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From the January Uprising of 1863  
to Regaining Independence  
in 1918 – a Synthesis of Polish  
History in the *Blue uniform*  
[Błękitny mundur] by Donata  
Dominik-Stawicka

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ABSTRACT

The novel of Donata Dominik-Stawicka entitled *The Blue uniform* [Błękitny mundur] treats about Poles' way to regaining independence by Poland, starting from the January Uprising in 1863 to November 1918. The way to freedom consisted of the armed struggle of Poles from various partitions, the tragic that in time World War I, fighting on different fronts under foreign command, they had to stand against each other. The title blue uniform is a reference to the biography of one of the heroes of the novel – the soldier of the Blue Army of General Józef Haller. He is, next to the gray uniform of soldiers of Józef Piłsudski, a symbol of dreams about the Polish army and the free homeland. *The Blue Uniform* is a family saga based on the stories of ancestors, photographs and other souvenirs. Family history on the basis of pars pro toto becomes a story about a nation struggling for survival, its own identity and dignity. The memory of the past of an individual and collective character passed from one generation to the next turns out to be the superior value. Intergenerational communication

builds historical, cultural and community identity. The intergenerational relationship is ethical and the memory of the past is the same as pride. The author writes her narrative about the family and the nation into the post-memory discourse. Thanks to the testimonies of our ancestors, history becomes an important source of identity.

KEY WORDS:    freedom, slavery, fight, uniform, homeland

#### STRESZCZENIE

*Od powstania styczniowego 1863 r. do odzyskania niepodległości 1918 r. – synteza polskich dziejów w Błękitnym mundurze Donaty Dominik-Stawickiej*

Powieść Donaty Dominik-Stawickiej pt. *Błękitny mundur* traktuje o drodze Polaków do odzyskania niepodległości, poczynając od powstania styczniowego w roku 1863 do listopada roku 1918. Na tę drogę ku wolności złożyła się walka zbrojna Polaków z różnych zaborów, tym tragiczniejsza, że w czasie I wojny światowej, walcząc na różnych frontach, pod obcym dowództwem, musieli oni stanąć przeciw sobie. Tytułowy błękitny mundur jest nawiązaniem do biografii jednego z bohaterów powieści – żołnierza Błękitnej Armii generała Józefa Hallera. Mundur ten, obok szarego munduru żołnierzy Józefa Piłsudskiego, to symbol marzeń o polskim wojsku i wolnej ojczyźnie. *Błękitny mundur* jest sagą rodzinną opartą na relacjach przodków, fotografiach i innych pamiątkach. Historia rodzinna na zasadzie *pars pro toto* staje się historią o narodzie walczącym o przetrwanie, własną tożsamość i godność. Wartością nadrzędną okazuje się pamięć przeszłości o charakterze indywidualnym, jak i zbiorowym przekazywana z pokolenia na pokolenia. Komunikacja międzypokoleniowa buduje ciągłość historyczną, kulturową i tożsamość wspólnoty. Relacja międzygeneracyjna ma charakter etyczny, a pamięć przeszłości jest tożsama z dumą. Autorka swą narrację o rodzinie i narodzie wpisuje w ramy dyskursu postpamięciowego. Historia dzięki świadectwom naszych przodków staje się ważnym źródłem tożsamości.

SŁOWA KLUCZE:    wolność, niewola, walka, mundur, ojczyzna

Return to us the free Homeland, o Lord<sup>1</sup>

*Błękitny mundur, czyli drogi do wolności* [The Blue Uniform, or the roads to freedom] by Donata Dominik-Stawicka is a family saga. It tells the story of two families, the Paneks from Greater Poland and the Stawickis from Volyn, whose fate has become part of the difficult Polish history of the last 150 years. In her novel, the author returns to the times of the January Uprising, when Franciszek Ksawery Stawicki set off to fight from his manor house in Volyn, and Augustyn Panek – from his home village of Lutogniewy near Krotoszyn. The nobleman and the peasant fought bravely in different formations: the first under the command of General Edmund Różycki, and the latter along with Adam Chmielowski, the later Brother Albert [Saint Albert Chmielowski – transl.], under the command of Marian Langiewicz. They took part in several bloody battles of Salicha, Grochowiska and Pansówka. They fought heroically in defense of their land, freedom and honor. They met, however, not on the battlefield, but in a field hospital. Miraculously, they managed to save themselves from a Russian attack on the hospital, when all the other wounded insurgents were killed. They were saved first by the inhabitants of a nearby mansion, and then helped out by Stefan Perz, the parish priest of the local church, and protected from being arrested and deported to Siberia.

