

THE MAKING OF HISTORY: SOME REMARKS ON POLITICIANS' PRESENTATION OF HISTORICAL EVENTS¹

Dariusz Galasiński

1. Background

On 1 August 1944 the Home Army, by far the largest among the underground armed forces in Poland under Nazi occupation, decided to start its military operation "The Storm". Its main objective was to defeat the Nazi forces stationed in Warsaw and take over military control of the city. This objective had at least two political dimensions. Firstly, it was to show that the armed forces associated with the Polish government in exile were an active and successful party in the war; secondly, and perhaps more importantly, it was to preempt the Soviet take-over of the city - especially in view of the fact that the Soviet Union had already been attempting to form a communist government for Poland.

The Warsaw Uprising, doomed from the very beginning, was counting on the Allies' help from the air and the Red Army approaching from the east. It was hoped that at least the Polish units within the Soviet army would be allowed to join with the uprisers. But the governments of the Allied Forces, on the one hand, delayed the recognition of the Home Army and throughout August they did not make any official statement about the Uprising. The Soviet war machine, on the other hand, stopped at the eastern bank of the Vistula river and looked on as Warsaw was gradually being destroyed. Furthermore, when the Allies asked Stalin to give permission for their planes to use Soviet airfields, he repeatedly refused. Allied Forces pilots had to fly from Italy to provide the fighting city with some help. When Stalin eventually agreed (18 September), it was far too late. After 63 days, the elite SS forces crushed the Uprising and Warsaw was systematically destroyed. More than 200,000 inhabitants of Warsaw were killed in action or executed afterwards. More than 80 per cent of the city was demolished.

The Warsaw Uprising was one of the bloodiest and deadliest battles fought by the Polish underground army. As such it is also one of the most remembered and cherished Polish military operations of the Second World War. Its special place in Polish history was also fostered by the fact that the communist authorities of Poland hardly acknowledged either its existence or, later, its significance. This attitude was an attempt to conceal or play down the Soviet silent agreement to the destruction of the city.

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Last year brought the fiftieth anniversary of the Uprising. Amidst controversy, Lech Wałęsa, the President of Poland invited the presidents of both Germany and Russia to attend the celebrations along with the representatives of the Allied Forces. Controversial as they were, the invitation and the future visits of both presidents were hailed by the Polish media as a historic opportunity to rekindle the process of reconciliation between Poland and Germany on the one hand and between Poland and Russia on the other. Because of the controversy, Boris Yeltsin declined the invitation and sent his "special representative", Sergei Filatov. The President of Germany, Roman Herzog attended in person. The anniversary celebrations at which all the representatives made speeches, took place on 1 August 1994 in Warsaw.

2. Assumptions and objectives

The main assumption upon which this paper is based is that language can be a means of control. While representing extralinguistic reality, language also shows it from a particular point of view. Being capable of conveying what has been referred to as a "structure of faith" (see Menz 1989), a text renders a particular set of values and beliefs which are, in turn, imposed on its addressees. It is also assumed - along the lines of critical language study (cf. e.g. Fowler et al. 1979; Hodge & Kress 1993; Fairclough 1989, 1992, 1995; Wodak 1989) - that linguistic analysis is capable of revealing the assumptions behind linguistic choices. The indispensable part of such an analysis is one on syntactical and lexico-grammatical levels of a text (cf. Hodge, Kress 1993).

This paper reports the results of an analysis of two speeches made at the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising: President Wałęsa's and Mr. Filatov's. Both speakers explicitly spoke of improving Polish-Russian relations. Both referred to (the beginnings of) the Polish-Russian friendship. In this paper I am seeking to find out whether such a positioning of the speeches can actually stand the test of a critical (linguistic) analysis. To what extent can the two speeches be thought to have used the "great opportunity" for reconciliation? More concretely I am interested in how the 'difficult issue' of the Soviet participation in the Uprising was handled in the speeches of the Polish and Soviet representatives. The main objective of the paper therefore is to find out how - textually speaking - Polish and Soviet troops are positioned as parties in the Warsaw Uprising. A comparison between representations of Soviet and Nazi forces will also be made. I shall also be asking who is represented as having taken part in the military conflict. What were their actions and roles in it? What are the implications of the battle for the present day and the future?

