Radical 'Historical Politics' and its Impact on the Concept of Patriotism in Poland

“‘Historical politics’ became a tool used to exclude opponents from the realm of the national community; a tool used to decide who is a good patriot and who does not deserve this name; finally, a tool to create a new vision of history subjugated to current needs and divisions.”¹ Paweł Machcewicz

Abstract
The concept of patriotism and the contestation over its meaning are a permanent fixture in key public debates in Poland over the last twenty-five years. The analysis focuses on the strategies used to define, re-shape and «bend» the notion of patriotism, which during this period has become a central issue in Polish political discourse. Contemporary Polish society is characterized by a growing polarization of the public sphere. Rivalry between former communists and former dissidents has been progressively replaced by internal opposition within the ranks of once-dissident allies, now divided into civic-minded «critical» patriots and nationalist-oriented «traditional» patriots. This division re-emerges regularly during key moments in Polish public life – most recently in the aftermath of the highly contested 2015 parliamentary elections. By tracing the evolution of the debate over patriotism since 1989, the paper provides crucial insights into the current political situation, and the growing discursive polarization due to the conservative party PiS radical 'historical politics'.

¹ „Polityka historyczna” stała się narzędziem wykluczania przeciwników poza wspólnotę narodową, orzekania, kto jest dobrym patriotą, a kto nie zasługuje na to miano, wreszcie budowania nowej wizji historii podporządkowanej współczesnym potrzebom i podziałom”. Paweł Machcewicz, Spory o historię 2000-2011, Znak 2012.
The public debates between intellectuals that occurred during the first decade of the democratic transition in Poland fostered the re-definition of key political concepts, such as fatherland, patriotism and nationalism, and the recovery of their meaning after years of communist manipulation. The discussions concerning the form of the new regime and the heritage of the former regime signalled the emerging opposition between liberal and conservative positions, but remained open in nature.

This situation was to change progressively, following the emergence of a new strong intellectual conservative circle in the early 2000s, and the growing impact it was to have both on the nature of public debates and on politics. While in the beginning of the second decade of democratic transition the intellectual discussion was still relatively open and deliberative, later on, the nature of the contestation was to become increasingly polarized. The conservative intellectual circle, which will be introduced in the next sub-section, increasingly influenced the political discourse, because of its association with the conservative party PiS, Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice). Its leading representatives provided the conservative party with a conceptual framework, helping it not only to win the legislative elections in 2005, but also to frame the public discussion.

The contestation over the meaning of patriotism increasingly spread beyond the discussion of the regime form to encompass the discussion about the approach to be taken with regards to the past and national history, especially with the emergence of the concept of ‘historical politics’ and the progressive polarization it had on the public discourse on the whole.

This paper will start from presenting the intellectual circle that developed new concepts that the conservatives started to use in their policies. It will then analyze the
concept of historical politics and its transposition into the realm of public policies during PiS government between 2005 and 2015. By analyzing the impact of this concept on the discussion about patriotism, the paper will show a growing polarization of discourses, which continues to rise with the come-back of PiS to power in 2015.

**New circle of conservative intellectuals**

Young conservative philosophers and historians, born in the 1960s, created the Warsaw Club of Political Critique in 1995, in reaction to the election of the post-communist politician, Aleksander Kwaśniewski, as President of Poland. Its prominent members, such as Marek A. Cichocki, Dariusz Karłowicz, Tomasz Merta or Dariusz Gawin, are predominantly linked to Warsaw University and the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences. Apart from their academic work in the field of political philosophy, these authors also participate in daily *Publizistik*, and write articles in a number of right-wing dailies and weeklies, as well as in Kraków’s *Ośrodek Myśli Politycznej* (Centre of Political Thought).

Cichocki, Gawin, and Karłowicz are united in their communitarian criticism of liberalism and of the nature of consolidation of Polish democracy after 1989 that to their mind did not achieve a proper break with communism. They criticize the alleged lack of political community in Poland that prevents the emergence of a strong republic. They believe that the Church has sometimes filled this void, and that theses about the incompatibility of religion with modernization or about growing

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2 Piotr Kieżun concludes that post-political liberalism aiming at transforming politics into administration is the main enemy of the conservatives. The field of fight is culture and memory that conservatives use to create symbols that bring together political community. ("Konserwatyzm w cieniu apokalipsy (Conservatism in the shadow of apocalypse)," *Znak* 668 (2011)).

secularization are mistaken. The name of their flagship publication, *Teologia Polityczna* (Political Theology) reveals their intention to bring together the political and religious spheres, from which they derive values or ethics on which politics and democracy are to be founded. They also point to republicanism as the ideal political form that could guarantee Polish ‘political subjectivity (*podmiotowość*)’ and taking ‘truly’ political decisions.

‘Historical politics’: the emergence of the concept - political intellectuals versus historians

The idea of *polityka historyczna* (historical politics) was initially a concept developed by the aforementioned conservative philosophers in the early 2000s, inspired by the German term *Geschichtspolitik*. According to Alexei Miller, *Geschichtspolitik* was a derogatory term coined by the opponents of Chancellor Helmut Kohl’s revisiting of some elements of historical discourse in the early 1980s, and was never adopted by his proponents. Polish proponents of historical politics openly gave it the programmatic aim of promoting one specific vision of the past in society: an exclusively positive and heroic one.