After the Uprising, they parted ways. Augustyn returned home, having served one year in a citadel prison for participating in the Uprising. In the case of Franciszek, it turned out that his beloved home, salvaged with a great effort, was confiscated. He emigrated to Greater Poland with his wife and son. Under a changed name of Franciszek Ksawery, he began a new life. He purchased a piece of land in the Odolany district and he began work as a blacksmith. He never met with Augustyn again. “Years passed, filled with daily toil.”<sup>2</sup> Fate did not spare either family sorrow and trouble. After the death of his beloved wife, Franciszek succumbed to melancholy, and then developed a heart condition. His son, Józef, got married, but soon widowed, his wife having died in childbirth. Immediately after that he lost his father. Józef remarried soon and in the times of heightened prowess of the Hakata, he had to leave the Grand Duchy of Poznań and live in North Rhine-Westphalia in Hamborn. Augustyn’s son, Mikołaj, did not become a farmer like his father. Instead, he graduated from a school and started working on the railway. At the beginning of the twentieth century, when anti-Polish activities

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1 A. Feliński, Antoni Gorecki, *Boże coś Polskę*, [www.wolnelektury.pl](http://www.wolnelektury.pl) (access: 20.11.2018).

2 D. Dominik-Stawicka, *Błękitny mundur, czyli drogi do wolności*, Kraków 2018, p. 70. All quotes are from this edition. After this quotation, I provide the page numbers in brackets.

intensified, the family was transferred deep into Germany to Giessen in Hesse. Mikołaj lived to see several children, including a daughter named Marianna, the grandmother of the novel's author. In the end, the fates of these two families came together again. Marianna Panek, granddaughter of Franciszek, and Augustyn Stawicki, grandson of Franciszek Ksawery met and started a family. They were married in February 1914. Soon, on 28 June 1914, World War I broke out. On the one hand, the war, for which Mickiewicz had prayed in his poem *Litania pielgrzymśka* [Pilgrim's litany], was expected by Poles, and on the other hand, it turned to be total war, and for Poles, it was a fratricide. Poles found themselves in direct combat against each other in the foreign armies of the three partitioning powers. Franciszek Stawicki and his wife's brothers were conscripted into the German army and forced to fight against their compatriots in the opposing army. After Franciszek was injured, he surrendered to the British when returned to the front and found himself in a POW camp in Scotland, where he spent three years. In 1917, upon the news of the appointment of the Polish Army in alliance with the Entente, he decided to join it. His dream came true only on 3 December 1918, when he was a soldier of the Blue Army under the command of the "blue" General Józef Haller. He put on the blue uniform, a dream of many generations.

Blue uniforms, Polish flags and symbols were a very important sign for people who were so long in captivity that here finally they have their own army, fighting for their own great cause: a homeland (159).

Now was the time to return home and rebuild it. Franciszek stood up to fight for the defense of the Polish borders. Then, the family of Franciszek and Marianna settled in Ostrów Wielkopolski. There, Franciszek died during the German occupation [during WWII – transl.] and was buried in the local cemetery. The inscription on his tombstone proclaims proudly that he was Haller's soldier and remained faithful to the homeland. The story of two families – the Paneks and the Stawickis – reconstructed in *Błękitny mundur*, as Donata Dominik-Stawicka states in its end, is a homage to all those generations who stood up to fight for independent Poland, and who considered the matters of the Homeland superior.

Two ancestors – one from a country mansion in Volyn, and the other from a village in Greater Poland – a noble and a peasant, consciously joined the insurgent ranks, facing a battle for Poland's independence. This gesture has a deeply symbolic importance, as it allowed to build ties across the boundaries of partition and social class. It was an event to which successive generations could refer to as a specific model of patriotic attitudes

