

ROLE OF HISTORICAL STUDIES ON THE POST-WAR PRO-INDEPENDENCE UNDERGROUND IN POLAND

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Research into the independence underground has had an important place in the Polish historiography for the past 30 years. These studies have influenced not only the historical knowledge, but also the perception of the modern Polish society of its own past. It is one of the most important research themes that Polish historians had to deal with in a country freed from the Soviet yoke. In this article the qualitative framework method was used to explain how research on complex forms of the Polish anti-communist independence underground influenced contemporary Poland, its society, and even internal and external politics.

Key words: Pro-Independence Polish Underground, “Cursed Soldiers”, Soviet occupation of Poland, post-war partisans, resistance movement

Pro-Independence Underground in Poland 1939–1956/1963

It is worth starting with the fact that the post-war armed struggle of the underground is part of a long tradition of Polish uprisings that goes back to the 18th century, and thus, is perceived by the Poles themselves in a wider historical context. Therefore, it is part of the historical dispute in Poland about the meaning, role, and effectiveness of armed struggles under the occupation of a stronger enemy¹.

1 For example, one of the books dealing with this subject was a work published in 1960 entitled *Two Ways (Dwie drogi)*, devoted to the anti-Russian January Uprising 1863,

The occupants themselves were aware of the existence of that dispute. In their propaganda, they made efforts to convince the Poles to abandon the idea of an armed struggle, which was presented as “irrational”. The freedom struggle, in contrast, was supposed to be a manifestation of “madness”. The goal was to reconcile the Poles with their subjugation and, in the long term, the loss of their statehood. Thus, as we can see, the question of attitudes towards the post-war armed underground in Poland goes beyond the academic discussion and extends to emotions fuelled by propaganda. It is a sensitive topic also for another reason. It contained elements of a civil war, as the Soviets were using anti-partisan units composed of the Poles. Generally speaking, the entire Soviet occupation system resembled that of the 19th century colonial powers, where power was exercised by intermediaries recruited from the ranks of the indigenous population, in this case native communists. Only small garrisons were involved and also various types of “advisers” were placed in key offices. As a result, the Poles fought the Poles, which in itself gave rise to internal conflicts, tearing the conquered nation into opposing fractions, in accordance with the principle of *divide et impera*. These divisions remained in place even after the fall of the communist system in Poland in 1989. The role of the historian is to go beyond those divisions in order to study the past in accordance with the methodology of historical research. Still, it should not be surprising that the Polish historians naturally evaluate the activities of their people in the past from the perspective of Polish interests, and the fundamental issue for them is their attitude towards Polish independence.

To fully understand the origins of the Polish post-war resistance movement, one must go back to the beginning of the Second World War, when Poland was attacked by Germany and the USSR and then divided into two occupation zones. Nevertheless, Poland did not officially capitulate and the Polish government managed to evacuate to France (and later Great Britain), where it continued to fight. The rebuilt Polish army was divided into two parts – the army in exile and the army in the country. The latter was called the Home Army.

the author of which was Pawel Jasienica – one of the best and well-known Polish historians and essayists. This book has a special expression when reading it, we realise that Pawel Jasienica, whose real name was Lech Beynar, was a soldier of the Polish underground from 1940, and in 1945 he was a deputy to Zygmunt Szendzielarz “Łupaszka”, the commander of the famous Vilnius V “Death Brigade” of the Home Army. On the night of 8/9 August 1945, during the manhunt of the communist “Polish Army” and the Red Army, he was wounded and he left the Brigade before it was destroyed by the Soviets, and avoided the fate of most of its officers who were sentenced to death.

The Home Army was formally established in 1942 and originated from the Union of Armed Struggle (ZWZ). Attempts were made to subordinate other smaller political formations to this military organisation, such as Peasant Battalions (*BCh*) or the National Military Organisation (*NOW*). Some success in that field was achieved in 1942–1944.

The characteristic features of the Home Army were its extensive structure, strong government legitimacy, military apoliticality, and orientation towards acting as part of a broader anti-Hitler coalition². The formations of the national movement had their own, different point of view, based on the “theory of two enemies”, according to which Germany and the USSR, although being opponents, were equally dangerous to the independent existence of Poland. From a historical perspective, this view cannot be refuted.

All the aforementioned organisations, together with the secret branch of the Government in the country, formed the so-called Polish Underground State.

