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Politics of Memory in Poland from 1795 to 1939: Was It Soft Power?

Abstract

The article analyzes the Polish elites' politics of memory in the "long" nineteenth century and during the interwar period. The creation and implementation of methods to promote appropriate interpretations of the Polish past for geopolitical gains are discussed against the background of broader processes, including the fall of empires in Central and Eastern Europe and the coming of World War II. Using the traditional historical method and theoretical literature, the author frames Poland's politics of memory as a historic form of soft power. The article is an introduction to the topic, pointing to potential directions for future research.

Keywords: soft power, politics of memory, modern Poland

The concept of soft power refers to the search for non-material manifestations of strength. It was first introduced by American political scientist Joseph Nye, according to whom a state's soft power complements its hard power, which is defined by clearly tangible resources such as population, territory, raw materials, economy, and army. The sources of soft power can be found in the country's culture, political foundations, and foreign policy. Nye stresses that success in the operation of soft power depends on the state's credibility, but he also points out that its tools are often in the hands of civil societies, not only governments. By appealing to principles ranging from charity and competence to beauty and fairness, for instance, the state – but also groups supported but not necessarily controlled by the state – can contribute to its image abroad. Nye writes about the need for daily and strategic communication; the final winner in this competition is seen as a credible international partner. In the politics of the information age, credibility can be an important factor, as stories, including histories, become a tool of soft power.[1]

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[1] J. S. Nye, *The Future of Power*, Public Affairs, New York, 2011, pp. 66, 199.

Despite its emergence as a respected academic discipline in the nineteenth century, the credibility of history has been challenged by multiple scholars. In his seminal book, Karl Popper argues that some of the most empirical historical studies written in the spirit of Leopold von Ranke might still draw upon innately imperfect sources.[2] Other theorists underline history's relationship to personal and cultural memory.[3] According to Jacques Le Goff, history has become the story of ordinary man (and woman) that does not necessarily respond to the needs of nations but to people's search for identity.[4] Likewise, Hayden White writes that historiography is literature in which the past is narrated and elucidated by the author.[5]

The state's role in shaping the ways the past is remembered, recorded or discarded has also been studied. The concept of "politics of memory" (*Geschichtspolitik*, *polityka historyczna*) has emerged to describe the German and Polish attempts to narrate the history of World War II in the public sphere, both domestically and internationally.[6] Politics of memory and cultural propaganda[7] can be elements of a broader strategy known as public diplomacy, which continues to be widely pursued by nations' diplomatic posts and state-sponsored agencies. Alan K. Henrikson defines it as the "conduct of international relations by governments through public communications media and through dealings with a wide range of [domestic and foreign] nongovernmental entities," including labor unions and religious institutions.[8] History often plays a role in public diplomacy, as historically "friendly" or "sympathetic" countries, or

[2] K. Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, Routledge, London 1994.

[3] M. Halbwachs, *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*, Librairie Félix Alcan, Paris 1925; J. Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen*, C.H. Beck, München 1992; A. Assmann, *Ku europejskiej kulturze pamięci*, [in:] *Między historia a pamięcią. Antologia*, ed. M. Saryusz-Wolska, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2013, pp. 274–307.

[4] J. Le Goff, *Histoire et Mémoire*, Gallimard, Paris 1988.

[5] H. White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, John Hopkins University, Baltimore 1973.

[6] S. Troebst traces this concept to the publication of Howard Zinn's landmark book *The Politics of History* in 1970 and to the so-called German dispute of historians. H. Zinn, *The Politics of History*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana-Champaign 1970; *Historikerstreit. Die Dokumentation der Kontroverse um die Einzigartigkeit der nationalsozialistischen Judenvernichtung*, ed. R. Augstein et al., Piper, München–Zürich 1987; S. Troebst, *Geschichtspolitik. Politikfeld, Analyserahmen, Streitobjekt*, [in:] *Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989. Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen im internationalen Vergleich*, ed. E. François et al., Wallstein Verlag, Göttingen 2013, pp. 15–34.

[7] Cultural propaganda is the making instrumental use of culture in more or less subtle ways to appeal to foreign populations. See discussions on cultural propaganda in American and British contexts: A. Goodfriend, *The Dilemma of Cultural Propaganda: "Let It Be"*, „The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science" 1971, no. 398(1), pp. 104–112; P.M. Taylor, *The Projection of Britain: British Overseas Publicity and Propaganda 1919–1939*, Cambridge University Press, London 2009.

