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## **POLISH HISTORICAL NARRATION AND NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE LIGHT OF STUDIES AT YOUTUBE**

### **Abstract**

The subject of the article is the specific nature of historical narration in digital media (YouTube). Both the media where the Polish state is the channel owner and ones belonging to individual political parties and fractions are being studied. The relationship between the narration and national identity is analyzed. The question under discussion is to what extent national identity is a phenomenon ingrained in the ethnic and historical peculiarities of a given society. The authors contrast the primordialist concept with Ernest Gellner's modernist concept. In the second part the authors refer to the discussion about the significance of historical narration for the formation of identity: if historical narration is just an accidental component of identity formation processes or rather a fundamental one.

**Keywords:** national identity, digital media, historical narration, Web 2.0, narrative forms

## 1. RESEARCH PROBLEM AND DISCUSSION

The subject of the article is the specific nature of historical narration in the field of digital media (on the example of YouTube), owned both by the Polish state (particularly the channel of the Institute of National Remembrance<sup>1</sup>) and by the individual parties and political factions which participate in the legislature (are represented in the parliament), and the relationship between this narration and national identity. The topic of this paper lies at the intersection of several discussions with the present-day historiography and humanities.

The first discussion involves the relationship between the national identity and the educational and informational activities of both the national government and the political parties connected with it. The problem scrutinized here is to what extent the phenomenon of national identity is ingrained in the ethnic and historical peculiarities of a given society, and thus the nature of this identity is a bottom-up need of a specific *communitas*, independent from the activities of the state as the producer and distributor of various forms of narration. This position, known as primordialist, describes the national identity traits as inherent traits of a given ethnos.<sup>2</sup> The modernist concept, mainly associated with the works of Ernest Gellner, is a separate position, under which national identities are closely tied to the activities of political and intellectual elites, who formulate and disseminate a national ideology among broad masses of people. This ideology, found in numerous communication activities, serves to consolidate the society around the symbolic values projected as national ones. It requires an appropriate narration which describes the reality in such a way that this description becomes an element of individual identity and self-identification. Therefore, according to the modernist concept, national identity is produced by elites and then, through educational, instructional, and propaganda activities, internalized by the individual members of the communities affected by these activities.<sup>3</sup> This case emphasizes the top-down flow of information, from the information channels organized by the state (or elites) to the society which absorbs and internalizes the national message and identity. The ethno-symbolic position, relatively newest in this discussion, indicates both the creative role of the elites – particularly those who have access to information channels and the ability to create a specific message – and the active role of the society which formulates a specific demand for a narration (world description) and can distinguish between the messages matching its existential and spiritual needs, which may be accepted, and the ones missing these needs, which will be ignored. Under this research concept, an important

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<sup>1</sup> IPNtvPL, YouTube channel, accessed 8 January 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/user/IPNtvPL>; the official channel of the Institute of National Remembrance.

<sup>2</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *The Nation in History: Historiographical Debates about Ethnicity and Nationalism* (Hanover, NH: UPNE, 2000), 46.

<sup>3</sup> Brendan O'Leary, "On the Nature of Nationalism: An Appraisal of Ernest Gellner's Writings on Nationalism," *British Journal of Political Science* 27, no. 2 (1997): 191–222.

component of understanding the formation processes of cultural (and national) identities is, besides the information flow from creative elites to society, the social reception phenomenon, or the ways in which a community receives a specific message.<sup>4</sup>

The second discussion to which we relate our research involves the significance of historical narration for the formation of national identity and, more broadly, cultural identity: whether historical narration is just an accidental component of identity formation processes or rather a fundamental one. Therefore, our research is related to the reflection on the importance of history and historical narration in the current social and political life of today. The relationship between historiography and the formation of national identities has been thoroughly described in numerous studies of the history of individual European<sup>5</sup> and non-European countries.<sup>6</sup> Historical knowledge and narration became the intellectual foundations of the German<sup>7</sup> and Italian unifications,<sup>8</sup> which converged on the idea of one nation, the national integration and political emancipation of Poles,<sup>9</sup> national renaissance

<sup>4</sup> Anthony D. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Monika Baár, *Historians and Nationalism: East-Central Europe in the Nineteenth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Neville Meaney “Britishness and Australian Identity: The Problem of Nationalism in Australian History and Historiography,” *Australian Historical Studies* 32, no. 116 (2001): 76–90; Patrick Jory, “Problems in Contemporary Thai Nationalist Historiography,” *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 3 (2003); Rommel Curaming, “Towards Reinventing Indonesian Nationalist Historiography,” *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia* 3 (March 2003); Gyan Prakash, “Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32, no. 2 (1990): 383–408; Toyin Falola, Saheed Aderinto, *Nigeria, Nationalism, and Writing History* (Rochester, NY: University Rochester Press, 2010).

<sup>7</sup> Georg G. Iggers, “The Origins of German Historicism: The Transformation of German Historical Thought from Herder’s Cosmopolitan Culture-Oriented Nationalism to the State-Centered Exclusive Nationalism of the Wars of Liberation,” in *The German Conception of History: The National Tradition of Historical Thought from Herder to the Present* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 29–43; Georg G. Iggers, “Nationalism and Historiography, 1789–1996: The German Example in Historical Perspective,” in *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800*, ed. by Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan, and Kevin Passmore (London: Routledge, 2002), 15–29.

<sup>8</sup> Martin Thom, “Unity and Confederation in the Italian Risorgimento,” in *Writing National Histories: Western Europe since 1800*, ed. by Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan, and Kevin Passmore (London: Routledge, 2002), 69–81.

<sup>9</sup> Jerzy Maternicki, “Historyk w służbie «sprawy ojczystej»: Kilka uwag o poglądach Henryka Schmitta” [Historian in the service of the «native cause»: Several notes on Henryk Schmitt’s views], *Śląski Kwartalnik Historyczny Sobótka* 64, no. 2–3 (2009); Jolanta Kolbuszewska, “Historiografia polska wobec niepodległości-oczekiwania, plany, nadzieje (zarys problematyki)” [Polish historiography in view of independence: Expectations, plans, hopes (an outline)], *Res Historica* 32 (2011): 111–120; Violetta Julkowska, “Kreacja bohaterów historycznych jako istotny element interpretacji dziejów narodowych w ujęciu historyków XIX i początku XX wieku: Studium przypadku Waleriana Kalinki i Adama Skalkowskiego” [Creation of national heroes as an important component in the interpretation of national history as seen by 19th century and early 20th century historians: A case study of

of the Czechs<sup>10</sup> and Ukrainians,<sup>11</sup> as well as many other nations, both in the 19th century and now.<sup>12</sup> As the digital and social media spread, the contribution of the narration about the past in the formation of national identities does not seem to diminish. However, its nature changes: the discourse of both the broadly understood (social, cultural, and historical) memory and the visually attractive and popular historical narration tends to play an increasingly important role in shaping the ideas of the past at the expense of the academic, critical historiography.<sup>13</sup>

The next discussion involves the way in which the digital nature of the message and its placement within Web 2.0 change the way it functions and can also affect its content. This discussion is related to an older reflection in media studies, the question of how the form of the message affects the functioning of its content. The relationship between the form and content of information was studied by Walter Ong in his works on the orality and textuality as styles of thought underlying separate epistemological realities.<sup>14</sup> Marshall McLuhan pursued this topic in his publications on the formation of “information universes” based on different information dissemination technologies: print, radio, and television.<sup>15</sup> With the advent and rapid growth in significance of digital technologies for creating and disseminating information, the discussion about how the form of the message (here: digital) affects the meaning of its content becomes increasingly diverse and important. New concepts emerge, which indicate the importance of information digitization, unique in the history of civilization,<sup>16</sup> the breakthrough nature of the computer as a meta-medium,

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Walerian Kalinka and Adam Skalkowski], *Klio Polska: Studia i Materiały z Dziejów Historiografii Polskiej* 12 (2020): 73–96.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Frederick Zacek, *Palacký: The Historian as Scholar and Nationalist* (Hague: Mouton, 1970), vol. 5 of *Studies in European History*.

