

‘Introduction: Remembering Katyn’ (pp. 1-12) and ‘Coda: Katyn-2’ (pp.132-152) taken from: Alexander Etkind, Rory Finnin, Uilleam Blacker, Julie Fedor, Simon Lews, Maria Malksöo, Matilda Mroz, *Remembering Katyn* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2012)

Introduction

Remembering Katyn

On the clear, crisp afternoon of 7 April 2010, Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk stood before a phalanx of pines to address his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin and other dignitaries in a cemetery complex outside the village of Katyn, in western Russia. He began his remarks with a question. ‘Why are we here today? Why do we come to this place every year?’ He continued: ‘Above all, because we remember’ (Tusk 2010).

Pamiętamy: we remember. In Eastern Europe, a pivotal object of public memory is Katyn, the mass murder of over 20,000 unarmed Polish prisoners in the spring of 1940 by officers of the NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs), the Soviet secret police. ‘We will always remember those killed here,’ declared Tusk, a historian by training. His stirring call to remember the Katyn tragedy was, of course, a call to remember the past, for as Aristotle posited long ago, to remember the future is impossible (Aristotle 1928). Yet three days after Tusk’s address, the grounds for Aristotle’s claim would feel vacant and forsaken. On 10 April 2010, an aircraft carrying 96 members of Poland’s military and political class, including the nation’s president Lech Kaczyński, crashed only miles away from Katyn, killing all on board. Time’s arrow lurched and fell; the bounds between past, present, and future dissolved; only space seemed to matter. ‘Katyn is a cursed place, a terrible symbol,’ said Tusk’s predecessor, former Prime Minister Aleksander Kwaśniewski, on the day of the tragedy, ‘it sends shivers down my spine’ (‘Kwaśniewski’ 2010).

Yet the ‘cursed place’ of Katyn and the ‘terrible symbol’ of Katyn are not congruent. The place is singular; the symbol is, in effect, plural, signifying a multitude of killing fields and burial sites. The majority of those killed in what has become known as ‘Katyn’ in fact perished in other places well beyond the Katyn forest in the Soviet Republics of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine. The toponym associated with their murder, moreover, has become a referential touchstone and descriptive shorthand throughout Eastern Europe for other, lesser-known sites of past savagery – Vinnytsia, Bykivnia, Kurapaty – and for sites of more recent savagery – Srebrenica, for instance, at one time proclaimed the ‘new Katyn’ (‘Srebrenica’ 1995). Today Katyn circulates with alacrity in public memory and in political discourse in Eastern Europe, fuelling both solidarity and suspicion, fellowship and fear. This book maps its legacy through the interconnected memory cultures of seven countries – Belarus, Poland, Russia, Ukraine, and the Baltic States – and explores its meaning as site and symbol, event and idea, fact and crypt.

1.

In the bloody annals of the twentieth century, Katyn stands as one of the first coordinated transnational mass murders of foreign prisoners by a totalitarian state. At the direction of one order from the Kremlin – Politburo Protocol 13/144, drafted by NKVD chief Lavrenty Beria and dated 5 March 1940 – NKVD agents shot 21,857 Poles and buried them in a number of clandestine sites in the Soviet Republics of Belarus, Russia, and Ukraine (Cienciala et al 2007, 332-33). The victims had been rounded up in the territory known in Polish as the *kresy* – encompassing much of today’s western Ukraine and western Belarus – during and after the Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939. They were either incarcerated in local prisons or sent eastward to special camps administered by the NKVD in

Kozelsk and Ostashkov (in western Russia) and Starobilsk (in eastern Ukraine). In Kozelsk, Ostashkov, and Starobilsk, they were classified as ‘prisoners of war’, even though war between Poland and the Soviet Union had never been declared. Months later, they were classified, fatally, as ‘enemies’, even though they were potential allies. Indeed, as early as 1941, Stalin would begin actively recruiting Polish soldiers and officers to fight alongside the Red Army against Nazi forces. What made these 21,857 prisoners, by contrast, such a threat to the Soviet regime? After all, in the clinical words of the 5 March 1940 execution order, they were only ‘former [military] officers, officials, landowners, [...] rank-and-file police, [and] priests’ (ibid 119). Among their number were also physicians, pharmacists, veterinarians, lawyers, teachers, priests, rabbis, and an eighteen-year-old telephone operator. The victims of Katyn, in other words, were the pride and the promise of the Polish people – young and old, soldier and civilian. In large measure, every memory of Katyn today is a struggle to confront the sheer senselessness of their death sentence, to overcome a persistent and perplexing *why?*

The prisoners’ executions were as methodical as they were grisly, involving a formidable state logistical apparatus that, in effect, operationalized displacement. Prisoners were kept on the move. Those held in the *kresy* were dispatched by train to various NKVD prisons in Kyiv, Kharkiv, Kherson, and Minsk, where they were then put to death. Precise details about the location and the identity of these victims remain, to an extent, unclear. What is better known is the fate of the prisoners held in the Kozelsk, Ostashkov, and Starobilsk camps, who were, in NKVD parlance, ‘unloaded’ (*razgruzhalis*) from their cells – sometimes to a lively musical accompaniment, and nearly always under the pretence of imminent release – and sent to Smolensk, Kalinin (today’s Tver), and Kharkiv, respectively. At Kalinin and Kharkiv, victims were led into NKVD prisons and asked to state their names, one by one, before being shot in the back of the head at the base of the skull. Their bodies

were then transported to NKVD burial sites in forests abutting the nearby villages of Mednoe and Piatykhvatky and dumped in mass graves, which were, in at least one case, scattered with 'white powder' intended to 'speed up decomposition' (Cienciala et al 2007, 127). At Smolensk, victims were organized into groups and sent by rail and then by bus to Katyn forest, where they were largely not afforded the charade of questions from NKVD functionaries. Most were shot immediately upon arrival at the edge of eight pits, in broad daylight and under cover of darkness. By the middle of May 1940, their graves were filled in with dirt and covered over with pine seedlings. Weeks later their executioners were given rewards equivalent to a month's salary for, in the words of one Soviet document, 'successfully completing their assignments' (ibid 272).

Just as the singular term 'Katyn' cannot convey the plural, transnational nature of the massacre, an exclusive focus on the executions themselves cannot convey the extent of the horror of the crime. In the midst of killing these Polish prisoners in cold blood, the NKVD also actively sought out their wives and children and deported them to central Asia, where many perished from malnutrition, mistreatment, and disease. In May 1940, four children who survived the arduous journey eastward appealed directly to Stalin for support and assistance, addressing him as their 'great', 'beloved father'. 'We little children are dying of hunger and we humbly ask Father Stalin not to forget about us,' they wrote from the village of Rozovka in Kazakhstan. 'We will always be good working people in the Soviet Union, only it's hard for us to live without our fathers' (Cienciala et al 2007, 198). The 'great father' had these fathers killed in Kalinin and buried at Mednoe.

This heartrending letter captures the particular perversity of the Stalinist disciplinary regime, which so often compelled the victim to honour and supplicate the victimizer. As the Russian writer Aleksandr Tvardovskii would declare sardonically in his poem 'By Right of Memory' ('Po pravu pamiati', 1966-69), 'Be thankful for your fate, whatever it may be,/ And

swear one thing: that [Stalin] is great' (Tvardovskii 1991, 111). After World War II, with their decimated country firmly within the geopolitical orbit of Soviet power, the Polish people had little choice but to honour the victimizer, to ingest the 'Pill of Murti-Bing' that reconciles one to being ruled by another in Czesław Miłosz's *The Captive Mind* (Miłosz 1953: 4-5).¹ In 1951, for instance – the same year that an investigation into the Katyn massacre was being launched in the United States Congress – Communist Poland issued a commemorative stamp adorned with the face of the man responsible for the atrocity. It featured a profile of Stalin as decorated *generalissimo* and celebratory text marking 'Polish-Soviet friendship month'.

