

JAROSŁAW KILIAS
University of Warsaw

Is there any Sociological Tradition of Social Memory Research? The Polish and the Czech Case

Abstract: The paper deals with social memory research done by Polish and Czech sociologists. In Poland it started in the 1960s when an outline of a historical consciousness study was sketched by Nina Assorodobraj-Kula. Although her original concept was soon left out, a series of surveys was conducted. Recently memory has become a popular research field and numerous studies have been employing various research methods. In Czechoslovakia opinion polls on historical consciousness were conducted as early as in the 1940s, and recently a study has started in the Czech Republic that resembles and was probably influenced by earlier Polish survey research. In my paper I try to map out the research done in the two countries in order to identify typical features of the local studies. It seems that in spite of a large quantity of studies published, the character of most of Polish and Czech works on memory were purely descriptive, and any sociologically relevant problems started to be posed only recently. Therefore it may be suggested that although a certain common Polish and Czech tradition of memory research exists, it cannot be called sociological in any strict sense.

Keywords: Social memory studies, historical consciousness, Polish sociology, Czech sociology, social memory research tradition.

And in a general way we know that human attitudes and beliefs fail to persist unless the situations and sanctions that reproduce them continues to persist or, more crassly, unless people get something out of them.

(Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy. Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World*, Boston: Beacon Press 1993: 335).

Social Memory, Memory Research and Sociology in Poland and Czech Lands

Although social memory is usually considered interdisciplinary research field, many of memory students were (and still are) sociologists who did substantial empirical and theoretical work. My paper is a scrutiny of memory studies carried out by Polish and Czech sociologists, and an attempt to identify specifically sociological traditions discernible within this research area. There are two reasons why the scrutiny of research in the two countries can be considered justified and useful. The first one is the affinity between the Polish studies and the work done recently by Czech scholars, which at least in part resulted from an inspiration by earlier Polish research, even though citations in Czech texts did not reveal the whole extent of this influence. Whether or not this is enough to speak about a common scientific tradition of sociological

memory studies, capabilities and limitations of approaches used by the scholars in the two countries seem to be analogous.

The second reason why it is useful not to confine the analysis to just one, Polish or Czech case is the character of social memory in Central-Eastern Europe¹. Obviously, a study of just two cases does not enable to grasp all the regional context, but at least puts local research in a perspective broader than just a national one. Most scholars study local memories separately, consequently (though not always deliberately) treating them as if they were unique phenomena. However in Central-Eastern Europe at least public cultural memories have been not at all unique in their content and structure, being formed by similar historical experience, undergoing similar transformation processes and being influenced by the same or akin factors. This applies to both Polish and Czech historical imageries which have been telling stories that usually oscillate between historical romance and tragedy (cf. White 1973: 8–9). They have been often sharing the belief in justness of their national political claims and aspirations, typical for Central-East European small nation historical imagery (Hroch 1999b: 160).² Analogous though not identical has been the official picture of the Communist rule as a period of oppression and the idea of a return to the once banned “genuine” national tradition after 1989.³ There were similar public debates on the painful histories of relations with the neighbor nations, Stalinist and Nazi crimes, collaboration and—especially in Poland—the participation of the local population in the extermination of Jews. An interesting feature of public cultural memories in both countries is a considerable role of self-referential motifs—remembrance of supposed deficits and lies of previous, mainly Communist versions of the history. Still, there are notable differences between the two public cultural memories. An influential segment of the Czech anti-Communist opposition and the post-1989 political and intellectual elite managed to revise some of the basic notions of predominantly cultural, progressivist (and anti-German) Czech nationalism (e.g. Patočka 1992, Podiven 1991), contributing to a noticeable shift in the popular opinion on national history (cf. Šubrt, Vávra 2010). Polish Solidarity movement and most of the post-1989 elites built on nationalist symbols rather than detested them.

From the sociological point of view the uses of memory and the factors that influence it are as important as its contents. A significant aspect of the Polish and, to a degree, the Czech historical memory is its continuous application as an in-

¹ The notions of “social” or “collective memory” designate a galaxy of polymorphous, rarely clearly defined phenomena from various social fields and types of individual and collective experience. To put some order into my scrutiny I take upon Jan Assmann’s (1992) distinction between cultural memory, mostly spread by specialized institutions and communicative memory, transmitted by face-to-face communication. Obviously, in the late modern societies various social fields proliferate different pictures of the past. Furthermore, it seems useful to distinguish public and private or semi-private (e.g. family) memories, even though it is hard to imagine purely private cultural memories, and any memories are nowadays filled with elements of public memory spread by media, state administrative or education institutions.

² Although Poland is not a country which Miroslav Hroch himself would qualify as a “small nation” (cf. Hroch 1986, 1999).

