




### **Katarzyna Kość-Ryżko**

[Institute of Archaeology and Ethnology of the Polish Academy of Sciences]

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6103-2474>

### **Zbigniew Kubiowski**

[University of Warsaw]

### **Ewelina Ebertowska**

[Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań]

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-2778-7002>

## **Memory dissonance and competitive discourses about the past on the example of the legacy of the “Gryf Pomorski” Secret Military Organisation**

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### **Abstract**

In the article, we present the circumstances surrounding the establishment and activities of the “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organisation and contemporary forms of its commemoration in the context of historical policy. We discuss the causes and effects of the conflict over the memory of the partisans of “Gryf Pomorski” and the manifestations of competing discourses about them. The basis of the analysis are materials collected during ethnographic field research in Pomerania.

### **Key words**

memory dissonance, troublesome heritage, TOW “Gryf Pomorski”, conflicts over memory, resistance movement in Pomerania, Second World War, regional education, commemorative practices, memorial sites



Memory conflicts are inherent in the processes of collective remembering/forgetting. All because of the creative role played by collective memory in terms of identity. From a biological point of view, collective memory does not exist. However, each social group defining itself as us needs a canon of references to the past to create its own cohesion rooted in the past and directed towards the future.<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction: Social context of ethnographic research on Pomeranian partisans**

Although almost 80 years have passed since the end of the Second World War, many events that took place have remained unexplained to this day. Even if it is difficult to accept, it will probably stay that way. This also applies to the past related to the activities of the Pomeranian resistance movement, where historical knowledge is often mixed with informal knowledge, and collective imaginations with legendary stories. The passage of time is not without significance in this case, as it has a degrading effect not only on the material artifacts that remain today, but also on human memory and the ideas constructed on its basis.

The current body of knowledge about this paramilitary formation is a compilation of researched documents and archives, as well as collected memories and accounts of the participants of these events, their relatives and other people directly and indirectly related to the activities of the partisans. Ultimately, also information provided by those who claimed to have heard “something” – “once” – “somewhere” – “from someone”. Verifying stories claiming to be true is a tedious and not always successful process. Memory trajectories can be surprising, and without knowing the contexts that constitute turning points for them, it is easy to get lost. Stories recounted years later are not always consistent with the official version, often reflecting more about the context of events rather than strict factual accuracy. In the case of the memory of the activities and heritage of the “Gryf Pomorski” (“Pomeranian Griffin”, hereinafter GP) Secret Military Organization (Tajna Organizacja Wojskowa, TOW), there are many factors determining its content. Suffice it to mention the circumstances, time and place of creation of this formation, bringing together professional soldiers, as well as foresters, railway workers, farmers and “ordinary” boys and girls from Kashubian towns and villages. The dissemination of information about the Pomeranian resistance movement after the war, as well as the narratives and myths surrounding its members, was influenced by the communist authorities of the Polish People’s Republic and

1 R. Traba, *Konieczność zapominania, czyli jak sobie radzić z “ars oblivionis”*, “Herito”, vol. 13 (4), 2013, p. 23.

the years following the political transformation.<sup>2</sup> For many regional communities representing various ideological persuasions, it was a convenient topic with distinct leading actors that could be helpful in promoting their own goals and values. At the same time, a grassroots movement of social activists, aware of regional history and committed to restoring its rightful place in memory and the public space, was developing dynamically. Their goal was to popularise knowledge and local patriotic traditions and to try to include them in the canon of local and national cultural heritage. The post-war past of the Pomeranian region (especially the Kashubian region, Kociewie, Bory Tucholskie) and the underground activities of the regional resistance movement intertwined with it are an important and often underestimated element of the local identity, which was clearly confirmed by our field research,<sup>3</sup> the preliminary conclusions of which we would like to present in this article.

Interviews provided valuable information about the organization's members and their activities. This included among other things alleged skirmishes with the Nazis, the locations of shelters, the participation of local residents in the conspiracy, the resting places of the remains of murdered partisans, and information about universal mythization processes. The credibility of the memories and accounts conveyed generally relied on the source of the stories heard, gaps in memory and the degree of participation in the social transmission of historical knowledge. The narrator's perspective often resulted from their place of residence, origin, family history, personal experiences, education, political views and even religiosity. The memory of the activities of row "Gryf Pomorski" has been shaped over several decades during dynamic political and socio-economic changes in Poland. As a result, it is not surprising that this memory is not consistent or uniform. However, a specific coherence of the message can be observed within specific groups and communities (social, professional, hobbyist, ideological), created around a similar ethos or sense of mission.

2 See W. Dewka, O „Gryfie Pomorskim” bez mitologii, „Express Kaszubski”, [https://expreskaszubski.pl/pl/14\\_kultura/8250\\_o-gryfie-pomorskim-bez-mitologii.html](https://expreskaszubski.pl/pl/14_kultura/8250_o-gryfie-pomorskim-bez-mitologii.html) [accessed: 24.01.2023]; A. Gąsiorowski, K. Steyer, *Tajna organizacja wojskowa Gryf Pomorski*, Gdańsk-Kwidzyń 2010.

3 The research was conducted within the framework of the project entitled “People and the heritage of the forests – material evidence and memory of the activities of the “Gryf Pomorski” Secret Military Organization” financed by the County Office in Chojnice and the Patriotic Fund of the Roman Dmowski and Ignacy Jan Paderewski Institute for the Legacy of National Thought (2021 cycle: Freedom across Poland), coordinated by Fundacja Przyjaciół IAE PAN. Ethnographic field research in Pomerania lasted from July to September 2021. Most interviews were conducted in Chojnice and surrounding towns; for example, Brusy, Męcikał, Lubnia, Konarzyńki, Leśna, Kosobudy, Borowy Młyn, Myłof, Przytarńnia. The remainder were performed in towns and villages in the north of the Tuchola Forests National Park and the Kashubian region, where there are several schools named after the partisans and numerous memorial sites dedicated to row “Gryf Pomorski” (Lębork, Redkowice, Kępa Kaszubska, Miechucino, Kiełpino).

The adopted methodological perspective, justified by the issues and the method of data collection and their interpretation, refers to the cognitive apparatus adopted within the framework of oral history, its theory and methodology.<sup>4</sup> This is also consistent with the assumption that our goal is to learn and describe universal history through the prism of specific biographies and the fates of individual human beings. We are interested in historical events both individually and socially, and access to these is possible through stories stored in the reservoir of personal and collective memory. The past and knowledge about it are here filtered through personal experience and experienced through the consequences this brings. The subject of this oral history understood in this way is the history of the underground organization and its members, told by the descendants of the direct actors and observers of the events discussed, as well as the recipients of its resonance in the contemporary semiosphere in local and global (historiographic, social, political) dimensions. In this case, the relationship between the methodology of ethnographic field research and the analytical procedure of oral history is equal and complementary. Ethnography primarily provides data collection techniques and description tools, while oral history methodology is used for operationalisation. Materials obtained through thematically focused conversations and semi-structured interviews provide source data that are interpreted in a broad contextual perspective.<sup>5</sup>

The ethnographic research above-mentioned focused primarily on learning about the contexts in which the phenomenon of the “Gryf Pomorski” functions in social transfer and perception. This enabled us to reach the communities of leaders and initiators of projects aimed at commemorating it. The contemporary image of a partisan organization is primarily the domain of activities undertaken by local organizations and associations, local government institutions, schools named after the organization, cultural animators and individual enthusiasts of history and the region. It is also worth mentioning that the area where the “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organization operated is exceptionally attractive regarding sightseeing, nature, and tourism. It is full of picturesque forests and lakes, castles and cultural monuments. It is no coincidence that this area garners significant interest from visitors from Poland and abroad. They often visit the more well-known regional attractions related to wartime operations in this area, such as the remains of “bunkers” in Męcikał and the Lasy Mirachowskie, as well as the reconstructed bunker at the Centre for Regional Education and Promotion in Szymbark.

4 P. Thompson, *The voice of the past*, in R. Perks, A. Thompson (eds.), *The oral history reader*, London–New York 1998, pp. 21–29.

5 For more on the topic of the mutual relationships and convergence between ethnography and oral history, see: M. Di Leonardo, *Oral history as ethnographic encounter*, “The Oral History Review”, no. 15 (1), 1987, pp. 3–5.

In the ethnographic part of the project, we were primarily interested in learning how the heroes of “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organization function in the collective consciousness: what social and cultural needs they respond to; to what extent they satisfy them; what sustains their myth and legend in the region and beyond. We were also focused on how people and events related to “Gryf Pomorski” are used by various institutions and entities depending on their activities and goals. The analysis allowed for the identification of several leading task paths implemented in the region: didactic, pedagogical and educational, patriotic, martyrological, ideological, cognitive and entertainment. Frequently, these tasks overlap or are performed at the same time. The gathered data also yielded information about the symbolic significance attributed to the “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organization and the commemorative locations linked to their heritage. We plan to systematically analyze these materials and share them in a series of articles, of which this is the first.

Since the topic itself is difficult and maintaining research distance during field research was sometimes complicated, we – as the authors of the text – would like to emphasize that we do not pretend to be arbiters of the subject of the dispute regarding the “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organization, nor do we take one of the sides in the dispute. We avoid assessing the behavior of the main actors in the dispute while retaining the right to critically analyze the source materials. The description and interpretation of the “memory phenomena”<sup>6</sup> identified during the research, constituting a specific “regional memorial landscape,” is also an opportunity for us to initiate discussions on related topics with researchers, observers, and participants of social life who are especially interested in the consequences of conflicting narratives about a common, although troublesome, cultural heritage and constructive ways of dealing with cultural trauma. Sharon Macdonald calls the above “memory phenomena” “memory obsession,” and its manifestations can be found in various forms throughout the continent: “[...] in museums, monuments and in various rituals and traditions that are brought back to life, more or less consciously (this includes culinary “heritage,” the creation of retro brands or associations that deal with historical reconstructions).”<sup>7</sup>

### **Selected aspects of constructing historical memory**

Narratives about the past, especially about events that have not been thoroughly understood and described or whose effects cannot be assessed, often arouse controversy. This is especially true when the preserved testimonies and accounts of participants are ambiguous and contradictory, and the emotions they evoke

6 We take this term from the anthropologist Sharon Macdonald, who refers to it in her article: S. Macdonald, *Europa jako kraina pamięci*, “Herito”, vol. 13 (2013), no. 4, p. 31, and especially in her inspirational book entitled *Memorylands* from the same year [Polish trans. *Krainy pamięci. O dziedzictwie i tożsamości we współczesnej Europie*, Kraków 2021].

