

RAFAŁ ŻYTYNIEC
Elk

POLAND'S ROLE IN THE ANTIFASCIST POLICY OF MEMORY OF THE GERMAN DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC (1949-1972)

In 1949, the Thüringer Volksverlag in Weimar published a book of poems titled *Hallo, Bruder aus Krakau!* by socialist-realist poet Armin Müller. Its title was the title of a poem included in the book dedicated to “the Third Parliament of Free German Youth (*Freie Deutsche Jugend*, FDJ), the unstoppable avant-garde of the young generation storming ahead in its struggle for the unity of Germany, for a happy future in peace and friendship with all nations in the world!”¹ This “parliament” was held on 1-5 June 1949, only a few months before the creation of the first “democratic state of workers and peasants” was proclaimed on 7 October 1949. Müller’s poem perfectly illustrates the objectives of the later GDR policy of memory towards Poland, which was separated from Germany by the abyss of the still vivid six years of occupation.

Hello, brother from Kraków [Cracow]!

Once we pointed
guns at each other
in Lublin or Stettin
or somewhere else, brother
from Kraków. I speak from
Henningsdorf, where
we produce steel
to execute our plan,
with your coal, brother! But you too
have your plan. You have yours
and we ours. This plan
is not divided into
mine and yours. This plan
is ours, brother,
and this plan
will transform the whole world,
from Korea

¹ A. Müller, *Hallo Bruder aus Krakau!*, Weimar, 1949, p. 5.

on the one side
 up to Iceland on the other!
 This plan
 has many friends,
 not only you
 and me. Thus,
 brother, give me
 your hand. Let's
 forget about guns!²

The message of Müller's poem was an appeal to jointly build a new system and friendship between nations based on communist internationalism, while the recent and painful past dividing the two nations had to be simply forgotten. Before that scheme became the basis of East Germany's policy of memory, there was a phase in which the Socialist Unity Party of Germany (*Sozialistische Einheitspartei Deutschlands*, SED) – which was supported by the Soviet Military Administration in Germany – refused to recognise the Oder–Neisse border. That was an attempt to avoid the perception of a “Soviet party” among the SED membership. It was also relevant that at that time there was a huge inflow of Germans displaced from the pre-war eastern territories of Germany into the Soviet occupation zone. At the turn of 1947 and 1948 the Cold War was evident and the divide of Germany deepened. The power that guaranteed Poland's western border line was the Soviet Union, which forced the SED and the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) to cooperate.³ The change in the attitude towards Poland required the SED to undertake many propaganda activities justifying the “German–Polish friendship” in the eyes of East Germany's population, a majority of whom did not accept the new territorial order and the loss of their homelands. That was the situation in which Poland entered the orbit of the antifascist founding myth of the German Democratic Republic and the official policy of memory based on that myth. Gradually, the myth became the doctrine legitimising the SED government. As German historian Edgar Wolfrum rightly observes, since only few Germans had resisted Nazi dictatorship, this myth could not be constructed on the basis of communicative memory, that is in the space of

² *Ibidem*, pp. 11-12, “Wir hatten einmal/ die Flinten aufeinandergerichtet/ in Lublin oder Stettin/ oder sonstwo, Bruder/ aus Krakau. Ich spreche/ aus Henningsdorf, wo/ wir Stahl produzieren/ für unseren Plan/ mit eurer Kohle./ Bruder! Und ihr/ habt auch einen/ Plan. Ihr euren/ und wir unseren. Aber/ dann ist noch ein Plan. Der teilt/ sich nicht/ in deinen und/ meinen. Der ist/ unser Plan, Bruder./ und dieser Plan/ wird die ganze/ Welt verändern./ von Korea/ auf der einen Seite/ bis nach Island/ auf der anderen!// Und dieser Plan/ hat viele Brüder./ nicht nur dich/ und mich. Darum/ Bruder, gib mir/ die Hand. Wir/ wollen die/ Flinten/ vergessen!”

³ Cf. B. Olschowsky, *Der wenig vertraute Nachbar – Das Bild Polens in der DDR 1949-1989*, [in:] J. Kochanowski, B. Kosmala (eds.), *Deutsche, Polen und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Geschichte und Erinnerung*, Potsdam–Warsaw, 2009, pp. 142-153, here p. 143.

living memory “formed, vouched for, and communicated solely by way of personal experience”⁴ reaching at most 80 years back. But it

was condemned to take on cultural forms of transmission such as rituals, monuments, literature, and arts to begin to exist in the collective memory of the citizens of the GDR. This explains why such carriers of memory were used so intensely in order to enroot in people's heads the myth of the GDR being born by an antifascist resistance movement. Almost the entire GDR was covered with monuments and plaques commemorating antifascist resistance, heroes of communism whose example was to be followed, and commemorating the development of the GDR.⁵

The creation, maintenance, enrooting and transmission of the antifascist founding myth included many activities which sociologist Lech M. Nijakowski called “the state policy of memory”. In contrast to the vague and controversial concept of *Geschichtspolitik* or history-oriented policy⁶, Nijakowski defines the state policy of memory as “all intentional actions by politicians and administration that are formally legitimised and which aim at the embedding, eliminating or redefining of some specified content of social memory”.⁷ He also drew attention to the closeness between the state policy of memory and state propaganda.

The state authorities would strive to change the citizens' collective memory so that their legitimisation be stronger. The scope of propaganda depends on the political system (e.g. whether there is institutionalised censorship or media pluralism), but its nature is always similar. Propaganda is employed by democratic and authoritarian governments. [...] What is at stake in this game is power, citizens' loyalty and their mobilisation to perform defined tasks.⁸

At the foundation of the GDR political authorities' approach to the heritage of the Third Reich lay Georgi Dimitrov's definition of fascism, which was “the open terrorist dictatorship of the most reactionary, most chauvinist, and the most imperialist elements of finance capital”⁹. As Anna Wolff-Powęska rightly observes, that approach permitted only the “class interpretation” of the criminal system and thus excluded individual guilt and responsibility.¹⁰ It was also a comfortable way to bypass the asymmetric memories of WW2 which divided Poles and Germans. Examples of the avoidance of divisions will be discussed below.

⁴ J. Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination*, Cambridge, 2011, p. 36.

⁵ E. Wolfrum, *Die beiden Deutschland*, [in:] V. Knigge, N. Frei (eds.), *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord*, München-Bonn, 2005, p. 163.

⁶ For criticism of “history-oriented policy” see J. Kalicka, *Polityka historyczna*, [in:] M. Saryusz-Wolska, R. Traba (eds.), *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, Warsaw, 2014, pp. 378-387.

⁷ L. M. Nijakowski, *Polska polityka pamięci. Esej socjologiczny*, Warsaw, 2008, p. 44.

⁸ *Ibidem*, pp. 44-45.

⁹ After: A. Wolff-Powęska, *Pamięć – brzemień i uwolnienie. Niemcy wobec nazistowskiej przeszłości (1945-2010)*, Poznań, 2011, p. 223.

¹⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 224.

Hans-Helmuth Knütter distinguished two basic functions of the GDR policy of memory based on antifascism: internal and external. Its internal function was ideology serving integration, that is social and cultural transformation and moral justification of the new system. It also served to paralyse political opponents. Its external function was to draw a line separating the GDR from the FRG and its politics, to destabilise West Germany's system, and to win moral recognition for East Germany as an antifascist state.¹¹

In the construction of the GDR founding myth, Poland played a special role in the early days. Later, Poland became an important element of the strategy legitimising East Germany's own political identity, though the intensity with which East Germany "used" Poland depended on the actual political situation in relations between Poland and East Germany¹² and between East Germany and West Germany. The most serious obstacle in constructing the new ideology of friendship between East Germany and Poland was the two asymmetrical collective experiences resulting from the different memories of the recently ended WW2.¹³

Literature is a telling example of how divergent Polish and German collective experiences of the war were. If we view literature as a medium of memory, we can say that such literature covers "texts treated as part of the literary canon [...], which are carriers of memory".¹⁴ Hubert Orłowski long ago presented the thesis of a fundamental caesura dividing Polish and German literatures on war and occupation that was conditioned by the experience of deprivation.

¹¹ Cf. H.-H. Knütter, *Antifaschismus*, [in:] R. Eppelmann et al. (eds.), *Lexikon des DDR-Sozialismus. Das Staats- und Gesellschaftssystem der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik*, Paderborn, 1996, p. 56. More on antifascist ideology in the GDR in: A. Gruneberg, *Antifaschismus – ein deutscher Mythos?*, Reinbeck, 1993; J. Danyel (ed.), *Die geteilte Vergangenheit. Zum Umgang mit Nationalsozialismus und Widerstand in beiden deutschen Staaten*, Berlin, 1995; A. Leo, P. Reif-Spirek, *Vielstimmiges Schweigen. Neue Studien zum DDR Antifaschismus*, Berlin, 2001; T. Ahbe, *Der DDR-Antifaschismus. Diskurse und Generationen – Kontexte und Identitäten. Ein Rückblick über 60 Jahre*, Leipzig, 2007; A. Wolff-Powęska, *Pamięć – brzemie...*, pp. 223-247; E. Matkowska, *Propaganda w NRD. Media i literatura*, Wrocław, 2012, pp. 43-66.

¹² For periods in the relations between Poland and the GDR see also: Ch. Kleßmann, *Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen der DDR und der VR Polen (1949-1989)*, [in:] A. Reich, R. Maier (eds.), *Die lange Nachkriegszeit. Deutschland und Polen von 1945 bis 1991*, Braunschweig, 1995, pp. 85-103.

¹³ On the memory of WW2 in Poland and in Germany see also: E. Pawełczyńska, *Żywa historia. Pamięć i ocena lat okupacji*, Warsaw, 1977; E. Dmitrów, *Niemcy i okupacja hitlerowska w oczach Polaków. Poglądy i opinie z lat 1945-1948*, Warsaw, 1987; J. Danyel, *Vergangenheitspolitik in der SBZ/DDR 1945-1989*, [in:] W. Borodziej, K. Ziemer (eds.), *Deutsch-polnische Beziehungen 1939-1945-1949*, Osnabrück, 2000, pp. 265-295; R. Traba, *Symbole pamięci. II wojna światowa w świadomości zbiorowej Polaków*, [in:] R. Traba, *Kraina tysiąca granic. Szkice o historii i pamięci*, Olsztyn, 2003, pp. 179-198; S. Zabierowski, *Wojna i pamięć*, Katowice, 2006; T. Fischer, M. N. Lorenz (eds.), *Lexikon der Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Deutschland. Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945*, Bielefeld, 2008; A. Wolff-Powęska, *Pamięć – brzemie...*

¹⁴ K. Trybuś, *Literatura*, [in:] M. Saryusz-Wolska, R. Traba (eds.), *Modi memorandi. Leksykon kultury pamięci*, Warsaw, 2014, pp. 105-210, here p. 205.