In what follows I shall first deal with Wałęsa's speech. I shall then compare it with that of the Russian representative. It must be noted that Mr. Filatov delivered his speech in Russian, and was consecutively translated into Polish. The analysis is based on the Polish text, because it is the Polish translation which would have mattered to the audience. It would be interesting in its own right to compare the structures of the original version of the text with its translation. Such an endeavour, however, is outside the scope of the present study.

3. Wałęsa

President Wałęsa's speech was by far the longest of all the speeches. As he was the host of the ceremony, his speech not only talks about the events of 50 years earlier, but also directly addresses the representatives of the Allied Forces, Russia and Germany. Wałęsa's speech consists of two main parts. The first one tells a brief story of the Uprising, while the other addresses diplomats and veterans.

3.1. *What happened*

3.1.1. *How it started*

Wałęsa starts off with an account of what actually happened. He is distinctly careful in describing the conflict.

- (1) 50 lat temu Warszawa zerwała się do walki.
'50 years ago Warsaw rose to fight.'
- (2) Pierwszego sierpnia Warszawa stawiała do walki.
'On 1 August Warsaw was standing up to fight.'
- (3) Rozpoczęła się jedna z najkrwawszych bitew II wojny światowej, najbardziej okrutnych.
'One of the bloodiest, most cruel, battles of W.W.II commenced.'

The Uprising is constructed as a **response** to external forces. Although the Polish expressions *zerwać się do walki* as well as *stawać do walki* show the subject of the clause as the agent (i.e. a participant who is endowed with the power of purposeful action, who makes things happen according to his/her design or intent), they presuppose at the same time that the subject of the clause is not the primary cause of what happened. The events referred to in (1) and (2) are a result of another party's actions, (normally) a response to a threat or an aggression. Although constructed as an agent, inhabitants of Warsaw (metonymically referred to as 'Warsaw') are not responsible for the fight. The party who actually **is** responsible is not mentioned throughout the text. Alternatively, as in (3) the Uprising starts, as it were, on its own; discursively there is not even an implicit enemy which can or should be fought.

3.1.2. *Parties in conflict*

There are only three parties textually rendered as participants in the Warsaw Uprising. The first, as signalled above, are Poles - the uprisers. The second one is the **unnamed** force the uprisers fight:

- (4) Przeciwno Powstancom, prócz frontowych, rzucono bowiem represyjne formacje.

‘Against the uprisers, apart from front troops, also repressive formations were deployed.’

Although Wałęsa adds to the drama of the situation by defining the troops sent to fight the Uprising as repressive, still the Polish President does not mention the participation of Nazi forces. Moreover, agency in (4) is not only suppressed (cf. van Leeuwen 1996) but even further removed by the use of the impersonal “-no/-to” form. Unlike the passive voice in English, this form does not allow for the agent of the action to be realised within the structure of the sentence. The ‘external’ force therefore is merely implied rather than actually asserted.

Now, although the force which started the Uprising is unidentified, there is a clear identification of the one responsible for the fall of the Uprising. This third party in the conflict is, surprisingly, **Josif Stalin**. Witness:

- (5) Samobójcz ą [decyzja walki] okazała się ona później, gdy na racje Powstańców Stalin odpowiedział zgodą na zagładę miasta. Przemówił językiem imperatora. Cynicznie odpowiadał aliantom: "W Warszawie są tylko zamieszki", kiedy konsekwentnie odmawiał prawa lądowania amerykańskim fortecom.

‘It [the decision to fight] turned out to be suicidal later, when, in spite of the uprisers’ reasoning, Stalin responded by agreeing on the destruction of the city. He spoke in the language of an emperor. He was cynically responding to the Allies: "There are only riots in Warsaw", when he persistently refused American fortresses [sic] the right to land.’

Stalin is constructed as unambiguously responsible for the demise of the Uprising. The declarative, unmodalised sentences allow no doubt that Wałęsa is merely reporting facts. Moreover, describing Stalin as speaking as an emperor directly associates him with Russian tsars. Using the word *imperator* (normally used in reference to Russian tsars), Wałęsa invokes the times of Poland’s partition at the end of the 18th, the whole of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries. By bringing up one of the darkest periods of Polish-Russian relations, Wałęsa significantly increases the negativity of the context in which he mentions Stalin.

