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History in the Service of the Authorities – Transformations of the Official Image of the Occupation in Łódź in the Time of the People's Republic of Poland. A Study of the Local Politics of Memory

ABSTRACT

Keywords: politics of memory, People's Republic of Poland, Łódź, World War II

The presented dissertation addresses the issue of politics of memory understood as an attempt of a top-down management of collective memory. The subject of the analysis, however, has been significantly narrowed in terms of both the time and the topic, since the basic objective of this paper is to trace the crucial initiatives undertaken officially in the PRP to construct a coherent and clear message on the history of the Second World War in Łódź. In short, we are thus interested in how the communist authorities dealt with the problem of managing the memory of German occupation in a place like Łódź, with its past so difficult to interpret unequivocally. The preliminary assessment of the source materials led to the selection of three key issues, which appeared to be prominent in the assumed research spectrum, i.e. the so-called 'Związek Promienistych', the labor camp for children at Przemysłowa Street and the Łódź ghetto. Those three motifs were strongly interlocked, which enabled an attempt to construct a three-dimensional model of the phenomenon described in this dissertation.

Since we are above all interested in the issue of the communist politics of memory in Łódź, it is only natural that the time frame is confined to between 1945 and 1989. The term 'People's Republic of Poland', mentioned in the title, has been treated symbolically to define that period, even though that name of the ruling system in Poland was created only in 1952.

The number of publications concerning the broadly understood research into memory, including the politics of memory, has been growing fast in Poland. From among many essential works related to the research field indicated above, only a few have been used for the purpose of this paper basing on the assumption that the subject of the dissertation is solely a chosen aspect of a definitely broader research problem. The findings of sociologists, historians and culture studies specialists, included in the works of Barbara Szacka, Aleida Assmann, Bartosz Korzeniewski, Andrzej Szpociński, Lech M. Nijakowski, Michał Łuczewski, Ann Wolff-Powęska, Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska, Robert Traba, Dorota Malczewska-Pawelec, Tomasz Pawelec, Rafał Stobiecki and others, which have been extensively discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, were

extremely important when defining the subject of research.

This dissertation consists of five chapters. The first one presents a theoretical framework of the discussed analyses and provides a synthetic description of analytical categories such as collective memory and politics of memory. The second chapter is an attempt to outline the institutional aspect of the investigated phenomenon. Among several subjects, which in the time of the People's Republic of Poland were responsible for the shape of the collective memory of the Second World War, the main focus is directed towards the analysis of the role and significance of the Łódź branch of Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację ('The Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy').

The subsequent three chapters collectively constitute the basic analytical part of the dissertation. Chapter three contains an analysis of the central motif of the officially constructed message on WWII, i.e. the narrative on the underground structures of the communist party in Łódź, the emanation of which were the 'Promieniści'. In the fourth chapter, the main issue under research – the problem of the utilization of national threads in the story of the occupation – was presented through a reference to the labor camp for youth and children organized by the occupational authorities of the city in 1942 in Przemysłowa Street.

The fifth and last chapter deals with the problem of the deepening marginalisation of the topic of the Łódź ghetto and the annihilation of its prisoners within the official narrative on the German occupation in Łódź during the WWII. In the proposed arrangement of the dissertation, this chapter is supposed to present one of the consequences of the politics of memory implemented by the authorities and described in the previous chapters. The ending contains a summary of the main elements of the analysis in its two basic aspects, i.e. institutional and concerning certain operations on the three motifs of the communist policy on historical memory: the 'Promieniści', the labor camp at Przemysłowa Street and the Łódź ghetto.

Source materials created by institutions such as the local branch of the Polish Workers' Party (PPR) and Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR), the Regional Board of ZBoWiD in Łódź as well as its central authorities, the Regional and Main Commission for the Investigation of Nazi Crimes in Poland or Wydawnictwo Łódzkie (a local publishing house) were used for the purposes of this dissertation. Film materials and the accompanying archive documentation managed by Wytwórnia Filmów Oświatowych (Educational Film Production Company) in Łódź and Filmoteka Narodowa (National Film Archive) were also analysed.

Simultaneously with the strictly archival research, a query of press materials and non-serial publications was conducted. The investigation of press materials was focused on the analysis of local titles, particularly 'Głos Robotniczy', which had been an official daily newspaper of the Łódź branch of the communist party. A few nationwide titles, such as 'Trybuna Ludu' or 'Za Wolność i

Lud' and regional press from other parts of the country were also included in the description of some key issues. Library research also included texts about Łódź under occupation published in specialist magazines such as 'Biuletyn Żydowskiego Instytutu Historycznego', 'Przegląd Lekarski' or 'Rocznik Łódzki'.

Finally, the research included non-serial publications published in the People's Republic of Poland, which despite the variety of types – from fiction and memoirs to scientific works – contained certain interpretations of the wartime past of Łódź. It should be noted here that a large group of those publications have a double status, so to say; they provide a testimony of the phenomenon we are interested in, i.e. formatting of the official memory, and at the same time constitute a basic source of information about the fate of Łódź residents under occupation. That group also includes source materials published in the People's Republic of Poland, concerning, for example, the history of the Łódź ghetto.

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