It results from three key collective experiences. In the case of Polish literature these are: 1) Poland's defeat in September 1939 (1 and 17 September) understood as the fall of civilisation and the world of values; 2) the everyday "Make-believe life" under war occupation (Kazimierz Wyka's short stories); 3) the experience of "The world of stone", that is of a death camp (Tadeusz Borowski's short stories), and of "A world apart" that is the Gulag (Gustaw Herling-Grudziński's memoir), and thus of people "led to slaughter" who (incidentally) survived (Tadeusz Różewicz's poem "The survivor"). In the case of German literature, one should speak of three very different collective experiences: 1) the disaster and shock of the Battle of Stalingrad as a Cassandran prophecy of defeat; 2) the Dresden flames of hell as a metaphor of life or rather death in the bombing apocalypse; 3) the end of the war, which was the time of fleeing and expropriations.¹⁵

Asymmetries in that sphere have also been observed by researchers comparing Polish and German remembrance cultures. Robert Traba identifies the following events dominating the German collective memory of WW2: KL Auschwitz as a metaphor of the Holocaust and Germans' responsibility for it; the Battle of Stalingrad as a symbol of the heroism and sacrifice of *Wehrmacht* soldiers on the Eastern Front; bombings by the Allies and the most often quoted tragedy of Dresden; and the *Vertreibungen*, "expulsions" as trauma of a civil population forced to leave their motherlands. According to Traba, the Polish discourse on WW2 has been dominated by Poles' heroism in their fight against the Germans in the September Campaign of 1939, the Warsaw Uprising, and KL Auschwitz and Katyń (the Katyn massacre) as symbols of Polish victims of the two foreign totalitarianisms.¹⁶

This human ballast of the diametrically different perspectives on the war experiences of Poles and Germans was to be overcome by various undertakings under the umbrella of East Germany's officially approved antifascist policy of memory. Their goal was to create a shared or common narrative and thus memory of the Second World War, and to present East Germany as a peace-loving country in contrast to her political opponent, West Germany. The process of constructing this policy of memory was very complex and had many stages, its intensity kept changing, and a wide range of memory carriers was used. No systematic description of this policy has yet been given, although some attempts have been made.¹⁷

¹⁵ H. Orłowski, *O asymetrii deprivacji. Ucieczka, deportacja i wysiedlenie w niemieckiej i polskiej literaturze po 1939 r.*, [in:] H. Orłowski, A. Sakson, *Utracona ojczyzna. Przymusowe wysiedlenia, deportacje i przesiedlenia jako wspólne doświadczenie*, Poznań, 1996, pp. 189-207, here p. 191ff.

¹⁶ Cf. R. Traba, *Warum Besatzung? Reflexionen über die deutsch-polnische Geschichte*, [in:] *Historie. Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Folge 7 2013/2014: *Besatzung*, pp. 7-26, here p. 19. See also: *Historie. Jahrbuch des Zentrums für Historische Forschung Berlin der Polnischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, Folge 1 2007/2008: *Krieg und seine Folgen*.

¹⁷ In older publications on this subject there is little critical distance from the ideological content in the analysed examples of GDR literature. Cf. R. Orzełek-Bujak, *Die Thematik Polen und der II. Weltkrieg in der DDR-Literatur*, [in:] W. Wrzesiński (ed.), *Wokół stereotypów Niemców i Polaków*, Wrocław, 1993, pp. 235-265. The most thorough and valuable study so far is E. Dzikowska, *Gedächtnisraum Polen in der DDR-Literatur. Fallstudien über verdrängte Themen*, Wrocław, 1998.

The aim of this paper is to present the function of Polish threads of WW2 memory in the East German policy of memory in 1949-1972, by analysing three examples. These are: the reception of Leon Kruczkowski's play *Niemcy* (*Die Sonnenbrucks*) in the GDR, the activities of the *Helmut-von-Gerlach-Gesellschaft – Gesellschaft für kulturelle, wirtschaftliche und politische Beziehungen zu dem neuen Polen* (Helmut von Gerlach Association for Cultural, Economic and Political Relations with the New Poland), and the story of the Memorial to Polish Soldiers and German Antifascists in Berlin-Friedrichshain. The timeframe is delimited by the establishment of the German Democratic Republic in 1949 and the unveiling of the said Memorial on 14 May 1972, which marked the climax of the Polish–German remembrance discourse described here. Developments after 1972 will also be presented, but in brief.

The East German policy of memory has been little researched, and the same applies to its public reception in Germany and Poland. In the case of Poland, it can be hypothesised that it had a very limited impact. In the case of East Germany, further research is needed, especially in the archives of the Ministry for State Security (*Ministerium für Staatssicherheit*), commonly known as the Stasi.

LEON KRUCZKOWSKI'S *NIEMCY* AS AN ELEMENT OF THE GDR ANTIFASCIST FOUNDING MYTH

In its policy of memory, the GDR started to pay more attention to Poland with the German preview of Leon Kruczkowski's play titled in Polish *Niemcy*, literally (*The*) *Germans*, but staged as *Die Sonnenbrucks*. This took place on 28 October 1949 at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, only a week after its Polish première in Cracow on 22 October and shortly after the German Democratic Republic was established (7 October 1949). The play was not chosen accidentally, since up to the end of the 1940s and in the early 1950s the reception of Polish literature in the GDR was strictly constrained by the directives of the GDR's cultural policy. The aims of the directives of the Cultural Association of the GDR (*Kulturbund der DDR*) were "re-education in the antifascist and democratic spirit", understanding and cultural exchange with other nations.¹⁸ Susanne Misterek, in her book on the reception of Polish plays published in the GDR and the FRG, observed that in East Germany, Polish post-war literature which dealt with WW2 and Nazi war crimes had a double significance: it played an educational role in a social situation requiring a transformation of cultural patterns and values, and it supplied information about Polish history and culture.¹⁹ This educational and popularising function determined the choice

¹⁸ S. Misterek, *Polnische Dramatik in Bühnen- und Buchverlagen der Bundesrepublik Deutschland und der DDR*, Wiesbaden, 2002, p. 262.

¹⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 263.

of what was to be translated. Misterek established that Poland exerted much influence on which Polish plays were to be staged in East Germany in its early years. Poland presented its offers to the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs via the Polish Diplomatic Mission in Berlin. The East German Ministry of Foreign Affairs passed such offers to the Department of Cultural Cooperation at the State Commission for Arts. At the same time, the expectations of theatres in the GDR were taken into account.²⁰ The fact that translations of Polish plays were prioritised was also due – according to Misterek – to the admiration and recognition of and will to learn from Poland, which could be observed in the eastern part of Germany.²¹ The positive recognition of Poland did not mean, however, that East Germany's authorities on memory policy did not interfere. They claimed their right to intervene in the content and form of translated literary works.²² Leon Kruczkowski's *Niemcy* is a fine example of a play which as a result of a number of "suggestions" was adjusted to serve the GDR's memory policy. What changes were introduced? The first and most important change was in the title of the play. Its translator Horst Holzschuher did not translate the title as *Die Deutschen*, but he resorted to the main character's family name – which he altered – and titled it *Die Sonnenbrucks* ("The Sonnenbrucks").²³ This was "a more conciliatory title, which – for the East German audience – posed no threat of being mistakenly understood as a generalisation."²⁴ The reason why the surname of the main character was altered – that is, Sonnenbruch was changed to Sonnenbruck – was probably to avoid associations with well-known surgeon Ferdinand Sauerbruch (1875–1951).²⁵ During WW2, Sauerbruch headed the General Medicine Branch of the Reich Research Council. He was interrogated by the Gestapo because his son had ties to the leading members of the failed plot of 20 July 1944 to assassinate Adolf Hitler. In 1945, the authorities of the Soviet Occupation Zone appointed him as head of the Health Department of East Berlin. He was also a member and co-founder of the CDU (Christian Democratic Union of Germany) in East Berlin and in the Soviet Occupation Zone.²⁶

²⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 269.

²¹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 273. This matter will be discussed further below in the context of the Helmut von Gerlach Association for Cultural, Economic and Political Relations with the New Poland.

²² Cf. T. Taterka, „Das kann dem deutschen Leser nicht zugemutet werden“: *polnische Literatur über Konzentrationslager und Judenvernichtung in der DDR*, [in:] M. Brumlik, K. Sauerland (eds.), *Umdeuten, verschweigen, erinnern. Die späte Aufarbeitung des Holocaust in Osteuropa*. Frankfurt am Main, 2010, pp. 203–224.

²³ L. Kruczkowski, *Die Sonnenbrucks. Stück in drei Akten mit einem Epilog*. Deutsche Übersetzung: Horst Holzschuher, Berlin, 1952.

²⁴ S. Misterek, *op. cit.*, p. 279.

²⁵ Cf. D. Scholze, *Zwischen Vergnügen und Schock. Polnische Dramatik im 20. Jahrhundert*, Berlin (Ost), 1989, footnote 16, p. 328.

²⁶ Cf. G. Baumgartner, *Sauerbruch, Ferdinand*, [in:] G. Baumgartner, D. Hebig (eds.), *Biographisches Handbuch der SBZ/DDR 1945-1990*, vol. 2., Munich, 1997, pp. 756-757.

The last manoeuvre to adjust *Niemcy* to meet the postulates of the GDR's memory policy was to ask Kruczkowski to add an epilogue to his play, which he did. Professor Sonnenbruck, disappointed with the Nazi ideology still present in West Germany, decides to move to East Germany to contribute to its emerging democracy. In 1955, Kruczkowski was asked by the *Nowa Kultura* weekly to justify the epilogue. Kruczkowski justified the addition of the epilogue on the grounds of "political rationality"²⁷ and the fact that his play was to be staged in German theatres in 1949. According to Kruczkowski, his epilogue was meant to calm down the German audience. It was to show that

this or other evil exists in our life, but also to make instantly sure – in the same piece – that it is contrasted with a victorious "positive" which means – in some situations at least – to renounce the mobilising impact of the piece, to weaken its social function, to calm down the spectator-listener that there is nothing to worry about because there are powers which...etc.²⁸

There is much evidence, however, that Kruczkowski was simply forced to add the epilogue to his play. This thesis was put forward by Edmund Jan Osmańczyk in his paper published in *Poglądy* in 1977:

Kruczkowski – who knew the Germany of wartime well and whose idea of the social phenomenon of the German nation's transformations under the fascist system was ideologically grounded – was unfortunately – and let us say it openly now – literally forced to write the epilogue, which was to be a short scene rounding up the metamorphosis of the German nation in four post-war years which were devilishly complicated and followed thirteen years of the Third Reich.²⁹

In a later part of his text, Osmańczyk recollected that the suggestions on what to change in the German translation of Kruczkowski's play came directly from German reviewers.

I do not know when the idea of concurrent previews of the new play in Polish and German languages was born. I only know that in the spring of 1949 a little bird told me that *Niemcy* was already being translated, and then some gossip that German reviewers in the Soviet occupation zone had suggested some amendments or corrections. It was the time of the Cold War [...] I can only speculate that in this heated atmosphere where the divided Berlin was called a "front city" in both of its parts, the arguments of "our Germans" that the modified play would aid the ideological war carried much political weight for Leon Kruczkowski, who was a conscientious Party member, despite the fact that the arguments were narrow-minded, short-sighted and far from historical truth.³⁰

²⁷ L. Kruczkowski, *Ankieta »Nowej Kultury«*. *Pisarze wobec dziesięciolecia.*, Nowa Kultura, No. 27/1955. After: T. Sivert, „*Niemcy*” *Leona Kruczkowskiego*, Warsaw, 1965 (Biblioteka Analiz Literackich, 16), p. 63.

²⁸ *Ibidem*.