[8] The Edward R. Murrow Center for Public Diplomacy, The Fletcher School, Tufts University, *Definitions of Public Diplomacy*, https://web.archive.org/web/20100617004930/http://fletcher.tufts.edu/murrow/pd/definitions.html (accessed: 27.06.2024).

those that pursue a fair reckoning with their histories, score points with others. Nowadays, however, politics of memory is often interpreted as featuring an instrumental treatment of history, and, therefore, it is not an optimal instrument of public diplomacy or soft power.[9]

In this article, I analyze the politics of memory that Polish elites first used in the "long" nineteenth century, under the partitions, which was then elaborated in independent Poland during the interwar period. History was at the center of this politics of memory, with Polish patriots presenting the past in ways supposed to elicit interest in, and sympathy for, the "Polish Question."[10] After independence, Polish elites used an enhanced set of tools now at their disposal – the state apparatus – to promote Poland's international image, sponsoring and coordinating different actions meant to influence the public, or at least influential groups, in countries considered geopolitically crucial for its survival. Studying the Polish politics of memory during these volatile periods of time can elicit interesting analogies and lessons for the present, including the question of its similarity to the concept of soft power. This article is an introduction to the topic, pointing to potential future research directions; it does not exhaust the material touched upon.

Recreating a Commonwealth? Politics of Memory under Partitions

It has become an accepted practice to mark the demise of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth as the beginning of the modern period in Poland. The Commonwealth's belated race to introduce major reforms – which included the establishment of the Commission of National Education (1773) and the Constitution of May 3 (1791) – inspired stateless Polish elites to attempt its restoration, while the Napoleonic period generated a heroic military ethos, including the legend that some of the Polish soldiers sent to put down the Haitian Revolution joined the rebels.[11] The first attempts to tell the world about Polish heroism and tragedy through a "soft" tool – art – can be traced to the middle decades of the nineteenth century. In the aftermath of the failed uprising of 1830–1831 in the Russian partition, and especially after the so-called "Spring of Nations" of 1846–1848, émigré Romantic artists such as Fryderyk Chopin and Adam Mickiewicz compared Poland's fight "for your freedom and ours" to the passion of Christ. The instruments of this soft power in-

[9] K. Ruchniewicz, *Polityka historyczna,* [in:] *Historia w przestrzeni publicznej*, ed. J. Wojdon, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 2018, pp. 75–82.

[10] Regarding the "Polish" and other "Questions," see: H. Case, *The Age of Questions: Or, a First Attempt at an Aggregate History of the Eastern, Social, Woman, American, Jewish, Polish, Bullion, Tuberculosis, and Many Other Questions over the Nineteenth Century, and Beyond*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 2018.

[11] J. Pachoński, R.K. Wilson, *Poland's Caribbean Tragedy: A Study of Polish Legions in the Haitian War of Independence, 1802–1803*, Columbia University Press, New York 1986.

cluded polonaises, epic poems, and literature courses at the Sorbonne.[12] In the professional realm, as the discipline itself was only emerging, historians such as Joachim Lelewel underscored the liberal and democratic character of the defunct Commonwealth.[13] This politics of memory was conducted by an émigré community concentrated at Hotel Lambert in Paris, which elicited sympathy for the Polish cause from Western cultural elites. The great powers remained indifferent, being more concerned with their relationship with Russia, but the "Polish Question" began to resonate with the French and British: for instance, French artist Casimir François Delavigne wrote the famous song *La Varsovienne*.[14]

Another politics of memory was practiced in autonomous Habsburg Galicia. After 1867, the Polish elites in charge of Galicia's culture sponsored mass celebrations, usually in Kraków, with the intention of reminding both the domestic and international audiences about selected elements of the past. These included the reburial of Casimir the Great (1869), the anniversaries of the Siege of Vienna (1883) and the Battle of Racławice (1894), and the erection of a statue of Adam Mickiewicz (1898). The aim was to present a historical universe simultaneously acceptable to the Habsburgs, enticing to Polish nationalists scattered around Europe, and stimulating for masses of nationally indifferent peasants.[15] By the outbreak of World War I, Galicia, a long-time sanctuary for refugees from other partitions, was allowed to create separate Polish military units to fight Russia, in line with the so-called "Austro-Polish

[12] Concerning Polish Romanticism, see: P. Litka, Ł. Kowalik, *Polski mesjanizm romantyczny*, "Przegląd Filozoficzny – Nowa Seria" 2018, no. 10(1), pp. 67–91; Cz. Miłosz, *The History of Polish Literature*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1983. The idea of preserving the spirit of the Commonwealth in one's heart was perhaps first suggested by Jean-Jacques Rousseau. J.-J. Rousseau, *The Government of Poland*, ed. W. Kendall, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis 1985.