The emergence of the concept was prompted by two public debates about controversial historical questions. The first took place in 2000-2001 and concerned the uncovering of the pogrom of Jewish inhabitants of Jedwabne in 1941, by their

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4 [www.teologiapolityczna.pl](http://www.teologiapolityczna.pl)
Polish neighbours.\textsuperscript{10} The second debate was a controversy (that peaked in 2002-2003) about the construction of the research and educational institution ‘Centre against Expulsions’\textsuperscript{11} in Berlin, promoted by Erika Steinbach, a CDU member of the German Bundestag (centre-right Christian Democratic party), and president of the German Federation of Expellees (\textit{Bund der Vertriebenen}). According to the conservative intellectuals, both of these debates ‘tarnished’ the image of Poland in the world, and prompted the rise of a ‘critical’ approach to national history, according to which Poles had been not only victims\textsuperscript{12} of the Second World War, but also wrongdoers. The alleged need for an active historical politics affirming prideful historical moments was further reinforced by the allegation advanced by the conservatives that throughout the democratic transition very little had been done in the domain of promoting positive historical references among society.

Having said that, the promoters of historical politics did not define it very precisely; rather each of them applied it freely to his domain of interest: culture, national heritage, tradition, literature, diplomacy, or the role of state in determining national holidays and commemorations. A strong accent was put on memory, history and historical education, and their role in the transmission and reproduction of a positive national identity that, according to the conservatives, should be encouraged by the state administration. The idea of historical politics, they argued, was prompted

\textsuperscript{10} It was prompted by the publication of Jan Tomasz Gross’ book, \textit{Sąsiedzi} (Sejny: Pogranicze, 2000).
\textsuperscript{11} The controversy whether, how and where to commemorate Germans (and other nations), expelled from their properties in Eastern European countries after the Second World War, lasted until 2008, when the decision was taken to locate the memorial ‘Visible sign’ in Berlin. The construction of the Centre started only in 2013, due to long controversy over its form. A number of promoters of Polish historical politics refer to the controversy over the commemoration of expellees to motivate their perception of a need to promote country’s vision of the past internationally, and avoid adopting others’ national narratives or concepts, such as expulsions. Dariusz Gawin, ‘Krytyczny patriotyzm: próba bilansu, (Critical patriotism: an attempt at conclusion)’ http://www.omp.org.pl/artylku.php?artykul=82, accessed on 10 March 2012.
\textsuperscript{12} The post-war communist historiography forged a canonical memory of the Second World War in which Poles were depicted as heroes and victims.
by the willingness of Poles to ‘affirm their history,’ and the need to reinstate ‘just proportions’ between an ‘affirmative’ and a ‘critical’ approach to history, as they believed that the critical approach was overpowering the affirmative one.

While every government performs some elements of historical politics, without necessarily calling it such: for example, by choosing national holidays and ways of commemorating important historical events from the past, naming of streets, or constructing specific statues and places of memory; in the case of conservative historical politics, the mental image of attempting to determine the ‘right’ memory put off many a professional historian. Historians showed a strong scepticism towards historical politics, because they understood it as another kind of political propaganda, making history political. These doubts were ignited by statements of the promoters of the concept, who, in numerous debates organized by newspapers, defined it, among others as:

[…] posługiwanie się przez demokratyczne (ale nie tylko) społeczeństwa własnymi interpretacjami wydarzeń z przeszłości do osiągania — między innymi — bieżących celów politycznych.

Furthermore, from many programmatic statements of its creators, one can deduce that the aim of the conservative historical politics was to take away history (or rather memory) from the sole influence of historians, given that Cichocki claimed that:

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15 Tomasz Merta recognized that the name historical politics might not have been the most suitable in Polish, where putting together politics and history was likely to bring to mind the communist propaganda, manipulating history (in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, ‘Czy państwo ma rządzić historią?’ [Shall the state govern history?], debate with the participation of Jerzy Jedlicki, Tomasz Merta, Barbara Engelking-Boni, Andrzej Friszke, Zbigniew Głuza, Daniel Grinberg, 16 June 2006.)
16 Politics has here the negative connotation of acting according to one’s immediate interest, and not taking decisions concerning the community in the name of the common good.
The conservative creators of historical politics dismissed any objection to this concept, advanced by historians, or *Publizists* of liberal and left-wing leaning, by accusing them of hidden agendas or negative intentions. A soft way of dismissing criticism was to imply that this concept became a ‘fashionable object of criticism’, but many strategies went further, discussing the alleged motivations of the critics. Gawin, for instance, insisted that every criticism was psychologically based, allegedly resulting from the critics’ trauma with the communist historical propaganda, in which pride in national history often led to national megalomania and nationalism. The conservatives also implied that the detractors of historical politics were criticizing it out of spite, because they did not do much in the 1990s to promote history and were jealous of those who tried to change this situation:

> [...] trudno uwolnić się od wrażenia, że autorzy [krytyki] za własne zaniechania krytykują tych, którzy dzisiaj realizują projekty polityki historycznej. [[…] it is difficult to lose the impression that the critics blame those who currently implement projects of historical politics for their own failures.]

More harshly even, Gawin accused the critics of historical politics of attempting to discredit the concept of collective memory, prompting historical amnesia and contributing to a ‘cold democratic project’ of the Third Republic. Cichocki, in turn, linked the alleged neglecting of history in the 1990s to the lack of recognition of the role of the Solidarity movement in the end of communism both in Poland and in

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21 Cichocki, ‘Polityka pamięci.’

22 Gawin, ‘Wspólnota przeszłości.’

23 Third Republic of Poland is the regime that was created in 1989 (*III Rzeczpospolita*), after the demise of the communist regime.
Europe. And a radical right-wing Publizist Piotr Semka accused liberal and left-wing elites of reacting nervously towards attempts at reinstating real value to concepts such as patriotism and solidarity. In his nationalist line of argumentation, any criticism concerning historical memory demonstrated an ‘allergy’ to patriotism.