²⁹ E. J. Osmańczyk, *Niemcy czy »Sonnenbruchowie«? Wspomnienie o Leonie Kruczkowskim*, *Poglądy*, No. 15/1977, pp. 13-15, here p. 14.

³⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 15.

Literary critic Ryszard Matuszewski – who saw the preview of *Die Sonnenbrucks* in East Berlin – was of the opinion that Kruczkowski “added to his play an epilogue which was completely redundant from an artistic perspective and was but pure propaganda” to meet “the demand of Party ‘consultants’”.³¹

It can be concluded not only that the epilogue of *Die Sonnenbrucks* was influenced by ideology, but also that the whole translation process of the play was a political priority for institutions creating the GDR policy of memory. Initially, Kruczkowski was ready to make some concessions for ideology, but finally he deleted the epilogue when the play was later staged by Erwin Axer at the National Theatre in Warsaw in 1955. The epilogue was also omitted from *Niemcy in Dramaturgia Leona Kruczkowskiego* (“The collected plays of Leon Kruczkowski”).³²

With the epilogue, *Die Sonnenbrucks* as staged in East Germany was a classic example of agitprop. The epilogue was crucial to the reception of the play in Germany. Ryszard Matuszewski reported on the Berlin première of the play as follows: “During the performance the entire audience hold their breath waiting for the *Epilogue* as one awaits the court ruling [...]”³³. The reasons were the emotions and expectation of the German audience: “something like hesitations, fear, a prejudice against a play written by a foreigner who tells Germans the truth about themselves [...]”³⁴. These doubts were dispelled only by the epilogue. Its effect on the German audience was described by Jan Alfred Szczepański in his review published in the Polish *Trybuna Ludu* daily.

In the epilogue, Professor Sonnenbruck, shocked with the post-war relapses of Hitlerite sentiments in Germany, breaks free of passivity and declares the will to join the active struggle for peace and the democratisation of Germany. What is the average German spectator's reaction to the decision of the old liberal? The audience was silent till the end of Act III. But now, while they watch the epilogue the silence is broken with a murmur of hand clapping. And this applause, a long and wholehearted applause for the message of the play, the performance of the actors, is repeated after the play ends.³⁵

The thesis presented above is confirmed by the reception of Kruczkowski's play in the GDR press, especially the reviews published in the *Neues Deutschland* daily, the official newspaper of the SED Central Committee. There a review written by Fritz Erpenbeck, a most prominent literary critic in East Germany at the time, was published on 1 November 1949. In his review of the *Die Sonnenbrucks* preview, he emphasised the significance of the almost concurrent premières of the play in Ber-

³¹ R. Matuszewski, *Literatura polska 1939-1991*, Warsaw, 1992, p. 62.

³² Cf. R. Szydłowski, *Dramaturgia Leona Kruczkowskiego*, Cracow, 1972, p. 110.

³³ R. Matuszewski, *Tydzień w Berlinie*, Kuźnica, No. 51-52/1949; after T. Sivert, *op. cit.*, p. 106.

³⁴ *Ibidem*.

³⁵ J. A. Szczepański, *Gdy w Berlinie grają »Niemców« Kruczkowskiego*, Trybuna Ludu, No. 336/1949; after T. Sivert, *op. cit.*, p. 108ff.

lin and Warsaw and described it as a “prominent demonstration of the re-emerging friendship with our closest neighbour”.³⁶ Erpenbeck appreciated Kruczkowski’s readiness to overcome the suffering experienced in wartime and his ability to empathise with Germans and their situation,

with their doomed conditionalities, their actual historical existence [...]. Here, there is no hatred, no resentment, but the endeavour to present an objective, fair evaluation and the true will to forgive and move ahead to the future together, on a common path respecting the man.³⁷

Consequently, *Die Sonnenbrucks* was “so far the most **German** modern play written by a Pole.”³⁸ According to Erpenbeck, such a play could be written by a Pole because the “Polish nation – in its majority (and in contrast to our nation) – took real, active and politically informed actions to combat fascism, and it won.”³⁹ Erpenbeck’s review contains a wide range of elements present in the GDR policy of memory, which were used by the official propaganda. Kruczkowski’s merit was the differentiation he made and consequently his objective, fair and realistic presentation of German entanglements in the Nazi period. Thus Kruczkowski’s play had a very important prospective dimension for the GDR policy of memory, in which the desire to shape relations with the eastern neighbour in a peaceful and friendly way was officially declared. This dimension was much more emphatically accentuated in other reviews of the German preview of *Die Sonnenbrucks*.

The aforementioned characteristic feature of the antifascist doctrine propagated in the GDR was the class interpretation of Nazi crimes, which here could be identified with the “internationalisation of fascism”. This interpretation was propagated in an article on a debate on *Die Sonnenbrucks* organised by the *Helmut-von-Gerlach-Gesellschaft – Gesellschaft für kulturelle, wirtschaftliche und politische Beziehungen zu dem neuen Polen* held in November 1949. It was published in the Association’s monthly *Blick nach Polen*. Its author praised the impartiality of Kruczkowski, who – being Polish – showed to Germans that “**national socialism** – which so inhumanly treated Poland – **was not a German but an international matter** of significance to world politics” [emphasis mine] and that “equating Germans with the national socialists is a manifestation of racist reasoning”.⁴⁰

The play was then staged in other theatres, including provincial ones, and its reception became a permanent and significant element of the GDR policy of memory. It was a propaganda instrument serving to reinforce the idea of East Germany’s friendship with Poland.

³⁶ F. Erpenbeck, *Ein politisches und künstlerisches Ereignis. Zur deutschen Uraufführung des Schauspiels »Die Sonnenbrucks« von Leon Kruczkowski*, Neues Deutschland, 1 November 1949, p. 3.

³⁷ *Ibidem*.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ W-S., *Wirkliches Verständnis*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 3/1949, pp. 34-25, here p. 34.

On 6 July 1950, the Treaty of Zgorzelec (*The Agreement Concerning the Demarcation of the Established and the Existing Polish–German State Frontier*, also known as the *Treaty of Görlitz*) was signed. In a commentary published on that occasion in *Neues Deutschland*, Kruczkowski's play was identified with a stage "on the path to Polish–German friendship"⁴¹. Its author wrote, with pathos, that:

Kruczkowski's drama presents the old and new Germany. Next to the horrifying and blood-thirsty Germany, which Poles know from their own experience, there is the good and progressive Germany that was deeply hidden for years. [...] The phase of long-lived hostilities between Poles and Germans has ended. The time of everlasting friendship has begun.⁴²

The thus proclaimed eternal friendship was directed against the external enemy, which for both East Germany and Poland was West Germany.

This dimension of the construction of the GDR's political identity in its early days – that is, in opposition to a class enemy in the West – became much more obvious after the film adaptation of *Die Sonnenbrucks*. The film was directed by Georg C. Klaren and produced by DEFA in 1951. The film differed more from the Polish version of the play than the German theatrical version did. Klaren put his expectations about his film in the following words: "I expect this film to be an artistic and political success. It is directed against West German re-militarisation and reactionaries."⁴³ In the film, the antifascist fight of both countries was accentuated, and the message of the epilogue became central and was elaborated. A telling example is the last scene, where Professor Sonnenbruck announces to his students that he is going to emigrate to the GDR. This is both a propagandist apotheosis of the new, peace-loving German state and a stigmatisation of relations in the FRG. The following is a translation of the film script:

Deeply moved students are listening with attention to their beloved professor. Sonnenbruck slowly starts climbing the stairs. Stopping at the highest landing, he addresses the students gathered at the railings:

– I am leaving for a Germany which rebuilds itself as a new democracy and not the former military state. [To a country] Where war is hated and it is demanded that science serves a peaceful future and not destruction.

One of the students runs up the stairs shouting:

– Long live Professor Sonnenbruck!

The enthusiastic cheers get louder when the professor turns once more to make his farewell to the students by waving his hand in a friendly way.

– Long live the new, united, peace-loving Germany!⁴⁴

⁴¹ Cf. A. Rehahn, *Der Weg zur deutsch-polnischen Freundschaft*, Neues Deutschland, 22 July 1950, p. 10.

⁴² *Ibidem*.

⁴³ *Vor der Uraufführung des DEFA-Films „Die Sonnenbrucks“*, Kulturdienst ADN, 27 February 1951.

⁴⁴ T. Kowalski, *Rodzina Sonnenbrucków*, Warsaw 1951, p. 111 (Biblioteka scenariuszy filmowych, VIII).

The political message of the film was strongly highlighted in reviews of its first screening on 1 March 1951. Hans Urlich Eylau, in his article significantly titled *Dich selber geht es an* ["It is you who should care" or "It's up to you"] published in *Berliner Zeitung*, wrote:

What in theatres was a short epilogue becomes the decisive moment in the film plot. The most important word, not the one spoken in the past but in the present. What the Sonnenbrucks experienced and did during the Nazi time justifies their conduct after the war. [...] The current relations in West Germany including its white and secret channels – the information from which fuels the reactions of reactionaries and the neofascists abetting another war – are somewhat aggregated in the film, albeit the crux of the matter is carefully presented. [...] This is the message, the sense of this important film addressing the heart and reason of its every viewer: it was not that in 1945 the fascist threat ended; it was only the war that ended. This – what always seemed to be part of earlier times – has to be decided upon today. Today is the time to fight.⁴⁵

The above is characteristic of the Cold War confrontational rhetoric, full of hatred between the two German states. In East Germany that rhetoric was supported by concrete educational goals and the official interpretation of Kruczkowski's play, which complied with the teaching directives in the GDR.

In 1952, in an article published in *Deutschunterricht*, a periodical devoted to German language teaching, Karl Kögler wrote:

By reading and interpreting this realist play, students should – from their most often misty recollections – gain a clear image of how fascism humiliated Germans and pushed them to [commit] crimes against their own and other nations. Through this experience they should comprehend the huge guilt bearing down on the German people who tolerated and supported fascism. The abhorrence at fascist crimes must evoke in the students their hatred of those fascist powers which today, in the West of our country, rely on American imperialism that supports them. These powers again foment violence against other nations and arm themselves to start a new war against peace-loving nations. From the literary experience and examples of positive characters, a will to defend the democratic achievements of the German Democratic Republic must stem, and also the will to fight again – together with all patriotic powers in West Germany – against the awakening fascism and for the unity of the truly democratic and peace-loving Germany. The students should feel obliged to do so, the more so since a Polish playwright tells them with his play that he and the Polish nation believe in the victory of democratic powers in the new Germany.⁴⁶

Thus it is not surprising that the reception of the play in West Germany was also dominated by political aspects of the Polish–German–German confrontation. In their book on the reception of Polish plays in Germany, Christine Fischer and Ulrich Steltner pointed out that West German reviewers focused on the agitprop epilogue

⁴⁵ H. U. Eylau, *Dich selber geht es an. Zur Uraufführung des DEFA-Films „Die Sonnenbrucks“ im Babylon*, *Berliner Zeitung*, 3 March 1951.

