The suffering of German or Soviet civilians and soldiers is almost omitted since PiS insists upon an unambiguous distinction between victims and perpetrators. In other words, Germany and the Soviet Union are portrayed as arrant villains whose war-time miseries are self-inflicted thus do not deserve any compassion.

“The Long Shadow of War” exhibition is mainly devoted to the liberation of Europe, the Soviet occupation and nuclear bombs on Japan. Visitors can feel the disappointment and resentment of Poland towards its western allies who betrayed Poland and handed it over to the Soviet Union at the Yalta Conference in 1945. Such sentiments are clearly shown in the display of “On the Two Sides of the Iron Curtain”. It was humiliating that the western Europe gained prosperity and democracy while Poland felt suffocated by Soviet totalitarianism, economic stagnancy and backward civilization. The museum exhibition also expresses dissatisfaction about the fact that many German and Soviet criminals were never held accountable. One shining point in this narrative block is the content of “Spontaneous Payback” by peoples of the occupied countries who ventilated their grievance or tried to conceal their passivity during the occupation by cutting off *“the hair of women thought to have collaborated or had intimate relationships with occupiers.”*²³³ This is very conducive to understanding the complexity of humanity. Unfortunately, such reflection is rare in the whole museum exhibition.

5.1.1. Polish Suffering and Heroism

Fairly speaking, the MSWW attaches significance to presenting the sufferings of ordinary people not limited to Poles. For instance, in the “Merciless War” exhibition, visitors can learn about the Nazi persecutions of Jews, the murders of prisoners of war, the dire living conditions and starvation of civilians marooned in bombed cities. Similarly, in the “Horror of War” section, there are more visually impacting presentations about the Holocaust and other atrocities committed by totalitarian states. However, since the MSWW is a Polish national museum, it is not difficult to discern that the exhibition

²³³ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 1.

applies more energy to Poland-related topics and experiences. The Second World War in Europe started with Hitler's invasion of Poland, therefore Polish resistance and suffering make up a substantial portion of the exhibition. For instance, there are many detailed displays of the fighting of Westerplatte and the resistance of the Polish Post Office staff in the first narrative block. It is described that

*“During the seven days of fighting, 200 Polish defenders resisted nearly 3,000 German troops and policemen attacking from water, land and air” and “about 50 poorly armed postal workers offered resistance, fighting, even though the attackers had artillery support.”*²³⁴

Similar narratives of how ill-equipped Poles defended their homeland ferociously against German troops with technical superiority are common in the museum exhibition. One of the most touching individual relics might be the handkerchief of Bolesław Wnuk, a Peasant Party politician and deputy to the Sejm who was killed in Operation AB in 1941.²³⁵ The handkerchief records his last words,

*“I will be executed by the German authorities today, I am dying for our country with a smile on my face, but I am dying innocent. Let God pay for my blood with eternal damnation for the foul villains.”*²³⁶

This handkerchief merges the main themes of Polish historical narration: being invaded and occupied by hostile powers, struggling and fighting as an innocent victim and a valorous hero, devoted faith in Catholicism and vehement patriotism. “A City Under Siege” also praises the resistance of the Polish Home Army and local population by quoting Julien Bryan, a famous American photographer and documentarian, that *“I have never encountered...such a dignified attitude, such great heroism and such great perseverance as in Warsaw.”*²³⁷

Visitors can see plenty of contrasts between the German atrocity and the Polish suffering. A command of Adolf Hitler on the eve of Germany's attack on Poland is inscribed on the wall, saying that *“Don't let compassion into your hearts. Inflict death on men, women and children of Polish origin without*

²³⁴ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 2.

²³⁵ “Ausserordentliche Befriedungsaktion (Extraordinary Pacification Action), the German plan to exterminate the Polish elite.” Dignity website, <https://dignitynews.eu/en/operation-ab-the-german-plan-to-exterminate-the-polish-elite/>, consulted on 22.7.23

²³⁶ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 3.

