

# Теоретические дискурсы и дискуссии

## Memory cultures and politics of history. A plea for Polish-Russian cooperation

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Once upon a time a Russian and a Pole laid the foundations for modern sociology. Their names were Pitirim Sorokin and Florian Znaniecki. After years of 'dependent development' of Polish and Russian social sciences it is high time we came back to the forgotten classics. A joint study of memory cultures and politics of history is a very good point to start with.

It seems there are some lessons we can draw from the noble sociological ancestors. First is quite straightforward: we should communicate with one other, as they did. There is no intellectual creativity without constant cooperation. In a long exchange of letters, both scholars expressed great interest in one another's 'theory, their growing friendship, and a deep and grave concern with the general development of sociology' (Vaitkus, 1994. P. 230). Thus — and this is the second point — rather than imitating Western theoretical perspective we should try, drawing on it, to develop our own independent standpoint, which will combine both theory and research. Third, following in Sorokin's and Znaniecki's footsteps, we should look at society in its entirety. On this view, memory is not some self-contained phenomenon, but a part of broader social processes.

Accordingly, in our paper we present a general research-program to analyze memory cultures. In this, we begin by sketching possible approaches to study phenomena in question; we go on, then, to construct a perspective, which will allow us to define and explain memory culture and politics of history in Poland and Russia.

### **Approaches to memory**

In analyzing social practices connected with a national past, social scientists can employ a wide range of approaches. In the first place, they can make use of sociology of memory and memory studies in general, the field that exploded in the early eighties (Assmann, 1995, 2009; Halbwachs, 1969; Lenz & Welzer, 2005; Nora, 1989; Olick & Robbins, 1998; Szacka, 2005). Alternatively, they can refer to the frameworks provided by museology (Popczyk, 2008), Kulturgeschichte (Hardtwig & Wehler, 1996) or aesthetics (Morawski, 2007).

All those possible and recognized perspectives have some limitations, though. First, at times they appear to be confined by their disciplinary boundaries, which leads to — in Raymond Boudon's apt phrase (2001. P. 1–14) — an 'anomic division of labor'. Aestheticians deal solely with aesthetics, and do not make use of the achievements of sociologists. Sociologists care about sociology, reluctant to learn lessons from historians. Museologists, for their part, create their own, self-sufficient conceptual world.

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Second, academic disputes are a battleground of particular memory cultures. There is always a temptation to use science as a refined tool to legitimize politics. Under the veil of neutral language, scholars can promote vision of history characteristic of their own nation, while questioning rival visions. In consequence, rather than characterize and explain cultures of remembrance and politics of history, they actually reproduce them (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000). This threat is especially serious in museology, the discipline most directly related with commemoration of a particular national history. This can be illustrated with popular terminological oppositions, such as museum-agora versus museum-temple, which, when transferred from analysis of art museums to historical museums, imply that a democratic 'agora' is 'better' than a monological 'temple' (Cameron, 1972). The same problem applies to the two very terms we are concerned with: 'memory culture' (resp. 'culture of remembrance') and 'politics of history' (resp. 'politics of the past'). They both were introduced into the scientific discourse by the German scholars, who attributed more positive meaning to the former and more negative to the latter Pitirim Sorokin.

Given his immense erudition and breadth of interests, Sorokin had a knack to demonstrate that sociological discoveries are merely repetitions of old ideas. 'The main body of current research — he wrote — represents mainly a reiteration, variation, refinement and verification of the methods and theories developed by sociologists of the preceding period' (1965. P. 834). Not surprisingly, we can find some fundamental Tilly's insights in Sorokin's work — and not only his. As the former half-jokingly remarked: «Rediscovery of those arguments in my old teacher's writings recalls one of Sorokin's preferred putdowns. 'A very good idea, Mr. Tilly,' he would rumble in his heavy Russian accent, 'but Plato said it better'» (Tilly, 1984. P. 28).

