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WHEN THE MNEMONIC ACTORS BECOME STORYTELLERS: THE LORE OF THE 'RECOVERY' IN 1970S POLAND*

Abstract

The article examines the memoirs of Polish soldiers who settled in the lands that Poland acquired after the Second World War, the so-called Recovered Territories. The author argues that these memoirs reflect different forms of conveying the stories about the 'recovery', i.e. the acquisition of the formerly German lands by the Polish state in 1945. Depending on the historical and political context, as well as the personal and collective experiences of the settlers, she identifies its two main forms: myth and lore. The myth involves stories that are considered authoritative and obligatory, while lore is a type of storytelling that involves stories that are considered flexible and optional by the people who tell or listen to them. She further analyses how the myth of the 'recovery' subsequently transformed over time into lore from the immediate post-war period up to the 1970s.

Keywords: Recovered Territories, myth, lore, formerly German lands, Związek Osadników Wojskowych, Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację

INTRODUCTION

When, in the late 1960s, the District of Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy [Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację, hereinafter referred to as the Union] in Koszalin asked its members for

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accounts on 'the formation of the People's government in Central Pomerania and the socio-economic development of this region", one of them sent his three-page-long recollection. This veteran of the Polish Defensive War of 1939 and later a POW and a forced war labourer in Pomerania, informed the readers in a series of short, compact sentences about the consequent events of his stay in Pomerania.[1] Delving into his memoirs allows us to see how the 'recovery' [*odzyskanie*] was narrated in the People's Poland of the 1970s.

The term 'recovery' was used by the Polish authorities and propaganda to describe the process of acquiring and resettling the formerly German lands that were incorporated into Poland after the Second World War. The term implied that these lands were originally Polish but had been lost and Germanized over centuries and that their post-war incorporation into Poland was an act of historical justice. 'Recovery' also suggested a process of healing, as Poland was recovering from the trauma and devastation of the war, and establishing its new identity and borders. The Polish term '*odzyskać*' – to recover – denotes the act of regaining possession or control of something that was lost or restoring something to its previous condition. The official English translation of this term in the context of the post-war resettlement action was precisely 'recovery', as evidenced by the documents from 1946 by the Ministry of the Recovered Territories, or Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych in Polish. It is plausible that the early English translators, who were also researchers working for the Ministry, intentionally chose the word 'recovery' to convey not only the idea of returning to the 'natural' borders of Poland, but also the notion of overcoming a state of 'unnaturalness', meaning being out of place geographically and historically. As such, narration on the 'recovery' was a particular 'memory game' in People's Poland, where "political and social actors see and 'relate to' certain historical events through the prism of how those same actors construct their identities, interests and strategies".[2] What form did it take in the aforementioned veteran's narrative?

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[1] Archiwum Państwowe w Koszalinie [State Archives in Koszalin] (hereinafter: APK), Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację Zarząd Okręgu w Koszalinie, sig. 314, Reports on the formation of the People's government in Central Pomerania and the socio-economic development of this region, 1945–1965, file no. 132, fols 228–30.

[2] Georges Mink and Laure Neumayer (eds), *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe: Memory Games* (Basingstoke, 2013).

The veteran uses the passive voice. Thus, he seems more like a bystander than an active mnemonic actor. The essential role is played by the Red Army: the Soviet soldiers are liberators and exploiters at the same time. By contrast, what the veteran stresses are the hardships he had to bear on his own as a settler, and the cleverness he had to show to survive. His awareness, bordering on certainty, that the region will be Polish, is connected with the effort and toil required to 'Polonise' these territories. Thus, he quickly and unemotionally displaces the Germans, and inhabits an empty locality waiting to be settled without any hassle.

Unlike many others who submitted their memoirs to the Union's call, this veteran did not start the account with an elaborate recollection of his actions during the Second World War. Although the Union's invitation set the beginning of the timeframe at 1945, many of the members focused, sometimes exclusively, on their war stories. This shows the importance of the memory of the war in communist Poland: by stressing their wartime participation, the veterans-memoirists positioned themselves at an appropriate level of the social and political ladder.[3] They wanted to be myth-builders of an important element of the memory landscape rather than mere storytellers, repeating the stories no one needs. Moreover, this focus on the war experience suggests something else: that the post-1945 events, such as expulsion, resettlement, and acquisition of German property, were not as attention-grabbing as the war that preceded them. Even though these events tackled the 'recovery' of territories that constituted one-third of post-war Poland, they did not receive much public attention or recognition. The relevance of the 'recovery' in the public discourse slowly diminished. How come one of the founding blocks of People's Poland changed into an obscure, peripheral element of the politics of memory? In other words, how did the 'recovery', one of the myths of post-war Poland, change over time into lore and what factors, present in the public memory of the Recovered Territories, made that possible?

I would argue that the Treaty of Warsaw signed between the People's Poland and West Germany on 7 December 1970, which, after twenty--five years of uncertainty, finally established the Polish-German border

[3] Joanna Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory. The Politics of the Second World War in Communist Poland* (Frankfurt am Main *et al.*, 2015), 13.

on the rivers of the Oder and Lusatian Neisse, relieved the tension in Polish-German relationship[4] and eventually diminished the role of the 'recovery' in the public discourse. Accordingly, the particular group of mnemonic actors, namely the veterans who settled in the Recovered Territories, were no longer needed as myth-builders who strengthened the Polish rights to the formerly German territories, amplifying the stories that legitimised their Polishness. Instead, they became storytellers, repeating the no-longer-needed tales of lore. Therefore, in my article, I aim to analyse how the myth of the 'recovery' in post-war Poland gradually turned into lore.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

In my analysis, I refer to two forms of conveying a story, i.e. myth and lore. The myth involves stories considered authoritative and obligatory by those who believe in them. Myths are, thus, conveyed by the myth-builders, or *aoidos*, to use the Greek term for the professional myth singers in antiquity. Lore, on the other hand, is a type of storytelling that involves stories that are considered more flexible or even optional by the people who tell or listen to them. The veterans, downgraded in the mainstream narrative from the 1970s onward, when the 'recovery' as such changed from myth into the lore, were no longer the myth-builders, and instead, they became plain storytellers. In turn, applying these concepts allows me to understand the specificity of the form and content of the memoirs, as well as the positionality of their authors in the changing memory landscape of the late People's Poland.