The conservatives seemed to have missed the point in directing their rejection of criticisms of historical politics at the previous political elites who allegedly did not promote historical memory in the society, because the main rebuttal came from professional historians. This criticism was not based on the rejection or undermining of national history, let alone post-national theses. Rather, as liberal historian Andrzej Romanowski deplored, it was the fact that historical politics meant the promotion of one-sided, unequivocally right-wing historical discourse attacking the alleged ‘relativism’ of historians, and ‘neutrality’ of the state. Other renowned historians, such as Marcin Kula, reproached historical politics with its inherent intention of using history instrumentally to achieve political goals, promoting one, ‘good’ version of it. Daria Nałęcz and Maciej Janowski objected to the fact that the conservative politicians, after adopting the concept for their electoral programme and governmental politics, considered the promotion of a specific vision of the past as its task. While any government controls and approves school programs and/or the content of textbooks, thus influencing the vision of past, and memory of a population, the

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24 Cichocki, ‘Polityka pamięci’.
26 According to Aleksander Hall, it is difficult to qualify this project as truly conservative, because an affirmative approach to history is the antithesis of the most mature strand of 19th century Polish conservatism, Krakowska szkoła historyczna, Kraków’s historical school, highly critical of noble republicanism and opposed to the idealization of Polish past.
29 In a debate organized by Gazeta Wyborcza, ‘Po co rządzić historią?’
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controversy touched upon the question of the role of historians with respect to politics, and the possible undermining of the objectivity and neutrality of research.

‘Historical politics’ as public policy of PiS
The concept of historical politics was deployed in the sphere of public policies by the conservative government of PiS, between 2005 and 2007, demonstrating a growing influence of conservative intellectuals over the public sphere. Within its electoral program of 2005, the PiS implied that there was an alleged crisis of ‘Polonism’ and a lack of patriotism in the public sphere. The party thus called for reinforcing the role of family, schools and media in forming patriotic behaviour rooted in Christian values and national traditions. This plan for a strong offensive of a specific, closed and nationalist vision of patriotism materialized after the PiS’ electoral victory in 2005, via the deployment of historical politics in the realm of public policies, illustrating the transposition of the concept from ideational sphere into politics.

During the government of the PiS, between 2005 and 2007, the historical politics promoted an ‘affirmative’ approach to national history and patriotism, in opposition to a ‘critical approach’ championed by the liberal camp. The affirmative approach is sometimes called defensive or apologetic, because it focuses solely on the promotion of positive and prideful elements of the national past, and does not admit the discussion of problematic questions (e.g. dark pages of Polish-Jewish war history). The promotion of an ‘affirmative’ approach resulted from the critical assessment of the conservative intellectuals of the democratic regime of the Third Republic, and their claim that this regime is not the state the 1980s right-wing opposition had fought for, because it inherited many laws and institutions of the

former regime.\textsuperscript{31} They insisted that the nature of the state (sometimes called in a belittling way, the ‘Republic of the Round Table’\textsuperscript{32}) should be thoroughly changed and won back from the liberal-left-wing elites, or even that a Fourth Republic\textsuperscript{33} should be installed. This last idea migrated from conservative intellectuals and \textit{Publizists} to the broader political discourse, where it became a key point of the electoral program of the PiS in 2005, alongside historical politics.

Once the government was formed by PiS, the expansion of historical politics could be strongly observed in public policies. It concerned particularly the activity of the Ministries of Education, and the Ministry of Culture and national heritage. Patriotism ranked particularly high on the agenda of Roman Giertych, extreme-right wing politician from the LPR,\textsuperscript{34} Minister of Education between 5 May 2006 and 13 August 2007. Giertych tried to interpret the promotion of patriotism advocated by historical politics in line with his nationalist worldview, proposing patriotic excursions, lessons of patriotism in schools, or amending the list of set texts. His ideas were too radical even for the conservative intellectuals and the PiS, and were often criticized, finally leading to his resignation. But it was the activities of the Ministry of culture and national heritage, led by conservative Minister Kazimierz M. Ujazdowski and Vice-Minister Tomasz Merta (conservative intellectual behind the cultural


\textsuperscript{32} Słomka, Tomasz "Patriotyzm konstytucyjny: próba identyfikacji zjawiska w warunkach polskich" [Constitutional patriotism: attempt at identifying the phenomenon in Polish reality], in \textit{Patriotyzm współczesnych Polaków} [Patriotism of modern Poles], ed. Aleksandra Skrabacz (Centralna Biblioteka Wojskowa im. Marszałka Józefa Piłsudskiego 2012).