According to the official Soviet narrative, Katyn was a 'monstrous' Nazi atrocity. This lie – known as the 'Katyn Lie,' *klamstwo katyńskie* – was the centerpiece of a relentless Soviet campaign of falsification and disinformation that spanned nearly half a century. Today it constitutes one of the longest and most extensive cover-ups of a mass murder in history. The Katyn Lie began as a fiercely defensive rejoinder to an announcement, broadcast worldwide from Berlin on 13 April 1943, that a mass grave of Polish victims of 'Bolshevik' terror had been found by German authorities near Smolensk (Cienciala et al 2007, 216). The *Wehrmacht* had seized Smolensk in the autumn of 1941 during Operation Barbarossa, and whispered rumours of burial pits in the Katyn forest soon reached German authorities, who promptly ordered an excavation. Goebbels, who apparently found the whole matter 'gruesome', gleefully remarked in his diary that the discovery would be used 'for anti-Bolshevik propaganda in a grand style' (Lochner 1948, 253).² In an effort to shame Moscow and divide the Allies, the Nazis invited the Red Cross and formed an International

¹ Originally the brainchild of writer Stanisław Ignacy Witkiewicz, the Pill of Murti-Bing is a drug that impedes the realization that the approach of the occupier is an existential danger to one's culture and civilization in the novel *Nienasylenie* (*Insatiability*).

² Western observers commented that Katyn was 'a gift to Goebbels' (Harvey 1978, 249-51).

Commission of forensic scientists to examine the burial site. In the war of perception that attended World War II, 'Katyn' became a potent weapon, a chilling refrain.

The Soviet counter-accusation was swift and vociferous. 'In launching this monstrous invention, the German-Fascist scoundrels do not hesitate at the most unscrupulous and base lies in their attempt to cover up crimes which, as has now become evident, were perpetrated by themselves' (Cienciala et al 2007, 306). Moscow responded by alleging that the bodies found in the Katyn forest were those of Poles who had been taken captive and executed by Nazi forces on Soviet territory in 1941, after the launch of Operation Barbarossa. The date – 1941 instead of 1940 – was everything to the Katyn Lie. Indeed, as we shall see in Chapter One, simply marking the Katyn tragedy as an event of 1940 would constitute a resounding protest against Soviet power in post-war Communist Poland.

Not to be outdone by Goebbels, Soviet authorities set up an investigatory commission of their own upon retaking Smolensk and its environs in 1944, which was preceded by an NKVD operation that doctored evidence and coached local witnesses (Lebedeva 2001, 429-30). The preordained conclusions of the Burdenko Commission gave cover to the Katyn Lie and emboldened Moscow to 'double down' on its claims. In 1944, for instance, the Red Army brazenly considered the formation of a new Polish tank brigade called 'the avengers of Katyn' (Sanford 2005, 206). In 1945 and 1946, they attempted to establish German guilt for Katyn at Nuremberg, only to fail spectacularly in the face of refutations drawn from witness testimony. Talk of Katyn was subsequently abandoned at the international tribunal. The Katyn Lie, however, endured. Only in 1990, when Mikhail Gorbachev handed over cartons of documents attesting to Soviet perpetration of the crime to Polish President Wojciech Jaruzelski, did the truth finally begin to emerge publicly.

The full truth, however, has yet to prevail. In 1992, the President of the Russian Federation Boris Yeltsin offered his Polish counterpart Lech Wałęsa an additional cache of

archival documents related to the massacre. Rather than closing the case, these documents confirmed the worst: namely, that there were indeed 11,000 more victims than the 10,000 announced by both the Nazis and the Soviets in 1943. Among these documents was the now-infamous decree of 5 March 1940, bearing the signatures of Stalin and Beria and condemning to death not only the ‘former Polish officers [...] who are now in the prisoner-of-war camps’ but also ‘those who have been arrested and are in the prisons of the western oblasts of Ukraine and Belorussia, numbering 11,000’ (Wosik 1992, 34-41; Cienciala et al 2007, 119-120). A letter dated 3 March 1959 from the head of the KGB Aleksandr Shelepin to Nikita Khrushchev was particularly revelatory. It proposed to ‘destroy all records of the persons shot’ in the Katyn operation, listing the following figures: ‘a total of 21,857 persons were shot; of these, 4,421 in the Katyn Forest (Smolensk Oblast), 3,820 in the camp of [Starobilsk], close to [Kharkiv], 6,311 in the camp of Ostashkov (Kalinin Oblast), and 7,305 persons [...] in other camps and prisons of western Ukraine and western Belorussia’ (Wosik 1992, 42-47; Cienciala et al 2007, 332). Whether the prisoner records identified by Shelepin were destroyed or not, these numbers remain, prompting more difficult questions. Where are the other 11,000 victims buried? How did they die? In the words of two Polish historians, in 1992 ‘the Katyn murder was drastically broadened to include people whom we had previously never connected to the idea of Katyn, about whom we simply did not know’ (Strzembosz and Jasiewicz 1992, 161).

2.

The truth of Katyn does not concern some. As we shall see in Chapter Six, Katyn deniers in Russia (and elsewhere) cling to the Katyn Lie and its assertion of Nazi guilt,

disputing the admissions made by Mikhail Gorbachev, Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin, Dmitrii Medvedev, and most recently, the entire Russian parliament, the *Duma*. They do so by pitting history against memory, by mixing pseudohistorical research with emotional appeals to Russian national pride and accusations of Polish martyrdom and greed. To understand the place of Katyn in Eastern Europe today is to come to grips with this tense, volatile interplay between history and memory. In recent years, there has been a scramble for memory in the humanities and social sciences, a ‘memory boom’ (Bell 2003) that has at times thrown the term itself into terminological chaos (Klein 2000). To clarify our usage briefly and abstractly, we refer to a supple distinction made by the historian Jay Winter. ‘History,’ he writes, ‘is memory seen through [...] documents. Memory is history seen through affect’ (Winter 2010a, 12). Defining each by way of the other, Winter underscores that history and memory are inseparable, mutually dependent phenomena. Whereas his formulation hinges on the perceptual, on a ‘seeing through’, ours hinges on the discursive, on a ‘speaking through’. History is memory spoken constatively; it abides to rules of verifiability enforced by a narrow circle of professionals, trained historians and archivists. It is truth-evaluable. Memory, meanwhile, is history spoken performatively; it abides to the poses and practices of a broad circle of priests and pilgrims, politicians and filmmakers, artists and scholars, tourists and their guides. It is not truth-evaluable. The difference between history and memory is both discursive and social; it is also a moving target. As the linguist J.L. Austin reminds us, there is always a ‘danger [in the] distinction between constative and performative utterances breaking down’. History and memory therefore cannot be confined, to borrow once more from Austin, to ‘a desert of comparative precision’ (Austin 1978, 54, 55). In the case of the Katyn massacres, as we shall see, history and memory overlap and interact with one another constantly, with fact-finding provoking meaning-making, and meaning-making perpetuating (and challenging) fact-finding.

If memory is history spoken performatively, memory studies benefits from the employment of the practices of literary and cultural studies, which are attentive to forms and strategies of representation as well as questions of audience and reception. We examine these issues by way of cinematic, literary, and memorial texts that commemorate, meditate upon, and allude to the Katyn massacres, paying close attention to what might be called the rhetoric of memory. Indeed, rhetoric is the art of persuasion, and memory persuades. Whether painful or heartening, distant or close at hand, memory persuades us of the significance of our past in order to persuade us of the certainty of our present and of the promise of our future. This rhetorical utility makes memory a powerful, and powerfully efficient, political tool. In an instant, it can transform workaday political and economic disputes into pitched battles for collective 'souls'. In the countries of today's Eastern Europe, immersed in an often subterranean conflict over their historical and present-day (in)compatibility, the memory of the Katyn tragedy is frequently put to the service of such alchemy because, in large measure, it productively travels two fundamental rhetorical trajectories: the metonymical and the metaphorical. The first involves a 'concatenation of signs along a string of contiguity'; the second, a 'substitution of one sign for one another within a sphere of similiarity' (Ricoeur 1978, 427). Colliding and colluding with one another across national borders, the Katyn metonym and Katyn metaphor have helped make a tragedy of the past an influential arbiter of the present.