³ A good example is Polish national holiday of May 3. May 3 is the jubilee of the May Constitution, a political reform effort of 1779, but it was reintroduced mostly as “the proper, pre-war” national holiday after 1989 (Hałas 2001: 59–62).

strument of political struggle and domination (Nijakowski 2008: 66–144). Also the Communist ruling elites attempted to establish themselves as true bearers of national traditions (Zaremba 2001). Unfortunately for them, some aspects of their national history projects did not correspond with private memories and/or were in conflict with national symbols and once popular, alternative historical narratives. In the 1980s Poland this led to an open conflict with the history spread by the Catholic Church and the political opposition. After the fall of Communism there has no longer been state monopoly, but the efforts to disseminate one official vision of the past have continued (e.g. Mayer 2009: 52–54). So has the political application of history. It is powered by the belief in the unifying power of national symbols, and the rhetoric of truth and justice that dominates public historical discourse. As a result political dispute turns into a moral one, which aims at the exclusion of opponents from the political community (Kilias 2004: 194, e.g. Śpiewak 2005).

Not only has internal politics fostered interest in the past. The end of Communism coincided with a wave of politics of collective identity and a renewed debate on the Second World War. Behind the debate about guilt and forgiveness there has been certain political as well as economic interests, especially after the successful campaign to compensate for savings lost in Swiss banks and German compensations to forced laborers, which were imposed by a coalition of transnational organizations and governments. Cultural memory played somewhat instrumental role in the process, as the decisive element was the bargaining power. Nevertheless, common people together with governments lobbying for their citizens became once again interested in supposedly forgotten past. As a result, the past itself turned into an object of increasing interest of both individual and collective actors (more in: Kilias 2004: 208–211).

Another factor that contributed to the growth of interest in history has been re-opening of issue of property lost due to the post-war nationalization in all Communist countries. Again, beyond legal and/or moralist public discourse there have been claims for once owned assets, which has turned into an important revenue source in the whole Central-East Europe. In both Poland and the Czech Republic there is a similar tendency to exclude foreign (especially German) demands, and the responsibility for Second World War has become a handy rationalization to keep status quo. Once again cultural memory has become a source of arguments used in bargaining between collective actors, which has resulted in different versions of selective restitutions of lost property. Also in the case of property restitutions the return to the past at least has coincided with a more general transformation of property rights as such, where immaterial and especially intellectual rights have been becoming more and more important (Verdery 2003: 1–41), and perhaps with a more general shift from work to capital and property rights as a dominant income source.

Last but not least, both countries have been affected by the rising wave of individualism which has fostered individuals to look into their identities (Giddens 1991); hence inspiring interest in family histories, genealogies, and exploring, or even re-enacting voluntarily selected episodes and characters from the past (Kwiatkowski 2008: 110–179). This has contributed to the development of old and new forms of group cultural memory.

Polish and Czech Sociological Memory Research: an Overview

Today social memory is a broad and still expanding research field for scholars from various social science and humanity branches, but in order to trace back the tradition of sociological memory studies I have concentrated on sociologists only. First studies on this topic appeared long before the idea of systematic study of memory as a social phenomenon emerged, and a Polish Durkheimian Stefan Czarnowski can be considered one of its predecessors (e.g. Czarnowski 1919). Systematic research on social memory had also started in Poland long before the topic became popular within Anglo-Saxon social science. Its first sign was a paper entitled “‘Żywa historia’. Świadomość historyczna: symptomy i propozycje badawcze” [“Living History.” Historical Consciousness: Symptoms and Research Proposals], published in the *Studia Socjologiczne* journal by Nina Assorodobraj-Kula, a former disciple of Stefan Czarnowski, and an exponent of historical sociology (Assorodobraj 1963). In her paper she focused on popular concepts and uses of history, especially on alterations of historical consciousness caused by thoroughgoing social changes. She stressed the complex and multi-faceted character of historical consciousness, which required usage of diverse research methods. Assorodobraj-Kula identified a variety of structural transformations and power relation types that are likely to influence historical consciousness. They would determine possible research cases, as the case study was her preferred approach. Unfortunately, she neither defined the character of memory to be studied nor identified any specific data to be collected and analyzed. Consequently, even though she set up ambitious research agenda, she hardly touched upon practical methodological issues associated with the kind of an inquiry she proposed.

Despite the early start, the factual research on social memory developed slowly and it had little to do with the large-scale program of the “Living History.” Probably the only attempt to follow it was Assorodobraj-Kula’s (1967) paper on the role of history in the formation of national consciousness in Western Africa. In the mid-1960s extensive research on historical consciousness started, which comprised a series of surveys among various sections of population, which due to the political sensitivity of the issue resulted mostly in creating reports for internal use. The first two of them were Jadwiga Possart’s (1967) and Barbara Szacka’s (1967) booklets about—respectively—urban and rural population’s opinions and attitudes towards history. The only theoretical work published in Poland was a translation of Maurice Halbwachs’s *Les cadres sociaux de la mémoire* (1969), which appeared long before an English version of any of his works on collective memory was issued (Halbwachs 1980). Useful as a legitimacy and a visible symbol of the new research branch (cf. Alexander 1989), the book was by no means unproblematic as a theoretical inspiration, as it was first and foremost an attempt to substantiate the “strong version” of the Durkheimian idea of collective consciousness, and did not correspond with neither the original Assorodobraj-Kula’s program, nor the survey research practice. In the 1970s several papers and reports for internal use, which based on opinion polls, came out (Szacki 1973, Pawełczyńska 1977). In the second part of the decade and during the next one a whole series of papers and books based on research among Polish intelligentsia was written by Barbara

Szacka. As the topic was sensitive from the ideological point of view, publication of her first book on social memory was delayed for almost ten years (Szacka 1977, Szacka 1983, Szacka, Sawisz 1990, cf. Szacka 2006: 7). These works basically followed the existing research pattern, being analyses of individual opinions as gathered (or created) in surveys, even though they employed more refined statistical instruments and included tentative attempts to reconstruct mechanisms that influenced them (Szacka, Sawisz 1990). The research scope of the Warsaw sociologists broadened when Szacka's disciple Andrzej Szpociński published a book not about popular opinions on the past, but about historical radio plays for elementary school students—i.e. their possible sources (Szpociński 1988).