At this moment, it is necessary to look at the Polish–Soviet relations. The starting point for them in the context of the Second World War is the Soviet aggression against Poland on 17 September 1939. The Polish government, in the face of the catastrophic situation of its army, decided not to declare war on the Soviets. This decision, which may seem strange today, had political consequences. Despite that, in 1939–1941, the Soviets, on the basis of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, brutally occupied the eastern territories of Poland, ruthlessly repressing the Polish civilian population. The most terrible crime was the “Katyn massacre” – the murder, in April 1940, of over 20,000 people – mainly Polish officers, policemen, and officials, in short – the national elite³. Henceforth, Katyn weighed on the attitude of the Poles towards the Soviets, as it still weighs on the Polish–Russian relations.

2 The first book about the Home Army was published while the organisation still existed, in 1944 in USA (Jan Karski, *Story of a Secret State*). Nowadays, there is also rich literature on the subject, for example: Ney-Krwawicz 2022. The state of research on topic of Home Army was presented in the article: Grabowski 2018, 21–58. See also: *Home Army in Documents 1939–1945 [Armia Krajowa w dokumentach 1939–1945]*, Vol. I–VI, many editions, the last one is published (Vol I–II) since 2015 by IPN, the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in London (*Stydium Polski Podziemnej – Instytut Polski i Muzeum gen. Sikorskiego w Londynie*) and Military Historical Bureau (*Wojskowe Biuro Historyczne im. gen. broni Kazimierza Sosnkowskiego*); Bułhak 2008.

3 In addition to Polish literature, like for example: Adamska 2021, there is also rich English-language literature on the Katyn massacre, such as: Bębnowski, Musiał 2020; Urban 2020; Rogoża, Wyrwa 2020.

The case of the Katyn massacre came to light in 1943. Until then, the fate of the Polish elites had been unknown. In the meantime, the German–Soviet war broke out, which forced the Polish government to normalise relations with the USSR. That led to the signing of the “Sikorski–Mayski Pact”, the creation of a Polish army in the USSR (later evacuated to Iran), and the formal withdrawal of the USSR from the provisions of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact. In practice, Stalin did not intend to give up the Polish territories conquered in 1939. Therefore, he used the disclosure of the Katyn massacre by the Germans in 1943 for his own purposes, breaking off relations with the Polish government that sought to establish an international commission to investigate the Katyn murder. Then, in the USSR, he created an alternative “Polish” centre of power and a “Polish” army, subordinated to Moscow. These formations, in order to maintain the appearance of Polishness, used Polish national symbols. At the same time, attacks of the Soviet partisans on the Home Army units began in the eastern territories of Poland occupied by the Germans.

The incursion of the Red Army into the territory of the Second Polish Republic in January 1944 put the Polish government in London and the underground structures subordinated to it in a critical situation. The Home Army was ordered to launch Operation Tempest, which was a “zonal uprising” (*powstanie strefowe*)⁴. The German rear and frontline towns were attacked, on the one hand, to save them from destruction, and on the other hand, to take control of them before the communist collaborators did.

However, the Soviets, often after the stage of a joint fight against the Germans, destroyed Polish troops without any qualms, disarming them and imprisoning their soldiers (sometimes also killing them). In the areas occupied in 1939, the Soviets installed their own administration, making it clear that they considered these areas as their property. After crossing the line of the Ribbentrop–Molotov pact, the Soviets announced the creation of the *PKWN* – a Polish puppet quasi-government.

In the face of that, the Home Army launched an uprising in Warsaw, aspiring to gain political advantage by taking over the country’s capital. It was then that Stalin stopped the advance of his troops, giving the Germans the opportunity to suppress the uprising. Despite that, the two-month battle of the Home Army for Warsaw created the ethos of this formation, which in Poland was raised

4 The uprising did not start all over the country all at once, but it was moving like a wave, first in the east, then in the centre of the country, just before the German–Soviet front line.

to the level of near-sanctity and also influenced the opinion of the Poles about the communists after the war.

After the defeat of the Warsaw Uprising, the *PKWN* was unable to win over the Polish population. Even the peasants, despite the fact that the communists carried out the so-called agricultural reform, remained faithful to the legal government in London. The mobilisation to the “people’s Polish army” was also boycotted. Therefore, throughout the Soviet-controlled country, repressions began – deportations to gulags, etc. Unfortunately, all this happened with the tacit acceptance of Poland’s Anglo-American allies.

