

Mass grave exhumations as patriotic retreat: sacralisation and militarisation in the remembrance of the ‘cursed soldiers’

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Abstract

Between 2012 and 2017, at the Ł-section of Warsaw’s Powązki Military Cemetery, or ‘Łączka’, the Polish Institute of National Remembrance exhumed a mass grave containing the remains of post-war anti-communist resistance fighters. Being referred to as the ‘cursed soldiers’, these fighters have become key figures in post-2015 Polish memory politics. In this article we focus on the role of the volunteers at these exhumations in the production of the ‘cursed soldiers’ memory. Following the idea of community archaeology as a civil society-building practice, the observed processes of sacralisation and militarisation show how the exhumations create a community of memory that promotes the core values of the currently governing national-conservative PiS party. We found that tropes related to forensic research and typically identified with cosmopolitan memory paradigms are used within a generally nationalist and antagonistic memory framework.

Key words: ‘cursed soldiers’, exhumation, volunteers, IPN, Poland, collective memory

Introduction

In May 2017, the Institute of National Remembrance (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, IPN) carried out exhumations at the Ł-section of Warsaw’s Powązki Military Cemetery, popularly known as Łączka (in Polish, literally: ‘little meadow’).¹ It was the last stage of the uncovering of a large, post-war-era mass grave, which had served as a dumping ground for the bodies of numerous people who had been sentenced to death by the Polish state communist government in the period 1944–56. Many of the victims were members of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK), who became anti-communist resistance fighters after the Second World War and are now identified as ‘cursed soldiers’ (in Polish, *żołnierze wyklęci*), which emphasises their post-mortem state-imposed oblivion.

The term ‘cursed soldiers’ was coined at a 1993 exhibition on the post-war anti-communist resistance organised by right-wing activists and was popularised

through the book by writer and former partisan Jerzy Ślaski,² but gained currency only in the 2000s. As historian Kornelia Kończal explains, the slogan was transferred 'from the margins of memory activism to the center of the state-sponsored politics of memory and the pop-cultural mainstream' and was 'eventually taken over by one political force'.³ What is more, over time, the term expanded to include both honourable resistance fighters, such as the celebrated Witold Pilecki, and partisans accused of genocidal crimes against Polish citizens of Belarusian, Jewish, Lithuanian, Slovak and Ukrainian origins.⁴ Yet, portrayed as a homogeneous group, the 'cursed soldiers' have become key figures in the memory politics of the Polish right-wing and nationalist Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), particularly after its rise to power in 2015. With that, in the words of President Andrzej Duda, the Powązki 'Meadow' has become 'one of the most eloquent symbols of the Third Republic of Poland. Here, for nearly seventy years, have lain the remains of the soldiers of our last uprising, the anti-communist uprising'.⁵

The exhumations at Łączka were carried out by the IPN's Office of Search and Identification (Biuro Poszukiwań i Identyfikacji), led by historian Krzysztof Szwagrzyk. For these exhumations, the Office searched for volunteers whose task was, first and foremost, to sieve the exhumation sites' earth. Archaeologist Anna Zalewska calls this 'community archaeology', a participatory and civil society-building process in which the volunteers gradually become an integral part of the research team.⁶ As such, according to Szwagrzyk, they become 'participants of post-communist societies' collective catharsis.⁷ The volunteers are referred to as the 'heart' of the exhumation process, as they bring emotions and a sense of purpose to a site which otherwise would remain a place of 'cold' science, dominated by archaeological specialists.

In this article we analyse the central role of Łączka's volunteers in the process of sacralisation and militarisation of the 'cursed soldiers' memory. We argue that the volunteers play a key role in linking the exhumations to the memory paradigm of the 'cursed soldiers'. Through their position as volunteers at Łączka, their voice is treated as that of a witness of a kind, as they have first-hand and inside information about the search and identification process.⁸ Following the idea of community archaeology as a civil society-building practice,⁹ we contend that the exhumations create a memory community that reflects and fosters the central values of the ruling right-wing and nationalist PiS party, such as anti-communism, patriotism and conservative Catholicism. As such, the volunteers perform an important link between the sacralised space of Łączka and Polish society at large. Our study is based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in May and June of 2017, working alongside the volunteers at the exhumation site at Łączka and participating in other activities organised by the volunteers. It is complemented by participant observation of volunteer meetings organised by the IPN's education centre, Przystanek Historia, in Warsaw in March 2018.¹⁰

Forensic work in the twenty-first century is a practice of counter-memory under the umbrella of discourses related to human rights and transitional justice.¹¹ We

argue, however, that in Poland these victim-oriented, 'cosmopolitan' memory discourses are downloaded and reused within a nationalist and antagonistic framework of memory.¹² The scholarly research on the exhumations of the 'cursed soldiers', mainly authored by researchers and experts from the IPN's Office of Search and Identification, is rather disconnected from a large volume of work produced within the 'forensic turn'.¹³ With that, this is the first study that looks at these exhumations from the perspective of necropolitics and memory studies.

Searching for the 'cursed soldiers'

The exhumations in search of the remains of the 'cursed soldiers' carried out at Łączka between 2012 and 2017 are symbolically linked to the prominence of exhumation work in Polish memory production. In Poland, exhumations have proved to be a tool for creating myths, as in the case of the 'Katyń lie',¹⁴ as well as a means for countering those myths by verifying historical interpretations based on archival research, as in the case of the partial exhumations conducted in Jedwabne in 2001.¹⁵ Hence, for many people the act of exhuming, identifying and gathering evidence about communist crimes against the 'cursed soldiers' is not only about revealing 'historical truth' but also about breaking an institutionalised silence surrounding these 'heroes', which continued, according to the activists, even after the transition to democracy. As such, the fact that the bodies of the partisans remained hidden for more than a decade after the end of communism proves to the activists that the transition was not complete and many facets of the communist regime remained intact. In fact, a similar argument is used by Spanish activists searching for the forgotten victims of the Spanish Civil War and its aftermath to criticise the Spanish transition as incomplete.¹⁶ In Poland, this critique blatantly omits the fact that the 'cursed soldiers' had already entered state-sponsored memory politics before PiS was elected in 2015.