²³⁷ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 4.

mercy.”²³⁸ More detailed cases about Germany’s terrorist strafe attack on civilian refugees and its retaliatory execution of Polish prisoners of war after Polish Units killed about 350 German minorities in Bydgoszcz are also introduced. Similarly, in the “Total War” presentation in a digital computer, visitors are informed how the German Luftwaffe carried out terror bombing raids on defenceless Polish towns to “*test the effectiveness of new types of bombs*” or “*to spread panic among the civilian population and weaken Polish resolve to fight*”.²³⁹ When it comes to German air-attacks on Warsaw, there are enlarged photographs which elicit a tremendous amount of sympathy of visitors like “*a nine-year-old Ryszard Pajewski sits on the rubble of a building which had been shelled by German aeroplanes*”.²⁴⁰

Visitors are immersed in information about the tremendous losses of Poland. It is stated that “*over 5 million Polish citizens were dead, but no figures can convey the scale of loss, destruction and suffering*.”²⁴¹ During the visit, I sensed the sentiment of “competitive victimhood” in the museum narratives. For instance, it is stated that western countries under the German occupation retained some autonomy and sovereignty while Poland was subjected to brutal Germanization and severe oppression. Another example is in the board entitled “Casualties Sustained by a Given Country during the Second World War”, Poland ranks first with the heaviest civilian causality. There are small words explaining that “*casualties sustained by the Jewish population -c.6000000 people- have been included in the casualty estimates for individual counties*.”²⁴² In other words, the reason why the Polish casualties come as the highest is because the data include Jewish casualties. The merge of Polish and Jewish sufferings can also be found in the Holocaust section where the tragic fate of Jews is used to denounce the German atrocity and magnify the martyrological virtues of the Polish nation. For instance, there is a display called “Poles in the Face of the Holocaust” that presents stories of Poles saving their Jewish compatriots regardless of German authorities’ capital punishment. It is texted in a digital computer presentation titled “Poles saving Jews” that

“The death penalty (...) was the only such drastic law introduced in the German-occupied

²³⁸ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 5.

²³⁹ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 6.

²⁴⁰ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 7.

²⁴¹ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 8.

²⁴² The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 9.

Europe. Poles were sentenced to death not only for hiding Jew but also for sharing bread with them”, nevertheless, “the tragedy that struck Jews during the German occupation did not leave ordinary poles indifferent. (...) Poles were involved in supplying food, money and medicines to the ghettos although they were in a very difficult financial situation themselves.”

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The case in point of Poles risking their lives to save Jews is the Ulma family. Visitors can see an enlarged photograph of Wiktoria Ulma with her six children taken by Józef Ulma. Like the exhibition in the Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II, the tragic death and heroic sacrifice of the Ulma family rather than the Jews who were helped leave a much strong impression on visitors. As Stephan Jaeger said, “the Jewish victims become anonymous sidekicks to the suffering of the courageous Poles.”²⁴⁴

Although the exhibition does mention the pogrom in Jedwabne in which several hundred Jews were murdered, the description is that “*Poles were persuaded by the Germans, probably following a pre-existing German plan*”.²⁴⁵ It seems that it is German authorities deliberately provoked conflicts between Poles and Jews, and instigated or threatened the former to murder Jews, therefore giving visitors the impression that Germany is the evil chief culprit. There is no information of those perpetrators engaging in the Jedwabne program and the Polish anti-Semitism sentiment is actually soft-pedalled in the exhibition. What the director wants to emphasize in this section is the heroism and martyrdom of the Polish nation by claiming that the number of Poles persecuted and murdered for helping Jews is probably many times higher since many of them remain anonymous.

The Polish heroism is explained as being prompted by Poles’ “*unique love for freedom and liberty*” and their “*freedom gene*”,²⁴⁶ as introduced in the temporary exhibition titled “Fighting and Suffering. Polish Citizens During World War II”. It is stated that in 1940s Polish Armed Forces “*fought for the liberation of occupied countries such as France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Italy*”.²⁴⁷ In general,

²⁴³ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 10.