3.2. *Alone we stood...*

The Uprising, according to the Polish speaker, is a conflict between three forces: Poles, Stalin (and thus the Soviet Union) and the unnamed one. Poles were in opposition to the latter two and are constructed as fighting on their own, without friends or allies. Wałęsa finishes the 'historical' part of his speech with a representation of Warsaw - and thus, probably, Poland as a whole - with no friends, with no allies:

- (6) Po Powstaniu Warszawskim nikt z wielkich tego świata nie upomniał się o sprawę, za którą zginęła Warszawa. Nie zawołał "Jestem warszawiakiem" (...) W pełnej harmonii dokonał się gwałt na suwerenności Polski...

'After the Warsaw Uprising, none of the powerful of this world stood for the cause for which Warsaw died. Nobody called out "I am a Varsovian". (...) In full harmony, Poland's sovereignty was violated.'

It seems that Wałęsa makes a reference to J.F.Kennedy's statement "Ich bin ein Berliner" made in one of his speeches on a visit to Berlin, and then alludes to the Yalta agreement, adding to the impression of Poland's being left out. After all, even the aggressor (although never actually mentioned) got some sympathy from America. Poland on the other hand was not part of the Yalta deal - popularly held to be the start of Soviet dominance in Poland. The construction of Polish lone fighting goes on when Wałęsa turns to the representatives of the Allied Forces. Although their role in the conflict is represented in positive terms only (through the medium of Polish gratitude), it is not clear what they actually did:

- (7) Rok 1944 nie przysłania nam wcześniejszych lat. Pamiętamy, ile dla nas zrobiliście, ile wtedy zrobiliście dla Europy i dla świata. Warszawa także pamięta nadludzkie wysiłki alianckich lotników, ich hojną ofiarę krwi. Za to wszystko serdecznie dziękuję: Brytyjczykom, którzy dowiedli, że Brytania jest naprawdę wielką, szlachetnym i wspaniałomyślnym Amerykanom, bliskim nam zawsze Francuzom. Dziękuję lotnikom z dalekiej Kanady, Australii, Nowej Zelandii i Republiki Południowej Afryki (...).

'The year 1944 does not overshadow the earlier years. We remember how much you did for us, how much you then did for Europe and the world. Warsaw, too, remembers the superhuman efforts of the Allies' airmen, their generous offer of blood. For all that I thank you: Britons who proved that Britain is really great, noble and generous Americans, Frenchmen who have always been close to our hearts. I thank the airmen from Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the Republic of South Africa...'

Initially Wałęsa suggests that the praise and the gratitude is not for what the Allies

did in the Uprising. The year 1944 is something which might be capable of overshadowing other, positive, aspects of the relations in question. The Allies are thanked for the vague "how much they did for us" (*ile dla nas zrobiliście*) - a phrase which borders formulaity and then for efforts rather than achievements. Note also that Wałęsa represents the agency of the Allies through the Polish medium. It is Poles who do the remembering and thanking, thus constituting what the Allies actually did.

3.3. *The Polish slant*

It is also the Polish perspective from which Wałęsa further constructs the Soviet Union and Russia. This time it is almost entirely remembering. Turning to the Russian representative he says:

- (8) Mam świadomość, że historia zrzuciła na Rosję bagaż win i krzywd imperium sowieckiego. Jest w nim również krzywda powstańczej Warszawy (...) Pamiętamy o Katyniu, pamiętamy o grobach zamordowanych przez NKVD Polaków, pamiętamy żołnierzy powstania. Ale pamiętamy też o setkach tysięcy grobów rosyjskich żołnierzy poległych na polskiej ziemi.

'I am aware that history burdened Russia with the blame and harms done by the Soviet Empire. We remember Katyn, we remember the graves of Poles murdered by the NKVD, we remember the soldiers of the Uprising. But we also remember the hundreds of thousands of Russian soldiers killed in combat on Polish land.'

Although the Polish President makes a distinction between the Soviet Union and Russia, still the latter bears the responsibility for the Soviet wrongdoing. Soviet agents - this time it is the NKVD, the all-powerful security forces of the USSR - are ascribed negative actions. Soviet soldiers, on the other hand, textually, are only afflicted participants of actions - they get killed. Notably, once again, it is not mentioned who did the killing. Interestingly, the mental-state verbs by which aspects of Soviet involvement and actions are introduced are all factive; i.e. they presuppose the truth of the dependent clause. There is still no doubt that the Soviets did what is ascribed to them.