⁴⁶ Karl Kögler: »Die Sonnenbrucks« von Leon Kruczkowski. *Analyse und Unterrichtsentwurf für das 8. Schuljahr*, *Deutschunterricht. Zeitschrift für Erziehungs- und Bildungsaufgaben des Deutschunterrichts*, Heft 3/1952, pp. 135-147.

of *Die Sonnenbruchs*. They wrote about the structure of the play, its three acts and the epilogue, but for the sake of anti-propaganda polemics, their main arguments focused on the epilogue.⁴⁷ The very titles of those reviews tell much about the way East German propagandistic arguments were refuted: *Terror in Göttingen. A peculiar legend on the German stage* (in *Die Zeit*)⁴⁸ and *Germans are also people. In the dictatorship climate* (in *Der Spiegel*).⁴⁹

Summing up the reception of Leon Kruczkowski's *Niemcy/Die Sonnenbruchs* in East Germany, the following conclusions can be offered. In the GDR, the play was forcibly manipulated because of the immediate needs of East Germany's policy of memory. It was used for the antifascist legitimisation of the then young German state "of workers and peasants" in the eyes of its citizens and world opinion. The date of the preview was carefully chosen in East Germany. Interventions of party officials in the "translation" of the play's title and the addition of the socialist-realist epilogue, which was to clearly explicate the thesis of the play, were effective. In this way the treacherous reefs of the recent Polish-German past and the burden of World War II were avoided. What counted was the present and future in the new German state, which apparently even by 1949 had managed to overcome the Nazi past. Nazism was recognised as an international phenomenon (also by Kruczkowski himself⁵⁰) and thus "internationalised". The war guilt was externalised and the blame put on West Germany, governed by "monopolists", "imperialists" and former Nazis. The weight of such statements in the East German discourse on the policy of memory was huge, especially since they came from a prominent representative of Polish culture and a recent victim of the Nazis. They were strengthened still further when the stage play was adapted into a film. In the film, in contrast to the play, the issue of German war guilt was hardly raised, as it was the common socialist present and future which mattered. Finally, in 1975, when Kruczkowski's 75th birthday was celebrated, Peter Ball translated *Niemcy* anew. That fact perfectly illustrates the ad hoc political needs of the East German policy of memory. The new translation was published under the title *Die Sonnenbruchs*⁵¹ and without the epilogue. The original family name of the main character was restored; however, the translator did not attempt to use the equivalent of the original Polish title, i.e. *Niemcy* ("Germans").

The role which *Niemcy* played in the policy of memory of the newly created GDR was well identified by the authors of a history of theatre in the GDR published

⁴⁷ Cf. Ch. Fischer, U. Steltner, *Polnische Dramen in Deutschland. Übersetzungen als deutsch-deutsche Rezeptionsgeschichte 1945-1995*, Cologne, 2011, p. 171.

⁴⁸ K. W.: *Terror in Göttingen*, *Die Zeit*, 24 November 1949, <http://www.zeit.de/1949/47/terro-in-goettingen> (accessed: 30.08.2012).

⁴⁹ *Deutsche sind auch Menschen. Im Klima der Diktatur*, *Der Spiegel*, No. 49/1949, p. 35.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Kruczkowski's words in Herman Müller's »Die Sonnenbruchs« als Film*, *Neues Deutschland*, 3 March 1951, p. 5.

⁵¹ L. Kruczkowski, *Die Sonnenbruchs. Stück in drei Akten*, translation: Peter Ball, [in:] P. Ball, *Dramen*. Berlin, 1975, pp. 5-295.

in 1972. It was called a “significant contribution of the new Poland to the antifascist fight in eastern Germany”⁵² and the Berlin première of this play by a Polish author “announced abroad the existence of the new, democratic Germany.”⁵³

ACTIVITIES OF THE HELMUT VON GERLACH ASSOCIATION FOR CULTURAL,
ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL RELATIONS WITH THE NEW POLAND

In the difficult first years following WW2, the Oder–Neisse border caused much tension, which lessened once the GDR was created. Relations between the neighbouring GDR and Poland entered a new phase, which lasted until the Polish October of 1956. In that phase the GDR policy of memory was conditioned by political facts, including the Treaty of Zgorzelec (*The Agreement Concerning the Demarcation of the Established and the Existing Polish–German State Frontier*) of 6 July 1950, the GDR–Poland agreement on cross-border supplies and payments in 1952–1955 signed on 10 November 1951 in Warsaw, and the bilateral agreement on cultural cooperation of 8 January 1952.⁵⁴ These agreements led to the mass propaganda of “Polish–German friendship” which was then a significant component of the East German policy of memory. The leading role was played by the Helmut von Gerlach Association for Cultural, Economic and Political Relations with the New Poland (*Helmut-von-Gerlach-Gesellschaft – Gesellschaft für kulturelle, wirtschaftliche und politische Beziehungen zu dem neuen Polen*), which was founded on 19 August 1948, a year before the creation of the GDR. In March 1950, the name of the Association was changed to the German–Polish Association for Friendship and Good Neighbourhood (*Deutsch-Polnische Gesellschaft für Frieden und Gute Nachbarschaft*).⁵⁵ Krzysztof Ruchniewicz underlined the unique character of this Association estab-

⁵² M. Berger et al., *Theater in der Zeitenwende. Zur Geschichte des Dramas und des Schauspieltheaters in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik 1945–1968*, vol. 1, Berlin, 1972, p. 175.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 177.

⁵⁴ Cf. Ch. Kleßmann, *Die politischen Beziehungen...*, p. 87.

⁵⁵ For the history and activities of the Association see F.-H. Gentzen, *Die Umerziehung der Bevölkerung der Sowjetischen Besatzungszone Deutschlands und der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik im Geiste freundschaftlicher Beziehungen zum neuen Polen (1945–1952)*, [in:] *Jahrbuch für Geschichte der sozialistischen Länder Europas*, vol. 13/1/1969, pp. 111–142; Ch. Hübner, *Zum Wirken der Deutsch-Polnischen Gesellschaft für Frieden und gute Nachbarschaft (1948–1952)*, [in:] *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, No. 5/1979, pp. 409–422; E. Dzikowska, *Gedächtnisraum Polen in der DDR-Literatur. Fallstudien über verdrängte Themen*, Wrocław, 1998, pp. 70–91; K. Ruchniewicz, *Warszawa-Berlin-Bonn. Stosunki polityczne 1949–1958*, Wrocław, 2003 (Monografie Centrum Studiów Niemieckich i Europejskich im. Willy Brandta, 3), pp. 129–158; Ch. Lotz, *Die Deutung des Verlusts. Erinnerungspolitische Kontroversen im geteilten Deutschland um Flucht, Vertreibung und die Ostgebiete (1948–1972)*, Cologne, 2007, pp. 84–103. See also Ch. Lotz, *Zwischen verordneter und ernsthafter Freundschaft. Die Bemühungen der Helmut-von-Gerlach-Gesellschaft um eine deutsch-polnische Annäherung in der DDR und in der Bundesrepublik (1948–1972)*, [in:] H. H. Hahn, H. Hein-Kirchner, A. Kochanowska-Nieborak (eds.), *Erinnerungskultur und Versöhnungskitsch*, Marburg, 2008, pp. 201–216.

lished in the GDR, since at the time, the only other association dealing with the GDR's relations with a country of the Eastern (Soviet) Block was the German–Soviet Friendship Association, created on 30 June 1947.⁵⁶ The Association was named after Helmut von Gerlach (1866–1935), born in Mönchmotschelnitz (Moczydlnica Klasztorna) in Silesia. He was a German politician, journalist and writer. His views changed over time from conservative and nationalistic to left-leaning, liberal and pacifistic. In 1918 he supported the right to self-determination of the Polish population in territories occupied by Prussia, and opposed the demands for revision of the German–Polish border which were widespread in the Weimar Republic.⁵⁷

In the first months after its establishment, the Association concentrated on providing reminders of the crimes committed by Nazi Germany in Poland during WW2. Initially, its attitude to Poland and Poles was remorseful. Its application to be registered – submitted to the Lord Mayor of Berlin on 1 April 1949 – stated that the Association's main goal was to “make a wide array of the German society aware of the disastrous policy which Germany applied to its neighbour for dozens of years and the catastrophic results of which are visible still today”⁵⁸. The tasks of the Association included the elimination of widely held prejudices against Poland:

redressing historical mistakes, especially those made under Nazism; propagating information about political and economic relations in the new democratic Polish state; initiating good cooperation between people of culture; and supporting good relations between progressive elements in both countries.⁵⁹

On 19 August 1948 the Statutes of the Association were approved. The goal and tasks of the Association were laid down as follows:

The goal of the Association is to care for and support cultural, economic and political relations between the new Poland and Germany. This goal is to be realised by the organisation of lectures, concerts, theatrical performances, film shows, exhibitions and study visits, the creation of libraries and the issuing of publications which correspond to the Association's goals.⁶⁰

The first Secretary-General of the Association was Karl Wloch (1905–1982), appointed on 9 September 1949. This appointment was not accidental: in 1949 Wloch had returned to Germany from Poland, where he had stayed since 1948, working

⁵⁶ Cf. K. Ruchniewicz, *Warszawa-Berlin-Bonn. Stosunki polityczne 1949-1958*, Wrocław, 2003 (Monografie Centrum Studiów Niemieckich i Europejskich im. Willy Brandta, 3), p. 129.

⁵⁷ Cf. H.-J. Bömelburg, *Helmut von Gerlach. Konstruktion einer Biographie „von rechts nach links“*, [in:] Ch. Koch (ed.), *Vom Junker zum Bürger. Helmut von Gerlach – Demokrat und Pazifist in Kaiserreich und Republik*, Munich, 2009, pp. 1-17, here p. 2ff.

⁵⁸ Antrag beim Oberbürgermeister von Berlin auf die Registrierung der Helmut von Gerlach-Gesellschaft vom 1. April 1949, SAPMO, BAArch, DY 13/1.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁶⁰ Satzungen der Helmut von Gerlach – Gesellschaft für kulturelle, wirtschaftliche und politische Beziehungen zu dem neuen Polen vom 19. August 1948, SAPMO, BAArch, DY 13/1.

among German POWs to gain support for the SED.⁶¹ Already in the autumn of 1949, working groups of the Association were created at various workplaces and other institutions, and their regional and county networks grew. According to official data, the membership also grew rapidly, and in June 1952 the number of members was 110,000.⁶² That figure, however, does not reflect actual involvement, since in many cases people joined the Association on being persuaded to do so by members of the SED, and were not motivated by a will to contribute to German–Polish reconciliation.⁶³

Until 1949, the Association focused on organising cultural events such as concerts, screenings of Polish films and exhibitions presenting Polish art.⁶⁴ After the GDR was created, the Association was institutionally involved in the implementation of the official antifascist policy of memory. The political role of the Association grew, and consequently it was renamed the German–Polish Association for Friendship and Good Neighbourhood. The new name was approved at the Association’s first working conference, held on 25–26 March 1950. Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl was the first honorary chairman of the Association, and the 22nd of July was proclaimed the “Day of Polish–German Friendship”.⁶⁵ Events organised in 1950 were mainly propagandistic and aimed to explain the sense of the Treaty of Zgorzelec/Görlitz, which confirmed the Polish–German border line.⁶⁶ The first celebrations of the Polish–German Friendship Day on 22 July 1950 also served “to explain the German–Polish agreements, policies of the SED and the government of the GDR, to popularise knowledge of the recovery of People’s Poland, and to contribute to foster international awareness” further⁶⁷. To fight the then widely spread stereotype of *polnische Wirtschaft*, the so-called “Warsaw pace” was propagated. This was a name given to Poland’s approach to its recovery after WW2, which was an example to be followed in the GDR.⁶⁸ In July 1949 the Association began publishing its *Blick nach Polen* (“A Look at Poland”) monthly.