I study this change in memoirs written by one of the memory groups involved in the legitimisation efforts of the People's Poland, namely the members of the Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy at the cusp of a particular turn: in the late 1960s and the 1970s, just before and after the Treaty of Warsaw. This memory group consisted of veterans, POWs, and former Nazi camp prisoners who had been associated with one organisation since 1949. The memoirs of the Union's members concern one specific region

[4] Robert Traba, Rafał Żytyniec, 'Ziemie Odzyskane/utracony Heimat', in Robert Traba and Hans Henning Hahn (eds), *Wyobrażenia przeszłości. Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci* (Warszawa, 2017), 237–59.

of the Polish Recovered Territories, namely Central Pomerania, which became for me "a fascinating laboratory in which to study memory in action".[5]

My analysis is founded in the in-depth analysis of the forty-one memoirs, written on invitation by The Union of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy Information Guide [*Informator ZBoWiD-u*] under the title as mentioned above: 'Reports on the formation of the People's government in Central Pomerania and the socio-economic development of this region, 1945–1965'.[6] As many as nineteen of them were written after 1970, thirteen of them were explicitly written on the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the People's Republic of Poland (1974), while the remaining sixteen came from the end of the 1960s but were not appropriately dated by their authors. However, they may have originated similarly because they are stored in the same archival unit and tackle the same subject matter. Thus, I address the period right after the end of Joanna Wawrzyniak's seminal study on the Union, i.e. when "the dominant narrative changed from revolutionary internationalism to national communism".[7] The 1960s saw the consolidation of the master narrative about the war in the Eastern Bloc, along with solidifying the relationship between the communist state and various memory groups.[8] In short, the Soviet Union and the communist parties were glorified as the main anti-fascist forces, while alternative or critical views were suppressed. This master narrative was disseminated and reinforced through various media and cultural forms, as well as through the co-optation or coercion of memory groups. However, in the case of the Polish 'recovery', such a consolidation within the Bloc was not possible: although similar, the processes of expulsion and resettlement in different Eastern Bloc states were not associated with such a drastic change of borders and the overall shape of the country.[9] Thus, looking beyond the 1960s

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[5] Alexander Etkind *et al*., *Remembering Katyn* (Malden, MA, 2013), 10.

[6] Since less than seventy years have passed since the invitation was issued, I anonymised the personal data of the memoirs' authors.

[7] Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory*, 14.

[8] *Ibid*., 213.

[9] Hugo Service, *Germans to Poles: Communism, Nationalism and Ethnic Cleansing after the Second World War* (Cambridge, 2013); T. David Curp, *A Clean Sweep? The Politics of Ethnic Cleansing in Western Poland, 1945–1960* (Rochester–New York, 2006); Jan Jeništa, 'Pogranicze w czeskiej perspektywie oglądu', in Wojciech M.

allows me to see how the narratives changed and how the veterans as storytellers referred to previously essential elements, while their pivotal role diminished.

The idea to use the concepts of myth and lore stems from Joanna Wawrzyniak's thesis that there were three main narratives within the communist politics of memory about the Second World War in Poland. She referred to them as 'myths'; hence, I have similarly chosen to start with the 'recovery' as a myth, i.e. a narrative that is not necessarily true or factual but that serves a political or ideological purpose. Wawrzyniak lists the myth of victory against fascism, the unity of the resistance movement, and national innocence.[10] All three complemented each other, but they were not immutable. On the contrary, the importance of each of them changed over time, with the 1956 Thaw as an important turning point. Wawrzyniak argues that the aim of focusing the master narrative around these three myths was to consolidate society around the newly emerged People's Poland. However, as the new state was founded within new borders – and the struggle over the western border was not of the least importance to the regime – another myth emerged, to which the politics of memory of the Second World War was a point of departure: the myth of the 'recovery'.

MEMORY DISCOURSE ABOUT THE 'RECOVERY'

As a discourse, i.e. a way of constructing and communicating knowledge, meaning, and identity through language and other symbolic forms, the narrative about the 'recovery', reflected in the public memory about the Recovered Territories, went through distinctive phases and turns, embedded within various hardware and software memories.[11] In short, we can see three distinct phases where the narration on the 'recovery' in post-war Poland played a peculiar role. Surprisingly, however, they

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Chlebda and Ivana Dobrotová (eds), *Pograniczność i pogranicza w perspektywie nauk społecznych i humanistycznych* (Opole, 2015), 19–28; Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska, 'Pamięć w słowach – o nieadekwatności pojęć (przypadek czesko-polsko-niemiecki)', *Acta Baltico Slavica*, 42 (2018), 8–24.

[10] Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory*, 13–4.

[11] Alexander Etkind, 'Hard and Soft in Cultural Memory: Political Mourning in Russia and Germany', *Grey Room*, 16 (2004), 36–59.

mainly were backed up by employing a software memory, i.e. texts, either published, like newspapers, constructed to be presented, like speeches, or prepared for the internal use of memory groups, such as the memoirs under scrutiny. Hardware memories, a useful means to persuade the group that there is a shared past, re-enacted in various rituals,[12] were produced to a minimal degree. Thus, it is difficult to say to what extent the 'recovery' was a part of collective memory, as it was shared chiefly in communication through the software, and more fragile, memories.

