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## A discussion of books:

*The Modi memorandi: Leksykon kultury pamięci*<sup>1</sup>

by Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska

(Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014)

and *The Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*

(Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012–2015) /

*Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*<sup>2</sup>






(Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2013–2015)

### Abstract

This article presents a discussion of two monographs reporting on their merits and shortcomings: *Modi memorandi: Leksykon kultury pamięci* by M. Saryusz-Wolska (2014), and *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, vols 1–5 (2012–2015) / *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, vols 1–4 (2013–2015).

<sup>1</sup> *Ways of remembering: A lexicon of culture memory* (in English).

<sup>2</sup> *Polish-German places of memory* (in English).

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## Omówienie książek:

*Modi memorandi: Leksykon kultury pamięci*

by Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska

(Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2014)

*Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, tomy 1–5

(Paderborn: Schöningh, 2012–2015) /

*Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, tomy 1–4

(Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2013–2015)

## Streszczenie

Artykuł przedstawia omówienie monografii *Modi memorandi: Leksykon kultury pamięci* M. Saryusz-Wolskiej (2014) i *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, t. 1–5 (2012–2015) / *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, t. 1–4 (2013–2015).

**Słowa kluczowe:** *kultury pamięci • Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte / Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*



Fig. 1–2. Front pages of *Modi memorandi: leksykon kultury pamięci* by M. Saryusz-Wolska (2014) and *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*, vols 1–5 (2012–2015) / *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*, vols 1–4 (2013–2015)

## 1. Introduction

In this commentary I would like to focus on two issues: (a) the main merits of the books, which regards both the memory cultures as well as Poland and Germany, and (b) a certain risk in applying the approach of memory culture to analyses of historical cases (“site of memory”), including the cases linked with the history of science.

It is obvious that these comments are given from my own perspective – I formulate them as:

- a professional researcher, that is a historian and philosopher of science, and among others a researcher of Copernican issues,
- a person coming from an indigenous Polish family of north Poland, from regions called Krajna and Warmia, which belonged to Poland or Germany in the last centuries,
- a hobbyist of my family’s genealogy, i.e. a local history and a local memory culture,
- an advocate of a true Polish-German reconciliation in the spirit of the 1965 *Message of the Polish bishops to the German bishops*.<sup>3</sup>

Since a majority of Polish-German sites of memory is a part of my own ancestors’ history, my reading of the books is not merely restricted to a “theoretical” knowledge of these “sites of memory”, which we can find in the literature that is often dominated by authors coming from non-indigenous families.

## 2. Advantages of *Lexicon*

*Modi memorandi: Leksykon kultury pamięci* is a very important book in Polish research literature, since it describes, in 180 clear entries, a new exciting interdisciplinary field of research named *memory culture studies* that originated in the 1970s–1980s thanks to the works of mainly French and German scholars.

In this field of research we analyze “the formation of collective notions about the past, the changes to which they were and are subjected, and the role of memory in the process of constituting collective identities”.<sup>4</sup> As

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Polak 2012.

<sup>4</sup> “[...] powstawanie zbiorowych wyobrażeń o przeszłości, zmiany, jakim one podlegały i podlegają oraz rolę pamięci w procesach konstytuowania się tożsamości

a consequence, this sort of studies uses historical analyses at the crossroads of different branches of knowledge: history, political history, sociology, literature studies, history of arts, culture studies, etc., as well as the memories of witnesses, family memories, local memories, etc. Moreover, the memory culture studies are also open to analyses of myths of “collective memory” and deconstructions of “collective memory”.<sup>5</sup>

The memory culture studies use history of the first degree (the study of the given event in the past) and also history of the second degree, that is history of history (following the terminology of Robin George Collingwood).<sup>6</sup> These interdisciplinary studies are therefore an important supplement to classical studies on social and humanistic sciences, including history, sociology, literature studies, history of arts, and culture studies.

Let us move on to a brief description of the scope of *Modi Memorandi*. In order to characterize the scope of the 180 entries of this lexicon, it is useful to repeat the choice of 22 entries mentioned by Magdalena Saryusz-Wolska in her own article on her book, that is: “| *anamnesis* | *biography* | *ensorship* | *counter-memory* | *cultural memory* | *discourse* | *generation* | *guilt* | *Holocaust* | *image* | *metaphor* | *modernity* | *museum* | *myth* | *nation* | *palimpsest* | *power* | *silence* | *tradition* | *trauma* | *victim* | *witness*”.<sup>7</sup>

Then, in order to express better the spirit of this lexicon, it is worth adding a supplementary non-alphabetic list of 24 entries, which starts from the entries “history” and “historical memory”, and ends with the

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zbiorowych” (Centrum Badań Historycznych Polskiej Akademii Nauk w Berlinie [2006–2015](#)).

