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**A 'DIVIDED HISTORY':
THE POLITICS OF MEMORY
ON THE TERRITORY
OF THE FORMER EAST
PRUSSIA IN THE LIGHT
OF CURRENT DISCUSSIONS**

I. Dementyev*



In the humanities and social sciences, the politics of memory and related culture of remembrance increase their significance, affecting legislation, historiography, and political science. This article aims to present key approaches to studying the politics of memory and employ them to the analysis of the politics of memory on the territory of the former German province of East Prussia. The author shows different research perspectives on the key concepts of memory studies. Some researchers identify the notion of the 'politics of memory' with that of the 'politics of history', while others distinguish between them. The author evaluates the effects of using the category of 'memory sites'. Applying the method of historiographical analysis, the author examines similarities of and differences between approaches to the politics of history and the politics of memory. The author evaluates the effects of using the notions of 'memory sites' and 'memory conflicts' in the Baltic Region states, and reviews recent works of historians and political scientists on the changes in the culture of remembrance in Russia in general and the Kaliningrad region in particular during the Soviet and post-Soviet periods. Modern historiography is used as an example to demonstrate that 'memory sites' and the 'politics of history' are the most relevant concepts in the study of the culture of remembrance and identity, whereas a comparative analysis proves to be effective for the identification of the main features of the politics of memory on the territory of the former East Prussia.

Key words: East Prussia, politics of history, Kaliningrad region, politics of memory

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The politics of memory, as a subject, lies somewhere between two fields in the humanities: political history, which studies activities of political institutions and their representation

in social consciousness, and memory studies, an interdisciplinary effort dedicated to researching collective memory. Political history has been successfully developing over several centuries, whereas memory studies became a fully-fledged research area only in the last quarter of the 20th century, yet the borderline between the two fields is easily crossed, as the problems of political history are also closely connected to those of political science.

Studies of collective memory are best represented by the classical works of Pierre Nora and Jan and Aleida Assmann et al. [1; 2; 11]. Nora's concept of 'sites of memory' vs. the Assmanns' concept of communicative memory gained wide acceptance. Using the new conceptual framework, scholars have been able to theorise different aspects of collective memory since the 1980s. 'Memory boom', or 'memorial turn' are the two buzz-phrases used to describe the rising interest to all things memory (as expressed by experts and members of general public alike).

The basic concepts of memory studies are the 'politics of commemoration' and the 'politics of memory', which are interpreted differently. For instance, A. Assmann tends to treat the 'politics of memory' (understanding it, in line with Claus Leggewie's views, as organisation, management, and political decision-making shaping 'memorial structures') [1, p. 300] and the 'politics of commemoration' as synonyms. N. E. Koposov also equates these terms ('The politics of history — or politics of commemoration — is a relatively new term, although the phenomenon is very old' [6, 9. 52]) describing memorial legislation as an obvious manifestation of such politics. Some authors use this concept denoting a 'very old phenomenon' in the context of early Middle Ages [24].

However, some researchers distinguish between the two terms. In this case, the politics of commemoration (German *Gedächtnispolitik*) is interpreted as discursive, performative, and material representations of collective identity, strategies of struggle and completion between memories of different groups. The politics of memory (German *Geschichtspolitik*) is pursued by the authorities in the framework of a certain political regime, being one of the forms of the politics of commemoration. Ethnic, cultural, social, and gender groups competing with the 'hegemon' develop their own politics of commemoration. Thus, the intricate interrelations between different agents concerning the interpretation and representation of the past become a suitable object for interdisciplinary research.

A. I. Miller distinguishes between the politics of commemoration and the politics of history. Dating the emergence of the 'politics of memory' back to Helmut Kohl's time in office, when the critics of the politician coined the term *Geschichtspolitik* to denote a decidedly political turn in interpreting the past, the historian follows the term's revival and positive revision (*poltyka historyczna*) by the conservative elites in Poland in 2004, as well as in other countries of the region [8, p. 7]. Miller defines the politics of memory as 'political manipulations of history' [8, c. 12] interpreted as an instance of keen interest to the *politics of commemoration* from politicians and researchers [8, p. 8]. The latter means that these terms are not synonymous. A. I. Miller's logic is further developed by O. Yu. Malinova, who, following Markku

Kangaspuro, distinguishes between the politics of memory and political exploitation of history — a wide category suggesting conscious manipulations of history as a tool of political argumentation [7, p. 8—9]. The analysis of the past in modern political discourse and the rhetoric of Russian presidents gives O. Yu. Malinova the right to speak of political uses of the past as one of the ‘central elements of the *politics of symbols*’ [7, c. 23]. By adding yet another notion in to the mix, she avoids the difficult choice between the notions of ‘politics of memory’ and ‘politics of commemoration’.