7 S. Macdonald, *Europa...*, p. 31.

make an objective and distanced judgment of events impossible. In such situations, it is easy to question the authenticity of the available archival documentation and its completeness, and it is easy to question the bias or lack of competence of the people preparing this data. Discussions generated in this way rarely lead to consensus on historical facts, and alternative versions of certain events emerging during these discussions are just some of the strategies for reconstructing the past.<sup>8</sup> Especially a not too distant one which still has witnesses, which is both exciting and polarising society. These measures also help build and consolidate group identity, especially one based on a simple us/them division and strengthen the sense of moral superiority of supporters of one or the other version of events. However, this tactic is sometimes abused, and then it becomes a simple social engineering tool used for private or collective purposes: political, ideological, economic, administrative, and ambitious.<sup>9</sup>

The costs of participation in larger or smaller “historical battles” – theoretically fought for memory and the past, but actually for immediate or future profits – are generally characterized by overestimating profits in the short term and underestimating losses in the long term. In the context described here, an example may be some activities addressed to the local community, including school children and the young, undertaken by various institutions for the purpose of regional education and patriotic upbringing. It sometimes happens that their overly simplified or intrusive message has the opposite effect to that intended: it causes prejudice and permanently discourages people from expanding their historical knowledge and becoming involved in similar celebrations.<sup>10</sup> Narratives that trivialize reality, overly heroize or antagonize the local community are perceived by critical and aware young people as inauthentic and manipulative.<sup>11</sup>

8 It is also worth paying attention to the risk of making one of the common memory errors in such a situation, called “memory sins” by psychologists (see D. Schacter, *The seven sins of memory*, Boston 2002; A. Stone, *The seven sins of memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers*, “American Journal of Psychiatry”, no. 158 (12) (2001), pp. 2106–2107.); this refers to “suggestibility.” This problem is in some respects similar to “misattribution” (expressed in the assignment of memory to the wrong source), but it differs in surrendering to open suggestions regarding stored memories, e.g. as a result of conversations, suggestive questions, comments and understatements.

9 See Ch. Kertcher, O. Turin, *Understanding the construction of historical memory: Identifying mistakes in war movies*, “Communication Teacher”, no. 37/2, (2023), pp. 126–131. For further examples of the construing of historical memory in various European countries, see: J. Hackmann, M. Lehti (eds.), *Contested and Shared Places of Memory: History and Politics in North Eastern Europe*, London 2010.

10 This conclusion can be drawn on the basis of surveys conducted in several schools named after row “Gryf Pomorski” and interviews with representatives of the teaching staff. We will discuss and analyse this part of the research in more detail in the next article in this series.

11 This does not mean, of course, that there are no recipients who are satisfied with such a message. However, our research conducted among the inhabitants of Pomerania shows that this is a minority approach.

They also often alienate their creators and the institutions or political parties they represent, and as a consequence, backfire; they make it difficult to identify with the characters who seem too “plastic” and idealized. Especially when their written biographies are closer to hagiography than real life. Meanwhile, the above identification is one of the main determinants of effective modeling of attitudes and interiorization of values, which are an element of social learning through historical education.<sup>12</sup> An unintended, although positive aspect of a critical response to a given message is the encouragement to independently explore a given topic, which is facilitated by the tendency to rebel and contest “existing truths,” which is typical at a given developmental stage.

Although disputes over the interpretation of past facts, which have been going on for years, lose their substantive clarity over time, they may still contribute to the perpetuation of divisions of opinion between the parties involved (both individual people and organised groups, as well as nations and states). Paradoxically, what permanently unites the conflicting entities is their common heritage and the trouble it causes its heirs. Striving for cognitive consensus and avoiding ambivalence,<sup>13</sup> are commonly known tendencies in human behavior described by psychologists and sociologists.<sup>14</sup>

These tendencies manifest themselves at the individual and collective level, and their effects are observed both in the public space and in private life.<sup>15</sup> Circumstances that make people particularly vulnerable are difficult experiences and memories, as well as crises and traumatic situations, e.g. a growing risk of losing their current identity, belonging and group cohesion.<sup>16</sup>

12 See G. Żuk, *Edukacja aksjologiczna. Zarys problematyki*, Lublin 2016, pp. 131–137, 185–207.

13 Eugen Bleuler is considered to be the author of the term ambivalence which defines the simultaneous occurrence of contradictory tendencies, attitudes or feelings towards a given object. He distinguished three types of ambivalence: volitional, intellectual and emotional. In this case, its manifestation may be, for example, the difficulty in recognising that someone was brave and courageous and at the same time indulged in addictions and tended to violence, or the need to commemorate certain events from the past with the accompanying desire to forget and “erase” others. See E. Bleuler, *Dementia praecox: the group of schizophrenias*, New York 1911/1950. Cf. S. Fhanér, *Słownik psychoanalizy*, Gdańsk 1996, pp. 13–14.

14 Cf. M. Kaliszewska, *Paradygmat dwoistości jako perspektywa widzenia świata i człowieka*, “Nauki o Wychowaniu. Studia Interdyscyplinarne”, vol. 1 (2015), no. 1, pp. 132–154; E. Bielska, *Ambivalencja ulokowania bezpieczeństwa i zagrożenia w dyskursie nauk społecznych. Wybrane perspektywy*, “Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska Lublin – Polonia”, vol. 32 (3), pp. 40–42.

15 For more on the topic, see: F. van Harreveld, J. van der Pligt, Y.N. de Liver, *The Agony of Ambivalence and Ways to Resolve It: Introducing the MAID Model*, “Personality and Social Psychological Review”, vol. 13 (45), 2009, pp. 45–46.

16 See P.A. Levine, *Trauma i pamięć. Mózg i ciało w poszukiwaniu autentycznej przeszłości*, Warszawa 2017, pp. 32–37. Cf. P. Sztompka, *The Ambivalence of Social Change in Post-Communist Societies*, “Kultura i Polityka. Zeszyty naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Europejskiej im. ks. Józefa Tischnera w Krakowie”, no. 2/3, (2008), pp. 131–133; *idem*, *The ambivalence of social change: Triumph or trauma?*, “Polish Sociological Review”, no. 131 (2000), p. 276.

An example illustrating the described phenomenon in the context of these considerations may be the disclosure years later of some facts from the past that radically change existing beliefs on a given topic, e.g. the assessment of the occupation activities of one of the heroes or the established memory of this person. A stimulus understood in this way causing cognitive shock, consternation, resistance, and internal conflict includes various situations, for example, new historical and archaeological discoveries, finding unknown documentation or witnesses, as well as the appearance of a publication that demystifies existing beliefs. Sometimes, even an insinuating entry in mass or social media or a quasi-scientific study referring critically, undermining credibility, to the events that constitute the basis of collective myths and imaginations is sufficient. A clear impulse is negative media discourses about the past, which can lead to a loss of identification with a given environment, opinion-forming group, or region, and even to a crisis of identity.<sup>17</sup>

The methods of dealing with discomfort and uncertainty caused by cognitive dissonance<sup>18</sup> and emotional ambivalence described in the literature include intellectual rigidity, denial, low tolerance of different attitudes, selective selection of incoming information, and grounding in one's own beliefs.<sup>19</sup> It is not without reason that the effort and difficulties caused by this state are sometimes called torment.<sup>20</sup> This is mainly because it forces one to consolidate and synthesise contradictory content, making it impossible to make an unambiguous moral assessment and take an important decision. This process involves not only considerable intellectual and mental effort but also considerable risk and responsibility (for the possible consequences of a mistake). In this situation, regaining cognitive balance and stabilizing the disturbed mood is not easy, and the accompanying tension requires reduction and release. This can be obtained in various ways, not always available, because it usually requires some insight and

17 An example may be community reaction to revelations about the crimes in Jedwabne; see A. Sułek, *Pamięć Polaków o zbrodni w Jedwabnem*, "Nauka", no. 3 (2011), pp. 39-49; as well as the general specificity of the relationship between memory and social attitudes; cf. S. Chwin, *Polska pamięć - dzisiaj. Co pozostaje? Trwały ślad i mechanizmy niepamiętania*, "Teksty drugie", no. 6 (2016), pp. 15-29.

18 We define this expression as a state of mental discomfort caused by the simultaneous occurrence of two contradictory visions of the past. This leads to cognitive disorientation, emotional tension and internal conflict. It may be caused by information that interferes with events or the behavior of specific people recorded in a person's memory or historical records, or by (re)interpretation of the attitudes and motivations of significant people that are inconsistent with existing knowledge on the subject and/or social ideas.

19 For more on this topic, see: L. Festinger, *A theory of cognitive dissonance*, Illinois 1957; cf. L. Festinger, *Conflict, decision, and dissonance*, California 1964, pp. 45-47.

20 Cf. F. van Harreveld [et al.], *op. cit.*, p. 55.

so-called overwork.<sup>21</sup> This is engaging and time-consuming.<sup>22</sup> It is, therefore, not surprising that shortcuts are often chosen. One of the most popular is “defense by attack” and the denial of unacceptable facts or information.

Forgetting is also used for this purpose, although not always consciously. As surprising as it may sound, *ars oblivionis*<sup>23</sup> is also one of the methods of remembering and creating (creative processing) memory resources. Generally, “forgetting” is assumed to be the result of natural processes of the blurring of memory traces over time and the abandonment of the practice of reminiscing, but it may also be the result of intentional actions (e.g. the authorities) selecting content worth preserving for future generations at the expense of displacing others. The processes of social forgetting are usually institutionalized through the mediation of institutions belonging to the state authorities and responsible for the mass media and school education.<sup>24</sup> According to Paul Connerton, the author of the concept of seven types of forgetting and its causes, in the collective dimension it is the result of the process of the creation by a given group of a unified version of “knowledge” about the past, which is particularly important when it concerns aspects of identity key for its persistence.