\textsuperscript{33} This concept was used the first time in July 1989, by the Chairman of \textit{Senat}, Andrzej Stelmachowski, former member of the democratic opposition, in his critique of the election of Wojciech Jaruzelski, former communist head of state, as President of Poland. It was further developed by Rafał Matyja in 1998, and by Paweł Śpiewak, in 2003. In the legislative campaign 2005, it was used by the PiS, PO and PSL, but it became progressively linked with the PiS.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Liga Polskich Rodzin}, the League of Polish Families.
program of the PiS) that prompted a new iteration of contestation about patriotism within the prism of historical politics. In 2005 Ujazdowski created ‘Patriotyzm jutra’ [Patriotism of tomorrow], a new operational program of the Ministry for financing cultural projects. It replaced the funds allocated by Ujazdowski’s left-wing predecessor Waldemar Dąbrowski to the third sector of cultural NGOs. This program, alongside ‘Dziedzictwo kulturowe’ [Cultural heritage], was to promote various local initiatives in the domain of patriotism. Furthermore, the budget of the program ‘Dziedzictwo kulturowe’ was extended, while the program ‘Znaki czasu’ [Signs of time], designed to promote modern art was reduced. For the abovementioned reasons, some commentators concluded that a far better name for the Ministry of Culture would be the Ministry of the Past.35

Another important front of historical politics was a creation of specific museums. Two are particularly worth mentioning here. *Muzeum Powstania Warszawskiego*, MPW [Museum of Warsaw Uprising], which was open in 2004, when Lech Kaczyński was mayor of Warsaw is often described as an example of historical politics avant la lettre, i.e. before its ideational conceptualization, by its proponents. It commemorates the Warsaw Uprising of 1944, depicting it in a purely heroic and glorious way, without entering into more in-depth historical discussions about its timing and military chances, contributing to perpetuating the heroic memory of Second World War, as mentioned before. The second example is *Muzeum Historii Polski*, MHP [the Museum of History of Poland], which was among the institutions created at the height of historical politics, by conservative minister of culture and

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national heritage, Kazimierz M. Ujazdowski, in 2006. Robert Kostro, one of Ujazdowski’s close collaborators, directs it.

The analysis of the operational programme ‘Patriotism of tomorrow’ and of the museums created in line with the label of historical politics, let concluding that promotion of history and of patriotism envisaged by the Ministry focused essentially on the military fight for freedom during the war. The generation who fought against communism or just had to live under this regime seems absent from the narrative; even Solidarność rarely makes the cut. The conservatives claimed that they wanted ‘żeby słowo patriotyzm nie było staroświeckie, ale nowoczesne i modne [the word ‘patriotism’ to be perceived as modern and fashionable, not old-fashioned].’\(^\text{37}\) While they underscored that patriotism was an important element of civic activity, the most often presented models of patriotism were fighters from the times of Second World War. The traditions of dissidents under communism and their action towards constructing civil society were not showcased. Given that conservative intellectuals and politicians often claimed that after 1989 there was no proper settling of accounts with the communist past, potentially then, in their idea of patriotism, the people who lived during that time could not be presented as role models of patriotism.

‘Affirmative patriotism’ promoted by historical politics
Within their historical politics, conservative intellectuals created a strong framework aiming at promoting the vision of patriotism rooted in heroic and war traditions, framing it as ‘modern.’ Historians criticized this dubious and controversial promotion of patriotism, because ‘the concept of patriotism popularized by historical politics

\(^{36}\) It is so despite of the strong discourse of proponents of historical politics about Solidarność.

supporters in most cases relates to nationalism in its narrow sense, based on the simple dichotomy “us-them” in its most extreme form, or patronizing “the others” in its gentler form.\textsuperscript{38}

The liberal and left-wing critics of historical politics dubbed this approach ‘affirmative,’\textsuperscript{39} because it insisted on a solely affirmative approach to the national past, but also because it was coined in binary opposition to an enemy – ‘critical’ patriotism.\textsuperscript{40} Critical patriotism, just as historical politics, was a concept coined by the conservatives to discredit a critical or ‘revisionist’ approach to national history allegedly promoted throughout the democratic transition.

The conservative approach included a number of elements. Tomasz Merta’s explanation of the program ‘Patriotism of tomorrow’ is exemplary for its stances. He focused on the dichotomy between the counter-concepts of ‘critical’ and ‘affirmative’ approaches that he called fatalism and triumphalism, and insisted on the need of coexistence of critical and heroic history:

\begin{quote}
Historia krytyczna jest naturalnym dopełnieniem historii bohaterskiej, choć niedobrze się dzieje, kiedy próbuje ją zastąpić.
\end{quote}

He implied that patriotism in times of war was always more visible than in times of peace, concluding that in peaceful times it should be promoted by the intentional action of public administration, starting with historical education in schools. Merta’s position can be qualified as moderate, in the sense that he promoted the co-existence of critical and affirmative approaches to history. Other conservative intellectuals and \textit{Publizists} were not so benign, trying to frame critical patriotism as an extreme

\textsuperscript{38} Stobiecki, “Historians facing politics of history,” 186.
\textsuperscript{39} Romanowski, ‘Majsterkowicze.’
\textsuperscript{40} Kurski, Jarosław. ‘Kicz patriotyczny’ [Patriotic kitsch], \textit{Gazeta Wyborcza}, Interview with Robert Traba. 7-8 January 2006.
position or even not patriotism at all. Paweł Ukielski, deputy director of the Museum of Warsaw Uprising, was one of them. To his mind, the Museum:

> [...] wychodzi poza schemat konfliktu między chwalcami a szydercami. Uważamy, że można poruszać się pomiędzy tym, co zwykle się nazywa patriotyzmem krytycznym, a drugą skrajnością – chwaleniem wszystkiego co polskie, bo polskie właśnie.

[...] steps beyond the schematic conflict between the flatterers and the deriders. We believe that it is possible to navigate between critical patriotism, and the other extreme – praising anything that is Polish, only because it is Polish.