Another complication comes from the different naming traditions in the major languages of contemporary science (see [39, S. 15—16]). A lack of terminological consensus leads to questionable decisions. One of recent publications has two titles — a German and an English one. The former uses *Geschichtspolitik*, while the latter — *Historical memory culture* [20].

The first scholar to use the term *Geschichtspolitik* was Christian Meier (incidentally, as of the end of 2000s, this had the widest circulation between the *Vergangenheitspolitik*, *Erinnerungspolitik*, and *Gedächtnispolitik* [see 33, p. 70—71]). In the British and American scholarship, the *politics of memory* was conceptualised at the turn of the 1970s. The studies in this field gained additional momentum at the end of the Cold War.

The major research achievement of the 1990—2000s concerned Europe after World War II. The classical work *Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (edited by Richard Ned Lebow et al., 2006 [35]) carries out a comparative analysis and discusses different European cases of using the past for political purposes. Other European and US researchers followed suit. In 2010, certain conclusions were drawn in the collection of papers *Geschichtspolitik und kollektives Gedächtnis* edited by Harald Schmid (2010). Thus, Heidemarie Uhl and Harald Schmid described different aspects of politics towards the past in modern states [33; 40]. The politics of memory is interpreted by the German researchers as a factor of significant political influence and an instrument of struggle (*Geschichtskampf*), which can hardly be reduced to either narrow-field historiographical discussions or a public debate on urgent political and socioeconomic problems. History-centred struggle is becoming an increasingly important field of modern politics. Today, researchers analyse the forms and means of the politics of memory, its functions and outcomes, actors, and normative contexts (including legal ones — ‘memorial’ legislation, etc.).

Most researchers of the politics of memory emphasise the influence of current elites on its implementation. For instance, in France, active interventions of the authorities into the processes of commemoration (perpetuation and representation in national cultural memory) date back to François Mitterrand’s time in office (1981—1995). His predecessor, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing did not intervene in the field of historical expertise. However, since the early 1980s, the authorities represented by special committees have been regularly organising commemorations of significant events or persons ([19, p. 920]. See, for example, Pierre Nora on the ‘era of commemorations’ [11, p. 95—96]). The state involved in the process of revising history does not only maintain ‘cold’ memory (through celebrating national heroes and na-

tional victories) but also takes part in solving the problems of ‘hot’ memory, usually dubbed ‘contentious issues of history’ here in Russia. In the 1990s France officially recognised its responsibility for the deportation of Jews during World War II, which created the framework for a new attitude to the ‘black pages’ of national narrative (slavery, colonial wars, and other phenomenon, including those, in which the French state had no complicity, for instance, the Armenian Genocide in Turkey). Despite Jacques Chirac’s 2005 declaration that the Republic had no official history [19, p. 921], the state formulated a ‘memorial economy’ balancing recognition of mistakes with glorification of achievements.

To understand the direction memory studies are now taking, it is important to address the notion of the ‘site of memory’ (also known as ‘one of the most successful concepts in European historiography over the past 30 years’) [29, S. 129]. Formulated by researchers of Pierre Nora circle, it simply denotes everything that is commemorated. The famous three-volume edition describes the means to develop a national discourse: symbols, memorials, pedagogical and historiographical strategies, etc. [28].

Many criticised the project. Some opponents would say, for instance, that the ‘sites of memory’ were clearly connected with national (state) interests. A single national discourse could provoke conflicts over the ‘sites of memory’ and a competition for commemorative strategies. Others would claim that the project proposed by Nora and his colleagues was a mere intellectual game, a game possible only within the French cultural tradition and irreproducible in other contexts [4, p. 70]. It was time that has proven the critics wrong.

It is not surprising that further studies of the ‘sites of memory’ pursued two research avenues — applying the popular concept to other countries and studying ‘sites of memory’ at different levels. The first research area has produced works on the history of Italian, German [14; 16]) and other national ‘sites of memory’. According to Benoit Majerus, as of 2013, 12 national projects, including studies of the ‘geography of memory’ were completed in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Russia, and Switzerland alongside the countries mentioned already [29, p. 121].