Strategies used to strengthen a specific narrative message, especially when it is not possible to obtain new evidence confirming the validity of the presented theses, also include deprecating the opponent, pointing out logical errors, belittling their morals or intellect, gaining allies and supporting the authority of well-known and influential people.<sup>25</sup> Although it may seem that this is a repertoire of measures used in the political and business arena rather than in environments where knowledge and professionalism are important, the analysis of discourses on the issues in question leads us to the opinion that there are also examples of aggressive persuasion here, to which we will return later in this text.

21 The term overwork has recently become popular in everyday speech, but here it is used in the classic psychoanalytic sense. It defines the complicated mental work accompanying the process of gradual familiarisation and acceptance of repressed content (e.g. traumatic experiences). See J. Briere, C.N. Scott, *Podstawy terapii traumy. Diagnoza i metody terapeutyczne*, Kraków 2020, pp. 15–20.

22 The process of overworking is intellectual and emotional, and its goal is to accept, reconcile and integrate that part of history (your own, family, community, nation) that has been rejected or unconscious. The key element of overworking and healing “one’s own relationship with the world” is overcoming the resistance caused by repressed (unaccepted) content. Examples of the described process at work: M. Klein, *Narrative of a child analysis*, London 1962. Cf. S. Phanér, *op. cit.*, pp. 196–197; P.A. Levine, *op. cit.*, pp. 26–30.

23 Cf. R. Traba, *Konieczność zapomnienia, czyli jak sobie radzić z “ars oblivionis”*, “Herito”, vol. 13 (4), 2013, p. 23.

24 See P. Connerton, *Jak społeczeństwa pamiętają*, Warszawa 2012, pp. 27–28.

25 Cf. T. Dewan, M. Humphreys, D. Rubenson, *The elements of political persuasion: content, charisma and cue*, “The Economic Journal”, no. 124/574 (2014), pp. 257–258.

### Circumstances surrounding the establishment and activities of row “Gryf Pomorski”

During the Second World War, several underground organizations operated in Pomerania, whose goal was to fight the enemy; the main ones were Grunwald, Strażnica (English: watchtower), Wojskowa Organizacja Ziem Zachodnich (Military Organization for the Western Territories), Związek Młodzieży Wiejskiej “Wici” (Union of Rural Youth “Wici”), Związek Jaszczurczy (Military Organization Lizard Union), Komitet Obrońców Polski (Committee of Defenders of Poland).<sup>26</sup> However, the strongest regional formation was “Gryf Pomorski”, founded on 7 July 1941 in Czarna Dąbrowa. The organization was created from the merger of three others: the “Gryf Kaszubski” secret military organization (row GK)<sup>27</sup> commanded by Józef Dambek, alias “Adam”, “Kil” or “Lech”; the military independence organization codenamed “Koral” commanded by Lt. Col. Rev. Józef Wrycza alias “Rawycz” and the group of Józef and Leon Kulas.<sup>28</sup> At the beginning of 1942, the organizational alliance was joined by the “Wolność” (English: freedom)<sup>29</sup> partisan group commanded by a veteran of the Polish-Bolshevik war, Lieutenant Józef Gierszewski alias “Ryś”,<sup>30</sup> who had been awarded the Silver Cross

26 For more on this topic, see: B. Chrzanowski, A. Gąsiorowski, K. Steyer, *Polska Podziemna na Pomorzu w latach 1939–1945*, Gdańsk-Kwidzyń 2005.

27 The date of establishment of row “Gryf Kaszubski” is assumed to be the spring of 1940, when its organizational framework was created, and its statute was adopted. The founders of “Gryf Kaszubski” were Józef Dambek (a teacher from Czarlin), Klemens Bronk from Czarlin, Bronisław Brunka from Stężycka Huta, Józef and Jan Gierszewscy (father and son) farmers from Czarlin (not to be confused with Major Józef Gierszewski, commander of row “Gryf Pomorski” who was in conflict with Józef Dambek). See A. Gąsiorowski, *Początki konspiracji – jak powstawało Polskie Państwo Podziemne na Pomorzu*, in G. Górski (ed.), *Polskie Państwo Podziemne na Pomorzu 1939–1945*, Toruń 1999, p. 52.

28 Cf. A. Gąsiorowski, K. Steyer, *op. cit.*

29 According to Gąsiorowski, this group was created by Gierszewski only after a split in the organization in 1943, as a result of which some members of “Gryf Pomorski” abandoned their commandant. See A. Gąsiorowski, *Tajny i skuteczny „Gryf Pomorski”*, „Historia. Polska zbrojna”, no. 1 (2020), p. 93; cf. A. Gąsiorowski, K. Steyer, *Tajna organizacja wojskowa Gryf Pomorski*, Gdańsk-Kwidzyń 2010, pp. 21–22.

30 Józef Gierszewski (son of a farmer Leon Gierszewski and Ewa née Pruska, born in Prądzona) was a reserve officer in the Polish Army, a distinguished teacher and social activist in Kashubia. He had considerable combat experience gained during the First World War, the Polish-Bolshevik War and the defensive war in 1939. In September 1939, he was captured by the Germans near Rawa Ruska, but soon managed to escape from the POW transport and return to Pomerania. The prospect of long-term occupation prompted him to organize an underground group in Bory Tucholaskie called *Wolność* (English: freedom), which was eventually incorporated into row “Gryf Pomorski”. See K. Komorowski, *Pomorian Conspiracy 1939–1947: leksykon*, Gdańsk 1993.

of Merit by Prime Minister Sławoj Składkowski.<sup>31</sup> The manpower and structural base of the newly established organization was the first to be mentioned (ТОВ ГР).<sup>32</sup>

The aim of this consolidation was to prepare, in cooperation with the Western Allies, an uprising in Kashubia and ongoing armed resistance against the occupier and defense of the Polish population against mass extermination. This organization achieved its greatest impact in the poviats of central and northern Pomerania. According to the ideological declaration, it was Catholic, non-party and military in nature. It was agreed that the signal for a joint military operation would be an appeal made by Lt. Col. Józef Wrycza, who enjoyed the greatest authority among the Polish underground activists in this region. It was at his request, as the first president of the Supreme Council, that the position of commander-in-chief of the organization was assumed by Lieutenant Józef Gierszewski from July 1942. The advantages of this appointment included, among others, his organizational skills, military and sabotage training.<sup>33</sup>

The scope of operations of "Gryf Pomorski" primarily included self-defense, material assistance to injured families and prisoners, social assistance, the fight to preserve religious life and the native language, assistance in legalization, including obtaining false documents, issuing and carrying out sentences on criminals and informers, intelligence and counterintelligence, providing information about enemy activities to warn the civilian population, e.g. against deportations and recruitment campaigns, collecting information about German crimes, carrying out sabotage and sabotage actions, information and propaganda work in the spirit of patriotism and independence.<sup>34</sup>

The organizational development of "Gryf Pomorski" lasted until 1943, and by that time several smaller local groups had been subordinated to it.<sup>35</sup> After this period, problems began, giving rise to contemporary disputes about the memory of "Gryf

31 See P. Skurzyński, *Pomorze*, Warszawa 2007, p. 186.

32 Its origins date back to the resistance movement initiated by officers of the secret military organization in the Free City of Gdańsk in December 1939. It was officially established during the inaugural meeting organized in early 1940 in Czarlin. Józef Dambek and several local farmers participated in it: Jan Gierszewski (died of typhus in 1944 in the Stutthof camp), Józef Gierszewski, Klemens Bronk, Bronisław Brunk from Stężycka Huta (pre-war mayor of the Stężyca commune, shot as a hostage in May 1944 in Szymbark) and probably Brunon Mionskowski. The main goal of the organization was sabotage. See K. Komorowski, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

33 P. Skurzyński, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

34 They also published their own underground press, including the following titles: "Gryf Pomorski," "Świt," "Głos Serca Polskiego" and "Biuletyn Radiowy." See G. Górski, *Polskie Państwo Podziemne na Pomorzu na tle ogólnopolskim*, in J. Borzyszkowski (ed.), *Losy Tajnej Organizacji Wojskowej „Gryf Pomorski”*. *Materiały z konferencji w Gdańsku z dnia 12 maja 2000 roku*, Gdańsk 2000, pp. 15–16. The circumstance and conditions of publication of "Głos Serca Polskiego" are described in: J. Weltrowski, *Drukarnia w Borach Tucholskich z lat 1941–1943*, Tczew 1995.

35 K. Komorowski, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

Pomorski”, and leading to events that are still controversial and cause problems with the heritage of the “Pomeranian Forest people”.

An important topic of the ongoing discussions is, among others, the issue of registering members of “Gryf Pomorski”. Theoretically, it was encrypted and stored in three different places, hidden outside built-up areas, but despite this, members of the underground were exposed several times and captured by the Gestapo. This was caused by the multiple copies of the list of members, a situation which should not have happened. As a result, many people working in the underground lost their lives. This case is still fresh in the memory of the region’s inhabitants and, despite the passage of time, continues to lead to endless debates that antagonize both the local community and researchers of the topic.<sup>36</sup> The number of unknowns regarding the events of that time have allowed for speculation to mushroom, along with the search for guilty perpetrators and the growth of conspiracy theories with betrayal and human weakness in the background.<sup>37</sup>

Initially, as already mentioned, the General Council of the organization was headed by the president, Lt. Col. Rev. Józef Wrycza (until he withdrew from active service in 1943), then Józef Dambek<sup>38</sup> (until his death on 4 March 1944) and Augustyn

36 B. Chrzanowski [et al.], *op. cit.*; K. Ciechanowski, *Ruch oporu na Pomorzu Gdańskim 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1972; *Losy Tajnej Organizacji Wojskowej „Gryf Pomorski” ...*; A. Gąsiorowski, K. Steyer, *Tajna organizacja wojskowa Gryf Pomorski*, Gdańsk–Kwidzyń 2010. Cf. R. Leszkowski, *Egzekucja w partyzanckim bunkrze*, “Magazyn Kaszuby”, 22.04.2016.