Conservative historian Andrzej Nowak resorted to a strong communitarian proposition to reject both critical patriotism and the liberal call for impartial treatment of everyone, implying that such an approach would not favour the creation of a universal community, but rather reinforce the split into two communities: ‘us’ and ‘them.’ It would exclude, he argued, some groups from the realm of the community, notably proponents of the ‘old fatherland,’ who did not understand or accept ‘critical patriotism.’ The liberals used this accusation of exclusion in the reverse way: Bronisław Łagowski, for instance, suggested that the conservatives, within their affirmative conception of love of one’s country also excluded different groups of Polish population from the community, namely those subscribing to ‘critical patriotism.’ Hence a mutual exclusion and feeling of being excluded arose between the opposed camps.

Nowak rooted his position in the strong communitarian stance developed by Alasdair MacIntyre, claiming that belonging to a community was necessary to learn moral rules, and that moral and political judgements could not be abstracted from the interpretive frameworks provided by the community. Nowak put forward this proposition in his polemical answer to the provocative proposition of philosopher...

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42 In debate ‘Polityka historyczna – za i przeciw’.
43 Nowak, Andrzej. ‘Czas patriotów’ [Time of patriots], Wprost, 37/2007
Tomasz Żuradzki, who, in centre-left daily Gazeta Wyborcza, defended a strong liberal position that moral impartiality was a *sine qua non* condition of moral philosophy and thus patriotism, favouring specific people or country, was like racism. Żuradzki, in a rare contribution engaging with the question of moral permissibility of patriotism, drawing on Peter Singer, concluded that

> Patriotyzm nie ma żadnego uzasadnienia moralnego – jest zbędnym reliktem przeszłości, pozostałością po dawno zapomnianych sposobach życia. [Patriotism does not have any moral justification – it is a useless relic of the past, a residue of the forgotten ways of life.]

This strong, liberal rejection of patriotism was isolated. But there were many other criticisms directed specifically at the ‘affirmative’ version of patriotism from leftist and liberal circles, focusing on the fact that the affirmative approach prompted: the rejection of critical thinking; or the concealing of the dark past and an overly negative assessment of the democratic transformation. Cultural anthropologist Joanna Tokarska-Bakir qualified the affirmative approach, valuing positive experiences and concealing the negative and shameful ones, as ‘childish.’ To counter the ‘affirmative’ approach, she proposed to develop a ‘mature’ approach towards the past that would also accept dark moments. The motive of maturity of the nation was also invoked by historian Anna Wolff-Powęska, who noted that concepts such as nation, identity and patriotism were over-used, and concluded that the more a nation was mature, the more it could be self-critical.

However, the conservative intellectuals, backed by a newly emerging strong circle of national-conservative *Publizists* gathered around right-wing daily

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45 Żuradzki, Tomasz. ‘Patriotyzm jest jak rasizm’ [Patriotism is like racism], *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 17 August 2007.
46 Traba, interviewed by Kurski, ‘Kicz patriotyczny’.
48 In the debate ‘Po co rządzić historią?’
49 Wolff-Powęska, ‘Jak dziś być patriotą?’
Rzeczpospolita, continued to dismiss such criticisms. Tomasz Terlikowski maintained that their robust communitarian approach constituted a third way between two extremes that he described as secular liberal (allegedly ‘distilling patriotism from any concrete, particularist national [and religious] characteristics’) and extreme national-Catholic (linked to the nationalist party LPR and its leader Giertych, who pushed his nationalist agenda under the label of patriotism). Terlikowski accused both ‘extremes’ of willingness to construct the national community and patriotism in a de-contextualized way, implying that the conservative approach was based on the rejection of such supposed constructivism, and on the concrete context of the specific community:

Odrzucenie konstruktywizmu związane jest z uznaniem, że tym, co kształtuje patriotyzm, nie jest idea intelektualistów ani wyobrażenie artystów, ale konkret historycznego, społecznego i kulturalnego bytu partykularnej wspólnoty. 

[The rejection of constructivism is linked to the fact that patriotism is not an idea of intellectuals or creation of artists, but constitutes the product of a concrete historical, social and cultural existence of a community.]

However, by the same token, the conservative historical politics, promoting the intentional use of history to achieve political goals could be qualified as constructivist. This argument was notably used by one of leading Publizist of Gazeta Wyborcza, Adam Leszczyński, who claimed the conservatives also performed a choice of tradition in their arguments. He played devil’s advocate by implying that:


[In the whole Teologia Polityczna [right-wing publication of the conservative Publizists], the choice of tradition is presented as evidence, but it is not an evident choice. Paradoxically, by writing incessantly about tradition and identity, these authors prove right the post-modern thesis that both tradition and identity are ideological constructs.]

50 Terlikowski, Tomasz. ‘Po diabła narody?’ [Why the hell nations?], Rzeczpospolita, 15 September 2007.
51 Leszczyński, Adam. ‘Narodowy sposób wiązania sznurowadeł’ [National way of tying the laces]. Gazeta Wyborcza, 8-9 August 2009.
Hence one can observe that the concept of constructivism served both liberals and conservatives to mutually accuse each other and reject their respective specific types of cultural or ideological references.

**The entrance of a new contender in the contestation over historical politics – the left-wing**

The intellectuals from the left-wing intellectual circle of *Krytyka Polityczna* that emerged in the early 2000s also participated in the contestation over historical politics and ‘critical patriotism.’