As mentioned above, the name 'cursed soldiers' was coined to assert that the anti-communist resistance fighters were doomed to oblivion and no one in Poland was supposed to remember and honour their struggles. In Polish, *wyklęci* is an emotionally loaded description which connotes stigma and banishment, a certain code of silence, an erasure. Thus, in English, 'cursed' should be understood as a signifier of a post-mortem misfortune of being forgotten by society.¹⁷ According to PiS and right-wing activists, the soldiers were cursed (silenced) twice. First, when their bodies and graves were hidden by the communist regime in order to erase all traces of their existence. And second, after the transition of 1989, by the intellectual, political and cultural elites of the Third Republic of Poland, who tried to erase the memory of the anti-communist conspiracy.¹⁸

This is not an accurate description, as there were instances of commemoration of the anti-communist partisans before and after the fall of communism. In the late 1980s, reporter Małgorzata Szejnert investigated the burial places of political prisoners from the Stalinist era.¹⁹ Although relatives of the victims were not informed about their burial place, they knew about Łączka through rumours and impromptu memorials established there. Łączka as a burial place was officially recognised after

1989. In 1991, under the auspices of a committee led by Maria Romer-Kędzierska, a relative of one of the victims, a memorial was erected at the site. What is more, already during the 1980s, memory activists started collecting oral histories related to the partisan struggles. This practice was carried on during the 1990s under the umbrella of associations such as We Remember (Pamiętamy) and Freedom and Independence (Wolność i Niezawisłość: WiN). As Kończal points out, the IPN started including the post-war partisan struggle in its agenda in 2005, producing a variety of publications, films and events for a wider audience. And finally, in 2011, during the mandate of Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska: PO), in an attempt to restrain right-wing memory activism, the Cursed Soldiers National Remembrance Day established on 1 March, following a proposal from the late President of Poland Lech Kaczyński.²⁰

In the same year, the IPN started a large-scale investigation into the possibility of exhumation of the unmarked graves of the victims of communism from the period 1944–56. However, Szwagrzyk, who had previously been employed by the Wrocław branch of the IPN, started his search and exhumation activities in the Lower Silesia region as early as 2003.²¹ The exhumations at the Ł-section of the Powązki Military Cemetery were initiated in 2012 and concluded in July 2017. During that time, the excavations were stopped several times because of administrative and judicial hurdles encountered in the effort to exhume and relocate the tombs that in the 1980s had been built on top of the unmarked graves from the 1940s and 1950s.

Most of the post-war victims were buried within the perimeters of the cemetery walls, or even in the confines of the prisons where they were sentenced to death. According to Szwagrzyk, the burial places were purposely concealed so that they could not become places of remembrance.²² It is estimated that until 1956 more than 4 000 individuals were executed by the regime; most of them were related to the Polish anti-communist underground.²³ Łączka was one of the main burial sites in the country. It is estimated that the bodies of around 300 victims were interred at Powązki Military Cemetery.

Since the election of PiS and the introduction of their memory programme, the emphasis in the memorialisation of the ‘cursed soldiers’ has been placed on forensic archaeology as a means of truth finding. In June 2016 the IPN’s Office for Search and Identification was established as a statement of this elevated interest in forensic research. Importantly, the emphasis on forensics brings about an implicit connection with memory activism related to human rights violations in other countries, such as Argentina, Spain or Bosnia. Although these comparisons are not made explicitly by the IPN itself, the transfer of memorial practices and vocabulary is evident. These implicit linkages provide the heroic myth of the ‘cursed soldiers’ with a powerful connotation of ‘universal’ victimhood while it reconnects with human rights-inspired counter-memory discourses, even if these exhumations are state sponsored.

The IPN’s Office for Search and Identification has two objectives. First, the exhumations should determine the causes of death, showing the systematic manner in which the victims were killed. For instance, according to the IPN, the exhumed remains evidence the recurring use of the ‘Katyń-method’, killing the victims with a

shot in the back of the head. For Szwagrzyk, the way the remains from Łączka were defiled during the reconstruction of the cemetery in the 1980s serves as evidence of the criminal nature of Polish communism, as the bones of the dead had been used as building blocks in the formation of new tombstones for communist dignitaries. The archaeological research thus proves the systematic way in which the victims were killed and also the long-term brutality of the Polish communist regime. According to Szwagrzyk, the victims' remains were violated twice: first, when they were dumped into a mass grave, and second, when they were unearthed, jumbled and used as building blocks.

The second objective is the identification of the remains through DNA analysis,²⁴ which echoes the enormous impact of DNA analysis in forensic research of mass crimes and its important influence on memory practices, increasingly focusing on individual identities instead of collective ones.²⁵ The forensic team sometimes travels hundreds of kilometres across Poland to take DNA samples of victims' distant relatives or to exhume the remains of close relatives in order to compare the DNA material. Moreover, the focus on DNA eclipses other forms of identification and remembrance. We noticed the team's lack of interest in the relatives' personal memories and life stories. The questionnaires the victims' relatives had to fill out focused only on the physical identification of the remains. In mass grave exhumations in countries such as Argentina or Spain, the voice of the victims' relatives is emphasised as an important part of the connected processes of remembrance, and the return of the remains to the families is one of the most important goals. In the case of the remembrance of the 'cursed soldiers', the relatives' voice is present in a much more enigmatic way. While being invited to reburial ceremonies and depicted in memory narratives (the 2017 movie *Wykłety* serves as a good example), the relatives were practically absent during the exhumation process. This was partly due to the fact that many of the partisans were young and had never started families, and partly due to the IPN's memory politics. In our view, the IPN carried out the exhumations not to return the remains of the lost relatives to their families, but to return the lost heroes to the nation. We argue that the 'nationalisation' of these remains is a key element in understanding the memory production connected to the exhumation sites, a process in which volunteers play an important role.

As the burial site of some of the most 'famous' 'cursed soldiers', Łączka has become the main reference point in the exhumation movement. The exhumation works at Łączka have served as a basis for a travelling exhibition, several documentary films, a special exhibition at the former Mokotów prison in Warsaw, public engagement talks and a virtual map, 'Virtual Łączka', advertised as a 'moving journey to places that were supposed to remain inaccessible'.²⁶ The centrality of the exhumations in the production of the memory of the 'cursed soldiers' highlights the continuous and deliberate post-mortem silence imposed on these soldiers, during communism and after the transition, as one of the distinctive discursive features in the current memorialisation. While the complex processes of searching, exhuming and identifying undo that silence, they also show how effectively it was imposed. At the same time, the exhumation marks a clear time frame of imposed silence from the moment of the partisans' death to the moment of their unburial.

Volunteers at Łączka

Finding volunteers at exhumation sites, particularly where the unburial activities are not state sponsored, is a common practice. As such, the exhumations currently being carried out in Spain are almost entirely led by volunteers. In Poland, however, where the IPN's Office for Search and Identification has received a large state budget, the admission of volunteers appears to serve a different purpose.