The construction of Germany in terms of agency is different. Although Wałęsa mentions "the murderers of Warsaw", he never explicitly attributes the blame to the German side. The only individual of German origin who is mentioned is Otto Schimek, a Nazi officer who refused to shoot Poles, an act which resulted in his execution:

- (9) Na tej ziemi spoczywa również Otto Schimek.
'It is this [Polish] land where Otto Schimek is buried (lit. is resting).'

The only German agent in Wałęsa's speech is a positive one. Moreover, while the

atrocities committed by Soviet forces are shown from the Polish perspective, i.e. through the repeated reference to Poles' remembrance, German actions are, as it were, detached from the Poles' mental processes:

- (10) Na polskiej ziemi jest Oświęcim i Warszawa. Jest na niej również Krzyżowa. Na tej ziemi spoczywa również Otto Schimek. Nie rozgrzeszamy morderców Warszawy, ale tych uczuć nie przenosimy na naród niemiecki. Chcemy i możemy żyć z Wami w przyjaźni, jak dobrzy sąsiedzi.

'There is Auschwitz and Warsaw on the Polish land. There is also Krzyżowa². It is this [Polish] land where Otto Schimek is buried (lit. is resting). We do not give absolution to the murderers of Warsaw, but we do not extrapolate those feelings onto the German nation. We can and want to live with you in friendship, as good neighbours.'

Although it could be argued that the absence of mental-state verbs gives the above a more factual character, yet it seems that - given the contrast with the representation of the Soviet Union/Russia - it can also be construed as a way of acknowledging what happened (admittedly, in a very cautious way), but at the same time leaving it outside of 'lived' history. Such an interpretation seems plausible especially in view of the fact that the only mental action Wałęsa ascribes to Poles in reference to Germans is the positive wish to live in friendship with Germans. In the case of the Russians, there are merely seeds of friendship with no particular commitments on the part of Poles:

- (11) Zachowujemy tę pamięć jako ziarno przyjaźni.

'We keep that memory as a seed of friendship.'

Wałęsa's speech is about Poles. First, it is about constructing a history of a tragic nation which was faced with having to fight two independent forces with very little or no help at all. The few uprisers had to face the overpowering forces of the USSR and Nazi Germany and had merely efforts on the part of the Allies to help.

On the other hand, the Poles are given a role barely short of setting the standards of history. The Poles or, as Wałęsa puts it, 'we' (all but one uses of 'we' refer to Poles only), are the frequent theme (cf. Halliday 1985) of sentences in the latter part of the Polish President's speech; it is the Poles who may or may not forgive, forget, remember, give absolution. Describing a historical event where Poles were defeated, Wałęsa's speech constructs them as those who have the power to pass judgement on the event and those who took part in it. It is now the Poles who are all-powerful and get their five minutes in history.

In the Polish speech only the Soviet party in the conflict is rendered directly

² Krzyżowa is a Polish village where the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the then Polish Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki took part in a common Mass during which they exchanged a sign of peace. The event has come to be considered one of the milestones of Polish-German reconciliation.

responsible for anything. Nazi forces are not even mentioned. Similarly, later in the speech, although Russia is separated from the Soviet Union, only negative actions are predicated of Soviet/Russian affiliated agents. Agentivity is ascribed only to one German-related agent - and the context of this agency is positive.

4. Filatov

There are two parts in Filatov's speech. After a lengthy introduction which he himself could be seen as the author of, he also reads a message from Boris Yeltsin, the President of Russia. Admittedly the double structure is more a diplomatic device, allowing for a personal message from the President of Russia, than an important distinction in the speech

4.1. *Who knows how it happened*

Unlike Wałęsa, Filatov does not attempt to reconstruct the history of the Uprising. Moreover, while for the Polish President the history of the Warsaw Uprising is quite clear and unproblematic - especially insofar as Soviet participation in it is concerned - it is hardly so in the case of the Russian representative. Witness:

- (12) Jesteśmy za tym, aby historia Powstania Warszawskiego i stosunków polsko-radzieckich z tego okresu została w pełni ujawniona i zbadana. Poglądy historyków na ten okres historii często nie pokrywają się, ale nakaz czasów oraz mądrość polityków polegają na tym, żeby nawiązywanie do przeszłości stanowiło nie barierę między nami, lecz przeciwnie, żeby wzajemnie chroniło nas przed powtórzeniem starych błędów. Jesteśmy pewni, że tylko droga prawdy historycznej prowadzi do przyjaznych stosunków między naszymi narodami, które ucierpiały od faszyzmu hitlerowskiego i totalitaryzmu stalinowskiego.