In Poland, Katyn has long been read metonymically, as a part of the country's history meant to stand for the whole. The relation is one of contiguity. In the words of Józef Czapski, 'All of us [...] are bound together by an invisible chain, of which one of the final links is Katyn' (Sobolewski 2007). Or in the words of Donald Tusk, 'in a sense, we Poles are one, big Katyn family' (Tusk 2010). In today's Russia, after decades of denial and enforced forgetting, Katyn is at times deployed as a metonym as well. 'All

of Russia,' declared Sergei Karaganov in 2010, 'is one big Katyn, dotted by the largely unmarked graves of millions of victims of the [Soviet] regime'.³ The Katyn metonym in the Russian context, however, bears a painful ambivalence. Is 'all of Russia' a site of historical victimhood – or of criminality? If all of Russia is 'one big Katyn', does the Katyn massacre itself lose its specificity and singularity?

Elsewhere in Russia, Katyn resounds metaphorically, as an event meant to evoke another tragedy – the so-called 'anti-Katyn', in which thousands of Soviet POWs perished from hunger and disease in Polish camps during the Soviet-Polish War of 1919-21 (Shved 2006) – by virtue of a putative relation of similarity. The forced metaphorical equivalence between the Polish treatment of Soviet prisoners in 1919-21 and the Soviet treatment of Polish prisoners in 1939-40 has been posited by Vladimir Putin, who in 2010 rationalized the Katyn massacres as Stalin's act of revenge for Soviet losses at Polish hands. In Ukraine, Belarus, and the Baltic states, Katyn tends to be employed as a metaphor as well, albeit much differently. Vinnytsia, where the NKVD slaughtered many thousands of Ukrainians in 1937-38, has been called the 'Katyn of Ukraine'; Kaušėnų and Ablinga, where the Nazis killed a total of nearly two thousand Jews and other civilians during World War II, is a 'Lithuanian Katyn' (Kamenetsky 1989, 41; 'Dēkoju jaunimui ir visiems' 2010). The expediency of Katyn as a metaphorical vehicle by which to elucidate such tragedies is testament to the fact that, in a region replete with unmarked death pits and ignored atrocities, 'Katyn' is not unknown to the world.⁴ Whether it is truly understood remains to be seen.

The metonymicity and metaphoricity of the Katyn massacres are a natural function of their transnational execution, historical resonance, and contemporary political significance. They cannot but signify something beyond themselves. Yet the circulation of the Katyn

³ Nikolai Burdenko, who led the Soviet investigation of the Katyn graves in 1944, is also believed to have said privately that Russia's soil is full of Katyns (Sanford 2005, 139).

⁴ 'Traditionally, metaphor has been represented as a trope of transference in which an unknown or imperfectly known is clarified, defined, described in terms of a known' (Whalley 1974, 490)

metonym and the Katyn metaphor is also at times symptomatic of a failure to remember Katyn *qua* Katyn, on its own terms, in its own way. To borrow a turn of phrase from Roland Barthes: no sooner is Katyn remembered than it must resemble something (1977, 44). Over the course of the chapters ahead, we note these resemblances and follow them wherever they lead, for their itineraries mark an instructive series of differential responses to the Communist legacy in Europe. At the same time, we attend to critical moments in which Katyn's propensity for resemblance gives way to revision and change. Such moments are the consequence of what we call the *memory event*, a revisiting of the past that creates a rupture with its accepted representation.

3.

Memory events are explosive. They are not standard ritual commemorations, anniversaries, or holidays – memorial rites, in other words – whose significance and value lie in their repeatability and constancy. Such rites duplicate memories, whereas memory events generate new memories bearing the structural imprint of old ones. In contrast to Pierre Nora's 'sites of memory' (*les lieux de mémoire*), which are defined spatially, as material and non-material 'symbolic element[s] of the memorial heritage of any community' (Nora 1996, xvii), memory events are deterritorialized and temporal phenomena, moments of agitation and transformation in the public sphere that generate secondary waves and aftershocks and eventually produce revised memorial rites. Sites of memory 'stop time' by simulating eternity (Nora 1989, 19); memory events 'start time' by endowing the past with new life in the future. Memory events spring from a diverse array of genres – from films, novels, court proceedings, political announcements, textbooks. An instructive example, which is dealt with at length in this book, is the 2007 release of Andrzej Wajda's *Katyn*, a film that emerged out of the realm

of private memory to penetrate the public sphere and to change the various ways the tragedy was remembered throughout Eastern Europe. Memory events are typically secondary to the history events that they interpret, but they sometimes attain the status of history events themselves. The 2010 crash of Lech Kaczyński's plane, which was transporting nearly one hundred Poles to Katyn to mourn the massacre, is an extreme example of this conflation, by which a memory event became a history event that is today commemorated in its own right.

Memory events may be said to 'reboot' cultural memory. Much like a computer, cultural memory is dependent on an interaction between 'hardware' (e.g. monuments, plaques, street signs) and 'software' (e.g. novels, films, marches) (Etkind 2004, 2009). Monuments are inconspicuous if people are not writing about them, snapping photos of them, laying flowers at their pedestals. Marches have incomplete itineraries without a physical structure designated for commemoration and hewn from stone. Memory events reboot cultural memory by keeping this hardware and software in dialogue while refreshing and updating the code that facilitates their exchange. The memory events in the seven countries surveyed in this book have kept the Katyn massacre a highly fluid, dynamic, and contested subject of memory politics in Eastern Europe and beyond. From the Nuremberg Trials in 1946 and the US Congressional enquiry of 1951-52 to Wajda's film and Kaczyński's crash, they have sustained the memory of the massacre while ensuring that its memorial representations change in creative, unpredictable ways.

Tragedies like Katyn impose immense psychological and spiritual burdens on families and communities both bound to the victims and unrelated to them. They also impose considerable burdens on concepts, which by nature seek to define and determine what is for so many indefinable and indeterminable. As a result, the lexicon of catastrophe often eschews concepts for proper names, which work like cultural crypts, simultaneously burying the past and preventing it from dissolution. The Holocaust is one such name, the Gulag another.

'Katyn' functions in a similar way, symbolizing – to borrow from the philosopher Nicholas Abraham (1994) – the inability to symbolize. The cultural memory of such tragedies is, to an extent, an implicit struggle to compensate for this inability, to produce public symbols in the present capable of making sense of the past. In Eastern Europe many of the actors shaping this memory today did not experience the horrors of the Gulag or the tumult of World War II; in fact, some of them have no experience of the Soviet regime at all. Theirs is the generation of what Marianne Hirsch calls 'postmemory', the memory 'of those who grow up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are evacuated by the stories of the previous generation shaped by traumatic events that can be neither understood nor recreated' (Hirsch 1997, 22). Remembering things that have not happened to us: this is the work of the imagination. Postmemory in this sense has more to do with poetics than with history, which helps explain why writers like Józef Mackiewicz and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn have done more to cultivate a memory of Stalinist terror than generations of professional historians.

In the twenty-first century, many scholars of memory (Levy, Sznajder 2006; Rothberg 2010) have issued a call for us to overcome methodological nationalism, which views cultural processes as circumscribed by the nation-state. They posit that one of the most tragic and also most ethnic-bound of losses, the Holocaust, has produced an experience of mourning that has become the subject of global, cosmopolitan memory – 'memory unbound'. We see memories of Katyn and other Stalinist atrocities breaking free of the national as well. Despite a tightly-controlled public sphere, international debates and émigré activities helped to promote and consolidate the memory of Katyn in Communist Poland. More recently, Wajda's film has done much to shape an *ad hoc* memorial community that extends far beyond Poland; it has moved Ukrainian, Russian, British, American audiences alike and offered them a visceral and graphic vision of the massacre that is difficult to forget. It has helped to inspire East

European youth to march together in commemoration of Katyn and to bolster the activities of non-governmental organizations like the 'Memorial' Society, which are increasingly international in scope and reach. Such global, cosmopolitan mourning for the atrocities of the twentieth century is both a cultural reality and a moral responsibility.

Coda Katyn-2

On 10 April 2010 the Polish presidential plane went down in the forests of Smolensk, killing all 96 members of the delegation on its way to a ceremony commemorating the seventieth anniversary of the Katyn massacres. Although the Smolensk crash was an accident, the tragic result of a combination of adverse weather conditions and human error, the impulse to read the catastrophe in the light of Katyn was a powerful one. In one stroke, the crash immediately called forth seventy years of mourning for the victims of Katyn. During the initial period of shock that followed the tragedy, Lech Wałęsa was only the most famous voice in a chorus labelling the disaster ‘Katyn-2’ (Kublik 2010). Indeed, the crash would bring in its wake a new wave of encounters with the memory of Katyn.