It does not matter, then, that we can trace back Tilly's logic of explanation of social phenomena to Sorokin's texts. Neither does it matter that social movement theory (SMT), which resembles in many aspects Tilly's perspective, was developed already in the thirties under the auspices of Florian Znaniecki by his beloved student, Jozef Chalasiniski (see Luczewski, 2009). The point after all is not whether it is Tilly's theory, but whether it is a good theory.

We believe this theory is good indeed, as it allows to use and integrate intuitions from within particular disciplinary perspectives and, at the same time, it provides us with a broad explanatory apparatus. In other words, employing SMT should make it possible to transcend partial approaches, while drawing on their best elements.

Second, SMT allows us to look at cultures of remembrance and politics of history not merely as phenomena in themselves. We consider practices of memory to be a part of social reality (see classic work by Halbwachs, 1969) and, therefore, we believe that they are subject to the same processes as is society as a whole. In consequence, memory studies would stop being a self-contained discipline and would be reconnected with mainstream sociology.

SMT enables us, third, to notice that social reality is dynamic. Simultaneously, it reveals that our identities are not of collective or individual, but of relational nature, for every relation between social subjects leads to a change in their particular identities. Polish identity would be different without the Russians, and Russian identity would be different without the Poles.

Fourth advantage of SMT is its relatively high level of development. After all, it is one of not so many domains in the social sciences, in which one can speak of consistent accumulation of knowledge (Collins, 1994, 1999; Tarrow, 1999; Tilly, 1999). Among its dominant trends, several are particularly worth mentioning: the *resource mobilization* perspective (McCarthy and Zald, 2001), which stresses the potentiality of acquiring resources (especially in the form of funds and supporters) via social movements; *political processes theory* (McAdam, 1982; Tarrow, 1994), which focuses on the political context of movements (state strength, its democratic vs. authoritarian character, divisions within the political elites, etc.); finally, the interpretative perspective, which deals with rhetorical aspects of social movements (*framing*; Benford, Snow, 2000). Currently, after a period of forming rival schools and approaches, the main aim of the SMT-scholars is to bring the theories together into a single and consistent perspective (Snow et al., 2007). We would like to follow in these footsteps (see McAdam et al., 2001).



From what has been said it should follow that SMT has many promising advantages for memory studies. Yet, we still do not know how to realize this promise. Let us go one step further, then. Memory as a social phenomenon has to be experienced, at least potentially, by social actors. If nobody remembers, memory does not exist. In Pierre Nora's (1989. P. 9) phrasing, memory, granted it has a social resonance, 'crystallizes and secretes itself' in objects, he calls *lieux de memoire*, i.e. 'memory sites' or 'realms of memory'. 'Memory attaches itself to sites — the French historian notices — [...] from such natural, concretely experienced *lieux de memoire* as cemeteries, museums, and anniversaries; to the most intellectually elaborated ones' (Nora, 1989. P. 22). Nora refers here to films, archives, flags, banners, libraries, festivals, dictionaries, persons etc.

Now, if we look at such sites from the perspective of SMT, we will see that their goal — as intended by the authors — is often mobilization. Memory sites can be founded and used by social movements and the state alike to advance their respective goals. It is exactly for this reason that the use of social movement theory is ever more justified.

### Definitions

The concepts 'memory culture' (resp. 'culture of remembrance'; *Erinnerungskultur*) and 'politics of history' (resp. 'politics of the past'; *Geschichtspolitik, Vergangenheitspolitik*; Frei 1996) became popular in Germany in the late nineties. Although it is not the right place here to trace their history (see Kohlstruck, 2004. P. 178–181; Troebst, 2005. P. 2–9), let us point out in passing that they still have not acquired established definitions, and, as a result, they are often used as one another's equivalents (Assmann, 2006. P. 273–274; Nijakowski 2008: 41). For instance, what Edgar Wolfrum considers part of politics of history (1999, see Mazur 2009) is presented by Michael Kohlstruck (2004) as a prime example of a culture of remembrance.

