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## **The Land of Childhood. Nostalgia and Myth of Poland's Recent Past**

### ABSTRACT

The article deals with the issue of nostalgia for childhood as a mythical period which is exemplified by the current popularity of the People's Republic of Poland among those who spent their childhood in its final decade. This article focuses on a nostalgia for the past that is triggered by various cultural artefacts connected with the country's communist heritage. Special attention is paid to PRL themes that are present in popular culture, especially TV productions. The TV series *Daleko od szosy* serves as an example as it appeals particularly to people born in the late 70's as well as the 1980's.

### KEY WORDS

myth of childhood, nostalgia, memory, popular culture, PRL

The period of socialist rule in Poland between 1945 and 1989 poses a challenge to many scholars, not only historians. To quote professor Michał Głowiński, it is a goldmine for those who attempt to analyse this particular era because of its peculiarity that demands a thorough commentary.<sup>1</sup> The majority of historians tend to focus on the more dramatic aspects of PRL (People's Republic of Poland) history.<sup>2</sup> They write about the crimes committed by the

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<sup>1</sup> M. Głowiński, *Realia, dyskursy, portrety. Studia i szkice*, Kraków 2011, p. 32.

<sup>2</sup> In the period 1952–1989 the official name of the state was Polska Rzeczpospolita Ludowa (Polish People's Republic), but it is commonly referred to (the period and the

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totalitarian regime, limitations of personal freedom, censorship and the ideological pressure which was exerted upon society by the communist authorities. Thus, the main current of research in political, economic and social history focuses on tragic events. The year 1989 marked the beginning of a new era in the history of Poland. The past was then rejected along with four decades of communist heritage. Today, however, the popular image of the “bygone era” is quite different. The People’s Poland as manifested in various products of popular culture is something to be laughed at and mocked rather than feared or despised. The past reality compared to the present seems grotesque and full of absurdity – this sentiment is amplified by popular films from the era like *Miś* (Teddy Bear) by Stanisław Bareja. No one is shocked by PRL-style pubs or gadgets that draw from the communist heritage. Because of this comical image of the People’s Poland, this era is now thought of as the most amusing and comical in the entire history of Poland.<sup>3</sup>

This article attempts to show the presence of the People’s Poland in mass culture and to reflect on this particular brand of nostalgia by analysing today’s reception of the TV series *Daleko od szosy* (Far from the beaten track). Nostalgia is an intense experience and a form of selective memory. Its intensity distorts the true image of a bygone era. Past events appear in an exaggerated, idealised form that only recall the pleasant things. The past is – to some extent – a myth.

However we may look at various myths – such as national myths – it is undeniable that the subject itself is an interesting challenge. The presence of myth in everyday Polish life draws the attention of many scholars who specialise in history and culture, but also of journalists and columnists.<sup>4</sup> In academic work and journalism we find both a negative and affirmative approach to myths. More often than not, these fierce debates turn political. Post-modernism was more suspicious of myth – it was considered a falsification of reality, a vehicle for conservatism, reactionary ideas or even superstition.

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state alike) by the abbreviation PRL.

<sup>3</sup> E. Domańska, *Obrazy PRL w perspektywie postkolonialnej. Studium przypadku*, [in:] *Obrazy PRL. Konceptualizacja realnego socjalizmu w Polsce*, red. K. Brzechczyn, Poznań 2008, pp. 170–171.

<sup>4</sup> Academic works on the subject include: *Popkomunizm. Doświadczenie komunizmu a kultura popularna*, red. M. Bogusławska, Z. Grębecka, Kraków 2010; M. Prusik, *Raj utracony? Nostalgia za PRL-em – rola mechanizmów pamięci kolektywnej*, (2011), Ph.D. thesis from the Faculty of Psychology at the University of Warsaw. An event was devoted to the topic of nostalgia for communism, organized by the Batory Foundation on 18<sup>th</sup> November 2013. The meeting was attended by scholars and publicists.