The first phase (1944–56), starting with the manifesto of the Polish Committee of National Liberation [Polski Komitet Wyzwolenia Narodowego, PKWN], was characterised by the dominance of the myth, which portrayed the settlers, among them the soldiers who fought in these lands and later on decided to settle here, as heroic pioneers who had reclaimed the lands from the Germans and defended the territories. Here, the 'return to the Motherland' [*powrót do Macierzy*] was an explicit term of the new order, establishing a new *axis mundi*: the country should be shifted westward, and its centre of gravity placed firmly between the basins of the Oder river and the Baltic Sea. Soon, the 'return to the Motherland' was replaced by the shorter term of the 'recovery', as present in the name of the centralised institution for the administration of the incorporated lands: the Ministry of Recovered Territories, which lasted until 1949. The political turmoil around minister Władysław Gomułka, himself a prominent communist, and internal tensions within the communist party resulted in the final announcement of the successful unification, despite the final arguments of the minister and the Ministry,[13] and the dissolution of the institution.[14] Along with it, a part of the myth of 'recovery' was eliminated. The myth was narrated and reiterated

[12] Aastrid Erll and Ann Rigney, 'Introduction: Cultural Memory and Its Dynamics', in *eaed*. (eds), *Mediation, Remediation, and the Dynamics of Cultural Memory* (Berlin, 2009), 1–14; E. Hobsbawm, 'Introduction', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge, 2003), 1–14.

[13] Archiwum Akt Nowych [Central Archives of Modern Records], Warsaw, Ministerstwo Ziem Odzyskanych [Ministry of the Recovered Territories], Report on the activities of the Ministry of Recovered Territories for the period between 27 Nov. 1945 and 21 Jan. 1949, file no. 50.

[14] G. Strauchold, 'Okoliczności likwidacji Ministerstwa Ziem Odzyskanych', *Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie*, i, 287 (2015), 111–20.

in official propaganda's software memories, such as newspapers and political speeches. Any hardware memory, set in stone and dedicated to the settlers in general, was unveiled much later, i.e., the memorial devoted to the settlers of Koszalin, with the motto 'We were, we are, we will be' [*Byliśmy, jesteśmy, będziemy*] was built as late as 1965 and as such belongs to the later phase.[15] To sum this up, the myth served to legitimise Poland's claim over the territories and to justify the communist regime's policies.

The second phase (1956–70) started when the golden age of the myth ended, as it was briefly revived after Gomułka returned to power in 1956. With the Polish Thaw, the myth of the 'recovery' was subject to renegotiation, albeit in a more pluralistic form, in a relative and descriptive sense, implying that there was more diversity and complexity in the forms of conveying the 'recovery' story than in the previous phase, when the myth had been dominant and obligatory. This does not mean that the alternative voices were equally accepted or influential. It only implies that there was some space for renegotiation and modification of the myth, within certain limits and under certain conditions. This entailed acknowledging that the reality did not match the idealised vision, and that the early days of settlement in the Recovered Territories were fraught with turmoil and danger, coming not only from Germans – who remained the main threat, as the propaganda continued to fuel the fear of their return – but also from the unruly elements of the Soviet army, Bureau of Public Security [Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, UBP] and Citizens' Militia [Milicja Obywatelska, MO]. However, under Gomułka's leadership, it was repeatedly emphasized that Germans were and always had been the enemy.[16] During this second phase, a process of cleansing, i.e. the deliberate removal or erasure of any traces of German presence or influence, and memorialisation took place. To mark the 1000th anniversary

[15] One could argue that the Exhibition of the Recovered Territories in Wrocław (1948), especially the rededication of the Centennial Hall and its vicinity, are an example of producing hardware memories. However, because of the geographical limitations of this article, it remains beyond the scope of my considerations.

[16] Tomasz Żukowski, 'Ustanowienie nacjonalistycznego pola dyskursu społecznego. Spór między partią a Kościołem w roku 1966', in Katarzyna Chmielewska, Grażyna Wołowiec, and Tomasz Żukowski (eds), *Rok 1966. PRL na zakręcie* (Warszawa, 2014), 11–38.

of the Polish state,[17] localities were purged of the remnants of the German past, resulting in the creation of some hardware memory. Thus, various memory practices were implemented to assert that these lands were 'recovered': the establishment of 'rooms of memories' [*izby pamięci*], the creation of museums, and musealisations.[18] For instance, in Central Pomerania, the myth of the Pomeranian Line [*Pommernstellung*] was strongly emphasized, with the destruction and reuse of German war memorials for materials and spaces for new commemorations, as well as plans on how to manage the space to make it both attractive to tourists and to highlight the sacrifice and martyrdom of the Polish soldier.[19]

The third phase (after 1970) was characterized by the transformation of the myth into the form of lore. This involved software memories, adapted to the situation where Germans became less and less of a central enemy, emphasizing the internal struggles the communist regime had to overcome to achieve full power. Thus, in the memoirs submitted to the call under scrutiny, Germans are only briefly mentioned: as in the aforementioned veteran's account, where they were quickly and effortlessly displaced. Other memoirists mention the German gangs [*bandy*] still lurking in the region, but more dangerous are 'the gangs' of former soldiers who opposed the communist takeover and continued to fight as part of the anti-communist underground movement, especially under the command of Zygmunt Szendzielarz, *nom de guerre* 'Łupaszka'. Since his unit was active in Pomerania, as many as four memoirists mention their efforts in fighting this 'gang'. Similarly, another internal enemy, especially at the time of the referendum of 1946 and the elections to Sejm in 1947, was the Polish People's Party [Polskie Stronnictwo Ludowe, PSL] which as a whole is depicted in several memoirs as the main obstacle to the establishment of the communist power.