²⁴⁴ S. Jaeger, The Second World War in the Twenty-First-Century Museum, (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2020), p. 250.

²⁴⁵ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 11.

²⁴⁶ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 12.

²⁴⁷ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 13.

the Second World War is apparently depicted in a way that without Poland's role as a martyrdom fighting against both totalitarian states would have caused more catastrophic losses. Besides, the post-war Polish subordination to the Soviets is also glorified as protecting western Europe from communist terror. Such rhetoric echoes Poland's longstanding identity as the "Christ of Nations" and its self-indulging messianic mission in protecting the Christian Europe and Latin culture from being tarnished by uncivilized others. As historian Tomasz Szarota said, the Second World War is reinterpreted by Poles in a way that it can be a mood booster, and "confirmation of their uniqueness and as an ersatz success".²⁴⁸

5.1.2. The Juxtaposition of Nazism and Communism

The second motif of the museum is anti-Communism by the juxtaposition of Nazism and Communism, which echoes with the Warsaw Uprising Museum about the equation of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union. In the narrative of the MSWW, the Communist regime established after the October Revolution was based on terror, and its ruthless policies scourged and killed more than ten million of its citizens. Regarding its role in the Second World War, the Soviet Union is frequently referred to and emphasized as Nazi Germany's ally rather than the backbone force that contributed to the defeating of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. It is said that the cataclysmic war was

*"Launched by the totalitarian regimes of Germany and the Soviet Union, which cooperated with each other. They committed acts of unimaginable cruelty and crimes in the name of lawless ideologies."*²⁴⁹

There are many photographs showing these two regimes' collusion, such as "*German soldiers welcoming Soviet tank crews with flowers in September 1939*", "*German and Soviet armed forces working closely together as they fought the Poles in late September and in October 1939*" and "*the Joint Wehrmacht-Red Army parade in Brest on 22 September 1939, the celebration aimed to display the two countries' friendship.*"²⁵⁰

Visitors can learn from the exhibition that the seeds of the Second World War had already been sowed

²⁴⁸ P. Forecki, p. 34.

²⁴⁹ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 14.

²⁵⁰ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 15.

by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, due to which Poland became the first and the predominant victim of the double totalitarianism. In the 70th anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War at the Monument to the Coastal Defenders on Westerplatte, Former president Lech Kaczyński referred to the Soviet invasion of Poland on September 17 as “a stab in the back, (...) in accordance with the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact” which led to the failure of the September campaign.²⁵¹ Therefore, PiS has spared no effort to promote the equal commemoration of 17 September and 1 September, the day Germany attacked Poland.²⁵²

There are numerous displays of Soviet crimes. For instance, a moveable erotic figurine representing sexual intercourse made by a Red Army soldier is exhibited to show the biological need and bad taste of those Soviet soldiers who committed mass rapes on German and other foreign women in their occupied territories. Women refusing to submit themselves to cruelty and humiliation committed suicide. For those who survived, the insulting rape became an indelible psychological trauma. It is also stated that after occupying Gdańsk, the Red Army plundered and destroyed the city just like their ally, the German ruffians. Besides, there are repetitive displays about Soviet persecution against the Home Army soldiers. For instance, in the section of “New Government’s Terror”, it is texted that

“From 1944 the Soviets and the Polish Communists persecuted them brutally, seeing them as a challenge to the new authorities. Many soldiers of the Polish underground were arrested and deported into the far reaches of the Soviet Union.”²⁵³

A case in point of Soviet crimes against Poland is the Katyń massacre, the murder of Polish elites in 1940, including militaria officers and clergies of different denominations. Lech Kaczyński once said that “There is one comparison between [the Holocaust carried out by Nazi Germany and the Katyń massacre carried out by Soviet Russia], Jews died because they were Jews, Polish officers died because they were Polish officers.”²⁵⁴ In this way, Kaczyński put the Katyń massacre on a par with the Holocaust and equated Russian attack (Communist crimes) with German atrocities against Poland.²⁵⁵

²⁵¹ Wprost website, <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/170535/prezydent-na-westerplatte-katyn-jak-holokaust.html>, consulted on 22.7.23

²⁵² R. Fredheim, ‘The Memory of Katyn in Polish Political Discourse: A Quantitative Study’, *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 7 (2014), pp. 1165-1187.