to identify with. “Generationality happens only to some”<sup>3</sup> and generates a sense of separateness from other generations. What is important is not what is individual, separate, but what is common and what leads to the birth of a generational legend and “refers to those characteristics which, over and above individual differences, are meant to bind the group together into a spiritual whole.”<sup>4</sup> The insurgent tradition permanently inscribed itself in the memory space of both families, and it was this tradition that significantly influenced the formation of their thinking about the national past. The January Uprising was an event that “illuminates life, ... opens ... the world of reflection and forces one to make an internal inventory.”<sup>5</sup> Already then a conviction emerged that on the one hand the insurgence was a fight doomed to failure, associated with pain, suffering and disillusionment, and an emerging sense of tragedy, but on the other hand it stimulated activity, taught heroism and sacrifice. The January Uprising forged the identity of successive generations both personally and socially. Both the nobleman from Volyn and the peasant from Greater Poland proved their moral sensitivity and did what they believed was the only one possible right thing to do. They confirmed their right to defend their dignity, inherent on the one hand from disagreement to the existing political and ethical *status quo*, and on the other with the pride of being Poles and of Polish history, which they believed gave them a basis to take up the fight for Polish independence. In their opinion, this was the most important gesture of opposition to the political and ethical death of the nation. They joined in building an emotional community around the notion of the homeland they considered to be the highest value, which made the Polish problem sacred, based on the awareness of living the past together in a heroic and martyrological spirit. They associated Polishness with a necessary, purposeful sacrifice, the right to rebellion in the name of freedom, fidelity, honor and the duty to fulfill the will of those who already gave their lives to the great cause of the fatherland according to the thinking inscribed in the romantic paradigm that sacrifice for the community should be considered an overriding value. These experiences built up their patriotic knowledge, boldly passed on to subsequent generations. As a teaching and a value, they became a source of energy for the national life and its indestructible power.

The role that patriotic heritage played in the fate of the Stawicki and Panek families is undeniable. The subsequent generations living in the

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3 J. Garewicz, *Pokolenie jako kategoria socjofilozoficzna*, in: *Na krawędzi epoki. Rozwój duchowy i działanie człowieka*, eds. J. Rudniański, K. Murawski, Warszawa 1985, p. 140.

4 K. Wyka, *Pokolenia literackie*, Kraków 1977, p. 101.

5 M. Sprusiński, *Juliusz Kaden-Bandrowski. Życie i twórczość*, Kraków 1971, pp. 106-107.

Prussian partition had to take up a difficult, arduous, not very impressive struggle to preserve Polishness and national identity not anymore on the battlefield, but in everyday life. They became participants in “the longest war in modern Europe.” They fought against forced Germanization, against the Kulturkampf and the Hakata, for the Polish language, Polish books, and the Polish catechism. The adjective “Polish” was of particular importance. It became an axiological category. The nation “without a state,” condemned to perpetual struggle to preserve its identity, was able to focus around the ethical ideas, which allowed it to get involved in spiritual self-organization. Thanks to this, the national community took on ethical dimensions. Parents were left to take care “that the children knew the Polish language and were aware where their roots” (86). Only Polish was to be spoken at home. Polish books and newspapers were bought and read, despite often being banned under Prussian rule, and focus was put on the knowledge of Polish history or learning Polish patriotic songs. A book that was especially appreciated was *Mickiewicz* by a well-known bookseller, Witold Leitgeber. Besides, *Lives of the saints* [Żywoty świętych] by Piotr Skarga was read, along with the writings of Boleslaw Prus, Eliza Orzeszkowa and Henryk Sienkiewicz. The Krakow *Czas* and the Poznan *Orędownik* were important newspapers. The greater part of the books was brought secretly from Congress Poland and Galicia. Polish books taught people fortitude and pride in their own history and language. Humiliation, which enslavement carried with it, demoralizing and promoting attitudes of servility and meekness was opposed with spiritual heroism and bravery.

Although the Paneks and Stawickis, like other Polish families, came to face various insults and harm, they persevered to the end despite the dangers of denationalization. None of the members of these two families succumbed to fear and they all heroically defended their national identity. Even children fought courageously for their right to preserve their Polishness. Raised in a patriotic spirit, they declared war on the German school and the forced Germanization. Despite beatings and harassment from teachers, the pupils boldly demonstrated their Polishness, an example of which was the school strike in Września, when the students refused to recite prayers in German.

The times were hard and Prussian injustice flooded Greater Poland. Sentences of arrest or fines for the rebels, increasing school taxes, and finally the worst punishment – leaving students for several years in the same class to hamper their education – were to be the brakes of the fight for the Polish language at school (109).

Poles were denied the right to land ownership and employment in the Grand Duchy of Poznan, which was why both families had to go deep into Germany. As one of the people said: “There is one thing that the Prussian and the Muscovite did not take away from us – dignity and belonging to the Polish nation” (86).