<sup>11</sup> Vasył Pedych, Vitaliy Telvak, “Lvivska istorychna shkola Michaýla Grushevskogo: Diaspornyý dyskurs” [Hrushevsky Lviv Historical School: Diaspora discourse], *Scientific Notes of Ostroh Academy National University: «Historical sciences» series* 1 no. 24 (2015); A. Tokarska, “Slovo, zakorinene u nacionalnyý dukh (do 150-richchya vid dnya narodzhennya M. Grushevskogo)” [The word, which is ensued to national spirit (to 150 years of the birth of M. Gryshevskiy)], *Visnyk Nacionalnogo universytetu Lvivska politekhnika: Yurydychni nauky* 855 (2016): 259–263.

<sup>12</sup> *Nationalizing the Past: Historians as Nation Builders in Modern Europe*, ed. by Stefan Berger, Chris Lorenz (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016).

<sup>13</sup> *Memory, Conflict and New Media: Web Wars in Post-Socialist States*, ed. by Ellen Rutten, Julie Fedor and Vera Zvereva (London: Routledge, 2013); Wiktor Werner, Dawid Gralik, Adrian Trzoss, “Wiedza historyczna w świecie cyfrowym: Funkcjonowanie, problemy, wymiana pokoleniowa” [Historical knowledge in the digital world: Condition, problems, generational change], in *Historia a media: Zbiór studiów*, vol. 4, ed. by Dominika Golaszewska-Rusinowska, Małgorzata Mielewska (Toruń: Instytut Promocji Historii, 2019), 120–140.

<sup>14</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and literacy* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>15</sup> Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage* (New York: Penguin Books, 1967), 126–128; Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2011); Marshall McLuhan, “McLuhan's laws of the media,” *Technology and Culture* 16, no. 1 (1975): 74–78.

<sup>16</sup> Alvin Toffler, *The third wave*, vol. 484 (New York: Bantam books, 1980).

where not only new messages are produced but previously non-digital information is transformed as well. Since the meaning of information always emerges from interacting with its recipients, who are in turn affected by the form of the information (as the former relates to the latter's common or limited availability, continuity or discontinuity, completeness or fragmentariness, social or individual reception context, finally the scope and extent of the involvement of senses), the form is also not without effect on the meanings assigned to a given piece of information, whereas the phenomenon of information transformation occurring between media (remediation) is of a particular cultural and social significance.<sup>17</sup> The continued presence in individual and social life of increasingly mobile computers, because of which human activities more and more frequently result from the coexistence of humanistic and technological factors, is seen as even more important: while one may have a positive<sup>18</sup> or negative<sup>19</sup> opinion of this fact, it is difficult to deny its significance.

The wide spread of digital social media in the development of the so-called Web 2.0 turned out to be yet another breakthrough in the functioning of information. Web 2.0 was considered as the first instance of a new type of civilization based on new mechanisms – networking<sup>20</sup> rather than hierarchical (a shift from the Cathedral model to the Bazaar model<sup>21</sup>) – of producing both information and other goods, as well as the departure from a clear distinction between the producers and consumers to prosumption and the relations of participation.<sup>22</sup> As a result, phenomena characteristic of the new kinds of information and cultural practices increase in significance, including the information bubbles<sup>23</sup> created by the information distribution mechanisms which had no direct counterparts in pre-digital practices, i.e., algorithms to customize access to information<sup>24</sup>, the phenomenon of computer-assisted descriptions or models of

<sup>17</sup> Jay David Bolter, Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000); Jay David Bolter, "Remediation and the Language of New Media," *Northern Lights: Film & Media Studies Yearbook* 5, no. 1 (2007): 25–37.

<sup>18</sup> Joseph C. R. Licklider, "Man-computer symbiosis," *IRE Transactions on Human Factors in Electronics* 1 (1960): 4–11.

<sup>19</sup> Theodore J. Kaczynski, *Technological Slavery: The Collected Writings of Theodore J. Kaczynski, a.k.a. "The Unabomber"* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2010); Manfred Spitzer, *Digitale Demenz: Wie wir uns und unsere Kinder um den Verstand bringen* [Digital dementia: How we drive us and our children mad] (Munich: Droemer eBook, 2012).

<sup>20</sup> James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds* (New York: Anchor Books, 2005).

<sup>21</sup> Eric Raymond, "The Cathedral and the Bazaar," *Knowledge, Technology & Policy* 12, no. 3 (1999): 23–49.

<sup>22</sup> George Ritzer, Nathan Jurgenson, "Production, Consumption, Prosumption: The Nature of Capitalism in the Age of the Digital «prosumer»," *Journal of Consumer Culture* 10, 1 (2010): 13–36; Jean Burgess, Joshua Green, *YouTube: Online Video and Participatory Culture* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2018); Andrew Keen, *The Cult of the Amateur* (New York: Doubleday/Currency, 2007).

<sup>23</sup> Siva Vaidhyanathan, *Antisocial Media: How Facebook Disconnects us and Undermines Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>24</sup> Siva Vaidhyanathan, *The Googlization of Everything (And Why We Should Worry)* (Oakland, CA: Univ. of California Press, 2012); Andrew Keen, *The Internet is not the*

reality<sup>25</sup> (which find more and more uses in humanistic studies and historiography as well<sup>26</sup>), and deep fakes.<sup>27</sup>

Our analysis of historical narration arising and operating in the digital Web 2.0 takes the above-mentioned circumstances into account, specifically the emergence of new phenomena at the intersection of human communication, symbolic, and social activities with the dynamically developing information technologies. As the research covers the content of YouTube channels, the interpretation context will include not only the network-community nature of the portal and the digital nature of the information therein but also the visual specificity of the presented message. The question of the visual and its impact on the specificity of the message and its reception have been studied in many works devoted to the culture-forming role of the cinema and television message.<sup>28</sup> In the context of a community website such as YouTube, there is a network context superimposed on it, containing its own characteristic phenomena of social interactions, and a digital context, in which the phenomena typical of digital information occur, namely the role of positioning and recommendation algorithms and the issue of the range and transmission dynamics of information. The complexity and significance (for contemporaneity) of the research problems accumulated in the case of YouTube make this portal an important area of study for contemporary reflection on culture, politics, and the society.<sup>29</sup>

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*Answer* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 2015); Neil Postman, *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).

- <sup>25</sup> Ronald T. Azuma, "A Survey of Augmented Reality," *Presence: Teleoperators & Virtual Environments* 6, no. 4 (1997): 355–385.
- <sup>26</sup> Kevin Kee, Timothy Compeau, *Seeing the Past with Computers: Experiments with Augmented Reality and Computer Vision for History* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2019).
- <sup>27</sup> Kai Shu et al., "Fake News Detection on Social Media: A Data Mining Perspective," *ACM SIGKDD Explorations Newsletter* 19, no. 1 (2017): 22–36; Wiktor Werner, Adrian Trzoss, "Czy cyfrowe media wywołują społeczną paranoję? Dwugłos w sprawie obecności teorii spiskowych w mediach społecznościowych i kulturze masowej" [Do digital media cause social paranoia? A dialogue on the presence of conspiracy theory in the social media and mass culture], *Nauka* 3 (2019): 147–169.
- <sup>28</sup> Chris Jenks, ed., *Visual Culture* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002); Richard Howells, Joaquim Negreiros, *Visual Culture* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012); Marianne Hirsch, *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture after the Holocaust* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012); Victor Burgin, *In/different Spaces: Place and Memory in Visual Culture* (Oakland, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1996); Giovanni Sartori, *Homo videns: La sociedad teledirigida* [Homo videns: Teledirected society] (Madrid: Taurus, 2012); Dorota Skotarczak, "Kilka uwag o historii wizualnej" [Some remarks on visual history], *Klio Polska* 8 (2016): 117–130; Thomas Elsaesser, *Film History as Media Archaeology: Tracking Digital Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019).
- <sup>29</sup> Burgess, Green, *YouTube*; Clement Chau, "YouTube as a Participatory Culture," *New Directions for Youth Development* 128 (2010): 65–74; Jane Arthurs, Sophia Drakopoulou, Alessandro Gandini, "Researching YouTube," *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* 24, no. 1 (2018): 3–15; Kevin Allocca, *Videocracy: How YouTube Is Changing the World... With Double*

## 2. PRELIMINARY RESEARCH – INTEREST IN HISTORY IN POLAND, 2016–2020 RESEARCH LANDSCAPE

The interest in history in Poland, in light of the surveys carried out regularly by CBOS (most recently in 2016), remains at a relatively high level as more than three quarters of the society declare medium or higher interest in historical topics, and 87% believe that modern humans need historical knowledge.<sup>30</sup> More detailed questionnaire surveys carried out among Poles interested in history in 2019 revealed a significant share of on-line repositories in the creation of historical knowledge, particularly YouTube, which was indicated by 76% of respondents. Most interestingly, a diversity of interest in specific historical topics as well as the way of its presentation depending on the age of the surveyed Poles can also be observed. The younger fans of history preferred the repositories of historical information which were more visual in form and entertaining in nature, whereas the older ones were interested in textual repositories and more academic content.<sup>31</sup>

The research carried out specifically on YouTube in 2020, focusing on the content and (quantitatively measurable) reception of the six most popular video channels about history, indicates the prevalence of interest in national history in its military and political aspects. Simultaneously, content devoted to recent history – 20th-century and contemporary history – clearly predominates, which is in line with the major epochal topics and trends observed in the historical policy.<sup>32</sup> These trends associated with the interest in more recent times were also corroborated by the analysis of the ten most popular Polish-speaking YouTube channels whose main topic is military history, in which 40% of all views were generated by videos devoted to World War II, closely followed by productions about World War I, the inter-war period, and the Cold War counted together.<sup>33</sup>

It is worth mentioning the activities of Internet users outside of social media, which are related to real-world events. One such example is the situation which

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*Rainbows, Singing Foxes, and Other Trends We Can't Stop Watching* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> “Świadomość historyczna Polaków” [Historical consciousness of Poles], *Komunikat z badań 68/2016* (Warszawa: CBOS, 2016); Artur Wysocki, “Stosunek społeczeństwa polskiego do przeszłości a tożsamość narodowa. Analiza badań sondażowych” [Attitude of Polish society to the past and national identity: Analysis of the surveys], *Annales Universitatis Mariae Curie-Skłodowska, sectio I – Philosophia - Sociologia* 43, no. 1 (2018): 111–124.

<sup>31</sup> Wiktor Werner, Dawid Gralik, Adrian Trzoss, “Media społecznościowe a funkcjonowanie wiedzy historycznej w Polsce: Raport z badań” [Social media and the condition of historical knowledge in Poland: Research report], *Przegląd Archiwalno-Historyczny* 6 (2019): 211–223.

<sup>32</sup> Wiktor Werner, Adrian Trzoss and Dawid Gralik, “Historia i YouTube. Narracja historyczna w dobie Web 2.0” [History and YouTube. Historical narrative in the age of Web 2.0], *Nauka* 3 (2020): 135–138.

<sup>33</sup> Dawid Gralik, “Prezentacja historii wojskowości w mediach społecznościowych na przykładzie portalu YouTube” [Presentation of military history in social media on the example of YouTube] (in press).

followed the première of the movie *Warsaw '44*.<sup>34</sup> When analyzing the problem of interest in history outside the social media – or, more broadly, digital media – one should pay attention to the still important role of such media as film and video games, and even more traditional ones like books and the press. Particularly in the latter group it is worth to notice a broad range of periodicals, both scientific and popular-scientific, available on the Polish publishing market<sup>35</sup>, as well as the noticeable presence of historical topics in popular literature, not just in historical novels in the strict sense, but also in such literary genres as historical crime fiction, historical fantasy, and alternative history.<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the traditional audio-visual media, mainly the cinema, should be seen as the tools which affect the perception of history much more strongly. What can be stressed here is the foreign origin of most of such productions, whose main area of influence is the perception of world history.<sup>37</sup> Finally, while analyzing all the above-mentioned sources of historical knowledge, it is necessary to mention the wide-spread phenomenon of remediation, or the presence of narration of analogous content within different media.

Moreover, the questions of the perception of the above-mentioned types of sources of historical knowledge by their recipients and the extent of critical approach to them are no less important. Consequently, one should point out two divergent trends, above all else. On the one hand, the critical approach is notably present among the fans of historical films and video games;<sup>38</sup> on the other, there is a noticeable practice among most Internet users to content oneself with the information found in the web either with no verification or with verification limited solely to other on-line resources. This, considering that systems

<sup>34</sup> Maciej Białous, Piotr Gliński, “Internet jako medium pamięci zbiorowej młodych ludzi: Przykład sieciowej aktywności wokół filmu «Miasto 44»” [The Internet as a medium of young people’s collective memory. The examples of Internet activity regarding the film «Warsaw 44»], *Studia Podlaskie* 24 (2016): 315–327.

<sup>35</sup> Paweł Rzewuski, “Polaków prasa historyczna” [Poles’ historical press], *Histmag.org*, 3 January 2014, <https://histmag.org/Polakow-prasa-historyczna-8896>.

<sup>36</sup> Wiktor Werner, “Land, History and Imagination, Or Remarks on the Foundations of the New Patriotism,” *Historia@Teoria* 1, no. 2 (2016): 13–29; Wiktor Werner, “From Andrzej Kmiecic to Witcher. Alternative History and Historical Fantasy in Poland at the Turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries,” in Wiktor Werner and Violetta Julkowska, *Contemporary Lives of the Past* (Poznań: Instytut Historii UAM, 2018), 139–163.

<sup>37</sup> Dawid Gralik, “Ku nowej pamięci historycznej? Kreowanie wizji przeszłości w popkulturze na przykładzie II wojny światowej” [Way to new historical memory? Creating a vision of the past in pop culture on the example of World War II], *Sensus Historiae* 36 (2019): 115–118; Dawid Gralik, “Wpływ gier wideo na wiedzę historyczną i popularyzację historii” [Impact of video games on historical knowledge and popularization of history], in *Popularyzacja nauk historycznych – teoria i praktyka. Zbiór studiów*, ed. by Dominika Gołaszewska-Rusinowska, Małgorzata Mielewska and Tomasz Sińczak (Toruń: Instytut Promocji Historii, 2018): 190–191.

<sup>38</sup> Maciej Białous, *Spoleczna konstrukcja filmów historycznych: Pamięć zbiorowa i polityka pamięci w kinematografii polskiej lat 1920–2010* [Social construction of historical films: Collective memory and memory policy in the Polish cinematography of 1920–2010] (Białystok: Uniwersytet w Białymstoku, 2015): 362–365, 379–380; Gralik, *Wpływ gier wideo*, 188, 190–191.



of algorithms are used on-line to personalize access to digital repositories, may lead to negative outcomes for the historical awareness of Poles, particularly in the form of one-sided politicization of historical knowledge or dumbing it down for commercial reasons.<sup>39</sup>

### 3. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method adopted in this paper is narratological discourse analysis. Therefore, the subject of analysis is the narration on historical topics related to the question of national identity, present in videos hosted on YouTube, and its reception measured by the number of views (of videos), subscriptions (of a given channel), comments (posted under a video), and reactions to videos (likes and dislikes).

The analysis of narration occurs on three levels: of symbol and metaphor analysis, of character and event type analysis, and of narrative form analysis.

At the level of symbols and metaphors we used conceptual metaphor, an analytical category of cognitive linguistics: it is a notion which is not just linguistic or symbolic in nature but also performs conceptual functions, ones which enable understanding reality.<sup>40</sup>

In the analysis of types we used categories borrowed from Vladimir Propp's method,<sup>41</sup> namely his method of analyzing tales from the perspective of repeatable types of characters, events, and themes.

In the scope of interpretation of narrative forms, categories suggested by Northrop Frye<sup>42</sup> in his studies of literature were used, also employed by Hayden White<sup>43</sup> in his analysis of historiography. The categories of stylistic forms or modes, epic-romantic, tragic, ironic, and comedic, are notions of high importance for our research. The epic-romantic style is oriented towards the deeds of the hero, such as slaying monsters and villains, facing elemental forces, and defying the adversities of fate.<sup>44</sup> The tragic style introduces the hero's confrontation with fate, which leads to suffering. The fate which condemns the tragic hero to suffer also exalts him above his environment, which he surpasses with the qualities of his character: dignity, nobility and morality. Simultaneously, his

<sup>39</sup> Werner, Gralik and Trzoss, *Media społecznościowe*, 230–231.

<sup>40</sup> George Lakoff, Mark Johnson, "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language," *The Journal of Philosophy* 77, no. 8 (1980): 453–486; George Lakoff, "Conceptual metaphor," in *Cognitive Linguistics: Basic Readings*, ed. by Dirk Geeraerts (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2006): 185–239.

<sup>41</sup> Vladimir Yakovlevich Propp et al., *Morfologiya "volshebnoy" skazki* [Morphology of "magic" tale], (Moscow: Labirint, 1998).

<sup>42</sup> Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: JHU Press, 2014).

<sup>44</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 186–205

uniqueness breeds hostility, which increases suffering. Revenge may be a component of the tragedy: it makes the world more just, but does not alleviate the hero's suffering.<sup>45</sup> The ironic-satirical style focuses on showing anomalies and injustices in the world. The hero is lost in the reality which is not what it is supposed to be, as the rules we expect to be there either do not work or only appear to work.<sup>46</sup> Finally, the comedic style creates a cheerful image of the hero who integrates with the world and society regardless of his actions. In comedy, the world embodies not a higher moral rule but rather a tendency towards wholeness and fullness, which makes chance and circumstance always work for the benefit of the hero.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4. CASE STUDY: POLAND

Our source base consisted of Polish digital repositories of historical knowledge on YouTube, both state-operated and oriented to specific political parties. The contents of these repositories including basic quantitative information is described separately from their substance and its interpretation.

IPNtvPL (the channel of the Institute of National Remembrance): 97.4 thousand subscriptions, 1,473 videos, 29.8 million views:

“NIEZWYCIĘŻENI”<sup>48</sup>

Description: publication date: September 15, 2017. 5.615 million views, 200 thousand likes and 6.5 thousand dislikes, 18.5 thousand comments (some comments are removed as the description of the video informs). The Polish version is narrated by Mirosław Zbrojewicz. The narrator of the English version is the actor Sean Bean: two million views, 79 thousand likes and 3 thousand dislikes, 13 thousand comments. Both videos have their own dedicated websites, [www.niezwyciezeni-film.pl](http://www.niezwyciezeni-film.pl)<sup>49</sup> and [www.theunconquered-movie.com](http://www.theunconquered-movie.com),<sup>50</sup> containing additional features like the table of contents as well as explanations of dates and events, e.g. “Scene 20. Jan Karski's missions. After the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939,” “Jan Karski (born Jan Koziński on 24 April 1914 in Łódź; died on 13 July 2000 in Washington, D.C.) was taken prisoner but soon managed to escape.” There are thirty-two scenes in total, some described as

<sup>45</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 206–222.

<sup>46</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 223–239.

<sup>47</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, 163–185.

<sup>48</sup> IPNtvPL, “IPNtv: Niezwyciężeni” [IPNtv: The Unconquered], YouTube video, 4:20, September 15, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M7MSG4Q-4as>.

<sup>49</sup> *Niezwykniężeni*, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, <http://www.niezwyciezeni-film.pl> (accessed: 8.01.2021).

<sup>50</sup> *The Unconquered*, Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, <http://www.theunconquered-movie.com> (accessed: 8.01.2021).

events: The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, September 1, September 17 – described as “a stab in the back,” Katyń massacre, deportations, the Battle of Monte Cassino, Karski’s missions, Warsaw Ghetto Uprising, Operation Tempest, Warsaw Uprising, breaking the Enigma code (placed at the end against chronology – with all credits given to the Poles – while actually the Polish intelligence worked on the Enigma code already before the war, passed the results to the British intelligence, then the work was continued by Alan Turing’s team<sup>51</sup>), Yalta, strikes in the Polish People’s Republic, the Pope’s visit, Carnival of “Solidarity,” Martial Law, the fall of Communism.

Interpretation: the video begins with the statement: “nobody thought the war (i.e. World War II) and its effects would last half a century for Poland” – stressing the post-war situation, i.e. the Polish People’s Republic (PRL) is not fully recognized as the Polish state. The scene where “first, Germany attacks” (not the Nazis, but rather Germany), with a Polish soldier trying to hold two advancing walls, is maintained in the style of the tragic defiance of the fate. The event is shown (0:14–0:19) as a mechanical and inevitable fate (the Polish text says “the war was imminent”) through the image of converging monumental machine walls trapping a human – a Polish soldier – between them. The mechanistic metaphor is seen a few more times in the imagery of the video. When further in the film the Polish Underground State appears, it takes the form of an underground factory (0:26), the wall dividing Europe also builds itself as a mechanism (3:36), while the image of the “hand of power” (3:36–3:39) suppressing freedom movements and worker protests is mechanical, even robotic in its form. The tragic style of the film description of the September Campaign defeat, mass murders of the Polish population committed by the Germans and the Soviets, shooting of the Polish POWs in Katyń and deportations of Poles to forced labor camps (GULag) deep in the USSR is replaced by the epic-romantic style, which underlines the heroism of the struggles to regain freedom. Victories are accentuated: military (Monte Cassino, Battle of Britain, where the dynamic image is strengthened by such phrases as “we conquer,” “crush the [German] resistance,” “wreak havoc and fear”), intelligence and underground (Enigma, paratrooper missions, acquiring secret plans for the Allies, saving Jews) and moral (informing the Allies about the Holocaust, ineffective because unheard, as expressed by the metaphorical image of the monumental sitting US President “facing away” from the Polish agent Jan Karski, 2:28). The Warsaw Uprising is shown not in the tragic style (as a defeat) but rather epic-heroic as “giving up life in the name of dignity and freedom” (3:03). There is a short instance of the ironic style in the film when, after showing the Polish contributions to the Allies (“we break the German Enigma code – saving millions of lives,” 3:11), “in exchange for all that we do – we are betrayed” (3:16), which points a finger at the Yalta Conference.

<sup>51</sup> Chris Christensen, “Polish Mathematicians Finding Patterns in Enigma Messages,” *Mathematics Magazine* 80, no. 4 (2007): 247–273; Marian Rejewski, “How Polish Mathematicians Deciphered the Enigma,” *Annals of the History of Computing* 3, no. 3 (1981): 213–234; Joanne Baker, “Forgotten Heroes of the Enigma Story,” *Nature* 561, no. 7722 (2018): 307–309.

The irony indicates a dissonance between the expected and just, and the actual and unjust (“the free world distances itself from [the Poles fighting for freedom]” with “an iron curtain,” 3:27). It then gives way to the returning romantic-epic style, which describes pursuing the fight for freedom, supported by the Polish Pope, and the final triumph in the form of regaining independence in 1989.

“NIEZWYCIĘŻENI. CZAS PRÓBY”<sup>52</sup> – A PREQUEL FOR “THE UNCONQUERED” VIDEO

Description: publication date: June 28, 2019, one million views, 41 thousand likes, 1.8 thousand dislikes. 3.8 thousand comments.

Interpretation: The video introduces its story with the statement that “in the late 18th century, Russia, Prussia and Austria occupied and divided the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. Poles lost their state but [not] the Polish spirit”. The film, consistently maintained in the epic-romantic style, mostly involves enumerating the achievements of the Second Polish Republic, from “reclaiming the city of Lviv,” the victorious Greater Poland Uprising and the Silesian Uprisings, to the strongly accentuated theme of victory in the war against the Soviet Russia. This event, shown in the epic-romantic style as its fundamental theme of “slaying the monster” is visually accentuated by the image of the galloping “Bolshevik hordes” with torches in hands, lit by a red glow (1:25). We win because we are “united” and “entrust our country to God” (1:39). The series of successes indicated in the video includes establishing a democratic electoral law, rebuilding the country after the ravages of war, economic, scientific, and cultural achievements. Not to end the video on an unambiguously optimistic note, after the idyllic image of a couple relaxing at the cinema (3:39) we are shown a poster proclaiming mobilization (3:58), then a new sequence informs about the arming of neighboring powers and more trying times ahead of Poles. The ending is not tragic, however (regardless of what the viewer knows about the events to come): the video maintains its epic manner to the end.

“IPNTV: WYWALCZONA. NIEPODLEGŁA. POLSKA. (SPOT)”<sup>53</sup>

Description: 268 thousand views, 7.4 thousand likes, 174 dislikes, 320 comments, publication date: November 10, 2017.

<sup>52</sup> IPNtvPL, “IPNtv: Niezwyciężeni: Czas próby,” YouTube video, 4:36, June 28, 2019, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13Nn\\_2sAnR4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=13Nn_2sAnR4); English version “IPNtv: The unconquered: Trying times,” YouTube video, 4:37, June 28, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WlOjMs6HIU>.

<sup>53</sup> IPNtvPL, “IPNtv: Wywalczona. Niepodległa. Polska. (spot)” [IPNtv: Hard-won. Independent. Poland. (clip)], YouTube video, 0:30, November 11, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wzJ909w6Hbo>.

Interpretation: “a public campaign of IPN, our contribution to the preparations for the 100th anniversary celebration of regaining Independence by Poland.”<sup>54</sup> “IPNtv: Hard-won. Independent. Poland” is a short (30 seconds) clip, full of content and imagery, maintained in the romantic-epic style, which accentuates battle scenes of symbolic significance, such as the rearing steed of Piłsudski, who is shown in a metallic (knightly) halo (0:17), a falling, bleeding soldier whose sacrifice (spilled blood) “animates” the resurging Homeland (0:25).

“IPNTV KRAKÓW – POLSKIE SYMBOLE NARODOWE – POLAK MAŁY”<sup>55</sup>

Description: “IPNtv Krakow – Polish national symbols – Little Pole” is a film for children from April 2014. Because it had a large percentage of negative comments, the option to add comments has been blocked. 3.660 million views, 20 thousand likes, 6.4 thousand dislikes.

Interpretation: the video is kept in a cheerful comedic style, its narrator is a figure of a boy, infantilized in both the voice and appearance (head-to-body ratio as in a toddler). The comedic manner involves not only the content but also the visual form, which refers to children’s drawings of smiling figures with identical, schematic facial features, which yet stay distinct thanks to more carefully drawn uniforms (noble and knightly attire, Napoleonic Wars era uniforms, and camouflage of Warsaw Insurgents). Through the comedic style the world is generally shown as tending towards harmony and positive solutions. The tumultuous past (“spilled blood,” 3:10) leads to the happy present times, where everything has its place, that is, the nation has its state, emblem and hymn, which one should know and respect.

“IPNTV: GRA O NIEPODLEGŁOŚĆ”<sup>56</sup>

Description: 716K views, 31K likes, 395 dislikes, 1300 comments. Publication date: 10 Nov. 2018. There is an English version too (77K views).<sup>57</sup>

Interpretation: IPNtv: Game for Independence – the conceptual metaphor of the “game” in the title holds the narration of this video together. It generates such phrases as “everything was on the line,” “play relentlessly,” “play to the

<sup>54</sup> IPNtvPL, “IPNtv: Wywalczona,” commentary under the video.

<sup>55</sup> IPNtvPL, “IPNtv Kraków – Polskie Symbole Narodowe – Polak Mały” [IPNtv Krakow – Polish national symbols – Little Pole], YouTube video, 6:43, April 30, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQk8p7XY23A>.

<sup>56</sup> . IPNtvPL, “IPNtv: Gra o Niepodległość” [IPNtv: Game of Independence], YouTube video, 5:29, November 11, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M55hKTnUbKk>.

<sup>57</sup> IPNtvPL, “IPNtv: Game for Independence. Poland,” YouTube video, 5:29, November 11, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nE2TjpLCmX8>.

end,” “high stakes,” “go all-in” (0:00–0:10). Visually, this metaphor is invoked by showing props associated with various games (playing cards, domino tiles, chess pieces, three-player chess board – as a reference to the game between three partitioning powers 1:19, 5:08). The visual style of a game (people like chess pieces, notions like playing cards, a map like a board) is related to the view of the “world as a mechanism” (0:28, 1:19, 1:30), which seems a leading theme of many IPNtv publications (as seen in “The Unconquered” too). The world as a mechanism also means history as a mechanism: hence the history of (literally) gearing events, where effects result physically from causes, just like in a gearbox or in a game of tumbling domino tiles (3:20), there is no leeway or any room for ambiguity of interpretation: there is only the simple impact of prior events on later ones. The symbolic representation of the partition of Poland as the shattering of a heart (of stone?) into three parts, albeit still connected with a chain, is an additional strong visual motif. This shattered heart becomes a peculiar quasi-mechanism, mass events are even more clearly mechanical in nature (1:30), people are pieces on the board, whose placement is affected by the only slightly visible mechanism (some revolving gears can be seen) of cabinet intrigues (1:37). However, politicians (namely Piłsudski, Dmowski and Paderewski) are also shown as pieces in a board game (chess, Monopoly), which then transform into figures in a deck of cards (1:45). Political terms such as “federation state” and “nation state” are cards as well. Politics involves playing a game, part of which is “bidding” (1:56), more like bridge than poker. The general thrust of the visual side of the film creates a message about a generally rational world (references to games of skill such as chess or bridge predominate over few references to games of chance or gambling), where the playing elite takes on itself the responsibility for the society (pawns), and the course of events can be properly arranged (solitaire or domino) and predicted.