⁶¹ Cf. Wloch, *Karl*, [in:] H. Müller-Enbergs, J. Wielgoths, D. Hoffmann (eds.), *Wer war wer in der DDR? Ein biographisches Lexikon*, Berlin, 2004 (Digitale Bibliothek Band 54), p. 928. For Wloch’s activities among German POWs see J. Kochanowski, *W polskiej niewoli. Niemieccy jeńcy wojenni w Polsce 1945–1950*, Warsaw, 2001.

⁶² Cf. Ch. Hübner, *Zum Wirken der Deutsch-Polnischen Gesellschaft für Frieden und gute Nachbarschaft (1948–1952)*, Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft, No. 5/1979, pp. 409–422, here p. 414, footnote 31.

⁶³ Cf. Ch. Lotz, *Zwischen verordneter und ernsthafter Freundschaft...*, pp. 201–216, here p. 214.

⁶⁴ Cf. Aufstellung über die bisher durchgeführten Veranstaltungen der Hellmut von Gerlach-Gesellschaft (6.9.1948–16.3.1949), SAPMO, BArch, DY 13/1.

⁶⁵ Cf. Karl Wloch, *Unser Präsident Otto Grotewohl* (1982), SAPMO, BArch, SgY 30/1103, p. 97.

⁶⁶ Cf. Ch. Hübner, *Zum Wirken der Deutsch-Polnischen Gesellschaft...*, pp. 409–422, here p. 417.

⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 418.

⁶⁸ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 420.

On 1 January 1953 the Association became part of the *Gesellschaft für Kulturelle Verbindungen mit dem Ausland* (Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries). Officially, that decision was justified by the need to deepen and strengthen relations with socialist countries, which required the creation of a special institution focused on cooperation with all such countries and to ensure that this goal would be reached.⁶⁹ In reality, the SED Department for Political Agitation probably recognised that a separate institution propagating Polish–German friendship was no longer needed.⁷⁰ This thesis was confirmed by Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, who searched the archive of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He found that at that time the GDR authorities refrained from emphasising relations with Poland in East Germany's internal propaganda and decided that they did not require specialised institutional forms. This mirrored a general cooling in relations between East Germany and Poland at the turn of 1952 and 1953, which was deepened by the de-Stalinisation processes that took place in Poland after 1956.⁷¹

How did the Helmut von Gerlach Association handle the asymmetries of Polish and German memories of the Second World War? An answer can be found in articles published in *Blick nach Polen* in 1949–1953. The above-mentioned remorse for German crimes in Poland during WW2 was clearly visible in articles published in the first issues of the monthly. In the foreword to the first issue, president of the GDR Academy of Sciences and of the Association Johannes Stroux, a German classicist, underlined that the date of the first *Blick nach Polen* was the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of the war. He wrote that Germany was solely guilty for the war: “Doubting the unilateral responsibility for what happened in the past would, especially in the case of Poland, contradict historical truth”.⁷² That was why the goal of the Association's members and of the editors was – on one hand – to compensate for the “unquestionable guilt” which “aggravates bilateral relations between the German and Polish nations”, and – on the other – to focus on current issues relevant to both nations in order to fight misunderstandings which “might be an obstacle to a peaceful advancement of bilateral relations”⁷³. One such current issue was the recently ended war. Christian Lotz, in his book on the history of the Association, observed that “in its publications, the Association usually faithfully followed the communist interpretation of Polish–German relations and the mechanistic vision of the ‘Polish–German friendship’ in the form developed by the SED Department for Political Agitation”.⁷⁴ Lotz rightly noticed that articles on German war crimes published in *Blick nach Polen* should not be considered plain propaganda, because shortly after WW2 there

⁶⁹ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 409 and 421ff.

⁷⁰ Cf. Ch. Lotz, *Zwischen verordneter und ernsthafter Freundschaft...*, p. 214.

⁷¹ Cf. K. Ruchniewicz, *Warszawa-Berlin-Bonn...*, pp. 156-158.

⁷² J. Stroux, *Geleitwort*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 1/1949, p. 1.

⁷³ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁴ Ch. Lotz, *Zwischen verordneter und ernsthafter Freundschaft...*, p. 206.

were very few publications dealing with this topic.⁷⁵ With time, even war crimes came to serve the GDR policy of memory. That phenomenon manifested itself clearly in the second issue of the monthly, published on 1 September 1949. It contained a statement issued by the Association on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the outbreak of WW2. It began with a powerful enumeration of Polish war losses.

Ten years ago on 1 September 1939, Hitler attacked Poland and started the Second World War. The number of the killed and deported and the magnitude of destruction tell the horrific story of the suffering inflicted on the Polish nation during that second war until Poland's liberation. The Polish nation mourns 6 million lives lost, including 3.5 million Jews, who were victims of Hitler's barbarism. 5,000 teachers, 3,500 clergy, 700 professors and scientists, 200 artists and 60 writers were deliberately murdered in concentration camps. 5 million Polish children lost their parents. Warsaw was 93 percent destroyed. 84 percent of Polish railroad infrastructure was destroyed. In total, war losses amount to 258.8 thousand million peacetime Polish zlotys.⁷⁶

The Association's stance was that that the national collapse of Germany was an outcome of the war. The statement was directed against Hitler's accomplices to the attack on Poland and against "representatives of the American and English industrial capital" who were using the new German-Polish border as an argument justifying them "talking about the new thrust toward the East" and who "want to make Germany the battlefield of the third world war, the end of which can only be total destruction"⁷⁷. The way the statement served the policy of memory of the emerging GDR was clearly visible; the causal link between the situation in Germany and the Second World War which Germany had started was acknowledged, but the statement also served the current goals of the GDR, which claimed its right to represent all of Germany and presented itself as a peace-loving country. The statement ended in a manner characteristic of SED propaganda:

However, the German nation is not considering sending fathers and sons to a war as imperialists' mercenaries. The German nation does not want another war and new catastrophes. It wants peace, reconciliation, recovery and better life. The German nation must acknowledge that instigation against and hostility towards Poland may finally turn against Germans.⁷⁸

The official establishment of the new German Democratic Republic in the Soviet occupation zone was greeted with enthusiasm in *Blick nach Polen*. The third issue of the monthly opened with an article by Karl Wloch. He underlined that thanks to "this generous act of the Soviet Union and its brilliant leader Generalissimus Stalin", Germany had regained its sovereignty and was thus "able to base its relations with

⁷⁵ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 207.

⁷⁶ *Erklärung der Helmut-von-Gerlach-Gesellschaft für kulturelle, wirtschaftliche und politische Beziehungen zu dem neuen Polen zum 1. September 1949, dem 10. Jahrestag des faschistischen Überfalls auf Polen*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 2/1949, p. 1.

⁷⁷ *Ibidem*.

⁷⁸ *Ibidem*.

all nations on completely new principles”⁷⁹. As for Polish–German relations, Wloch postulated that the “incredible suffering” of the Polish nation inflicted by Germans would lead to Germans’ “more serious and honest self-criticism”. This self-criticism was to give rise to a “sincere friendship relation of the entire German nation with the neighbouring nation”⁸⁰. Wloch’s key observation was that Germans “must and can learn from the Polish nation its active involvement in the fight for peace, its unity in political activity, its grand trust in the Soviet nation, active recovery undertakings and removal of the destruction caused by Hitler’s fascism”⁸¹.

This approach, where on one hand the German guilt for WW2 crimes was acknowledged, and on the other a will to break anti-Polish stereotypes was propagated, was typical of articles published in *Blick nach Polen* in 1950. At the same time, the peaceful intentions of the newly created GDR and its hostile attitude to the FRG and western “imperialists” were underlined. Thus the first years of the Association and its monthly may be seen as a period of remorse for the German guilt and a will to learn from the Poles. Henryk Keisch, in his 1950 book *Der unbekannte Nachbar* (“The unknown neighbour”) published by the Association, summarised this approach metaphorically: “Tell me how you are overcoming the effects of the war and I will tell you who you are.”⁸² Shortly after, however, it turned out that this approach was solely motivated by the immediate needs of the GDR policy of memory. Already in 1950, and especially after the Treaty of Zgorzelec was signed, articles published in *Blick nach Polen* were propagating the idea of the “eternal, steadfast friendship between the Polish and German nations”⁸³ which would henceforth share the “friendship border” along the Oder and Neisse rivers. Articles published then referred less and less to the difficult aspects of the past. There was an increasing shift of emphasis to the present and future of Polish–German relations, which, in the view of the authors published by the Association, were continuing to improve surprisingly quickly. In February 1951, Karl Wloch, in his report on Wilhelm Pieck’s visit to Warsaw, concluded: “The German language has become the language of a friend”⁸⁴ adding that only three years before he had had difficulties communicating in German in that same city. *Blick nach Polen* increasingly underlined what Poles and Germans in East Germany shared. Most importantly they shared their common struggle for peace and the introduction of socialism. The new policy of memory of the GDR required that *Blick nach Polen* focus on the “too little known, by our nation, tradition of friend-

⁷⁹ K. Wloch, *Es kommt auf uns an*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 3/1949, pp. 2-4, here p. 2.

⁸⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁸¹ *Ibidem*, p. 4.

⁸² H. Keisch, *Der unbekannte Nachbar*, Berlin, 1950, p.117.

⁸³ *Zwei Völker – ein gemeinsamer Weg*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 6/1950, p. 5.

⁸⁴ K. Wloch, *Mit Präsident Wilhelm Pieck in Warschau. Eindrücke vom ersten Besuch eines deutschen Staatsoberhauptes seit rund tausend Jahren in der Hauptstadt Polens!*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 2/1951, pp. 5-8, here p. 6.

ship between the best Germans and Poles”⁸⁵. This tradition was symbolised by the names of Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Karl Schapper, Bettina von Arnim, Ludwik Mierosławski, Adam Mickiewicz and Fryderyk Chopin. Soon, German antifascists fighting in WW2 were added to that list. On the occasion of the first anniversary of the Treaty of Zgorzelec, an article by Otto Grotewohl, the first prime minister of the German Democratic Republic, was published. He wrote:

Peace and friendship between Poland and Germany were the goal of active antifascist and democratic fighters whose bodies became covered with honourable scars while fighting Hitler in the times of fascism, who suffered in dungeons and concentration camps, in prisons and in exile. Those circles of honest, true democrats and friends of peace were the first to recognise the necessity of reviving Polish–German relations.⁸⁶

Once this appropriation of the German antifascists had been made in order to talk about the struggle for peace and friendship with Poland, only one more step was needed, in the GDR policy of memory, to equalise their struggle with that of Poles against the Nazis. This step came with the publication of a short story by Polish writer Wilhem Szewczyk in the February 1952 issue of *Blick nach Polen*. Its title was *Kleszcze* (“Pincers”) and it was about the common struggle of Polish and German communists in Silesia.⁸⁷ Then, in the April 1952 issue, a correspondence from Warsaw by Marcel Reich-Ranicki, a Polish-born German literary critic later called the *Literaturpapst* (“pope of literature”) in Germany, was published.⁸⁸ He described the “extremely high interest”⁸⁹ of the Polish readership in the then published translation of *Briefe von Antifaschisten geschrieben vor ihrer Hinrichtung* (“Letters by antifascists written before their execution”).⁹⁰ The remorse and will to learn from Poles were thus gradually replaced by awareness of the common antifascist struggle of communists in Poland and Germany. This common struggle resulted in the GDR’s policy of friendship towards the first victim of the war started by Germany. This replacement process was completed surprisingly fast, considering the asymmetries in the German and Polish memories of WW2. Institutions responsible for memory policy in the GDR – of which the Association unquestionably was one – did their best to publicise this success. Henryk Keisch wrote about this even in 1950, in his book on the “unknown neighbour”. He argued that the key to shaping the German future was in the hands of the democratic part of Germany:

⁸⁵ F. Wolf, *Zwei Völker – ein Ziel*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 6/1951, pp. 2-4, here p. 2.