In order to reorganise the underground structures, the Home Army was formally dissolved by the Polish government in London⁵. That had both good and bad effects. With the liquidation of the Home Army, its centralised structure fell apart, but at the same time, a new cadre elite underground formation called NIE (in Polish means “No”) was created. However, despite the dissolution, the Home Army soldiers, constantly exposed to Soviet repression, took up the armed struggle. A series of guerrillas, known collectively as Home Army Resistance Movement (*Ruch Oporu Armii Krajowej – ROAK*), was formed. In order to control that movement, in place of NIE, in May 1945, the Armed Forces Delegation for Poland (*Delegatura Sił Zbrojnych na Kraj – DSZ*) organisation was established by the Commander-in-Chief of the Polish Armed Forces, General Władysław Anders. Its internal structure was based on that of the Home Army but it operated on a much smaller scale, trying to curb partisan activity. In July 1945, the Western Allies withdrew their recognition of the Polish government in London, recognising the Warsaw government (to which a group of politicians from London, led by former Prime Minister Stanisław Mikołajczyk, was co-opted). Along with the government, the Polish underground also lost its international legitimacy. Therefore, *DSZ* was disbanded in August 1945. In its place, a group of *DSZ* officers created the organisation “Freedom and Independence Association” (*Zrzeszenie Wolność i Niezawisłość – WiN*)⁶. Its characteristic feature was the desire to abandon armed struggle in favour of political and intelligence underground activities. By the end of 1947, the communists had destroyed four consecutive *WiN* commands.

Another faction of the Polish underground was the national resistance. The National Armed Forces (*Narodowe Siły Zbrojne – NSZ*) and National Military Organisation (*Narodowa Organizacja Wojskowa – NOW*) formations, despite being partially merged with the Home Army, were against any cooperation with

5 Mazur 1995, 34–59.

6 Frazik, Musiał 2020.

the Soviets, even as part of the anti-Hitler coalition. For this reason, they separated from the Home Army and, in February 1945, formed a joint organisation of the National Military Union (*Narodowe Zjednoczenie Wojskowe – NZW*). This organisation initially focused on the armed fight against the communist regime. Then, however, its commanders came to similar conclusions as *WiN*, trying to reorganise structures and prepare for a long-term occupation. Ultimately, the *NZW* shared the fate of other underground organisations and its structures were destroyed.

The final episode of the activities of the armed underground in Poland are the struggle of the so-called “last forest soldiers”, single troops, or individual people, fighting the regime to the very end⁷. The last one of them was killed by the communist security forces in 1963. But the resistance in practice ended in 1956, under the influence of the October 1956 events.

Falsification of the history of the Polish Pro-Independence Underground in the period of the People’s Republic of Poland

In the post-war years, until the fall of communism in Poland in 1989, the issues of recent history were completely manipulated. The communists in Poland wanted to convince the young generations of the Poles that their rule had had full national legitimacy in 1944 and beyond. Meanwhile, in reality, they exercised power only by the right of the strongest, and formally on the basis of the rigged elections in 1947.

In order to hide the inconvenient truth and to indoctrinate the society, the communists used a number of methods. The simplest one was censorship – efforts were made to remove from public space, wherever possible, any information about the post-war underground. For the inquisitive, however, publications were prepared that presented the communist vision of the truth, which had little to do with the reality⁸. Independence underground formations were pictured as illegal and criminal. This was achieved by many semantic tricks, repeated words that were forced into the minds of the recipients. The most important of them was the word “bandit” and “band” used to describe the armed units of the Polish Underground. In order to make the intellectual fraud even more credible, access to historical sources was blocked for historians. Only selected fragments were presented which, in isolation from the broader context, falsified the image of the past.

7 Łabuszewski 2003.

8 Kuta 2010, 570–591.

The communists even falsified historical sources, creating alleged partisan “diaries”, etc. In addition, there was a whole range of published memories of security officers who presented themselves as defenders of the public against “banditry”⁹.

Any attempts at more reliable research into the history of the Home Army and post-war resistance were always burdened with the threat of repression and were observed by the Security Service which treated them as a manifestation of hostility towards the system. Despite that, such attempts were made among veterans of the Home Army in Poland, where morale was quite high, despite infiltration by communist agents. However, the communists had no influence on what was happening in the West. The researchers there had access to the archive of the Polish Underground Movement Study Trust in London which contained, among others, the documents of the Special Section VI of the General Staff in London (during the war responsible for communication with Occupied Poland) and the Social Affairs Department of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Polish Government-in-Exile (MSW). The findings of these studies reached the country in the form of underground publications, the access to which, however, was limited.

As a result, the average Poles graduating from communist education institutions were convinced that Poland had been “liberated” by the Soviets in July 1944 and knew nothing about the real structures and purposes of the post-war independence underground. If they were at all interested in the subject, they were acquainted with a picture of the post-war “reactionary banditry” which was destroyed by the heroic “participants in the fight for the strengthening of the people’s power” – as the communists called ex-members of the formations fighting against the pro-independence underground. However, the truth was preserved in the provinces, far from the universities preaching the official propaganda narrative. It was also deposited in the Catholic Church which was the only institution in the country that remained independent from the communists and unofficially but continuously supported the Home Army and the post-war underground.