Today, scholars consider this harsh opinion to be oversimplified or even false. Myth is an integral element of human culture. Leszek Kołakowski wrote that every culture needs a myth to establish order.<sup>5</sup> Myth is an element of the most basic and primary reflection on history. It sacralises the past and it shapes our reception of historical events.<sup>6</sup> To provide an example – most Poles believe that almost every Polish citizen took part in the struggle against the communist ideology. This is a claim often made even by people who spent their adult life in communist Poland.<sup>7</sup> The statistical data prove them wrong. In 1980 over 3 million Poles were members of the PZPR (Polish United Workers Party).<sup>8</sup>

The PRL-nostalgia remains a cause of political controversy – it seems to be an inexhaustible source of problems and inspiration. Old communist Poland is present in everyday conversations as well as in the media and the Internet. It is also true, however, that nostalgic voices are heard among young people who simply cannot remember such “benefits” of the system like the policy of guaranteed employment or other perks: sport achievements, festivals, infrastructural projects. Additionally, people from younger generations who, at best, spent their childhood in the People’s Poland, feel somehow linked to it. Nostalgia is thus experienced by those born at the end of the 70’s and in the 80’s, which might seem surprising as their teenage years were supposedly “better” after the political change that was brought about by their parents. Therefore, it will be interesting to look into this phenomenon and think of the reasons for it that run much deeper than the issue of the reception of modern history in general.

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Today’s twenty- and thirty-year-olds are acquainted with modern technology, well-educated and – unlike their parents – familiar with Western culture. Most speak at least one foreign language (English) and can freely travel

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<sup>5</sup> L. Kołakowski, *Obecność mitu*, Wrocław 1994, pp. 13–17.

<sup>6</sup> K. Zamorski, *Dziwna rzeczywistość. Wprowadzenie do ontologii historii*, Kraków 2008, pp. 114–115.

<sup>7</sup> A more comprehensive analysis of this problem can be found in Paweł Smoleński’s book *Nostalgia. Eseje o tęsknocie za komunizmem*, Wołowiec 2002. The author points out that the views of people, who talk about the communist era with melancholy, may be defined as strongly anti-communistic, as their longing is related to their involvement in the opposition movement.

<sup>8</sup> K. Zamorski, op. cit., p. 115.

around the world – something the generation of their parents would never have dreamt of. One can say that they are part of the West, which is no longer an unattainable model. They have different problems than their parents. As baby boomers they are forced to compete on an inherently unstable job market. Lack of social security leads them to postpone the decision to start a family. Thanks to the universal access to the internet one can easily see how frustrated they are. Disillusioned with the present, they feel sentimental about the past. The generations of people born in the late 70's and in the 80's write about their frustration via social media or create internet memes that are designed to trigger memories. The "old days" were better, even if they did not have all the gadgets and amenities that (post)modernity and pop-culture have supplied them with. Here is a text of one of those memes:

We were born in the 80's and grew up in the 90's. We are the last generation that played football in the streets and played video games and the last generation to record music on a cassette – we are the pioneers of the Walkman. We learned to use a video player, play on Atari, Super Nintendo and Game boy. We are the generation of Thundercats, Power Rangers, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles, Transformers, Super Mario, Looney Tunes... We lived without mobiles. We rode bicycles. Our mother was not our driver, we did not have 99 channels on the TV, flatscreen TVs, surround-sound music systems, MP3, iPods, Facebook or Twitter... but we had fun. Share if you are a happy child of the 80's.<sup>9</sup>

Comments that appear under the meme confirm that such a happy childhood is a valuable experience, but some people born in the 90's protest: this experience is not limited to the previous generations. On Facebook we find a lot of fanpages that represent similar attitudes: Born in the PRL,<sup>10</sup> Born in the 70's<sup>11</sup> and 80's.<sup>12</sup> It is telling that these pages attempt to create a community by recalling a carefree past. They use images and text to recreate the times when people drank Vibovit (a multivitamin preparation for infants and children), roller skated, watched *Przyjaciel wesolego diabla* (Friend of a Jolly Devil, a bizarre fantasy movie) or listened to a reel-to-reel recorder. There are also groups gathering fans of films produced in the socialist era: *Marian tu jest jakby luksusowo*, *Kocham filmy PRL*, and the webpage nostalgia.pl brings us back to the world of old cartoons.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://demotywatory.pl/3832780/Pokolenie-%6080> [accessed: 23.01.2015].