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[17] Anita Młynarczyk-Tomczyk, *W kręgu polityki, nauki i popularyzacji. Obchody „Polskiego Tysiąclecia" (1957–1966/67)* (Kielce, 2019); Wojciech Wróblewski, 'Tysiąclecie państwa polskiego: dawne koncepcje a nowe perspektywy', *Wiadomości Archeologiczne*, lv, 55 (2001) 95–9.

[18] Robert Traba, 'Symbole pamięci: II wojna światowa w świadomości zbiorowej Polaków. Szkic do tematu', *Przegląd Zachodni*, 1 (2000), 52–67.

[19] Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska, 'The Competition of Memories: The Commemorative Landscape of Polish Central Pomerania after 1945', *East European Politics and Societies*, xxxv, 1 (2020), 26–49.

Generally, the software memories in the form of lore underwent constant repetitions and frequent changes. Their form becomes condensed, as illustrated by the example under scrutiny. The memoirs submitted by the Union members take the form of extended CVs, sometimes succinct accounts hastily written and spanning a long period of time, due to the vagueness and breadth of the subject. Thus, some of the soldiers structure their stories around a single central event, such as the fighting on the Pomeranian Line or the stay at the POW camp. Other recurring motifs appear to be less important to warrant a full description, but they are still significant enough to merit a mention, as evidenced by the referendum and the elections.[20] In sum, the lore enables the elaboration of other memories from the 'storage memory'[21] besides the previously obligatory ones, when the myth was narrated and reiterated. Since this time, the veterans were writing with their group in mind, so only some parts of the stories were recounted in the same manner as they had been repeated daily. This stems from the fact that the veterans associated with the Union functioned as 'memory gatekeepers', i.e. they were invited to schools or other youth gatherings, to deliver speeches and recount their lives in a systematic, recurring form, transmitting 'the official history'.[22] Nevertheless, they were now retelling their stories from a long-term perspective. It should be noted that at the cusp of the 1970s, they had often spent more years as civilians than as soldiers. Consequently, they attempted to explain their contemporary situation as frail pensioners or retirees facing a fate much less dignified than they had anticipated.

However, why does their storytelling take this form? To explain this, I will further clarify the difference between the myth and the lore of the 'recovery'.

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[20] Czesław Osękowski, 'Nowi "Lubuszanie" wobec problemów osadniczych i politycznych na Ziemi Lubuskiej w latach 1945–1956. Opór – przystosowanie – uległość', *Studia Paradyskie*, 28 (2018), 255–91; *id.*, 'Referendum z 30 czerwca 1946 r. na ziemiach przekazanych Polsce po II wojnie światowej', *Dzieje Najnowsze*, xxvii, 3 (1995), 87–97; Andrzej Paczkowski, *Od sfałszowanego zwycięstwa do prawdziwej klęski. Szkice do portretu PRL* (Kraków, 1999).

[21] Aleida Assmann, 'Pamięć magazynująca i funkcjonalna w historii i teraźniejszości', w: *ead.*, *Między historią a pamięcią*, ed. by Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska (Warszawa, 2013) 58–73.

[22] Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory*, 22.

THE LORE OF THE 'RECOVERY'

The change that occurred in narratives after 1970 can be explained in terms of storytelling itself, as a shift from recounting the myth to transferring the lore. 1970 saw the treaty regarding the western Polish border with the Federal Republic of Germany, which resulted in relieving at least some tension in the internal communist discourse on the Recovered Territories. Thus, not only did the form of what was told change, but also the content. For sure, war myths in communist Poland underwent frequent revisions, as they were reinterpreted to suit the presentist needs of authorities, in negotiation with the various memory groups. This transformation is then a kind of memory game in the sense that certain events from the past are recollected only when they are important for groups currently in power.[23] However, the change of the 'recovery' from the myth into the lore, as well as the degeneration of its status, deserves some more attention to fully understand the process and its further ramifications.

Some of the Union's members who wrote their memoirs in the period under scrutiny referred to the earlier versions of their memories. These would be the stories bearing the mythical features, no longer available in the times of lore when the narratives about the mythical past are inaccessible and serve to recall the lost days of glory.[24] Furthermore, the relics of the primary importance of the 'recovery' could be found in both the title of the contest and small references to basic points of the early People's Poland, e.g. the aforementioned 1946 referendum and the elections to Sejm in 1947. The former, the so-called 'Three Times Yes' [*'trzy razy tak'*] referendum involved not only changing the basic structure of the Polish parliamentary system (the first question was "Are you in favour of abolishing the Senate?"), introducing the basic principles of the communist rule ("Do you want consolidation […] of the economic system founded on agricultural reform and the nationalization of basic national industries, including the preservation of the statutory rights of private enterprise?"), but also agreeing on the new Western border, with the fundamental shift of the country to the West, i.e. incorporating the Recovered Territories ("Do you want consolidation of the western border of the Polish State on the Baltic,

[23] Mink and Neumayer (eds), *History, Memory and Politics*.

[24] Verlyn Flieger, *A Question of Time: J.R.R. Tolkien's Road to Faërie* (Kent, OH, 2001).

Oder river and Lusatian Neisse?"). Similarly, the elections of 1947, although rigged, were the next step in founding communist Poland, as they were allegedly won by the Democratic Bloc which consisted of the Polish Workers' Party, Polish Socialist Party, People's Party [Stronnictwo Ludowe], and Alliance of Democrats [Stronnictwo Demokratyczne].