Analysis of research on the Polish Pro-Independence Underground after the fall of the communist system

Under such conditions, in Poland research into the history of the pro-independence underground began only after the fall of the communist system. It was carried out by groups of students centred around two researchers. The first

⁹ The most well-known example of such a false source was the so-called “Ogień Diary” (Józef Kuraś “Ogień” was a partisan unit commander in Podhale region).

community gathered around prof. T. Strzembosz and included such scholars as Sławomir Poleszak, Grzegorz Motyka, Rafał Wnuk, Piotr Niwiński, Jerzy Kułak, Ryszard Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki, Kazimierz Krajewski, and Tomasz Łabuszewski. The second group consisted of historians gathered around Prof. Janusz Kurtyka and *Zeszyty Historyczne WiN* (Historical Fascicles of Freedom and Independence Association) magazine – among them Zdzisław Zblewski, Wojciech Frazik, Maciej Korcuć, and Filip Musiał. The *Zeszyty Historyczne WiN* later played a major role in researching the history of the Polish underground. The first issue of *Zeszyty Historyczne WiN* was published in March 1992, on the initiative of Andrzej Zagórski, a historian and former Home Army soldier¹⁰. So far, over 40 issues of this very valuable magazine have been published. Thanks to the efforts of this group, a six-volume work entitled *The Freedom and Independence Association in Documents*¹¹ was also published, which contains 600 documents and many biographies. Moreover, in the first half of the 1990s, other interesting publications appeared as a result of academic discussions on the history of the period 1944–1956¹².

In parallel with the first historical research, many diaries and memories have been published, some of them as a result of the work conducted by historians like Ewa Kurek, who has gathered accounts of Hieronim Dekutowski “Zapora” soldiers¹³.

Other no less significant initiatives have emerged as well. Freedom of speech came and many local newspapers timidly published articles and reports from the post-war period accusing the communists of their crimes. However, their scope of influence was usually local. At the same time, veterans of the Home Army, National Armed Forces, and other organisations founded new veterans’ associations, the most important of which was the World Union of Home Army Soldiers (*Światowy Związek Żołnierzy Armii Krajowej*). Also, in the public space there appeared the first commemoration sites of the Home Army, located outside the areas of churches. However, these activities still did not affect wider circles of society.

10 Andrzej Zagórski was not only a writer, but also from the early 1960s, he collected documents, copies of documents and reports on the war time and post-war independence conspiracy in Lesser Poland in the years 1939–1956. His collection, comprising over 2500 accounts, approximately 25,000 pages of original or copied documents, and over 4500 press clippings, is one of the most significant in Poland and certainly the most important private collection concerning the conspiracy in the Rzeszow region. Now it is part of the Institute of National Remembrance archive.

11 Kurtyka 1997.

12 Giżejewska 2002; Szucki 1994; Komorowski, 1994; Motyka 1997.

13 Kurek 1997, 2009, 2011. She also wrote book *Zaporczycy* (Clio, 1995) and photoalbum *Zaporczycy w fotografii 1943–1963 [Zaporczycy in photography 1943–1963]* (Clio, 2005).

The group that, quite unexpectedly, started the national discourse on the post-war anti-communist underground in Poland was the Republican League, an organisation founded by a group of former activists of the underground Independent Association of Students of the University of Warsaw which had been active in the 1980s.

At the end of 1993, they prepared an exhibition entitled “The Cursed Soldiers. Anti-Communist Armed Underground”, displayed for the first time in the Auditorium Maximum of the University of Warsaw, and later, also in many Polish cities all over the country. In addition, in 1996, a book was published, with a similar title *The Cursed Soldiers*, written by a former underground soldier Jerzy Ślaski¹⁴. It was the catchy name “Cursed Soldiers” that became a pick-lock that opened the gates of the historical awareness of the Polish society to the history of the anti-communist underground. Interestingly, the activists of the Republican League understood the term “Cursed Soldiers” differently than Jerzy Ślaski. Members of the Republican League wanted to indicate by this term that the new Polish elites had forgotten about the post-war underground soldiers. Ślaski saw it differently, seeing the meaning of the term as a phenomenon of being erased from the history by the communists in the period of the People’s Republic of Poland. However, the name “Cursed Soldier” became a buzzword, a kind of a slogan, which has been accompanying the history of the post-war independence underground in Poland since then.