[13] Concerning Lelewel, see: S. Seegel, *Cartography and the Collected Nation in Joachim Lelewel's Geographical Imagination: A Revised Approach to Intelligentsia*, "Slavica Lundensia" 2005, no. 2, pp. 23–31.

[14] Concerning the failed Polish attempts to gain the great powers' assistance against the partitioning powers, see H. Kocój, *Mocarstwa europejskie wobec powstania listopadowego*, "Acta Universitatis Lodziensis. Folia Historica" 1983, no. 16, pp. 81–96; J. Pezda, *Emigracyjne gry dyplomatyczne*, [in:] *Polacy i świat, kultura i zmiana*, eds. J. Pezda, A, Zięba, J. Lencznarowicz, Księgarnia Akademicka, Kraków 2016, pp. 65–74. Concerning the impact of Polish cultural "soft power" in France, see: I.H. Pugacewicz, *Polonika francuskie w zbiorowej świadomości organizatorów i członków pierwszych towarzystw i instytucji Wielkiej Emigracji*, "Z Badań nad Książką i Księgozbiorami Historycznymi" 2017, special issue, pp. 413–428.

[15] Concerning national Polish mass commemorations in Galicia, see: P.M. Dabrowski, *Commemorations and the Shaping of Modern Poland*, Indiana University Press, Indianapolis 2004; P.A. Nungovitch, *Here All Is Poland: A Pantheonic History of Wawel, 1787–2010*, Lexington Books, 2018. Concerning the nation-building project in the Galician village and Habsburg loyalism, see: K. Stauter-Halsted, *The Nation in the Village: The Genesis of Peasant National Identity in Austrian Poland, 1848–1914*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 2001; D.L. Unowsky, *The Pomp and Politics of Patriotism: Imperial Celebrations in Habsburg Austria, 1848–1916*, Purdue University Press, West Lafayette 2005.

option," or the plan to reunite most Polish lands under the Habsburgs.[16] However, the "Piedmont" of Galicia was not free of political divisions, with distinct interpretations of the past determining different projects for a future Poland.[17] Roman Dmowski's National Democracy promoted the "Piast" idea of a Polish-Catholic nation that refrained from assimilating minorities such as Jews and Lithuanians and populated a state with borders corresponding to the ancient domain of the eponymous house.[18] In contrast, Józef Piłsudski's idea became known as "Jagiellonian," after the dynasty that had united Poland and Lithuania. Piłsudski, for most of the time in charge of the Polish Legions, believed that future Poland should not only tolerate ethnic and religious minorities but consider entering a (con)federation with the nations that constituted the historic Commonwealth ("Intermarium").[19] Another difference between the two national leaders was their military orientation: Dmowski believed that an independent Poland could emerge under the formal rule of the tsar, while Piłsudski considered Russia the greater danger and chose the struggle for full independence by force. The competition between these two leaders translated to at least two different modes of Polish politics of memory.

At first, since Piłsudski tactically accepted the Austro-Polish option in 1914–1916/1917, his allies participated in pursuing the appropriate politics of memory. In the summer of 1914, the Austrians allowed the creation of the National Supreme Committee (*Naczelny Komitet Narodowy*, NKN) in Galicia, which became the political backbone of the Polish Legions and laid the groundwork for a post-war Polish administration. In fact, the NKN was perhaps the first modern state-based Polish institution to carry out politics of memory aimed at the international public. Through the efforts of its informational agencies located in 12 countries – including Germany, Hungary, England, France, the United States, and Brazil – the institution attempted to sway foreign public opinion to support the Austro-Polish option and to gain recognition as the leading representation of its irredentist cause. The informational agencies made "suggestions" to influential figures and circles through

[16] M. Gmurczyk-Wrońska, *Pozyskać Królestwo Polskie. Z dokumentacji Sekretariatu Generalnego Naczelnego Komitetu Narodowego z 1914 r. i pierwszej połowy 1915 r.*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2020, no. 52(3), pp. 75–88.

