Florian Peters’s aim is to analyse the conflicts regarding politics of memory in late socialist Poland. The main antagonists were the supporters of the “official” communist narrative of Polish – especially 20th century – history on the one hand, and “oppositional” historians that were associated with the Workers’ Defence Committee (Komitet Obrony Robotników) and different oppositional groups founded in the 1970s, on the other. These groups were the core of the free trade union Solidarność, emerging in the early years of the 1980s. The main historical source material of this Ph.D. thesis are “official” studies on the history of 20th century Poland as well as self-reproduced "unofficial" studies published in the so-called "drugi obieg", the Polish samizdat. Peters uses Jörn Rüsen’s concept of „Geschichtskultur“ to examine history cleavage as discourse. He looks for certain discourse patterns that its users were not aware of whilst producing and/or being part of said discourse. However, historical discourse should not be treated as a separate issue in itself, which is why Peters argues that the dynamics of the developments in Poland cannot be understood without taking the interdependencies between social actors and discourses into consideration (p. 31-33).

The study starts with a chapter on the historical thinking and the place of history in communist politics as well as in Polish society between 1945 and 1989. After the Stalin era had laid its focus on development and the future, there was a shift in political legitimacy that resulted in an emphasis on Polish history. This led to a shift from the understanding of history as the "prequel to a future communist society" to a "prequel of the socialist present" (p. 47f.). The author then looks at the representation of the German and Soviet occupation and the Katyn mass murder as a taboo in communist Poland (Peters sums up the official policy until the end of the 1970s as "better to say nothing than to reproduce Soviet lies," p. 220), the Warsaw Uprising and the extermination of the Jews. Every issue – especially the last one – leads to controversies, as the case of Jan Tomasz Gross’s books Neighbors, Golden Harvest, or Władysław Pasikowski’s film Aftermath demonstrate.

Furthermore, Peters discusses the impact of the Solidarność movement and exemplifies its importance on debates on the school curricula in 1980/1981. They ended with a change of the curricula because of the
pressure of the teachers' branch of the trade union and its famous academic supporters (p. 130 f.). Another example for the impact of the "oppositional" historical narrative were the attempts to restore the tabooed memory of Katyń (p. 236f.). The author argues that the foundation and widespread support for the union until the introduction of martial law in December 1981 led to a defensive stance within the "official", communist perspective on narratives of Polish history.

However, the introduction of martial law – although it nearly crushed the trade union – did not lead to a total reversion of or to a return to the status quo ante (e.g. p. 139). Official historiography and politics of memory still remained defensive due to the pressure of an "unofficial" culture of history. One of the protagonists of this "counter-culture" was the former communist historian Krystyna Kersten who had an enormous impact on the creation of an alternative discourse (p. 150).

After the introduction of martial law, one topic that was put at the centre of the debates was the understanding of "nation." There was a remarkable focus on national history which became an even more important part of the narrative on political legitimacy, or, as Peters puts it: When "declaring war on his own society", Jaruzelski presented himself as the saviour of the nation, not of socialism (p. 42). This was based on the perception that the emergence of Solidarność had shown that the communist power base was very small in the 1980s (due to Poland's economic troubles as well as the Helsinki effect – the transnational discourse on human rights – since the second half of the 1970s). These developments challenged the official narratives of contemporary Polish history and the communist's coming into power, the Second World War, the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, the Soviet occupation of East Poland and the Katyn atrocities. This was highly problematic for the Polish communists, because the government's legitimacy was based on the "liberation" by the Soviet Union (p. 45). Therefore, the oppositional historians' main objective was to "rid history of lies" and to search for a "historical truth". A side effect of this search – that pleased right-wing oppositional members especially – was the de-legitimization of the government (p. 191).

Despite his elaborations on Polish culture and history, and albeit I generally sympathise with the author's interpretations, a few minor issues need to be mentioned here. One concerns the impact of (feature) films on collective memory: Films (and later TV series) were one medium that was broadly consumed by the Poles after the Second World War, and therefore they were (and still remain) important for the perception of a certain historical narrative. In his attempt to give a broad insight into the culture and politics of remembrance, Peters only pays marginal attention to mass media and their representations. The author mentions some important film and TV events [1], and shortly analyses the depiction of the Second World War in the most important TV series (Czterej pancerni i pies and Stawka większa niż życie). Since the 1970s however, ambivalent narratives in TV series had evolved that were not considered in this study: Especially the series Polskie drogi by Janusz Morgenstern took a new approach to the representation of the war and concentrated not only on everyday life under German occupation, but also gave the main antagonist, a "Volksdeutscher" named Johann, much room and showcased his motivations.
In the 1980s, Polish television produced a series called *Popielec*, which took an even more ambivalent stance on the war. It painted a picture of rural Poland not just as a non-heroic, but rather dark and primitive society. Right at the beginning of the series – in episodes one and two – the extermination of the local Jews and Roma is shown, while the Polish neighbours passively look on. The protagonist who joins the Polish partisans does not do so due to his patriotic feelings – but rather by accident. *Popielec* caused an outcry among viewers who sent letters to Polish Television demanding an explanation for the "rubbish" and "wrong" representation of rural Poland during the war. [2]

In this respect, the assumption that the state as the sponsor of film and TV productions was in total control of the production process is debatable. Although a difficult system to control the film production was set up in the late 1940s (which included an analysis of the screenplay by censors and party members as well as closed screenings for said groups), especially filmmakers with a (national and international) reputation like Andrzej Wajda could bend the restrictions – as his famous film *Człowiek z marmuru* shows. Of course, all of this depended on the currently prevailing atmosphere in communist cultural policy.

A further problem is that it is questionable to argue that the communist regime under Gierek did not use violence to calm down social discontent, as the workers' strikes in Radom and Ursus in 1976 demonstrate (p. 104). Besides that, from a technical point of view, I had the impression that references or more thorough argumentations are missing at some points (p. 77, 86, 120, 148, 176, 201, 246).

Apart from these minor critical remarks, I largely agree with the author's analysis and his conclusion that the "unofficial" historiography put pressure on official politics of memory and remembrance that, in turn, were forced to react to this challenge. This is an important part of the changes Polish culture underwent in the 1980s. I would also agree that the majority of the oppositional discourse on history reproduced black-and-white-schemes as well as the (messianic) heroic narratives of Polish historiography, which had already been part of the official Marxist historiography (e.g. p. 204, 210 f.) and can be interpreted as "a monumental national-catholic interpretation of history" (p. 129). This did not lead to the construction of a new historical narrative, but it enriched the heroic narrative and therefore strengthened it (p. 227). This binary narrative was (and remains) highly popular in Polish society.

Peters' study is remarkable – especially in the present day. Discourses on "right" and "true" national history still constitute a major divide in Polish society. The cleavage between "official" and "unofficial" representations of history of the 1970s and 1980s has now become a cleavage between "liberal" and "conservative" representations of Polish history. This is especially true when referring to protagonists of the discourses in the 1970s and 1980s and current political protagonists. The main actors in present discussions are former members of the opposition (and their students). Looking at the attempts of the Polish government to introduce a law on remembrance of the Holocaust or the reconstruction of politics of memory, the importance of Peters' study becomes all too obvious.
For example the reaction to the miniseries *Holocaust* that, even though it was screened only in the west, nonetheless had an impact in Poland because of its media coverage, or Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* that was shown on Polish television in a shortened version in 1985.


Zitierweise: