

From Memory to Freedom.
Research on Polish Thinking about National
Security and Political Community
Review of the book by Cezary Smuniewski

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8973-3539>

Agostino Massa

agostino.massa@unige.it

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4559-5226>

Department of Political Sciences University of Genova

The relationship between national security in Poland and elements of memory, identity, culture and patriotism of this European country, not forgetting its Christian “soul”, are at the core of a book recently published by Cezary Smuniewski (2018), a professor at the War Studies University in Warsaw.

The context for this book review is provided by three broad issues, which also have a direct bearing on the assessment of the work.

Firstly, it should be noted that in recent years, there has been an increasing interest in security issues. The evolution of security sciences allows researchers to make more detailed and precise observations concerning security threats and to describe the multifaceted needs of societies, nations, political communities and individuals. In Poland, the development of security sciences is further stimulated by the progressing transformation of what was formerly labelled military science into security science. The emergence of this new scientific domain has broadened the scope and depth of research into security. The Polish scientific community’s escape from the limiting grasp of military science has led to the internationalisation of domestic research in a country that is, after all, located in the geographical centre of Europe. On the other hand, this transformation has proven to be an open call for collaboration addressed to researchers in other fields of international reach: political scientists, sociologists, culture experts and anthropologists.

Secondly, the last decade has seen growing interest in patriotism and national identity in Poland. This surge in patriotic interest has been accompanied by the coincidental emergence of pro-defence movements and organisations, as well as associations fostering national heritage and the legacy of history. The most widely recognised and celebrated achievements are primarily sought in the Second Polish Republic, the state established after World War I (1918), which existed until the end of World War II and the subsequent USSR-devised Communist takeover of Poland. It should be remarked that for the Poles, the Second Polish Republic symbolises the strength of a nation without its own state, which had managed to survive under partitions for over a hundred years, when Polish lands were incorporated into Russia, Prussia and Austria. The existence of the nation was maintained by means of: culture, Catholic religion, underground education and national revival, stimulated by national uprisings against the invaders. The survival of the national identity was vigorously fuelled by the activities of Polish emigrants residing in France, Great Britain, Switzerland and the USA. It was there that Polish literature (Adam Mickiewicz – d. 1855, Juliusz Słowacki – d. 1849, Cyprian Kamil Norwid – d. 1883) and the music of Fryderyk Chopin were created (d. 1849). It was also abroad that numerous highly distinguished Polish scientists gained recognition including double Nobel Prize winner, Maria Skłodowska-Curie (d. 1934), who, with her husband, established the Radium Institute in Paris, and Józef Wierusz-Kowalski (d. 1927), head of a research centre on phosphorescence in Freiburg, Switzerland, not to mention Bronisław Malinowski (d. 1942), a social and economic anthropologist, sociologist. The concept of national security developed in the contemporary Third Republic of Poland is, therefore, rooted in the activities and achievements of Polish fighters for freedom and independence, which was eventually regained in 1918. At the same time, there has been noticeable enthusiasm for rescuing Polish World War II national heroes from oblivion. This concerns Poles who later refused to submit to the communist dictatorship and were determined not to surrender their arms and stood firm and faithful to the ideals of a free Poland.

Lastly, the prevailing current approach towards Polish national security is emerging from the experience acquired in the fight against the totalitarianism of the 20th century – both fascism and communism. Contemporary narratives regarding the functioning of the state and the life of society remain under the impact of the legacy of the “Solidarity” movement and Catholic social teaching. Poles still believe that their current freedom would not have been possible had it not been for the Catholic Church, headed by John Paul II.

These three aspects are evident in the national security science research narrative. In addition, they have been igniting intense discussions in Polish and European media, as well as numerous political debates in Poland. National identity and patriotic narrative frequently appear to oppose the current trends of globalisation and unification. Cezary Smuniewski's monograph should be approached from the perspective of vital contemporary issues regarding the impact of ideas permeating Polish society. As such, the book *From Memory to Freedom. Research on Polish Thinking about National Security and Political Community* not only fits the context of contemporary Polish scientific research but also emerges as a valid point of reference for discussion. The work addresses questions emerging from various spheres of Poland's political life and, above all, from the academic research in the field of Polish national security.

The author places his research within the social sciences, specifically, in the space concerned with security studies: «This monograph is specifically concerned with security studies. Not only does it deal with the problem of national security, but it also aims to reflect on the Polish cultural and social determinants affecting the functioning of: an individual within the state and the entire nation in order to influence the organisation of the political community in Poland and protect it on an individual and social level against the influence of various negative factors» (Smuniewski, 2018, p. 11).