Unintended Sacrifice

The crash took place in what former Polish president Aleksander Kwaśniewski called a ‘cursed place’ situated a few miles away from Katyn forest but at the very centre of Poland’s historical mythology of sacrifice and martyrdom. For Polish historian Andrzej Nowak (2011a), this mythology is behind the political rivalry between President Lech Kaczyński, who perished in the crash, and Prime Minister Donald Tusk over the years 2007-2010. Their rivalry marked, in a sense, a dramatic ‘return’ of history and memory to Polish public life at the turn of the twenty-first century. Both politicians *nolens volens* turned their gaze to the socialist past, diverging from the positions adopted by their predecessors Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki (1989-91), who sought to draw a ‘thick line’ between past and present, and President Aleksander Kwaśniewski (1995-2005), whose electoral slogan ‘Let’s

Choose the Future' called upon Poles to look ahead, not back. In the wake of a series of historical controversies, from the debates over the 1941 Jedwabne pogrom to periodic scandals connected to documents uncovered in the archives of the Communist security service, such positions became untenable.

Alongside his twin brother Jarosław, Lech Kaczyński was one of the most politically active proponents of this historical mythology of sacrifice and martyrdom, which imagines Poland as the Christ of nations and its suffering at the hands of Russia and Germany as a national Golgotha. Their Law and Justice (PiS) party – which won both parliamentary and presidential elections in 2005 – has called for active state intervention in defence of Polish collective memory (Brier 2009) and, to some degree, cultivated a sense of moral panic around the idea of a crisis of Polish memory. A group of conservative historians and philosophers provided the ideological underpinnings for this platform (e.g. Cichocki *Power and Memory* 2005; Merta *Memory and Responsibility* 2005; *Polish History Policy* 2004) (Tokarz 2011). Lech Kaczyński had a keen sense of a mission to restore Polish memory and to educate the world about Polish history (Niżyńska 2010, 472-4). This mission was made manifest in one of his projects as Mayor of Warsaw (2002-05), the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising, which is noted for, among other things, its willingness to draw upon popular culture, from rap music to comic books, in order to make history more appealing to Polish youth (see, for instance, www.1944.pl). Similarly, the 2004 commemorations of the Warsaw Uprising that he organized had a significant resonance in Polish society. Focusing on the sacrificial heroism of the Poles and blaming the Soviet Union for neglecting to help this major anti-Nazi rebellion, these commemorations convinced many Polish politicians and intellectuals of the need for a robust memory policy that would be a cornerstone not only of domestic policy, but of foreign policy as well (Gawin and Kowal 2004). As president (2005-10), Lech Kaczyński took issues of memory to the international stage, condemning the Putin regime for a creeping

rehabilitation of the Stalinist and Soviet legacies. In September 2009, he hosted a ceremony in Gdańsk to commemorate the onset of World War II. Among the heads of state in attendance were Vladimir Putin and Angela Merkel. In opening the proceedings, Kaczyński emphasized the symbolic role of Katyn and compared it to the Holocaust. ‘What is the comparison between the Holocaust and Katyn?’ he asked. ‘Jews died because they were Jews. Polish officers were killed because they were Polish officers’ (Day 2009). Putin, of course, did not pursue this idea in his own remarks, emphasizing instead the number of Soviet losses during the war (Mal’gin 2009; Etkind 2009).

Once Donald Tusk became premier in 2007, however, Polish policy towards Russia bifurcated. Tusk is, after all, a trained historian who in 1987 ridiculed the Polish ‘Romantic-imperial-messianic’ tradition as a ‘pathetic-grim-grotesque theatre of unfulfilled dreams and ungrounded longings’. In his view, Poland’s national task is to find its place in ‘the end of history’ and, more specifically, to play the pragmatic role of mediator between the European Union and its trading partner Russia (Nowak 2011a). His minister for culture and national heritage, Bogdan Zdrojewski, once proclaimed that Poland should not become ‘a country of necropolises and museums’ (Smolar 2008, 61). The remark was a thinly veiled reference to Lech Kaczyński’s politics of memory, a politics driven, in the view of Tusk and his allies, by a morbid fascination with victimhood and bloodshed (Romanowski 2010b).

Tusk’s Civic Platform (PO) – which was elected to government in 2007 and, as of November 2011, also holds the presidency – has sought to depart from the Romantic model of Polish memory and identity, viewing it as an obstacle to Poland’s development and European integration, on the one hand, and an obstacle to the creation of viable economic relations with Russia, on the other. Tusk has framed this cleavage in terms of modernity vs anachronism (Nowak 2011a). Historians in this camp – such as Paweł Machcewicz, the director of the planned Museum of World War II, which Tusk announced in late 2007 would

be built in his home town of Gdańsk – argued that the time had come to correct the Kaczyński government’s excessive focus on Soviet crimes against Poles. Kaczyński had created a ‘completely false image’ of World War II in Poland whereby the German crimes were pushed ‘into the shadows... as somehow less deserving of memory’. Writing in the wake of the Smolensk crash, Machcewicz (2010) asserted that the real state of Polish collective memory was closer to historical truth than the version propagated by PiS.

This deep ideological and memorial bifurcation in Polish politics was clearly manifested in Tusk and Kaczyński’s duelling commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre in 2010. They were scheduled three days apart from one another: Tusk flew to Katyn on 7 April, Kaczyński on 10 April. (The discrepant timing of their trips is, to an extent, a legacy of the Katyn Lie: for decades, the precise dates of massacre were unknown. In Poland, for instance, the nationwide commemorative date observed by decision of the Polish parliament is 13 April, when the Germans announced their discovery of the mass graves in 1943.) Only on 3 February 2010, well after his itinerary had been confirmed, did Kaczyński become aware of the plans for Tusk and Putin’s preemptive meeting. Despite the divisive political posturing around the event, Kaczyński prepared a conciliatory speech for his commemoration ceremony on 10 April. Still speaking of ‘the Polish Golgotha of the East’ and framing Katyn the ‘most tragic station [of the Cross]’, the Polish president nonetheless expressed the wish that ‘the Katyn wound [would now] finally heal and cicatrize’. Typically a memory hawk, Kaczyński even wrote in this last text that ‘we’ – by which he meant both Poles and Russians – ‘are already on the way’ toward such healing. He was killed before he was able to give his speech praising the Russians for ‘what they have done in the past years’ with respect to Katyn (Kaczyński 2010).⁵

⁵ Kaczyński was also to have decorated Russian activists from the ‘Memorial’ Society during his stay in Smolensk (‘Katynskii rok’ 2010).

It is in the context of Kaczyński's sacrificial discourse that his own accidental death became so meaningful. The magnitude of the disaster and its extraordinary location made the crash at Smolensk-Severnyi airport on 10 April a memory event of unique intensity. Adam Michnik (2010) described the powerful outpouring of emotions released by the disaster: 'The Smolensk catastrophe broke something in our Polish and Russian hearts. In the hearts of the leaders and of regular people. It was as if a gigantic dam opened – a dam behind which unexpressed words and gestures were piled up'. Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs Radosław Sikorski likewise announced an 'emotional breakthrough' in Russian-Polish relations (Kulish and Levy 2010). In this way, the last station of the 'Golgotha of the East' offered redemption and freed both sides from their entrenched positions. Rather than cicatrizing the wound, the crash opened it once more, but in this opening it promised the possibility of healing.