²⁵³ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 16.

²⁵⁴ Wprost website, <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/170535/prezydent-na-westerplatte-katyn-jak-holokaust.html>, consulted on 22.7.23

²⁵⁵ Wprost website, ‘Prezydent na Westerplatte: Katyn jak holocaust’, <https://www.wprost.pl/kraj/170535/prezydent-na-westerplatte-katyn-jak-holokaust.html>, consulted on 22.7.23

For PiS, the Katyń massacre is the epitome of pure Polish suffering that can support uncontested claims to national victimology in the face of accusations of anti-Semitism in Poland. Second, the Katyń massacre is the prove of the double victimization of the Polish nation, thus spotlighting the uniqueness of Polish suffering.

One problem of the anti-Communist content in the MSWW is that it conflates Stalinism, Communism, Marxism and Bolshevism, and misleads visitors that all those are evil ideologies.²⁵⁶ Whether this is due to knowledge ignorance or deliberate design, anti-Communism is a convenient political ideology for PiS to justify its hostile foreign policy towards Russia.²⁵⁷ PiS always equate contemporary Russia with the Soviet Union, repetitively portraying Russia as stereotypic security threat to Poland and reprobating that Russia's celebration of the Victory Day is a brazen beautification of its role in the Second World War. For Poland, Russia is a heinous invader. What Poles recall of Russia is usually its partition of Poland at the end of the 18th century, undeclared invasion of Poland in September 1939, massive terrors, deportations and genocides, and the persecution of the Home Army.²⁵⁸ Therefore western participation in Russia's May 9 military parade is the denial of Poles' never relieved sufferings under the Soviet totalitarianism and once again the betrayal of Poland.²⁵⁹

5.1.3. Russia as Polish's Identity Other

Throughout my visit, I sensed the emphasis on the religious difference between Russia and Poland. For instance, visitors can see the "Crucifix with a Bullet Hole": a lead figure of Christ with its side most likely shot by a Soviet soldier in 1946. And in the section "Emblems of Polish Institutions and Organizations before 1939", it is stated that "*After occupying easter Poland, the Soviets attempted to destroy symbols of Polishness and Catholicism.*"²⁶⁰ It is clear that such exhibitions attempt to create a contrast between the European Catholic Poland and Asiatic Communist Soviet. For Poles, being Catholic is not only an essential part of being Polish, but also a distinctive marker of being Western European whenever they are compared to the Slavic Eastern Europe. This rhetoric does not spring up

²⁵⁶ M. Mälksoo, 'A Baltic Struggle for a "European Memory": The Militant Mnemopolitics of the Soviet Story', Journal of Genocide Research, Vol. 20, No. 4 (2018), pp. 530-544.

²⁵⁷ R. Fredheim, pp. 1165-1187.

²⁵⁸ J. Niżyńska, pp. 467-479.

²⁵⁹ S. Olga, pp. 45-59.

²⁶⁰ The Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, exhibition 17.

in the MSWW. Poland's highly insecurity caused by its geopolitical position and painful experiences of being frequently invaded and partitioned propels the nation to maintain or create a clear division between "us" and "others". Russia fits perfectly into the role of Poland's "identity other" and it has been long portrayed as a non-European, uncivilized and backward nation. It can be said that Poland borrows the way Western Europe treating Eastern Europe as its complementing and retarded "the other half" and applies that to Russia to gain a relative superiority.