“IPN TV – TELEDYSK KASIA MALEJONEK JEDNA CHWILA PANNINY WYKŁĘTE (INKA)”<sup>58</sup>

Description: “Jedna Chwila” [One Moment], a video clip by Michał Wilczek (director) and Kasia Malejonek (singer) about Danuta Siedzikówna “Inka,” Home Army soldier and nurse executed in 1946 by Communist authorities, 837 thousand views, 7.3 thousand likes, 243 dislikes, 459 comments.

Interpretation: The style of the video clip is satirical: it is based on the juxtaposition of the present-day reality shown in cheerful colors (happy life of young people, dating, marriage, motherhood, learning, work, raising children) and the injustice which Home Army soldiers suffered after the war (prison, brutal interrogations, execution). The lyrics “nie oglądaj się za siebie

<sup>58</sup> IPNtvPL, “IPN TV – Teledysk Kasia Malejonek Jedna Chwila Panniny Wyklęte (Inka),” YouTube video, 7:46, September 14, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QvqLy88OPJ4>.

gdzie dym i mrok” [don’t look behind where there’s smoke and dark] points out even more of world’s injustice, which is forgetting the sacrifice of young people who gave up everything for the homeland without receiving their due chance of happy life in return. At the end of the clip, however, there is a break in style towards certain comedic components (which is paradoxical in the tragic context of the story shown; nonetheless, the whole clip is rather cheerful) when the modern protagonists visit Inka’s grave (4:17) to thank her for the chance of living in free Poland. This way the world regains its harmony, the living remember the dead and are grateful for their sacrifice, as stressed by the lyrics “niech obejrzą się za siebie tam gdzie dym i mrok” [let them look behind where there’s smoke and dark]. Therefore, a tragic death is not final: memory remains, a sacrifice is not wasted, and through it a happy life is made possible.

Polish National Foundation (PFN) holds a channel on YouTube aimed at popularizing the history of Poland and reinforce the message of historical policy. It is incomparably less popular than the channel of IPN. It has five thousand permanent subscribers and a total of three million views over sixty-one videos.

#### “FRANTIC 7. THE WARSAW UPRISING”<sup>59</sup>

Description: Publication date: August 1, 2018 (fourth most popular video on the PFN channel). 211 thousand views, 660 likes, 37 dislikes, 60 comments. Concerning the reactions to the film, its reception is relatively small, especially considering the means at the Polish National Foundation’s disposal. The production is in English (text only, the video has no spoken narration, the soundtrack is music only).

Interpretation: The style of the video is tragic with elements of irony. The Warsaw Uprising is shown as honoring obligations towards the Allies, paid back with betrayal by an official ally, the Red Army who “sat idly” watching the slaughter of the insurgents, inhabitants of Warsaw, and the destruction of the city (1:50). The actions of the Americans aimed at delivering supplies to the Uprising are shown as heroic (the sacrifice of pilots’ lives is underlined, 1:23), yet tragically inefficient due to yet another betrayal of the Soviet leaders who denied American planes the right to use their airstrips, and due to the progress of the German actions in Warsaw (they captured most of the drops). It is therefore a narration of the injustice of the world and the heroism associated with suffering and martyrdom.

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<sup>59</sup> Polska Fundacja Narodowa, “Frantic 7. The Warsaw Uprising,” YouTube video, 2:30, June 1, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyaYU8y-Y\\_k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AyaYU8y-Y_k).

MIRACLE ON THE VISTULA. BATTLE OF WARSAW 1920<sup>60</sup>

Description: Narrated by actor Liam Neeson; 710 thousand views, 7.5 thousand likes, 132 dislikes, 714 comments, publication date: August 15, 2018.

Interpretation: The film is centered around the narration provided by American actor Liam Neeson, known from films about hard men not caring for political correctness (he was hired by PFN for the role). Neither graphics nor animation are used in the film: it means that the actor's expression, his voice, and the spoken text are the only components of the narration. It is thus a quasi-testimony, where the narrator's personality is to guarantee the importance of the message. The style of the expression maintains the epic-romantic tone: it is a narration about the Polish victory over Lenin's military communism, to which the American pilots flying in the "Kościuszko Squadron" also contributed. The positive message of the film thus involves bravery and solidarity, through which adversities can be overcome. The history of the battle is extended into the future, as the occupation of Poland in 1939 is mentioned and its post-war dependence upon the USSR, in which times the memory of this historic victory allegedly helped to maintain the Polish national spirit.

RADOSŁAW PATLEWICZ'S CHANNEL – CURRENTLY (JANUARY 2021)  
 269 VIDEOS (3,426,978 VIEWS), 15.5K SUBSCRIPTIONS

Patlewicz is politically connected with the circle of Grzegorz Braun (Pobudka [wake-up call], Confederation of the Polish Crown). While the channel was officially created in 2014, the first video was published there on October 27, 2017 along with the publication of volume one of Patlewicz's book *Historia polityczna Polski – nowe spojrzenie*,<sup>61</sup> yet, in his own words, he intends to discuss current topics "as you cannot fail to spot the analogy between the past and the present." He motivates creating the channel and publishing the book saying that "historical knowledge in our country is slim", while our history "is falsified at least from the 16th century on", which should be clear from giving more significance to wrong events and characters, whereas he is going to re-define the perception of the history of Poland using facts and historical sources.<sup>62</sup>

The style of the channel and the films it contains is generally ironic and satirical. It is a confrontation with falsified history (in view of the films' author),

<sup>60</sup> Polska Fundacja Narodowa, "Miracle On The Vistula. Battle Of Warsaw 1920," YouTube video, 2:13, August 15, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Yhgwp94IEo>; name originally capitalized.

<sup>61</sup> Radosław Patlewicz, *Historia polityczna Polski – nowe spojrzenie* [Political history of Poland: A new view], vol. 1 (Częstochowa: 3DOM, 2017).

<sup>62</sup> Radosław Patlewicz, "I. Historia Polski – Wstęp" [I. History of Poland: Introduction], YouTube video, 2:35, October 28, 2017, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SAgp96gNIZI>.



and therefore an unjust world, where traitors are honored as heroes (according to Patlewicz, these traitors include Jan Henryk Dąbrowski<sup>63</sup> and Józef Piłsudski<sup>64</sup>) while the true heroes are either forgotten (as, e.g., Jan Tarło<sup>65</sup>) or underestimated (Sigismund III Vasa). The narration focuses on the function described by Propp as exposing a false hero.<sup>66</sup> This state of the world is supposedly due to neglecting traditional values (primarily religious, i.e. Catholic, political, i.e. monarchy, and economic, i.e. freedom of property), whereas the historic figures who do not fit in Patlewicz's definition of a hero as a defender of not only the homeland but also the Catholic faith, the political practice of monarchy (democracy is seen as pathological) and property are "exposed" as hidden traitors. In their place new heroes are being suggested, more deserving in the history of Poland, according to the author of the channel, and unjustly forgotten. The author of the channel positions himself in the romantic style as a fighter for the truth, who restores order to the world falsified by academic historians. According to Patlewicz, professional historians miss the truth because they are carriers of false ideas: socialist (as post-Communists, or those who gained their academic degrees in Polish People's Republic and their disciples), democratic (all who are not monarchists), Masonic-Enlightenment (those who declare secular world view), or because they are hypocritical as "regime" historians (being employed by the state).