The foundation for the narrative in *Błękitny mundur* became the authentic accounts of the author’s ancestors narrated by her grandmother and mother, that accompanied her childhood and youth. As she puts it in the introduction: “I listened to them willingly and diligently collected in them in *memory*. Now I want to tell you about them [stress by M.J.O.] (6). The narrative here takes the form of “oral history.” It is based on personal experiences and opinions of the narrator, also containing elements passed down from generation to generation, arousing very different emotions in the reader.<sup>6</sup> The interest in the family past, however, is of a special character. Dominik-Stawicka’s saga is not merely a colorful story about what happened once, so that the memories gain substantiality, multidimensionality, texture and color. The family history reconstructed by the author has two dimensions: private and public. They are closely interlinked and mutually determined. The author, reconstructing the history of her family, at the same time builds her own version of the history of Poles that has permeated through the filters of her ancestors’ memory. According to Dominik-Stawicka:

history is a continuity of events, values, knowledge, and legends. One generation educates the other. Knowledge of the ancestors is priceless, and if you have a unique national history as we do, you should know about it (178).

In the case of *Błękitny mundur*, recovery of the past is devoid, as we can see, of a dramatic sense of irrevocable loss so characteristic of post-memorial perspectives.<sup>7</sup> In Dominik-Stawicka’s memorial narrative, there is no

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6 It is a variant of “oral history,” whose founder was Paul Thompson.

7 At this point, reference should be made to the concept of “postmemory” by Marianne Hirsch, i.e. inherited memory, the memory of the second generation, descendants of the generation who experienced a collective trauma. M. Hirsch (*Żaloba i postpamięć*, transl. K. Bojarska, in: *Teoria wiedzy o przeszłości na tle współczesnej humanistyki*, ed. E. Domańska, Poznań 2010, p. 254) says that, as she understands it, postmemory is distinguished from memory by a generational distance, and from history by a deep personal bond. Post-memory is a strong and very special form of memory precisely because its relation to the object or source is mediated not by memories, but by imagination and creativity. Postmemory is characterized by the experience of those who grew up in an environment dominated by narratives originating from before their birth. Their own, belated stories are being replaced by the stories of the previous generation shaped by a traumatic experience that cannot be understood or processed.” This memory refers to events

attempt to cut herself off from the past as in the case of events that give rise to trauma, where the story is pushed into the subconscious. Remembrance is then combined with suffering and mental discomfort. The author of *Błękitny mundur* is a person for whom the knowledge of the past is an element of “group pride” and therefore she willingly returns to the difficult past of her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. In this perspective, history ceases to be a chaos, a tangle of facts, something opaque, unreadable, a traumatic experience. Memory of the past is not a kind of trauma but pride, which translates into consent to its inheritance, because, as Dominik-Stawicka claims: “history is also a source of identity: through the testimonies of our ancestors we know who we are” (177). The transfer of intergenerational knowledge is the basis for building national awareness and self-knowledge, both in the individual and the community, which confirms the author’s conviction of the inalienable value of historical cognition.

The question how Poles could regain independence is closely connected with the one of the national *ethos* and shape of the national history. In *Błękitny mundur* the ethical dimension of the narrative concerning the Poles way to freedom has been restored to a high value. According to family stories, this way leads from the painful events of the January Uprising of 1863 to the end of World War I and the Bolshevik invasion [of 1919-1920 – transl.]. It covers the difficult time of the successive generations of Poles fighting for independence, to which, in the words of Zygmunt Kisielewski, they followed along “bloody roads.” According to Dominik-Stawicka:

The way to freedom combined the armed struggle of Poles from the three partitions, the more tragic that in time of World War I they had to stand against each other fighting in different uniforms, on foreign ships, under foreign command. They gave rise to the gray and blue uniformed troops. The title blue uniform is a reference to the biography of one of the characters, the Blue Army soldier of general Haller. It is also a symbol of dreams about a Polish army, sabers with the inscription “God, Honor, Homeland,” and the crowned eagle on the soldier’s caps (5).

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that were not the object of direct experience. Rather, these events grow with such force into the consciousness of subsequent generations that they are felt by their representatives as their own. The relationship of post-memory to the past is, to a greater extent than in the case of “ordinary” memory, mediated by artifacts (e.g. photographs, memorabilia), and also by the message of others – those who “really remember.” The concept of “postmemory” refers primarily to the experiences of the children of Holocaust victims, however, according to Hirsch, *it can also be used to refer to societies that have been affected by collective trauma at some point in history – that is, any societies that have been deprived of their subjectivity by an extremely oppressive system* [underline by M.J.O.]. After all, the partitions, the civil nonexistence, the destruction of the nation, and the subsequent defeats suffered during the national uprisings were such a trauma for the Poles the partitions.



For the author of the novel, the sacrificial trait of Polish history testifies to the uniqueness of its national history and in this version, it becomes – according to her – the basic source of its identity.

The family narrative in *Błękitny mundur* has, as has been mentioned, a para-documentary form, because, as the author stresses, it is “a very personal look at a morsel of the history of the pursuit of independence through the prism of family stories, preserved family memorabilia, photographs and memories” (177). This is a special kind of return to the past. The source of regaining the memory as a restitution of the past world in this case are not academic textbooks, but family stories, preserved photographs and various types of family memorabilia such as the porcelain figurine of Our Lady of Berdychiv, which is one of the main sources of communication with the past for subsequent generations. Among the preserved objects, a special place was taken by the blue uniform of the author’s grandfather, who “became a family myth, a sacrum, a legend, just like General Józef Haller, Franciszek’s commander” (176). These objects, which form a special kind of family archive, act as visual signs of the heroic past, refer to specific people and events, and at the same time to the affective sensitivity of the observer. They confirm the authenticity of the personal, individual dimension of the account which takes on the value of a testimony. According to Paul Ricoeur, memory can also be manifested and disseminated by means of cultural artifacts linked to specific relationships that are appropriately valorized.<sup>8</sup> It is thanks to them that the past, especially when the witnesses of given events are already dead, is made present through a sign and symbol. Collective memory does not only include events that have taken place over a generation, only through processes of direct communication or by means of “memory carriers” (Marcin Kula’s term), knowledge of the past is passed on to successive generations.<sup>9</sup> A significant role in this intergenerational transmission is played by memorial activity recorded in customs, letters, diaries, various objects or artifacts. These serve as a medium of the past; they carry certain assigned emotions and meanings, and most importantly they create an entity at the same time revealing the truth about it (Bjørnar Olsen).<sup>10</sup>

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8 P. Ricoeur, *Pamięć – zapomnienie – historia*, in: *Tożsamość w czasach zmiany. Rozmowy w Castel Gandolfo*, introduction and ed. K. Michalski, Warszawa–Kraków 1995, p. 27.

9 M. Kula, *Nośniki pamięci historycznej*, Warszawa 2002. The researcher writes on this topic: “The past is reflected ... in virtually every object and phenomenon that exists to this day. Consequently, literally everything is, at least potentially, a past memory carrier” (pp. 7-8).

10 B. Olsen, *W obronie rzeczy. Archeologia i ontologia przedmiotów*, transl. B. Shallcross, Instytut Badań Literackich PAN, Warszawa 2013.

Therefore, we can talk about a special “biography of things” present in Dominik-Stawicka’s family tale; about “cultural descriptives of what an object means, what are its relations to other items, what can be communicated by means of it, what we express by means of such and no other object, what we can say about the person who uses it.”<sup>11</sup> The method of description used in *Błękitny mundur*, close to the “dense description” method, makes it possible to extract the emblematicity of these objects. The insurgent jacket and the blue uniform reveal the truth about the Polish biographies, both individual and collective. In shaping national consciousness and patriotic attitudes, the category of “heredity” turns out to be the primary one: it is a way of mediating the past and building a narrative about the past from an appropriately chosen and accepted axiological perspective.

Thus, *Błękitny mundur* confirms that according to the principles of collective memory, certain groups build their own variants of the national narrative. This knowledge remains in line with current feelings, values systems and ways of seeing the world. Jan Prokop claims that the determination of national identity is made by an individual’s recognition of the universe of signs “constituting a *sui generis* mythology or *legendarium* – the matrix of archetypes-toposes.”<sup>12</sup> The decisions of the protagonists – as the author emphasizes – were primarily due to their inner convictions. They were fully conscious of their choice to fight for the freedom of their Homeland. Thus, the history of the Polish nation in *Błękitny mundur* has a dimension of a personal matter, which at the same time becomes more important than one’s own life, beyond this intimacy. This is what Franciszek’s son, Józef, says to him:

“Daddy! Me too, when I grow up, I will fight for Poland!” ... Franciszek’s heart sank painfully. When will this hecatomb made by every generation for the homeland finally end? How much more blood, victims, fires and ruins in places once teeming with life? How many times will we have to abandon the family nests and go into the uncertain world? And for what? That you’re defending your property, your family, your loved ones, your homeland? How does one bend to the fate of a slave, how does one bear the humiliation? (63).