<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, it is worth adding that such studies on the development of collective notions is well known in the history of science. It suffices to mention the views of two authors: Ludwik Fleck (1896–1961) and Thomas Samuel Kuhn (1922–1996). Cf. Ludwik Fleck, *Entstehung und Entwicklung einer wissenschaftlichen Tatsache. Einführung in die Lehre vom Denkstil und Denkkollektiv*. Basel: Schwabe, 1935. Nevertheless, this book became famous only after its English translation: *The Genesis and Development of a Scientific Fact* (edited by T.J. Trenn and R.K. Merton, foreword by Thomas Kuhn). Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979.

Thomas Samuel Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. In: International Encyclopedia of Unified Science, “Foundations of the Unity of Science”, vol. II-2 (1962) and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962.

<sup>6</sup> Collingwood (1946) [1993](#), p. 379.

<sup>7</sup> Saryusz-Wolska 2015, p. 1. Cf. these entries in the *Lexicon*.

entries “patriotism” and “nationalism”, that is: | *history* | *historical memory* | *historical consciousness* | *realm of memory* | *cultural memory* | *collective or social memory* | *tradition* | *communicative memory* | *individual memory* | *floating gap* | *post memory* | *global memory* | *functional memory* | *counter-memory* | *conflict of memories* | *false memory* | *discourse* | *narration* | *myth* | *ideology* | *identity* | *nation* | *patriotism* | *nationalism* |.<sup>8</sup>

It is evident that the list represents a broad spectrum of concepts creating a rich palette of valuable interpretative tools to be used in constructing rich analyses of “sites of memory” in all cultures, including science.

### 3. Advantages of *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci* | *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte*

The lexicon is one of the results of the largest Polish-German project in the field of social sciences and humanities in history, that is *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci* | *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte* organized by the Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin, realized in cooperation with the Institute of History of Polish Academy of Sciences in Warsaw (IH PAN) and Deutsches Polen-Institut, Darmstadt (DPI), and initiated by two scholars: Prof. Hans Henning Hahn, Habilitated Doctor (University of Oldenburg, Historical Institute, Department of the History of Eastern Europe) and Prof. Robert Traba, Habilitated Doctor (Centre for Historical Research of the Polish Academy of Sciences in Berlin and Freie Universität Berlin, Friedrich Meinecke Institut).

The main result of this project is the nine-volume set of collective monographs, published in German (five volumes) and in Polish (four volumes), and edited by Professor Hans Henning Hahn, Eva Hahn, and Professor Robert Traba, in cooperation with Doctor Maciej Górny and Kornelia Kończal.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. the German edition: Hahn, Traba (eds.) (in cooperation with Maciej Górny and Kornelia Kończal) 2012–2015, and the Polish edition: Traba, Hahn (eds.), (in cooperation with Maciej Górny and Kornelia Kończal) 2013–2015.

The volumes include works of above 100 authors about: (a) “sites of memory”, that is about the historical phenomena (persons, events, artifacts) that affect the processes of formation of cultural identities in Germany and Poland, and (b) the methodology of research into cultural memory.

The first three volumes presents as many as 92 entries that cover a very broad spectrum of issues. The 4<sup>th</sup> volume of this series, titled *Methodological reflections* (2013), is a very good supplement of *Modi memorandi...* (2014). The 5<sup>th</sup> volume, as its title reads *Die Vertreibung im deutschen Erinnern. Legenden, Mythos, Geschichte* (2015), refers to German culture.

Since all volumes present deftly great cultural differences between German and Polish “memory cultures”, I can but recommend a reading of these works. Nevertheless, the reader should remember that these differences are well known to specialists, and for them the assertion of the very existence of such differences is not revealing. A much deeper problem is how to build a dialogue between the advocates of different visions of the “same” sites of memory, and a possible reconciliation or adjustment of these differences in the light of critically read historical sources.

#### 4. A certain risk and limits of “memory culture studies”

The reader of the books must be aware of the following serious methodological problem. In “unskilled hands” the rich palette of valuable interpretative tools of a “memory culture” described in *Methodological reflections...* (2013) and *Modi memorandi...* (2014) can become very dangerous. It can disrupt and corrupt interpretations and lead to creating an unrealistic image of “a site of memory”.