As I have explained earlier in the text, these pivotal points are not the pillars for the whole narratives of the memoirs under scrutiny, as they are no longer parts of the myth. The system is already established and solidified, thus what is transferred is lore: a traditional knowledge with fixed points that are hard to omit. Therefore, the memoirists had to briefly mention both events, yet they did it in a shortened, basic version. It depended on their status: it is obvious that the militiamen and UBP employees remembered their professional duties differently than people who had just voted in both the referendum and elections. Thus, some of the memoirists only mentioned their participation, like the veteran who worked for the new Polish administration in the post-1945 Koszalin. For him, both events provide an opportunity to stress how hard it was to be a settler in the Recovered Territories: "Apart from this really hard and strenuous work [i.e., of being a settler], I took an active part in the Referendum and Elections".[25] As both names were written with the capital letter, there is still a notion of something important, yet it is no longer an elaborated origins myth, but a part of lore, a brief mention that something important has indeed happened. However, these events are only the background; the real toil was elsewhere.

Others recollected these events to depict the dangers and hardships of being a communist in Poland that was not yet entirely communist. Both historical moments could have been transformed into one chain of events, as in one of the veteran's memoir: the author simply refers to them as "the referendum and elections"[26] or even reduces them to one event. This happened also in another memoir, whose author merges them in his account, stating that he took part in securing the polling stations during "the National referendum of 1947".[27]

[25] APK, Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację Zarząd Okręgu w Koszalinie, sig. 314, Reports on the formation of the People's government in Central Pomerania and the socio-economic development of this region, 1945–1965, file no. 132, fols 51–3.

[26] *Ibid.*, fols 98–103.

[27] *Ibid.*, fols 74–6.

MNEMONIC ACTORS AND STORYTELLERS

Former soldiers who became members of the Union and wrote memoirs analysed here were, like many other groups of settlers, promised that the resettlement to the Recovered Territories gave them a chance for social advancement and a better life. Especially those who decided to settle as farmers, and belonged to the Union of Military Settlers in the Recovered Territories [Związek Osadników Wojskowych na Ziemiach Odzyskanych, ZOW] were at the forefront of such promises.

Among the memoirists, there is one group more present in the ranks of the ZOW than others, namely the soldiers of the Polish 1st Army, i.e., a Polish military unit of the Polish Armed Forces in the East, formed in the Soviet Union in 1943 and fighting against the Third Reich in the eastern front. Among its most famous battles were the capturing of Warsaw in January 1945, breaking through the Pomeranian Line in February 1945, and finally taking part in the capturing of Berlin in May 1945. Some soldiers were then allotted properties in the Recovered Territories, sometimes in places they had fought. In addition, there were also soldiers of the Agricultural and Economic Division [Dywizja Rolno-Gospodarcza] who were delegated to organise the farms and cultivate the crops, in this case also in Central Pomerania. As many as ten memoirs were written by the soldiers of these units.

Other groups of mnemonic actors represented in the collection can be divided into several different clusters. Among them are five memoirs written by the POWs held in Pomerania or labour conscripts in Pomerania, and four by authors who were POWs or labour conscripts held and forced to work in Germany in general. Party activists and people with ties to the regime (e.g., members of the Citizens' Militia or the Public Security Service [Urząd Bezpieczeństwa, UB] employees) have submitted thirteen memoirs, and soldiers of other units, such as the Home Army, the Red Army, and one who did not identify his unit, wrote three memoirs. Additionally, as many as six memoirs were submitted by administrative officers who had had some military experience in the past, e.g., as partisans.

Despite having various backgrounds, all memoirists who enlisted in the 1st Army and took part in the battles fought by this formation made that part of their war experience central to their accounts. Some settled in the Recovered Territories just after their unit was demobilised; others served in different units before coming to Pomerania.

One veteran has explicitly pointed out that he decided to settle in Wałcz [*Ger.* Deutsch Krone] as late as 1948, although he already had a "nice flat" in Gdańsk, "because in these […] lands I went through the toughest fights as a commander of a platoon and so many of my brothers in arms have fallen, so dear and close to my heart".[28] It becomes evident that the Pomeranian landscape is the main point of reference for many of them. The aforementioned veteran continues that he started to work as an accountant on a collective farm in Lubno [Lüben]. Here, the brief introduction entangled with the memories of the war: "Lubno complex had seven farms and two distilleries. It was exactly here, in Lubno, where after the breakthrough of the 'Pomeranian Line' on February 12, 1945, in the early morning hours, the 3rd battalion of the 12 under-regiment of the 4th Division of Infantry, where I served, had their breakfast".[29]

One of the ways that the memoirists expressed their connection to the Pomeranian landscape was by seeing it through the lens of their war experience. As a result, even after he is moved to another collective farm in Jastrowie [Jastrow], the veteran depicts the municipality as "the town seized by our division". Similarly, when he moves to Kołobrzeg [Kolberg], he concludes that it was the town "I was fighting for in March 1945". Even more, "When I reached Kołobrzeg, I immediately went to the area where our battalion advanced".[30] Visiting places of the former battles was not only his experience. For example, another veteran recollected that when he came to settle in Czaplinek [Tempelburg] in the autumn of 1946:

> The first I did […] was visiting the fighting sites. On a borrowed bike, starting in Złotów through Podgaje, Jastrowie, Nadarzyce, Żablice [*sic*], Iłowiec, Sośnica, Laski, Mirosławiec, Żabno, Wierzchowo, Złocieniec – I travelled the trail, visiting battlefields and cemeteries, single graves, reading on the temporary plaques, written using chemical pencil or paint, known and unknown names of soldiers who died in the fight for the ancient Polish land of Koszalin.[31]

According to his memoir, he was not aware that while he was "taking part in the fights for the liberation of numerous towns in this

[28] *Ibid.*, fols 4–8.
[29] *Ibid.*
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] *Ibid.*, fols 284–91.

part of our province [i.e. the Pomeranian Line battles – author's note], […] I would come back here to live and work".[32] This tension between the war and civil memory seems to be won over by the more idyllic reminiscences of the 'recovery': however, the act of 'recovery' would not be possible without the previous bloodshed. Thus, the war memory is embedded in the civilian landscape.