The volunteers we met during the fieldwork were a heterogeneous group of people representing different ages and backgrounds. They came to the exhumation site for different periods of time. Among those who stayed for more than a week were university students. Some of them were studying history or archaeology, and dreamed of a well-paid job at the IPN. Others were older supporters of PiS, disappointed by the political developments after 1989. Some people would take a few days off from work to attend the exhumations. Many volunteers had a particular interest in history, participated in re-enactments or were members of historical or memory associations. Often, volunteers had a special interest in the stories related to the Home Army, the Warsaw Uprising and the post-war partisan struggle. Many of them had a favourite hero partisan. They would show up dressed in 'cursed soldiers' attire during the exhumation work. Some had participated in exhumations before, but many were doing this for the first time. They could register at the site of the exhumation or via an online form on the IPN's website.²⁷ The exhumations were open to the public, and, almost every day, the site was visited by general visitors to the Powązki Military Cemetery, mostly school groups, as well as politicians, priests and other well-known faces of the Polish media landscape.

Basically, anyone aged eighteen or older interested in volunteering could sign up and participate in the exhumations. On the site, Marek, the head of the volunteers employed by IPN, who once had been a volunteer himself, gave a short introduction to the work, which for most of the volunteers involved sieving the earth retrieved from the burial site in search of small objects and bones. On the IPN's website the work of the volunteers was described as a 'mission' or a 'duty' in search of Polish heroes. The volunteers who had been participating in the exhumations for longer acquired a specialised vocabulary related to forensic science. At the same time, their emotional investment in their task, the exhumation team and other volunteers, as well as the victims whose remains they were searching for, was remarkable.

Discussing the exhumations at Łączka in terms of community archaeology, Zalewska points to the staggering number of volunteers and their exceptional enthusiasm. In this model of archaeology, public exhumations are envisioned as a collective, inclusive and participatory effort which carries an educational potential.²⁸ Zalewska explains that community archaeology is crucial in creating and sustaining social order. Particularly in places of 'difficult memory', community archaeology can serve as a vehicle of social integration, cohesion and reconciliation, as it is sometimes attributed therapeutic and cathartic powers. According to Szwagrzyk, the exhumations are 'a helpful contribution to relieving post-communist trauma'.²⁹

Whereas the exhumations were certainly used as a very powerful educational tool, we doubt – as we show in the analysis of the underlying processes of sacralisation and militarisation – to what extent they are producing the balanced inclusive social order which Zalewska envisions. When talking to the volunteers, their discourse, while being strongly antagonistic, as we will show below, reminded us of a counter-memorial narrative. For example, the volunteers pointed to the ongoing silences in society and told us how many Polish citizens did not understand the importance of their work. As such, they portrayed Szwarzgryk, his team and themselves as a small group defending Poland's pride, similar to the 'cursed soldiers' depicted as a small exclusive group trying to save Poland's freedom. It is noteworthy that a lone wolf has become one of the main symbols of the 'cursed soldiers',³⁰ representing small paramilitary groups.

As we observed, the volunteers treated the remains of the partisans as 'their' heroes, whom they were returning to the fatherland. This is very different from memorial cultures surrounding exhumation practices in other parts of the world, where the traumatic narratives of the victims' relatives are made central in the meaning-making process of the exhumed remains and their memorialisation. As we noted above, at Łączka there were hardly any relatives involved in the exhumation work. In their absence, the volunteers filled the exhumation site with emotional attachment and care.

Anthropologist Adam Rosenblatt uses the word 'care' to talk about the relation between the forensic team and the dead: 'Forensic care aims to restore the dead body's own integrity, and its place within the social and material world from which it was violently torn. It seeks, in every touch, examination, and technical practice to which the dead body is subjected, to respond to, reverse, and/or repair the violence suffered.'³¹ Rosenblatt acknowledges that forms of care are always there, but that, at the same time, the scientific members of the team uphold professional detachment, psychological distance and try to not to cross into the area of 'caring too much'. Rosenblatt underlines that 'forensic care is involved in the creation of more caregivers', and 'naturally seeks to end the monopoly of the forensic expert to spread the activity of care out from the gravesite into the community'.³² At Łączka, we observed that the volunteers did not maintain these professional standards and became real caregivers during and after the exhumations.

We posit that the IPN uses volunteers to infuse its scientific discourse with emotional significance, a sense of duty and counter-memorial urgency. The IPN produces a platform for volunteers to perform this role, as they have become central to ceremonies related to the identification and reburial of the exhumed remains. As we show throughout our analysis of the elements of sacralisation and militarisation in the memorialisation of the 'cursed soldiers', volunteers play an important role in linking the forensic work to society at large. In these processes, the volunteers' voice, which is that of a witness to the violence done to the partisans, displays the corresponding emotions of grief, hate, care and duty to carry on the 'cursed soldiers' words and work. As such, in terms of Rosenblatt's forensic care, the volunteers intend to respond to, reverse and repair the violence and injustice that happened. The use of forensic tropes, narratives of silencing and disappearance,

together with nationalistic and antagonistic frameworks of heroes and villains, produces a rather strange mixture of memory modes, in which discourses normally related to victim-oriented cosmopolitan memory are used in an antagonistic matter.

Sacralisation

On 20 May 2017 Warsaw celebrated International Museum Day with the 'Museum Night', an event often organised in large cities across Europe. On that evening, the Łączka volunteers gathered at the premises of the Ministry of Culture to attend a concert by *Contra Mundum*, a rock band that defines its style as patriotic rock.

The volunteers were excited. They had met the lead singer of the band, Norbert 'Smola' Smoliński, during the excavations and rumor spread that the whole team of volunteers was going to be invited on stage as a kind of homage. When the concert was about to start, a group of 150 people gathered in front of the stage, many of them dressed in clothes bearing 'cursed soldiers' imagery and carrying Polish flags. Towards the end of the concert, the whole crew of volunteers was called on stage, while the band played one of their songs which is about the 'cursed soldiers'.

For the volunteers it was one of the highlights of their participation in the exhumations. The rock band made sure that emotions were running high, with a combination of dramatic tunes and even more dramatic images. The volunteers were received as heroes for dedicating their free time to exhuming the lost Polish heroes, those who fought communism from the very beginning. Every day, they were in contact with this small sacred place at the furthest corner of the Powązki Military Cemetery, popularly known as Łączka.³³

This vignette shows how the volunteers came to perform an important link between the exhumation work and the remembrance of the 'cursed soldiers' at large. The act of inviting the volunteers on stage transformed them into heroes, in the image of the 'cursed soldiers', and they were symbolically appointed to bear testimony to the sacredness of Łączka to a bigger audience. The concert was one of the first 'presentations' of the community of volunteers to the public. After that, the volunteers were frequently invited as 'special guests' to outreach events about the exhumations at Łączka, such as exhibitions, concerts and debates, including 'Łączka through the eyes of the volunteers' at the IPN's *Przystanek Historia*. During these events, the volunteers referred to Łączka as a sacred place.