Regarding that danger of applying the approach of memory culture studies, this matter is explained on many pages (“sites”) in the above-mentioned *Methodological reflections* (2013). This is a real tension between history, sociology and cultural studies, between history and collective memory, between objectivity and subjectivity, which must be tackled in the spirit of the truth of research. However, it is a very difficult challenge, requiring a very good knowledge of historical facts but aware of the manipulations of political correctness.

The final result of such a confrontation can be a *mythical history* of a site of memory, dominated by falsely perceived ideas of reconciliation etc., without the need to seek and know the historical truth or the need for a mutual confession of guilt. In this way, the boundaries of critically justified scientific knowledge and the uncritical common knowledge are becoming blurred. However, while applying this approach, we need not be surprised with such an answer. We can simply say: we have different memories of the “same sites”... (it is called a *polyphony of memories*) or even our memory is “better” than yours, since... it is justified by a number of more or less clear reasons.

I recognize this kind of limitation in the entry “Copernicus” – the only one entry in all volumes of *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci* | *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte* that is related to history of science.<sup>10</sup>

Firstly, the author<sup>11</sup>, Elisabeth Ritter, herself not being an expert in Copernican studies, overlooked historical nuances, such as: (a) the Jagiellonian idea of religious and ethnic tolerance, (b) the difference between nationalism and patriotism, (c) the fact that Copernicus knew not only Greek, Latin and German, but also Polish. Then, she mistakenly reinterpreted a few centuries of the Polish-German controversy about Copernicus – Kopernikus – Kopernik as a symptom of the same kind of nationalism, equally German and Polish.<sup>12</sup>

Of course, we can easily defend the stance assumed by E. Ritter on the ground of the axioms of “memory cultures”, by saying that (a) “she presents shared views of different German and Polish groups”, and by adding that (b) “German memory is neither better nor worse than Polish memory”, since a polyphony of memories does exist. However, the paradox of this approach consists in the fact that it is equally reasonable to assume a contrary opinion, namely that this type of argument is not convincing and can be easily refuted with a set of concepts taken from the – already mentioned – vocabulary of memory cultures, such as: “conflict of memories”, “false memory”, “myth”, and “ideology”.

<sup>10</sup> Incidentally, it is worth mentioning that it shows that history of science has a very low cultural importance for the authors of the project *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte* / *Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci*.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Ritter 2015.

<sup>12</sup> I described in detail this controversy in: Kokowski 2009, pp. 115–136, fns. 458–569 (pp. 402–431).

As a consequence, I can but agree with the authors of *Deutsch-Polnische Erinnerungsorte / Polsko-niemieckie miejsca pamięci* that the approach of memory cultures differs from the approach of historiography.<sup>13</sup>

## 5. “Memory culture studies” and their potential for Polish and German culture

I honestly think that (a) the approach of memory cultures with the polyphony of memories can serve as a very good introduction to deeper and more critical historiographic studies on Polish and German cultures<sup>14</sup>, and (b) that these results can constitute a solid basis for a true Polish-German reconciliation in the spirit of the 1965 *Message of the Polish bishops to the German bishops*.

As a conclusion of these considerations I quote the statements of Robert Traba from his brochure entitled *1 September 1939 – 2009 Ein deutsch-polnischer Erinnerungsort? / 1 września 1939 – 2009 Polsko-niemieckie miejsce pamięci?*:

In order to understand the difficulties in crossing the threshold of holding monopoly on the only right memory of one’s own, one only needs to remind the Polish-Russian controversy surrounding Katyń, Auschwitz, Soviet occupation, the Warsaw Uprising, the Polish-German frictions around the Centre against Expulsions, or the German-Polish-Russian discussion about the «Liberation» of 1945. The alternative is a niche that I was not the first to call ‘a polyphony of memories’. It does not mean forgetting «bad experiences», hatred or personal tragedies. One has to encompass «bad memory» along with forgiveness, compromise and openness. One has to reconcile the competing memories. How? Through a continuous dialogue and an exploration of the sites that were consciously forgotten.

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<sup>13</sup> Of course, this conclusion is not especially revealing. For example, Pierre Nora explains this issue in detail. Cf. “General Introduction: Between Memory and History”, pp. 1–23 in: Nora 1996, vol. 1. He states there, among others, that “Memory and history, far from being synonymous, are thus in many respects opposed” (p. 3).

<sup>14</sup> This modified approach can be found e.g. in a paper entitled “Ile ofiar wysiedleń?” / “Wie viele Vertreibungsofoper?” (“How many victims of expulsions?”) by a German author, Robert Żurek (2009).