The second approach involves both transnational and local (regional) studies. 2002 saw the publication of such works as *Transnationale Erinnerungsorte: Nord- und südeuropäische Perspektiven*, *Transnationale Gedächtnisorte in Zentraleuropa* [37; 38], etc. Similar studies are dedicated to local sites of memory (at the level of cities and regions). The first attempts to apply this method theorizing the history of Königsberg and East Prussia were made by the Polish and German historians R. Traba, B. Hoppe, A. Engel-Braunschmidt, and others [15; 22; 23; 36]. Lithuanian researchers offer an analysis of ‘Lithuania Minor’, a Lithuanian site of memory [41]. Finally, Russian scholars are using the notion of sites of memory to reconstruct major elements of regional identity discourse and practices of collective memory and historical consciousness in Soviet Kaliningrad (1945—1990) [5].

In the cases above, the ‘sites of memory’ have come a long way from their initial perceived function of supporting national master narrative towards detailed studies into specific collective memories, their competition, strategies for their representations, and so on. Today, studying the ‘politics of memory’ at any level requires identifying and analysing ‘sites of memory’ both at the general national level and at the level of individual social and/or ethnic groups. In this context, the politics of memory will be described as the activities of different actors aimed at interpreting and representing the past through the symbolically expressed ‘sites of memory’ (in the case of the ruling elite, the politics of memory is an instance of the politics of commemoration).

Another important notion is the concept of ‘conflicts of memory’. In Eastern Europe, they usually focus on the interpretation of the Soviet experience. In effect, there are many more grounds for ‘memorial wars’. For instance, in Lithuania, commemorating the anti-Soviet partisans as heroes goes against the counter-narrative perpetuated by the Jewish communities. According to the latter, some members of the Lithuanian resistance were Nazi collaborationists and accomplices to the Holocaust. A situation captured exceptionally well in one article analysing the debates surrounding the Bronze Soldier in Tallinn: the author of the study, Claus Leggewie aptly named it ‘A divided history of Europe’ [27].

The concerns of ‘division’ become more and more pronounced when one looks at the politics of memory studied at the regional level (see, for example, Krzysztof Pomian’s article ‘*“Geteiltes Gedächtnis”: Europas Erinnerungsorte als politisches und kulturelles Phänomen*’ [31, S. 39]). Although the politics of memory in the Baltics Sea region is still a very new research area, it is evident that one of its central questions is the historical potential for conflicts in the region. In her article, Imbi Sooman stresses the conflict potential of relations between the Baltics and Russia alongside that of Swedish-Finnish and Finnish-Estonian debates [34, S. 17–25]. In Central and Eastern European history, collisions of memories of the deportation of German population from regions ceded to Poland, the USSR, and Czechoslovakia following World War II are fraught with imminent conflicts. In the cultural memory of Russians (except those from Kaliningrad), this aspect of the first post-war years is almost unnoticeable; therefore, deportation does not play an important role in the national politics of memory. However, in the cultural memory of Germans, the Polish, and Czechs it has an increasing significance (see [26]).

Western researchers focus on the Western politics of memory, which is natural. A more recent trend, however, is an increase in the interest to the history of Eastern Europe. Newer publications include monographs examining individual cases, F. B. Schenk’s fundamental work *Alexander Nevsky in Russian cultural memory 1263–2000* [12], and such collections of papers as *The politics of memory and the culture of remembrance in new Russia* (2009, ed. by L. Karl and I. Poljanski [21; 25]). In the first case, a classical interpretation of the evolution of Alexander Nevsky’s image in Russian cultural memory transformed into a study of mechanisms of the politics of

memory in the Russian state until the post-Soviet period. The second work opens a discussion of the ways in which the politics of memory and the culture of remembrance correlated in Russia at the turn of the century.

One study worth noting is the article by Olga Kurilo, published in a collection of papers. The article follows the evolution of Russian cultural memory in the USSR and the post-perestroika Russia. Until the perestroika, Russian memory landscape (*Erinnerungslandschaft*) was mostly homogeneous. The official discourse of the past in a multi-national state prescribed a single Soviet history rather than a diversity of national histories. The officially approved memories of individual national groups were subject to significant ideological distortion. The central themes of Soviet history (primarily, the October revolution and World War II) dominated both research and public rituals. Homogenisation of the culture of memories was made possible through imposing prohibitions on alternative memories and public criticism. Tabooed topics (the Red Terror, deportation of peoples under Stalin's rule, captivity and collaborationism during World War II) were forced out into the space of personal and family memories or the memory of groups beyond the governmental control (dissidents). Individual memories of war contradicting the canonical version could not be made public [25, S. 144—145].