*Krytyka Polityczna* set itself the task of saving leftist traditions from oblivion that was prompted by historical politics in the public sphere. Its 2007 book’s significant title *Ile ojczyzn, ile patriotyzmów* [How many fatherlands? How many patriotisms?] was reminiscent of the influential essay by the spiritual father of the new left, Jan Józef Lipski, ‘*Dwie ojczyzny, dwa patriotyzmy*’ [Two fatherlands, two patriotisms], from 1981. The book presented the position of the left, concerning its identity and historical politics. The left-wing intellectuals recognized the need to use references to history and acknowledged that memory was a political question. In the opinion of Rafał Chwedoruk, the left needed to lead its own historical politics to prevent the disappearance of the left-wing traditions that the

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52 *Krytyka Polityczna* is a club created in Warsaw in 2002 by young left-wing intellectuals, around Sławomir Sierakowski. It holds vibrant local discussion clubs all over Poland. It publishes articles on its website and has edited books since 2007, promoting different traditions of the leftist thinking. *Krytyka Polityczna* sets itself the aim of promoting a strong leftist political language, as a complement to the liberal and the conservative ones. It distances itself from the post-communist social-democrat party SLD, and from members of the post-Solidarity left, such as Adam Michnik. While it shares many of the pro-European, economic and social postulates of these left-wing camps, it differs from them by accentuating the need to promote deep change in political culture, for example by promoting the cultural rights of discriminated minorities.

53 *Krytyki Politycznej przewodnik lewicy. Idee, daty i fakty, pytania i odpowiedzi* (Warszawa: Stowarzyszenie im. Stanisława Brzozowskiego, 2007). While initial de-communisation of the public sphere took place in years following the regime change in 1989, and a number of status and street names linked to communism were then removed, within conservative historical politics in mid-2000s, the trend was to associate or even assimilate different past left-wing figures to communism (even Interwar socialists), and try to get rid of these references from the public sphere.

conservative party tried to annihilate, notably by assimilating them to the communist regime. The leader of *Krytyka Polityczna*, Sławomir Sierakowski, further enumerated a number of leftist traditions worth saving, or even promoting: the idea of state patriotism, promoted in the Interwar period by the socialist party PPS, or the thought of socialist philosopher Stanisław Brzozowski.\(^55\)

According to the authors of *Krytyka Polityczna*, only the revival of left-wing thought could transcend the impasse between conservatism and liberalism.\(^56\) They thus tried to position themselves as the third ideological option. In doing so, they intentionally tried to position the conservatives as nationalist and challenged the conservative’s attempt at presenting themselves as a viable third option between liberalism and nationalism, in terms of defining historical politics or the concept of patriotism.

In *How many fatherlands?* Maciej Gdula concluded that while ‘critical patriotism’ provided a tool to criticize the right-wing vision of history, it was not sufficient to build an alternative, positive historical politics, because it only focused on the dark pages of history. Gdula pointed out that adopting this concept could contribute to perpetuating the conservative, ‘affirmative’ approach to history, rather than going beyond it. Indeed, the perspective of leading leftist historical politics just for the sake of preserving leftist heritage, would contribute to reinforcing partisan approaches to the past rather than to opening a new platform for dialogue. For that reason, he argued, the leftist project of historical politics needed to go beyond the

\(^{55}\) Sierakowski, Sławomir. ‘Gra w klasy z historią’ [Playing hop-scotch with history], Dziennik, 12 April 2008.

horizon of national history and focus, e.g. on the fight for emancipation of women or ethnic minorities.

It is noteworthy that young leftist intellectuals did not reject the idea of patriotism en bloc. A prominent left-wing feminist thinker Agnieszka Graff, among others, presented a polemical response\(^57\) to the aforementioned liberal refutation of patriotism advanced by Żuradzki. Graff concluded that Żuradzki’s objectivist argument about the lack of moral permissibility of patriotism did not reflect the reality, and that patriotism, contrarily to nationalism, did not have to lead to conflicts. Graff also objected to leaving the care for national tradition and its values to the conservative right and the Church,\(^58\) because it would imply the victory of the extreme position, aiming at instilling in Poles the conviction that Polishness needed to be identified with Catholicism in its ‘Radio Maryja’ (closed Church) version, or with the male gender:\(^59\)

\[\text{Zamiast rezygnować z patriotyzmu jako zbędnego balastu, trzeba go redefiniować; wpisywać weź otwartość, różnorodność, sprawiedliwość. W kraju, gdzie depozytariuszami wspólnotowych emocji i symboli pozostają Kościół i konserwatywna prawica, podobny projekt dużo łatwiej opisać, niż przeprowadzić. […] Jeśli chętnie się upomnieć o prawa kobiet i mniejszości, to musimy je wpisać w nową formułę polskiego patriotyzmu.}\]

Instead of renouncing on patriotism entirely or describing it as unnecessary ballast, we have to redefine this concept, link it to openness, diversity and justice. In a country where the Church and the conservative right consider themselves depositaries of communitarian emotions and symbols, this is easier said than done, but we have to try. […] If we want to fight for the rights of women and minorities, we have to inscribe them into the new formula of Polish patriotism.]\(^59\)

\(^{57}\) Graff, Agnieszka. ‘Polskość nie jest własnością endeków’ [Polishness is not owned by Endecja], Gazeta Wyborcza, 23 August 2007.

\(^{58}\) Idem.