Love for the Homeland and the choice of such a patriotic attitude, identified with the armed struggle as well as the struggle for honor, became a moral imperative for them. In the consciousness of *Błękitny mundur*’s

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11 M. Krajewski, *Ludzie i przedmioty – relacje i motywy przewodnie*, in: *Rzeczy i ludzie. Humanistyka wobec materialności*, eds. J. Kowalewski et al., Olsztyn 2008, p. 137.

12 J. Prokop, *Uniwersum polskie. Literatura, wyobrażenia zbiorowa, mity polityczne*, Kraków 1993, p. 11.

characters, the boundary between the private and the community lives was ultimately blurred. These people, entangled in the struggle against the political, social and moral reality, were united by a common idea of independence, transmitted in their families from generation to generation, which allowed them to build a multi-generational community. Common values such as: God, honor, and homeland entered the realm of the sacred. They became the subject of multi-generational pride and a source of identification. The history of Poland is not seen by Dominik-Stawicka in her family tale in the categories of a slave complex, backwardness, madness and meaninglessness, unnecessary sacrifice and eternal mourning, self-condemnation to life among graves, or self-flagellation. In the case of the two families, Polishness was associated with independence, with a necessary, purposeful sacrifice, the right to rebellion in the name of freedom, fidelity, honor and the duty to fulfill the will of those who already gave their lives to the great cause of the Fatherland according to the thinking inscribed in the romantic paradigm that sacrifice for the community should be considered an overriding value.

In building her family narrative, Dominik-Stawicka did not focus, as we can see, on official history, on the history of the state, but on the history of the nation, affected by a string of disasters and suffering, experiencing the cruelty of history, unbreakably struggling for survival and despite many bad experiences, persistently building its identity and individuality. This transmission described in *Błękitny mundur* involved the ennoblement of privacy and family values recognized as a fully-fledged cultural category. In this case, memory is not a simple recording of events that go through human life and are recorded as on film.<sup>13</sup> It has become a kind of interpretation of the surrounding personalistic and phenomenistic world. Thus,

it is memory, not history, that makes the past concern us, it is our past, in which a fragment of the truth about ourselves marked with emotion is imprinted. It is memory, not history that transcends the boundaries of representation.<sup>14</sup>

The fate of the Paneks and Stawickis confirms that societies last thanks to the memory of the past passed on from generation to generation. In this sense, history is the continuity of events, knowledge and values. One

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13 According to modern definition in psychology, “memory is the ability to store information and its later use. From another point of view, memory is a set of cognitive processes involved in the acquisition, storage and subsequent reproduction of information” (E. Nęcka, J. Orzechowski, B. Szymura, *Psychologia poznawcza*, Warszawa 2006, p. 320).

14 K. Trybuś, *Pamięć romantyzmu. Studia nie tylko z przeszłości*, Poznań 2011, p. 64.

generation passes knowledge and moral principles to the other. History turns into an endless relay of generations. Therefore, as the fate of the two families shows, knowledge about one's ancestors turns out to be invaluable for building the Polish universe, which is connected with the belief, derived from Romanticism, that the primary goal of the actions of a nation plunged into political non-existence should be to save the memory of the past.<sup>15</sup> Without it, the nation will not exist and will be doomed.

In *Błękitny mundur* we are dealing with building a space of collective and cultural memory – the memory of the past in certain social groups, i.e. “a set of images of this past, whose knowledge is considered a condition for full participation in it and which are commemorated in a variety of ways, on top of the forms of this commemoration.”<sup>16</sup> This way of thinking is close to the concepts of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs (1877-1945), as well as John and Aleida Assmann, who treated memory processes as a socio-cultural phenomenon passed on from generation to generation without disruption, which formulates a tradition that binds a community together and creates a group identity. According to Halbwachs, recollection of what happened is not simply recalling facts from the past, only the reconstruction of the memory of the community. What is significant is that, according to the French thinker, collective and cultural memory are not the sum of individual experiences of the members of a community, but are the result of interactions between them.<sup>17</sup> In this way, communities form “a collective framework of memory,” as an image of the past consistent with the ideals prevailing in society in each era.<sup>18</sup> In the case of *Błękitny mundur*, the narrative is imbued with the conviction of the repetitiveness of Polish history, and the belief that the overriding duty of all Poles is to fight for independence.<sup>19</sup> Dominik-Stawicka's story shows that the attitude characterized as romantic – heroic and sacrifice-making – has become the dominant paradigm regulating Polish collective life. The great heritage of Romanticism has been the basis for patriotic thinking of the community until the present day.<sup>20</sup> The fates of the two families in the novel confirm that the romantic heritage has been the primary determinant of Polish culture for so many years. With such an attitude, Polish