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/BornInThePRL?fref=ts> [accessed: 23.01.2015].

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/urodzeni70?fref=ts> [accessed: 23.01.2015].

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/urodzeni80?fref=ts> [accessed: 23.01.2015].

It is hard not to notice that over the last few years there has been a growing interest in the four decades of the PRL. This interest is not limited to a narrow group of people who are fascinated with the artefacts of the past (like cars) or the pop culture enthusiasts (who admire films, music and literature from that period). It is a much wider phenomenon. In popular stores we can buy a growing number of PRL-themed board games. They take us back to the reality of the PRL by recreating a world of queues, food stamps, empty shelves and stuff “from under the counter”. Those who want to learn effective logistics and at the same time learn about the way the PRL government used to operate are given a chance to play “The Pilgrimage”, a board game inspired by the Pope’s first visit to Poland. Children’s bookstores offer books that all 30 and 40-year olds recognise: the “Poczytaj mi Mamo” series that had been published by Nasza Księgarnia publishing house since 1952. Adult children of the PRL can gaze with envy at the fancy, plush toys of old cartoon characters: Filemon and Bonifacy, Miś Uszatek and Reksio. Back in their childhood they could only dream of such goodies. Those born after 1989 can experience the mood and atmosphere of the PRL by visiting one of the popular socialist-themed pubs. Adult Poles visit bars that offer vodka served with traditional socialist delicacies: pickled herring or cucumber. They can still eat at the immortal cheap Milk Bars that attract clientele from various economic backgrounds.<sup>13</sup> We could go on and on with such examples of PRL-mania.<sup>14</sup>

These examples of the phenomenon of the rising interest in the PRL have one thing in common: nostalgia. Internet memes and Facebook fanpages reveal a yearning for childhood days. Board games are designed as a family entertainment, something both children and their parents can enjoy. Children’s books first published in the PRL are now being reissued for the same reason – adult readers know them from their own childhood and want their children to share the same experience.

Here is another example. The public was very intrigued by the experiment conducted by Witold Szablowski and Izabela Meyza who decided leave behind their modern life for half a year in order to recreate the PRL lifestyle, the one they knew from their childhood. They described their experience in

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<sup>13</sup> [http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,14801857,Tlumy\\_w\\_barach\\_mlecznych\\_Stolik\\_w\\_stolik\\_siedza\\_hipsterzy.html](http://wyborcza.pl/1,75475,14801857,Tlumy_w_barach_mlecznych_Stolik_w_stolik_siedza_hipsterzy.html) [accessed: 15.12.2014].

<sup>14</sup> There is plenty of evidence for such popularity of the PRL. Julia Banaszewska mentions some examples in an article published after a conference devoted to Polish TV series of the communist era. Vide: J. Banaszewska, *Powtórka tęsknota czy zapośredniczenie... Skąd się bierze moda na PRL*, [in:] *Zanurzeni w historii – zanurzeni w kulturze, Kultowe seriale PRL-u*, red. M. Karwala, B. Serwatka, Kraków 2010.

a book *Nasz Mały PRL* (Our Little PRL). The experiment turned out to be something of a temporary salvation for them. Tired with the world of money and consumerism, they came to the conclusion that revisiting the past could help them understand the present.<sup>15</sup> There are similar voices of exhaustion and frustration with the modern world that come from successful people like the writer Dorota Masłowska, born in 1983, who says in one of her interviews that she yearns for the world where everything was meagre and simple – the reality of *Daleko od szosy*.<sup>16</sup> The writer chose a TV production that is perhaps not the most famous or recognised, but has its own devoted audience.

