

SHAPING MEMORY, SHAPING POLITICS: POLAND'S USE OF NATIONAL  
NARRATIVES IN RESPONSE TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis examines how Poland's reinterpretation of the past was politicized to establish itself as a leading force in the Western world in response to Putin's invasion of Ukraine. It investigates how the right-wing Polish government, the Law and Justice Party (PiS) utilizes national histories to cultivate a sense of victimhood and how various actors adopted this narrative in response to Putin's invasion, ultimately garnering support for Ukraine while undermining Russia. Through the application of Discourse-Historical Analysis (DHA) to eight public opinion pieces published in the online magazine *Wszystko Co Najważniejsze*, written by members of PiS and affiliates for an international audience, this research sheds light on the strategic use of Poland's national narratives for political gain. The research addresses two primary questions: (1) How are the historical narratives of Poland, promoted by PiS, utilized within the top-down discourse surrounding the invasion? (2) What forms of legitimation and argumentation are employed in this discourse? The analysis reveals how the top-down discourse strategically uses Poland's national narratives to present the country as the protector of Europe, the official authority on Russia, and a new Western leader, drawing on its history as a victim of Russian aggression. The study highlights the utilization of collective memory, national narratives, and victimization as theoretical frameworks, emphasizing how they are employed in the discourse. By leveraging these narratives, they justify Poland's unwavering support of Ukraine and attempt to persuade the international community to align with their rhetoric. The study argues that the ruling Law and Justice party, along with Poland, is depicted as defenders of Europe and authoritative figures on Russia, thereby reinforcing their position through historical legitimacy.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

“Every Polish man and every Polish woman is familiar with the situation in Ukraine. Every Polish man and every Polish woman really remembers what Russian occupation means, what Russian invasion means, what Russian terror means, because Polish families have lived through that terror...that is why Poles went to help Ukrainian refugees without asking any questions” Polish President Andrzej Duda told the United Nations General Assembly in September 2022 (Duda 2022a, 18:11). This statement highlights the official Polish perspective on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, presenting a striking instance of using national narratives for political purposes. Poland’s complicated history puts it in a special position where the nation feels an unconditional responsibility to help Ukraine. By blurring the boundaries of the Soviet invasion with the 20th century to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, Poland sees the war as a personal experience in which individuals and families are involved, not just the state itself.<sup>1</sup>

Following Putin’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, neighboring country Poland has been at the forefront of accepting Ukrainian refugees and sending aid to Ukraine while calling for tougher sanctions on Moscow (Rzhevkina 2022). Poland has responded to the war strongly in a pro-Ukrainian fashion while simultaneously reports of discrimination against Russians increased (Rzhevkina 2022). In many of the big cities in Poland, there are signs, posters, and even graffiti that show support for Ukraine and animosity towards Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> Parts of this thesis have previously appeared in my final paper submitted for Discourse Analysis with Dr. Ruth Wodak and Dr. Markus Rheindorf in Winter 2023. Permission to use this work has been granted by Dr. Ruth Wodak and Dr. Markus Rheindorf and my supervisor, Dr. Ana Mijić.

During my recent trip to Poland in late 2022 and early 2023, I could not help but notice the overwhelming support for Ukraine throughout the country. From the vibrant blue and yellow colors painted on the buildings and roads to the many Ukrainian flags to anti-Russian slogans decorating walls, it was clear that the people of Poland were standing in solidarity with their neighbor. This support was especially evident in the capital city of Warsaw and the coastal city of Gdańsk. As I wandered through the streets, I saw posters and graffiti calling for an end to Russia's aggression and for Ukraine's sovereignty. Even official government buildings proudly displayed their support for Ukraine, with flags and banners. Please refer to the appendix for photographs I took in Gdańsk and Warsaw highlighting this support.

This stood in stark contrast to many other European capitals I had visited in 2022 where support for Ukraine was not nearly as blatant. It was clear that Poland had a deep investment in their support, perhaps due to a different perspective on the conflict, and that their commitment to supporting Ukraine was unwavering.

Overall, my trip to Poland was telling, and it was obvious that the war in Ukraine was a topic that resonated deeply with the Polish people. The overwhelming support I saw throughout Poland, both from the government and from everyday people, was a powerful demonstration of solidarity and it left a lasting impression on me. However, it is worth noting this thesis focuses on top-down, official discourse in response to the war.

Due to its firsthand experience with Russian imperialism, both from the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union, Poland has been warning Europe about the danger posed by Russia, and as a result, has taken a prominent role in the EU's and NATO's response to the invasion of Ukraine (Francis 2023). Since the beginning of the war, Poland has been raising concerns and issuing a warning about the potential for the war to escalate and spread further: "Poland is now attempting

to warn the wider world about the danger posed by Putin's Russia. 'This is not just a regional conflict. Russia's war against Ukraine is a potential source of global conflagration. This war will affect our countries as well as yours, if it hasn't already,' Polish President Andrzej Duda told the United Nations General Assembly in September 2022" (Francis 2023).

