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Katyń Anniversaries in 1990–2010. The Position and Functions of Political Ritual in the Polish Culture of Remembrance. Research Report¹

Abstract: The main goal of the research is to show the functional dimension of the political rituals associated with the celebrations of the Katyń massacre anniversaries in 1990–2010. Using the method of political linguistics, the study makes it possible to identify ten topoi organizing the Katyń anniversary discourse. They include the topos of “an innocent victim”, “violated justice”, “compensation”, “fair Russians”, “friends Muscovites”, “elite”, as well as the topos of “a shared field of remembrance, reconciliation” (“from foes to friends”), the topos of mutual forgiveness and the anniversary as a special occasion, or the topos of “inhuman land”. The pragmatic-semantic analysis of the contents of media reports accompanying the Katyń celebrations allows the author to show a number of functions that the Katyń ritual performed in the Polish culture of remembrance in 1990–2010. The study of functions proceeds from emotional, through normative, legitimization, integration and educational functions, to the performative function.

Key words: political ritual, anniversary rhetoric, political linguistics, Katyń massacre crime anniversary

In the contemporary world, the use of collective memory is one of the means of exercising political power. Commemorative rituals – one of the instruments of policy on history – allow the recipient to experience the past in a way that conforms to the interpretation created by authority.

The main objective of the research conducted was to show the functional dimension of political rituals related to the 1990–2010 commemo-

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rations of anniversaries of the massacre committed by the NKVD (Narodnyy Komissariat Vnutrennikh Del – People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) on Polish army officers in April 1940. The subject touches upon a matter that is vital not only for the Polish culture of remembrance but also for Polish politics, both in its domestic and foreign dimensions. In the literature on the politics of memory and Polish-Russian relations, the thesis is repeated that the Katyń massacre and controversies associated with it are a factor that has significance for Polish-Russian relations, and at the same time constitutes one of the “major topics” of national history that is important for Polish identity.² Commemoration of the tragic events did not exist in the official anniversary calendar at first, and its unofficial form was associated, among others, with the symbolic de-legitimization of the communist political system in Poland. The state ritual associated with Katyń belongs to events that appeared in the official memory after 1989, and since then remembrance of the Katyń crime has functioned in a completely different way than before. Therefore, it is worth tracking the changes the commemorative ritual has undergone in the conditions of a democratic state.

Research questions and hypotheses

The analysis conducted attempted to find answers to the main research question which is: what is the position and the functions of the Katyń anniversaries in the Polish culture of remembrance in 1990–2010?

The study undertaken required the formulation of the following supporting questions to the main one:

- What were the outcomes of “liberating” the memory of Katyń after 1989?
- Did the political rituals associated with the Katyń anniversary reflect the state of Polish-Russian relations?
- How did the anniversary commemoration and the accompanying discourse influence the way of political communication?
- Were the Katyń commemorations used to serve current political goals in 1990–2010?

² A reservation has to be made here that the adopted research perspective concentrates on the analysis of discourse around the anniversaries of the Katyń crime. It was not my aim to study the reception of the ceremony among its participants.

At the preliminary stage of research, the following research hypotheses were formulated:

- Hypothesis 1. Liberation of the remembrance of the Katyń crime was associated with such phenomena as memory conflict and victim rivalry.
- Hypothesis 2. Together with the 1989 breakthrough, the Katyń anniversary appeared in the official anniversaries calendar, and its commemorations reflected the state of the Polish-Russian relations.
- Hypothesis 3. The discursive practice accompanying the Katyń commemorations reproduced certain permanent argumentative structures called *topoi*, thus consolidating culturally and historically established patterns of thought.
- Hypothesis 4. In the anniversary rituals, the past played the role of a political factor, and the way it was used depended on immediate particular interests.