Cezary Smuniewski points out that memory, identity, Christianity, culture, patriotism and freedom constitute a set of distinctive social and cultural determinants of national security formation processes, and thus have become the subjects of the six chapters of the book. The description of research methods lacks depth, which is problematic. The introduction to the monograph reads: «The analyses have been made using experience and methods aligned to research in security studies, such as philosophy, history and political science» (Smuniewski, 2018, p. 11). Synthesis is justifiable as long as the text only reaches a small group of recipients concerned with the national security of Poland, specialists who are familiar with the research methods pertaining to the field.

The overall structure of Cezary Smuniewski's study takes the form of six chapters: 1) Memory - the "beginning" of thinking about the national security of Poland; 2) Identity - the "condition" for thinking about the national security of Poland; 3) Christianity - the "soul" of Poland's national security; 4) Culture - the "pillar of strength" in thinking about the national security of Poland; 5) Patriotism - the "way" of thinking about the national security of Poland; 6) Freedom - the "zone" for thinking about the national security of Poland.

What ought to be highlighted is the competent and commendable division of content. The author skilfully juxtaposes "memory" and the "beginning" of thinking about the national security of Poland, and subsequently: "identity" and "condition", "Christianity" and "soul", "culture" and "pillar of strength"; patriotism and "way", "freedom" and "zone". The linguistic layer reveals the writer's aptitude for conveying the content with written word.

Among the conclusions from the opening chapter, on memory, the author writes: «In building a political community's identity, memory allows those who create it to realise their social nature and a courageous community of free people. The same memory becomes for them a constant school of diplomacy, not only in the sense that history is the master of life, but also because it opens the way to a diachronic community. For memory, exceeding time, increases the power of those forming a political community through synchronous communion in the "today" of every generation looking into the future. There is no room for despotism in such a community, but for the privilege of rational justice and the resulting order, for which axiology is the point of reference. Memory in a political community is the strength of rational freedom and order, constant opposition to anarchy and submission to enslavement. Such a community, being an association of free people, desires subjectivity, which is supported by the fact that, firstly, the people who create it constitute a cause for themselves and, secondly, they

recognise and define the goal they want and achieve, with their legally established authorities helping them» (Smuniewski, 2018, pp. 37–38). Despite the sharp tone of the formulated observations, directly related to the current situation in Poland, the conclusion does have an invaluable provocative character, which is likely to spur further research and polemics.

The same applies to a different conclusion, concerning the ideology and functioning of totalitarian systems: «The analysis of the functioning of totalitarian ideologies and systems leads to aspirations to make collective memory disappear, i.e. the purging of the collective memory stored for the common good of society. In totalitarian ideologies and systems, changes in the common memory turn out to be one of the ways of exercising power. The narrative of such an authority is focused on what is coming, on building the future, which, however, is in contradiction to looking back, remembering the past. Totalitarian ideologies and systems see common memory and national traditions as their enemy, so “tomorrow”, their main interest, cannot grow out of “yesterday”, and history is not so much studied as it is written, freshly created as a product built on the ruins of the destroyed past. In Poland after World War II, Catholicism was, therefore, recognised as the main enemy. A strong emphasis on tradition and memory is part of Catholic doctrine. The ideological system of the totalitarian communist state could not allow anyone other than the party to teach about the past and, thus, build the continuity of the national identity of Poles» (Smuniewski, 2018, p. 38). What resonates throughout the excerpt is the impact of the 20th-century experiences on the contemporary line of thought regarding the building of the national security of Poland.

Identity is among the key concepts dealt with in the book, discussed in the context of the current age of globalisation (see, among others: Giddens, 1990; Held *et al.*, 1999; Beck, 2000), which tend to make it «displaced away from locality or from being clear» (Martell, 2017, p. 80). Because of the huge complexity of incoherent social structures, fragmentary affiliation to diverse social groups, and cultural and ideological pluralism, the author is not surprised that an individual living in Europe today may have a problem with his/her identity, even suffering an identity crisis.

In his analysis of national identity, Cezary Smuniewski points out that the experience of memory, amplified by the contemplation of what memory is and what comes into it, authorises and capacitates a nation to reflect on its cultural and national identity. The author argues that it is this approach that enables a fuller reflection on the contemporary functioning of Polish politics.