37 Most often, they were described as a conflict of ambition between the military commander-in-chief “Ryś” and the leader of the organization “Jur.” Dambek allegedly envied Gierszewski’s charisma, service in the army and military rank, as well as respect among soldiers and contacts with other organizations and their leaders. Less directly, men’s envy for the erudition, refinement and success among the women has also been mentioned. W. Jastrzębski, *Jan Kazimierz Szalewski (1914–1988) – partyzant z Borów Tucholskich z czasów okupacji niemieckiej*, ps. *Soból, Szpak, Szpakowski*, “Zeszyty Chojnickie”, no. 33 (2017), pp. 203–216; R. Leszkowski, *op. cit.*

38 Before becoming the leader of the “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organization, Józef Dambek had been active as a social activist and educator. He was born in Zdroje and was the son of Józef Dambek, the owner of a colonial store, and Matylda, née Szczęsna. He taught, among others, at a school in Kobyl and strongly sympathised with the National Party. In the years 1930–1935, when intelligence activities by the Germans in Pomerania intensified, Dambek underwent partisan and sabotage training in Warsaw and became a liaison officer with the Warsaw headquarters. From the first days after the outbreak of the war, he hid and created a network of partisans near the front. At the turn of 1939–1940, as already mentioned, he created a secret organization, “Gryf Kaszubski”, and attracted the legendary Pomeranian independence activist and priest Lt. Col. Józef Wrycza, thanks to which his influence soon spread over a large part of Gdańsk Pomerania. As the initiator of joining the Sword and Plough Movement, Józef Dambek significantly contributed to the split in row “Gryf Pomorski” in the summer of 1943, which will be discussed in more detail later in the text. He died tragically, shot in an ambush organised by the Gestapo (4 March 1944), probably as a result of provocation after the breaking of the arrested liaison officer during the investigation. It is not known where he was buried, and there are still disputes about this. A cross commemorating Józef Dambek is currently located in a symbolic place of commemoration in Gołubie on Lake Dąbrowskie, which is one of the sources of the modern conflict, more about which later in the article.

Westphal. The organizational crisis that had been growing for some time in the structures of “Gryf Pomorski” and the conflict between the main commanders, i.e. the formal leader Dambek and the commander-in-chief Gierszewski, ignited their different opinions on the merger of the organization with the Home Army. Dambek, a supporter of maintaining independence and local action in the Kashubian region, was against this.<sup>39</sup> Ultimately, a decision was made not to surrender to the Polish Home Army (Polish: Armia Krajowa, AK), although a joint armed response was agreed in the event of “W”.<sup>40</sup> However, the result was a deepening internal split and gradual disintegration in the organization. As a consequence, many significant mistakes were made, leading to the arrests of members of the organization and mutual recriminations. Józef Dambek was accused of an improper command system and failure to respect the rules of the underground, and thus of exposing members of the underground to danger. In return, he accused his adversary, Lieutenant Gierszewski, of an immoral lifestyle, embezzlement of 3,000 marks and alleged betrayal to the Germans (collaboration with the Gestapo).<sup>41</sup>

The growing tension between the organization’s commanders gradually paralysed the main goal of its activities and deepened mutual distrust and heightened

39 Melchior Wańkowicz also addressed this issue in his book *Walczący Gryf* (Fighting Griffin), in which he tried to present the history of the Gdańsk region over a thousand years. He also became interested in the history of the Pomeranian resistance movement and described its leaders in his characteristic fictional style: “[...] it seems that this bright, energetic man, a teacher in Kashubia, a regionalist in his flesh and blood, pulsates with concern for the post-war system of relations. Dambek dreams that the war will end with the strengthening of this region, so that the military deeds of this land will not be credited to the general account of some Home Army. So that Pomeranians are not pushed around again by newcomers from the Centre. The Home Army is organised by Sanation officers, and the Sanation was hated in these lands. Dambek considered himself more far-sighted than Ryś. He suffered from the fact that due to his lack of military training he could not combine political and military powers. It would seem that partisan command does not require great military studies, that Dambek’s scruples were misplaced, but in this environment humiliated by the Germans, eager to confirm the very values of Polish achievements, there is a cult of hierarchy, a cult of rank carried to the point that the statutes of “Gryf Pomorski” provide for the automatic resignation of each commander-in-chief if officers of higher ranks join the organization. In these conditions, “Ryś” Gierszewski is irreplaceable.” See M. Wańkowicz, *Walczący Gryf*, Warszawa 1963.

40 In April 1943, the “Gryf Pomorski” formation was merged with the united organizations of the “Sword and Plough” movement, which weakened the formation, more about which later in the text. Cf. K. Komorowski, *op. cit.*, p. 168.

41 After the war, Gierszewski was cleared of the charges and posthumously rehabilitated. The ceremonial act of unveiling a commemorative plaque on his grave in Borzyszkowy took place in 1984 (you can hear more about it in the radio reports of Polish Radio Koszalin: produced by Bogumił Matuszkiewicz entitled: *Wyrok na „Rysia”* [Sentencing of “Ryś”] and the article by Piotr Głowacki entitled *123 lata temu urodził się Józef Gierszewski „Ryś”, komendant Tajnej Organizacji Wojskowej Gryf Pomorski* [The leader of row “Gryf Pomorski”, Józef Gierszewski, “Ryś”, was born 123 years ago]).

a psychosis of suspicion.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, this resulted in Józef Dambek and his supporters depriving Lieutenant Józef Gierszewski of his position as commander-in-chief (17 February 1943).<sup>43</sup> Unable to come to terms with this, he still tried to lead the “Gryf” group and continued integration talks with representatives of the Home Army. As a result of his alleged insubordination and a combination of previously unexplained circumstances, he was assassinated<sup>44</sup> in a shelter near a forester’s lodge in the town of Dywan, Dziemiany powiat (probably 8 July 1943).<sup>45</sup> As Gąsiorowski writes, when “[...] information about his death reached the members of “Gryf’s” leadership structures, some of them decided to break with “Gryf Pomorski” and, despite threats from Dambek, subordinate themselves to the Home Army and their subordinates.”<sup>46</sup>

The provocative action of the Gdańsk Gestapo contributed to the final fiasco of the organization. Its executor was agent Jan Kaszubowski aka Hans Kassner, posing as the deputy district commander from Tczew (it turned out over time that he was a double agent).<sup>47</sup> He murdered Józef Dambek by shooting him on 4 March

42 This thread was also presented and discussed in a radio report from 1984 by Bogumił Matuszkiewicz, entitled *Reportaż o majorze Józefie Gierszewskim, ps. „Rys”* (Report about Major Józef Gierszewski, alias “Rys”) (Polskie Radio Kalisz, 29.11.1984).

43 It was possible to establish that the accusations that led to the tragedy (attributing betrayal from the Gostomek area to Gierszewski), spread by one of the organization’s members (Kiedrowicz), were unconfirmed. Later research has shown that the denunciator was Gruchała from Sierakowice. See A. Gierszewska, *Tajemnica śmierci “Majora Rysia”* (Secret of the death of “Major Rys”), *“Naji Gochë”*, no. 2–4 (43–45) (2010), p. 20; cf. B. Matuszkiewicz, *ibidem*.

44 According to available sources, and thanks to the efforts of his family, his remains were exhumed on 19 March 1960 and solemnly buried in the church cemetery in Borzyszkowe (photos from this ceremony are available in private archival collections). Plaques dedicated to the memory of Lieutenant Józef Gierszewski are located in schools in Borzyszkowe and Chełmża. See P. Skurzyński, *op. cit.*, p. 187.

45 Information on this subject by Dr hab. Andrzej Gąsiorowski (research employee of the Stuthof State Museum, Sopot branch), located on the website coordinated by Roman Dambek (president of the Kashubian–Kociewskie Association named after row “Gryf Pomorski”) and Dr Stanisław Uciński states that: “In the area of the forester’s lodge, there was a “Gryf” bunker – the place of death of reserve lieutenant of the Polish Army Józef Gierszewski codename “Rys”, “Szulz”, removed from the position of commander-in-chief of “Gryf”, shot by members of “Gryf Pomorski”, probably by virtue of the judgment of the “Gryf” organizational court” (see row “Gryf Pomorski” Kashubian–Kociewskie Association).

46 Source research confirmed that Józef Dambek issued several death sentences in retaliation against former row GP members, forcing the headquarters of the North-West Sub-District of the AK to intervene in the case. See A. Gąsiorowski, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

47 The exceptionally complex and wicked character of Kaszubowski, whose role in the surveillance of the Pomeranian underground was significant, is an example of a biography suitable for a film script. He was not only a collaborator and Gestapo agent, but after the end of the Second World War he also cooperated with the НКВД and the Ministry of Public Security of the Polish People’s Republic. He spent the last years of his life in the GDR. He probably died in 1970. See W. Bułhak, P. Pleskot, *Szpiedzy PRL-u*, Kraków 2014, p. 53. His fate became the subject of a monograph by Andrzej Gąsiorowski, based on previously unpublished source materials. See A. Gąsiorowski, *Jan Kaszubowski i służby specjalne. Gestapo – Smiersz – UB*, Gdańsk 2008.

1944 in Sikorzyn<sup>48</sup> under unexplained circumstances.<sup>49</sup> Shortly after Józef Dambek's death, the archive of "Gryf Pomorski" fell into the hands of the Gestapo. The archive contained a list of organization members encoded with a simple cipher. As a result, the Germans obtained the personal details of approximately 1,300 people. Furthermore, an additional 2,000 people were identified through the exposure of district headquarters in Chojnice, Kartuzy, and Starogard. As you can imagine, this was a great tragedy for the entire movement and its activists, and many of them paid for it with their lives, imprisonment in camps, torture in prison or deportation to forced labor.<sup>50</sup> The repression also affected the families of the partisans.<sup>51</sup>

The numerical strength of tow "Gryf Pomorski" is still difficult to clearly determine. Available sources allow us to estimate the number of associated members at five to eight thousand. at the peak of its development, although there is no lack of data mentioning approx. 20 thousand sworn in. However, it is assumed that these figures are overstated.<sup>52</sup> Krzysztof Komorowski also refers to this issue and notes:

48 According to other information, Dambek was shot at Lake Dąbrowskie near Gołubie. See A. Gąsiorowski, *Tajny i skuteczny...*, p. 94. Cf. K. Komorowski, *op. cit.*, p. 169.