[...] Europe, [...] seems not to be dealing well at all with «bad memory», not only in the East but also in the West. Hence different stopgaps or attempts of escape. Most often we resort to well-known sites, that is already established national notions. Meanwhile, our memory needs to be detoxified. We should also look for a «good» but forgotten memory. This is especially true of collective remembering between neighboring countries and nations, whose territories formed overlapping hybrid cultures for centuries. At the same time, a polyphony of memories does not mean forgetting the «bad» events at all. There is no «eternal memory». There is also no «divided memory of Europe», because it would mean that there once was «a common memory» that fell apart. Memory is consciously constructed through various forms of political culture: the policy towards history, commemoration, musealization, etc. And paradoxically, it is a positive statement, because it gives hope that the polyphony of memories, today – a niche, may someday become a dominant narrative in Europe. Instead of searching for common European sites of memories I see a need to foster a sensitivity mainly to the experiences and the memories of «others» (Traba 2009, pp. 19–20).<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> „Wystarczy przypomnieć polsko-rosyjskie kontrowersje wokół Katynia, Auschwitz, radzieckiej okupacji, powstania warszawskiego, polsko-niemieckie zadrażnienia wokół Centrum przeciw Wypędzeniom, czy niemiecko-polsko-rosyjską dyskusję o „wyzwoleniu” w 1945 r., by zrozumieć trudności w przekroczeniu progu monopolu na jedynie słuszną, własną pamięć. Alternatywą jest nisza, którą nie ja pierwszy nazwał polifonią pamięci. Nie oznacza ona, by zapomnieć «złe doświadczenia», nie-nawiść, osobiste dramaty. Trzeba pomieścić w sobie «złą pamięć» razem z przebaczeniem, kompromisem, otwartością. Trzeba doprowadzić do pojednania konkurujących pamięci. Jak? Poprzez ciągły dialog i odkrywanie miejsc świadomie zapomnianych. [...] Europa, kontynent, który w tym stuleciu doświadczył największych zbrodni ludobójstwa, zdaje się nie radzić sobie zupełnie, nie tylko na wschodzie, ale i na zachodzie, ze «złą pamięcią». Pojawiają się więc różne protezy i próby ucieczki. Najczęściej ucieka się do miejsc znanych, czyli do utrwalonych już narodowych wyobrażeń. Tymczasem pamięć trzeba odtruć. Trzeba też szukać «dobrej», ale zapomnianej pamięci. Dotyczy to szczególnie zbiorowego pamiętania między sąsiadującymi państwami i narodami, których terytoria tworzyły przez stulecia nakładające się na siebie kultury hybrydowe. Polifonia pamięci nie znaczy przy tym zapomniania «złych» wydarzeń. «Wiecznej pamięci»

I do agree with these statements with regard to the realms of (political) memory.

## 6. “Memory culture studies” and their potential for the history of science

I think that, albeit with a certain degree of caution, it is worth referring to and applying the memory culture approach to the realms of memory in science.

For example, using the terminology of memory cultures one can explain in a clear way the following finding by professor Andrzej Kajetan Wróblewski, namely that for 1,444 different names in total mentioned in four textbooks of general history of physics written in: Italian – Gliozzi 1965 (with 789 names), Russian – Дорфман 1974–1979 (with 707 names), German – Schreier (ed.) 1988 (with 594 names) and French – Boudenot 2001 (with 504 names), only 199 (13.8%) overlap.<sup>16</sup>

This finding is obviously a manifestation of a *polyphony of memories*, etc. However, as I mentioned above, one cannot stop at this clear statement and should look for more sophisticated explanations (cf. section 4).

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nie ma. Nie ma też «podzielonej pamięci Europy», bo znaczyłoby to, że kiedyś była «jakaś wspólna pamięć», która się rozpadła. Pamięć się świadomie konstruuje poprzez różne formy kultury politycznej: politykę wobec historii, upamiętnianie, muzealizację itp. I paradoksalnie jest to pozytywne stwierdzenie, bo stwarza nadzieję, że niszowa dzisiaj polifonia pamięci może kiedyś stać się dominującą narracją w Europie. Zamiast poszukiwania wspólnych, europejskich miejsc pamięci widzę potrzebę uczenia się wrażliwości głównie dla doświadczeń, ale również dla pamięci «innych» (Traba 2009, pp. 19–20).

<sup>16</sup> He described it in his plenary lecture “Are we ready for common history of science?”, delivered during the 2nd International Conference of the European Society for the History of Science held in Cracow in 2006 – cf. Wróblewski [2006](#).

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