Our fieldwork covered the last stage of the exhumation process, which had started five years earlier. Over this period, Poland underwent some significant political changes, with Polish public opinion shifting to the right. In June 2015, Andrzej Duda of PiS was elected the President of Poland, and three months later his party won an overall majority in the parliamentary elections. PiS reorganised the IPN, making the Office for Search and Identification one of its central branches. Szwagrzyk became the director of the Office for Search and Identification and vice-president of the IPN. Furthermore, the new government decided to transform the former prison on Rakowiecka Street into the museum of the 'cursed soldiers'. In September 2015,

when the centrist political party PO was still in power, a Pantheon-Mausoleum of the ‘cursed soldiers’ was unveiled next to the exhumation site. Then, between May and December 2016, around 180 graves from the 1980s were moved from the Ł-section to other parts of the cemetery to allow the last phase of the exhumations to begin. The state-sponsored media portrayed the long-awaited relocation of these tombs as a victory of the renewed IPN and a critique of the previous government, which they felt had been too slow in giving out permits to continue the exhumation. These developments gave considerable momentum to the final stretch of the exhumations carried out at Łączka in the spring of 2017.

All these changes generated a huge interest in volunteering at the exhumation sites. More than 270 people came to Łączka in May and June 2017. Tirelessly sieving the enormous amounts of earth from the graves, the volunteers treated even the smallest pieces and objects with great reverence, since they belonged to the ‘cursed soldiers’. In the words of Marek, the head of the volunteers, ‘holding the remains of the cursed is like touching something sacred, those bones are relics.’³⁴ From time to time the volunteers would collect some earth from Łączka in small bags or jars to take home. They explained that Łączka was a sacred place to them, the earth was sacred too and they wanted to keep it close to them. During a meeting with the volunteers at the IPN, a small blade, still covered with earth from the exhumation site, was passed among the audience. Some people kissed it, as a gesture of love and respect, similar to that of the adoration of the Holy Cross. In this case, the earth from the mass grave and the earth on the blade became objects that connected the people at the meeting with the late ‘cursed soldiers’, serving as vehicles for revering their martyrdom.

Along with the rise of the myth of the ‘cursed soldiers’, their burial sites have become sacred places too. This phenomenon is particularly noticeable in the case of Łączka, where some of the most well-known resistance fighters were buried. As such, the Ł-section has become a pilgrimage destination for patriotic Poles who want to pay tribute to their murdered heroes.³⁵ Similar to the idea of a pilgrimage, some of the volunteers described their participation in the exhumations in terms of a ‘patriotic retreat’ (*rekolkcje patriotyczne*), referring to a tradition of religious practices.³⁶

The sacralisation of Łączka as a site of memory was also seen in numerous spontaneous and improvised religious ceremonies at the exhumation site. One day, two young priests from Łomża – a small town in north-eastern Poland – came to volunteer. Dressed in T-shirts with the images of the ‘cursed soldiers’, they were sieving the earth like everybody else. Towards the end of the day the archaeological work was stopped for a while, prompting the priests to improvise a funeral ceremony on the spot. Strong emotions, both of the professionals and the volunteers, connected to their daily witnessing of death and signs of raw violence, were channelled through these improvised religious ceremonies. For many volunteers, when looking back at their experience, these moments were seen as extremely moving and important. During an event at the IPN’s Przystanek Historia featuring the volunteers, Marek recalled that this was one of the most special experiences: ‘It was spontaneous, we were crying, praying or just having a moment of private reflection.’³⁷

Sacralisation of sites of violence is a common process which, according to sociologist Janet Jacobs, 'serves to connect survivors to the victims, creating a shared terrain of suffering, grief, and mourning.'³⁸ However, in the case of Łączka, the sacred becomes an all-encompassing narrative which transcends the space of the mass grave and the scope of grief and mourning. We started this section of the article with a vignette that exemplifies the role of the volunteers as transmitters of the sacredness of Łączka. The sacralisation of the burial place is directly related to the devotional cult surrounding the 'cursed soldiers'. Communication scholar Mariola Marczak, who analysed hagiographic structures of film narratives on the 'cursed soldiers' argues that they are usually portrayed as 'saints': flawless characters who suffered innocently because of their uncompromising fight for a good cause – the freedom of their fatherland – and whose biography is accompanied by a series of 'miracles.'³⁹ This mode of imagining the 'cursed soldiers' is reflected in the way the volunteers talked about their 'heroes': Pilecki, Inka, and also those who had committed war crimes, such as Łupaszka or Bury.

Strikingly, at Łączka, the volunteers employed similar narrative structures to talk about the leader of the IPN's Office of Search and Identification, Szwagrzyk, as the initiator of the search for the 'cursed soldiers' remains. Marta, who together with Marek and Monika, found a job at the IPN through volunteering, described the team as one big family. Szwagrzyk was her hero. She was amazed by his stalwartness and perseverance and described him as a very sophisticated, gallant, polite and, at the same time, humble person. She was very moved by the way he showed genuine interest in all of the volunteers and cared for them, making sure everyone got to eat and stayed warm.

Many volunteers shared details of Szwagrzyk's biography. There was a striking similarity between the way they talked about resistance fighter Witold Pilecki and Szwagrzyk. For example, Ada, a history student from Toruń who quit her job to volunteer at Łączka:

Ada talks very affectionate[ly] about Szwagrzyk and tells me something about his story. When he was 18, she says, he saw crosses without names and could not bear to see that. He wanted to reverse it. He will do this until he dies, Ada is convinced. She talks the same way about Pilecki. She cannot imagine he was a human being like you and me. He is somebody from a movie or a book. Whenever she talks about Szwagrzyk, Pilecki, or the participants of the Warsaw Uprising, she uses this extremely emotive mode and describes the main characters as heroes, emphasising their extraordinary personal qualities.⁴⁰

The passage reveals that Szwagrzyk's work for the IPN is something more than a job. It is his calling. At the volunteers' presentation at Przystanek Historia, Marek, the head of the volunteers, described Szwagrzyk as their commander and leader. To him, Szwagrzyk was a 'paragon of diligence and hard work'.