Russia Responds

The spontaneous outpouring of grief on the Russian side was perhaps the most striking consequence of the crash. Traffic routes surrounding the Polish Embassy in Moscow had to be closed off because so many mourners had rushed there to lay flowers and sign the book of condolences (Kolesnichenko et al 2010). Similar scenes were witnessed in other cities throughout Russia (Rogoża 2010). This mass public performance of grief was also an act of mourning for the victims of Russia's own traumatic past. One Russian newspaper headline, 'A Doubling of Grief', played on the doublings and repetitions at work: not only had Smolensk 2010 amplified the echo of the Katyn of 1940 and provoked an outpouring of Polish grief, but it had unlocked and unleashed Russian grief as well (Kolesnichenko et al 2010). For Russian journalist Ol'ga Allenova, these events seemed to indicate that Russian

memory had entered a new phase, which might one day make it possible for her to find and visit the unknown grave of her great-grandfather, a victim of Stalinist terror (Allenova 2010). As a journalist at the influential Polish daily *Gazeta Wyborcza* remarked, ‘Today Russia is weeping together with us. In Russia things are happening which Poles are looking at in amazement... Russia has opened up to Poland, but also to itself, to its history and to a coming to terms [*na rozrachunek*] with Stalinism’ (Kurski 2010).

A key motif in the Russian commentary on the new tragedy near Katyn was the feeling of release engendered by the sense that something deeply significant had happened: something had ‘shifted’ [*sdivinulos*] after the crash, in the words of Russian poet, journalist and scholar Lev Rubinshtein (‘Posle tragedii’ 2010). It was the uncannily iterative nature of the event – a ‘Katyn-2’ – that was at the core of its perception. A Polish public address to the Russian people issued shortly after the crash acknowledged this strange metaphysical doubling: ‘Both these events are united by location and by pain, and if the first was the result of Stalinist terror, which also affected Russians themselves, then the second proved to be a misfortune for which we cannot blame the masters of the Russian land’ (Miasnikov 2010). In effect, this time around, things could be done differently. The victims and the bereaved would be treated with care and respect. The newly dead would be given a decent burial. In so doing, the Katyn dead might perhaps finally also be laid to rest. The Russian authorities, and the Russian public, assumed the role of friend to the victim, recognizing and acknowledging pain and showing respect for suffering and grief.

The response on the part of Russian authorities was marked by strong expressions of empathy and solidarity. Pledges were made to ensure a swift, transparent investigation of the crash, and extensive support was provided to the victims’ families. In an unprecedented gesture, President Medvedev declared 12 April a nationwide day of mourning, and the Russian parliament observed a moment of silence. Even more importantly, Wajda’s *Katyn*

was broadcast for the first time in a primetime Sunday evening slot on Russian state television on 11 April. (As noted in Chapter Six, before the crash the film had been shown only on the *Kul'tura* arts and culture channel). Polish academic Włodzimierz Marciniak interpreted the decision to re-screen *Katyn* as a desperate move aimed at warding off suspicions of Russian involvement in the crash (Marciniak 2010) and to send ‘a signal to the world that the [Katyn] problem had been solved’ (‘Rosja’ 2010). Whatever the motivation, the results were impressive: fourteen million Russians watched the film in the two screenings (‘Świat ogląda “Katyn”’ 2010). Previously opinion polls had found that less than a quarter of Russians had heard of Katyn (Moshkin 2010); by mid-April this figure rose to 74 percent. The number of people who remained unaware or unconvinced that the massacres were carried out by the NKVD, however, was still surprisingly high (Levinson 2010).⁶ Wajda later said that he considered the screening of *Katyn* on Russian state television to be one of the greatest achievements of his career: ‘Just as Russia is searching for a way out of [...] Soviet epoch, my film is in some sense taking part in this process’ (Rokossovskaja and Lisinova 2011; Rokossovskaja 2010).

Post-Smolensk Poland

⁶ Responses to the question ‘Who, in your opinion, organized the executions of the Polish officers in Katyn?’ were divided as follows: the Stalinist leadership of the USSR: 35%; the Hitlerite leadership of Germany: 18%; and ‘don’t know/no opinion’: 47%. The results for the under-25 age group were especially striking: for this group, the proportion of those responding ‘don’t know/no opinion’ was even higher (56%). Moreover, more young people identified the perpetrators as German (23%) rather than Soviet (21%) responsible. Respondents were also asked whether they had heard that NKVD responsibility for the massacres had been established in documentary form. Forty-seven percent said they were unaware of this, while another 28% said they had heard this but were unconvinced (Levinson 2010).

The unity in grief elicited by the catastrophe was intense but short-lived. It soon broke down, exposing fault-lines that now, in a paradoxical turn of events, only seemed to have been aggravated by the plane crash. In Poland, these divisions were first manifested in the protests which followed the announcement that the remains of Lech Kaczyński and his wife were to be buried in Krakow's Wawel Cathedral, a site traditionally reserved for the burial of Polish monarchs and national heroes (see Niżyńska 2010). This announcement sparked off the first in a long series of battles over the meaning of the Smolensk crash.

For many Poles, the victims were killed on a pilgrimage, en route to a memorial rite of great significance. It is no exaggeration to say that many of them had devoted their life's work to the struggle for the memory of Katyn. Among the victims were the leading figures in that struggle, the heads of the major Katyn groups and institutions described in Chapter One, such as Andrzej Sariusz-Skapski, the head of the Federation of Katyn Families; Andrzej Przewoźnik, head of the ROPWiM and the driving force behind the construction of the Polish Katyn cemeteries in Russia and Ukraine; Janusz Kurtyka, head of the Institute for National Remembrance; Tomasz Merta, historian and Deputy Minister for Culture and National Heritage; the leaders of the Katyn Committee and the Polish Katyn Foundation. President Kaczyński gathered and led this group of enthusiasts of memory, and clearly belonged to it. Should their deaths be remembered as a kind of martyrdom in the service of the memory of Katyn? The surviving families of some of the victims were determined that this should be the case, and formed the Katyn 2010 Families' Association. The name of this association has provoked a conflict with the Federation of Katyn Families, which disputes the new group's right to use the Katyn name.

The crash rent asunder the configuration of political forces in Poland. The positing of a direct line of continuity between the two events, Katyn-1 and Katyn-2, became a political bone of contention in the months following the crash. Efforts to bury Lech Kaczyński at

Wawel Castle on the banks of the Vistula River in Krakow – to install him, in effect, in a pantheon of great Polish leaders and martyrs – was the first sortie in a new memory war. Some of those who protested the burial at Wawel broke the taboo against speaking ill of the dead in spectacular fashion, rallying on the streets dressed in oversized faux crowns and bearing banners with slogans like ‘Bury me in Wawel too!’ Images from advertising billboards promoting ‘Lech’ beer with the slogan ‘A Cold Lech’, which appeared (apparently coincidentally) near the Presidential Palace in Warsaw around the time of the crash, went ‘viral’ on the Polish internet (Murawski 2011).⁷ Later, the government announced that a cross erected by scout groups near the castle in April in memory of the Smolensk crash would be relocated, providing a rallying point for those who refused to accept that the crash was accidental and who instead viewed it as another act of Russian violence against Poles.

This attempt to move this makeshift cross incited a long protest, which became emblematic of the struggle over the meaning of the Smolensk catastrophe. Jarosław Kaczyński asserted that ‘[i]f president Komorowski removes the cross, it will be clear who he is and which side he is on in debates concerning Polish history and Polish relations’ (Olszewska and Szpala 2010). For the protesters who gathered in support of the cross, the crash at Smolensk was inextricably entwined with the Katyn massacre. They bore banners reading ‘Wake up Poland!’, ‘Katyn Isn’t Over’, and ‘Are the Traitors and the NKVD So Powerful?’. They pledged to defend the cross ‘to the death’. The resulting stand-off, which was punctuated by periodic flare-ups, dragged on through the summer of 2010. Here Poland’s distinctive and highly performative memory culture was strongly in evidence. The self-styled ‘defenders of the cross’ tied themselves to the cross, wept and shouted, at times coming to physical blows with young participants of counter-protests, some of whom mocked and provoked the cross defenders. Other protesters saw the conflict as an opportunity to assert a

⁷ The producers maintain that this was an advertising campaign that had been planned months earlier (Odorczyk 2010).

secular Polish identity based on a strict separation of Church and state. The right place for a cross, they said, was a church.