## HISTORIA REALNA

Polish for "real history", channel created in August 2020, 18.8 thousand subscribers (which suggests a permanent growth of interest in the channel's content), 977,764 views, 38 videos.

The channel is run by Piotr Zychowicz, associated with *Do Rzeczy* (a conservative weekly, it also has a historical monthly magazine *Historia Do Rzeczy*, where Zychowicz is the editor-in-chief). Examples of videos:

"What if... Poland formed a government collaborating with the Germans?"<sup>67</sup> – authors: P. Zychowicz and A. Karbowski, 16,250 views, release date: October 13, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> Radosław Patlewicz, "XXIII. Postacie historyczne: Jan Henryk Dąbrowski" [23. Historical figures: Jan Henryk Dąbrowski], YouTube video, 15:30, January 29, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3L9mR4DxH8>.

<sup>64</sup> Radosław Patlewicz, "VII. Postacie historyczne: Józef Piłsudski" [7. Historical figures: Józef Piłsudski], YouTube video, 12:33, November 17, 2017, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXqg4pion\\_c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BXqg4pion_c).

<sup>65</sup> Radosław Patlewicz, "XIX. Bohaterowie wyklęci: Jan Tarło" [19. Forsaken heroes: Jan Tarło], YouTube video, 13:55, January 8, 2018, <https://youtu.be/9bjrf-Ny9p8>.

<sup>66</sup> Pablo Gervás, "Propp's Morphology of the Folk Tale as a Grammar for Generation," in *2013 Workshop on Computational Models of Narrative* (Saarbrücken/Wadern: Schloss Dagstuhl – Leibniz-Zentrum fuer Informatik, 2013).

<sup>67</sup> Piotr Zychowicz, Arkadiusz Karbowski, "Co by było gdyby... Polska stworzyła rząd kolaborujący z Niemcami?" [What if... Poland formed a government collaborating with the

“What if... Poles attacked the Soviet Union at Germany’s side?”<sup>68</sup> – authors: P. Zychowicz and A. Karbowski, 33,569 views, release date: September 17, 2020.

“Home Army failed in Volhynia: It did not protect Poles from genocide by UPA.”<sup>69</sup> – author: P Zychowicz, 5,467 views, release date: September 15, 2020.

Interpretation: the historical narration presented by Piotr Zychowicz in his video is explicitly critical towards modern historiography, particularly regarding the Polish–German conflict as a kind of fatalism, or an event that cannot be avoided. Zychowicz appears here as a promoter, commentator, and apologist, in a way, of the position of Władysław Studnicki<sup>70</sup> – Polish aristocrat, politician and journalist, who solicited an alliance with Germany in the inter-war period, and after the war demonstrated in his analyses that such an alliance would prevent much of the suffering of Poles and Polish Jews – as well as other pre-war journalists, ideologically close to Studnicki, like Stanisław Cat-Mackiewicz or Adolf Bocheński, which is even reflected in the name of the channel intended as a reference to the tradition of inter-war conservative circles. Zychowicz compares the situation of Poland with that of Germany’s allies (mainly Hungary and Romania) and shows that their societies avoided persecution during the war, then suffered a fate no worse than Poland after the war. The irony of Zychowicz’s narration consists of showing the historiosophical axiom of Polish historical consciousness (the necessity of engaging in war with Germany in September 1939) as a false premise, and the alternative history scenario (where Poland as an ally of the 3rd Reich wages war against USSR) as an unfulfilled opportunity. Zychowicz is also critical in describing the policy of the London government and Home Army as excessively and needlessly confrontational in relations with the German occupants while sluggishly fighting the Communist underground and Ukrainian nationalists who slaughtered the Polish inhabitants of Volhynia and Podolia.

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Germans?], YouTube video, 50:29, October 13, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8N39HwdtPe8>.

<sup>68</sup> Piotr Zychowicz, Arkadiusz Karbowski, “Co by było gdyby... Polacy u boku Niemiec zaatakowali Związek Sowiecki?” [What if... Poles attacked the Soviet Union at Germany’s side?], YouTube video, 53:26, September 17, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qmkZN3zSrmg>.

<sup>69</sup> Piotr Zychowicz, “Armia Krajowa zawiodła na Wołyniu. Nie obroniła Polaków przed ludobójstwem UPA” [Home Army failed in Volhynia: It did not protect Poles from genocide by UPA], YouTube video, 10:29, September 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-beUsDeCXs>.

<sup>70</sup> Jacek Gzella, “«W obronie naszej całości»\* – na marginesie pracy: Władysław Studnicki, *O przymierze z Niemcami. Wybór pism 1923–1939*, Wydawnictwo TAIWPN Universitas Kraków, Kraków 2019, ss. 328” [“In defence of our whole”\* – Gloss to the work: Władysław Studnicki, *For the alliance with Germany: Selected writings 1923–1939*, Wydawnictwo TAIWPN Universitas Kraków, Kraków 2019, pp. 328], *Europa Orientalis. Studia z Dziejów Europy Wschodniej i Państw Bałtyckich* 10 (2019): 247–254.

THE KOLEKTYW FILMOWY [FILM COLLECTIVE] CHANNEL<sup>71</sup>

Created by a group of people who describe themselves as radical socialists and Marxists, its videos generate few views (usually 500–1000 views). The channel regularly publishes videos on various issues related to the history of socialism (as a political system) and Marxism (a doctrine). The authors explain theoretical concepts such as dialectical materialism or historical differences between social democracy and Marxism, and present the biographies of selected theoreticians and activists, e.g. Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Karl Kautsky, Che Guevara. There are also videos devoted to historical processes, such as the fall of the Soviet Union. The Collective includes archival images and footage in its videos.

“Why did the Soviet Socialism collapse?”<sup>72</sup> (also discusses the fall of CMEA and the Warsaw Pact). Publication date: Nov. 2019, 1200 views.

Description: According to the channel’s authors, the Soviet Union collapsed because a solution justified by the military communism period (the one-party system) was introduced in permanence; also because of the discrepancy between the power structures (dominated by professional party activists and intelligentsia) and the assumptions of Marx, who wrote that workers’ participation was necessary in the government of a socialist state. The channel’s authors also follow Western Marxists<sup>73</sup> in pointing out the issue of economic backwardness of Russia as the first socialist state, which had to catch up with the civilizational achievements of the West and fell before it could “see” the technological development (computerization) which would enable the central management so vital for socialism. Finally, the channel’s authors repeat the argument of contemporary Russian journalists<sup>74</sup> speaking about the expansion of bureaucracy in the USSR and emergence of a certain bourgeois bias (tendency to personal enrichment) among Soviet officials, through which the communist mono-party, within its own structures, bred an internal enemy who started striving for the collapse of the state and takeover of its property.

Interpretation: the narration style in the videos present on the channel is epic-romantic, enriched with a clearly signalized nostalgic theme, also associate with the ironic-satirical manner. As a conceptual and narrative topos, nostalgia means not only yearning for a “golden age” or a “paradise lost” but also a positive message that it is (will be) possible to correct the mistakes and attain the ideal. Thus, being a part of the epic-romantic style, the topos of nostalgia

<sup>71</sup> Kolektyw Filmowy, YouTube channel, accessed January 8, 2021, [https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCetxq4gJcqEwKbH\\_t5E7bNg](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCetxq4gJcqEwKbH_t5E7bNg).