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The popularity of the series produced in the PRL can be easily proven by the simple fact that public TV channels broadcast them over and over again. The first PRL TV series was produced in 1964, eleven years after the first TV programme was broadcast from a studio in Warsaw. It was a comedy of manners entitled *Barbara i Jan* (Barbara & Jan) about the adventures of a young journalist and a photographer.<sup>17</sup> Everyday life was also portrayed in such popular shows as *Wojna Domowa* (Civil War) and *Doktor Ewa* (Doctor Ewa). The Second World War and the struggle with the occupants was also a popular theme, to mention just a few: *Dzień ostatni dzień pierwszy* (Last Day First Day), *Kolumbowie* (Columbuses) and *Stawka większa niż życie* (More Than Life at Stake). The fight with the Nazis, side by side with the Red Army, was a popular theme all over the Eastern bloc. Therefore protagonists like the heroic tank soldier Janek Kos from *Czterej pancerni i pies* (Four Tank-Men and a Dog) would also become beloved figures abroad.<sup>18</sup>

Nowadays, these shows are not only watched by the people who spent their lives in the socialist era. Their tone of propaganda goes unnoticed, is either ignored or simply accepted as part of the previous reality. Young people too, who spent only a few early years in the People's Poland, watch them and more often than not they first saw these TV series as teenagers living in a democratic Poland, just like the people who were born after the transition. As far

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<sup>15</sup> I. Meyza, W. Szablowski, *Nasz mały PRL. Pół roku w M-3 z trwałą, wąsami i ma-luchem*, Kraków 2012.

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CwNZ12Bxurc> [accessed: 25.01.2015].

<sup>17</sup> <http://filmpolski.pl/fp/index.php?film=123731> [accessed: 25.01.2015].

<sup>18</sup> D. Palczewska, *Historyczna baśń w odcinkach*, [in:] *Szkice o sztukach masowych w Polsce*, red. A. Helman, M. Hopfinger, M. Raczewa, Wrocław 1974, p. 143.

as popularity goes, *Daleko od szosy* (1976) cannot compete with shows such as *Cztery pancerni*. And yet, it is still remembered and discussed, sometimes on an academic level.<sup>19</sup>

Let's take a short look at the reality of *Daleko od szosy*. The first image it presents is the image of the Polish countryside in the 1970's. We see sandy roads that turn into mud after rain. Shabby wooden fences full of holes that look ridiculous compared to modern fences. Carts are still the basic means of transport and tractors are a rarity and something to be proud of. Young people help their parents and every once in a while attend dance parties. They meet every Sunday afternoon – bachelors with bachelors, young girls with other girls. The countryside is free from the noise of vehicles: you can hear bird-song, the crowing of the cock, the bleating of sheep, the bark of a dog chained to its kennel. Hen, geese and ducks walk freely around the farmyard. Neat rows of fresh laundry on a line indicate a good housewife. Children eat bread with butter and drink fresh milk before they set off for school. However, seasonal work and helping parents is more important than school. Young people help their parents in the field and then build a bonfire and roast potatoes. It is in this environment that young Leszek Górecki grows up. We watch his transformation – from a young village boy full of complexes to a self-confident adult man, who knows what he wants. Gradually he achieves everything he ever dreamt of. Ania, a city girl, educated and refined, helps him in his struggle. She is his inspiration and true love whom he eventually marries. Leszek is now different – no longer a village boy but a man of manners who speaks a different language.