'We support [the idea that] the history of both the Warsaw Uprising and the Polish-Soviet relations of that period should be entirely revealed and investigated. Historians' views on this period of history often differ, yet the demand of the time as well as the wisdom of politicians consist in that remembrance of the past should not be a barrier between us but, on the contrary, that it should protect us from repeating the old mistakes. We are sure that only the path of historic truth leads to friendly relations between our countries which suffered from Nazi fascism and Stalinist totalitarianism.'

Filatov takes for granted (in a presupposition) that the history of the Uprising has not yet been revealed. And until that happens both nations should not go on remembering the unknown. It can only be damaging to the Russian-Polish relations.

Notice also an interesting use of the pronoun "we". Admittedly, the initial *we* refers to Filatov and people on behalf of whom he makes the speech, i.e. President Yeltsin and, perhaps, other Russian authorities. The identity of the "we" (*nami* 'us' as it is actually used) in the second sentence, however, has changed: it must refer to both Russians and Poles. And thus the initial "we" in the final sentence may refer to both nations, especially since the final "we" (realised by the possessive pronoun *nasz* 'our' must again refer to both parties - Poles and Russians. The text may suggest therefore that it is also the Poles' stance that the truth is yet to be revealed.

It seems, however, that at least something did happen. Filatov first makes a vague reference to some "old mistakes" in Polish and Soviet history and then, later on, to dishonourable mistakes in Russian/Soviet history. It is far from clear, however, what those mistakes are. Consider:

- (13) Rosja przeżywa obecnie złożony okres przejściowy od wszechwładzy totalitaryzmu do demokracji, ale ma wystarczająco sił i determinacji by rozliczyć się z haniebnymi błędami przeszłości i nie dopuścić do ich powtórzenia. Spuścizna przeszłości nie powinna wpływać na budowanie nowych stosunków między demokratyczną Polską a demokratyczną Rosją.

'Russia is experiencing presently a complicated period of transition from the omnipotence of totalitarianism to democracy, yet she has enough strength and determination to deal with the dishonourable mistakes of the past and not to let them happen again. The legacy of the past ought not to influence the building of new relations between democratic Poland and democratic Russia.'

By referring to mistakes, Filatov seems to achieve two goals. On the one hand, he manages to represent Poland on a par with the Soviet Union: they both made mistakes - even though it is unclear what kind of mistakes. On the other hand, Russia is constructed as a powerful nation, one which will be able to face its own history. Furthermore, whatever the dishonourable mistakes were, they are hardly the fault of Russia. If anything, they should be blamed on totalitarianism.

Interestingly, although according to Filatov it is uncertain what happened 50 years ago, there is at least one thing which is certain: the Poles' enemy was the Nazi forces. Consider:

- (14) Chylimy głowy przed bohaterstwem uczestników Powstania, przed bohaterstwem wszystkich, którzy przyczynili się do rozgromienia faszyzmu.

'We pay tribute to the heroism of the participants of the Uprising, of all those who helped destroy fascism.'

Later Yeltsin writes:

- (15) (...) zwracam się do (...) całego przyjaznego narodu polskiego z najszczerzym uczuciem szacunku wobec czynu Powstańców i ludności cywilnej polskiej stolicy, którzy stanęli do walki z tyranią faszystowską.

'I turn to (...) the entire friendly Polish nation with the feeling of the most sincere respect for the actions of the Uprisers and the civilian population of the Polish capital, who rose to fight against the fascist tyranny.'

Polish *faszystowski* 'fascist' - and *faszyzm* 'fascism' above - cannot mean anything else but Nazi fascism here, in fact the word is normally used to refer to Nazi Germany. As pointed out earlier, Polish *stanąć do walki* presupposes a response to an attack, one which, this time, came from metonymically rendered Nazis. The expression "fascist tyranny", used here probably to add elevation to the style, must strike a false cord in Polish ears. It is one of the most commonly used clichés in communist propaganda.