⁸⁶ O. Grotewohl, *Es lebe die ewige Freundschaft zwischen dem deutschen und dem polnischen Volk*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 8/1951, pp. 2-3, here p. 2.

⁸⁷ W. Szewczyk, *Die Zange*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 2/1952, pp. 14-16, here p. 14.

⁸⁸ M. Ranicki, *Deutsche Bücher vertiefen die Freundschaft*, *Blick nach Polen*, No. 4/1952, pp. 21-23.

⁸⁹ M. Ranicki, *Deutsche Bücher...*, p. 22.

⁹⁰ *Briefe von Antifaschisten geschrieben vor ihrer Hinrichtung*. Polish translation by Maria Wisłowska, *Nieugięci. Listy niemieckich antyfaszystów*, Warsaw, 1951.

Thanks to it [this part], Germany re-entered the milieu of peace-loving nations. Also thanks to it, **the fascist Cain's mark on the forehead of the German nation will shortly not be visible**. Only in this democratic part of Germany is it possible to stigmatise the crimes of Hitler's clique with the impartiality needed to do so, **because the past has been definitely overcome and its roots pulled up**. [Emphasis mine]⁹¹

After the Helmut von Gerlach Association ceased to exist and its *Blick nach Polen* transformed (in 1953) into *Von Peking bis Tirana* ("From Peking to Tirana"), dedicated to friendship with all socialist states, the topic of Polish suffering during WW2 and the German guilt almost totally disappeared from the pages of the monthly. Articles published to commemorate the outbreak or end of the war focused on emphasising the role of the Soviet Union as the liberator of Germany from the yoke of fascism and on the struggle of German antifascists. Oskar Kurpat's article, published in 1955 on the anniversary of the end of WW2, was a telling example.

On the 8th of May, in the Democratic Republic of Germany we celebrate liberation from fascism. On that day we first go to the resting places of the deceased Soviet heroes. Their victory paved the way to our bright future. At that hour our thoughts also go to many brave antifascists who, like the unforgettable Ernst Thälmann, died fighting fascism.⁹²

In the article quoted above, Polish losses and victims were no longer mentioned.

There was another facet of the assignment of a special role to Poland in the GDR's policy of memory in its early years. Poland expected that her role in the victory over fascism would be appropriately commemorated. These expectations brought about the long story of Poland's efforts to have an appropriate memorial erected in East Berlin.

THE MEMORIAL TO POLISH SOLDIERS AND GERMAN ANTIFASCISTS
(*DENKMAL DES POLNISCHEN SOLDATEN UND DEUTSCHEN ANTIFASCHISTEN*)
IN BERLIN-FRIEDRICHSHAIN

The climax of the Polish–East German discourse of memory described here came with the unveiling of the Memorial to Polish Soldiers and German Antifascists in Berlin-Friedrichshain on 14 May 1972.⁹³ The initiative to erect the memorial was one of both the GDR Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters (*Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer der DDR*) and the

⁹¹ H. Keisch, *Der unbekannt...*, p. 43.

⁹² O. Kurpat, *Unsere Republik das Bollwerk des künftigen Deutschland*, *Von Peking bis Tirana*, No. 5/1955, pp. 4-7, here p. 4.

⁹³ More on the history of the memorial in R. Żytniec, „Symbol myśli i czynu najlepszych sił obu narodów” czy „historia polskiej walki z faszyzmem”? *Pomnik Polskiego Żołnierza i Niemieckiego Antyfaszysty w Berlinie-Friedrichshain (1965-1972)*, [in:] R. Traba (ed.), *Historie wzajemnych oddziaływań*, Berlin–Warsaw, 2014, pp. 194-226.

Polish Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy (*Związek Bojowników o Wolność i Demokrację*). From the end of the 1950s, relations between the German Democratic Republic and the Polish People's Republic were ideologically and thus politically frozen⁹⁴; that, however, was not an obstacle to the close cooperation of two ideologically close organisations. On 19 November 1965 they signed a declaration of cooperation. The text of this declaration, written twenty years after WW2, was a narrative on the concerted struggle of Polish and German antifascists. It followed that one of their common initiatives was to “commemorate places of the struggle and martyrdom speaking for the common struggle of Polish and German antifascists.”⁹⁵ It should be noted that the cooperation declaration concerned commemoration of the veterans' common struggle, but most documents on the war memorial referred to the memorial as one “commemorating Poles' fight” in the Battle of Berlin.⁹⁶ The goal of the Polish side was that the memorial would be erected at the most prominent possible location in the capital of the GDR. The Poles proposed various sites, including: Brandenburg Gate/Pariser Platz; Thälmannplatz, the green area in front of the seat of the State Council; Liebknechtstraße, opposite the Red City Hall between Spandauer Straße and Steinweg; and the intersection of Karl-Marx-Allee and Warschauer Straße.⁹⁷ The memorial initiative soon led to negotiations at the highest political level. The GDR was represented by the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Culture, and Poland by Prime Minister Janusz Wierzbowski. The memorial project became an important issue in GDR–Poland relations. Poland increasingly pressured the GDR to take a decision. Evidence of this is contained in a letter of 1 February 1966 written by the East German ambassador in Warsaw, Karl Mewis. This letter allows us to reconstruct the Polish argumentation strategy and the significance of the memorial for the Polish policy of memory. Initially, the memorial in Berlin was to commemorate only Polish soldiers. However, shortly after the negotiations started, the idea of commemorating the common struggle was put forward (it is notable that this proposal came from the Polish side). Mewis wrote:

Already a year ago, the Political Bureau of the Polish United Workers Party pointed out to me that we – that is the antifascist Germany and People's Poland – were allies fighting against fascism during WW2 and that is why our concerted achievements need to be commemorated. [Emphasis mine]. Comrade Gomułka delivered his famous speech in Wrocław where he spoke about victims in the struggle against fascism in the democratic Germany, and by doing so, [...] he acknowledged the achievements of the GDR. Our Polish comrades expected and expect that we – in addition to clear political declarations [...] commemorate the role of the Polish Army

⁹⁴ Cf. Ch. Kleßmann, *Die politischen Beziehungen...*, pp. 88–89.

⁹⁵ Cf. Erklärung der Delegation des ZBoWiD und der Vertreter des Komitees der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer in der Deutschen Demokratischen Republik, unterzeichnet am 19. November 1965 in Berlin, SAPMO BArch, DY 57/602.

⁹⁶ *Ibidem*.

⁹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 217.

in the destruction of Hitler's Reich and in the battle of Berlin. Our Polish comrades are aware that this will in no way belittle or undervalue the successes of the Red Army and its leading role. In historic reality, nevertheless, many Polish divisions [...] took part in liberating important territories of today's GDR.⁹⁸

This letter of Mewis also proves that the Polish proposal to erect a memorial commemorating Polish soldiers in Berlin did not initially meet with the approval of the GDR authorities. Only after "initial hesitations"⁹⁹ was there "some readiness to erect a **small monument**"¹⁰⁰ [emphasis mine]. Decisive proof that the initiative to "symbolically express the common struggle of both countries against Fascism"¹⁰¹ came from the Polish side is found in a report by Paul Verner, a member of the Political Bureau of the SED, on his conversation with GDR foreign affairs deputy foreign minister Oskar Fisher on 26 May 1966. This states that the prominent Polish politicians Marian Spychalski and Mieczysław Moczar had suggested the memorial idea to the East German authorities.¹⁰² Initially, the common struggle was to be symbolised by statues of a Polish soldier and a German worker shaking hands over a broken swastika. The monument was to be in the socialist realism style.¹⁰³ The symbolism was fully approved by the East German party: "We fully agree with the Polish proposal for the memorial's symbolism: the common struggle of Polish soldiers and German antifascists. We support its realistic implementation"¹⁰⁴ read the negotiation directives of 27 June 1966 prepared for the following day's talks with Janusz Wieczorek, the plenipotentiary of the Polish government for the memorial.

In 1966 no more steps were taken. Later, deputy minister of culture Kurt Bork was made the GDR plenipotentiary for the memorial. On 21 December 1967, plenipotentiaries of both governments signed an agreement on the memorial. It foresaw that the memorial would be dedicated on the 25th anniversary of the victory over fascism (8 May 1970).¹⁰⁵ The agreement was not followed up, however. It was not until 10 January 1969 that the Polish Section at the Department of Neighbouring Countries of the GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs undertook to evaluate the proposed de-

⁹⁸ Brief des DDR-Botschafters in Warschau Mewis an den Vorsitzenden des Ministerrates der DDR Willi Stoph vom 1. 2. 1966, PA AA, MfAA, C 826/73, p. 205-207.

⁹⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰¹ Abteilung Benachbarte Länder, Aktenvermerk über eine Unterredung zwischen dem Mitglied des Politbüros des ZK der SED, Gen. P. Verner und dem Stellvertreter des Ministers, Genossen Fischer und Helmer, dem Abteilungsleiter am 26. Mai 1966 (27.06.1966), PA AA, MfAA, C 826/73, pp. 163-164.

¹⁰² Cf. *ibidem*.

¹⁰³ Cf. *ibidem*.

¹⁰⁴ Abteilung Benachbarte Länder, Sektion VRP, Hinweise für das Gespräch mit Vizeminister Janusz Wieczorek am Dienstag, dem 28. Juni 1966, um 10.00 Uhr (27. 06. 1966), PA AA, MfAA, C 826/73, pp. 165-166.

¹⁰⁵ Vereinbarung über die Errichtung des Denkmals des polnischen Soldaten und des deutschen Antifaschisten vom 21. 12. 1967, PA AA, MfAA, C 826/73, pp. 42-45.

signs for the memorial. Four Polish and four German designs were to be evaluated. No Polish design was approved by the German side because “they appeared to be memorials of the victory of the Polish Army”¹⁰⁶. In three Polish designs “the main groups presented only Polish soldiers”¹⁰⁷. In the fourth Polish design “in addition, the Polish soldier stood higher than the German antifascist, which resulted in the soldier symbolising the victor and liberator”¹⁰⁸. Designs by German sculptors were assessed as “more varied than the Polish ones”, while “at least three designs much more emphasised the common struggle of both nations”¹⁰⁹. The proposal which was most appreciated was one which

has as its centrepiece a V-shaped block from which two hands stick out holding a broken barbed wire. The sides and the back are covered with reliefs depicting the common struggle of the Polish and German working class in the past up to the present, symbolised by the “Friendship” Pipeline. In front of this block there are two statues of people shaking hands. However, the features of the Polish soldier are somewhat weak.¹¹⁰

The GDR Ministry of Foreign Affairs concluded that the German design which they chose “is most expressive and best meets the conditions outlined in the competition”¹¹¹. In January 1969 the joint Polish–German jury proposed a compromise “combining the designs (of the GDR sculptor and the Polish team) into one common design”¹¹². The new design was to be a merger of those by German sculptor Arnd Wittig and Polish sculptors Zofia Wolska, Tadeusz Łodziański and architect Władysław Strumiłło. It was to be presented by the end of March 1969. The above-mentioned agreement of 21 December 1967 set the time frame (8 May 1970), which was not respected, however, as the memorial’s cornerstone was laid only on 17 July 1969.