There is a high degree of sacralisation in the memorialisation of the 'cursed soldiers'. Not only do the 'cursed soldiers' attain saintlike qualities, as shown by Marczak,⁴¹ but at the exhumation site human remains were revered as relics and

the people directly involved in the identification of the ‘cursed soldiers’ remains acquired a saintlike status. In retrospect, the volunteers described Łączka as a ‘sacred space’, a ‘magnet’, a ‘magic place’, a place that ‘absorbs you completely’.⁴² As we can see, the volunteers become more than just activists for the recovery of the lost memory of the ‘cursed soldiers’. They become devotees, not only of the ‘cursed soldiers’, but also of Łączka, as a memory site, and of Szwagrzyk, as an apostle of sorts.

Militarisation

Anthropologists Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman propose seeing militarism as a cultural system: ‘It is shaped through ideology and rhetoric, effected through bodies and technologies, made visible and invisible through campaigns of imagery and knowledge production, and it colonises aspects of social life including reproduction, self-image, and notions of community.’⁴³ In Gusterson and Besteman’s special issue on cultures of militarism, anthropologist Francisco Ferrándiz analyses the dismantling of Francoist cultures of militarism, among others, through the exhumation of the mass graves of Republican civilians. He argues that this process ‘necessarily involves a certain level of remilitarizing by other means.’⁴⁴

We argue that both Łączka and the ‘cursed soldiers’ bear highly militarised memorial references. Whereas Ferrándiz uses the term ‘phantom militarism’ to describe this boomerang effect in Spain, in Poland we observe a form of (re-)militarisation in relation to the ‘cursed soldiers’ exhumations which is much less illusional. In this case, the exhumations’ aim is to erase the traces of communism, but not to dismantle the accompanying cultures of militarism. What is more, while PiS’s discourse abounds in anti-communist rhetoric, the party’s style and practice is rather reminiscent of late communism.⁴⁵ In the case of Łączka, the exhumation practices produce the militarisation of mostly non-military arenas, for instance activities closely related to human rights activism.

Looking at the aesthetics of the ‘cursed soldiers’ memory products such as T-shirts, comic books or murals, the militaristic undertone related to this memory culture does not come as a surprise.⁴⁶ It is, however, important to understand how this kind of aesthetics co-produces a culture of militarism. At Łączka, alongside religious references and metaphors, the volunteers often had recourse to military jargon. Besides referring to their participation in the exhumations as a ‘retreat’, they also used the term ‘patriotic duty’. Not only priests came to Łączka to volunteer, but also soldiers, to fulfil their ‘duty’. A young priest from Łomża quoted one of the volunteering soldiers on his Twitter account: ‘I am a soldier, and we – the Polish Soldiers – are returning for the bodies of our fallen comrades. That’s why I am here – volunteer at Łączka.’⁴⁷ Tellingly, on the occasion of a concert of gratitude organised for the head of the search team, Szwagrzyk himself called the volunteers his ‘personal squadron’, and told them: ‘your uniform is your yellow vest.’⁴⁸

One situation at Łączka illustrates this kind of militarisation. On 19 May 2017 a new group of very young volunteers came to the exhumation. The six boys belonged to a memory organisation called Mała Garstka, which was a re-establishment of a

1950s anti-communist students' organisation from Wrocław. In the afternoon, the boys went on a tour through the cemetery to pay tribute to their heroes.

They brought candles they wanted to light in remembrance of different heroes, and invited me to join them. On the tour, Maciej, a first-year law student, gave me a short introduction to Polish history. He definitely knows his history, but goes back and forth between big heroic battles of the Poles in different time periods. It is difficult to keep up with him. Our first stop is the memorial for the 'cursed soldiers' just next to the exhumation site. The boys from Mała Garstka confess that they don't like the memorial, which to them looks like a big fridge. It is too cold. But they light up a candle, place it in front of the memorial inscription, step back and give a quick nod with their heads. They are not very trained in this semi-military gesture, but it seems to me like the thing to do for them. After that, they repeat the same gesture of respect at the grave of Łupaszka, the symbolic grave of Pilecki and at the special section for the heroes of the Home Army.⁴⁹

Poland has a long tradition of state-supported civil defence military training programmes and these organisations seem to fit well within the construction of the remembrance of guerrilla forces such as the 'cursed soldiers'. Although Mała Garstka is a scout movement of historical legacy and character and not a real paramilitary unit, they do show some similarities and solidarities with paramilitary organisations. As such, Mała Garstka co-organises certain commemorations with an organisation called Związek Strzelecki, a kind of militaristic scout group.⁵⁰

In their research article on the Polish Military Organisation (Polska Organizacja Wojskowa, PMO) from Suwałki – a small town in north-eastern Poland – journalists Grzegorz Szymanowski and Katarzyna Piasecka emphasise the relation between scout movements, paramilitary units and historical references.⁵¹ 'PMO members love talking about history,' they write. 'They mention Piłsudski and the so-called 'cursed' soldiers [...] as their role models. Suwałki's inhabitants also preserve the memory of the Augustów roundup, a tragic event in which about 600 people disappeared, presumably killed by the Soviet Army and the NKVD.'⁵² What is more, this paramilitary unit took up the name of a secret military organisation created during the First World War.

Vernacular memorials and shrines built at Łączka after the exhumations came to an end – similar to those built by relatives of the dead before 1989 – reflect the connection between paramilitary organisations and the exhumations. Błyska National-Patriotic Organisation (Stowarzyszenie Narodowo-Patriotyczne im. Błyska) erected a shrine at Łączka on 1 March 2018, the Cursed Soldiers National Remembrance Day. This organisation is a good example of how paramilitary activities, historical re-enactments and the 'cursed soldiers' remembrance are intertwined. Behind the logo combining the Polish flag and an aggressive-looking wolf is an organisation founded in 2016 whose aims are, among others, propagation of patriotic attitudes, dissemination of information about the anti-communist underground and its heroes, taking care of places of historical remembrance, as well as conducting

shooting training and collecting weapons.⁵³ At Łączka, alongside the shrines erected by grassroots paramilitary units, there are also shrines by state-sponsored military units, such as the GROM Military Unit, which inherited the traditions of the legendary Cichociemni Paratroopers of the Home Army.⁵⁴ The overlaps and linkages between such organisations and the Łączka volunteers show that the militarisation in the structures of remembrance and exhumations of the ‘cursed soldiers’ goes beyond historical discursive levels. At the same time, these interconnected cultures of militarism clearly display the antagonistic nature of the ‘cursed soldiers’ memory, as it reimagines territory in exclusive terms and constructs rigid boundaries between ‘us’ and ‘them’.⁵⁵