[17] R. Król-Mazur, *Idea odrodzonego państwa polskiego w poglądach galicyjskich ugrupowań politycznych do utworzenia Naczelnego Komitetu Narodowego*, "Politeja – Pismo Wydziału Studiów Międzynarodowych i Politycznych Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego" 2010, no. 14(7), pp. 269–300.

[18] Concerning national democracy, see: E. Maj, *Związek Ludowo-Narodowy 1919–1928. Studium z dziejów myśli politycznej*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 2000; B. Porter-Szücs, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*, Oxford University Press, London, 2000; R. Wapiński, *Narodowa Demokracja 1893–1939*, Ossolineum, Wrocław 1980.

[19] M.J. Chodakiewicz, *Intermarium: The Land between the Black and Baltic* Seas, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick 2012; J. Levy, *The Intermarium: Wilson, Madison, & East Central European Federalism*, Universal-Publishers, Boca Raton 2007. Piłsudski's biographies include A. Garlicki, *Józef Piłsudski 1867–1935*, Znak, Kraków 2017; P. Hetherington, *Unvanquished: Joseph Pilsudski, Resurrected Poland, and the Struggle for Eastern Europe*, Pingora Press, Houston 2012.

the local press, conferences, lectures, and larger publications.[20] For instance, one of the most important informational agencies was in Berlin, where Wilhelm Feldman managed to persuade some prominent Germans to support the attachment of the Kingdom of Poland to Galicia. Historical discourse played a crucial role in this endeavor, with one Georg Gotheim from Wrocław (Breslau) admitting "the hundred years of harm inflicted upon the Polish nation" and promising to take action to "take off the anti-Polish linguistic muzzle" (in the German partition).[21] Likewise, the press campaign of historian Jan Dąbrowski at the NKN's informational agency in Budapest, in which the Polish-Hungarian historic friendship was often underlined, was meant to acquire the support of the Hungarian half of the Habsburg Monarchy.[22] The largest success of the Austro-Polish option was in the United Kingdom, where prominent figures (and historians) such as Lord Eversley, John Shaw Lefevre, Francis Fortescue Urquhart, John Holland Rose, and Robert William Seton Watson granted it at least partial support. However, this was also thanks to August Zaleski's Polish Informational Committee (*Polski Komitet Informacyjny*) in London, which was independent of the NKN but noticed the British anticipation of the collapse of the Habsburg-Hohenzollern alliance.[23]

The Central Powers gradually lost the support of its junior Polish allies (or clients) as a result of the reduction of the Kingdom of Poland to a German sphere of economic exploitation. Most of Piłsudski's troops refused to swear their allegiance to the Kaiser in July 1917. In response to this "oath crisis" and the February Revolution, Dmowski shifted his orientation from pro-Russian to pro-French and established the Polish National Committee (*Komitet Narodowy Polski*, KNP) in Lausanne (soon relocated to Paris), which uprooted the NKN in representing the Polish cause abroad and became officially accredited at the Entente.[24] The idea of Poland's independence gained traction among the Western powers and was ultimately included in President Wilson's "Fourteen Points" of March 1918, but the most important task of the KNP was to secure the Western support for the future state's borders. The face of these efforts was Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860–1941), a famous pianist. In January 1919, two months after assuming power over the former Kingdom and Western Galicia, Piłsudski reached an agreement with Dmowski, turning the KNP into Poland's official representation at the Paris Peace Conference. There, the aim was to argue for Poland's right to some other territories of the historic Common-

[20] M. Drozdowski, *Naczelny Komitet Narodowy (1914-1918). Polityczne i organizacyjne zaplecze Legionów Polskich*, Towarzystwo Wydawnicze Historia Iagellonica, Kraków 2017, pp. 325–330.

[21] Ibidem, pp. 331–332. Most German politicians, however, worried that Galicia's territorial growth would result in attempts to detach the Poznań region from Prussia.

[22] Ibidem, pp. 338–340.

[23] Ibidem, pp. 353–354.