Obviously, social memory studies in Communist Poland were not only surveys. There were numerous other works, including some written by professional sociologists, yet not as the outcome of any sociological research. The most important ones were definitely Jerzy Szacki's writings on tradition, in which he explored, explained and tacitly reinterpreted ideas concerning social implications and uses of the past (cf. Szacki 1971).

The work of Szacka's team composed what might be called the first generation of social memory research. The beginning of the democratic transition in 1989 was hardly any turning point in the development of Polish memory studies, but new research issues and methods started to appear slowly in the 1990s. Qualitative interviews—especially narrative biographical ones—became a widespread research method, and among most popular topics were Holocaust and Second World War traumas (Engelking 1994, Kaźmierska 1999, later also: Melchior 2004). Although such an extensive use of interviews was new, the interest in individual biographies was a follow-up to a much longer Polish sociological tradition. As for the social memory research, albeit the terms “memory” or “identity” appeared in such book titles as *Zagłada i pamięć* [Holocaust and Memory] or *Zagłada a tożsamość* [Holocaust and Identity] (Engelking 1994, Melchior 2004), their authors showed little interest in the social process of remembering and forgetting, concentrating solely on telling stories about past events as described by their respondents.

An interesting addition to the Polish literature based on narrative interviews was the *Autobiographies of Transformation*, a collection of autobiographies of East- and Central-East European sociologists, the last in a series of three books dealing with the post-war history of sociology in the Communist countries edited by Janusz Mucha and Mike F. Keen (2006).

Although a few relevant publications were issued in the late 1990s and early 2001 and some eminent sociologists published individual papers on memory (e.g. Ziółkowski 2001, Hałas 2001), the second generation of memory studies started to appear on the academic scene in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century. This was elicited by two factors. The first one was the increasing popularity of memory studies in Western social science, which, from the very beginning of Polish sociology, (Bystroń 1915) and today probably more than ever before sets theoretical trends and fashions. The second was a new wave of the right-wing politics of memory which arose in the middle of the first decade of the new century, aiming at the renewal of

the glorious Polish national history (i.e. at the exclusion of those who were accused of forsaking it, or were involved in its darkest episode, Communism). The direct result of this political activity were partisan works of sociologists, both sympathizing with it (Śpiewak 2004) and critically examining some of its outcomes (Nijakowski 2008, Ostolski 2009, Żychlińska 2009). Increased interest in Western memory studies reflected in broadening the range of theoretical inspirations, resulting by a series of translations, especially from German literature. As for original works, the political dimension of memory was explored for the first time—Lech Nijakowski (2007) dealt with commemorative practices as an element of symbolic politics, Joanna Wawrzyniak (2009) provided historical sociological account of institutional memory making, while Karolina Wigura (2011) explored international politics of forgiving. Renewed interest and broadening horizons of memory research encouraged Szacka's students and cooperatives too. Some of them basically followed their usual survey-based research pattern (Szacka 2006), sometimes offering analyses of other type of data (Kwiatkowski 2008), but Andrzej Szpociński attempted to explore more general issues, such as memory and social communication (Szpociński 2009). Their latest work concerned the memories of the Second World War and based mostly on survey material, old and new, but supplemented with qualitative research method which at that time became standard instrument of commercial research—focus group interviews (Kwiatkowski 2010c). As memory is an extremely popular subject, a lot of other research is under way. What is interesting, in case of studies done by sociologists new inspirations seem to be coming from anthropology and cultural studies rather than from sociology itself (cf. Szpociński 2009, Kaprański 2010, Traba, Hahn 2012).

The development of Polish and Czech sociology followed somewhat similar paths, and they had close ties at times. Especially in the 1960s Poland became a role model for its neighbor's sociologists. Although the period of particularly close cooperation had ended after the fall of the Prague Spring, Czech scholars were usually familiar with the work of their Polish counterparts. This was also the case of memory research.