49 Every year, patriotic celebrations take place at the place of his alleged death, often with the participation of high-ranking officials and representatives of the state, which we will return to later in this work. On 5 March 2017, in Gołub, during a ceremony commemorating the 73rd anniversary of the death of the commander of "Gryf", Józef Dambek was posthumously promoted to the rank of captain of the Polish Army by the then Minister of National Defence Antoni Macierewicz. Thus, through this symbolic gesture, his great dream came true during his life, which was also the cause of discord and loose morale in the organization. Other forms of commemorating the leader of "Gryf Pomorski" include the unveiling of a commemorative plaque at the primary school in Kobyl in 1970, opening a memorial room dedicated to him and naming the primary school in Leśniewo on 10 October 1992 after Lieutenant Józef Dambek.

50 When the Soviets occupied Pomerania in 1945, many members of the GP partisan units were detained and deported to Russia. Among them was the former commander-in-chief of "Gryf", 2nd Lt. res. Grzegorz Wojewski (died in the NKVD stage camp in Grudziądz) and Jan Gończ, who was the chronicler of "Gryf", who died in Siberia. After the end of hostilities, security officers began investigating the environment of former members of "Gryf Pomorski". See A. Gąsiorowski, *Tajny i skuteczny...*, p. 94; cf. M. Golon, *Tajna Organizacja Wojskowa Gryf Pomorski wobec Armii Czerwonej a powojenne losy gryfowców*, in J. Borzyszkowski (ed.), *Losy Tajnej Organizacji Wojskowej "Gryf Pomorski"*, Gdańsk 2000, pp. 127-149.

51 It is officially reported that by the end of September 1944, approximately 1,105 members of tow "Gryf Pomorski" had been captured, many of whom did not survive. 100-200 partisans died in direct fighting, and this number does not take into account the post-war crimes committed against members of the resistance movement by the NKVD and UB. Cf. D. Steyer, *Eksterminacja ludności polskiej na Pomorzu Gdańskim w latach 1939-1945*, Gdynia 1967, pp. 339-340.

52 Andrzej Gąsiorowski's research shows that the difference in estimates is justified by the available sources. Some are based on Home Army documents and data from the German security police (lower numerical data), and the others on: "a copy of the organizational document of "Gryf" from 31 December 1943, the original of which has not survived." See A. Gąsiorowski, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

“While row GP numbered 6–8 thousand members in the spring of 1943 (according to some accounts 12–18 thousand), at the end of 1944 there were half of that number, with weaker morale, as a result of the spreading psychosis of betrayal and rumours about the agentic nature of “Miecz i Pług” (English: sword and plough).”<sup>53</sup>

The latter information was confirmed and significantly influenced the overall image of row “Gryf Pomorski;” this also contributed to post-war disputes and controversies surrounding the “revitalised memory”<sup>54</sup> of the formation. When no agreement was reached on merging with the Home Army, talks began on uniting forces with representatives of the united organizations of the “Miecz i Pług” movement (Zjednoczone Organizacje Ruchu “Miecz i Pług”, ZORMiP). As a result, in April 1943, an agreement was signed which guaranteed row “Gryf Pomorski” organizational autonomy after the merger with ZORMiP. This had significant consequences because the leadership of “Miecz i Pług” cooperated with the German security police, and this was also known at the Home Army Headquarters. As you can easily guess, this damaged the already weakened trust in row “Gryf Pomorski.”<sup>55</sup>

Despite the turbulent and dramatic fate of the organization, the activities of “Gryf Pomorski” continued until the end of the war. In the final stage, when it was already in liquidation, it was commanded by its last leader, Augustyn Westphal. From January to March 1945, he coordinated the disarmament of German soldiers and was responsible for sabotage activities behind enemy lines. However, fearing repression from the communist authorities, the command of the Pomeranian underground organization decided to lay down their weapons, reveal themselves and join the Polish Army or the militia. Despite this, harassment and repression from the NKVD and Polish Office of Public Security (Polish: Urząd Bezpieczeństwa Publicznego, UBP) were not avoided.<sup>56</sup>

The last stage of the official history of row “Gryf Pomorski” passes with the end of the Second World War, and the political change that took place after it. The new authorities of socialist Poland treated members of the underground ruthlessly; this was also felt by the “Gryfians” and was summed up synthetically by Krzysztof Komorowski:

Despite the protest of 117 Griffin members on 10 August 1947 to the Ministry of Justice, the General Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Poland, and the Main Board of the Association

53 *Ibidem*, p. 169.

54 Ewelina Jurasz writes about the role of animators in the revitalisation of cultural and social memory in an article entitled *Rewitalizacja pamięci*, “Res Publica Nowa”, 2014, <https://publica.pl/teksty/rewitalizacja-pamieci-47335.html> [accessed: 13.01.2023].

55 See B. Chrzanowski, *Miecz i Pług*, Toruń 1997; R. Sierchuła, *Śmierć jest zapłatą za zdradę. Historia organizacji „Miecz i Pług”*, “Nowe Państwo”, no. 9 (55) 2010, pp. 2–7.

56 K. Komorowski, *op. cit.*, p. 170.

of Participants in the Armed Struggle for Freedom and Independence, supported by 110 testimonies of injured Kashubians, justice and compensation for post-war wrongs and crimes was not obtained. TOW GP members were harassed until 1956, often deprived of their jobs and veterans' rights.<sup>57</sup>

About the events outlined above, the comment made by Andrzej Gąsiorowski seems to be accurate when he states that "there are secrets associated with the "Gryf Pomorski" organization."<sup>58</sup> Indeed. Although it is difficult to say to what extent this opinion was supported by collective memory and to what extent it was the fashion for fictionalizing history and making it more attractive with legends, gossip, and scandals like tabloids, there are many indications that this aura is not the best for the transmission of reliable knowledge and its reproduction among the younger generation.

### **Memory and commemoration of the Pomeranian resistance movement**

The presented circumstances of the establishment and activities of TOW "Gryf Pomorski" do not definitively end its history. It can even be said that the death of the movement's leaders, Józef Gierszewski and Józef Dambek, and the end of the Second World War begin its next stage. Sometimes, this is as dramatic as the original one. The memory of partisans and members of the underground organization is still alive in Pomerania, especially around the places where they came from or operated, and traces of it remain to this day. This is also accompanied by a number of commemorative practices undertaken over the years to protect the tangible and intangible heritage related to "Gryf Pomorski." The material remains of the secret military organization include numerous dugouts in the surrounding forests (commonly called bunkers or shelters), fortifications, graves, military items found by seekers of Second World War artifacts, and items collected in local memorial rooms (everyday equipment, clothing, photographs, weapons). However, there are particularly numerous symbolic signs of memory of the "Gryfans," such as monuments, cemeteries, forest graves, obelisks, boulders and information boards. They

57 *Ibidem.*

58 Among them, the researcher mentions, among others, rumours about contacts between "Gryf Pomorski" and the Polish authorities in London (for years questioned by members of the Home Army, who saw it as an attempt to increase the importance of TOW GP, and finally confirmed in the course of post-war research); denied information about General Władysław Sikorski granting the rank of general to Fr Józef Wrycza (before the war, chaplain of the Polish Army with the rank of lieutenant colonel). He was awarded the rank of general of the Polish Army brigade posthumously by the decision of the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, of 10 September 2019. See. A. Gąsiorowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 94–95.

are also accompanied by memories and accounts preserved to this day,<sup>59</sup> as well as various stories, oral histories and collective imaginations. Intermediaries in the process of commemoration and the transmission of knowledge and memory include, among others, modern reenactment groups, patron schools, scout troops, associations and cultural institutions.<sup>60</sup>

Controversies related to the heritage of row “Gryf Pomorski” have been ongoing since the war and post-war years and continue to this day.<sup>61</sup> They concern various aspects that can be presented in two main dimensions: private (conflict between the families of heroes and GP commanders),<sup>62</sup> public (disputes between multiple institutions and associations over the memory legacy of partisans and activists of “Gryf Pomorski;”<sup>63</sup> polemics from experts on the role and the importance of the organization; arguments in the local media about the moral assessment of GP’s activities and other imponderables, including disputes on internet forums and social media; conflicts regarding the methods and forms of commemorating row GP between various entities; mutual accusations of appropriating memory and places

59 Part of the project was also an archival query devoted to the activities of row “Gryf Pomorski”, which covered the following facilities: Archive of New Records in Warsaw, Central Military Archive in Warsaw-Rembertów, State Archives in Poznań, Gdańsk and Lublin, Archive of the National Commission of NSZZ “Solidarność” in Gdańsk, Museum Archive Stutthof (materials about the “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organization), collections of the General Elżbieta Zawacka Foundation, the Pomeranian Archives and Museum of the Home Army and the Military Service of Polish Women in Toruń (part of this collection has been digitised and is available on the website of the Kujawsko-Pomorska Digital Library).

60 During ethnographic research, we identified several institutions whose names refer to “Gryf Pomorski” partisans (7 schools, 3 associations, 4 scout troops), although we are aware that there may be many more.

61 There were many more dramatic events in the history of row “Gryf Pomorski” than those previously mentioned. One of the most famous and explored threads (reconstructions, films, radio broadcasts, press articles and guide narratives) is that related to the Green Palace “bunker”, its defence and the circumstances of the denunciation of partisans. See tags: Battle of Męcikał 21–22/03/1944; forest bunker “GREEN PALACE”; Męcikał, Brusy commune. There are also films available on the Internet, e.g. made in the series: *Farwë Kaszëb*: episode 30.05.2021, <https://gdansk.tvp.pl/54085472/odc-30052021> [accessed: 22.02.2022] and *Zielony Pałac*, 2014, TVK Brusy, production of the film Ewa “Lala” Nowicka, Piotr “Pasal” Pastalniec, production manager: Anna Włodarczyk-Białogórska, <https://brusyenter.pl/brusy-i-okolice/zdrowie-palac> [accessed: 29.09.2021].