In the 70's, Polish cinematography pushed a new type of hero, quite different from the iconic character of the 60's – the brave tank soldier fighting the Nazi invaders in the TV series *Cztery pancerni i pies*. The spotlight was now on the common people and their everyday struggles with a somewhat coarse but “just and right” political reality. TV propagandists were in favour of characters that were close to the viewers and easy to identify with.<sup>20</sup> Leszek Górecki was exactly such a person. At the same time, attempts were made to divert the viewers' attention from his humble childhood that stood in contradiction to the materialistic ideal. When we watch young Leszek growing

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<sup>19</sup> At a conference *Zanurzeni w historii, zanurzeni w kulturze. Kultowe seriale PRL-u* (26–27th November, 2010), Amelia Wichowicz presented a paper *Być pomiędzy – „Daleko od szosy”, czyli love story po polsku*.

<sup>20</sup> A. Kisielewska, *Serial telewizyjny jako forma mitologizacji kultury*, [in:] *Między powtórzeniem a innowacją. Seryjność w kulturze*, red. A. Kisielewska, Kraków 2004, p. 212.

up in the countryside we do not see many Christian elements. The director avoids depicting religious life which was a crucial component of life in the countryside during the socialist era. Quite the opposite, we learn that Leszek, despite being brought up in a catholic home where Christmas is celebrated and phrases like “go with God” are used, is not a religious person. The path of life he chooses is secular – in keeping with the ideology of the People’s Poland.

Leszek’s life is marked by breakthrough moments that to some extent match the structure proposed by Vladimir Propp in his *Morphology of the Folktale*.<sup>21</sup> The first comes when Leszek realises that he does not want to live in the countryside. He is bored with weaving wicker baskets with his parents and brother and he finds such a life completely pointless. His inner voice tells him to leave that environment. His parents disapprove of his plans and for a moment it seems like he will obey them, to stay with his childhood sweetheart, Bronka, if not for other reasons. But the relationship does not last very long. When Leszek and Ania, a student from Łódź, fall in love things start moving faster and Leszek’s fate is sealed. Their symbolic kiss during a thunderstorm marks the beginning of a new chapter in their lives. Such motivations and such symbols are reminiscent of fairytale characters.<sup>22</sup>

Yet the protagonist is far being one of mythical heroes that modern audience is so fascinated with – he is not a superhero or a saviour of the world. In Leszek’s life we do not find a lot of mythological themes. Despite the apparent lack of spectacular events, if we take a closer look at his story we can see certain stages that are similar to those described by Joseph Campbell<sup>23</sup> but they are not distinct enough to be classified as such. His childhood is perhaps not that of Hercules, but he is nevertheless a smart and creative young man. As a teenager he built his own bike out of parts he either found or bought with his own money and so won his parents’ praise. Another common feature of a mythical hero is his or her impish and mischievous nature and Leszek is exactly that kind of boy. By following his dreams, he receives help from girlfriend, fiancée and future wife – Ania. She has to pay the price for her relationship with Leszek – he is not accepted by her mother, who thinks that marrying an uneducated man will make her life a failure. What is unique and important is Leszek’s willpower, his perseverance and persistence. Thanks to these qualities he manages to overcome an ordeal, graduate from technical college and eventually decides to study at the technical university. In the story

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<sup>21</sup> W. Propp, *Morfologia bajki magicznej*, tłum. P. Rojek, Kraków 2011, P. 72.

<sup>22</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> J. Campbell, *Bohater o tysiącu twarzy*, tłum. A. Jankowski, Kraków 2013, p. 274.

of the main protagonist's life we will not find any reference to providence or a higher power. Nor will we find magic and rituals that would substantiate his deeds as often happens in fiction. Despite this, the character is well received today as I will attempt to demonstrate later on. We can therefore conclude that there is a place for this kind of hero in Polish myth-making.