Apart from the presence of paramilitary groups, the militarisation of the ‘cursed soldiers’ remembrance happened through the hierarchical structures occurring during the exhumations. In the previous section, we mentioned the quasi-religious reverence that some volunteers held for Szwagrzyk. His statement that the volunteers are his personal squadron and the yellow vests are their uniforms draws us closer to the realm of militarisation. Some people who had worked with Szwagrzyk but left the team because of disagreements, off the record, pointed to the absolute control Szwagrzyk exerted over the team, not tolerating differing views or competing media attention. These views reflect the way the IPN was restructured when PiS came to power, when many distinguished scholars and collaborators whose research topics and opinions were not compatible with the memory politics of PiS were made redundant.⁵⁶

Tomasz, the head of the archaeologists, referred to the hierarchical structure of the exhumation team by declaring that he tried to remain professional ‘down there’ and that, in general, the archaeologists tried to stay away from ‘the hype’ as much as they could. He agreed that Szwagrzyk was performing extremely well before the media and he was happy with that because it meant he could focus on his own work. Indeed, Tomasz would silently disappear whenever a television crew or state officials visited the site. In his own words, he was a ‘digger’. Tomasz said: ‘I dig wherever the professor [Szwagrzyk] tells me to.’ Obviously, he tried to stay away from politics. Moreover, the IPN’s Search and Identification team comprised a combination of non-politically involved professionals and ‘cursed soldiers’ devotees, most of whom were recruited from the volunteers.

Traces of the subtle and gradual (re)production of cultures of militarism in the exhumations of the ‘cursed soldiers’ can also be found in a small exhibition on the exhumations at Łączka that has been on display in the former Mokotów prison in Warsaw since March 2018. The exhibition occupies three floors, and on a part of the first floor the space of Łączka was recreated through a life-size image of an exhumed skeleton displayed on the floor. This impactful image is surrounded by aerial pictures of Łączka, and display cases with objects retrieved from the excavations. The second floor is presided over by a large icon of the Virgin Mary. Just in front of the icon, stands a display case with Catholic medallions exhumed from the graves. The other display cases contain additional objects retrieved from the graves and a number of panels identify several prisoners from Rakowiecka. Ascending the stairs to the second floor, towards the large icon of the Virgin Mary, the exhibition

conveys a transcendence of the mass grave into the realm of the sacred. The top floor is dedicated to the exhumation team. Here, emotionally loaded pictures of the exhumation process are combined with quotes about the meaning of Łączka, collected from, mostly, the volunteers, but also archaeologists, forensic scholars and Szwagrzyk himself. Significantly, with the exception of Szwagrzyk, these quotes are anonymised, creating the idea of a singular voice, a squadron of volunteers who feel and think the same way. The photograph presiding over this floor is an enlarged, dramatic image of Szwagrzyk and Anna Szlag, deputy director of the IPN's Office of Search and Identification, carrying a coffin during a reburial ceremony at Łączka. In the picture, Szwagrzyk and Szlag are shrouded in red and white smoke, surrounded by activists dressed in attire with the 'cursed soldiers' imagery.

For us, the exhibition clearly demonstrates a tacit process of militarisation inherent to the IPN's exhumation practices at Łączka. That is, while militarisation is not directly visible, on the top floor, the merging of the anonymised volunteers' words into a singular voice accompanied by a photograph displaying explicitly patriotic aesthetics (red and white smoke, the T-shirts) transmits ideas of duty, hierarchy and patriotism which are closely linked to militarism. Importantly, spread over three floors, the exhibition transcends the physical presence of the mass grave, recreated through the life-size image on the floor, to the realm of the sacred on the second floor and that of tacit militarism on the top floor.

Conclusion

The exhumations at Łączka show many similarities to human rights-driven exhumations that are happening all over the world as part of the so-called forensic turn in transitional justice. In Poland, however, tropes and narrative structures related to human rights-based cosmopolitan memory modes are used in an antagonistic fashion to create a heroic narrative of the 'good' Polish nation against the 'evil' communist oppressor. As we have shown, the volunteers, being witnesses to the violent abuses of the communist regime, obtain that position of transmitters of that experience. As devotees of the 'cursed soldiers', Łączka and Szwagrzyk, the volunteers communicate their experiences to larger audiences using narrative structures characteristic of hagiography and sacrality. At the same time, we have pointed to the subtle overlaps between the body of volunteers and paramilitary scout groups, which, we believe, translate into a culture of militarism which permeates the narrative of the volunteers.

Following Zalewska's idea of community archaeology as a civil society-building practice, the processes of sacralisation and militarisation we observed in the group of volunteers illustrate how the exhumations of the 'cursed soldiers' promote the nationalist memory programme of the ruling PiS party.⁵⁷ With that, the exhumations of the victims of communist violence, carried out in and outside Poland, become a vehicle of patriotic education and 'patriotic retreats'.⁵⁸ Moreover, the IPN's Office of Search and Identification has become a branch of public outreach which enables direct citizens' engagement with the 'cursed soldiers' as a new memory

paradigm that encompasses the core societal values of PiS. The affective and emotional power of witnessing bare violence at the open mass grave produces deep and emotional levels of engagement which inspire the volunteers—devotees to become transmitters of the ‘cursed soldiers’ myth to society at large.

However, this type of community archaeology is not as inclusive as Zalewska suggests, since the mass grave exhumations of the ‘cursed soldiers’ carry a strong right-wing identity and nation-building component. IPN’s current exhumation practices show how narratives and practices which were originally developed by counter-memory and left-wing memory activists are, in Poland, being used in opposite political settings, and produce antagonistic memory narratives using cosmopolitan tropes.⁵⁹ That is, while partly making use of the language of victimhood, trauma, closure and the need for a fully fledged form of Transitional Justice, the IPN and PiS trace a monologic and exclusive memory discourse which spurs on the passions of belonging. In short, the ‘cursed soldiers’ myth enables the current government to question the Polish transition to democracy along with its leaders and protagonists. As such, the memory of the Solidarity movement is discredited and replaced by a myth of uncompromising, staunchly anti-communist heroes imagined as paramilitary lonely wolves. And, as such, the ‘cursed soldiers’ remembrance outweighs a number of other important anti-communist memory paradigms and myths, such as the myth of the Warsaw Uprising, particularly because of the rural setting of the post-war partisans’ struggles. Rather than proposing urban models of solidarity and activism, the ‘cursed soldiers’ military and rural contexts inspire a hierarchical and non-centrist style of commemoration and engage those who identify with PiS as a patriotic and anti-cosmopolitan party. The exhumations of the ‘cursed soldiers’ highlight the processes of (national) identity building which are inherent in exhumation practices, but are extra prevalent in Poland. As such, the right-wing appropriation of human rights-related discourses and practices in Poland invites us to review similar processes at work when analysing exhumations elsewhere.