Time frame

The temporal range of the study covered the years 1990–2010, although for the reconstruction of the broadly understood context the time frame may have been slightly exceeded. The selection of the lower time limit was dictated by the importance of the redefinitions that took place in the Polish politics of memory, together with the change of political system. In 1944–1989, when the Polish collective memory functioned in the conditions of an undemocratic state, the Polish politics of memory – expressed in official rituals and the narration on the Second World War that accompanied them – was mainly limited to the subject of Nazi crimes, whereas the Katyń anniversary ritual was limited to the individual and family sphere of memory. It was an expression of resistance to Soviet domination. The social and political changes which took place in Central and Eastern Europe in 1989 gave an impulse for issues associated with the martyrdom of Poles in the East to appear more broadly in the public discourse. This also became part of the global trend of including various visions of the past in the circulation of official memory. Singling this date out and making it an axis of division is associated with the change that was brought about in the way of remembering and commemorating the Katyń anniversary in the public space. Together with the change in the holiday calendar and the “liberation” of memory of the Katyń events, the remembrance of this experience was included in the mainstream of obser-

vances and state narration, and the contents of the memory present in the state rites became a reflection of the memories of individuals, families, the memories of Katyń widows and orphans. After years of taboo and maintaining the Katyń lie, it was this event that became a symbol of the accumulation of national emotions. On the other hand, the dividing line closing the research period – 2010 – is associated with the emergence of a new element in the Polish political ritual which appeared after the crash of the plane carrying members of the Polish political elite near Smoleńsk on April 10 that year. Since then, Katyń and its commemoration have been closely connected to the Smoleńsk events. A new phase of Katyń rituals has begun. They have become associated with the tragic events of April 10, 2010, and with the accompanying commemorations of the Smoleńsk crash, and its so-called “month-iversaries.”³ Between the opening and closing temporal limits of the study, there are three full anniversaries of the Katyń crime (50th, 60th and 70th) whose commemorations took place in a different political context. The redefinitions occurring in this twenty-year period require the perspective of political science in a research area which still offers a significant investigation potential.

Source materials

At the conceptual stage, material for analysis was chosen that included press releases and commentaries accompanying the commemorations of Katyń published in newspapers and magazines, i.e. in dailies: *Gazeta Wyborcza*, *Nasz Dziennik*, *Rzeczpospolita*, *Trybuna*, *Super Express*, *Fakt* and weeklies: *Polityka*, *Wprost*, *Newsweek Polska*,⁴ as well as in the main TV news reports, *Wiadomości* and *Panorama*, or feature programs in 1990–2010.

In the course of the study, materials on Katyń anniversaries from the April issues of each source were analyzed. The corpus of analyzed texts consisted of 8,331 documents of different length, from press releases of a few sentences to audio visual material transcripts of several pages, which I prepared on the basis of recordings of the commemorations of

³ This new phenomenon in commemorative politics requires separate discussion, nonetheless elements associated with the so-called “second Katyń” present in the public discourse in April 2010, have been included in the study.

⁴ I also used other titles as supporting materials, following the same interpretation principles.

Katyń anniversaries archived in the collection of Polish State Television. The material analyzed included speeches of politicians and sermons of church hierarchs delivered during the official anniversary commemorations, as well as selected testimonies in the media and the political perception of the anniversaries.⁵

Texts selected for analysis had to fulfill the following conditions:

- 1) their subject focused on the anniversary of the Katyń crime;
- 2) they constituted press releases and statements which were part of the discourse delivered by the symbolic elites;
- 3) they were popularized by the media in the period from March 5 to the end of April in a given year.⁶

Part of the texts includes speeches taken from the state commemorations in the indicated period. Resolutions of the Sejm and the Senate associated with the commemorations of the Katyń massacre were also used.

Research methodology

Research was conducted using both the genetic explanation method and, most of all, the discourse analysis method. The genetic explanation method was helpful in presenting the context of “liberating the memory” of the Katyń crime and the genesis of the Katyń ritual, which moved from the area of private memory and grass-roots commemorations to the area of state remembrance. Public discourse analysis, rooted in constructivism, proved to be the most appropriate method of diagnosing the political rituals accompanying the commemorations of the Katyń anniversaries in 1990–2010. For example, the contents of the TASS communiqué (which was published during the 50th anniversary of the massacre and included information on the NKVD being responsible for it) and the commentaries that accompanied it were analyzed using tools belonging to the sphere of linguistic pragmatics (Austin, 1993; Grice, 1980, pp. 91–114; Levinson, 2010; Searl, 1987).

⁵ Part of the source texts was acquired during traditional research of library holdings and archives of Polish State Television. Others (from 2005 to 2010) come from resources gathered by Press-Service Monitoring Mediów. Access to those was possible owing to the financing provided under the National Science Centre research project entitled *Rytuał polityczny w polskiej kulturze pamięci*, NCN UMO-2012/05/N/HS5/01621.

⁶ 1995 is an exception. It was proclaimed the Year of Katyń and state commemorations of the 55th anniversary of the massacre were held from January to September. Therefore, materials from the whole period were analyzed.