Another way that the memoirists demonstrated their identity as veterans was by comparing their civilian work to their military service and highlighting former soldiers' role in managing the Recovered Territories. Thus, not only the landscape but also the memoirists themselves as veterans were proof of what had happened in Pomerania. For example, the veteran who settled in Lubno, who, similarly to the one who settled in Czaplinek, adds that he did not think he would be working in this region after the war, repeatedly stresses the role of the combatants: "The most active in managing the recovered territories were veterans – they were first to fight, and they were forming the first row of builders of Socialism, as well as making all the Poles safe".[33] He parallels the hard-working circumstances in the collective farms and fighting in the war. For him, work is another kind of war against a different enemy. Even when he enumerates people working with him, such as a planner, he does not miss the opportunity to add that during the war, the planner was a partisan. When the veteran from Lubno stresses his advantages as an accountant, he writes that it is "because [he] was an old soldier, [so he] introduced an almost military kind of discipline at work". The management of the Recovered Territories was possible thanks to the "organisational skills of those recently wearing uniforms",[34] i.e. the former soldiers. Others go even further, as they depict the transition era: "The period of establishing the people's power in these areas was extremely difficult. While the Szczecin region had already been liberated, military operations still occurred in Pomerania. So it was a frontier area. There was a diversion, gangs [*bandy*], and groups of the enemy troops. The absence of the Polish population or local authorities, as well as the war damages, required a clean sweep of the situation. Here, words of appreciation are due to those people who, often risking their lives, paving the

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] *Ibid.,* fols 4–8.
[34] *Ibid.,* fols 305–9.

way for the Polish administration. They were soldiers of the 1st Polish Army, members of the Polish Workers' Party, and members of the Union [ZBOWiD]".[35] These temporary means, according to him, worked so well it was hard to call them 'random': "The farms and villages […] were properly managed, nobody felt that there was a random military administration there".[36]

As the war memories are full of combat, the 'afterlife' of the soldiers as settlers is full of activities such as farming and harvesting. Thus, one of them describes a harvest festival in Złocieniec [Falkenburg] as "a beautiful ceremony, the first harvest festival in the Recovered Territories, organised by those who, rifle in hand, captured every scrap of this land, marking it with their own blood".[37] Their right to the land is legitimised not only because they are now settlers, equipped with the legal solutions imposed by the state, but primarily as soldiers who had captured the region with their own hands.

We can trace this motif back as early as the late 1940s when the matters of the military settlement [*osadnictwo wojskowe*][38] were covered by *Osadnik* [*The Settler*], a bi-weekly briefly published in cooperation with the Ministry of Recovered Territories. Here, every type of settlement was described under a custom-designed logo.

The primary feature, both chronologically and meaning-wise, is being a soldier (it is a 'soldier-settler' and not *vice versa*). On both sides of the main logo, with a sword symbolizing combat, crossed with a plough, a symbol of the farmer, we see a brave soldier who is marching forward and, at the same time, shielding his colleagues, depicted as smaller figures next to his legs. With the rifle in hand, he paves the way for the tank, which is following the infantrymen. The sword placed in the logo instead of the rifle in the image, rather than depicting the realities of the Second World War, idealizes the fight, serves the purpose of medievalisation and acts as a reference to the chivalric ethos.[39] Furthermore, the myth of the 'recovery' was firmly

[35] *Ibid.*, fols 185–203.

[36] *Ibid.*, fols 259–70.

[37] *Ibid.*, fols 305–9.

[38] Krystyna Kersten, 'Osadnictwo wojskowe na Pomorzu Zachodnim', *Przegląd Zachodnio-Pomorski*, 2 (1964), 29–61.

[39] Stefan Goebel, *The Great War and Medieval Memory: War, Remembrance and Medievalism in Britain and Germany, 1914–1940* (Cambridge, 2007).

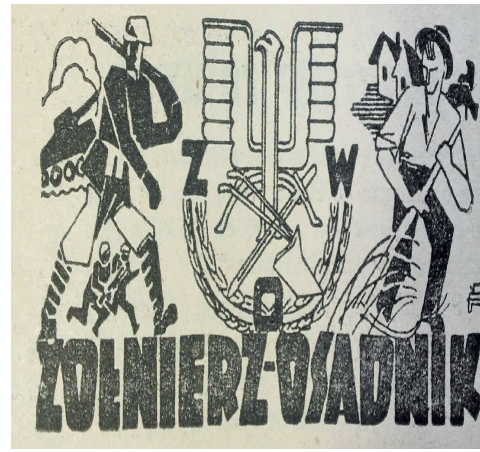

Fig. 1. Logo of the soldier-settler, *Osadnik*, no. 1 (32), (10 Jan. 1948), 13.

Central Archives of Modern Records, Warsaw, Ministry of the Recovered Territories, file no. 2203.

embedded in the Middle Ages,[40] so the connection between the 1st Army soldier and medieval knights of Polish Dukes Boleslaws was used in the visual propaganda. Other examples can be found in the military cemetery in Kołobrzeg, where the spatial model of the battle, shaped like a tomb, is covered with a variety of soldiers' helmets: ranging from the pot helmets of medieval warriors to the recent ones, worn by the 1st Army soldiers.