The prehistory of Czech sociological studies on memory started with Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, a philosophy professor at the Prague University and a politician, subsequently the first president of the Czechoslovak Republic and an exponent of sociology. In 1895 Masaryk published *Česká otázka* [The Czech Question], the first in a series of books (Masaryk 1990) that presented his idea of the meaning of the Czech history as the fulfillment of the humanitarian ideal set up by the Czech Reformation and followed up by progressive intellectual currents of the 18th and 19th century. He wished that this concept, supposedly an outcome of his sociological research, became a beacon for the Czech politics. Masaryk's works aroused a prolonged argument called "The debate on the meaning of Czech history" which oscillated between the ideological issue of the meaning of the Czech national history and the methodological problems of historical research. Another sociologist who published a few works on issues related to historical memory was Emanuel Chalupný who dealt with, among other topics, Czech national character and historical task of the Czech nation (Chalupný 1932, 1938, cf. Kiliás 2000: 63–77). As for modern research, as early as in 1946 *Československý ústav pro výzkum veřejného mínění* (Czechoslovak Institute for

the Public Opinion Research) managed to carry out an opinion poll on the Czechs' and Slovaks' perception of their history. Unfortunately, the Communists put an end to both the institute and the whole Czech sociology, making any similar research impossible. In the 1960s the Czechoslovak sociology underwent a rapid ascent, and experienced no less rapid suppression after the fall of the Prague Spring. As a result the second poll was done and the results were published in 1969, but the possibility to do any social memory research and to publish its results re-emerged only after the fall of Communism in 1989 (*Vztah... 1969*, Šubrt 1995). The main exponent of the emerging research branch was a Prague sociologist Jiří Šubrt. Being above all a theorist he wrote on sociological theory and some of his publications touched upon topics related to memory, such as time in sociological theory (Šubrt 2000). In the mid-1990s the Czech author did limited research (Šubrt 1995) and subsequently he published theoretical papers, mostly reviews of basic concepts and problems of memory studies (Šubrt 2006, Šubrt 2011). Šubrt nevertheless did not content himself with theory and started his own systematic research. Just like the Polish scholars at about the same time, Šubrt's team decided to use focus group interviews, adding a qualitative component to their data. Recently the Czech scholar has been finishing a thorough study of the Czech historical consciousness (Šubrt 2010).

It is hard to estimate any research in progress, especially when only preliminary results are available. Moreover, their most comprehensive presentation is a collection of diverse papers (Šubrt 2010) which do not conform with any unitary theoretical position—from the Miroslav Hroch's (2010) text, skeptical to the very possibility to discern such a phenomenon as historical consciousness, to a systematical presentation of a theoretical framework of the project written by Jiří Šubrt and Štěpánka Pfeiferová (2010a). As their inspirations they mentioned social constructivism of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann and the system theory. In an earlier paper Šubrt (2006) referred to Niklas Luhmann's theory, with its emphasis on the necessity to reduce the system complexity (in case of collective memory—to simplify and to partly forget it), but presenting the outcome of the team's work the Czech authors turned to the old Talcott Parsons's AGIL scheme (Šubrt-Pfeiferová 2010a: 25–30). Unfortunately, there is a certain discrepancy between this theoretical framework and the research results published in the volume. Explanatory potential of the system theory, their main theoretical basis, seems limited, as it is unable to explain any specific forms, let alone particular contents of social memory. Berger and Luckmann's ideas might be useful as an instrument enabling analysis of various levels and diverse sources of knowledge forming the supposed historical consciousness—still, the published research results concern exclusively the content of the supposed “historical consciousness” as inferred from surveys and focuses (Šubrt-Pfeiferová 2010b, Šubrt-Vávra 2010).

Needless to say, the Czech social memory studies were not only Šubrt's research, but they included numerous other works written by historians, literary critics, philosophers or sociologists. Some translations were also published, including two works of Maurice Halbwachs (1996, 2010). As for original works written by professional sociologists, writings of a Prague sociologist Miloš Havelka are noteworthy. They include a two-volume anthology of the debate on the meaning of the Czech history started by

Masaryk's *Česká otázka*, which continued long into the 20th century (Havelka 1995, 2006), and an essayistic book on the same topic (Havelka 2001). Together with some of his other papers (e.g. Havelka 2010) they have been probably the most valuable sociologists' contribution to the Czech social memory studies. In his works Havelka made use of conceptual instruments of sociology and showed significant interest in sociological theory. However, due to his prevailing interest in the intellectual contents of ideas he described, they seem to belong to the history of ideas rather than to sociology in a strict sense of the term. Another Czech work to some extent related to memory studies was Zdeněk Konopásek's (2000) project called "Ourselves' selves," an attempt to explore professional memory of sociologists that based on autobiographical writings of a group of Czech and foreign scholars.

Distinctive Features of Polish and Czech Sociological Memory Research

Polish and to a lesser extent Czech sociological memory research have a long and relatively successful history. Polish sociologists have been studying historical consciousness continually since the mid-1960s, and at the turn of the century the number of works on this topic rapidly increased and their assortment broadened seriously. Czechoslovak public opinion research institute studied historical memory already in 1946, while a fully-fledged research on historical consciousness started to emerge rather sluggishly only after 1989, resembling the first generation of Polish sociological memory research with its exclusive interest in the historical consciousness constructed from individual opinions on "grand national history" as produced by survey research. Moreover, it seems to be possible and useful to identify some other distinctive features of the Czech and most of the Polish social memory research.