[24] Concerning the KNP, see: M. Leczyk, *Komitet Narodowy Polski a Ententa i Stany Zjednoczone, 1917–1919*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1966; J. Zamoyski, *Powrót na mapę: Polski Komitet Narodowy w Paryżu 1914–1919*, Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Warszawa 1991.

wealth, although Dmowski and his ideological followers did not believe that a complete restoration of the 1772 border was realistic or desirable.[25] In this article, it must suffice to name the major areas of contention: (1) the Polish-German struggle over Gdańsk (Danzig), Upper Silesia, East Prussia and the Poznań region; (2) the Polish-Lithuanian struggle over Vilnius; (3) the status of Eastern Galicia and its possible autonomy under Ukrainian rule. While the French premier Clemenceau (later Millerand) mostly supported the Polish aspirations in these areas, Britain's Lloyd George desired the return of the Concert of Europe, a project in which independent Poland was an obstacle to establishing a European order with the participation of the Germans and (White or Red) Russians.[26]

As they dealt with the British retellings of Poland's past, the historians delegated to the Paris Peace Conference – independent Poland's first public diplomats – oscillated between Piłsudski's and Dmowski's positions. In preparation for discussing the "Polish Question" at the conference, the British commissioned a couple of "handbooks" of Polish history, mostly likely authored by William Chadwick Oman and Lewis Namier. One characteristic element of these was the recurrent interpretation of the Commonwealth's fall as stemming from its multinational character: its encroachment into Ukrainian lands had weakened it economically, politically, and geopolitically. In turn, the British posited the Polish "race to modernity" – for example, the "organic" economic self-betterment in "ethnic" Poland under the partitions, as opposed to the proto-democratic legacies of the Commonwealth – as the factor that justified the establishment of a Polish state.[27] Likewise, Dmowski and his closest associates such as Marian Seyda (1879–1967) and Jan Rozwadowski (1872–1935) drew the line of Poland's borders more to the west than Piłsudski, forsaking most of the Tarnopol and Stanisławów regions in line with an ethnic definition of the Polish nation-state.[28] Still, a group of Polish historians present at the conference, including Franciszek Bujak (1875–1953), Oskar Halecki (1891–1973), Władysław Konopczyński (1880-1952), Wacław Sobieski (1872–1935), and Stanisław Kutrzeba (1876–1946), opposed the British efforts to limit Poland's eastern territory.[29] Despite himself being a proponent of "ethnic" Poland, Konopczyński, in particular, contributed to the effort of depicting the Commonwealth as toler-

[25] J. Krzysztonek, *Roman Dmowski i sprawa Polski na konferencji wersalskiej*, [in:] *Niepodległość: idee, fakty, perspektywy. W 100. rocznicę odzyskania niepodległości przez Polskę*, eds. P. Krokosz, S. Romański-Cebula, M. Gorajczyk, Uniwersytet Papieski Jana Pawła II w Krakowie, Wydawnictwo Naukowe, Kraków 2019, pp. 121–137.

[26] A. Nowak, *Pierwsza zdrada Zachodu: 1920 – zapomniany appeasement*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Kraków 2015, pp. 35–67.

[27] P. Hanczewski, *Kursy historii Polski dla brytyjskich delegatów na konferencję pokojową w Paryżu w 1919 roku*, "Prace Historyczne" 2019, no. 146(1), pp. 149–170.

[28] P. Eberhardt, *Program terytorialny Komitetu Narodowego Polskiego i delegacji polskiej na konferencji pokojowej w Wersalu*, "Studia Geohistorica" 2015, no. 3, pp. 127–140.

[29] T. Srogosz, *Delegaci i eksperci polskiej delegacji na konferencję pokojową w Paryżu (1919–1920)*, "Історичний архів. Наукові студії" 2019, no. 20, p. 87–88.

ant toward Ruthenians (Ukrainians) and Jews.[30] In this respect, it is also worth noting that the publication of the Morgenthau Report on antisemitic killings of Jews by Polish troops, especially during the early struggle with the Bolsheviks in 1919, could be considered somewhat of a success of this fledgling Polish public diplomacy: the document condemned "extremists on both sides" and acknowledged Polish historic tolerance toward Jews.[31]