The settler, on the other hand, does not look behind his back nor wait for the reinforcements to come. He is solely focused on his work, as he toils in the fields, with his home, and farm animals behind him. What links him and the soldier is the eagle as a centrepiece of the logo: the characteristic shape of the crownless eagle, designed by Janina Broniewska, was sewn on the caps of the 1st Army Soldiers, and later on, also used in the visual propaganda.[41] Moreover, in the ZOW logo, his wings resemble ears of wheat. Although both the soldier and the settler are looking in the same direction, for the former, it is a look back 'just in case', while for the latter, it is a gaze towards the

[40] Marta Grzechnik, '"Recovering" Territories: The Use of History in the Integration of the New Polish Western Borderland after World War II', *Europe-Asia Studies*, lxix, 4 (2017), 668–92; Zbigniew Kobyliński and Grażyna Rutkowska, 'Propagandist use of history and archaeology in justification of Polish rights to the "Recovered Territories" after World War II', *Archaeologia Polona*, 43 (2005), 51–124.

[41] Sławomir Kordaczuk, 'Przez Sielce i Siedlce czyli o orłach w ludowym Wojsku Polskim', *Niepodległość i Pamięć*, xi, 1 (20), (2004), 157–66.

object of his work. However, we can deduce more meaning from the picture by reading the veterans' memories. They firmly embed their experiences as settlers in their military background. When one veteran describes himself as being good at accounting, he compares the feeling to that of being a victorious soldier. When he is awarded a medal for work, he adds that the satisfaction was similar to when "the war was over, and our 4th Division of Jan Kiliński […] was renamed to Internal Security Corps".[42]

The military background could not be forgotten, as the settlers-soldiers initially became the convenors of the myth of the 'recovery', the *aoidos* whose role over time was reduced to mere folk narrators. The ongoing process of transferring the memory to the next generations or to people who were not familiar with the particularities of local memory about the Second World War and the 'recovery', i.e. the Pomeranian Line, is frequently mentioned by various members of the Union. Here, the duty of remembering imposed by the state, sealing the narrative as well as changing it over time, meets with the duty of remembering felt by the narrators themselves. The veteran from Lubno stressed he had given a series of lectures for school children about the Polish People's Army, and that he had been frequently sharing his memories during meetings with scouts, patients at sanatoriums, or children on summer camps. The diminishing function of soldiers-settlers as storytellers in subsequent years is evident in the manuscript of his memoir. His sentence, "I had 24 such meetings this year, and I served three thousand people, similarly to previous years", was crossed out by whoever collected the memoirs and was responsible for publishing them.[43]

The sense of duty, connected to the role of a guardian of the memories, could be expressed in different ways. On the one hand, there were people like the veteran from Lubno, who explained that they were doing that since they "consider it [their] duty to tell the truth about those days because [they do] not want our young generation to experience war again".[44] On the other hand, the motivation could

[42] APK, Reports on the formation of the People's government in Central Pomerania and the socio-economic development of this region, 1945–1965, file no. 132, fols 4–8.

[43] *Ibid*.

[44] *Ibid*.

have been internal and connected to the group of veterans. Another veteran devoted his memoir to "the soldiers and officers who made a serious contribution to the establishment of the people's power in the ancient Slavic lands by the 1st Agricultural and Economic Division. The soldiers of the Polish People's Army swapped the rifle for a plough, axe, trowel, and hammer".[45] He aptly describes the transformation of a soldier into a settler, in line with the logo analysed above.

In the case of a distinct lack of hardware memories, the memoirists produced them within their software memories of the 'recovery'. Mnemonic devices the authors of the memoirs use to embed their memories within the larger narrative imposed by the state were either external or internal. Thus, some of the veterans legitimised their stories using diplomas or distinctions granted by the state: one took pride in the distinction for his work with youth, the other in the Knight's Cross of the Order of Polonia Restituta, and the third one in a diploma signed by Gomułka himself. For another veteran, it was the banner of the Union, which he helped to fundraise. Others use some material elements acquired during the early days of resettlement, like a wallet. It became a 'memorial wallet'[46] not because it was made as a souvenir but because it obtained such a function over the years.

The materiality, however, sometimes failed, and the lack of proper documents was the reason why one veteran excused himself for omitting some people in his memoir because "there are no necessary documents, which are very necessary for the writing of such a chronicle [he mentions that they were destroyed during the liquidation of the ZOW]. In this case, I used only photographs that confirm the authenticity of our work".[47] Another option, apart from the visual source mentioned, were people, as many of them "are still alive and remember this help [provided by the military settlers: grain, horses, etc.]".[48]

Examples of external memory included the cemeteries, which were designed to commemorate the soldiers' efforts in a certain way. The veteran who settled in Lubno for some time depicts himself as a regular guest at the cemeteries: "It has become a custom that my

[45] *Ibid*., fols 185–203.
[46] *Ibid*., fols 64–8.
[47] *Ibid*., fols 305–9.
[48] *Ibid*.

wife and I would often go to the military cemetery in Zieleniewo, where we place flowers on the graves of fallen soldiers. While being there, we often read the names engraved on the stone slabs several times, and then we remember those familiar faces of fallen comrades--in-arms, among them such almost childish youthful faces which were not granted a Free Homeland. Every time I visit Wałcz with my family, I also visit the collective cemetery in Bukowina, where the ashes of soldiers who died at the Pomeranian Line are buried".[49] Yet, the veteran is not a mere onlooker: his visit to the cemetery is a kind of remembrance roll call, as he reads out their names and tries to remember at least what these people looked like. In all cases discussed, the space and the figure of a veteran are tightly connected, as one gives the other its meaning.

The memoirs under scrutiny, as they were written relatively late, show the prevalence of "memories of victimisation".[50] On the one hand, the victimisation of Poles as victims of the Second World War was displayed, and on the other hand, there are narrators' mentions about how they felt diminished. It is connected with the changing status of the 'recovery'. As long as the Recovered Territories were the lands won in armed struggle and redeemed with the blood of the Polish soldier, the memories of victimisation were present. But when the myth of the 'recovery' subsequently faded, the lore was insufficient to satisfy the emotional needs and the feelings of the redundant victimisation among the memoirists. As Inge Melchior has shown, mnemonic actors who feel they are no longer recognised might start to employ defensive strategies, which result in polarisation of memory.[51] The changing status of the 'recovery', and its transformation into the lore, made this group especially prone to the progression of disenchantment.