These struggles were recorded in the documentary film *Solidarni 2010* and its sequel *The Cross* (Stankiewicz and Pospieszalski 2010, 2011), which aimed at demanding ‘the truth about Smolensk’. The conservative media hailed Ewa Stankiewicz, who directed both films, as Poland’s new Antigone (Leszczyński 2011). (For the meaning of Antigone for Wajda and his film *Katyn*, see Chapter Two.) Stankiewicz’s films purported to be authentic, unscripted footage of the spontaneous responses of ordinary Poles to the crash. Yet the newspaper *Gazeta Wyborcza*, a vocal opponent of the political instrumentalization of the Smolensk crash by the PiS camp, claimed that one Pole shown in the film sobbing as he alleged Putin had ‘blood on his hands’ was in fact a professional soap-opera actor (‘Solidarni-2010’ 2010). Since then, ‘Solidarni-2010’ rallies have featured banners proclaiming, in a surreal, metaperformative fashion, ‘We are not actors!’ Polish theatre scholar Dariusz Kosiński subsequently called these events ‘political street theatre’, enumerating the uncanny ways in which the proponents of the Smolensk myth were acting out the great works of Poland’s literary canon. To an extent, his critique evoked the rhetoric that Tusk had employed over two decades earlier in his historical work:

We are concluding a pact with the dead... [The poet Mickiewicz asserted that] specific for the religiosity of Slavs is belief in vampires [and] werewolves [that exist] between the living and the dead and are capable of influencing the living. Those who see an element of predestination in the post-Smolensk drama [...] are scratching at their wounds (Kosiński 2011; see also Mikołajko 2011, ‘Stasiuk’ 2011).

The hostile relations between Tusk and Lech Kaczyński, their respective relations with Russia, and the macabre character of the Smolensk catastrophe fed various conspiracy theories that proliferated on the Internet and in the tabloid press (Chaciński 2010). These conspiracy theories invoked and in various ways acted out the memory of the Katyn massacre. Jarosław Kaczyński, Lech's twin brother who became the new head of the PiS party after the crash, insisted that the Katyn massacre and the crash at Smolensk be read as two consecutive chapters in the same story.⁸ In fact, he used the term 'crime' (*zbrodnia*), the conventional Polish label for the Katyn massacres, to refer to the crash. Speaking at the funeral of one of the Smolensk victims, he proclaimed that 'we must bear witness – just like the generation shot in Katyn forest and like those who perished seventy years later, wishing to pay respect to [that generation]' (Pilawski 2011). He moderated this rhetoric as a candidate in the Polish presidential elections over the course of the summer 2010, only to resurrect it again after his loss to Bronisław Komorowski, who, incidentally, is a trained historian like his ally Donald Tusk. Kaczyński in fact blamed his defeat on a campaign manager who had advised him not to use the Smolensk theme (Uhlig 2010). Kaczyński's Law and Justice (PiS) party would go on to speak of the 'Smolensk assassination', advocating, with clear references to Katyn, a duty to fight for the right to remember the dead and to pursue memory in the face of those determined to falsify and obliterate it. The 'Smolensk Lie', echoing the 'Katyn Lie' of the Communist era, became a new political catchphrase.

One of the first to give a full articulation of this new 'Smolensk myth' was Polish conservative politician and publicist Ludwik Dorn. In a series of articles and interviews in May and June 2010, Dorn made the case for viewing Smolensk as a 'blood sacrifice'. A trained sociologist, Dorn argued that, given the relatively bloodless nature of Poland's

⁸ Politicians were not the only one giving credence to conspiracy theories. Even veteran campaigners who fought the Katyn Lie in the Communist era in both Poland and Russia lent their authority to allegations of Russian foul play or at the very least deliberate obfuscation of the circumstances of the crash (Bukovskii 2010; Trznadel 2010).

transition from Communism, the Polish Third Republic had hitherto lacked a foundation myth based on bloodshed, without which any state would ultimately remain unconvincing, in his view (Dorn 2010, Brzezicki 2010). Previously, bitter conflicts had been fought over the creation of a foundation myth for independent Poland. While political moderates based it on the 1989 Round Table Talks that had negotiated an end to Communism, Lech Kaczyński sought to promote in its place the heroic Warsaw Uprising, viewed by many of his opponents as an emblem of the futility of the romantic Polish tradition. According to Dorn, however, both of these events had been overshadowed by Smolensk in its role of the foundational event.

One opponent of the mythologization of Smolensk commented bitterly, ‘The Russians do not provoke us into uprisings any more; nowadays we provoke ourselves into them. Our political scavengers fed off the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising; today they are feeding on Smolensk’ (Michalski 2010). Indeed, the notion of Smolensk as blood sacrifice inextricably connected to the memory of Katyn was a common motif in responses to the crash. In a homily, priest Marian Putyra asked, for instance, ‘Has that Katyn earth demanded still more Polish blood?! How much more of that blood needs to be spilt in order that the truth about that drama be finally made clear?’ (‘Ile ofiar’ 2010). As Bishop of Świdnica Ignacy Dec commented on 11 April 2010, ‘We hope that this sacrifice of the life of our best sons and daughters will help to show the world the truth [about Katyn]’ (Szostkiewicz 2010, 22-23). Thus for some in Poland, the crash was inscribed into the Polish tradition of martyrdom and packaged as a critical ‘history lesson’ for the European Union. For others, however, this bloodshed could be used to transform Polish-Russian relations. In the words of Adam Michnik, ‘Today, out of the blood that was spilled seventy years ago at Katyn and again last Saturday at Smolensk, an authentic community of Polish and Russian fates is being born’ (Michnik 2010).

New president Bronisław Komorowski, who defeated Jarosław Kaczyński in the 2010, declared that his history policy would be aimed at uniting, not dividing, Polish society ('Prezydent Komorowski' 2010). His historical advisor, Tomasz Nałęcz, asserted that Komorowski opposed the use of history as a political weapon, even though he personally shared many of Lech Kaczyński's views about the past (Pilawski 2011b). Komorowski's political will was soon put to the test by events surrounding the ninetieth anniversary of the 1920 Battle of Warsaw of the Soviet-Polish War (1919-21), in which many Red Army POWs were killed. The event of these Red Army deaths has been framed by some in Russia as an 'anti-Katyn'; indeed, as we noted in Chapter Six, Vladimir Putin and others have rationalized the Katyn massacre as Stalin's revenge for these Red Army losses. Komorowski's office focused the commemorative ceremonies not on the Polish victory over the Red Army, but on the unveiling of a new monument built at the site where the remains of twenty-two Red Army soldiers had been discovered two years earlier on a battlefield in Ossów, near Warsaw. A symbol of Polish-Russian reconciliation, the monument was intended to reciprocate the establishment of the memorial complexes at Katyn and Mednoe.

While they pre-dated the Smolensk crash, the plans for the monument became prominent after the catastrophe due to a renewed public focus on Soviet war graves on Polish soil. On 9 May 2010, a large group of Polish intellectuals and civic figures – including Archbishop Józef Życiński, filmmaker Andrzej Wajda, poet and Nobel Prize laureate Wisława Szymborska, the first post-Communist prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki – issued a controversial 'Appeal' spearheaded by *Gazeta Wyborcza*. The Appeal called upon young Poles to light candles at Soviet war graves on Victory Day as a mark of respect and gratitude for the Russian response to Smolensk. Critics of this Appeal feared that it presaged a wholesale capitulation to the Russian narrative of the Red Army's liberation of Poland. Historian Adam Hlebowicz commented, for instance, 'I cannot understand at all the linkage

being drawn between lighting candles on the graves of Soviet soldiers and the remembrance by Russians of the presidential plane victims... I have the impression that in the candle-lighting action we are dealing with ideology. But what kind, and in whose service?' (Hlebowicz 2010, 174).

The Ossów monument took the form of a large Orthodox cross and twenty-two granite bayonets sticking out from of the earth. For historian Andrzej Nowak, the form of the monument represented an act of violence against the dead and served as yet another manifestation of a 'stubborn relativization of the Katyn crime' sponsored by Putin (Nowak 2011b). Following vandalism and protests, the ceremony at Ossów had to be postponed, and the Russian ambassador's car turned back at the last moment (Sroczyński 2010). The monument was vandalized again, but finally unveiled on 2 November 2010, the twenty-two granite bayonets now replaced by twenty-two candle-holders.⁹ The Orthodox cross, which Nowak describes as a 'giant question-mark' over the graves, remains in place (Nowak 2011a).