Precarious Soft Power? Politics of Memory in Interwar Poland

The results of the Paris Peace Conference can be seen as a success of Polish politics of memory, as Poland's western and northern borders were mostly drawn to Warsaw's benefit – except for Gdańsk, which became a free city. At the same time, the disappointing outcome of the plebiscite in East Prussia and the fateful decision of the Council of Ambassadors to grant most of Cieszyn Silesia to Prague can be attributed to Warsaw's weakness during the Soviet military successes of July–August 1920. In historic Lithuania, as early as April 1919, Piłsudski issued the "Proclamation to the Inhabitants of the Former Grand Duchy," informed by his "Jagiellonian" concept of restoring the Commonwealth in the form of a (con)federation of Eastern European states ("Intermarium") between Berlin and Moscow.[32] By October 1920, Gen. Lucjan Żeligowski carried out a false flag operation (a "mutiny") in Vilnius, which resulted in the creation of the Republic of Central Lithuania and its subsequent incorporation into Poland.[33] Despite this success, the Polish side made significant concessions to the Soviets during the negotiations at Minsk and Riga in late 1920 and early 1921. In the first place, Warsaw's acquiescence to Soviet Ukraine emerging as a theoretically independent state was a setback to the "Jagiellonian" idea. This also amounted to a betrayal of the Ukrainian People's Republic, Poland's ally since the signing of the Piłsudski-Petliura agreement. Furthermore, the Soviets did not accept Poland as the successor state of the whole Commonwealth. This was demonstrated by their refusal to return the Metrica of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, which the tsarist state had appropriated. Instead, only the Metrica of the Crown, or the Kingdom of Poland, was released, as Moscow decided to return the cultural artifacts originating from "ethnic" Poland only.[34] In this way, Polish politics of memory only bore out successes in the west, with its scope remaining limited in the east.

[30] W. Konopczyński, A Brief Outline of Polish History, [in:] *Polish Encyclopedic Publications*, Geneva 1919.

[31] Reproduced in: H. Morgenthau, F. Strother, *All in a Life-Time*, Doubleday, Page and Company, 1922; M. Urynowicz, *Raport Henry'ego Morgenthau*, "Biuletyn IPN" 2010, no. 10, pp. 70–79.

[32] Reproduced in "Monitor Polski," April 28, 1919, no. 95, p. 2.

[33] J. Czechowski, *Międzynarodowe uwarunkowania Litwy Środkowej (9 X 1920 – 6 IV 1922)*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2017, no. 49(2), pp. 189–204.

[34] M. Wołos, *A New Order in Central and Eastern Europe: Polish-Soviet Negotiations and the Peace of Riga (1920–1921)*, "Zapiski Historyczne" 2021, no. 86(2), p. 118.

As its borders were finally drawn in the early 1920s, the Polish state, which was patched together from at least four different socioeconomic and political systems, emerged debilitated in almost all possible ways, lacking fundamental infrastructural or legal frameworks. While the right-wing governments dominant at the time passed major reforms, the political instability that ensued ended with Piłsudski's coup d'état of May 1926.[35] Poland's politics of memory was turned inward in those years and became defined by the conflict between Piłsudski's supporters and opponents. For instance, as the director of a special commission of the Military Historical Bureau (*Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne*), Konopczyński was implicated in the conflict between Piłsudski and the officers accused by him of falsifying documents regarding his role in the Battle of Warsaw (1920).[36] After May 1926, a more concrete politics of memory emerged under the Sanacja ("cleansing") regime, which declared to purge public life from corruption and usher in more harmonious relations between social and ethnic groups in Poland.[37] One proponent of Piłsudskiite minority policies was historian Olgierd Górka (1887–1955). In 1933, Górka supported the elimination of Henryk Sienkiewicz's historic novels from the list of required school readings, pointing out their stereotypical and inaccurate depictions of Ukrainians.[38] While manifested internally in the policies of regional governors such as Henryk Józewski, this more conciliatory approach to the minorities was, at the same time, oriented toward the international public, in line with Piłsudskiite "Prometheism," or the concept of promoting irredentism among the non-Russian nationalities of the Soviet Union as a measure to erode its power.[39] In addition to Ukrainians or Belarusians, the "Orientalist" dimension of Prometheism was directed at the Turkic Muslims of the Caucasus and Central Asia, as Warsaw became a hub for Tatar and Armenian émigré communities. History became a useful tool in these efforts, with Prometheans such as Włodzimierz Bączkowski drawing connections between the anti-Russian animus of the Commonwealth's Lipka Tatars and the present-day Muslim struggles against the Soviets.[40]

[35] P. Brykczynski, *Primed for Violence: Murder, Antisemitism, and Democratic Politics in Interwar Poland*, University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 2016.