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15 Ibidem, p. 34.

16 B. Szacka, *Pamięć zbiorowa i wojna*, “Przegląd Socjologiczny” 2000, 49, p. 14.

17 M. Halbwachs, *Spoleczne ramy pamięci*, transl. M. Król, Warszawa 1969, p. 839.

18 Ibidem.

19 Cf. J. Prokop, *Szczególna przygoda żyć nad Wisłą*, Londyn 1985, pp. 9-11.

20 M. Janion, *Placz generała. Eseje o wojnie*, Warszawa 2007, p. 68.

modern history begins not with despair but with hope, not with a sense of the end and a fall, but with a call for courage and victory ... The external abolition of the state was not able to cross out the [homeland's] inner being. It is this feature that formed the type of modern Polish patriotism, emotional identification with the homeland, the spiritual style of the nation's existence.<sup>21</sup>

This attitude grew from the traumatic experiences of successive national uprisings and wars. Despite the frequent traumas, the author's ancestors remained faithful to the choices they had made. And they stayed with that conviction for the rest of their lives. That is why the gesture of burying her grandfather in the blue uniform of Haller's brigade was so significant in its pronunciation, so contrary to the occupation regulations. The conviction of the rightness of the choice of freedom attitudes is confirmed by the fate of successive generations described in *Błękitny mundur*. The attitudes of great-grandfathers, grandfathers, and fathers become a model for posterity. The portrait of the author's Grandfather hanging on the wall in her apartment reminds her of this today.

Dominik-Stawicka tells the story of her nation according to Homi Bhabha's statement that "nation is narration." She wanted to explain national forms of expression in her family tale that may seem incomprehensible on the surface. *Błękitny mundur*, written from a patriotic perspective is, however, just one of the possible narratives about the nation. The memory of the past in national discourse is based on facts, each of which can be interpreted differently in different historical periods by different national groups. The Polish fate can be read in terms of choice and ennoblement or as a curse and a yoke. The story breaks down into a series of alternative micro-histories. There is no single, binding patriotic and historical narrative, although such a macro-history is attempted to be imposed on recipients by historical policies promoted by various state institutions. A state organization usurps the exclusive right to exercise power over the past, over what is to be remembered and how it is to be remembered. In addition to official knowledge, there are two more polar models between which different representations of history are situated: history as a science based on verifiable facts and collective memory based on "heart knowledge." Scientific findings, i.e., the "illuminating memory" postulated by Jacques le Goff, provide knowledge, prevent manipulation and mystification, but do not explain everything in the life of the community. That is why non-scientific forms of conveying knowledge about the past of

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21 M. Janion, *Wstęp*, in: *Reduta. Romantyczna poezja niepodległościowa*, ed. M. Janion, Kraków 1979, pp. 8-9.

symbolic significance turn out to be so important in building the historical consciousness of the nation. A special role in building national identity is undoubtedly played by collective memory, using different criteria than historical science based on verifiable facts or official state propaganda.<sup>22</sup> Collective and cultural memory will usually not be identical to documented, historical, and official knowledge.

The common consciousness, as it is confirmed by reading *Błękitny mundur*, includes only some historical themes, characters and events, chosen by those interested, and appropriately illuminated that are best suited to the present day at a given moment.<sup>23</sup> It can be said that in the case of collective memory, the past adapts to the present, because we look at it with the same eyes as we look at our contemporary times. That is why “the momentous roles that collective memory plays in social life make disputes about its content not about the past, but makes them momentous problems of the present.”<sup>24</sup> Accordingly, it follows that:

For this double view of the world in prospect and in retrospect the historian must select his point of departure. He cannot find it except in his own time ... Historical knowledge is the answer to definite questions, an answer which must be given by the past; but the questions themselves are put and dictated by the present-by our present intellectual interests and our present moral and social needs.<sup>25</sup>

The lack of a constructive discussion about the national past leads to a lack of ability to determine one's own place in the present. The dispute over Polish national past, especially the one from the period of partitions, despite the fact that it has been repeatedly and comprehensively described scientifically, based on the verification of events, turns out to be extremely difficult to resolve and unequivocally assess from the political, social, economic, as well as, perhaps above all, moral side. Responsibly conducted, this debate turns into a dispute about national identity, which contains an awareness of the past, ultimately turning into a discussion about the choice of a model of national culture.