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Dedication

In memory of Stefan Hristov, whose loving support during the fieldwork in 2017 was fundamental to this research.

Notes

- 1 Established in 1912 in Warsaw, Powązki Military Cemetery is a burial ground for Polish political and military elites. With numerous symbolic graves, memorials and memory plaques, the cemetery testifies to the vicissitudes of Poland's modern history.
- 2 Marcin Czajkowski, 'Will the Cursed Soldiers Defend Us?', *Res Publica Nowa*, 2017, <https://publica.pl/teksty/czajkowski-will-the-cursed-soldiers-defend-us-62718.html>, accessed 17 August 2020.
- 3 Kornelia Kończal, 'The Invention of the "Cursed Soldiers" and Its Opponents: Post-war Partisan Struggle in Contemporary Poland', *East European Politics and Societies and Cultures*, 2019, 1–29, at 18.
- 4 Maria Kobielska, 'Die "Verstoßenen Soldaten"', *Zeitgeschichte Online*, 19 July 2016; Florian Peters, 'Remaking Polish National History: Reenactment over Reflection', *Cultures of History Forum*, 2016, DOI 10.25626/0054; Patrycja Baldys and Katarzyna Piątek, 'Memory Politicized. Polish Media and Politics of Memory – Case Studies', *Media i Społeczeństwo*, 6 (2016), 64–77; Kończal, 'The Invention of the "Cursed Soldiers"'
- 5 Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, 'In Search of a Buried Army', in Sławomir Moćkin and Tadeusz Wolsza (eds), *The Return of the Executed Army* (Brussels and Olsztyn, European Conservatives and Reformists Group, 2017), pp. 109–25, at 120.
- 6 Anna I. Zalewska, 'Archeologia Prospołeczna i Uspołeczniana (Public Archaeology) z Polskiej Perspektywy', in Joanna Wojdon (ed.), *Historia w Przestrzeni Publicznej* (Warsaw, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 2018), pp. 17–26, at 22.
- 7 Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, 'Archeologia Zbrodni Jako Źródło "Katharsis" Społeczeństw Postkomunistycznych', in Anna Zalewska (ed.), *Archeologia Współczesności* (Warsaw, Stowarzyszenie Naukowe Archeologów Polskich Oddział w Warszawie, 2016), 197–205; Zalewska, 'Archeologia Prospołeczna'.
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- 9 Zalewska, 'Archeologia Prospołeczna'.
- 10 The participants at the exhumations who are not directly employed by IPN are anonymised.
- 11 Sarah E. Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies: DNA Technology and the Search for Srebrenica's Missing* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, University of California Press, 2008); Zoë Crossland, 'Evidential Regimes of Forensic Archaeology', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 42 (2013), 121–37; Francisco Ferrándiz, *El pasado bajo tierra. Exhumaciones contemporáneas de la Guerra Civil* (Barcelona, Anthropos, 2014); Francisco Ferrándiz and Antonius Robben, *Necropolitics: Mass Graves and Exhumations in the Age of Human Rights* (Philadelphia, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015); Roger Luckhurst, 'Digging up Memories: Forensic Archaeology, Cultural Trauma and the Contemporary Mass Grave', in Sabine

- Coelsch-Foisner (ed.), *Memorialisation* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2015), pp. 115–28; Élisabeth Anstett and Jean-Marc Dreyfus, *Human Remains and Identification: Mass Violence, Genocide and the 'Forensic Turn'* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015); Isaias Rojas-Perez, *Mourning Remains: State Atrocity, Exhumations, and Governing the Disappeared in Peru's Postwar Andes* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2017); Zuzanna Dziuban (ed.), *Mapping the 'Forensic Turn': Engagements with Materialities of Mass Death in Holocaust Studies and Beyond* (Vienna, New Academic Press, 2017).
- 12 Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2006); Anna Cento Bull and Hans Lauge Hansen, 'On Agonistic Memory', *Memory Studies*, 2015, 1–15; Francisco Ferrándiz and Marije Hristova, 'Mass Grave Exhumation Sites as Agonistic Fora: A Comparative Study of Spain, Poland and Bosnia', in Marta Fernández Bueno and Johanna Vollmeyer (eds), *Repensar El Pasado: La Memoria (Trans)Cultural Europea* (Madrid, Dykinson, 2019).
 - 13 See, for instance, Łukasz Szleszkowski et al., 'Exhumation Research Concerning the Victims of Political Repressions in 1945–1956 in Poland: A New Direction in Forensic Medicine', *Forensic Science International*, 235 (2014), 103.e1–103.e6; Łukasz Szleszkowski et al., 'The Possibility of Establishing Causes of Death on the Basis of the Exhumed Remains of Prisoners Executed during the Communist Regime in Poland: The Exhumations at Powązki Military Cemetery in Warsaw', *International Journal of Legal Medicine*, 11:2 (2015), 801–6; J. Ossowski et al., 'The Polish Genetic Database of Victims of Totalitarianisms', *Forensic Science International*, 258 (2016), 41–9; Karolina Wichowska, 'The Soldiers' Field': *The Excavation and Identification of Communist Terror Victims Buried in the Powązki Cemetery in Warsaw* (Warsaw, The Institute of National Remembrance, 2016); Szwagrzyk, 'Archeologia Zbrodni'; Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, 'From the "Cursed Soldiers" to the "Steadfast (Unbroken) Soldiers" in Poland. Towards Restoring Individual Identity of the Stalinism Victims', in Anna I. Zalewska, John M. Scott and Grzegorz Kiarszys (eds), *The Materiality of Troubled Pasts: Archaeologies of Conflicts and Wars* (Warsaw and Szczecin, Department of Archaeology, Szczecin University and Roadside History Lessons Foundation, 2017), pp. 85–97.
 - 14 George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre of 1940: Truth, Justice and Memory* (New York, Routledge, 2005); Aleksandr Markovič Ėtkind et al. (eds), *Remembering Katyn* (Cambridge, Polity, 2012).
 - 15 Paweł Machcewicz and Krzysztof Persak (eds), *Wokół Jedwabnego* (Warsaw: IPN, 2002); Radosław J. Ignatiew, 'Findings of Investigation S 1/100/Zn into the Murder of Polish Citizens of Jewish Origin in the Town of Jedwabne on 10 July 1941, Pursuant to Article 1 Point 1 of the Decree of 31 August 1944', in Antony Polonsky and Joanna B. Michlic (eds), *The Neighbors Respond: The Controversy over the Jedwabne Massacre in Poland* (Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2004), pp. 133–6.
 - 16 Ferrándiz and Hristova, 'Mass Grave Exhumation Sites as Agonistic Fora'.