62 A detailed description of one of the media and local dimensions of the above-mentioned conflict is described in an article by Mateusz Jasik with a significant title: *Duże emocje, poważne zarzuty. Kulisy konfliktu o upamiętnianie Tajnej Organizacji Wojskowej “Gryf Pomorski”* (Great emotions, serious accusations. Behind the scenes of the conflict over the commemoration of the “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organization). The author discusses, among others, arguments and strategies used by one side of the conflict against the other, richly illustrating their arguments with quotes from sources. See M. Jasik, *Duże emocje, poważne zarzuty. Kulisy konfliktu o upamiętnianie Tajnej Organizacji Wojskowej “Gryf Pomorski”*, “Biuletyn”, vol. 34 (2022), no. 72, pp. 47–70.

63 *Ibidem*.

related to GP's activities).<sup>64</sup> The above-mentioned manifestations of antagonisms allow us to distinguish several dominant levels on which the lack of consensus in connection with the topic under discussion is revealed. Primarily, they concern the content of the narrative about past events, the method of conducting the "historical debate," methods of argumentation, entities involved in the dispute (witnesses of events, family members of partisans, researchers, representatives of local and national authorities, public media), instrumentalization of social memory (in the name of private, group and political interests), appropriation of places of memory (abuse of the authorities for this purpose), politicization of historical discourses.

From among the sample "consequences of the controversy" surrounding the memory of the "Gryf Pomorski" secret military organization, we have selected for discussion and analysis those that are represented in public discourses, conversations we have had, and memorial practices we have observed. The latter includes activities undertaken with the intention of consolidating and intergenerationally transmitting knowledge and ideas about facts in relation to the past of specific people, events and surrounding circumstances. Their implementation involves both representatives of the local community (e.g. veterans, school and pedagogical circles, officials, cultural animators and "ordinary" citizens), but also, to a greater or lesser extent, the highest organs of state power. The scope of "memorative practices" understood in this way includes various forms and methods of activity aimed at building a memory community. These include the creation of "places of memory" (monuments, cemeteries, museums and memorial rooms), as well as ritualised ceremonies (secular and sacred), such as anniversary celebrations, intentional masses, school academies, cultural and performative activities (exhibitions, competitions, stage performances, historical reconstructions, artistic realizations and others).

The phenomenon of "memory dissonance" mentioned in the title, in this case caused by the competing narratives and ways of commemorating the heritage of the "Gryf Pomorski" secret military organization, interests us here in the context of its manifestations in the public space and its consequences for the local community.

### **Competing narrative *topoi* about the "Gryf Pomorski" partisans**

The main motifs of oral history around which the ideas and stories about the "Gryf Pomorski" partisans are built and which have been identified based on the analysis of the collected materials, are heroic Kashubians opposing the Germans and defending their land; local people fighting against the Nazis; Poles fighting for

64 A large reservoir of literature on this topic are Internet resources and discussion forums, where publications are also available. Cf. S. Uciński (ed.), *Żołnierze wyklęci Tajnej Organizacji Wojskowej „Gryf Pomorski” ujawniają kolejne zbrodnie polskojęzycznej grupy Gestapo przemianowanej po 1945 r. na UB w okresie okupacji niemieckiej i sowieckiej w Polsce*, Gdańsk-Gdynia 2014.

the freedom and independence of their country; local people who had the courage to oppose German terror and stand up for themselves and their loved ones; leaders who are at odds with each other out of ambition and striving to seize power, contributing through their behaviour to a split in the organization and fratricidal fights; “bunkerers”<sup>65</sup> escaping from recruitment into the German army; people involved in various pro-Polish or anti-German activities (which, according to the interlocutors, are not always the same), but also common criminals seeking shelter from punishment at the hands of the occupier; local rebels and ordinary “adventurers” responsible for the death of many innocent people who died at the hands of the Germans for allegedly helping the partisans.

The above-mentioned narrative motifs characterize and describe the protagonists of the story discussed here in different ways. The multitude of perspectives from which the same events, widely known in the region, are perceived, illustrate well the lack of consensus and confusion among local people. It also reflects the wide interpretive spectrum of the recipients of heterogeneous messages about those aspects of history that are particularly important for their identity and identification with the region.<sup>66</sup> The cognitive ambiguity, fuelled for years by various opinion-forming circles, regarding the activities of the “Gryf Pomorski” partisans has also generated a number of doubts of an axiological and moral nature. These have largely resulted from the quasi-rationalisation and relativisation of events that took place in the past, blurring the clear line between “truth and falsehood” and “good and evil.” Over time, it began to resonate and chime with narratives that were hostile to underground partisans and conspiracy theories that questioned the sincerity and purity of intentions of soldiers “supposedly” fighting for a free Poland. According to the statements of the interlocutors, this was a time when their flaws and weaknesses began to be emphasised, their betrayals and lack of professional preparation for armed combat were highlighted, and at the same time the successes and importance of the movement in the region and the country were downplayed. Alternatively, the merits of one faction of the resistance movement were devalued, while another was glorified, forgetting that without mutual solidarity, brotherhood and courage (despite internal disputes), no effective action could have been carried out, and there were many of them.

65 An informal term meaning civilians living or hiding in forest shelters for reasons other than military and underground activities, e.g. due to desertion from the Wehrmacht. See Pomeranian Archives and Museum of the Home Army and the Military Service of Polish Women, hereinafter: AMPAK, M-105/ 714 Pom/ АIII/5/10, p. 103.

66 This is reflected, among others, in the scale of involvement in this conflict, the emotional nature of the discussion and the fact that it is almost hereditary, as can be judged by the active presence in its arena of representatives of the next generation of descendants of people associated with row “Gryf Pomorski”.

The escalation of tensions, which affected the activities and fates of the members of “Gryf Pomorski,” also marked their legacy and memory. The complexity of the history of the Pomeranian underground, which is difficult to operationalize simply, and especially difficult to translate into a simple language of historical policy (avoiding nuances, contradictions, and “shades of grey”), was not able to gain approval of contemporary “chroniclers.” Hence, there was no place for it in the “pedagogy of memory”: the combination of historical didactics with regional, social and civic education. In such a situation, it may seem easier to simplify the message and establish a “version of events” that fits the currently adopted rhetoric. Even at the risk of being drawn into conflict and polarising the local population, which involuntarily becomes the recipients of an ideologised historical narrative. In the case of the “inheritors” of the heritage of row “Gryf Pomorski,” who come from among the local population and have been drawn into the conflict of memory, the level of their frustration is evidenced by invective records of discussions on forums and comments posted under press articles on this subject published on the Internet. A particularly passionate polemic between various parties, bordering on verbal violence concerned steps aimed at “implementing a policy of erasing from memory”<sup>67</sup> some figures and highlighting others. However, the reinterpretation of the past in the case of row “Gryf Pomorski” met with clear resistance from the local community and ultimately led to a court trial that was supposed to decide on the “truth” and restore “justice” and “honour.”<sup>68</sup>

Apart from the detailed description of the above-mentioned “scandals” related to the tangible and intangible legacy of “Gryf Pomorski.” we would like to draw the reader’s attention here to the effects and potential consequences of previous conflicts over memory and commemorative strategies dedicated to members of the resistance movement observed during ethnographic research. Apart from the fact that they lead to cognitive dissonance caused by competing discourses on the past,

67 See: the practice of *damnatio memoriae* (condemnation of memory), known since antiquity, consisting in removing names and images of people and events doomed to oblivion from documents, monuments and other evidence of material culture. Cf. S. Zawadzki, *Puścić w niepamięć, zachować złą pamięć: władcy w asyryjskich inskrypcjach królewskich w pierwszym tysiącleciu przed Chr.*, in R. Gałąj-Dempniak, D. Okoń, M. Semczyszyn (eds.), *Damnatio memoriae w europejskiej kulturze politycznej*, Szczecin 2011, pp. 17–20.

68 This trial has been of interest in the region for a long time, starting from the first trial in 2007, and the local press wrote about it widely; see: B. Zybajło, *Bohater czy zdrajca*, “Gazeta Pomorska”, 23.10.2007; B. Zybajło, *Proces może potrwać kilka lat*, “Gazeta Pomorska”, 24.10.2007, p. 14. Despite its conclusion and the clear court decision, some of our interlocutors expressed disappointment with the low effectiveness of the judgment and its (in) remedial power in the face of “the harm done.” The course of the trial for damaging the good name of Józef Gierszewski – Major “Ryś” was also documented by a local magazine entitled “Naji Gochë”, in issues 5–8, 2008. See AMPAK, M-105/ 714 Pom; M. Jasik, *op. cit.*, p. 63; M. Kowalski, *Śledczy wyjaśnił tajemnicę Gryfa Pomorskiego*, “Głos Pomorza. GP24”, 2007, <https://gp24.pl/sledczy-wyjasnia-tajemnice-gryfa-pomorskiego/ar/4315101> [accessed: 22.02.2024].

as some of our interlocutors' statements showed, they also generate social discord over the abuse of local historical heritage for political-servilistic purposes. Especially since for some time now, thanks to educational and performative activities conducted, among others, by cultural institutions and non-governmental organizations, there is an increasing awareness of egalitarian, and not (only) elitist participation in the transgenerational transmission of social memory and post-memory.<sup>69</sup> The knowledge that the past of generations influences the lives of contemporary people makes more and more of them feel that they are depositories of historical heritage, responsible for its content, form and interpretation. They are not satisfied with being only recipients of a ready-made message, because involvement becomes an attribute of a mature civic attitude. It is not without significance that this change is occurring at the moment when the last witnesses and participants of these events are passing away; "guardians of memory," who often kept it alive only among themselves and remained silent in the presence of others or were reluctant to share it.<sup>70</sup>

### **Contemporary repercussions of the conflict over the memory of "Gryf Pomorski"**

Although much is now known about the sources of the original conflict in the underground organization, it is more difficult to pinpoint the origins of its contemporary re-emission, let alone systematise all its acts and subsequent instalments chronologically. We will therefore focus on the examples most frequently cited by our interlocutors and those that had resonance in the local and national media.