In the literature of the subject, however, there is a strong tendency to differentiate analytically between the two terms. While 'politics of history', an idea first formulated during the renowned *Historikerstreit*, is related to the realm of the state (Leggewie and Meyer 2005), 'memory culture' tends to be associated rather with the notion of civil society (Assmann 2006: 273). In addition, while 'politics of history' denotes official celebration, 'culture of remembrance' is related to everyday practices (Kohlstruck, 2004; Troebst, 2005).

As social scientists, we can conceive the cultures of remembrance and politics of memory as structures or as processes (see Van Dijk, 2001). Alternatively, in terms of the classical typology formulated Jerzy Szacki (1971. P. 98–146), we may say that memory culture and politics of history can be examined as either a subject or as an object. While in the former case, we would be concerned with the content, i.e. *what* is presented, in the latter, it would be the practice of *how* it is presented. It seems that in the literature, it is the latter approach that dominates, for, in dealing with the content, we would be using terms like 'social imaginaries', 'nationalism', or 'ideology' (Anderson, 1997; Baczko, 1994; Gellner, 1991).

Drawing on our analysis, let us define 'culture of remembrance' and 'politics of history' as **practices whose aim is to construct images of national past**. Thus understood, all actions taken by social and political subjects in order to establish a certain interpretation of national history would belong to the realm of cultures of remembrance and politics of history. Practices which fit this definition most usually (a) select arbitrarily real and imagined historical facts, (b) disregard some facts, while highlighting other, (c) represent positive or negative relations within a nation as well as with other groups; finally, they make claims about (d) the causes of historical events or (e) their consequences.

Let us now focus on the differences between 'memory culture' and 'politics of history'. In distinguishing between the terms we will be using a following framework, based on two dimensions<sup>1</sup>:

<sup>1</sup>We are referring here to the classic works of Halbwachs (1969), see also: Assmann (1995), Lenz & Welzer (2005), Szacka (2005), Billig (2008) and Mucha (1996).

a) Subject of a practice. Who is realizing a given type of action that deals with the past? Schematically, we can speak of three possible subjects: individuals (micro-scale); social groups and institutions (collective practices within the civil society; mes-scale); states (political practices of governmental institutions; macro-scale). We can distinguish two types of practices related to national past: bottom-up (individual →society → state) and top-down (state →society → individual).

b) Type of media. How are the interpretations of the past articulated? Again, we have three levels: individual (e.g. Mr. Kowalski recalls the Polish history; the level of internalization), public discourse (Mr. Kowalski's vision of the past published by a paper, or broadcasted on TV news; the level of externalization); cultural artifacts (Mr. Kowalski's vision preserved in a realm of memory, such as a museum, or a monument; the level of objectivation). Along with every such step, from the individual level through public discourse to the cultural artifacts, past-related practices become more solid, and more objectivated.

Not until we have left the individual level and shifted onto the social/political as well as the public discourse/cultural artifacts levels, can we speak of culture of remembrance or politics of history. **Culture of remembrance consists of past-related practices realized by the society, and politics of history-of those realized by the state.** In other words, politics of history is, by definition, top-down (state-led), while culture of remembrance-bottom-up (society-driven). Both culture of memory and politics of history, however, can be externalized via public discourse (social organizations, as well as the government, can start media campaigns, and realize their historical 'soft power'). Both of them can also be objectivated by means of cultural artifacts (when it is a government that creates a new site of memory, we speak of politics of history, and when it is a social organization — we speak of culture of remembrance).

This can also be summarized in a following table:

**Table 1. Culture of memory and politics of history**

<i>Past-related practices</i>	<i>Collective (civil society)</i>	<i>Political (the state)</i>
<b>Discourse (the level of externalization)</b>	<b>Culture of memory,</b> realized through the discourse, by the society	<b>Politics of history,</b> realized through the discourse, by the state
<b>Cultural artifacts (the level of objectivation)</b>	<b>Culture of memory</b> preserved via places of memory	<b>Politics of history</b> preserved by monuments and museums

Such a typology allows us to grasp the dynamics of national past-related practices. We have already mentioned the processes of externalization and objectivation of the imaginaries of the past. Yet, we should stress once more that a culture of memory can be politicized by the state, much as politics memory **can** be — so to say — 'cultured', once the image of the past it is constructing becomes internalized by the society. In other words, the culture of memory can emerge from some earlier politics of history, and the politics of history may well arise and progress on a cultural basis.