These proved helpful in finding answers to the research question concerning the circumstances of “liberating” the remembrance of Katyń.

Research of a phenomenon as complex as the anniversary ritual was conducted at three levels: narration, semiotics and pragmatics. All the three levels interpenetrate one another. It is necessary to draw attention to each of them, however, as it is difficult to explicitly show the connection to one of these levels in the course of analysis. Symbolic elements may occur not only in the material dimension of the ritual (gestures or objects), but also in the textual sphere (for example symbolic inference). Paul Ricoeur drew attention to the importance of narration in the perception of reality; he called it a cultural form creating meanings, connecting action with cognitive, ethical and value systems (Ricoeur, 2012, pp. 332–349). He showed that the way of describing and structuring events, and distributing accountability has consequences both at the level of everyday life and at the level of social change. Hayden White,⁷ too, analyzed the influence of narrative structures on the ordering of the historical imagination. He drew attention to the interpretation of historical events and, thus, also myths. Historical events which deeply move the collective consciousness become myths. The Katyń massacre ranks among such experiences. This myth, however, has not been adequately described, since, so far, focus has been placed mainly on describing the facts. Therefore, it has constituted a very important element of the Katyń rituals, which have created an opportunity to renew this myth every time.

The technical part of the analysis of the narrative conducted was interesting, involving isolating textual ingredients (Stalmaszczyk, Cap, 2014), namely who uses a given linguistic form, how, why and when it is used. What was the purpose of creating the text? Press releases concerning the Katyń ritual were analyzed at this level of the study. Examination of the narrative, tracking the political actors’ engagement in the anniversary ritual in connection with the extended reconstruction of the social context (balance of political power, events on the political scene, and election calendar) made it possible to look for an answer to the research question. The following pragmatic elements were taken into consideration: ideological threads appearing in public statements, the cultural and axiological resources to which political actors refer and which are enabled by a given utterance. In Poland, such channels of communication as Catholic religious services are of high importance.

⁷ Review of different researchers’ positions on narration, apart from P. Ricoeur, *op. cit.*; see also e.g. J. Topolski (2008) and K. Rosner (2006).

Additionally, in the analysis of the course of public debates, I also used the conceptual framework developed under the concept of “social drama” by Marek Czyżewski, who recognizes two communication mechanisms orientated towards the translatability of perspectives, namely agreement and ceremony, and two mechanisms where the translatability of perspectives is questioned, namely social drama and ritual chaos.⁸ Application of this concept allowed public debate to be characterized and contributed to the attempt at formulating an answer to the research question referring to the way in which anniversary commemorations and the debates that accompany them influenced the quality of political life and the way of political communication.

Theories of cultural trauma developed by such researchers as Dominick LaCapra (LaCapra, 2010), Cathy Caruth (Caruth, 2015), Piotr Sztompka (Sztompka, 2003, pp. 92–111) and Jeffrey C. Alexander (Alexander, 2010, pp. 193–221) were used in the part of the dissertation concerning the function of the Katyń rituals.

Terminological decisions indispensable for the operationalization of terms used in the study, such as culture of remembrance, politics of memory or policy towards memory constituted an inseparable part of the study preceding the discourse analysis. The Polish culture of remembrance, closely related to political culture, has been characterized as being anti-system, endangered, and active, since the state rituals of remembrance were examples of commemoration in Polish history that aroused mistrust and were treated as something imposed from outside, whereas the unofficial practice of remembrance was anti-government and anti-system in its meaning. Thus, apart from the official memory, the holiday calendar in the times of communist Poland included many threads of “counter-memory.” Because of lack of access to other means of expressing opinions, rituals of remembrance were vital forms of political participation. As the sociologist Barbara Szacka puts it: “The cultivating [of Katyń remembrance] itself constituted a form of resistance” (Szacka, 2006, p. 56). After the political system’s transformation, the way of conveying memory changed. Katyń moved from “grass-roots” commemorations to the resources of official memory created by the broadly understood authorities, first of all state authorities. The genesis of the endangered, cursed memory goes

⁸ For more information on “agreement”, “ceremony”, “social drama” and “ritual chaos” see M. Czyżewski, *W stronę teorii dyskursu*, in: *Rytualny chaos. Studium dyskursu publicznego*, eds. M. Czyżewski, S. Kowalski, A. Piotrowski, Warszawa 2010, pp. 92–111.