5.2. The New Movie "The Unconquered"

The new movie titled "The Unconquered" replaced the previous one which reflected on the human complexity and war dreadfulness like the chaos and violence after 1945, the rise of Islamism and the ongoing wars in Ukraine and Syria.²⁶¹ The new movie deletes those critical parts and only devotes to the heroic fights of Poland for freedom from the first day of the Second World War to the collapse of Communism. The new movie starts with the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, referring it as "the most criminal pact in the history of mankind" whose goal was to destroy Poland. Then following the chronological order, it presents core elements of the Polish World War II memory, from being attacked front and rear by the Third Reich and the USSR to a series of heroic uprisings. Poles are portrayed as a never capitulated nation who suffered from forced deportation, slave-labor camps and the Katyń massacre, yet still risked their lives to save Jews and fought against totalitarian states not only domestically without any assistance from its western allies, but provided resistance forces to other occupied countries. The early animation image of the movie showing a Polish soldier trying to ward off two huge walls, i.e., the Third Reich and the USSR, yet almost being crushed to death, has a significant visual impact. Later accompanied by the narration that "the Soviets deport Poles in cattle cars to Gulags in the East", a train running to the inhuman land is shown against a depressed and even a little creep black-and-red background, which reminds viewers of the German deportation trains driving to the extermination camps, thus juxtaposing Nazi Germany with Communist Soviet again. After presenting dedicative fighting and venerable sacrifices of the Polish nation, the narrator says that "but in exchange of all what we do, we are betrayed. The free world distances itself from us, leaving us behind the Iron Curtain." The last part explains how Poland regained its freedom and independence

²⁶¹ Radonic, pp. 44-78.

from the Communist Soviet with the help of unyielding resistance and steadfast Christian faith, accompanied by the narration that “the Iron Curtain falls, the war is over, we prevail, because we do not beg for freedom, we fight for it.” Obviously, the directors of this new movie have no intention to stir open-ended discussions about Poland’s role in the Second World War. What they want to convey is the image of Poland as unconquered, and as Rafał Pękała, the project coordinator of the IPN’s National Education Office said, “to emphasise how unjustly was Poland treated, (...) how undervalued were the efforts of Polish soldiers.”²⁶²

5.3. Conclusion of this chapter

There is an inevitable internal tension between a national perspective and an international synthetization in the master narrative of the MSWW. Every country attempts to stress on its own war experiences, so it is not strange that both motif narratives of the MSWW emphasize the uniqueness of the Polish experience. The first narrative stresses the suffering and heroism of the Polish nation, with the emphasis that Polish suffering is unique and incomparable because terror policies such as mass deportations, incarceration in prisons and extermination camps instituted by Nazi Germany and the Soviets inflicted Poland firstly and most severely. The second recurring narrative is that Poland was besieged by its aggressive neighbours and stabbed in the back by its western allies, which not only results from Poland’s attachment to innocent victimhood and its “defence mechanisms against shame” that attributes the responsibility for failures to others who betray “us”,²⁶³ but also implicitly draws parallels with PiS’s populist discourses and fundamental conviction about phantasmatic threats from Germany, Russia and the EU’s despotism that forcibly imposes western social-cultural templates on Poland. Besides, the self-image as the “Bulwark of Christendom” or “the bulwark of real Europe” is also a mnemonic code that gives testimony to Poland’s European genealogy and its indispensable contribution to the West.²⁶⁴ Such an emotional attachment to the role is easily perceivable in the museum exhibitions. However, it also reveals the self-soothing mentality of Poland due to being the periphery of Europe.

²⁶² Institute of National Remembrance website, <https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/954.039The-Unconquered039-premiere.html>, consulted on 22.5.10

²⁶³ A. Jasińska-Kania, ‘Bloody Revenge in ‘God’s Playground’: Poles’ Collective Memory of Relations with Germans, Russians, and Jews’, *International Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (2007), pp. 30–42.

²⁶⁴ A. Balcer, et al, pp. 1-18.