Notice that the role of the Nazi forces is not described; it enters the picture through what is attributed to the uprisers. Arguably, in this way the Russian representative escapes the need to present a full account of what happened and thus to deal with the difficult issue of Soviet involvement.

4.2. *There are more important things*

The most striking thing about the Filatov speech, however, is that - both in his part and in the message from Yeltsin - it does not even once talk about the Uprising itself! The only five occurrences of the term *Powstanie Warszawskie* 'Warsaw Uprising' are to be found when an address is made to the **participants** of the Uprising (three times), when Yeltsin says that the occasion of his message is the **anniversary** of the Uprising - this is the **only** time Yeltsin mentions the Uprising at all - and, finally, when Filatov refers to the **history** of the Uprising which needs to be revealed (cf. (12) above). The main strategy of the speech is actually to claim some common ground between Poland and Russia and, while forgetting the Uprising, to get on with the mutual relations. Poles and Russians are represented, first, as allies in war, and secondly, as having a similar history. Witness Filatov's:

- (16) Spuścizna przeszłości nie powinna wpływać na budowanie nowych stosunków między demokratyczną Polską a demokratyczną Rosją.(...) Jesteśmy pewni, iż tylko droga prawdy historycznej prowadzi do przyjaznych stosunków między naszymi narodami, które ucierpiały od faszyzmu hitlerowskiego i totalitaryzmu stalinowskiego.

'The legacy of the past ought not to influence the building of new relations between democratic Poland and democratic Russia. (...) We are certain that it is only the route of historical truth that leads to friendly relations between the two countries which suffered from Nazi fascism and Stalinist totalitarianism.'

Yeltsin refers also to Soviet and Polish victims of war.

- (17) W Rosji, jak nigdzie indziej, pamięta się, czym jest wojna. Wiedzą wszyscy, że

Polska i Rosja poniosły największe straty w ludziach.

'In Russia, like nowhere else, it is remembered what war is. Everyone knows that Poland and Russia sustained the greatest losses in people then.'

As can be observed in Wałęsa's speech, one of the Polish beliefs about the war is that the Poles were left out when their fate was agreed upon in Yalta and that their contribution to the war effort has never been appreciated. Russia, therefore, is constructed here as the one country which does remember and appreciate the Poles. Yeltsin attempts to tell the truth about the Poles, moreover the truth which the Poles want to hear. Rhetorically, the move could be seen as a compensation for the lack of references to the Uprising.

4.2.1. *Friends!*

The Russian representative, too, speaks of Polish-Russian relations. His speech, however, is more optimistic. Unlike Wałęsa, Filatov attempts to show the two countries as having achieved some success in building these relations. There is a base upon which to build, while for Wałęsa there was merely a seed of something to develop in the future. Filatov says:

- (18) Dzisiaj poziom osiągniętego zaufania i wzajemnego zrozumienia pozwala nam na rozwiązywanie wielu powstających problemów i daje nadzieję na bardzo bliską dalszą współpracę. Jesteśmy za wszechstronnym rozszerzeniem wzajemnych kontaktów na wszystkich szczeblach: Państwowych, regionalnych i międzyludzkich.

'Today, the level of achieved trust and mutual understanding allows us to solve the many problems arising and gives hope for further very close co-operation. We support versatile expansion of mutual contacts at all levels: state, regional and interpersonal.'

Also Yeltsin constructs the Polish-Russian relations as something already there, something to be continued rather than started.

- (19) Daje to pewność, że nasze narody nadal będą iść drogą przemian demokratycznych, będą budować swoje stosunki na zasadach równości, szacunku, prawdziwego dobrosąsiedztwa i wzajemnych korzyści.

'It [both countries' victory over Nazism and totalitarianism] makes it certain that our nations will continue to go along the path of democratic changes and to build their relations on the principles of equality, respect, genuine good-neighbourliness and mutual benefits.'

5. Reconciliation?

There are clear differences between the representation of the Warsaw Uprising in the two speeches. Textually, Wałęsa represents the Soviet Union as responsible for the demise of the Uprising. Nazi Germany is not explicitly positioned as the force against which the Uprising was directed. In Filatov's speech, on the other hand, Nazi Germany is blamed for the Uprising. The Soviet Union is situated both as an ally and a country with a similar history, suffering under the same enemies. It seems that the differences between the speeches lie in the political and social contexts of the two countries.