\(^{59}\) An early example of a gender-oriented reflection on the form of (national) political community comes from the contribution of Ewa Hauser ‘Traditions of patriotism, questions of gender: the case of Poland,’ in Post-communism and the body politic, ed. Ellen E. Berry (New York: New York University Press, 1995). Hauser argued that the re-definition of the content of national identity had to be linked to restructuring the meaning of gender, away from the repressive patriarchal element of traditional patriotism, infused with religion and maintained by the Church’s hierarchy, denying real agency to women and perpetuating hetero-normativity.
Wanda Nowicka, another key left-wing feminist, shared Graff’s call for re-conquering the notion of patriotism from the conservative right and rendering it more open and equal. She nevertheless doubted whether promoting the rights of different segments of the nation would be modern enough, as it would not offer anything new to Polish citizens of other nationalities. The fact that the left-wing intellectuals engaged in the debate over historical politics and patriotism (even if these are not concepts naturally associated with their ideological stances), and linked them to their political agenda, testifies to the importance of these concepts. It also proves the agenda-setting skills of the conservative politicians, who introduced these concepts, formulated by intellectual circle close to them, in the political discourse and set the terms of discussion, thus inducing the necessity for other ideological camps to engage in the debate over their meaning so as not to be marginalized in the political and ideological power struggle for the discursive domination.

**The aftermath of discussion**

The beginning of the second decade of the transition was marked by the emergence and consolidation of new intellectual circles: the conservative one and the left-wing one, which set the tone of public debates. While in the beginning of the 2000s conservative intellectuals tried to promote a moderate communitarian third way to patriotism (that according to them could be placed between liberalism and defensive nationalism), with time, they drifted towards more ‘closed’ positions, rejecting criticism. They skilfully introduced specific conceptual constructions such as historical politics in the public discourse, proposing them as political ideas to the

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conservative party, during the period of its government (2005-2007), despite significant criticism from their liberal and left-wing opponents. The capacity of the conservatives to influence the public discourse was achieved in parallel to the strengthening of the right-wing bipartisanism and contributed to discursive polarization. The conservatives’ ‘natural’ propensity to present themselves as the protectors of the community allowed them to master the act of definition or labelling of some concepts, notably patriotism, pushing some liberals, such as Magdalena Środa, previously committed to the intellectual debate about patriotism, to conclude:

Rzeczywiście, nie jestem patriotką, jeśli przez patriotyzm rozumieć potrzebę rozliczeń, zemsty, pomników, modlitwy i muzeów. [Indeed, I am not a patriot, if by patriotism we understand a need for drawing accounts, revenge, constructing statues and museums or saying prayers.]

Even if the conservative intellectuals and politicians progressively claim a monopoly over the definition of true patriotism, competing conceptualizations remain available in the public sphere, enabling other ideological positions to participate in the discussion over its meaning and tried to impose their counter-narratives, or counter-concepts to challenge the dominant conservative frame. Nevertheless, a growing perception of ‘discourses of exclusion,’ between proponents of ‘critical’ and ‘affirmative’ approaches accentuates the polarization. Even though PiS lost power in the anticipated 2007 legislative elections (that were called because of disintegration of its coalition with LPR and Samoobrona), the concepts that it introduced in the public discourse and policies remained. The opposition between affirmative and critical approach to history has also became an important cleavage that could be noted in the discussions that followed the publication of subsequent books of Jan Tomasz Gross on Polish-Jewish relations during and after Second World War in 2008 and 2011.

61 Walenciak, Robert. ‘Śmieją się z Kaczyńskiego’ [They laugh at Kaczyński] Przegląd, interview with Magdalena Środa. 16 May 2006.
The opportunity for a political and discursive reconciliation presented itself in the aftermath of the catastrophe of presidential aircraft in 2010, near Smolensk, flying to Russia for the 70th anniversary of the Katyn massacre. President Lech Kaczyński and other 95 members of the delegation on board were killed in the crash. The initial reaction to the crash led many a commentator to believe that a community could be rebuilt in the mourning for the deceased officials. However, soon enough, the initial reconciliation over coffins was lost, and the political divide between the liberal PO and conservative PiS parties kept growing deeper. The PiS progressively tried to monopolize the catastrophe, the mourning and its aftermath, and started using it instrumentally for achieving political goals, after Jarosław Kaczyński lost the presidential elections to fill the office vacated after his brother's death. It is significant that while the party did not use confrontational language during the electoral campaign, conservative Publizists, for example in Rzeczpospolita, did. But after the elections, PiS’ politicians again started dividing the political elites (and the society on the whole) into ‘patriots’ and ‘traitors.’ With time, they also started embracing and developing conspiracy theories about the crash and its causes.

Consequently, this division of Poland into two, or the existence of 'two

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62 In the beginning of April of 1940, NKVD (People’s Commissariat for Internal Affairs) executed around 21000 Polish prisoners of war, including more than 10000 officers of the Polish army captured after 17 September 1939. NKVD acted upon a secret order from the Soviet Politburo, adopted on 5 March 1940. The victims were buried in common graves in the forests surrounding Katyn, Kharkov, and Mednoe. After the discovery of the graves by Wehrmacht in 1943, the communists accused the German army of the crimes. This version of the facts had been promoted by the communists both in Poland and USSR until 1990. In 1990, USSR recognized that Katyn massacre was a Stalinist crime. Until today, however, many details of the massacre had not been fully researched, contributing to the perception that Russia continues to conceal the truth about the massacre.

63 Berendt, Joanna. ‘Działajmy, bo przestaniemy istnieć – profesorowie na kongresie z prezesem PiS’ [Let’s act, otherwise we will cease to exist – professors at the Congress with the president of PiS]. Gazeta Wyborcza, 7 May 2011.
Polands,\textsuperscript{64} seems to have become a permanent fixture in Polish public discourse. The opposition between two Polands was at some point even renamed the ‘Polish-Polish war,’\textsuperscript{65} and was used as a proof that there was no political nation (based on shared willingness to participate in the same community), because of the existence and permanence of this figurative, or at best discursive, civil war.\textsuperscript{66} This polarization on fundamental values has been framed ever since as an expression of ‘cultural wars.’