Back to the dispute around the motif and orientation of the MSWW which reveals how the museum narratives can be easily influenced or manipulated by political agendas, we can understand it as a polarized confrontation between, pro-EU liberals who aim to remodel Polish identity in a critical and European perspective and deepen Poland's integration into the EU, and Eurosceptic populists who attach importance to the construction of a unique Polish identity with unimpeachable character based on heroism, martyrdom and traditional values. It's unconfident of PiS to argue vehemently about the uniqueness of Polishness while believing that this uniqueness will be diluted or concealed if Polish history is incorporated into a cosmopolitan narrative framework.

Conclusion: Perspectives on The Past

Drawing on the analysis of these museums' websites, exhibitions and press coverage, I aim to find what dominant narratives are promoted, how PiS's memory politics penetrates into the construction of those narratives and why those narratives are chosen. In the Warsaw Uprising Museum, we can discern a narrative of romantic martyrdom and militaria heroism. The Ulma Family Museum of Poles Saving Jews in World War II highlights the righteousness of the Polish nation and promotes the narrative that Catholic Poles risked their lives to help Jews even though they suffered no less than the Jews. In the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk, the motif narrative emphasizes the uniqueness of the Polish war experience such as the double victimhood. Those narratives are prescribed and simplistic, which restrict visitors' freedom to participate in the interpretation and reconstruction of the past or reflect critically on it. Besides, since all three museums are influenced by PiS's memory politics, based on the above analysis, we can reach a conclusion that there are two common narrative paradigms exemplified by them.

The first paradigm is that Poles are victims par excellence. In this narrative, Poland was rendered victimized not only due to the rapacity of its two aggressive neighbours, i.e., Germany and Russia, but also because of its treacherous western allies who were reluctant to rescue Poland during the war and abandoned Poland in the Yalta conference, which aggravates Poland's "siege mentality" that "the whole world is against us".²⁶⁵ The first reason of the unique victimhood narrative and comparative victimhood is that Poland's sufferings and sacrifices are not well recognized. If PiS wants the "international recognition of the 'genocide' (against Poles)",²⁶⁶ it must construct the Polish nation as an innocent victim because it's usually more plausible and reasonable for immaculate victims to claim for the acknowledgement of and reparations for their messianic sufferings. Second, the victimhood narrative may also result from the misconception that "victimization equals virtue."²⁶⁷ The Polish identity contains implicit moral superiority. Therefore, no blame for certain historical opprobrium should be attributed to Poles and being a victim justifies the oblivion of Poland's ignominious past

²⁶⁵ M. Breen-Smyth, 'The Uses of Suffering: Victims as Moral Beacons or Icons of Grievance', in V. Druliolle, R. Leslie Brett (ed.) *The Politics of Victimhood in Post-Conflict Societies: Comparative and Analytical Perspectives*, (Heidelberg & New York & Dordrecht & London: Springer Cham, 2018), p. 222.

²⁶⁶ D. Budryte, 'Travelling trauma: Lithuanian transnational memory after World War II', in E.S.A. Resende, D. Budryte (ed.) *Memory and Trauma in International Relations: Theories, Cases and Debates*, (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 175.

²⁶⁷ A. Sodaro, *Exhibiting atrocity: Memorial museums and the politics of past violence*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2017), p. 17.

especially the Polish complicity in the Holocaust. One problem is that such a comparative martyrology has a propensity for being intolerant and exclusive to ethnic minorities.

The second narrative paradigm is that Poles resisted resolutely and fought heroically for the freedom of Poland and Europe, which resonates with Poland's messianic self-perception as the "Christ of Europe". The emphasis of muscular heroism narrative aims to rejuvenate patriotic pride, but it also implies the compensatory feature of Polish national identity. Without the heroic martyrdom, it will be difficult for Poland to deal with its humiliating enslaved experience and the inferiority within the EU.