Thus, summing up these reflections after reading *Błękitny mundur*, it must be stated that collective memory, shaping the community consciousness of individual groups, is of subjective and emotional character, using

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22 M. Halbwachs, *Spoleczne ramy pamięci*, transl. and introduction by M. Król, Warszawa 1969, p. 422.

23 B. Szacka, *Pamięć zbiorowa i wojna*, op. cit., p. 13.

24 Ibidem, p. 17.

25 E. Cassirer, *An Essay on Man. An Introduction to a Philosophy of Human Culture*, New York 1962, p. 226.

the only known criterion of truth, is subject to specific transformations and ideologies. In this approach, history, as evidenced by *Błękitny mundur*, takes on the shape of a subjective story, saturated with emotions, which is a special way of carrying meanings and building national myths. Using symbolic language, it provides categories and codes that influence the way past events are interpreted. Within the narratives within the sphere of collective memory that uses symbolic language, the process of transforming characters and events into one-dimensional symbols (“memorials”) takes place, which brings them down to archetypes. Such an archetype of Polishness becomes the afore-mentioned insurgent jacket, the gray or blue uniform, the saber, the rosary, the prayer book, and even any book in Polish, and eventually, the protagonists of these patriotic stories. Collective memory allows for the location of events and characters in the timeless antiquity, because one of the consequences of such an approach to the past is its sacralization, which in turn allows for mythologization of events, dangerously leading to their mystification and their functioning within a certain “timelessness.” The element of authenticity contained in intimate, subjective stories defends them from flattening and oversimplification. Their realism destroys falsehood and makes the accounts true and in their own way “alive,” just as the myth that unites the nation into one community is “alive” and immortal.<sup>26</sup>

Thus, memory and identity – the historical, memory and identity discourse – both in the individual and social dimension, are mutually dependent. Memory processed by emotions allowed building the patriotic or national myth of a leading character, shaping the national imagination and “Polish imponderabilia” based on Mickiewicz’s concept of a sense of collective responsibility for the historical evil that Poles were supposed to have committed in the past. Myth thus becomes a special kind of social communication. It is an important *medium* of knowledge about ideas and values, building and uniting the community, indispensable in building national and state awareness. It makes people aware of the other, nonempirical side of human existence. According to Norman Davies, myths do not have to be based on facts, but they provide us with a sense of belonging: they give

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26 John A. Armstrong, an American historian of ideas and researcher of nationalisms, supporter of the long duration of national identity, creator of the notion of *mythomoteurs*, which are the guiding myths that have given a lasting foundation to many countries and today condition their national or state identity, repeatedly asked questions about what, apart from the territorial bond, can build a group identity of people, e.g. in *Nations Before Nationalism* (1982). His findings seem significant to our deliberations. In his opinion, the basic building block that unites the group is myth. The issue of its truthfulness or falsity is of little importance to the researcher. What is important, however, is that the guiding myth determines the beginning of a nation, state, civilization, and even a group.

us an awareness of our origins, a sense of identity and purpose, and therefore, in his opinion, nations create their mythologies that live in them so that they can feel and experience their cultural identity. With myths, a nation can take root in history with its own distinct history, its own traditions handed down from generation to generation. In a difficult time for the nation it is its mythology that provides the source from which it draws the strength to fight, its pride and sense of dignity.<sup>27</sup>

The leading myths of a nation allow it to discover a deeper truth about its history, tradition, culture of the country, about the recognized system of values and preferred models to which they ascribe a special, inclusive power. They become the affirmation of certain values. All national defeats and sufferings, although they were traumatic experiences, seen from such a perspective, can undoubtedly become the victory of the idea of freedom; that freedom which, as Dominik-Stawicka proved in her story about “the roads to freedom,” Poles have loved so much – according to the version of national history she adopted. Above all it became a distinguishing feature of their identity.

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