It is worth noticing that the majority of writings on the topic were research studies based on limited data sets collected by the authors themselves as an outcome of their own research. They sometimes looked like research reports rather than genuine monographs; in fact most of early Polish publications were reports for internal use. Even if authors reached out for other sources, in most cases they preferred data at least similar to their own, which resulted in a methodological monoculture. A striking example is a Czech book summarizing the research of the Šubrt's team, which contained separate reports dealing with the survey and focuses (Šubrt, Pfeiferová 2010b). Such a monoculture was fully legitimate in studies aiming at describing clearly delimited, individual cases, such as works based on narrative biographical interviews (e.g. Kaźmierska 1999), but most of early Polish and majority of Czech studies aimed at describing whole populations (or population sectors) and employed survey data. In Poland this changed in the second generation studies which often based on broader data type and were also more closely entwined with theory, and consequently more topic-oriented (e.g. Nijakowski 2007), and not data-oriented as the earlier ones. The tendency to use wider variety of data was widespread, being reflected for example by supplementing quantitative survey data with the qualitative one (such as focus groups and interviews in: Kwiatkowski 2010c).

Assessing the legacy of the Polish survey-based empirical sociology of the Stefan Nowak's school, Antoni Sulek observed that it had collected considerable amount of knowledge about individuals', views, opinions and attitudes, but principally overlooked social structure and institutions (Sulek 2011: 174–176). This applies also to early Polish social memory research, as well as to recent Šubrt's work, which has involved thoroughgoing methodological individualism. In Polish sociology of the 1960s and 1970s, when survey was a dominant research method, it was treated as unproblematic and used without serious reflection about the character of data it produced, occasionally beyond the range of its applicability. As noted already by Herbert Blumer in the 1940s (1948: 543–546, cf. also Bourdieu 1990: 170–173) this method, or rather the usual way of its application not only presupposes individualist anthropology, but involves somewhat obscure hermeneutics ignoring distinction between various social contexts, especially between the public and the private sphere, and treating respondents' answers to questions about unfamiliar topics as their actual views and opinions. In the case of social memory there is also a problem with disassembling meaningful wholes (narratives, stories) that probably form the backbone of both public and private memories. What is interesting, survey was by no means an obvious choice as the basic research method. On the one hand, it was the standard method of sociology, but on the other hand the original Assorodobaj's idea did not determine whether the research should concern public cultural memory or individual memories and views. Moreover, it involved some problematical issues, including the fundamental question of whether common people do possess any historical consciousness, as they have rather limited competence and mostly lack any deeper interest in history (Hroch 2010).

Although methodological individualism was boosted by the practice of survey research, it was by no means restricted to it, being a basic premise of most of first generation Polish and Czech researchers. A characteristic example of the individualist approach is the application of focus group interviews. Although they simulated factual social memory formation processes and therefore offered various possible interpretations, they were in both Polish and Czech case used in a rather uninspired way as mere additional source of data on individuals' views and opinions (Kwiatkowski 2010a, Šubrt, Pfeiferová 2010b). The scholars who did biographical research also shared the perspective of radical methodological individualism. This was quite obvious for example in the case of Kaźmierska (1999) who treated her respondents as the sole authors of their life narratives, hence abstracting from both the social relationship of the interview and broader social context, that served (at least) as a frame of reference in which the life stories were embedded.

A quick look at the literature reveals another feature typical for Polish and Czech studies—the fact that they focused almost exclusively on the contents of memory. Needless to say, this was understandable in Nina Assorodobraj-Kula's time. Survey research was a dream come true of historical sociologists (and secret policemen), as it was an instrument that for the first time in the whole human history enabled to know what common people thought. Less obvious was why sociologists contended themselves with it for such a long time, instead of studying what made people think so.

There were at least two reasons for it. Although social memory research was possible in Poland (and not always in Czechoslovakia), in 1960s and especially in 1970s it dealt with delicate issues of ideology and political power. Consequently, it was probably possible to think about the factors that actually affected memory, but it would not be possible to write, let alone publishing texts about it. On the other hand, survey research in the Communist Poland was often treated as a surrogate of free public opinion, nonexistent at that time (Sulek 2001: 109). In this context mere describing the factual population's views on history, which not always conformed to official historical propaganda, might be perceived as a liberating act and a piece of valuable public sociology (Szacka 2006: 8). Altogether, most of published works remained descriptive, and first cautious attempts to look into the mechanisms of memory formation appeared only at the end of the 1980s. The number of such studies increased only in the first decade of the new century, when the second generation of memory research appeared, contributing to a genuine revolution in the Polish sociological memory research. Nonetheless, even today many studies, including most of works based on biographic interviews, only describe memory contents (e.g. Lemańczyk 2009). This is especially the case of those who write on marginal groups and minorities, who are tempted to play the role of public sociologists and perceive themselves as spokespersons of their suppressed memories.

Noteworthy was the way in which theory was evoked in most of Polish and Czech sociological memory research. Before the empirical work started high-brow theoretical papers appeared in both countries, albeit Šubrt's review essays were by no means programmatic manifestos comparable to the Assorodobraj-Kula's paper. Most of concepts mentioned in those introductory texts dealt with the social memory, not with the sociological theory. The above mentioned papers played little if any instrumental role in the empirical research work, as they concerned general problems, and they at best outlined a problem area and in most cases did not give any precise definitions of the subjects, offered no methods or analytical instruments. Research papers published afterwards were in turn strictly data-oriented and dealt with only a few if any problems among those touched upon by the theoretical works. This pattern repeated itself in individual publications, books and even shorter papers which usually comprised introduction containing overview of more or less standardized set of theories and hardly ever employing it empirical study (Kwiatkowski 2008, Šubrt 2010). Obviously, almost no potential ready-made theoretical inspirations were available when Polish research started, but in the course of time a group of names that repeatedly appear in such texts has been formed, which includes first and foremost Maurice Halbwachs and—in Polish texts—Nina Assorodobraj-Kula, who has been later joined by Jan Assmann and French historian Pierre Nora. It seems that they were used to legitimize the new research field rather than to guide the empirical work. In case of Halbwachs, whose main interest was the Durkheimian idea of collective conscience and the social formation of memory (in the literal sense, i.e. individual memory), this was perhaps the only possible usage.⁴ Some others, especially Assmann's idea of