back to the period of the partitions of Poland. When discussing modern technologies sustaining collective memory, Marcin Napiórkowski emphasizes that historic events which were banned, cursed, and absent are particularly attractive (Napiórkowski, 2016, p. 34). In turn, “active” memory forms a response to the “endangered” memory, and the core of the Polish culture of remembrance becomes then an obligation towards the dead to remember and execute their testament. The political communion of the living and the dead has existed in the collective universe since the times of the ritual called “Dziady.” As Kosiński wrote in *Przegląd Polityczny*: “The remembrance of the dead – *Dziady* – was the holiday of ancestors, and the pagan active memory was transformed by Mickiewicz into the Catholic statement: ‘If I forget about them, You, God in Heaven, forget about me’” (Kosiński, 2011, p. 36).

In his interview for *Tygodnik Powszechny*, Kosiński elaborated on this thought, adding that “[a]ctive memory’ consists not only of visiting graves and lighting candles. It consists of striving to transform Poland in a way that will make the vision promoted by the dead person come true” (Kuźminski, 2011, p. 13).

Course of research and conclusions

In the course of the research, the genesis of the Katyń ritual was recreated from the first commemorations used by Soviet propaganda in 1944, through the time when Katyń commemorations were a ritual aimed against the official state memory, to the official April commemorations in 1990 organized before the TASS communiqué stating that the NKVD had been responsible for the Katyń massacre.

An extensive analysis of the source materials commenting on the TASS announcement⁹ which were published in the Polish media in April 1990, constitutes a vital part of the study. The theory of speech acts, by John Austin and the continuators of his ideas, was used for this purpose. Its goal was to show *locutions* and *perlocutions* of the speech act constituting this announcement. Discussion of the *perlocutions*, or the results of a speech act, made it possible to show the outcomes of “liberating” the memory of the Katyń massacre. The observations made in the course of the analysis

⁹ The time of publication of the TASS communiqué, including information on NKVD’s accountability for the Katyń crime, was chosen in such a way that it coincided with its 50th anniversary.

made it possible to answer the supporting detailed question “**What were the results of ‘liberating’ the memory of the Katyń crime after 1989?**”. The analysis of the first official April commemorations of 1990 organized before the TASS communiqué made it possible to determine that the commemorations were accompanied by a special context that influenced their character. In the light of the conducted analysis, the research hypothesis based on the speculation that, together with the 1989 breakthrough, the anniversary of the Katyń crime became part of the calendar of officially celebrated anniversaries has been found incorrect, since the changes in the political system themselves were not connected with the explicit transition of the Katyń ritual to the sphere of official remembrance. The fact that the USSR did not plead guilty resulted in the commemorations, though a *novelty* in the Polish calendar of state commemorations, being at the same time conservative in character. In the sphere of both preparations and execution of the ritual, the Polish authorities did not try to annoy the authorities of the USSR. An event was organized on April 1 which in its name included the commemoration of the victims of the Second World War, and during the commemoration, the victims of Katyń were mentioned alternately with other victims of the Second World War. The results of the research confirmed the hypothesis assuming that the liberation of the memory of Katyń was associated with a conflict of memory.

The conflict of memory that became revealed then was related to the fact that the circle of Katyń victims’ families did not agree to the concept of commemorations in which Katyń victims were combined with other victims of the Second World War. However, the opposition concerning this matter was limited only to the Katyń families. There was no public discussion on the commemoration of Katyń victims. After years of driving the injustice out from the collective memory and suppressing all forms of its commemoration, it was a natural need to articulate it and to bewail the loss as a community, in the public space. The commemoration organized in this way did not bring closure to the mourning, which is shown by threads diagnosed in the discourse accompanying the subsequent commemorations. Thus, if the Katyń ritual is to be examined in the context of social drama according to V. Turner and A. van Gennep, the threshold/liminal moment in the memory conflict between the victims and the perpetrators seems to be the day of the TASS communiqué confirming Soviet accountability for the Katyń massacre. A rite of passage is characterized by the fact that in its course there exists a liminal, threshold phase between two identities. For a certain time, the status of a community is suspended between the old and the new role,