This had both a positive and a negative effect. The positive side is the power of this symbol, thanks to which it was possible to disseminate knowledge about the post-war underground. The disadvantage was that the whole of the complex history of post-war underground soldiers was somewhat simplified and reduced to popular history before it was thoroughly studied by historians. But the power of the term “Cursed Soldiers” and the story of rebellion against totalitarianism behind it, as well as the odium of secrecy that the communists had spread over that history, became an explosive mixture that instantly stirred the imagination of many Poles, especially young people, looking for a way to redefine their national identity¹⁵. In order to understand that need, it should be remembered that at that time Poland was engulfed by the economic crisis of the period of the political transformation. Under those circumstances, recent history became an element of politics, which did not make it easier for historians to research it. Unfortunately,

14 Ślaski 1996. He was also the author of other books, such as the six-volume work *Polska Walcząca (1939–1945) [Fighting Poland (1939–1945)]*, published in 1985, and *Skrobów. Dzieje obozu NKWD dla żołnierzy AK 1944–1945 [Skrobów. The history of the NKVD camp for Home Army soldiers]*, printed in 1990.

15 Dobrowolski 2018, 133–153.

more and more often, discussions about the anti-communist underground were accompanied by emotional involvement. When the post-communist Democratic Left Alliance (*SLD*) came to power in 1993, the patriotic narrative had to clash again with the narrative of veterans of the communist formations¹⁶. The shortcomings of the adopted model of the political transformation were also revealed. Since the democratic reform in the judicial system was in practice of a cosmetic nature, one of such shortcomings was the lack of accountability of communist criminals. After all, the judiciary circles themselves were responsible for a number of communist judicial crimes, committed mainly in the Stalinist period. There was also a problem of legal compensation for the victims of the communist regime. Meanwhile, communist functionaries drew high pensions, often living much better off than their former victims.

In effect, the “Cursed Soldiers” fighting courageously with weapons became a symbol for people disappointed with the direction in which Poland was heading. On the other hand, the image of the brutal destruction of the independence underground was a constant reminder for the former communists of their crimes, becoming a threat to their position and property. For their descendants, in turn, the struggle to preserve the attitudes from the times of the Polish People’s Republic often meant the defence of the biographies of their loved ones.

However, many Poles expected the disclosure of the communist special services archives which still remained beyond the reach of not only citizens but even a large part of historians. That factor, among others, resulted in invariably low interest in the research of the post-war underground at universities (where also, by the way, no verification of staff in terms of their communist past was carried out).

In the course of discussing these problems, it was decided to create a completely new institution. The act of the Sejm of 18 December 1998 established the Institute of National Remembrance – the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (*IPN*). It was a hybrid institution that had no equivalent in the world, combining archival, scientific, educational, and prosecutorial functions. The establishment of the Institute of National Remembrance was also intended to prevent the so-called “wild” vetting, subjecting the process to the control of historians. The aforementioned historians, gathered around both Prof. Tomasz Strzembosz and Prof. Janusz Kurtyka, found employment at the Institute. Prof. Kurtyka soon became the president of the *IPN*.

In the meantime, Grzegorz Wąsowski – a researcher associated with the Republican League, in cooperation with Leszek Żebrowski, a researcher of the history of the National Armed Forces, published a book in 1999 entitled *Cursed*

16 These problems are discussed in the book Spalek 2020.

Soldiers: the Anti-Communist Armed Underground After 1944, which was the first reliable attempt to synthesise the history of the independence underground¹⁷.

In 2001, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland adopted an act in which it recognised the merits of the independence organisations and groups that, after the end of the Second World War, had decided to take up an unequal fight for the sovereignty and independence of Poland. The Sejm thus paid tribute to the fallen and murdered as well as all imprisoned and persecuted members of Freedom and Independence Association. It was the first official, high-ranking honouring of the members of the anti-communist underground in Poland.

The Institute of National Remembrance launched its practical operation in 2000. The first step was to take over the archives of the Ministry of the Interior, containing the files of the communist secret services. At the same time, one of the first tasks was to start the research into the history of the post-war independence underground and education of the public about the relevant issues. A significant advantage of the Institute of National Remembrance was the fact that it had branches scattered throughout the country, so it was able to conduct nationwide comparative research. This first stage of research ended in 2007 with the publication of an atlas containing maps and numerical data showing the range of activity of armed formations of the anti-communist independence movement in Poland (also within the state borders before 1945)¹⁸. The atlas made the public aware of the scale of the resistance by the post-war underground, in which, according to the authors' estimates, up to 180,000 people had been involved. For comparison, during the war, the Home Army numbered about 350,000 soldiers.

The atlas, despite its generality, was a milestone and a foundation for further research. From that moment, monographs on the structure of specific underground organisations began to appear, often at a very high level of detail. This has been possible due to the specificity of the historical sources taken over from the Security Office/Security Service (*UB/SB*), which are filled with detailed information from the interrogation protocols of the arrested pro-independence underground soldiers.