Post-Smolensk Russia

Meanwhile, in Russia, the post-Smolensk opening made possible new official postures toward the memory of Stalinism, a point that the Russian parliament formally acknowledged in its resolution on Katyn in November 2011. According to some, the outpouring of support and grief after the crash 'humanized' Russia in the eyes of Poland and the international community. Polish commentaries spoke, for instance, of 'Russia's new face'

⁹ It was defaced once more on the anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Poland in September 2011 with graffiti that read, 'You cut them down with the sickle, you finished them off with the hammer – Katyn 2010' (Sroczyński 2011).

(Romanowski 2010a) and ‘the Russia of emotions, of compassion, of the human impulse towards help and solidarity’ (Sienkiewicz 2010). As Russian journalist Viktor Shenderovich (2010) remarked, ‘Perhaps no one was expecting anything but vileness from us. And we succeeded in pleasantly surprising the Poles’. The warmth of the international response to the Russian handling of the Smolensk crash served as an important lesson for Moscow, highlighting the considerable political capital to be gained by technical and historical transparency. A draft of the ‘de-Stalinization programme’ produced by President Dmitrii Medvedev’s advisers in 2011, for instance, cited the Katyn case as a model of demonstrating how Russia might profitably use memory politics in order to strengthen the country’s ‘international prestige’. The document notes that:

The President’s condemnation of the totalitarian regime and the Prime Minister’s genuflection before the Katyn cross have already played an obvious positive role. Having recognized that the whole of Russia is a ‘big Katyn’, having begun to extend gestures of respect to the victims of the totalitarian regime independently, voluntarily, without coercion, the country can only arouse respect on the part of all normal people and nations (‘Obshchenatsional’naia gosudarstvennaia-obshchestvennaia programma’ 2011).

In late June 2010, Konstantin Kosachev, chair of the Russian parliamentary committee for international affairs, argued that Russia caused damage to its reputation by defending the Soviet past on the international arena. Kosachev advocated instead the formulation of a new ‘historical doctrine’ that would be couched in terms comprehensible to Russia’s foreign partners. He argued that such a strategy could protect Russia against future demands for compensation for the victims of Soviet crimes (Kosachev 2010). As discussed in

Chapter Six, in July 2010, Sergei Karaganov, an expert in international relations and influential lobbyist, deployed the Katyn metonym in an article entitled the ‘The Russian Katyn’. In unusually strong words, he called upon Russia to ‘find within herself the strength to admit that the whole of Russia is one big Katyn, strewn with the mostly nameless graves of millions of the victims of the [Soviet] regime’. Karaganov argued that much remained to be done in order to overcome the legacy of the twentieth century; in fact, he framed the failure to do so as ‘one of the main roots of our problems’. He called for Russia to be ‘strewn with monuments to the victims of Soviet Stalinism’ and for crosses or other monuments to the victims of Stalinism to be erected alongside monuments to fallen soldiers. He also suggested that young people be mobilized for this task:

a truly patriotic youth movement, which would seek out the names of these fellow citizens of ours and return them to us, so that they might be etched into these obelisks. This could also become a movement uniting the peoples [...] After all the regime destroyed the best people from all peoples [...] Everyone could be found amongst the butchers too (Karaganov 2010).

Responding in the pages of *Gazeta Wyborcza*, journalist Waclaw Radziwinowicz noted that Karaganov’s article marked a considerable departure from comments he delivered in Poznań two years earlier. ‘Poles simply have a Katyn complex’, he was quoted as saying. ‘They must cure themselves of it on their own’ (Radziwinowicz 2010). An article in the newspaper *Rzeczpospolita* gave an extended version of his remarks: ‘You have a Katyn complex [...] you must cure yourselves of it. We are not your doctors. I will remind you that we were not [the only ones] who created the Cheka, the forerunner of the KGB: there were [also] Poles, Lithuanians and one Latvian in it’

(de Lazari 2010). According to other Polish publications, Karaganov also said that '[w]e admit that Stalin murdered [the Polish prisoners], Putin even apologized for this, though I do not completely understand why. Unofficially we apologized long ago. We do not want, however, to do so publicly, because you will immediately start to demand compensation' (Radziwinowicz 2010). These Polish responses faulted Karaganov for his inconsistent comments, but they did not attend to a more profound issue at the heart of his use of the Katyn metonym. While admirable in its confrontation with the Stalinist past, Karaganov's claim that 'the whole of Russia is one big Katyn' threatens to deprive the Katyn massacre of its specificity. Unlike many other crimes perpetrated across the vast Soviet territory, the Katyn massacre was, after all, an act of mass murder directed against foreign nationals in an undeclared war.

Putin's return to the Kremlin in 2012 likely means that Medvedev's new de-Stalinization programme will not be realized. Nonetheless, the case illustrates the way in which the Smolensk crash created an opportunity to forge a template for a new narrative of the history of Soviet state terror, which could help with Russia's plans to project 'soft power' around the globe. Karaganov's formulation of the 'all-Russian Katyn', however, is far from being commonly accepted among the Russian populace. As recently as 2011, Russian tabloids and Communist newspapers circulated a competing narrative of events in which the Smolensk crash was cast as the consequence of 'stirring up' the past. The narrative aspires to the status of morality tale, positing that Lech Kaczyński, who saw himself as fulfilling a sacred mission to restore Polish memory and educate the world about Polish history, brought about the crash by showing an unseemly, unnatural level of interest in the past. Indeed, on the first anniversary of his death, *Pravda* linked the Smolensk catastrophe to Kaczyński's 'excessive attention to issues of history in current politics', asserting that '[i]n a mystical way, near Smolensk, at an historical site, the lover of history Lech Kaczyński himself become

part of history'. According to *Pravda*, 'Lech Kaczyński lived in the captivity of historical myths, built his whole politics in accordance with historical myths, and endlessly speculated on the problems of the past. And now his death has been transformed into a new Polish myth' ('Lekh Kachin'skii' 2011).

Smolensk One Year On

Sadly, the outpouring of shared grief after the Smolensk crash was only an abortive catharsis in Polish-Russian relations. A year after the crash, the good will generated by the Russian response in the days following the crash has largely dissipated and given way to mutual provocations, accusations, and suspicions. This dynamic in Polish-Russian memory politics was strongly in evidence in the lead-up to the first anniversary of the crash, which was plagued by a series of scandals. The first was caused by Zuzanna Kurtyka, widow of Janusz Kurtyka, the head of the Polish Institute for National Remembrance who died in the Smolensk crash. Since her husband's death, Zuzanna Kurtyka has been a vocal and active fighter for the 'truth' about Smolensk. In the months following the crash, she was a prominent fixture in the media, functioning as an iconic personification of Poland's grief. At one point, she revealed that her husband Janusz had predicted that if he ever went to Russia, he would never return (Kurtyka 2010).

Zuzanna Kurtyka sees a direct link between Smolensk and Katyn and foregrounds it in the name of the support and lobbying group that she founded in late June 2010, the Association of Katyn 2010 Families. In November 2010, she and other widows from the Katyn 2010 group mounted a plaque to the victims of the crash during a pilgrimage to Smolensk on a memorial stone that the Governor of Smolensk had placed at the airport as a

gesture of sympathy. The text of their Polish-language plaque included a phrase describing the Katyn massacre as ‘genocide’. They apparently travelled to Russia carrying an electric drill and a generator for the express purpose of applying the plaque to the stone, without seeking permission or approval to do so. The Russian Foreign Ministry duly protested their actions, and the local policemen who failed to stop Kurtyka and her colleagues were reportedly dismissed over the incident (Radziwinowicz 2011). The plaque was left in place, however, until the night before President Komorowski’s wife was to arrive for official commemorations of the first anniversary of the crash. At this time, the plaque was removed under cover of darkness and replaced by a bilingual Polish-Russian plaque which made no mention of Katyn or genocide (Sokolov 2011).