The protagonist can be characterised as a typical self-made man, someone who takes fate into his own hands and succeeds in inventing himself. His struggle was in line with socialist ideology that stressed the importance of deeds and labour as superior values.<sup>24</sup> Modern viewers tend to identify with characters that are more heroic (as described by Propp). However, it seems that Górecki is an interesting character for the modern audience. There are multiple websites and forums where the adventures of the main characters of the show are discussed with obvious enthusiasm. It seems to be important for the viewers that the plot was inspired by actual events and therefore is considered to be realistic and authentic. The director succeeded in creating a TV series that is received with admiration and nostalgia. Fans speculate on Leszek's future<sup>25</sup> and look for similarities between their own lives and those of the main characters. Just like Leszek, perhaps they managed to break out from the villages and settle in the cities in defiance of their families and friends. Along with that comes an admiration for the everyday struggle in the harsh environment of the PRL – without telephones or other basic amenities. The Internet is full of quotations from the show – Wikipedia offers a number of particularly “cult” samples.<sup>26</sup>

TVP, the public broadcaster, offers the possibility to watch the series on their website.<sup>27</sup> Episodes of the series are also available on Youtube, most likely in violation of copyright. They usually get a few thousand hits. The most popular scene is one with Leszek and his girlfriend Bronka eating cherries. The video with the music theme is also very popular. There is a website run by a fan who writes his own version of the future adventures of Leszek and Ania up until the year 2006.<sup>28</sup> The phrase *Daleko od szosy* (off the beaten track) is associated by the Poles with something idyllic, removed from civilisation and

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<sup>24</sup> A. Wichowicz, op. cit., p. 91.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.filmweb.pl/serial/Daleko+od+szosy-1976-35024/discussion/SK%C4%84D+SI%C4%98+WZI%C4%84%C5%81+SERIAL+DALEKO+OD+SZOSY..,55-7609> [accessed: 25.01.2015].

<sup>26</sup> [http://pl.wikiquote.org/wiki/Daleko\\_od\\_szosy](http://pl.wikiquote.org/wiki/Daleko_od_szosy) [accessed: 25.01.2015].

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.tvp.pl/serie/archiwalne/daleko-od-szosy> [accessed: 25.01.2015].

<sup>28</sup> <http://wojna1920.pl/losy/scena.html> [accessed: 25.12.2014].

its products. That is why it is often used by agrotourism<sup>29</sup> farms or similar enterprises as well as travel agencies.<sup>30</sup> The show has its own dedicated group of fans who are fascinated with this particular period of our past.<sup>31</sup>

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Adults have to deal with everyday problems, face various adversities etc. Childhood returns to our memories, triggered by particular experiences and situations.<sup>32</sup> Nostalgia is something that we experience more frequently later in our lives. Old age is a time when people feel a certain connection with their childhood and tend to recall the past with details that once seemed forgotten. The short term memory of an old person might not function well, but they often remember their childhood with astonishingly clarity.<sup>33</sup> They also have more than enough time to spend on this activity. It perhaps helps them forget, if for a moment, about the present day – often sad and lonely.

However, nostalgia is not only experienced by old people. It is a natural feeling no matter what age. Three conditions have to be met in order for nostalgia to occur as a cultural phenomenon. First of all, a society has to see continuity in its history. The second condition is crisis and disillusionment with the present. Finally, since it is a particular item from the past that triggers nostalgia, such objects have to be available.<sup>34</sup> Nostalgia is much stronger when it is triggered by pictures and things that used to surround us in the past and take us back to our childhood days. Easy access to multimedia makes it possible for memories to be “regained” at any given moment. Today, childhood

<sup>29</sup> <http://dalekoodszosity.org/>; <http://www.dalekoodszosity.wczasypolsce.pl/> [accessed: 25.12.2014].

<sup>30</sup> <http://dalekoodszosity.com.pl> [26.12.2014]; <http://daleko-od-szosy.pl/> [accessed: 26.12.2014].

<sup>31</sup> Vide: <http://www.komunikacjalodz.fora.pl/lodz,1/lodzkie-ogorki-w-daleko-od-szosy,467.html> [accessed: 25.01.2015].

<sup>32</sup> The death of a close person linked to our past is often such trigger. Literature provides a good example. Jacek Dehnel, a writer of a young generation, born in 1981 re-examines the life of his family in his book *Lala* which also marks the end of his childhood. The death of his grandmother Lala and the grief caused by her passing inspired him to look at his early life, the forgotten stories and tales of his childhood.