until – owing to a ritual – an inclusion back into the community eventually occurs, though with a changed status. In the case of the Katyń ritual, there were various obstacles that made it difficult for it to play the role of a “rite of passage.” Neither the commemorations at the beginning of April 1990 in an already changed political reality, nor the TASS communiqué of April 12 that year finished the process of grief. This was manifested in the fact that the collective entity – which seems to emerge in the course of the analysis – “got stuck” as it were in the liminal phase, and because of the Soviets, and later Russians not taking full responsibility for Katyń, it recreated the traumatic experiences from the past.¹⁰ If the communiqué had been an effective speech act fulfilling the conditions specified by Grice, it would have had a chance of triggering the mechanisms that would have helped to finally process the traumatic past of tensions between victim and the perpetrator. However, that did not happen. After the enthusiastic words: “They pleaded guilty” on the first page of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, texts started to appear showing significant deficiencies in the Soviets recognition of their guilt.

The most noticeable outcome of the TASS communiqué was the inclusion of the Katyń massacre commemoration in the official commemorations calendar. This was particularly visible in the large-scale commemorations of Katyń Year, 1995, the year of the 55th anniversary of the massacre. The year-round commemorations aimed to do justice, so to speak, to the 1990 ceremony that had taken place in a special context. However, another outcome was the feeling of dissatisfaction provoked in the recipients of the communiqué, by its contents and the manner of its publication, as well as by the waiting for further moves from the Soviet authorities. It turned out that the feeling of dissatisfaction, and the expectations associated with the manner of announcing the perpetrators of the Katyń massacre were repeated in the public discourse on the occasion of the following anniversaries. The results of the analysis of the anniversary discourse confirm that the liberation of the memory of the Katyń crime did not bring about the end of mourning, and the main threads present in the 1990 discourse appeared in numerous perseverations till 2010.

Analysis of source material with regard to the presence of rhetorical figures referring to *topoi*, or literally “places,” from which argumentation is obtained, provided the answer to the research question “**Did the po-**

¹⁰ The ensuing, not fully successful, attempts to “send the dead to the hereafter” and come to terms with the loss took place in Katyń Year 1995, on the occasion of the burial of the generals murdered in Katyń. However, these commemorations were eventually held without the participation of the Polish delegation.

litical rituals associated with the Katyń anniversary reflect the state of Polish-Russian relations?”. In this perspective, the study focused around revealing the mechanism of giving meaning to certain elements of discourse, which made it possible to observe the main threads that constituted it. There were ten topoi organizing the Katyń anniversary discourse. They included: the topos of “an innocent victim,” “violated justice,” “compensation,” “fair Russians, friends Muscovites” and “elite,” as well as the topos of “a shared field of remembrance, reconciliation (from foes to friends)”, the topos of “mutual forgiveness” and “the anniversary as a special occasion” or the topos of an “inhuman land.”

The memory of the Katyń crime and the so-called Katyń lie is still a burden on Polish-Russian relations, as manifested by the evidence of the regularity, unchangeability and specific “stagnation of meanings” (Janion, 1980, p. 10) of the topoi present in the anniversary discourse, starting from the “liberation” of the Katyń memory in the TASS communiqué, to 2010. The topoi used are stable, despite the time-span between publications of individual articles and programs. The anniversary discourse was not a simple reflection of current events in the mutual relations, but it also related to domestic affairs and problems in both countries. For instance, in Poland, the topos of “an anniversary as a special occasion” was often perceived as a chance to obtain new information or documents concerning the massacre or an opportunity to improve mutual relations, while it was used according to the current needs of domestic politics on the other side. The revealing, or promises of revealing, Katyń documents “just before the commemorations” may serve as an example. The outcome of analyzing the contents of the discourse accompanying Katyń anniversaries was a positive verification of the hypothesis concerning the state of Polish-Russian relations being reflected in the Katyń rituals organized in 1990–2010.

In order to find answers to the research question concerning **the way in which the Katyń anniversary commemorations and accompanying debates influenced the means of political communication**, I also referred to the topoi organizing Katyń anniversary narrations. Thanks to the analysis of the topoi, the mechanisms revealed in the anniversary discourse do not count as productive or fostering an alleviation of tensions.