Moreover, the lore of the 'recovery', as an inaccessible memory "of the past glory that has to be restored",[52] applied only to small segments

[49] *Ibid*., fols 4–8.

[50] Tea Sindbæk Andersen and Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, *Disputed Memory: Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe* (Berlin, 2016), 2.

[51] Inge Melchior, 'Forming a Common European Memory of WWII from a Peripheral Perspective: Anthropological Insight into the Struggle for Recognition of Estonians' WWII Memories in Europe', in *Disputed Memory. Emotions and Memory Politics in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe* (Berlin, 2016), 203–26.

[52] Andersen and Törnquist-Plewa, *Disputed Memory*, 2–3.

of the Recovered Territories. The focus of the memoirs analysed in this paper illustrates it best: it was not about the entire region, and not even about Pomerania, but solely about *Central* Pomerania, more or less identified with the then Koszalin Voivodeship. Stories told by the Union members are already well known and they depict not the heroes full of the initial zeal, but people broken by life and disappointed. As much as he is a proud settler-soldier, the veteran from Lubno cannot resist informing us that he can no longer do some chores, as "at the front, [he] began to suffer from rheumatism".[53] Others finish their memoirs stressing that they are retired or receive their pension. Some mentioned a more drastic ending to the myth. One veteran recollected that while he had been seeking a job after being demobilised, he had received answers "with the question why [he] fought, [while he] needed just to take over the formerly German farm with all belongings and calmly watch how the Germans work for [him]".[54] He emphasises that it was a reality for some people with ties to the administration. A similar gloomy tone is present in the ending of another memoir, with the ZOW liquidated – important early on, as it praised the soldier-settlers for their toil and effort – and all the assets of this association confiscated. The ZOW was merged with other associations, and in consequence, became a part of the Union in the late 1940s.[55]

CONCLUSIONS

Contrarily to the initial myth of the 'recovery', the lore of the 'recovery' was only a partial, stunted version of the story of how the lands were incorporated into Poland and Polonised. The myth emphasised the belief about the eternal presence of Slavs, especially Poles, in the reclaimed lands, and thus depicted the settlers as heroes coming back to retrieve the lost regions and re-Polonize them through their hard work, with the confidence in the communist reforms and the traces of Polishness hidden somewhere beneath the German layer

[53] APK, Reports on the formation of the People's government in Central Pomerania and the socio-economic development of this region, 1945–1965, file no. 132, fols 4–8.

[54] *Ibid.*, fols 271–81.

[55] Arkadiusz Ogrodowczyk, *Nad Odrą i Bałtykiem: osadnictwo wojskowe na zachodnich i północnych ziemiach Polski po drugiej wojnie światowej* (Warszawa, 1979), 198.

of materiality. It was a story of origin – embedded in the alleged Polish past of the lands and the luminous communist future, backed up by the historical justice of punishment of Germans who were collectively blamed not only for the war but for many other events in Polish history as the eternal enemy in its numerous incarnations. This mythology was a memory discourse, based on a specific territorial imaginary, and it covered not only the geographical range of the whole Recovered Territories – in fact, a very heterogeneous area of Pomerania, Lubusz Land, Silesia, Masuria, and Warmia, each internally different from the rest – but also a grand time frame, being embedded as far as in the early Middle Ages, when the Piast dynasty had attempted to conquer the lands of various Slavic tribes.

The memoirs under scrutiny were firmly embedded within the national framework, even though their main topic was supposed to be the revolutionary enthusiasm of the early post-war period.[56] Moreover, they were written about the time when "the veterans were aging:" even though this memory group still played "an important ritual role",[57] their political influence had declined. Thus, more often than not, the bitterness, disappointment, and disillusionment of the memoirists come to the fore.

The transformation of myth into lore was dictated not only by changes within the internal communist narrative and the external circumstances, such as the Treaty of Warsaw, but also by the generational change. Some of the witnesses of history were already dead, and the "commemorative efforts that initially focused on veterans were redirected so as to concentrate on educational activities for the next generation".[58] Moreover, as many of the commemorative efforts were ineffective or ceased to be performed altogether, the lore could have been transmitted without the performative aspect. It is not surprising, then, that so many sources about the 'recovery' were written, including memoirs, while the actual commemorative spaces, i.e. hardware memories, are scarce.

In contrast to the myth, which "serves cognitive, integrative, communicative and legitimising functions […] often advanced by the

[56] Marcin Zaremba, *Komunizm, legitymizacja, nacjonalizm. Nacjonalistyczna legitymizacja władzy komunistycznej w Polsce* (Warszawa, 2001).

[57] Wawrzyniak, *Veterans, Victims, and Memory*, 14.

[58] *Ibid.*, 221.

state"[59] the lore could not address all the questions. The veterans remained with the unresolved feeling of not being respected enough, believing that their effort was underestimated. Especially when the state stopped being interested in maintaining the myth: as early as 1949, when the Ministry of Recovered Territories was dissolved, and the authorities concluded that the new regions were successfully assimilated. It resulted in the "reordering of meaningful worlds":[60] it was no longer the captured land demanding the toil of settlers, but an ancient part of the country, already managed and unified.

Therefore, I argue that the initial myth of the 'recovery', important for establishing and solidifying the new communist Poland, over time lost its relevance and changed into lore: a particular body of knowledge or tradition that could have been gained through one's own experience, but also learned in the course of stately supervised education. As that happened, the storytellers, such as the former soldiers-settlers, were no longer needed.

proofreading Krzysztof Heymer

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[59] *Ibid.*, 22.

[60] Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies* (New York, 1999), 50.

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