⁴ More in: (Kilias 2011).

the institutionalized, power-centered cultural memory could have been used not only to clarify basic concepts, but as a source of sociologically relevant hypotheses. The erudite Assorodobraj-Kula's text might have opened way for various research, from the history of ideas through something what today would be called public discourse analysis, to the historical sociology. Anyway, it was to general to serve as guidance for any particular research.

In more recent studies theory seemed to be used in a more organic way. Slightly different ideas have been evoked and used it in a dissimilar way. Instead of presenting the most general concepts and ideas, their authors concentrate more on middle and short range theories dealing with practical issues, such as concepts and methods used in the course of empirical research and data analysis (e.g. Nijakowski, etc.). This is probably the result of a twofold development of the memory studies. Firstly, younger scholars have no longer feel obliged to seek legitimacy for studying what has become part of standard sociological agenda; hence they have no need to evoke its classics with their sometimes problematic heritage. Secondly, the range of research methods and instruments available has widened significantly, so there is simply much more literature on practical issues to be cited. In this context the last Šubrt's work (2010) has been a noticeable exception. The Czech author not only started with high-brow, theoretical manifestos, but declared two general sociological theories—Niklas Luhman's system theory and social constructivism of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann to be his main sociological inspirations. None of these theories was actually used to analyze the data. As a matter of fact although social constructivism might eventually help to study memory, Luhman's theory was probably too general to shed light on the formation of any particular forms and contents of social memory. As a result the Czech author instead of explaining it contented himself with the usual description of his research data. This followed his previous scholarly practice—although familiar with quantitative research, as a theorist Šubrt dealt with concepts rather than with empirical data. On the other hand this resembled earlier Polish studies, dealing exclusively with individual memory contents as produced by surveys, with which he was well acquainted.

How Sociological was Sociological Memory Research?

So far I have attempted to discern the most characteristic features of Polish and Czech social memory research as done by sociologists. My interest is nevertheless sociological research tradition in narrower sense of the term. As a motto for this paper I have selected a sentence from a passage in Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*. Dealing with the Indian caste system, the American sociologist rejected the usual way of explaining political and economic phenomena by cultural ones. He suggested that persistence of attitudes and beliefs must be explained by institutional settings that supported them, not the other way around.⁵ This was

⁵ The phrase about "getting something out of them" he used was misleading, as his own analyses were afar from any form of functionalism (cf. Moore 1993: 204), including the psychological one.

definitely not the only possible solution of the issue, but it was one that could be called sociological in an unsophisticated and probably old-fashioned, but still worthwhile sense of the term: an explanation that related visible phenomenon with its social context, whatever structural or processual.⁶ Sociology in this sense is readiness and ability to apply the sociological imagination, although defined in a broad way, as it does not necessarily aim at explaining social condition of individual (Mills 2000: 5–15). Obviously, there are brilliant examples of this approach in works of scholars from various branches of social science, such as already mentioned works of a historian Miroslav Hroch's (1999a) or an anthropologist Catherine Verdery (2003). Still, in my paper I am going to look for the sociological research tradition in the works of professional sociologists only.

In order to describe the sociological tradition of Polish and Czech memory research I have to identify theoretical perspectives and approaches they favored. To do so, I must start with at least provisional catalog of available types of theories. There are typologies of sociological theory, such as the Randall Collins's (1994) concept of the four sociological traditions: the conflict, the Durkheimian, the microinteractionist and the rational-utilitarian one. Unfortunately, they are rather arbitrary and hard to apply to the specific research agenda of the social dimension of memory. Therefore, instead of using ready-made typologies I have decided to enumerate approaches that were at hand and potentially feasible for the subject area at the actual time of the research.

Probably the most obvious instrument of theory classification was, at least for older generation of sociologists, the juxtaposition between the conflict, coercion-oriented and the organicist-functional, consent seeking theoretical tradition (cf. Dahrendorf 1958). When the Polish research was starting, the dominant theory in Central-Eastern Europe was Marxism, theoretically the quintessence of conflict tradition. The author of the motto of this paper, Barrington Moore, made some use of the Marxist-Weberian version of the conflict approach, which explained social phenomena by connecting them to some factual, not necessarily material interests. For a long time scholars concentrated on macro-level interests, such as class or political faction interests, but in the last few decades they have turned their attention to more specific interests of individual or collective actors within particular social settings. This have caused the reorientation of research practice towards the analysis of factual interests as shaped by particular institutional settings, and consequently towards more detailed case studies. Used this way, the conflict approach merges with the institutional explanations. Definitely, the conflict theory was a viable solution for social memory research. Nonetheless, the most probable choice for Polish sociologist of Nina Assorodobraj-Kula time was structural functionalism (cf. Kurczewska 2006: 120)—her own paper placed the memory issue within the context of modernization and/or historical sociology, at that period explored by eminent functionalists, such as Neil Smelser or Samuel Eisenstadt (Smith 1991: 14–17).