All in all, the crash strongly affected the Polish public and political spheres and continued to divide them. The analysis of the public debate in the aftermath of the catastrophe shows an increasing polarization of the public discourse. Once again, the community of Poles has proven to be a myth rather than a tangible reality. The conservative monopolization of the concept of patriotism, thanks namely to their skillful use of Romantic references, turned the motive of the ‘two Polands,’ into an actual political reality. Consequently, the ‘cultural war’ that pits the proponents of the national community against the proponents of civil society is likely to continue.

The division into true and false patriots operated by the PiS affected even the party itself (where the right-wing ‘hawks’ started dominating closer to the centre ‘doves’) and so became a truly ubiquitous political weapon. It can be illustrated by the

\textsuperscript{64} Grzegorz Kucharczyk traces the use of this motive to 1990 and \textit{Gazeta Wyborcza} (Polska myśl polityczna po 1939), (Dębogóra: Wydawnictwo Dębogóra, 2009), 284). It was also used, among others, by Paweł Śpiewak ‘Dwie Polski,’ \textit{Wprost}, 35 (2003). In the aftermath of the catastrophe, apart from the formulation ‘two Polands’, the expression ‘two nations’ was used, conveying the same message, e.g. Tomasz Terlikowski, ‘Jedno państwo, dwa narody,’ \textit{Gazeta Polska}, August 8, 2012. The ‘two nations’ would not only have different approaches to patriotism, but also to politics. Norman Davies (\textit{Heart of Europe: The Past in Poland's Present}, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001)) shows that the notion of two nations, opposing collaborators to rebels, is helpful to analyze the dichotomous worldviews and positions of Poles during the last centuries. This powerful motive can also be used, e.g. to illustrate a binary opposition between a Poland that is ready to pick up the challenge and recognize the painful past, and a Poland that is frozen in a syndrome of victim and hero, subscribing to affirmative historical politics.

\textsuperscript{65} Brzeziecki, Andrzej. ‘Wojna polsko-polska pod flagą bialo-czerwoną’ [Polish-Polish war under white and red flag], \textit{Tygodnik Powszechny}, 12 June 2012.

\textsuperscript{66} Stefanek, Tomasz, and Piotr Szlagowski. ‘Polska stasis’ [Polish stasis]. Teologia Polityczna. 6/2012.
exclusion of the ‘Museum people’ close to Lech Kaczyński from the party in November 2010, and the ensuing conflict over the right to the intellectual and political heritage of Kaczyński between the ‘Museum people’ and Jarosław Kaczyński.

Conclusion
The discursive openness of the first decade after the regime change in 1989 was reversed a few years later, when the conservative intellectuals labeled the open approach confronting dark moments of the past ‘critical patriotism.’ They countered it with what they called an ‘affirmative’ approach, within the conceptual framework of the historical politics that they established for the conservative party PiS. The rise of PiS to power in 2005, and its governmental coalition with the populist Samoobrona and the nationalist LPR was characterized by the implementation of a number of ‘patriotic’ initiatives. ‘Patriotism of tomorrow,’ for instance, aimed at promoting an affirmative vision of the nation’s past and history. Such initiatives illustrated the transposition of intellectual propositions of the conservative philosophers to a political level via the introduction of specific public policies by the conservative party. It showed a simplification of ideas that gave basis to political initiatives, and their radicalization, also due to the participation of the LPR in the government. This enactment of a coherent ideological conservative framework, and its strong impact on the domain of politics and public policies, contributed to the increasing polarization of

67 The circle of PiS members and associates called ‘Museum people’ included e.g. Joanna Kluzik-Rostowska, Jan Ołdakowski, Elżbieta Jakubiak, Marek Cichocki, Paweł Kowal and Dariusz Gawin. Many of them can be counted among the creators and proponents of the concept of historical politics. They cooperated with Lech Kaczyński while he was Mayor of Warsaw in the creation of the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising, and later in PiS. Since late 2010 those who were party members were progressively excluded from the party by Jarosław Kaczyński, and the others also ended their ideological alliance with PiS.
the public discourse. The impact of this discursive radicalization could be felt as of the second half of 2000s, in the discussion led after the plane crash in 2010, further fostering the division of society into 'two Polands,' and even more so after the come-back of PiS to power in 2015. The current government of PiS, created after the 2015 elections shows a come-back in strength of a number of previously opened fronts linked to historical politics. Such actions concern, e.g. a new intervention into the list of set texts for school programs, steering it towards more traditional, historical and religious sources, or new controversies over museums.

One example is particularly fit to illustrate the lasting strength of conservative historical politics. It concerns the museum of Second World War, which is being constructed in Gdansk. In 2008, the government of PO created the museum and entrusted the creation of its exhibition to a distinguished historian, Paweł Machcewicz. A number of renowned Polish and international historians have participated in the preparation of the conception of the exhibition. The exhibition has been under the fire of criticism from PiS for a long time, notably because allegedly the museum would not sufficiently present 'Polish perspective' on the war. After the come-back of PiS to power in 2015, activities intensified in order to prevent the museum from opening in the current form. Finally in the beginning of 2017, by decision of merging this museum with museum of Westerplatte, the conservative minister of culture managed to take over the control over the museum and remove Machcewicz from his function. While museum opened to public a month before this happened, in March 2017, the future of its exhibition remains unsure. It is one of the last examples of government's intervention into the domain of history and memory, or the concept of patriotism, but surely not the last one. Given the previous strength of
historical politics in the realm of public policies, and current activities of PiS government one can only expect more such examples to come.