As the research continued, research groups focusing on specific views and interests emerged. The official "research programme" of the Institute of National Remembrance is led by Tomasz Łabuszewski. His closest collaborators are Kazimierz Krajewski, focusing on resistance in the eastern part of Poland¹⁹, Piotr Niwiński, a specialist in the resistance in Vilnius region. Among *IPN* researchers, we should also mention Tomasz Balbus, Ryszard Śmietanka Kruszelnicki,

17 Wąsowski, Żebrowski 1999.

18 Wnuk, Poleszak and others 2007.

19 Krajewski 2015.

Zdzisław Zblewski²⁰, and a number of others. The mentioned persons are authors of many valuable books about the Polish Pro-Independence Underground²¹. As a result of the teamwork, a few thematic conferences were also organised, which resulted in interesting publications²².

The second group consisted of historians, like Rafał Wnuk and Grzegorz Motyka. After some time, they left the Institute of National Remembrance, joining other research centres. They wrote a number of books devoted to the subject of post-war underground, among them a volume entitled *War After the War. Anti-Soviet Underground in Central and Eastern Europe in 1944–1953* published by the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk²³, the intention of which was to provide a comparative look at the armed resistance against the USSR. Wnuk also wrote a book *Forest Brothers Anti-Communist Underground in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia 1944–1956*²⁴. Equally interesting is the book published in 2015 by Grzegorz Motyka entitled *The White Poles Manhunt. NKVD Troops in the Fight Against the Polish Underground 1944–1954*²⁵.

As you can see, most of the indicated researchers wrote books of a descriptive nature, fragmentary monographs, containing facts, presenting structures, biographies, in short, works devoted to the functioning of a specific underground formation in a limited area. If we had to point out the most noticeable difference between the aforementioned groups of researchers, it would be their attitude towards the so-called national movement formations. Members of the second group are much more critical and rather negative towards the activists of the national movement formations, and insist on clearly distinguishing them from government formations such as the Home Army.

At this point, we can move on to the third group, which is made up of researchers of the abovementioned national movement formations, focusing on researching such organisations as the NSZ, NOW, NZW and SN. These include the already mentioned Leszek Żebrowski, as well as Wojciech Muszyński, Mariusz Bechta and Krzysztof Kaczmarski working at the Institute of National Remembrance. They are authors of a number of books and articles²⁶.

20 Zblewski 2005.

21 Krajewski, Łabuszewski 2002; Krajewski, Łabuszewski 1997; Krajewski, Łabuszewski, Niwiński 2010; Krajewski, Łabuszewski 2017; Balbus 2004; Balbus 2008; Śmietanka-Kruszelnicki 2002.

22 Bechta 2016; Łabuszewski 2018; Krajewski 2019; Krajewski 2021.

23 Motyka, Wnuk, Stryjek, Baran 2012, and also Wnuk 2000.

24 Wnuk 2018.

25 Motyka 2015.

26 Kaczmarski 2003; Bechta, Muszyński 2017; Surdej 2018.

The topic of the anti-communist underground also appears in the research of issues of the communist secret services. Both of these threads, for obvious reasons, are closely related. Therefore, a journal issued by the IPN under the title *The Apparatus of Repression in People's Poland 1944–1989* is worth mentioning.

Researchers interested in the post-war underground emerged also among university staff and students. One of them, for example, is Prof. Grzegorz Ostasz, an author of an excellent monograph on the Rzeszów *WiN* district²⁷. This topic has also been addressed by other historians, like Prof. Mariusz Mazur, specialist in the communist propaganda²⁸ or Stanisław Płużański²⁹. Some of them, however, have written books that have serious methodological flaws³⁰.

But we can say in general that universities are the notable absentees in the research on the anti-communist independence underground in Poland. One more interesting phenomenon that correlates with the issues discussed can be observed, namely the great interest in the subject of “Cursed Soldiers” among sociologists, anthropologists and researchers interested in “collective memory”³¹. It is also worth mentioning something that is easy to notice, namely that some researchers from these circles approach the topic with a strong negative ideological prejudice. This is discussed in more detail further in the article.

Other important types of publications are biographical dictionaries, for example, multi-volume *Lesser Poland Biographical Dictionary of Participants in Independence Activities 1939–1956*³² or *Conspiracy and Social Resistance in Poland 1944–1956*³³.

Changes in the public perception and evaluation of the Polish underground

Quite a large number of publications, as well as other educational activities showed the wider public not only the scale and importance of the pro-independence

27 Ostasz 2006.

28 Mazur 2019.

29 Płużański 2021.

30 Zaremba 2012, there is also an English edition of this book: *Entangled in Fear. Everyday Terror in Poland, 1944–1947* (Indiana University Press, 2022).