5.1. *Politics*

In the case of Poland, since 1989 the country has been attempting to shift its political affiliation from the Eastern bloc to Western Europe. Polish governments have made it repeatedly clear that they see Poland's place both within the EU and NATO. And it is the Federal Republic of Germany which gives the strongest support to those aspirations. In his speech Roman Herzog made an explicit reference to German support for those efforts. Furthermore, more than half of the foreign investment in Poland - which the country needs badly - comes from Germany. Wałęsa, therefore, was presented not with a problem of how to tell the 'truth' about the Western neighbour of Poland, but rather, how not to present it as an enemy - after all one does not get support from enemies and neither does one invite enemies to invest at home.

On the other hand, the account of the Soviet participation in the Uprising has always been silenced throughout the reign of communists in Poland. Wałęsa's representation gives Poles the satisfaction of eventually getting the 'truth' about the event: the truth they know and expect to hear aloud. Russia also objects to Polish aspirations to join NATO. Once again, therefore, it attempts to exert power over its former satellite. Telling the truth in front of the representative of Russia, therefore, is almost a symbolic act of bravery.

On the other hand, as Russia struggles to transfer from totalitarian communism to democracy, President Yeltsin has continually faced opposition from 'hard-liners' and most notably from the army. Moreover, the Russian political scene has witnessed the emergence of ultra-nationalist forces in the form of, for example, Vladimir Zhirinovskiy and his party explicitly demanding that the Russian government reinstate the country in its role as an awesome superpower. Any sign of apology to Poland - a former satellite of the USSR - could have been seen as selling the country out, as a weakness a powerful Russia cannot afford. Moreover, claiming common ground between the two countries helps Yeltsin distance himself and Russia in general from its past and, possibly, show the country in a new, democratic light.

Both representations of history - Wałęsa's as well as Filatov's - coupled with the absence of President Yeltsin, serve a political purpose and cannot and probably should not be construed in terms of truth.

5.2. Polish Messiah and Russian ghosts

There is also a social dimension to the two historical representations. Wałęsa, by constructing Poland as a lone fighter for its freedom and independence, ties into a long romanticist tradition of lone fighters against all odds. Polish romanticism (incidentally, the literary period most thoroughly covered in Polish schools) - coinciding with Poland's loss of independence in the 19th century - both in philosophy and literature, saw Poland as called to perform a sacred mission of suffering for and saving the rest of the world, the Messiah of the nations. Both Poland and the romanticist hero represented in literature lost (on Polish national mythologies, see e.g. Baczko 1994). Wałęsa, however, not only invokes the myth of the romanticist battle but also redeems it. The lone and abandoned Poland at last has the power to absolve or not to absolve, to forgive or not to forgive. Although it was lost in military terms, the Warsaw Uprising has eventually paid off. Wałęsa provides a country stricken by economic hardship with a moment of symbolic glamour; more importantly, it is glamour associated with its most beloved myth. Once again - this time in telling the 'truth' about the Soviet Union and intertextually contradicting communist propaganda - Poland has regained independence. Once again - by its attitude towards Germany - Poland has turned out to be generous and special.

Russia's present, on the other hand, is still overshadowed by the Great War for the Motherland. Nothing can or should question the glory of that time. It is the time of the blockade of Leningrad, of the winter of Stalingrad, of the 20 million deaths, by far the largest loss of life suffered by one country. To overturn almost 50 years of continual propaganda based on the Second World War as an all-important part of the cultural heritage of the Soviet Union, on a par only with the 1917 Revolution, is impossible to do in one speech. Especially one addressed to the very people Russians have always been told they first saved, and then protected.

5.3. Politics above all

Reconciliation does not fit into the two national mythologies. Speaking in Warsaw both politicians address their own nations. Wałęsa attempted to give the Poles their pride, Filatov attempted to save Russia's face. Reconciliation between the two countries would mean giving up their symbols, which is probably too high a price to pay for either of them. Politically, it is NATO, the EU and foreign investment rather than memories of the Warsaw Pact which are more important to the Poles. Representations of history must reflect those ambitions, as President Wałęsa's construction of Germany does. In the short term we have no political stake in reconciliation with Russia, but we care about reconciling with Germany. After all, we may well end up being called the latter's allies. What kind of reconciliation is that, though?

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