[36] P. Biliński, *Władysław Konopczyński w polityce II Rzeczypospolitej*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2016, no. 48(4), pp. 53–55; P. Stawecki, *Generał Marian Kukiel jako szef Biura Historycznego Sztabu Generalnego i jego konflikt z marszałkiem Józefem Piłsudskim w 1925 r.*, "Przegląd Historyczny" 1987, no. 78(3), pp. 493–516.

[37] J. Srokosz, *Elitarystyczne koncepcje Walerego Sławka oraz próby ich realizacji*, "Imponderabilia. Biuletyn Piłsudczykowski" 2011, no. 3, pp. 40–55; W. Paruch, *Od konsolidacji państwowej do konsolidacji narodowej: mniejszości narodowe w myśli politycznej obozu piłsudczykowskiego (1926–1939)*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Marii Curie-Skłodowskiej, Lublin 1997.

[38] E. Bunout, *Olgierd Górka's Polemics on the Contours of the Polish Nation (1933–1955)*, "Connexe: Les Espaces postcommunistes en question(s)" 2018, no. 4, pp. 28–31.

[39] *Ruch prometejski i walka o przebudowę Europy Wschodniej (1918–1940). Studia i szkice*, ed. M. Kornat, Instytut Historii PAN, Warszawa 2012.

[40] M.R. Garboś, *An Alternative Internationalism: The Main Lines and Legacies of Polish Sovietology, Promethean Orientalism and the Soviet 'Southern Borderlands', 1926–1939*, "Europe-Asia Studies" 2019, no. 71(9), pp. 1584–1608.

In the 1930s, as Stalin and Hitler radically transformed their dominions, Poland's information campaigns once again stressed its historic right to possess contentious lands such as Upper Silesia or Pomerania and fulfill its geopolitical aims in the region. A series of state-allied research institutions, such as the Silesian Institute (*Instytut Śląski*) and the Baltic Institute (*Instytut Bałtycki*), was in charge of these tasks. These institutions tackled the issue of Polish-German relations and drafted Poland's maritime policies. One disseminator of historical (counter)propaganda co-affiliated with the Silesian Institute was Jan Czekanowski (1882–1965), whose anthropological studies underlined the historical presence of Slavic tribes as far to the west as the Elbe.[41] Another was Józef Borowik (1891–1968) of the Baltic Institute, whose publications called for rendering Poland's maritime trade independent of German middlemen, with historical references made to the Commonwealth's semi-colonial economic structure.[42]

The Polish state also supported social institutions in their politics of memory. For instance, the Maritime and Colonial League (*Liga Morska i Kolonialna*, LMiK) promoted the establishment of settlements and commercial outposts in Africa and South America to turn Poland into a modern nation-state.[43] In doing so, the LMiK used a wide array of historical arguments, including the stories of Maurycy Beniowski (1746–1786) and Stefan Szolc-Rogoziński (1861–1896), which touted the actions of these "colonial pioneers" as historical precedents for Polish engagement in Africa.[44] Moreover, the LMiK presented the Commonwealth's historic role as a Catholic rampart against the Russians and Ottomans as the cause of its inability to participate in the first, Iberian stage of colonial conquest.[45] In a similar manner, colonial pundits estimated the contribution of the Polish lands to the imperial German budget at 8–9% and claimed that Poland was therefore entitled to the analogous percentage of former German colonial territories.[46] In a successful attempt at soft power in Africa, the LMiK promoted the image of Poland as a nation that had itself known foreign domi-

[41] J. Czekanowski, *Wstęp do historji Słowian*, K.S. Jakubowski & SP, Lwów, 1927; Czekanowski, *Struktura rasowa Śląska w świetle badań polskich i niemieckich*, Instytut Śląski, Katowice 1936. For a summary of Czekanowski's racial views, see: D. Wężowicz-Ziółkowska, *Jan Czekanowski w czasie i przestrzeni*, "Laboratorium Kultury" 2017, no. 6, pp. 69–93.

[42] Discussed in B. Poświata, *Naukowa uprawa morza. Instytut Bałtycki w latach 1925–1951*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 2020, no. 52(4), pp. 5–24.

[43] M. A. Kowalski, *Dyskurs kolonialny w Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Instytut Etnologii i Antropologii Kulturowej Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2010; concerning the LMiK, see: T. Białas, *Liga Morska i Kolonialna 1930–1939*, Wydawnictwo Morskie, Gdańsk 1983; M. Grzechnik, *'Ad Maiorem Poloniae Gloriam!' Polish Inter-Colonial Encounters in Africa in the Interwar Period*, "The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History" 2020, no. 48(5), pp. 826–845.