The perestroika created conditions for publishing alternative memories of the past. The post-Soviet memory is manifested primarily within special 'sites of memory' and 'figures of remembrance (*Gedächtnisfiguren*). The latter include the two competing discourses of the past chosen for analysis — the democratic and national-patriotic discourses [25, S. 146]. The first rests on acknowledging pluralism and possibility of alternative ways of social development it is supported by human rights organisations. The victim discourse (*Opferdiskurs*) observed in the Soviet cultural memory in the form of the narrative about the suffering of Soviet civilians during the placed the victims of the Soviet regime in the centre of memories. Despite certain achievements in promoting the democratic culture of remembrance both in the capital and regions (efforts of the 'Memorial' society, erection of monuments to victims of political repression, introduction of the topic of Holocaust into the school curricula, etc.), the post-Soviet memory contains topics that are still difficult to discuss (for instance, the scale of collaborationism during the war) [25, S. 147]. However, Russian authorities (the article was published in 2009) supported, to a degree, the democratic memory informing the society of its openness to and readiness for a dialogue with the West.

The 'national-patriotic memory', the domain of quite a few national-patriotic organisations (most notably, the Russian Orthodox Church), promotes the commemoration of events central to the formation of national identity. This figure of remembrance, according to O. Kurilo, is not supported by the Russian intellectual elite, whereas many such organisations are found on the margins of the society [25, S. 154].

Any historian would conclude that the modern culture of remembrance in Russia eludes an unambiguous definition by bringing together different symbols and 'sites of memory'. The heterogeneity of the priorities of modern Russian politics of memory also relates to the privatisation and interna-

tionalisation of memories, selective revival of old stereotypes, etc. According to Kurilo, the process of democratisation of the culture of remembrance in Russia is slow for both political and socio-psychological reasons: the liquidation of Soviet institutions did not change the mentality of the Soviet people [25, S. 158].

O. Kurilo meticulously paints a detailed picture of the evolution of the culture of remembrance in Russia, yet a number of points in her study can still be questioned. The characteristics of the culture of remembrances, whose framework was outlined by the Soviet politics of memory, are justified, although the homogeneity of said culture is slightly exaggerated. Certain discussions were allowed in the framework of Soviet historiography — at different stages, assessments of the repressions and Stalin's regime ranged from condemnation to silencing. Versions of national history deviating from the strictly ideologised canon existed in the Soviet republics (the victim discourse described the suffering of the people caused by both its own ruling class and Russian imperialism). Lev Gudkov analyses the heterogeneity of Soviet politics of memory by bringing the case of remembering the Great Patriotic War, ranging from a split between the personal experience of veterans and the official ceremonial version of the events in the late 1940s-early 1950s to intensive moulding of popular ideas of the war in the 1960s-early 1980s [3, p. 90—91; compare with 6, p. 90—105; 21].

Defining the post-Soviet situation as a competition between two 'figures of remembrance' is incomplete (preservation of the Soviet toponyms and symbols suggests that there is another discourse). Both 'figures of remembrance' hold certain positions in public opinion and preferences of the elite: Olga Kurilo's thesis about the authorities' motives for supporting 'democratic memory' are relevant even in the context of Russia's recent politics of memory, which has entailed a significant decrease in public support for 'democratic memory'.

A proof is the decree of Russian government of August 15, 2015 *On Establishing a Concept for Public Policy on Perpetuating the Memory of Victims of Political Repressions*, adopted at the height of tensions with the West. The concept intricately combines democratic rhetoric and statist stereotypes: 'Russia cannot become a rule-of-law state and play a leading role in the global community without perpetuating the memory of many millions of compatriots who fell victim to political repressions' [9]. This concept can be considered a result of a compromise between different figures of remembrance, since it unites an apology of a state reclaiming its position in the 'global community' with revering both 'national-patriotic' ('persecution of religious confessions' is mentioned as the second greatest tragedy of the Soviet period after the 'tremendous losses' in the war years) and 'democratic memory' (the 'formation of a rule-of-law states based on observation of human rights and the rights of social and ethnic groups' is declared the first objective of building the national identity). The principle of 'necessity of an objective analysis of both achievement of the Soviet period, and its tragic pages, including mass political repressions' [9] creates complications familiar to other elites (see the case of France described above).

Olga Kurilo's views correspond to the findings of other historians of memory. An article by Jörg Ganzenmüller and Raphael Utz (editors of a collection of paper entitled *Sowjetische Verbrechen und Russische Erinnerung*, 2014) underlines the contradictory nature of Russia's official policy towards Stalinism and the associated memory landscape [18, S. 28—30]. Similar conclusions can be found in the works of some Russian scholars [6; 7].