- 17 *Wykłęci* is variously translated into English as ‘cursed’, ‘accursed’, ‘doomed’ and ‘damned’. Even the IPN does not use one specific translation in its English-language publications.
- 18 See Czajkowski, ‘Will the Cursed Soldiers’.
- 19 Małgorzata Szejnert, *Śród Żywych Duchów* (Cracow, Wydawnictwo Znak, 2012).
- 20 See Kończal, ‘The Invention of the “Cursed Soldiers”’ for a detailed description of the process of the transfer of the ‘cursed soldiers’ memorialisation from the margins to the centre of state-sponsored memory politics.
- 21 Krzysztof Szwagrzyk, ‘Ekshumacje w Działaniach Oddziału IPN We Wrocławiu’, *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka*, 2007, 489–94.
- 22 Szwagrzyk, ‘From the “Coursed Soldiers”’.
- 23 It is not known exactly how many people belonged to all the organisations and underground groups existing between 1944–56. The estimated number is 120,000–180,000, of which a total of 20,000 partisans were hiding in forests. Rafał Wnuk (ed.), *Atlas Polskiego Podziemia Niepodległościowego 1944–1956* (Warsaw, IPN. Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni Przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2007), p. li; Szleszkowski et al., ‘The Possibility of Establishing Causes of Death’.
- 24 Szwagrzyk, ‘From the “Coursed Soldiers”’, p. 89.
- 25 Wagner, *To Know Where He Lies*.
- 26 For the virtual map see <https://laczka.ipn.gov.pl/>.
- 27 See <https://poszukiwania.ipn.gov.pl/bbp/wolontariat/wolontariusze/324,Wolontariusze.html>.
- 28 Zalewska, ‘Archeologia Prospołeczna’.
- 29 Szwagrzyk, ‘From the “Coursed Soldiers”’, p. 86.
- 30 The poem ‘Wolves’ is a prominent reference in the ‘cursed soldiers’ remembrance since poet Zbigniew Herbert wrote it with anti-communist partisans in mind. It starts with the stanza: ‘Because they lived by a wolfish law/history will grant them no place/they left behind them in pilling snow/a yellowish moisture a wolfish trace’. Zbigniew Herbert, *The Collected Poems, 1956–1998* (New York, HarperCollins, 2007).
- 31 Adam Rosenblatt, *Digging for the Disappeared: Forensic Science after Atrocity* (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2015), pp. 187–8.
- 32 *Ibid.*, p. 181.
- 33 Field notes, 21 May 2017.
- 34 ‘Łączka Oczyma Wolontariuszy’, Warsaw, Przystanek Historia Centrum Edukacyjne Instytutu Pamięci Narodowej im. Janusza Kurtyki, 7 March 2018.
- 35 The word pilgrim is also used in Szwagrzyk, ‘From the “Coursed Soldiers”’, p. 93.
- 36 ‘Łączka Oczyma Wolontariuszy’.
- 37 *Ibid.*
- 38 Janet Jacobs, ‘From the Profane to the Sacred: Ritual and Mourning at Sites of Terror and Violence’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1:2 (2004), 311–15, at 315.
- 39 Mariola Marczak, ‘Persuasive and Communicative Potential of Hagiographic Narrative Structures in Screen Representations of the Polish Underground Soldiers

- Struggling for Independence after World War II', *Studia Religioologica*, 1:2 (2018), 115–28.
- 40 Field notes, 17 May 2017.
- 41 Marczak, 'Persuasive and Communicative Potential'.
- 42 'Łączka Oczyma Wolontariuszy'.
- 43 Hugh Gusterson and Catherine Besteman, 'Cultures of Militarism: An Introduction to Supplement 19', *Current Anthropology*, 1:2 (2019), 3–14, at 4.
- 44 Francisco Ferrándiz, 'Unburials, Generals, and Phantom Militarism: Engaging with the Spanish Civil War Legacy', *Current Anthropology*, 1:2 (2019), 62–76, at 63.
- 45 Pieter Van Os, "Een Voorbeeld Voor de Wereld" De Onttaking van de Poolse Rechtsstaat', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 16 May 2017.
- 46 For an in-depth analysis of the pop culture related to the types of patriotism connected to the myth of the 'cursed soldiers', see Marcin Napiórkowski, *Turbopatriotyzm* (Wołowiec, Czarne, 2019).
- 47 See twitter.com/ksFilo/status/866387833505951744, 21 May 2017.
- 48 For a short impression of the concert, see the IPN's Office for Search and Identification's Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/poszukiwaniaipn/posts/713782058832203>.
- 49 Field notes, 19 May 2017.
- 50 For more information on the activities of Mała Garstka, see their Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/Ma%C5%82a-Garstka-1284770754997402/>.
- 51 Grzegorz Szymanowski and Katarzyna Piasecka, 'Meet the Patriotic Polish Paramilitaries Who Look beyond Russia for Motivation', *Euronews*, 17 December 2018.
- 52 *Ibid.*
- 53 See <https://www.facebook.com/PatriociBlyska/>.
- 54 See <http://grom.wp.mil.pl/pl/7.html> and <https://www.facebook.com/JednostkaWojskowaGROM/>.
- 55 Cento Bull and Hansen, 'On Agonistic Memory'.
- 56 See Peters, 'Remaking Polish National History'. On the closure of the IPN's monthly magazine *Pamięć* see Wojciech Czuchnowski and Adam Leszczyński, 'IPN aresztuje pamięć', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 1 October 2016, <https://wyborcza.pl/1,75398,20772776,ipn-aresztuje-pamiec.html>, accessed 7 October 2020. For an open letter denouncing the dismissals at the IPN signed by a large group of prominent Polish scholars see 'Oczekujemy interwencji Kolegium IPN. List otwarty naukowców', *Więź*, 31 July 2017, <http://wiesz.com.pl/2017/07/31/oczekujemy-interwencji-kolegium-ipn-list-otwarty-naukowcow/>, accessed 7 October 2020.
- 57 Jan Darasz, 'The History Men', in Jo Harper (ed.), *Poland's Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism* (Budapest, Central European University Press, 2018), pp. 131–59.
- 58 Cf. Berber Bevernage and Lore Colaert, 'History from the Grave? Politics of Time in Spanish Mass Grave Exhumations', *Memory Studies*, 1:2 (2014), 440–56.
- 59 See Ferrándiz and Hristova, 'Mass Grave Exhumation Sites'.