31 Kończal 2020, 67–95; Danek 2020, 219–238; Jaskulowski, Majewski 2023, 1–15. Available: <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12937>

32 Gąsiorowski and others 1997–2015.

33 Żaryn, Żurek 2002; Frazik 2004; Frazik 2007; Balbus 2010; Bielak, Krajweski 2018; Krajweski 2021.

underground, but also the sacrifice it made on the altar of the fight for freedom and independence. Therefore, after the conservative parties came to power in Poland, efforts were made to create an official, public remembrance day dedicated to the “Cursed Soldiers”. On the initiative of veterans’ circles and the President of the Republic of Poland, Prof. Lech Kaczyński, the National Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers was established. President Kaczyński, as well as the president of the Institute of National Remembrance Prof. Kurtyka, did not live to see the first celebration of this remembrance day, as both died 10 on April 2010 in the government plane crash in Smolensk. Finally, the remembrance day was solemnly celebrated for the first time on 1 March 2011 – on the anniversary of the murder of seven leaders of the *WiN* Association by the communists on 1 March 1951.

From the very beginning, the new remembrance day aroused resistance from the so-called “post-communists” – this is how different circles of people who sympathise with Polish People’s Republic are called in Poland – and some radical left-wing groups, who were aware of the profound role of the history of the independence underground not only as the historical foundation of new patriotism, but also as a factor binding the electorate around conservative parties. Greatly annoying for those groups was also the fact that this narrative appealed to young people. The greatest interest among young people was aroused by Witold Pilecki – the famous “volunteer to Auschwitz”, Danuta Siedzikówna, a nurse murdered as a result of a “court crime” (another example of a new term created in Poland to describe the problem of crimes committed in the majesty of the communist law) at the age of 17, and Col. Łukasz Ciepliński – the last leader of the *WiN* Association. The popularity of the National Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers, as well as history education conducted mostly by the Institute of National Remembrance caused a reaction from the post-communist circles. Among their activities was targeting public focus on a few specific characters who could be accused of crimes against civilians (any broader context was irrelevant). Three characters were selected, Józef Kuraś “Ogień”, Zygmunt Szendzielarz “Łupaszka”, and Romuald Rajs “Bury”. The units led by these soldiers operated in areas inhabited by ethnic minorities whose members often collaborated with the occupants. Although this subject requires more profound studies, it was used to continue the creation of the “black legend” of the underground, sometimes even on the basis of falsified communist sources.

Another trend also appeared, within a group of historians who wanted to gain popularity rather than conduct reliable research: they sometimes opted for methods like “cherry picking”. The subsequent public discussion of their work showed a number of research flaws.

The response of the Institute of National Remembrance to these activities was research into the history of Romuald Rajs' unit conducted in accordance with the requirements of the historical methodology³⁴. The research of the units of Józef Kuraś and Zygmunt Szendzielarz had already been carried out earlier (the previously mentioned works by Łabuszewski and Krajewski and books by Maciej Korkuć³⁵).

But these pro-communist efforts had far-reaching consequences. They were quickly noticed and used by the Belarusian regime. For example, in 2021, a young Polish woman affiliated with the left-wing party appeared on Belarusian television, slandering soldiers of the post-war underground. The pretext for this was the celebration of the National Day of Remembrance of the Cursed Soldiers in the Polish school in Brześć with the participation of boy-scouts, in the presence of the Consul of the Republic of Poland. After the Russian full-scale invasion in Ukraine in 2022, the Belarusian regime razed many cemeteries of Polish Home Army soldiers and the post-war underground, for example in Mikuliszki and in Surkonty, with bulldozers.

Let us leave aside political journalism and return to historical research. The current studies focus on further unexplored aspects of the Polish underground. These include the issues of a more accurate detection of agents in the structures of the underground, finding an answer to the question of whether the struggle of the post-war resistance can be called another Polish uprising, as well as the problems of banditry and communist provocations.

Another extremely important task carried out by a special team at the Institute of National Remembrance led by Prof. Krzysztof Szwaagrzyk is the search for and exhumation of victims of communist crimes. For example, the search carried out in section "Ł" of the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw was successful; many underground soldiers executed in accordance with the death sentences passed by the communist courts were found there, including Zygmunt Szendzielarz and Hieronim Dekutowski. The search for others, such as Witold Pilecki, is still ongoing³⁶.