The topoi illustrate key subjects of the Polish discussions of Katyń-related subjects that take place in the periods of the anniversaries of this massacre. The narration proposed during the commemorations of the ritual constituted a tool to impose discourse rules by showing categories that are intellectually and morally right. The annually repeated topoi gave social life

actors conventionalized ways of understanding events and their successful transfer to the next participants of the rite. Receiving at least a part of the message, they could recognize the story to which it refers and “add” the missing elements. The frames of “anniversary discourse” were an instrument that helped to store and multiply the reserves of collective memory. Reinterpretation of topoi was impossible because of their identity and integration function. Thus, the bond was reduced to shared experiences which could replace a matter-of-fact debate. The meaning of the message included in the topoi imposed a perspective of reception, depriving the recipient of the possibility to follow another track, and the compilation of projections and phantasms seemed to satisfy the hunger for knowledge as far as Katyń-related subjects were concerned. The declared meta-communication, connected with the potential ability of discourse to resolve conflict, would in this case be “Agreement is possible but...”, “We forgive but...” Since the communication mechanism was orientated towards the translatability of perspectives, but the orientation was superficial and excessively schematic in character, I would classify the discourse mechanism that accompanied the Katyń commemorations as a case of ceremony.¹¹ Thus, the hypothesis concerning the reproduction of permanent argumentative structures called topoi in the anniversary discourse has been proven.

Furthermore, the merging of state and religious ritual from the first commemorations in 1990 also influenced the language of the debate. Without the analysis of symbols of this language it is impossible to show the phenomenon of anniversaries in the Polish culture of remembrance. The main language was the code drawing on romantic literature and tradition. Remaining in the “romantic paradigm” was immediately taken over by the discourse associated with the commemorations of the Smoleńsk “month-iversaries.”

Answering the last research question: “**Were the Katyń commemorations used to serve current political goals in 1990–2010?**” required analysis of the source materials in the context of theoretical knowledge on the functions of rituals. This made it possible to determine the functions that the Katyń ritual played in the Polish culture of remembrance in 1990–2010. For clarity they were classified as the emotional, normative, legitimization, integration and educational functions, as well as the performative function.

¹¹ For theoretical deliberations on communication and discourse mechanisms: agreement, ceremony, social drama, ritual chaos, see *Rytualny chaos...*, op. cit., pp. 98–104.

Drawing attention to the affective dimension of constructing collective identities and giving high importance to the emotional function resulted from the simple statement that authority benefits from the feelings of others,¹² because holidays and rituals foster engagement in the recipient of political communications. This means that emotions create the basis enabling the performance of all other functions. Hence, the priority given to this function and the amount of space dedicated to it. Politicians participate in rituals which create emotions, because they sense that this not only gives them a bigger chance to win power but is also a convenient tool to manifest, or even exercise power.

Such phenomena as the repetition compulsion, the reduction of fear, or compensation were distinguished as elements of the emotional function. The cultural trauma theory made it possible to discuss the founding myth referred to by politicians in their anniversary speeches and associated with the truth and lies about the Katyń crime. By participating in the Katyń commemorations, the collective entity repeated ritually its attachment to the truth, to putting history straight, to fighting the distortion of history. Assuming that every traumatic experience reactivates earlier, unprocessed, traumatic experiences, the repetition compulsion was related to the trauma caused by the *damnatio memoriae* of the beginnings of Christianity. The properties of a myth constructed in such a way in the Polish historical context make it possible to exploit the myth in discourse as a means of legitimizing power by calling to fight the distortion of history.

The starting point of the discussion of the Katyń massacre as an example of a cultural trauma were the deliberations by Piotr Sztompka who, in his characteristics of trauma, points out that every change is traumatogenic, even if it turns out to be progressive, because it affects society adversely, it entails disorganization and losing balance (Sztompka, 2003, pp. 454–473). It seems justified to use “trauma” as the term for cultural and religious change connected with the introduction of Christianity, because it fulfills the hallmarks of what Sztompka defines as traumatogenic social changes,¹³ which are (1) sudden, (2) broad in scope (they affect

¹² V. Pareto, *The Mind and Society*, after: J. H. Hallowell, *Moralne podstawy demokracji*, Warszawa 1993, p. 13.