The researcher of collective memory, Andrzej Szpociński, characterizing the specificity of national confrontations around the heritage of the past and social divergence in this context, shares the following observation:

The various threads of disputes taking place over the past dozen or so years have two common features: firstly, in the dispute over Polish memory, opposing positions are articulated resulting from diametrically different perceptions of the same facts by participants of past events belonging to different nations and social groups, often former enemies, and today equal participants in the public discourse. The second common feature is the practical nature of disputes about the past – a new interpretation of past events is often the justification for a lawsuit in which the plaintiff demands a specific amount as compensation for wrongs suffered in the past, also by his ancestors.<sup>71</sup>

69 Cf. D. Kalinowski, *Kaszubska postpamięć. Kilka przykładów*, „Politeja”, no. 65 (2) (2020), pp. 153–169, <https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.17.2020.65.12> [accessed: 22.08.2023].

70 D. Kalinowski, *op. cit.*, pp. 156–158.

71 A. Szpociński, *Wprowadzenie*, in A. Szpociński (ed.), *Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów*, Warszawa 2009, p. 9.

It is worth noting that taboo areas of history and human memory, which, due to issues of reliability and awareness of the burden of responsibility for words, are omitted by experts, are willingly undertaken and explored without scruples by amateurs and sensation-seekers (often sharing their speculations via social media). During our research conversations, we heard several times about the consequences of this type of practice, including from family members of people mentioned by name, in this case, “positive” or “negative” heroes and participants of the described events. With helplessness in their voices, they admitted that they generally had no influence on the context in which their closer or more distant relatives appeared in the narratives created and perpetuated in society. Meanwhile, the “Second World War facts” or related “revelations” reproduced over the decades have a real impact on their lives and experiences. Accusations of betrayal, lack of courage, collaboration with the occupier, or mistakes during the underground activities leading to denunciation, repression or death of colleagues – comrades-in-arms – stick with the descendants of these families for years and become a stigma and irredeemable guilt. Over time, there is an element of self-awareness. It is therefore not surprising that for many years after the war, many people from this region left for the Recovered Territories in order to break with the past and escape the stigma. Some even changed their names to start a new life among strangers. Ethnographic research conducted 76 years after the end of hostilities confirmed that the local community generally does not forget and sometimes even does not forgive.<sup>72</sup>

The possible rehabilitation process and the fight to clear false accusations can be tedious and expensive. Therefore, only a few people dare to openly argue with people spreading stories that are not true or opposing them. Some believe that they do not have sufficient knowledge and substantive competencies; others believe that they lack the time and financial resources and are also afraid of local influence (in the sense of “powerful connections”). However, it sometimes happens that local journalists, social activists, and regionalists act on behalf of those who can no longer defend themselves. Their goal is generally similar, as evidenced by the statements heard during field research: “It’s about the truth,” “the facts must come to light,” “we need to restore these people’s good name,” “there must finally be some justice,” “you can’t let a lie take on a life of its own,” “alternative versions of history have been allowed for too long to become the correct version of events,” etc.<sup>73</sup>

As reported by the local press, which regularly follows threads strongly related to regional identification:

72 An example would be for interlocutors to precisely indicate where the descendants of a given man (accused of treason and collaboration) live or how to find the grandson of a partisan shot during a raid on Facebook. It is also significant that even without this it is relatively easy to reach the relatives of these people, because the continuity of family and settlement means that the same surnames are still found in the area.

73 The quoted phrases are fragments from the interlocutors’ statements.

The assessment of the activities of Gierszewski and Dambek still divides the Kashubian community. In the opinion of the vast majority of historians and former soldiers of Commander Gierszewski, the accusations against him were groundless. Members of the Naji Goche Association have been striving for the honour and memory of the commander of “Gryf Pomorski” since the mid-1980s. On their initiative, two commemorative plaques have been funded, and a memorial guard has been established at the site of the execution.<sup>74</sup>

Currently, the following entities are leading in the field of symbolic and material commemoration of the organization and its members: patron schools<sup>75</sup> named row “Gryf Pomorski,” “Gryf Kaszubski” or Partisans “Gryf Pomorski” (there is no coincidence in the choice of a specific name variant, and they result from beliefs about the history of the organization and its fate); non-governmental institutions and organizations;<sup>76</sup> scout troops.<sup>77</sup> In addition to these, local government officials, politicians, businessmen, and the previously mentioned publicists, as well as history enthusiasts and regionalists (not associated with any organization but initiating various forms of commemoration and monitoring local government bodies in this regard) also stand out for their commitment.

The disputes over the years about the heritage of “Gryf Pomorski” and the narratives about it have not revealed the fact that there are many effects of messages about partisans in the collective, local memory of the victims of the attacks. It is also still shared that they fought for a cause risking their own lives, which young people (school students, graduates and young people) especially recognise. Despite the old and new controversies and the awareness that in the history of the organization there are many events that remain unexplained, to this day this has not changed. The greatest difficulty, according to our interlocutors, is the lack of certainty about the facts and the “suspicion sown,” as well as integrating all the information

74 P. Głowacki, *op. cit.*

75 Currently, there are at least seven schools with this name in Poland, although until recently there were eight of them. During the research, it turned out that the school operating until recently in Chojnice (Zespół Szkół Ponadgimnazjalnych nr 1 im. Tajnej Organizacji Wojskowej “Gryf Pomorski”) had changed its name and profile (see decision no. XIX/241/2021 of Chojnice powiat council of 13 May 2021). It is worth noting that School No. 1 in Chojnice, which received its patronage and banner in September 2002, was one of the most active schools in the field of historical and regional education and commemoration of row “Gryf Pomorski”. Every year, students participated in, among others, trips thematically related to their patron and patriotic celebrations dedicated to them. They also maintained contacts and partnerships with other schools in the “Gryf Pomorski” region.

76 The most active in this field are the Team for Commemorating the Ethos of row “Gryf Pomorski” in Gdańsk, the row “Gryf Pomorski” Kashubian-Kociewie Association in Szymbark, “Cis” Association of Enthusiasts of the History of “Gryf Pomorski” in Męcikał.

77 Among them: 14th Gdańsk scout team “Gryf” named after Danuta Siedzikówna “Inki”; Luzińska water scout team “row Gryf Pomorski”; 32nd scout water team “Baszta”, Lębork; 1st assault team of senior scouts, Świecie.

and messages into a relatively coherent whole. What this entails is confusion that makes difficult intergenerational transmission and involvement in the national message about the Polish resistance movement, or the “national resistance myth.” In the current situation, one often hears bitterly ironic opinions that “Pomeranian partisans are doubly cursed soldiers.”<sup>78</sup>

Meanwhile, in the light of the preserved archival documentation and historical studies, as well as the source research carried out as part of the project, it is clear that the role and importance of the Pomeranian underground movement in the fight against the occupiers was unquestionable.<sup>79</sup> The oral history and collective imaginations of the local community also contain examples of the heroization of Pomeranian partisans. Traces of this can also be found in local memorial rooms and tourist sites exploring “patriotism” and the “eternal bond with the homeland.”<sup>80</sup> Places of martyrdom<sup>81</sup> and events associated with successful, legendary sabotage operations are particularly cherished in regional memory and tradition.<sup>82</sup> There are also memorial

78 This phrase was used by one of our interlocutors, explaining that “once, because they were active in an informal military organization and in the resistance movement, and secondly, because even when soldiers like them were restored to favour and rehabilitated after many years, they still remained in the shadow; this is because they were not considered sufficiently reliable and comfortable by the rest of their compatriots from central Poland.” The pessimism in this statement may be alleviated by the fact that the mention of the Pomeranian secret military organization has also been included in the exhibition space of the Warsaw Museum of Cursed Soldiers and Political Prisoners of the Polish People’s Republic. See S. Uciński, *op. cit.*

79 A detailed discussion of the archival materials obtained during the research on row “Gryf Pomorski” will be the subject of a separate article.

80 This can be exemplified by, for example, the exhibition related to row “Gryf Pomorski” at the Centre for Education and Promotion of the Region in Szymbark, as well as symbolic motifs and the accompanying narrative.

81 For example, the area around the “Zielony Pałac” (Green Palace) bunker near Męcikał, the “Dywan” (carpet) forester’s lodge, the “Młynek” (mill) forester’s lodge, etc.

82 For example, blowing up German trains several times, one of which is described as an attack on Adolf Hitler. This concerns the action of the unit commanded by Jan Szalewski, who organised and carried it out in June 1942. According to local reports, “this episode, little known to modern historians”, took place on the night of 8–9 June 1942, in the area of the Cis forester’s lodge near Zblewo. The partisans derailed the passenger train Hitler was supposed to be traveling on, but the Führer probably changed his travel plans at the last minute, foiling the plot. The attacked train was shot at by a unit of “forest people” dressed in German uniforms. Two generals and about 200 soldiers were said to have been killed in this attack, which seems to be a greatly exaggerated number. A similar partisan operation also took place on the night of 20–21 June 1942, when a German military transport was derailed near the town of Czarna Woda. In the light of available documents, including those from German and British archives, it is difficult to definitively rule out the possibility of a failed plot to kill Hitler. Cf. K. Ostrowski, *Wielcy Pomorzanie z naszych stron. Jan Szalewski, “Naji Gochë”*, no. 2 (2003), pp. 36–37; S. Raszeja, *Największa akcja dywersyjna ruchu oporu na Pomorzu. 75-lecie zamachu na Hitlera na Kociewiu w 1942 r.*, “Kociewski Magazyn Regionalny”, no. 97/2 (2017), pp. 3–4; S. Majewski, *Polski zamach na Hitlera. Akcja pod Strychem*, “Polityka”, no. 37 (1998).

traces relating to more difficult pages from “Gryf’s” past that are less clear in ethical and moral terms and give rise to doubts and understatements. Above all, they concern conflicts and acts of violence within the organization, including betrayal and assassination. The research has shown that although the level of general historical awareness and knowledge of the region’s past is high among local residents, and they openly talk about the “controversial Second World War heritage,” the dominant attitude is discouragement. This mainly results from fatigue with the confrontational nature of remembering and getting lost in contradictory information and emotional ambivalence, resulting in cognitive dissonance. Most of the interlocutors shared their personal knowledge and beliefs about the “Griffans” with restraint and tried to recognise our knowledge and the purpose of the questions asked. Despite this, however, they freely repeated commonly known facts and platitudes about the organization and partisans, claiming that this was just hearsay. Interlocutors often spoke in half-words, with the general conclusion being that “now, after many years, who knows what it was really like?” This can also be partly considered an effect of socialization: “about heroes and the dead – either well or not at all.” Some of the interlocutors explained that it was all because “the local area, especially the Kashubian region, has never had an easy history, and the history of “Gryf Pomorski” is the best proof of this.”<sup>83</sup> When asked about the dispute over Gierszewski and Dambek, which had been revisited after many years, some respondents referred to press headlines with the scandal in the background.<sup>84</sup>

As the headmistress of one of the row “Gryf Pomorski” patron schools commented on the conversation: “the result of this manipulation of history is that now

83 As the conversations conducted during the research show, there is an implicit feeling of Pomerania’s cultural isolation from central Poland and the lack of understanding by its inhabitants of the realities of local life in the interwar, post-war and post-war periods. This is also associated with a hidden and not always realised fear that someone asking about the “fate of the family during the Second World War” or the proverbial “grandfather” will react with disapproval and contempt at the mention of the Wehrmacht and the local distrust towards the nationwide structures of the AK.