34 Ostapiuk 2019.

35 Korkuć 2011.

36 More on this topic in: Wichowska 2015; Żychlińska, Hristova 2020, 42–60.

Conclusion

Summing up, the research into the history of underground plays an important role in modern Poland. It has literally changed the Polish society – especially the young generation. The soldiers of the independence underground from 1944–1956 have been included in the pantheon of national heroes. Their history was recreated and rewritten. Ironically, this was possible mainly thanks to materials from the archives of the communist secret services. The current state of research completely refutes the narrative of communist propaganda, although its elements are still visible even in scientific works, but mainly in journalism. This means that the topic still arouses emotions, including political ones.

Changes have also taken place in some institutional areas, like the modern Polish army. Over time, it has incorporated not only the traditions of the Polish Armed Forces in Exile, but also those of the Home Army or even the “Cursed Soldiers”, especially after the creation of a Territorial Defence Force. The attitude of the courts has also changed, and findings of the historical research is also used today as the basis for court verdicts and for obtaining compensation for the victims of the communist system.

In the meantime, new research and educational centres have been established. One of them is the Museum of the Cursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of the Polish People’s Republic which is currently being arranged at the former Detention Centre at 37 Rakowiecka Street in the Warsaw district of Mokotów. There is also the Museum of the Cursed Soldiers in Ostrołęka. Another centre is the Pilecki Institute, which conducts research, education and commemorates the Poles murdered for providing aid and assistance to Jews during the Second World War. We can be sure that those centres, as well as the Institute of National Remembrance and universities will continue to explore this difficult and complex, but also very interesting subject.

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POLIJAS PĒCKARA PAGRĪDES NEATKARĪBAS CĪŅAI VELTĪTO VĒSTURES PĒTĪJUMU LOMA

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Zinātniskās intereses: pagrīdes cīņa par neatkarību Polijas dienvidaustrumu daļā 1939.–1956. gadā

Pagrīdes cīņas par neatkarību pētniecībai pēdējo 30 gadu laikā ir bijusi nozīmīga vieta Polijas historiogrāfijā. Attiecīgie pētījumi ir ietekmējuši ne tikai vēstures zināšanas, bet arī savas pagātnes uztveri mūsdienu Polijas sabiedrībā. Tā ir viena no visnozīmīgākajām pētniecības tēmām, ar kurām Polijas vēsturniekiem nācās saskarties pēc valsts atbrīvošanās no padomju jūga. Rakstā izmantota kvalitatīvā ietvara metode, skaidrojot, kā pētījumi par Polijas antikomunistiskās pagrīdes cīņas par neatkarību sarežģītākajām formām ir ietekmējuši mūsdienu Poliju, tās sabiedrību un pat tās iekšpolitiku un ārpolitiku.

Atslēgas vārdi: pagrīdes cīņa par Polijas neatkarību, “nolādētie karavīri”, padomju okupācija Polijā, pēckara partizāni, pretošanās kustība

Kopsavilkums

Rakstā aplūkots viens no visnozīmīgākajiem Polijas 20. gadsimta vēstures aspektiem – antikomunistiskā pagrīdes cīņa par neatkarību, kas izauga no tā sauktās Polijas pagrīdes valsts un noritēja no 1944. līdz 1956. gadam.

Raksta mērķis ir iepazīstināt lasītāju ar “atmiņu atjaunošanas” procesu par Polijas pēckara pagrīdes cīņtājiem par neatkarību, kuri plaši pazīstami kā “nolādētie karavīri”. Raksta pirmajā daļā sniegts ieskats Polijas pagrīdes cīņas pret padomju okupantiem un to sabiedrotajiem vēsturē. Tālāk aplūktas problēmas, ar kurām saskārās pētnieki un vēsturnieki, kuri centās šo tēmu aplūkot. Nākamajā nodaļā lasītājs tiek iepazīstināts ar nozīmīgāko šai tēmai veltīto vēstures literatūru. Nobeigumā tiek aplūkots, kādas sekas šīs joprojām notiekošās pārmaiņas ir atstājušas Polijas sabiedrības atmiņā.

“Nolādēto karavīru” fenomens meklējams ne tikai pašos pagrīdes cīņtājos, bet arī gigantiskajos orveliskajos melos, ar ko komunisti viņus apvija. Rezultātā pēc komunisma sabrukuma Polijas sabiedrība saskārās ar izaicinājumu no jauna atklāt savu neseno pagātni. Drīz kļuva skaidrs, ka miermīlīgā 1989. gada valsts apvērsuma apstākļos Polijā bija aprindas, kuras nevēlējās mainīt komunistu rakstīto vēsturi. Tomēr gan zinātnes, gan izglītības sfērā tika sperti vairāki soļi, lai to mainītu un atklātu Polijā pēc kara

pastrādāto noziegumu apmēru un godinātu varoņus, kuri cīnījās par neatkarīgu valsti. Šodien varam teikt, ka šie centieni daļēji ir bijuši sekmīgi.

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