¹³ The syndrome of trauma and the syndrome of mistrust (towards public institutions and other citizens), apathy, the feeling of powerlessness, nostalgia for the past, idealizing history and one's past, juxtaposed with today's crisis, the ambience of anxiety, fear, vulnerability to myths and conspiracy theories, moral panic, in more detail *ibid.*, pp. 454–473.

many areas of life simultaneously), (3) deep (they touch on values and/or beliefs that are central for a community), and (4) shocking (Sztompka, 2003, pp. 454–473). Christianization constituted a mental revolution concerning matters crucial for identity: “The revolutionary changes affected all spheres of personal life, as well as social and political reality, which had to bring about serious tensions in all kinds of interactions between individual people and between communities” (Urbańczyk, 2012, p. 231).¹⁴

The proponents of the new religion ensured that the religious change was sudden and shocking. Marcei Kosman presents the dramatic history of the Christianization of Lithuania and Prussia (Kosman, 1981), while Karol Modzelewski describes pagan fears of Christianization and the acts of resistance to it in his book *Barbarian Europe*: “the missionaries demanded that the destruction of sacred places and figures precede collective baptism, and that they be destroyed publicly and in a shocking manner before the gathered crowds of worshippers” (Modzelewski, 2015, p. 372).

Thus, *damnatio memoriae* – apart from the suppression – would also be associated with the type of oblivion described by Frank Ankersmit, the one that constitutes the condition of a new identity. Andrzej Nowak, a historian, writes about the types of oblivion in his last book: “Collective identity is the sum of scars on our ‘collective soul’ left by previous enforced changes of identity. Probably the first such scar in our community history would be the one left by the forced disavowing of paganism in the state of Mieszko and Boleslav” (Nowak, 2019, pp. 529–530).

After the suppression of the traumatic experience, a situation may occur in which the collective entity ritually repeats its attachment to the truth, to putting history straight, to fighting the distortion of history. My findings, preceded by the analysis of the source texts, correspond to the theoretical remarks on the Polish culture of remembrance that is characterized by mistrust towards written history (because for a century it was the version enforced by a foreign power) and by higher recognition for private ritual. Moreover, the memory indicated “others” who wanted to erase or distort the past. That was connected with the occurrence of the categories of injustice and resentment as dominating emotions that can be turned into political mobilization. By participating in the anniversary commemorations, the collective entity repeated ritually its attachment to the truth, to putting history straight, to fighting the distortion of history,

¹⁴ On the effects of Christianization see, pp. 227–293. Research into the trauma of Christianization compare, e.g. J. Olko – NCN research grant, *Trauma, akulturacja i sprawczość. Świat Indian Nahua od szesnastego do dwudziestego pierwszego wieku*.

but was not aware of the real experience causing the need to recreate.¹⁵ Thus, it was susceptible to the mythology.

As I have tried to demonstrate, properties of this myth make it possible for it to be exploited in the discourse of authority as a means of legitimizing power by using the potential of injustice perpetrated on a community, the call to put history straight and to fight its distortion. The narration on Katyń constructed in such a way could serve to build the Smoleńsk narration, where it was used by politicians to construct a semantic boundary between two communities, namely the defenders of the truth and memory, and those who wanted to kill the memory.¹⁶

The reaction to trauma – which could constitute the source of registering it in consciousness, an impulse to look for identity and subjectivity, and thus make it possible to abandon the recreation of the role of victim – did not occur. It was limited to *acting-out*, instead of processing in a discussion or dealing with it by talking. The importance attached to narration in the case of trauma lies in the fact that it helps to give structure to experiences, to better understand them and to increase the sense of control, to become mature emotionally for subjectivity. Meanwhile, in the case of the Polish trauma of *damnatio memoriae*, the lack of contact with the suppressed part of identity resulted in its repetition by dwelling on hypocritical history. The resulting fear and the accompanying need to gather in a community can be used politically. Therefore, the anniversary commemorations also brought a response to the need for security, as they created a conviction of the purposefulness of certain behaviors and the sense of death. The basic sense of the ritual of worshipping the dead also consisted in the symbolic equalizing of the community as a whole.

The anniversary rituals were also a response to the need of the authority who wanted to legitimize itself as a guardian of the remembrance of such an important event, since the legitimization function remains in close relationship with the emotional function. In 1990–2010 the presidents of Poland – Wojciech Jaruzelski, Lech Wałęsa, Aleksander Kwaśniewski,

¹⁵ At the same time, it collectively denied the fact that adoption of Christianity was a traumatic experience, counted the beginning of statehood from this date and celebrated the anniversaries of adopting Christianity.