⁶ I am aware of justified criticism towards the polarity of the ideal (mental, knowledge) versus the social (structural, interests) (cf. Latour 2005: 1–17), and I resort to it only to bring up the issue of going beyond the former phenomena.

It is not enough to juxtapose the conflict and the functional tradition to catalog possible choices of Polish and Czech memory students, as at least two other perspectives have been potentially useful and do not fit into the opposition between the coercion and the consent-based social theories. Barrington Moore himself exemplifies another sociological approach *per se* which was available to Polish and Czech scholars—the institutional approach. His own analysis of the Indian caste system was the study of persisting institutional settings that supported it (Moore 1993: 334–341). All the above mentioned theories involved macrosocial perspective, even though the microinstitutionalist perspective might be feasible option for case studies. The interest in biographical research suggests that for some scholars the microinteractionist tradition, another one that escapes the opposition between coercion and consent, and which was becoming increasingly popular in the 1970s, could be the most suitable solution.

An attempt to identify the perspective favored by Polish and Czech scholars gives embarrassing results. If Assorodobraj-Kula's paper was to be treated as a cornerstone of a new research branch, it would entail various perspectives, most probably functionalist and/or institutionalist, as the main author interest was the change of memory contents in the situation of substantial societal change, such as modernization process. What actually followed was a series of studies that gave up any such analysis. Instead, they aimed at collecting individual opinions, and the social context was taken into the consideration only as social background that differentiated individuals. The first attempt to deal with it in any way was Anna Sawisz's (1990) not entirely successful attempt to use Bourdieu's concept of the field, which in principle combines the institutionalist with the conflict perspective. Studies based on biographical interviews concentrated on the structures of life stories, or were just telling about the past events as remembered by respondents. Paying little if any attention to social context of their biographies they did not need to employ any interactionist theory at all. What is interesting, even distinguished theorists who decided to write papers on memory gave up their theoretical apparatuses and opted for descriptive-empiricist literary convention coupled with normative approach (Ziółkowski 2001, Hałas 2001).

This state of affairs changed only in the second half of the first decade of the 21st century, when a new group of scholars appeared. They did not hesitate to explore the relationship between forms and contents of social memory and their social contexts. Lech Nijakowski's (2007) study on commemorative objects as elements that organize symbolic order of ethnic groups belonged to what Collins would call the Durkheimian tradition (in a distant sense—the functionalist one). A promising direction has been the institutional analysis, which might take form of case studies of social institutions that create and sustain memories—from friend and family circles to public bureaucracy. Perhaps the best example of a full-fledged historical institutional study was Joanna Wawrzyniak's book on the Polish Communist veteran association (ZBoWiD). Examples of fragmentary analyses of this kind might be found in other books and papers, such as a historical part of Lech Nijakowski's scrutiny of Polish memory politics, Barbara Szacka's (2006: 46–66) study on memory transmission forms or Andrzej Szpociński's work on memory forms and social communication (2006). Both Szacka

and Szpociński attempted to reconstruct functioning of social memory using basically information collected by the survey research as well as—in the case of the latter—of the data collected by the Łódź sociologists who used narrative autobiographical interviews as their main source. Unfortunately, institutional analysis requires detailed information about institutional actors, while material produced by surveys, focuses (when used as a source of data on individual views and attitudes) or even narrative interviews is evidently insufficient for such approach and may serve at best as secondary data.

Noteworthy are not only theories which were used by Polish and Czech scholars as instruments used to cope with memory, but also those which were ignored. The most striking feature of their writings was a lack of interest in the conflict approach. Already in the time of the Communist rule Polish and to a much lesser extent Czech elites were divided by their different visions of national history, and the public sphere was an arena of reoccurring disputes about the past and the character of public cultural memory. Moreover, political cultural memory was, or at least used to be the source of a fundamental sociopolitical cleavage in Poland—a fact acknowledged by political sociologists in the first half of the first decade of the 21st century (Grabowska 2004). Cultural memory served as an instrument of both political propaganda and policies aiming at symbolical (sometimes real) exclusion of various categories of people and political groupings. For most Polish scholars all this was not an integral aspect of cultural memory, but only a pathological phenomenon that should be eventually eradicated, or at least alleviated (Szacka 2006: 57–58, Nijakowski 2008: 251–257). Papers and books that dealt with this issue appeared only as a reaction against a new wave of right-wing politics of memory, dealing with selected aspects and consequences of it (Nijakowski 2008, Ostolski 2009, Żychlińska 2009). There was no attempt to present the conflict about public cultural memory as a structural feature and/or an instrument of political domination, let alone explaining it by the participants' interests, overt or hidden.

Notable is the lack of consideration for the economic dimension of memory—neither compensations paid for the Second World War losses and traumas, nor the property restitutions were taken into account as vital interests of certain groups and institutional actors. As for politics, there were at least partisan writings, but the economic aspect was simply left out, and did not appear in sociological memory research at all. Needless to say, it was overlooked even by socioeconomical transformation analyses (for overview of Polish research cf. Kolasa-Nowak 2010).