In 1970, work on the memorial progressed faster. The main reason was surely the profound change in Poland’s relations with the Federal Republic of Germany. The “Eastern policy” of Willy Brandt’s government resulted in the signing of the Treaty of Warsaw on 7 December 1970. This event obviously had an impact on relations between Poland and the GDR, as the latter based its political identity on its opposition to its western neighbour. Both in Poland and in the GDR, the internal and external situations changed after the Treaty of Warsaw and after Ulbricht and Gomułka

¹⁰⁶ Abteilung Benachbarte Länder, Ländersektion VRP, Vermerk über die Besichtigung der Modelle für ein Denkmal zur Würdigung des gemeinsamen Kampfes der polnischen Soldaten und deutschen Antifaschisten in Berlin, PA AA, MfAA C 826/73, pp. 12–13.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibidem.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibidem.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibidem.*

¹¹¹ *Ibidem.*

¹¹² Chronologie der Errichtung eines Denkmals des polnischen Soldaten und des deutschen Antifaschisten in Berlin vom 10. 12. 1969, PA AA, MfAA C 826/73, p. 5.

left office. Bilateral relations were much relaxed, a good example of which was the introduction of visa-free travel between Poland and the GDR on 1 January 1972.¹¹³ Also the work on the memorial speeded up. The Polish side submitted its proposal for the architectural design on December 1969.¹¹⁴ On 3 June 1970, the GDR cabinet of the Council of Ministers “acknowledged” the “acceptance” of a memorial design by plenipotentiaries of both governments.¹¹⁵ Berlin’s City Hall was made responsible for the technical side of the project. The cost of the memorial was estimated at 1,150,000 East German marks, and was to be covered in two equal parts by Poland and the GDR.¹¹⁶ On 14 September 1970, Poland consented to the earlier date suggested by the GDR for the memorial’s dedication, which was 9 May 1972.¹¹⁷ By the end of February 1971, the work needed to prepare the site of the memorial was completed.

The Berlin National Archive holds documents on the memorial’s construction which reveal another detail that is interesting in the light of the GDR policy of memory. The original relief designed by Arnd Wittig contained only two figures: a Polish soldier and a German antifascist.¹¹⁸ In June 1971, Wittig delivered his design with three figures: the two original ones together with a Soviet soldier.¹¹⁹ At the request of the German side, his new design had to be “corrected”. The Soviet soldier was on the left, but his head could not be turned away from the other two figures. The Soviet soldier had to look in the direction of the two figures and they in his direction. In addition, there was to be a line across the relief, from bottom left to top right, pointing to the red flag “joining” the centrepiece columns.¹²⁰ Wittig accepted the directives in part. The Soviet soldier in fact faces the viewer, whereas the Polish soldier and the German antifascist are looking at the flag. The relief figure of a Red Army soldier met the expectations of the “historic” hierar-

¹¹³ Cf. Ch. Kleßmann, *Die politischen Beziehungen...*, p.89ff.

¹¹⁴ Cf. Antrag der Abteilung für Kultur des Magistrats von Groß-Berlin auf die Standortbestätigung des Denkmals des polnischen Soldaten und des deutschen Widerstandskämpfers vom 10. 09. 1970, Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep. 121 No. 756.

¹¹⁵ Cf. Beschluss des Ministerrates der DDR vom 3. 6. 1970 betr. Errichtung des Denkmals für den gemeinsamen Kampf des polnischen Soldaten und deutschen Antifaschisten, Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep. 121 No. 756.

¹¹⁶ Cf. Antrag der Abteilung für Kultur des Magistrats von Groß-Berlin auf die Standortbestätigung des Denkmals des polnischen Soldaten und des deutschen Widerstandskämpfers vom 10. 09. 1970, Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep. 121 No. 756.

¹¹⁷ Schreiben des Stellvertreter des Ministers von Kultur Kurt Bork an den Stadtrat Dr. Horst Oswald vom 2. Oktober 1970, Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep. 121 No. 756.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Brief von Stiske an Minister für Kultur, Klaus Gysi, vom 21. Juni 1971, Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 121 No. 756.

¹¹⁹ Cf. Mitteilung von Kurt Bork an Minister für Kultur, Klaus Gysi, vom 17. Juni 1971, Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 121 No. 756.

¹²⁰ Protokoll über Beratungen vom 23. und 24. Juni 1971 in Berlin zur Abstimmung weiterer Fragen, die sich im Zusammenhang mit der Errichtung des Denkmal ergaben, Betrifft: technische Details und Vereinbarungen, ohne Datum, Landesarchiv Berlin, C Rep. 121 No. 756.

chy in the GDR policy of memory. In April 1972, it was agreed that the memorial would be unveiled and dedicated not on 9 May but on Sunday 14 May. This was at the request of the Polish authorities, who wanted “to make it possible for more Polish citizens to participate”¹²¹ in the event.

The memorial’s dedication ceremony began on Sunday, 14 May 1972, at 11 a.m. Polish Prime Minister Piotr Jaroszewicz, in his speech, underlined the role of Poland as the first victim of Hitler’s aggression: “Poland became the first victim of Hitler’s armed attack. From the first of September 1939, she conducted her uneven, heroic fight for survival with the aggressor. It was in Poland where fascism showed its genocidal face.”¹²² For the sake of Poland’s policy of memory, he recognised the role of the German antifascist resistance in WW2:

We know well how long and thorny the path of the German antifascist was in his struggle to protect the spirit and future of the German nation [...] Hitlerism first enslaved Germans. [...] Concentration camps in Dachau and Oranienburg were created before KL Auschwitz, and their first inmates were German communists.¹²³

The main thread of the speech by GDR Prime Minister Willi Stoph was – as expected – the common struggle of Soviet soldiers, Poles and German antifascists:

With this memorial we honour both German communists and antifascists who bravely opposed Hitler’s fascism and his imperial war of conquest. The heroic struggle of Polish communists and patriots waged together with German communists and antifascists in the hell of fascist prisons and concentration camps we will not forget. Also there was their class solidarity, strongly enrooted in the German and Polish proletariat alliance of rich revolutionary traditions.¹²⁴

The centrepiece of the memorial is a pair of parallel 15-metre stone columns (which are actually a single structure) united by a bronze flag. On the columns the emblems of Poland and the GDR are displayed. The monument area is set off with a 30-metre-long wall bearing the motto of Tadeusz Kościuszko, “For your freedom and ours”, in Polish (*Za waszą i naszą wolność*) and German (*Für eure und unsere Freiheit*), and a short wall with a relief showing figures of a Polish soldier together with a German resistance fighter (and a Red Army soldier).¹²⁵ Below the columns is the dedicatory plaque, in Polish, German, and Russian, which reads:

¹²¹ Vermerk über die Ergebnisse des Ministergesprächs vom 18. und 19. 2. 1972 in Berlin, Betr. Denkmal des polnischen Soldaten und deutschen Antifaschisten, Landesarchiv Berlin C Rep. 121 No. 756.

¹²² *Dokonałiśmy historycznego przełomu w stosunkach między obu narodami. Przemówienie Piotra Jaroszewicza*, Trybuna Ludu, 15 May 1972, p. 2.

¹²³ *Ibidem*.

¹²⁴ *Umacnia się bratni związek państw socjalistycznej wspólnoty. Przemówienie premiera Willi Stophy*, Trybuna Ludu, 15 May 1972, p. 2.

¹²⁵ Cf. U. Puvogel, M. Stankowski, *Gedenkstätten für die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus. Eine Dokumentation* (2nd edn.), Vol. 2, Bonn, 2000, pp. 54-55.

This memorial – erected by the governments of the Polish People's Republic and the German Democratic Republic on the anniversary of the victory of the anti-Hitlerite coalition – commemorates the armed effort of the Polish People's Army which arm in arm with the Soviet Army took the glorious battlefield route from Lenino to Berlin, contributing to the liberation of the nations of Europe from fascism. It commemorates the effort of German antifascists who – in the name of the highest moral values of their nation – struggled together with their Soviet and Polish comrades against Hitlerite terror, advancing a vision of the future socialist German Democratic Republic already in the time of fascist rule. We salute their memory!

In 1995, two additional plaques in Polish and German were mounted on both sides of the original plaque. They read:

This memorial was erected in 1972 by the governments of both countries to commemorate the officially recognised heroes of the struggle against fascism. Today we also pay tribute here to those who fought and gave their lives as soldiers of the Polish Secret State army, soldiers of the Allied armed forces and the Polish resistance, to those who as forced labourers, prisoners and POWs were deported and murdered, and to all antifascists of the German resistance who sacrificed their lives to liberate Germany from national socialism.

The new plaques counterbalance the original propagandistic statement. The new text was agreed with the embassy of Poland and the sculptors, and approved by the council of Friedrichshain district.¹²⁶ At present, the memorial still serves to commemorate Poles who lost their lives fighting in Germany, and each year the Polish embassy in Berlin lays wreaths there on 1 September.

The first unofficial reactions in the GDR to the unveiling of the Memorial to Polish Soldiers and German Antifascists demonstrate that abroad Poland officially upheld the international message of the memorial, but at home the original intention was emphasised, namely to commemorate Poles' contribution to the victory over fascism and liberation of Berlin. The reports sent to Berlin by the GDR embassy in Warsaw on commentaries in the Polish press indicate the embassy's dissatisfaction with the insufficient propagation of the common struggle of Polish and German antifascists. An article by Jan Wiczorek¹²⁷ in the *Trybuna Ludu* daily was criticised because Wiczorek “unlike in his article published in the *Neues*

¹²⁶ Cf. *ibidem*.

¹²⁷ Cf. J. Wiczorek, *Pomnik-symbol zwycięstwa pokoju i socjalizmu*, Trybuna Ludu, 13 May 1972, p. 5. In fact, Wiczorek primarily emphasised the contribution of Poles to the Battle of Berlin (“**The memorial in Berlin symbolises the fact that in WW2 Poland was a victorious country and no-one can question that.**”) and devoted only one paragraph to the struggle of German antifascists: “**In different conditions, but persistently, German antifascists struggled against Hitlerism, which was the enemy of its own people and country.** They struggled in Germany and outside its borders. As prisoners of the Hitlerite system, they took part in the international resistance. With their books and writings, they mobilised the world conscience. They had an impact on German prisoners of war, and – supported by the Soviet Army and Polish units – they created the nuclei of the peace-oriented government of workers and peasants in the redeemed territories of their own country.”