**Explanation**

According to SMT, explaining a phenomenon demands a combination of two procedures. First, we need to characterize the social context of a given site of memory. We will be considering, then, whether an idea behind a particular *lieu de memoire* was facilitated or resisted by politicians (political context) and other public figures such as journalists or scientists (cultural context). The second procedure is to give account of how interactions between particular individuals / groups / institutions / organizations, which took place in a given — favorable or unfa-



avorable — social environment, lead to the emergence and development of a *lieu de memoire*. Usually, culture and politics tend to, eventually, intersect with one another at some point. The two main schemes of how a realm of memory comes about is top-down (characteristic for politics of history) and bottom-up (typical of culture of memory).

The context and the type of interactions between the social subjects lead to the formation of a new site of memory. But this is not the end. Each *lieux de memoire* represents a different national ideology. In order to characterize it more closely, we are going to take notice of three phenomena. First, what type of identity is being constructed by the given place (usually, it is reflected in the name of the place). Second, what sort of relationship between different identities is emphasized — conflict or cooperation; how intense this conflict / cooperation is; who is assigned to 'us', and who is rejected as 'them'. And third, what kind of narrative is being told around the given identity; in particular, whether the group in question is presented as WUNC (worthy, united, numerous and committed) (Tilly, 2005).

The final stage of analysis of a site of memory is a description of its social consequences. To this, we have to describe, first, what are claims of a site on the public and political spheres, i.e., how does it affect politicians (if it is an element of politics of history), journalists and scientists (if it is an expression of culture of memory); second, what means are being used in order to achieve the goal of a site, i.e. what is its repertoire and campaign; third, is a place effective in terms of mobilizing people (qualitative and quantitative indicators).

In short, a full analysis of a given site of memory should undergo six stages of research:

- A. Political and cultural context
- B. The agents' activity
  - *top-down* (PH)
  - *bottom-up* (CM)
- C. Identity
  - Assertion of identity
  - Relations between identities
  - Narratives (WUNC)
- D. Goals
- E. Means
  - Campaign
  - Repertoire
- F. Effectiveness

## Conclusion

In accordance with this general research-framework it is possible to describe and explain all imaginable memory sites: museums, monuments, anniversaries, films etc in Poland, Russia and elsewhere. Nevertheless, we do not want merely to get to know a particular memory site, but a memory culture and politics of history of our nations in general. Moreover, it is not until we have compared Poland and Russia in this respect that we are able to describe and explain our respective memory cultures and politics of history. Put differently, we have to adopt a comparative perspective, as without a systematic comparison neither description, nor explanation is possible (Gerring, 2004). Such a comparison would be executed on the following dimensions:

- a) political and cultural context (in which one of the two countries is it more favorable? For what type of initiatives?)
- b) the agents' activities (are they initiated by the state or the civil society? What type of activities are top-down and bottom-up? Are there any distinguishable tendencies or trends of change within the memory cultures and politics of history?)
- c) identities (who is being commemorated? What narratives are being told about the commemorated groups, what connections between groups are being established?)

d) goals (what are the aims of the organizations dealing with commemorating the past? Who is their main address?)

e) means (what repertoire is being used? Traditional or innovative?)

f) effects (what is effectiveness of the activities?)

We will be able to answer those fundamental questions, provided we start a joint research. Empirical investigation will constitute an ultimate test of the framework's validity its usefulness or indeed uselessness. Alternatively, we can pursue any other viable project. The point is we should communicate with one other, as Pitirim Sorokin and Florian Znaniecki did.

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