¹⁶ “Ci, którzy chcieli zabić pamięć, przegrali. Nie udało się (Those who wanted to kill the memory lost. They failed),” said Jarosław Kaczyński, the president of the Law and Justice (PiS) party to the crowd gathered in front of the Presidential Palace on April 10, 2011, after: <https://www.fronda.pl/a/kaczynski-zabojcy-pamieci-przegrali,11759.html>.

and Lech Kaczyński, accompanied by prime ministers – Tadeusz Mazowiecki, Józef Oleksy, Jerzy Buzek, and Donald Tusk as well as many other politicians participated in the commemorations of Katyń anniversaries. It was impossible to refuse to take part in the ritual. The main actors on the political scene also participated actively in telling the Katyń narration. The possible legitimization deficit could be complemented by the shared experiencing of emotions during the ritual.

As part of the consideration of the last – performative – function, the phenomenon known as “the second Katyń” was discussed, which has been present in the anniversary discourse since the crash of the presidential plane on the way to the commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the massacre. The main course of the Smoleńsk narration, as “the second Katyń,” consisted in demanding the historical truth and the division into “us” and “them” as the defenders/forgers of history. Additionally, the narration of the Katyń crime built in the way described above could serve as a matrix to build the Smoleńsk narration using such analogies as: Katyń victims – Smoleńsk victims, Katyń families – Smoleńsk families, Katyń lie – Smoleńsk lie. The term “second Katyń” appeared in the public discourse already on the day of the crash, while “Smoleńsk lie” was a reaction to the air crash investigation report by the Interstate Aviation Committee (MAK) announced by Tatiana Anodina.¹⁷ According to the theory of trauma, the unconscious source of the primary wound returned in the form of a repetition compulsion. This was indicated by the discourse accompanying both the Katyń anniversaries and the first media reactions to the Smoleńsk crash. It did not touch upon subjects like what can be learned from such a traumatic experience as Katyń, but it was a kind of “stiffening” of the same topics.

Thinking in categories of myths is not reserved for ritual, but it becomes particularly active in its course. The examination of the multi-thread discourse around the Katyń anniversary and the analysis of the contents of anniversary statements made it possible to show that the Katyń rituals in 1990–2010 were of interest to politicians representing different sides of the political scene, and the Katyń ritual took up a very important place in the Polish culture of remembrance by performing emotional, legitimization, integration, normative, educational and performative functions. Thus, I have confirmed the hypothesis based on the assumption that

¹⁷ For more details see D. Kosiński (2013), pp. 322–330, where the author analyzes the MAK report as a performative speech act.

the past played the role of a political factor in the anniversary rituals, and the way it was used depended on immediate particular interests.

Power is surrounded by rituals, but those who wield power do not have full control of them. This is because rituals do not work in a simple and unambiguous way, and above all, their effects are strongly contextualized. This characteristic of a ritual makes it a fascinating and important subject of research. Therefore, it is worth reflecting on the ritual dimension of politics. The study conducted under the project discussed merely contributes to the discussion and further reflection on political anniversaries, which are an important element of political life and require constant updating.

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Rocznice katyńskie w latach 1990–2010. Miejsce i funkcje rytuału politycznego w polskiej kulturze pamięci. Komunikat z badań

Streszczenie

Głównym celem tekstu jest ukazanie funkcjonalnego wymiaru rytuałów politycznych związanych z obchodami rocznic zbrodni katyńskiej w latach 1990–2010. Dzięki przeprowadzonej metodą semantyczno-pragmatyczną analizie zawartości treści doniesień medialnych towarzyszących obchodom katyńskim, omówione zostały funkcje, które pełnił rytuał katyński w polskiej kulturze pamięci od 1990 do 2010 roku, takie jak funkcja emocjonalna, normatywna, legitymizacyjna, integracyjna, edukacyjna czy performatywna. Ponadto zaaplikowanie teorii traumy kulturowej umożliwiło analizę mitu założycielskiego, wskazywanego przez polityków w trakcie przemówień rocznicowych, wiążącego się z kłamstwem i prawdą o zbrodni katyńskiej. Zauważony w narracji katyńskiej przymus powtarzania, dotyczący walki z zakłamywaniem historii, odniesiony został do traumy spowodowanej *damnatio memoriae*, związanej z początkami chrześcijaństwa. W kontekście tych spostrzeżeń, w ramach rozważań na temat funkcji performatywnej, przeanalizowane zostało, obecne w dyskursie rocznicowym po katastrofie prezydenckiego samolotu lecącego na obchody 70. rocznicy zbrodni, zjawisko znane jako „drugi Katyń”.

Słowa kluczowe: rytuał polityczny, retoryka rocznicowa, politolingwistyka, rocznica zbrodni katyńskiej