<sup>72</sup> Kolektyw Filmowy, “Dlaczego Socjalizm Radziecki Upadł?” [Why did the Soviet Socialism collapse?], YouTube video, 12:34, November 29, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dI7afwg8VpE>.

<sup>73</sup> Marcel Van der Linden, *Western Marxism and the Soviet Union: A survey of critical theories and debates since 1917* (Leiden/Boston, MA: Brill, 2007).

<sup>74</sup> Alexey Alexeevich Chichkin, *Anatomiya krakha SSSR: Kto, kogda i kak razrushal velikuyu derzhavu?* [Anatomy of the collapse of USSR: Who, when and how destroyed the great power] (Moscow: Veche, 2011).

introduces more optimism to the message than does irony, related to nostalgia by the confrontation between the real and presented worlds. The nostalgia in the Film Collective's narration is underline by the specific choice of illustrating clips: Soviet propagand films and newsreels, similar in character, which show a warm and positive image of the Soviet reality.

#### THE RAZEM PARTY IN SOCIAL MEDIA: A YOUTUBE CHANNEL EXAMPLE

Video "The truth about the «Forsaken Soldiers:» What you won't hear in Public Television."<sup>75</sup>

Description: 20 thousand views. Publication date: March 1, 2018. A short lecture by Adrian Zandberg and Dorka Budacz from the Razem (Eng. "Together") party with archival materials and videos.

Interpretation: the description of the video says: "The term 'Forsaken Soldiers' is a hypocrisy. On the backs of Cavalry Captain Pilecki and other heroes, a cult of Nazi collaborators and perpetrators of genocide is being promoted. Rapes, ethnic cleansing, murders of children – it is no heroism. Do not build monuments to criminals!" The video ends with a call to abolish the "Forsaken Soldiers' Day" celebrated on March 1 every year (the video was released on that day). The style of the video is ironic, showing the tension between the view of history that supports the notion of "forsaken soldiers" as heroes and martyrs and the reality where, as the authors of the video claim, these soldiers were war criminals and collaborated with German occupants. Due to their anti-Soviet and anti-Ukrainian orientation and national-Catholic rhetoric, they are currently being promoted as symbols of the struggle for independence alongside Home Army soldiers such as Captain Pilecki.

#### A 90-MINUTE LECTURE BY ADAM LESZCZYŃSKI<sup>76</sup>

Description: 6 thousand views, publication date: Feb. 2016. Main points (on a slide at 3:26): "Poland has always been a country with higher poverty and social inequality levels than in the Old Europe. It is the same today, and the official inequality data do not show the actual scale of the problem. It does not bother Poles. Really." The lecture covers the inter-war period and PRL with some references to present times. Its content aims to point out the existence of

<sup>75</sup> Adrian Zandberg, Dorka Budacz, "Partia Razem: Prawda o «Żołnierzach Wyklętych»: O tym nie usłyszycie w Telewizji Publicznej" [Razem party: The truth about the "Forsaken Soldiers:" What you won't hear in Public Television], Partia Razem – Lewica Razem, YouTube video, 3:00, March 1, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfO2JhG0Oiy>.

<sup>76</sup> Adam Leszczyński, "Leszczyński: Krótka historia nierówności w Polsce [Czwartki Razem #1]" [Leszczyński: A short history of inequality in Poland (Thursdays Together #1)], Partia Razem – Lewica Razem, YouTube video, 1:31:49, February 12, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dhHq1TWOiSI>.

a continuum of social inequality realized in earnings, working conditions, social protection, taxation, and style of life. The inequality is that the distance from the rich Western countries increases with the degree of poverty, that is, while the elites in Poland enjoy living standards comparable to Western Europe, less well-off people are significantly poorer and live worse lives than comparable less well-off people in the West.

Interpretation: a lecture in ironic style with a strong thread of satire. It shows a discrepancy between the circulating images of the Second Republic as a prosperous country, and of PRL as a country of social equality, with the reality showing, according to the author, poverty and inequality as the prevalent phenomena in both. The author places himself (discreetly yet noticeably) in the epic-romantic style as a scholar drawing attention to the question, overlooked by the bemused majority, of poverty and social inequality, which results among other things from the work ethos not being very strong in Poland (particularly physical labour). The satirical tone is strongly heard when PRL is evaluated as the state where social justice was declarative only.

## 5. INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

The review of historical narrations on YouTube created by national institutions as well as political circles (with a very palpable absence of the circle of the largest opposition party, Platforma Obywatelska [Civic Platform], which only incidentally engages in historical topics, especially after 2015, and does so on Facebook and Twitter rather than YouTube) leads to the following conclusions.

The historical narration belonging to the ruling faction and the political mainstream (the one with access to national institutions and finances) is constructed as generally apologetic regarding the past, that is, it underlines the continuum in history. This narration is realized mainly through the epic-romantic style, with incidental references to other styles. The official historical policy emphasizes a positive view of the state and nation, clearly accentuating a view of history in which events are interconnected and give meaning to one another, whereas the agency in history results from political and military actions guided by elites and carried out by the masses sharing the same values as the elites.

The circles peripheral to the center defined by the ruling faction (both right-wing like the Confederation and the club of the *Do Rzeczy* weekly and left-wing like the Razem party and the people revolving around the Film Collective channel) show a tendency to the ironic-satirical manner. The main component of the narrations they create the negation of the existing, circulating knowledge about the past, shared by the majority, as false and hypocritical knowledge. At the same time, they present themselves as the guardians and advocates of true narrations: at the meta-narrative level it evokes the epic-romantic style, in which the narrator defines himself as revealing the truth in the falsified world.

At the communication level, the rhetoric of the ruling block (visible in the productions of national institutions: IPN, PFN) refers to the ethno-symbolic concept, in which the nation is being created by providing and maintaining the permeability of communication between the elites and the properly educated, guided and shaped society. The underplot of this message is the need to strive for unity and eliminate differences as threats to the national and state unity. The communication is top-down, which means that an esthetically and medially refined message is directed downwards towards the society of (projected) low intellectual capacity, which is from the fact that visual (particularly animated) and musical components clearly prevail over textual components. The narration is thus rich in media but poor in content, which means that its goal is to gain mass acceptance for a previously created story. Therefore, the assumed historical agency is based on the transfer of information and a feedback loop in the elite–masses system. This communication formula overlooks the existing elites (those which lie outside of the mainstream) as unimportant in view of the main authority–people communication axis.

The communication of the peripheries (both left- and right-wing) takes place at the top-top level, i.e. the message is textually rich and assumes that the recipient is able to think critically, has historical knowledge, and can associate facts. This narration is directed towards creating new elites (separately right- and left-wing). Therefore, both peripheries operate on modernist assumptions, where fundamental changes in history are achieved creating elites. Both cases reveal the assumption that the current political and intellectual elites are discredited (due to their Enlightenment, secular, post-Communist or clerical, nationalist and capitalist nature, respectively according to the right and the left), and therefore need to be replaced by new ones, sharing the right view of history and values.

Both the ruling block (represented by national institutions) and the right- and left-wing peripheries perceive historical narration as an important building block of collective identity. At the same time, there is little interest in historical topics from the “center” opposition faction, i.e. the Civic Platform (which is virtually absent from the prominent YouTube portal), meaning that this faction limits its impact on the collective identity formation processes based on historical identifications, focusing instead on contemporary and practical issues as the building blocks of identity.

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