84 Examples include: W. Drewka, *Wójt nie potwierdza słów R. Dambka*, “Expres Kaszubski”, 23.03.2009; *Bijatyka o pomnik*, <https://tvn24.pl/> [accessed: 30.04.2024]; R. Leszkowski, *Major „Ryś” nie mógł wiedzieć, że idzie na śmieć z ręką towarzyszy broni*, “Magazyn Kaszubski”, 22.04.2016; A. Frankowska, *Sprawa pomnika Dambka wywołała historyczną burzę*, “Expres Kaszubski”, 28.08.2007; A. Zielińska, S. Szadurski, *Miejsce pamięci dowódcy Gryfa Pomorskiego zdewastowane w imię prawa?!*, <https://gdansk.naszemiasto.pl/miejsce-pamieci-dowodcy-gryfa-pomorskiego-zdewastowane-w/ar/c1-6730265> [accessed: 30.04.2024]; W. Drewek, *Radni Stężyca zdecydowali: pomnik Dambka stanie przed szkołą w Gołubiu* (Stężyca councillors decided: a monument to Dambek will be erected in front of the school in Gołubie), “Expres Kaszubski”, 29/01/2008; W. Drewek, *Pomnik Dambka został przeniesiony*, “Expres Kaszubski”, 5.03.2008; J. Rybak, *Szef BBN interweniuje u Ministra Sprawiedliwości (List z prośbą o interwencję w sprawie zniszczenia miejsca pamięci narodowej)*, [www.bbn.gov.pl](http://www.bbn.gov.pl) [accessed: 30.04.2024].

we have a troublesome heritage that we – as teachers and inhabitants of Pomerania – have to deal with somehow.” The worst thing in all of this, in her opinion, is the fact that “the stereotype that ‘Kashubians cannot be trusted’ has been revived because it is not known for sure ‘which side they are on’” (a woman, a local, teaches science at a primary school to older children, approximately 60 years old).

The bitterness of these words can be alleviated by Jerzy Hausner’s reflection on the ways of releasing cultural energy.<sup>85</sup> These include, among others, dialogicity of social debate, opposing linguistic and cultural hegemony and constantly asking of the past new questions born from what is now in order to find new paths leading to the future.<sup>86</sup> In his opinion, it is crucial to confront discourses on heritage with different axiologies, because culture is always a field of dispute about values and moral disqualification of opponents of the debate denies opportunities for development and learning.<sup>87</sup>

An interesting attempt to break a certain convention of talking and thinking about the past of a given place or region may be initiatives analogous to this year’s competition announced by the Stutthof Museum in Sztutowo and the Towarzystwo Projektów Edukacyjnych Foundation, entitled: “Heroes of row “Gryf Pomorski” yesterday, memory today” (Polish: “row Gryf Pomorski – bohaterowie wczoraj, pamięć dziś”). The initiators of this project state that the title of the competition refers to the message that “[...] every time has its heroes. Those whose works influence the fate of subsequent generations deserve special attention.”<sup>88</sup> The aim is to engage young people in the process of reflective learning or re-reading the pages of collective history. Similar activities, especially organised in places of “living memory,” are important steps needed to overcome the impasse that leads to intrusive historical policy – appropriating the past, space and memory, and breaking down real communities in favour of “invented” ones.<sup>89</sup>

85 J. Hausner, *Kultura i polityka rozwoju*, in J. Hausner, A. Karwińska, J. Purchla (eds.), *Kultura a rozwój*, Kraków 2013, pp. 81–105.

86 E. Bendyk, *op. cit.*, p. 483.

87 *Ibidem*, pp. 487–491.

88 This year’s competition organized by the Educational Projects Foundation and the Stutthof Museum is addressed at young people aged 12 to 19. See Muzeum Stutthof w Sztutowie. Niemiecki Nazistowski Obóz Koncentracyjny i Zagłady 1939–1945, <https://stutthof.org/konkurs-tajna-organizacja-wojskowa-gryf-pomorski-bohaterowie-wczoraj-pamiec-dzis/> [accessed: 30.01.2024].

89 See B. Anderson, *Wspólnoty wyobrażone: rozważania o źródłach i rozprzestrzenianiu się nacjonalizmu*, Kraków 1997.

## Conclusion

A troublesome legacy is a difficult inheritance for future generations, but also a challenge for its contemporary depositories. They are responsible for the community legacy and its transgenerational transmission. The momentum accompanying commemorative practices, full of symbolic gestures and free associations that exceed the boundaries of historical knowledge, often creates a complex and complicated dramaturgy of affectively stimulating *theatrum*. However, it rarely serves exclusively cognitive and socialisation purposes, but more often political and ideological ones. In both cases, however, it plays an identifying, community and normative role. The message created on their basis favours the emergence of specific patterns of behavior, cultural scripts and ethos (not devoid of pathos). It is worth remembering that identity constructs not only connect but also divide – they are inclusive and exclusive. Building a dialogic historical narrative that also includes controversial, troublesome and silenced aspects of cultural heritage (not necessarily national heritage) is not easy. As a lesson learned in Poland, as well as in other European countries,<sup>90</sup> post-war wounds take a long time to heal, and the scope and depth of trauma<sup>91</sup> corresponds to the scale of the violence suffered. The conciliatory process of integrating antagonistic or competitive historical discourses requires not so much commitment and creativity, but maturity and developed social and civic awareness, which are much more difficult to obtain.

The words attributed to Henry David Thoreau seem even more valid at this point, as he somewhat provocatively claimed that: “it is the province of the historian to find out, not what was, but what is. Where a battle has been fought, you will find nothing but the bones of men and beasts; where a battle is being fought, there are hearts beating.”<sup>92</sup> The organ mentioned at the end is not only a metaphor

90 It is worth mentioning here the settlements with previous regimes, e.g. in Spain, Germany, Romania, France. See A. Beevor, *The Battle for Spain, The Spanish Civil War 1936–1939*, London 2006; M. Krotoszyński, *Modele sprawiedliwości tranzycyjnej*, Poznań 2017.

91 This is illustrated by the example of the Holocaust and other crimes of genocide, the devastating impact of which is manifested in subsequent generations of families of direct victims. Cf. S. Juni, *Second-generation Holocaust survivors: Psychological, theological, and moral challenges*, “Trauma Dissociation”, vol. 17 (2016), no. 1, pp. 97–111; B. Nir, *Transgenerational Transmission of Holocaust Trauma and Its Expressions in Literature*, “Genealogy”, vol. 2 (2018), no. 4, <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy2040049>, [accessed: 21.02.2024]; M. Weiss, S. Weiss, *Second generation to Holocaust survivors: enhanced differentiation of trauma transmission*, “American Journal of Psychotherapy”, vol. 54 (3) (2000), pp. 372–385.

92 In the original version the extract reads: “Critical acumen is exerted in vain to uncover the past; the past cannot be presented; we cannot know what we are not. But one veil hangs over past, present, and future, and it is the province of the historian to find out, not what was, but what is. Where a battle has been fought, you will find nothing but the bones of men and beasts; where a battle is being fought, there are hearts beating”, H.D. Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Princeton 1980, pp. 154–155.

for feelings and the “human command centre” pulsating with emotions but also a symbol of truth and real meaning, even if only from the perspective of the individual (and not the collective). Although it is usually contrasted with the “head,” which signifies prudence and common sense, one does not function well without the other, and a proven solution is a harmonious combination of both. Striking a balance between pragmatism and idealism is a difficult challenge, but it provides an opportunity to give voice to silent narratives and hear more. This broadens the perspective of viewing and understanding, and ultimately allows us to participate in a past that cannot be changed. You can try to accept it and “experience” it, and ultimately include it in the reservoir of transgenerational resources of shared experiences, among which there is also a place for “troublesome heritage.”



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### **Summary**

The article concerns conflicting historical and memory narratives as well as examples of social consequences caused by disputes over the activities and heritage of the “Gryf Pomorski” secret military organization (row). The analysis is based on materials collected during ethnographic field research conducted in Pomerania. During the Second World War, the Pomeranian resistance movement operated in this area, and to this day there are tangible and intangible traces of these operations. However, the activities of the movement and the forms of its commemoration have been the subject of disputes and discussions, as well as local and national controversies, for years. Conversations held during the research with local residents, educational workers and social activists primarily concerned issues related to the heritage of memory and methods of transmitting knowledge related to the history of the region, especially knowledge that arouses a lot of emotions and is politically charged. The aim of the research was to discover how the local community deals with the controversial and axiologically ambiguous past and its contradictory narratives. The article represents an introduction to the research issues and presents preliminary conclusions from an analysis of the collected data. We discuss the circumstances of the creation and activity of row “Gryf Pomorski” and contemporary forms of its commemoration in the context of selected aspects of constructing historical policy. We also present the causes and effects of the conflict over the memory of the “Gryf Pomorski” partisans and the manifestations of competing discourses about them.