There is no place here to examine the reasons why such a crucial, long lasting phenomenon as the conflict between different public memories and the fact that they were interrelated with configurations of particular, political and economic interests, was carefully evaded by Polish and Czech scholars for so long. Nonetheless, it is possible to post at least some hypotheses. The most obvious one is that it happened so due to political correctness, especially because the issues in question were widely considered a justified claim for moral and/or material compensation. This type of topics was rarely central to Western social science, which could not serve as an inspiration. Still, at least in Poland the inability to conceptualize conflict resulted probably from an

underlying, tacit concept of social memory and its bearers. Even though older memory research was not guided by any sophisticated sociological theory, it necessarily based on some rudimentary sociological assumptions. It seems that methodological individualism did not imply individualist social theory, and most Polish authors, and at least those who represented the first generation of Polish memory research, were influenced by a form of an organicist model of society as a community of shared (in literal sense of the word) memory. The very terms “collective memory” used by Szacka and her cooperatives, or “memory community” suggest grass root and organic character (Nijakowski 2008: 145–148) of what could be otherwise called an arena of memory production, propaganda and reception. This may be also suggested by texts dealing with the extreme ideological conflict of the late Communist period. They did not present it as an intrinsic aspect of the social life, but attempted to set it aside by excluding the Communist power elite and their historical propaganda from the society, as if the latter had its own inherent vision of history that should be described in different terms (Sawisz 1990, Kwiatkowski 2010b: 12–25). This perspective resembles the tacit ideology of Solidarity movement, and it seems that the organic society was in fact nation (Kowalski: 54–67, 112–121, cf. Kiliński 2010). Unfortunately, this leads a paradox typical for both nationalism and the Polish politics of memory: nation is a natural community of memory, but requires administrative measures to wipe out most of conflicting projects of history (and to exclude their bearers from the memory community) in the name of the only proper, organic one.

Conclusions:

Tradition of Survey Research and the Need for Sociology of Memory

Polish sociologists led by Nina Assorodobraj-Kula and subsequently by Barbara Szacka were pioneers in systematic social memory research. They managed to gather substantial amount of data from systematic survey research on historical consciousness that enabled them to map out what may be called historical depository of Polish society—views, beliefs and opinions of various sectors of population that was influenced by public cultural memories, including the official narratives on national history as spread by politician and bureaucrats. In the time of the Communist rule such research supplemented public opinion that was partly blocked, and partly unable to be articulated. This was perceived as a part of the sociologist’s role and was a piece of public sociology. Similar ambitions did not disappear altogether and many scholars, especially those who deal with autobiographical material, make themselves spokespersons of minority group memories. The pioneering character of Polish research caused the lack of appropriate theoretical apparatus, which consequently resulted in a methodological survey monoculture and excessive methodological individualism. The most striking is the fact that although the conflict between bearers of different versions of cultural, especially political memory was permanent in Poland, it was almost ignored by sociologists. Paradoxically, sociological memory research was not ready to deal with institutional infrastructure or economic and political interests that influenced it.

Therefore, although there was a certain tradition of memory research among Polish sociologists, their studies involved selected methods of sociological research only, first and foremost survey, later also biographical research based on interviews. Instead sociological analysis they concentrated on data collection and processing. This seems to have changed to some extent since the middle of the first decade of the 21st century. From that moment on memory has achieved exceptional popularity as a research field, which has contributed to broadening its scope and a shift from data processing to analysis. Although social memory studies embrace new perspectives and instruments, it seems that there is a need for sociology as the only instrument that shall eventually enable to link memory and its social context. Notwithstanding, such research needs not be necessarily named “sociological” and sociologists are not the only scholars able to do it.

At the time of the Communist rule Polish sociology served as a role model for Czech scholars, but when the Polish research results were published, it was impossible to do any similar inquiry in Czechoslovakia. Still, some local research was done in moments of relative liberty, and recently a study similar to Polish works has been done. Although the Czech authors do not indicate this in their citations, there is a factual affinity between the research in the two countries—possibly the result of familiarity with Polish literature and direct contacts with the Poles. Unfortunately, following the Polish memory research tradition the Czech team has adhered to an approach that concentrated solely on data collection, which seems obsolete outside its original context and the role of public sociology. Still, only the preliminary results have been published and it is still possible that the Czech research team will decide to take a step towards genuine sociological analysis, just as part of Polish sociologists did a few years ago.

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Biographical Note: Jarosław Kiliás, (Ph.D.), works at the Institute of Sociology, University of Warsaw. His main research field is the history of Polish and Czech sociology; he is also interested in social memory studies, historical and military sociology. His publications include, among others, books *Wspólnota abstrakcyjna. Zarys socjologii narodu* (Abstract Community. An Outline of a Theory of the Nation, Warszawa: IFiS PAN 2004) and *Jak socjologowie opowiadali o socjologii. Dwa studia* (How Sociologists were Telling about Sociology, Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego 2012), as well as numerous papers in Polish, Czech and English-language academic journals.

E-mail: kiliás@chello.pl