<sup>33</sup> D. Draaisma, *Fabryka nostalgii. O fenomenie pamięci wieku dojrzałego*, tłum. E. Jusewicz-Kalter, Wołowiec 2010, p. 8.

<sup>34</sup> M. Chase, C. Shaw, *The Imagined Past. History and Nostalgia*, Manchester 1989, pp. 9–11.

is considered a crucial time of life, because – as modern psychology makes us believe – it determines our future. Psychologists stress the fact that childhood is a unique period and therefore it is essential at this early stage that a child is educated properly and lives in secure environment, because this is the condition for a decent, happy adult life.<sup>35</sup>

In everyday language, memory and recollections are often used interchangeably. It is therefore important to mark the distinction between the terms. Paul Ricoeur proposes that memory should be understood as intention, while recollection is an object of our memory. Reflecting on the phenomenology of recollection, we think of “things” past.<sup>36</sup> We recollect what we experienced and what we did in the past – some recollections are clear while others are blurry. There are also recollections of a privileged kind. They return to us in the form of images, landscapes, faces of our beloved ones and events packed with emotions – they make us yearn for the past. Images from our childhood are more likely to be perceived as more positive than those from a later period in our lives that often happen to be linked with more negative events.

It should be stressed that memories are organised by events of particular importance. These “breakthrough moments” lead us to remember and classify memories in two categories: “before” and “after.”<sup>37</sup> This can be something from our personal life like graduation, the birth of our children or the death of someone close to us. But historical and public events matter as well – for many Poles it is the end of war, the papal conclave of 1978 or the martial law of 1981. 1989 is definitely one of those dates, constituting a symbolic breakthrough for the country and also for the people personally. The past is also a framework for our perception of the present. From this particular perspective we look at and judge what happens to us today. Polish people asked about the present problems often respond in a characteristic way: it used to be better – life was better back then.

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<sup>35</sup> What a person experiences in his early life determines whether this person turns good or bad. Alice Miller, the author of *Prisoners of Childhood* uses the example of Adolf Hitler – his early childhood was where his hatred originated from, hatred that led world to catastrophe. Miller points to his upbringing marked by physical violence and blind obedience as the reason for his tyrannical personality, A. Miller, *Zniewolone dzieciństwo. Ukryte źródła tyranii*, tłum. B. Przybyłowska, Poznań 1999, p. 159. Cf. B. Spock, *The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care*, New York 1946.

<sup>36</sup> P. Ricoeur, *Pamięć, historia, zapomnienie*, tłum. J. Margański, Kraków 2012, s. 36. On memory in historical perspective, vide: K. Pomian, *Historia. Nauka wobec pamięci*, Lublin 2006.

<sup>37</sup> D. Draaisma, op. cit., p. 39.

A few aspects of nostalgia for a childhood spent in the final years of communism should be considered. It should be pointed out that the way we think of our childhood has a lot to do with the myth of the beginning. For Mircea Eliade, the sacralisation of the beginning was merely a common anthropological phenomenon. Anyone living within a particular culture will look into the past (which is based on archetypes and stereotypes) for answers regarding the present reality that surrounds them.<sup>38</sup> Very often we see the first years of our life as a time of peace and security. Paradoxically, this is exactly the way in which many people think of the PRL in the sense that, despite all its negative features, it at least provided a certain stability and equality. In people's memory, the PRL was a time of more traditional values in which the family played a crucial role.<sup>39</sup> We can clearly see an analogy between the way we perceive our childhood and the perception of the PRL. Nostalgia strikes us as soon as we experience instability and change and when nothing can be taken for granted.<sup>40</sup>