Kurtyka’s actions evoke the Antigone sequence in Wajda’s *Katyn* (see Chapter Two), in which a Katyn victim’s sister inscribes the true facts of her brother’s death on his tombstone. The mounting and dismounting of the plaque was symmetrically aggressive and provocative, confirming for some the Russian stereotype of the Pole as determined at all costs to ‘spoil’ the prospects of harmonious relations and confirming for others the Polish stereotype of Russian officialdom as unable to admit its crimes.¹⁰ While newspapers in Moscow expressed outrage that foreigners dared to enter Russia with a drill, Polish academic Włodzimierz Marciniak alleged that the Russian side had undertaken a ‘professionally conducted political provocation’. Marciniak described this ‘provocation’ as very much in keeping with the contradictory and inconsistent history politics that Russia had been pursuing with regard to Poland for at least a year (‘Prof. Włodzimierz Marciniak’ 2011, ‘Marciniak’ 2011). Komorowski’s historical advisor Nałęcz said that the Russian response had thrown relations ‘back to the neolithic period’ as far as the Katyn issue was concerned. He noted that

¹⁰ Ol’ga Maiorova has traced the process whereby the Poles were labeled the Slavic family’s ‘vyrodok’ (‘black sheep’) due to their Western orientation in the 1860s and the threat that their resistance posed to narratives of the Russian empire as a peace-loving liberator (Maiorova 2001).

this development was particularly frustrating given that the dialogue on Katyn had been ‘only a few steps’ from its definitive resolution (‘To nas cofa do neolitu’ 2011). Meanwhile, Polish Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski, among others, soberly criticized the Katyn 2010 group for mounting the plaque unilaterally, without seeking Russian agreement. Sikorski was in turn condemned for ‘attacking widows’ (‘Sikorski atakuje wdowy’ 2011).

The scandal prompted protests near the Russian Embassy in Warsaw, where the crowd branded Putin a ‘murderer’ and Tusk a ‘traitor’ and burned Putin in effigy (Asadchii and Chernenko 2011).¹¹ In Moscow, a popular newspaper described Polish society as ‘on the brink of a nervous breakdown’ and ‘tormented by schizophrenic delirium’ brought on by months of Russophobic media campaigns (Aslamova 2011). All of these events threatened to jeopardize President Komorowski’s participation in the official anniversary commemoration ceremonies at Smolensk. There were reports that Komorowski refused to lay a wreath at the airport memorial stone as planned (Pashina and Lutchenkova 2011). A compromise option was devised, with the Polish and Russian presidents laying wreaths at a ‘memorial birch tree’ instead (Skwieciński 2011). The ‘genocide’ plaque that unleashed the scandal was eventually retrieved by the Katyn 2010 group and moved to the Katyn Chapel in the Warsaw Basilica of the Holy Cross and then to Poland’s most important religious pilgrimage site, Jasna Góra Monastery. It featured prominently in the Family Pilgrimage ceremonies organized by the influential conservative Catholic radio station Radio Maryja in the summer of 2011, taking up a place in the ranks of Katyn’s sacred relics.

¹¹ In May 2011, in an apparent retaliation against the ‘genocide plaque’ episode, unknown actors placed a plaque commemorating the deaths of Russian soldiers in Polish captivity on a memorial stone in Poland marking the 90th anniversary of Polish independence. The Russian-language inscription responded to the Polish assertion of ‘genocide’ with a reference to ‘Polish death camps’, setting into stone a particular memory of the past meant to provoke conflict and outrage in the present. As pointed out by Nikita Petrov, a historian from the ‘Memorial’ Society, the mounting of this new plaque realized a scenario that the Russian Foreign Ministry envisioned in a statement issued during the genocide plaque scandal: ‘We can only imagine what the reaction of the Polish authorities would be if someone were to place any kind of emblem without permission on memorial sites in Poland’ (Skwieciński and Zalesiński 2011).

This odd incident ultimately sparked a new round of debates over how to classify the Katyn massacres. The Polish Foreign Ministry adheres to the Institute of National Remembrance's 2004 definition of the massacres as genocide (Wroński 2011). This official position was called into question in April, after Andrzej Wajda and presidential advisor Roman Kuźniar each stated that they did not consider Katyn to be a genocide ('Wajda o Katyniu' 2011). Responding in an open letter, a group of politicians and publicists called for Kuźniar's dismissal and demanded that President Komorowski clarify his position on this issue (Wroński 2011; 'Politycy i publicyści' 2011). Komorowski's office responded by confirming its adherence to the 'genocide' classification ('Sovetnik prezidenta' 2011).

Following the crash, references to Katyn emerged in surprising and sometimes baffling contexts. These references telescoped time and shuffled Katyn with the Smolensk crash and other central events in modern Polish history, from the Warsaw Uprising to Martial Law. In January 2011, upon the release of an international report on the causes of the crash, one PiS official compared the findings to a 'shot to the back of the head' ('PiS ostro o raporcie MAK' 2011). Such attempts to frame the Smolensk catastrophe according to the Katyn template and the 'lacrimogenetic' narrative of foreign occupations and uprisings reached Brussels in 2011, when the PiS party staged a photographic exhibition in the European Parliament to mark the first anniversary of the Smolensk catastrophe. Entitled 'Truth and Memory', the exhibition featured, for instance, a photograph of an officer using a crowbar to destroy a window, apparently making a joyful gesture towards his friends. Its initial caption read: 'The Russians destroyed the wreck of the plane which crashed near Smolensk on 10 April 2010'. Other captions drew direct connections between Smolensk and Katyn: 'Many Poles calls the catastrophe at Smolensk the second Katyn. The Polish elite perished in both tragic events. All of them lost their lives in Russia' ('Awantura' 2011).

Before the opening of the exhibition, these captions were removed by officials of the European Parliament.

The Katyn massacre haunts the *White Book of the Smolensk Tragedy*, which was published in the summer of 2011 by the Polish parliament's Group for the Study of the Causes of the Smolensk Catastrophe, a PiS initiative dating to July 2010. The Group was led by Antoni Macierewicz, who referred to the crash as a crime (*zbrodnia*) from the outset (Potkaj 2010). The release of the *White Book* was seemingly timed to upstage a rival parliamentary investigation headed by Jerzy Miller whose report on the crash was due to be presented to Tusk shortly afterwards (Lewandowska 2011). Macierewicz claims that the *White Book* is not a report but a collection of documents, compiled in defense of the public's right to factual information about the catastrophe. The facts gathered in the book are clearly intended to suggest that Lech Kaczyński was murdered precisely for his historical policy on Katyn. The book's appendix, for example, includes various quotations from September 2009 in which Kaczyński described Katyn as a crime of genocide (*Biała księga* 2011, 25-6), suggesting a causal connection between these statements and the events of 10 April 2010. On 10 July 2011, Jarosław Kaczyński endorsed the *White Book* in his address to participants of the monthly 'march of memory' of Smolensk, held on the 10th of each month since August 2010 (Kaczyński 2011b).

The sociologist Hanna Świda-Ziemba complains that projects like the *White Book of the Smolensk Tragedy* have surrendered the memory of Katyn to Smolensk and made the massacre a mere footnote to the crash (Świda-Ziemba 2011). A singular event of unspeakable brutality in the geographical centre of Europe, Katyn has been relativized by its double, Katyn-2. This dynamic, which has also made the singular event of the crash dependent on a historical antecedent, threatens to stunt the work of mourning. In the words of Zbigniew Gluza, the head of the KARTA Center, an authoritative NGO that collects evidence on the

recent history of Poland and Eastern Europe: ‘Andrzej Wajda said to me in March this year that he has the feeling that the dead victims of Katyn are still here, demanding something... [C]ertainly we have not yet managed to bid farewell to our dead. They still seem to be waiting’ (Borowska 2010).

The dead are still waiting, while the living are insecure in their ability to ‘remember’. On the first anniversary of the crash, Jarosław Kaczyński held an alternative rally at the Presidential Palace, where he drew vague links between the Smolensk catastrophe and Polish historical struggles for survival, hinting strongly once again that the plane crash had not been accidental. The speech was framed as a defence of ‘memory’, which Kaczyński said had been ‘trampled’. Kaczyński described the crash victims as having been ‘betrayed at dawn’, deploying a famous line from a poem by Zbigniew Herbert and prompting a public protest from Herbert’s widow, who condemned the political exploitation of her husband’s work (‘Oddzielmy spuściznę mojego męża od polityki’ 2011). At one point Kaczyński proclaimed that ‘[t]hose who wanted to kill memory have lost, they have failed’ (Kaczyński 2011a). The crowd chanted in response: ‘We Remember! We Remember!’