Studying the politics of memory on the territory of former East Prussia (the Warmian-Masurian voivodeship in Poland, the Kaliningrad region in Russia, and the Klaipeda Country in Lithuania) requires a common framework for comparison provided by an analysis of the experiences of Socialism and post-socialist transition. The findings of Olga Kurilo and other authors can be extrapolated, with certain reservations, to all three regions, serving as a starting point for research on different models of the politics of memory on the territory of former East Prussia.

For instance, the politics of memory in the Kaliningrad region (as well as other regions) reflects national trends and shows certain regional features (in particular, those accounted for by the territory's pre-war past). The Polish sociologist A. Sakson analyses differences in the symbolical appropriation of the lands of former East Prussia in Poland and the Lithuanian SSR (as dominated by the idea of reclaiming historical territories) and in the Russian Kaliningrad region, where the territory had to be 'cultivated' anew [32]. This way, two models of the politics of memory emerged. (It is worth stressing that, in the first post-war years, Stalin's propaganda attempted at using the model of 'reclaiming native lands'. However, these attempts failed.)

Developing to image of 'division', the Lithuanian historian Vasilijus Safronovas, famous for his works on Klaipeda's 'culture of remembrance', came up with another comprehensive characteristic — the 'unfinished division of East Prussia's legacy'. Although the German province has not existed as a single region for many decades, it still provokes conflicts of territorial imagination based on the ethnographic principle and mental geography resting on the idea of legitimacy of conquests' [10, p. 208]. The scholar emphasises that Polish and German historians are experiencing a rapprochement of cultures describing East Prussian past from two different national perspectives. So far, this method remains unattainable in the case of Russian and Lithuanian historians, since the 'parties rely on two dramatically different approaches — one based on the idea of legitimate conquest and the other on the concept of ethnographic unity of population' [ibid.], which results in the inevitable collision of memories, partly accounted for by the 'unfinished division' of legacy.

In the post-Soviet period, the contradictions in the politics of memory in the Westernmost Russian region were more pronounced than in the other regions. Olga Kurilo says that Kaliningrad retains such attributes of the Soviet era as the name of the city and the monument to Mikhail Kalinin [25, S. 154]. Lithuania and Poland, despite the difference in the historical experience of these countries, chose a different strategy for de-Sovietisation. Moreover, a comparative approach can go beyond the three 'East Prussian'

lands and increase the scale through productive juxtaposition of the politics of memory in former German regions ceded to Poland in part (East Prussian) and in full (Silesia) [13, p. 28—29] or through comparing differences and similarities in the historical justification of Stalin's strategy for Sovietisation of newly incorporated district of the Kaliningrad region, part of the Karelian Isthmus, and Sakhalin with the Kuril Islands [30].

For modern scholars, studying the politics of memory is closely connected with using an interdisciplinary approach through collaborating with specialists in cultural studies, urban studies, trauma studies, discourse analysis, etc. The recent years have seen increasing interest in the socio-psychological aspect of the 'culture of remembrance' — the tension between memory and identity and the cognitive dimensions of changes in the culture of remembrance (for a detailed review, see [17]). In this light, Olga Kurilo's statements about the 'mentality of the Soviet person' can be augmented in view of these new theoretical findings.

As any other concept, the 'politics of memory' and 'memorial politics' have a history of their own. They emerged quite recently and can well lose their relevance. Krzysztof Pomian, understanding collective memory as a source of inevitable conflicts, made a radical statement: 'Recently, much has been said about the 'politics of memory'. I suggest replacing it with the 'ethnics of memory'. [31, S. 40]. With time, the humanistic pathos of scholars will probably prevail over the interests of political elites. At the moment, however, we cannot abandon studies of the politics of memory.

Changes in topics are accounted for by studying the continuity between the earlier and later periods in the development of the politics of memory pursued by modern states. This includes identifying contradictions in the interpretations and representations of the past by different ethnic groups (including minorities), analysing discursive and visual mechanisms of the politics of memory, etc. 'Sites of memory', 'politics of memory', and 'politics of commemoration' are becoming different points of entry to the field formulating and answering the questions relating to memory and identity. The need to use these concepts — despite the instability of the conceptual framework and the existing methodological limitations — was proven through analysing master narratives of national level. Apparently, it will also be the case in studying histories of regions, including the territory of former East Prussia, a land now divided between three states.

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