Another interesting observation is the diagnosis of modern Poland, which serves as a direct motivation to examine national identity in relation to building national security. Cezary Smuniewski notes that for the Poles of the first decades of the 21st century, the national identity drama provides evidence of the tangible tensions between Polishness and Europeanness, between the understanding of state sovereignty and becoming part of the European community, religion and desacralization, the defencelessness of an individual and the power of the mass, ethics and temptations of relativism. The reflection on national identity is, therefore, a precondition for constructive thinking on building national security. When we analyse the changes in narratives on national identity in Poland, its importance manifests itself even more clearly. In the first 25 years of the Third Polish Republic, liberal-democratic and European narratives prevailed. The external thought lacked counterbalance from within Poland, as it was suffering from historical amnesia and a sense of shame towards the West. Eventually, the national conservative narrative began to dominate. It appears to be considerably better-fitting to the historically grounded image of Poland – a state developing its cultural and economic potential, free and fighting for its freedom (Smuniewski, 2018, pp. 39–40).

Cogitation upon national identity leads Cezary Smuniewski to observe that: «Reflection on identity is one of the fundamental requirements for creating Poland's national security. This will not happen without reflection on the function of the family in a po-

litical community, culture and religion, the legacy of past generations and the complexity of contemporary methods of social communication. The future of Poland depends on the identity of contemporary Poles, on how they understand their own identity, whether they want to see in it the power connecting successive generations and the integration of modern people. National self-knowledge is a protection against national pride, national shame and national fear. National self-knowledge allows the value of cardinal virtues in the social order to be discovered» (Smuniewski, 2018, pp. 65–66). However, the statement may only be correct provided that the national self-knowledge is complete and multidimensional and that, most essentially, it resists the pressures of ideology and political correctness.

Coming to the conclusion, it is worth noting that an important recurring topic in Cezary Smuniewski's text is the heritage of the 20th century. Writing about freedom, the author concludes that: «The ideologies which gave rise to the totalitarianism of the 20th century first destroyed personality in order to make a human being a slave and, thus, the object of manipulation and abuse. They wanted a human being not to decide for itself, but passively obey someone else's will. Overcoming a vision of the world based on the master and servant relationship appears to be one of the essential conditions for the development of a human being capable of creating security» (Smuniewski, 2018, p. 192). In this statement, there is an undertone of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's master-slave dialectic and the understanding of freedom (Hegel 1980). The ideologies of the 20th century deprived man of freedom and mutilated his consciousness and subjectivity. To escape this kind of slavery, which may be referred to as enslavement of minds, is work for many generations. This, however, as Cezary Smuniewski rightly observes, cannot happen without highlighting human dignity. The pursuit of enslavement reflects on the one who enslaves, who in fact becomes a slave to himself, his visions and the desire for mastery. Only one internally free does not seek to enslave others. Freeing individuals and society from the pursuit of violence is a task of extreme complexity – it demands the overcoming of a fear of abandoning one's position; and this is not only the position of a master, but that of a slave as well (Smuniewski, 2018, pp. 192–193).

The monograph is constructed in accordance with models of integrity and coherence. The author distinguishes six values from the concept of Poland's national security, pointing to their fundamental importance to all processes shaping the current politics. The high quality of the manuscript is well-represented and confirmed throughout the text, in terms of both structure and content. Importantly, having been written in English, this is a pioneering study that attempts to present the subject of Poland's national security and its primary shaping factors to a global audience. Nonetheless, the book by Cezary Smuniewski deserves every success, not merely for being a well-developed study in English. It should be stated with full conviction that the book is an interesting intellectual journey from the idea of Memory to that of Freedom, across some other concepts relevant to understanding the definition of National Security in Poland.

With respect to the research problems posed by the author in this monograph, it should be noted that although he discusses the national security of his own nation and state, the relevance of the study should be considered in a broader – international – scope. After all, the provision of security in a country located in the heart of Europe will be inevitably connected with the security of the entire Continent. In addition, given that Poland is a member state of NATO, its security issues naturally fall within the sphere of international security. Processes related to globalisation apply to the security domain as well.

The reviewed book was published as:

Smuniewski, Cezary (2018) *From Memory to Freedom. Research on Polish Thinking about National Security and Political Community*. Institute of Political Science Publishers, Warsaw (pp. 220).

References

- Beck U.** (2000). *What is Globalization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Giddens A.** (1990). *The Consequences of Modernity*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Hegel G.W.F.** (1980). 'Phänomenologie des Geistes', in Bonsiepen W., R. Heede (eds.) *Gesammelte Werke*, Hamburg.
- Held D. and McGrew A., Goldblatt D. and Perraton J.** (1999) *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Martell L.** (2017) *Sociology of Globalization*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Smuniewski C.** (2018) *From Memory to Freedom. Research on Polish Thinking about National Security and Political Community*. Warsaw: Institute of Political Science Publishers.