In both narratives, the Polish national identity is inseparable from Christianity. As we can see from exhibitions, the resistance against Nazism and Communism is presented as a defence of Christian values and the preservation of Catholic faith and the homage to God are interpreted as the continuation of and the reverence for the nation.²⁶⁸ Besides, there are plenty of religious symbols and rhetoric reminding Poles of their Christian essential identity. As Joanna Niżyńska said, PiS has succeeded in gaining political capital by using a semiotic code that resonates with the simplistic yet appealing rhetoric of Polish romanticism, martyrdom and patriotism based on which the Polish national identity is inextricably interwoven with Christian mottos "God and Fatherland" and "Semper Fidelis".²⁶⁹

Moreover, in these two narrative paradigms, there is a clear dichotomy between "good we" and "bad others". PiS's mnemonical political policy legitimizes history that emphasizes the existence of a postulated external oppressor or inimical "identity other" to consolidate the imaginary unity of the Polish nation and to solicit ballots. For instance, the Jewish minority is excluded from the Polish nation. Another obvious identity other is Russia. In the museum exhibitions, the Soviets is portrayed even eviler than the Nazis and the repetitive emphasis on Communist crimes against Poland establishes a link between Russia and anti-Polishness, which has become PiS's "foundational belief and a source of its enduring political identity."²⁷⁰ PiS often takes advantages of Poles' anti-Russian sentiment and historical grievances to win popularity and delegitimize opponent. This may be conducive to political

²⁶⁸ R. Adekoya, p. 211

²⁶⁹ J. Niżyńska, pp. 467-479.

²⁷⁰ K. Korycki, 'Memory, Party Politics, and Post-Transition Space: The Case of Poland', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (2017), pp. 518-544.

mobilization, but it will also produce impermeable boundaries between countries and ethnic nations, thus being detrimental to coming to terms with the past.

Last but not least, the polemic revolved around the three museums reveals two different approaches towards Polish history in the Second World War, or more generally, of Polish collective memory and national identity. Cosmopolitan or nationalistic? Pro-EU or Eurosceptic? Inclusive or exclusive? Liberals and populists have a common expectation that the young generation can cultivate affinity with Polish heroism and have empathy for Poland's undue sufferings. But liberals wish young people to adopt an introspective attitude towards Poland's controversial past, which is an essential way to convince the West that Poland is a qualified EU member with mature democracy and progressive tolerance for multiculturalism. In contrast, right-wing populists think liberals' critical patriotism actually ingratiates Poland with western power's hypocritical political correctness at the expense of Polish interests. They prefer fostering a national identity associated with Polish traditions, Christian values, martyrdom Romanticism, unimpeachable victimhood and heroic uprisings. Although for most ordinary Polish people, whether Poland sticks to the exclusive ethno-nationalist approach or the inclusive civic-European approach is not that important since what they need is a sense of connectedness and continuity with the long-lasting self-image which can provide them with a fixed coordinate in the current fluid multicultural society. However, for the sustainable development of a mature civil society, cultivating critical reflections on the past rather than sticking to populist memory politics is more important. There is an alarming tendency in Poland that its political system is becoming more and more authoritarian with far-right populism, provincial patriotism and religious conservatism, which draws it further apart from the EU.²⁷¹ I do not know whether PiS's memory politics will end up making the West admire the distinct Polish history, but it is truly successful domestically and reveals PiS's arbitrary conviction that it should and can monopolize the definition of authentic Polishness as well as the interpretation of the past. The examination of these three museums provokes us to think: to what extent can politics legitimately interfere, instrumentalize or even manipulate history? How to deal with rent-seeking and nepotism resulting from the appropriation of memory politics for the sake of party interests? How can Poles draw lessons from history and establish benign and constructive relations

²⁷¹ P. Sztompka, p. 89

with former perennial enemies or ethnic groups with whom they had conflict? And when the post-transformation generation increasingly takes their identity root in the European mnemonic community and accustoms themselves to EU's normative values, does Poland still need a nationalist version of Polishness? In summary, we need to ponder on Tokarczuk's question that "how Poland can be imagined as a modern society if the dominant forms of national imagining are based on past historical narratives of victimhood and martyrdom."²⁷²

²⁷² M. Kania-Lundholm, Re-branding a nation online: Discourses on Polish nationalism and patriotism, (Diss, Sociologiska institutionen, Uppsala universitet, 2012), p. 115.

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