Deutschland daily, only briefly mentioned the role played by German antifascists in the liberation from fascism”.¹²⁸ According to these reports, the Polish press primarily focused on the history of the Polish fight against Nazism:

Even though the role of German antifascists in destroying fascism is mentioned in all of the articles published, their messages are very different. Some newspapers appreciate the struggle of German antifascists and underline their participation in destroying fascism. Others mention it only briefly and almost exclusively pay attention to the history of the Polish struggle against fascism.¹²⁹

While declaring abroad the memorial’s internationalism and the role of German antifascists in the common struggle, in her internal policy of memory Poland treated the memorial as a symbol of the Polish victory over fascism and Poles’ contribution to the liberation of Berlin. In other words, the memorial was part of Poland’s own narrative on martyrdom and heroism in WW2. This was confirmed in a guidebook by Edward Kmieciak published by the Polish Council for the Protection of Struggle and Martyrdom Sites in 1975. Kmieciak described the participation of the Polish 1st Tadeusz Kościuszko Infantry Division in the battle of Berlin. The antifascist thread was given only marginal significance. Kmieciak quoted excerpts from official speeches delivered at the memorial’s unveiling ceremony, but otherwise he only once mentioned the German antifascists’ support:

In Spandau [...] Polish soldiers met German antifascists who took an active part in the fight against Hitler’s army. To a site commanded by a Polish second lieutenant, whose unit was firing on the retreating Nazis, came a German in plain clothes with a red ribbon in his lapel to help in the reconnaissance of Wehrmacht units.¹³⁰

Kmieciak thus relied on the classic *pars pro toto* argumentation: one German antifascist mentioned in the context of Poles’ heroic participation in the Battle of Berlin was to embody the apparent existence of a massive and active German resistance.

CONCLUSIONS

The above discussed examples of the “use” of Poland to shape the GDR’s policy of memory well illustrate the desire of the GDR to overcome the burden of crimes committed by Germans during WW2 as quickly as possible. This was the GDR’s

¹²⁸ Botschaft der DDR in Warschau, Presseabteilung an MfAA, Abteilung Benachbarte Länder am 30. 05. 1972, Die polnischen Massenmedien zur Einweihung des Denkmals des polnischen Soldaten und des deutschen Antifaschisten, PA AA, MfAA, C 817/73, p. 3.

¹²⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹³⁰ E. Kmieciak, *Pomnik Polskiego Żołnierza i Niemieckiego Antyfaszysty w Berlinie*, Warsaw, 1975, p. 5.

strategy to legitimise its existence and political identity both at home and abroad. The GDR official policy of memory was based on the antifascist doctrine of the new state, and the goal of its many undertakings was to become part of the common memory of the victorious camp. Poland, which was the first victim of Germany's aggression, played an important role in the legitimisation process. Propagandist action was intensified once the GDR was created and the USSR demanded that the Oder–Neisse border be recognised. Strong propaganda concerning Polish–German friendship was needed, as most people in the GDR were reluctant to accept the border changes decided at the Yalta and Potsdam conferences. This reluctance was particularly strong among those who had been resettled from the former German territories in the East. Also, negative stereotypes of Poles were still popular. Nazi racist propaganda had contributed much to making them persistent. Most of them stemmed from the *polnische Wirtschaft* (Polish economy) stereotype.¹³¹ The greatest challenge for the GDR policy of memory, however, was to overcome the asymmetries in the memories of WW2 alive in both countries. The Nazi system was interpreted in class terms, which excluded individual guilt and responsibility. The guilty ones were not Germans, but some unclearly identified “imperialists”, “capitalists” and “monopolists”. They were to be blamed for the outbreak of the war and for war crimes. To create such a memory, the GDR used a wide range of carriers, including literature, monuments, films, political rituals and many more. Undesirable messages were eliminated from the collective awareness by censoring the “past”. This was done by the state censors and institutions like the *Komitee der Antifaschistischen Widerstandskämpfer* (Committee of Antifascist Resistance Fighters).

Censorship also affected the transfer of memories from abroad, which is well-illustrated by the changes introduced in the German version of Leon Kruczkowski's *Niemcy* to meet the needs of the GDR policy of memory. Consequently *Die Sonnenbrucks* lost its original memory context, as the emphasis was placed not on coping with the past, but on the peaceful intentions of the GDR and the stigmatisation of West Germany as the continuator of Hitler's policy. Reviews of staged performances and the film adaptation of *Die Sonnenbrucks* demonstrate that the German guilt was “internationalised” (“national socialism is not a German but an international matter”) and watered down. Finally, the guilt was externalised to the GDR's capitalist class enemy in the West.

New relations between Poland and the GDR required a special institution responsible for exploiting Polish threads in the memory of WW2 to meet the goals of the GDR policy of memory. The activities of the Helmut von Gerlach Association for Cultural, Economic and Political Relations with the New Poland, and the way

¹³¹ Cf. H. Orłowski, *Polnische Wirtschaft. Nowoczesny niemiecki dyskurs o Polsce*, Olsztyn, 1998; *idem*, *Die Lesbarkeit von Stereotypen. Der deutsche Polendiskurs im Blick historischer Stereotypenforschung und historischer Semantik*, Wrocław–Görlitz, 2005.

it tried to overcome the asymmetries in the Polish and German memories, were examples of a missed opportunity to face the German guilt issue and learn more about Poland. The commitment of some of the Association members was authentic; nevertheless, the Association was a tool serving to shape the GDR memory of memory, and it was strictly controlled by the SED. Thus the initial remorse and will to compensate for crimes committed by Germans during their occupation of Poland had to give place to authorities' declared completion of the overcoming of the past and uprooting of the remains of fascism in the GDR by the end of the 1940s. Compared with the lack of any similar discussion in West Germany at the time of its first post-war Chancellor Adenauer, where it was considered essential "to leave the past to the past" and focus on the future¹³², the GDR's approach to the troublesome heritage was very different.

The issue of Poles' suffering during the war vanished completely from publications of the Helmut von Gerlach Association (dissolved in 1953) and then from publications of the Gesellschaft für Kulturelle Verbindungen mit dem Ausland (Association for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries) in the mid-1950s. In the official East German policy of memory, that suffering gave way to the propaganda of the Red Army's contribution to the victory over Nazism and of the struggle of German antifascists. This founding myth of the GDR established itself institutionally and became a permanent element of the country's policy of memory. This myth required that the struggle of Poles be appropriated and equated with the struggle of German antifascists. This applied to the struggle of Polish communists only, as the Polish Secret State and the Home Army were stigmatised in German historiography and propaganda as fascists and imperialists, exactly in line with the ideology of Stalinism.

The climax of the common struggle narrative was the idea and erection of the Memorial to Polish Soldiers and German Antifascists in Berlin-Friedrichshain. Reports on the dedication ceremony in the Polish press demonstrate that Poland suppressed mention of the common struggle of German and Polish antifascists because of the demands of its own policy of memory, emphasising instead that the memorial commemorated Poles' contribution to the liberation of Berlin. This was part of the Polish martyrdom and heroism thread in Poland's narrative of the Second World War. This fact speaks for the antifascist founding myth of the GDR and makes it clear that the GDR's propaganda concerning the common struggle with Poles against fascism was a unilateral phenomenon. In Poland, this propaganda was positively received only by communists active in the Society of Fighters for Freedom and Democracy. Probably the only public debate on the memory of war in both the GDR and Poland was one that took place on the publication of Hermann Kant's book *Der Aufenthalt* [Polish:

¹³² A. Wolff-Powęska, *Pamięć...*, p. 251.

Pobyt, English: *The Turning Point*] in 1977.¹³³ However, further research is needed on Poland's attitude to the common struggle of Poles and Germans against Nazism as propagated by the GDR.

In addition to the examples discussed above, to propagate the myth of the common struggle of the Polish and German nations in the course of WW2, the GDR employed many other carriers of memory. Among them were: Wolfgang Schreyer's novel titled *Unternehmen Thunderstorm* on the Warsaw Uprising, published in 1954; the East German exhibition titled "Antifascist Resistance in Germany in 1933–1945" opened on 28 January 1961 at the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum; the censorship of translations of Polish literature on WW2 and of East German literature on the same topic; the German reception of Janusz Przymanowski's novel *Cztery pancerni i pies* ("Four tank-men and a dog") and of the television series based on it (1966–1970); articles by historians on the participation of Germans in the Polish resistance; and so on.¹³⁴ In the 1980s, the formula of the common war memory of Poles and Germans – which was part of the antifascist founding myth of the GDR – became gradually fossilized and exhausted.¹³⁵

Germany's unification made the GDR founding myth obsolete, although it remained alive in some niche circles of post-GDR Communists affiliated with the successor of the SED, the *Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus* (Party of Democratic Socialism), active between 1989 and 2007.¹³⁶

Rafał Żytyniec PhD, History Museum in Elk, Polsko-Niemiecki Instytut Badawczy/Deutsch-Polnisches Forschungsinstitut at Collegium Polonicum in Słubice (zytyniec@gmx.de)

Keywords: Polish People's Republic–German Democratic Republic relations, policy of memory, antifascism, Second World War

¹³³ Cf. M. Dirsch, H. Orłowski (eds.), *Annäherung und Distanz. DDR-Literatur in der polnischen Literaturkritik*, Halle–Leipzig, 1983; also E. Dzikowska, *Hermann Kant: Der Aufenthalt. Zur Geschichte einer Entgegnung*, [in:] E. Dzikowska, *Gedächtnisraum Polen...*, pp. 120-175.

¹³⁴ Cf. W. Góra, S. Okęcki, *Za naszą i waszą wolność: deutsche Antifaschisten im polnischen Widerstandskampf*, Berlin, 1975.

¹³⁵ Cf. P. Heider, E. Kozłowski (eds.), *Klassenbrüder-Waffenbrüder. Gemeinsame revolutionäre militärische Traditionen der Nationalen Volksarmee der DDR und der Polnischen Armee*, Berlin, 1988.

¹³⁶ Cf. G. Kaiser, H. Kühnrich, *Für Eure und unsere Freiheit auf polnischer Erde*, [in:] S. Doernberg (ed.), *Im Bunde mit dem Feind. Deutsche auf alliierter Seite*, Berlin, 1995, pp. 17-35.

ABSTRACT

This paper describes the activities of the Helmut von Gerlach Society for Cultural, Economic and Political Relations with the New Poland and the history of the building of the Memorial to Polish Soldiers and German Antifascists in Berlin–Friedrichshain, in the telling context of the reception of Leon Kruczkowski's drama "Niemcy" ("Germans") in the GDR. The focus is on the role of Poland in the antifascist policy of memory of the GDR in the years 1949–1972. The aim of this policy was to accede to the common memory of the victorious camp in the Second World War. Poland, being the first victim of Germany's aggression during the war, played a special role in this process, becoming an important element of the GDR's legitimisation strategy directed against the FRG. Following a relatively short period of official atonement for the war crimes committed in Poland, the memory policy of the GDR tended to underscore the two nations' allegedly common struggle against fascism. The asymmetries between the two countries in the still living memory of the Second World War were addressed by a class interpretation of the criminal Nazi system, thereby excluding individual guilt and responsibility. The reception of the policy of memory described in this paper shows that it was used in entirely different ways by each country for its own internal purposes. While in the GDR the dominant narrative was that of the common struggle, in the Polish People's Republic emphasis was placed mainly on the Polish contribution to the defeat of Nazism.