[44] M.B. Lepecki, *Maurycy August hr. Beniowski: Zdobywca Madagaskaru*, Książnica Atlas, Lwów 1938; S. Zieliński, *Wyprawa Stefana S. Rogozińskiego do Afryki*, Liga Morska i Kolonjalna, Warszawa 1932.

[45] An article presenting this argument was published in the semi-official Polish daily *Gazeta Polska* in 1938. *Kolonie*, "Gazeta Polska," April 10, 1938, p. 1.

[46] The first instance in which this argument was made was during the Paris Peace Conference. W. Bukowiecki-Olszewski, *Wartość porównawcza poszczególnych kolonji niemieckich*, 1919,

nation and could therefore become a benign protector of states such as Liberia, which prompted that country to request Polish protection.[47]

By the late 1930s, the Polish state was interested in politics of memory as a means of forging a military-political alliance with Britain and France, underlining the Commonwealth's historic tolerance toward Jews or its role as a buffer state and guarantor of stability in Europe. This state support for certain narratives was sometimes reflected in foreign publications. In March 1939, for example, the American educator Raymond Leslie Buell (1896–1946) cooperated with the Polish foreign ministry in publishing an important study promoting the idea that the entire Wilsonian international system hinged on Poland's survival in the face of German and Soviet "imperialisms". For this reason, Buell's study also promoted a sympathetic interpretation of the country's past.[48] In this way, independent Poland's politics of memory diplomacy ended in a similar way in which it had begun, with its "Jagiellonian" aspect stressed to gain the sympathy of Western powers. However, the story of the "tolerant" Commonwealth was also used as a justification for ambitious policies in Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa. Furthermore, the state that sponsored this historical discourse was increasingly becoming more "Piast" than "Jagiellonian," encouraging its national and religious minorities to emigrate and adopting an ethnic definition of the nation.

Conclusion

Joachim Lelewel created the concept of the Polish road to freedom in his *Remarks on the History of Poland and its People.*[49] According to Lelewel, the Commonwealth had been founded on its communal civic administration by all nobles, which allowed for its multicultural and multireligious character. The other popular interpretation of the Polish past, later appropriated by the likes of Lewis Namier, was the story of Poland's journey to modernity, in which the Commonwealth and its multinational character appeared as an impediment rather than asset. This historical interpretation focused on "organic" progress through entrepreneurship, science, and technology. During the stateless period, politics of memory was also directed at both domestic and international audiences by Galician elites or the Polish Informational Committee in London.

The Polish elites continued to pursue a politics of memory during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 and in the early years of Polish statehood. After Józef Piłsudski came to power in 1926, the story of Polish freedom was mar-

Archiwum Akt Nowych, reference no. 2/515/4/59; L. Bulowski, *Kolonje dla Polski*, Warszawa 1932.

[47] P. Puchalski, *Poland in a Colonial World Order. Adjustments and Aspirations, 1918–1939*, Routledge, London 2022, pp. 109–147.

[48] R.L. Buell, *Poland. Key to Europe*, Knopf, New York 1939.

[49] J. Lelewel, *Uwagi nad dziejami Polski i ludu jej*, [in:] *Polska, dzieje i rzeczy jej*, vol. III, Poznań, 1855, pp. 275–276.

keted as supporting the nations "imprisoned" within the borders of the Soviet Union. Prometheism also appeared in colonial discourse, with Poland marketing itself as a good candidate for the role of protector of African states such as Liberia. Poland's politics of memory was a sort of soft power that seemed to function well in the west, east, and south, but it was often undermined by reports about Polish antisemitic acts reaching the most distant cities around the world.[50] Despite their drawbacks, the Polish politics of memory warrants an academic monograph. In the future, scholars interested in historic Polish soft power might wish to analyse its other manifestations, such as the cultural policies pursued not only in Britain, France, or the United States, but also in countries such as Romania or Argentina.

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[50] Concerning Poland's public diplomacy directed at Jewish circles around the world, see: K. Czechowska, *Polska dyplomacja wobec „kwestii żydowskiej" w latach 1932–1939,* Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, Warszawa 2023, pp. 111–170.

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