The generation born in the 80's is well represented by Dorota Masłowska who entered adulthood in the last decade of the 20th century – a generation that has many reasons to identify with Leszek Górecki. Perhaps they experienced the problems depicted in the series even more acutely than the generation of their parents. This is especially true for those who left their villages in the search for a bourgeois ideal, access to which was supposedly gained via higher education. This generation does not reproduce tradition but concentrates on a future that is symbolised by new technology or engineering (as in Leszek's case). They do not mind the simplified image of the countryside. They are not limited by religion and rituals the way it was in the old days. To some extent the story of Leszek's life reflects what became widespread in capitalism. This parallel can also induce a feeling of nostalgia, as the past is somehow merged with the present. The popularity of *Daleko od szosy* can be understood in terms of the need for a secular myth to form individual identity.<sup>41</sup>

The generation people who lived most of their lives in communist Poland think of it as a time that provided an opportunity to join a noble cause and rebel against communist ideology. They could hope and dream that the new reality would eventually arrive. Their children (now adults) associate the PRL

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<sup>38</sup> M. Eliade, *Mity, sny, misteria*, tłum. K. Kocjan, Warszawa 1994, p. 110.

<sup>39</sup> A. Toczyński, *Mit Peerełu w literaturze i refleksji filozoficznej*, „Albo albo. Problemy psychologii i kultury” 2009, nr 4, p. 163.

<sup>40</sup> M. Krajewski, *Kultury kultury popularnej*, Poznań 2003, p. 207.

<sup>41</sup> R. May, *The Cry for Myth*, London 1993.

with the bygone days of a carefree childhood. The way in which today's society shapes the image of childhood years, the nature of a child and his or her privileges affects the issue of nostalgia. These images reflect our approach to the youngest members of our community, and also the way we think of our past selves. We tend to mythologize our childhood. In this respect, longing links us to a specific era and people we had the chance to meet at the time. In various circumstances we withdraw to that time not only because it is our past but also because it is a kind of land of innocence and happiness. We see it in a kind of childhood myth and we forget that myth deforms reality.<sup>42</sup> Our naivety is caused by disillusionment with the present. In these cultural circumstances we have more reasons to feel nostalgic about childhood than any other period of our lives.

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Sooner or later it happens to all of us: a desire to turn back time and rediscover the wonderful moments of our youth. Nostalgia, therefore, is a natural aspect of life. Even if we consider it a waste of time, a distraction, a pointless torment, we cannot dismiss it since it is part of how we experience the present.

Wojciech Burszta, who wrote on the issue of myths of the past, stressed that there is no going back to the initial and basic form of community and traditional society – history is ruthless.<sup>43</sup> In these circumstances two major trends appear: nostalgia and myth. Nostalgia is typical for the urban environment and, according to Burszta, the city is the fourth and final condition for nostalgia to occur. It is probably this brand of nostalgia that affects the viewers of *Daleko od szosy*. The civilisation in which they live is based on technological order. Traditional family ties get weaker and economic inequality becomes stronger (a form of inequality that constitutes the antithesis of a traditional moral order). It can be particularly observed in the cities.<sup>44</sup> Nostalgia and myth are therefore ways to escape the inevitable.<sup>45</sup> This crisis, which usually affects young people, is often seen as a crisis of meaning related to the necessity of taking moral responsibility of one's deeds. Men cannot rely solely on outside imperatives but they have to use their own

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<sup>42</sup> R. Barthes, *Mitologie*, tłum. A. Dziadek, Warszawa 2008, p. 261.

<sup>43</sup> W. J. Burszta, *Od mowy magicznej do popkultury*, Warszawa 2009, p. 151.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 147.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, s. 151.

conscience in order to solve the moral dilemmas of everyday life.<sup>46</sup> This is the price we pay for our freedom.

A whole generation of people born in the late 70's and the 80's return to the distant past to find the world that they yearn for, the world of the final decades of communist Poland, an idyllic world that never actually existed. They did not have a sufficiently intense experience of that past nor do they know much about the reality of a totalitarian regime, yet it became part of the collective identity for a large group of 30-year-olds.

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