For 123 years, Poland did not exist on a map. Between 1772 and 1795 the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth was partitioned by its neighbors (the Kingdom of Prussia, the Austrian Empire, and the Russian Empire) three times until it no longer existed as a sovereign state. It would not be until 1918, after the end of the First World War, that Poland would be reinstated as a country. During the interwar period, it would come into conflict with its neighbors again, in particular the Soviet Union and the Weimar Republic/German Reich. Poland was partitioned for a fourth time in 1939 when the USSR and Nazi Germany signed the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact, dividing the country to be annexed by each, effectively beginning the Second World War. Towards the end of the war in 1945, after the Soviet Union joined the allies, the leaders of the USA, Great Britain, and the USSR met at Yalta allowing Poland, and the rest of Eastern Europe, to come under the Soviet sphere of influence. The Soviets "liberated" Poland and it soon became one of the communist satellite states, "the Polish People's Republic". In 1989, Solidarity won elections in legislation and the first non-communist Prime Minister since 1948 was appointed. Poland today, the Third Polish Republic, joined NATO in 1999 and the European Union in 2004. The history of Polish-Russian relations continues to have implications to this day and this has been exacerbated since Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

The current populist, right-wing ruling party, Law and Justice (PiS) has been accused of not differentiating between Russian citizens and the government, leading to the rise in Russophobia (Rzhevskina 2022). Supporting this, a Pew Research Poll conducted in the spring



following the invasion found that 94% of Polish respondents see Russia as a major threat (Clancy, Huang, and Poushter 2022). PiS has openly pursued establishing a new national narrative for years, in which Poland's role as a victim to their neighbors is especially promoted (Etkind et al. 2012, 133), in particular, as victims of their dual occupation during the 20th century by the Nazi and Soviet regimes. Any discourse about Polish collaboration is left out, and in 2018 the government signed a law criminalizing "statements that attribute responsibility for the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities to 'the Polish nation'" (Charnysh and Finkel 2018). This is just one of the many "politics of memory" utilized by PiS. Their turbulent history has been drawn into the collective memory of contemporary Poland. Recently, political figures in Poland have been portraying the nation as a victim with Russia as the ultimate enemy, reactivating the collective memory in the discourse of the war and externalizing it to other countries.

The purpose of this thesis is to investigate how Poland's re-elaboration of the past is being politicized to position itself as a leader of the West against Russia. This study aims to explore how the right-wing Polish government pushes national histories to create a sense of victimhood, and how this narrative is also told by other actors in the face of Putin's invasion, ultimately promoting support for Ukraine at the expense of Russia. More specifically, I seek to answer two main questions: (1) How are the historical narratives of Poland, pushed by PiS, being used in the top-down discourse surrounding Russia's invasion? (2) Which forms of legitimization and argumentation are employed in the discourse?

I answer these questions by applying the framework of the discourse-historical approach (DHA) to my analysis of eight articles/public opinion pieces written by PiS officials and experts affiliated with the government that were published for international audiences in the online magazine *Wszystko Co Najważniejsze*, which has ties to the ruling party. In addition to DHA, I

will be drawing on the concepts of collective memory, national narratives, and memory politics, as well as reflecting on the phenomenon of Russophobia in contemporary Poland all of which have been extensively studied and I draw on this scholarship to contextualize the current usage of these topics in the discourse surrounding the war in Ukraine. The concept of memory politics involves the utilization of collective memory for political purposes. Memory is a powerful tool that can persuade people of the certainty of the present and the promise of the future. Elites play a crucial role in building national narratives using collective memory, making it important to study their discourse. The study will focus on how actors from the Polish government use narratives of the past for political gain regarding Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

I argue that the official discourse presents Poland, and by extension, the ruling Law and Justice party and those affiliated with it, as both protectors of Europe and as official authorities on Russia, by appealing to Polish history, in particular their history as victims of Russia, to justify their unwavering support of Ukraine, and to convince other countries to agree with their rhetoric.

I begin by providing the theoretical framework applicable to this research which is divided into the following three sections: collective memory and national identity, politics of the past and victimization, prejudice and symbolic boundaries, specifically with Russia as the 'other' or Russophobia. Next, I consider pre-existing literature regarding scholarship on collective memory and the politics of the past in contemporary Poland, paying particular attention to the governing Law and Justice Party and the established truth commission, IPN, which is responsible for recording the history of Poland during the 20th century. Then I present the methodology of discourse-historical analysis and the subsequent analysis and discussion of the text used for this

study. Finally, I finish this thesis with a conclusion that summarizes the thesis and the wider implications of the results and outlines potential future research.

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *2.1: Societal Beliefs, Collective Memories, and National Narratives*

By analyzing how the official discourse in Poland connects its past with the war in Ukraine, it is necessary to draw on various concepts related to history and politics. Shared societal beliefs and how these contribute to collective memory and national identity provide a good starting point. Shared beliefs are an important aspect of groups, making up basic units of knowledge such as ideology, goals, norms, and values, which provide meaning to memberships in groups (Bar-Tal 2000, xi). Societal beliefs are collective ideas shared by society members that contribute to the formation of identity, which are often transmitted via established institutions such as schools and media (Bar-Tal 2000, xii). The content of societal beliefs may include myths, collective memories, ideologies, and history. The sources of these beliefs are often derived from the past to establish a shared background for the present time, reflecting current concerns and issues of society, by reconstructing and reappropriating events to “serve current attitudes and needs” (Bar-Tal 2000, 43, 59). Societal beliefs are often apparent in the media, in public debates, and even in discourse by political figures, serving as a framework for society to approach issues such as security (Bar-Tal 2000, 53). The rhetoric used by leaders mirrors societal beliefs, legitimizing actions taken by the government. Specifically regarding security concerns, responses to military, political, economic, and cultural threats may be based on shared beliefs (Bar-Tal 2020, 90)

A large component of societal beliefs is collective memories. Collective memory refers to how people remember history as a group, influenced by social and cultural factors. It is a perception of the past that is a product of social construction that reflects contemporary issues, as the way people conceptualize the past is influenced by their present and is subject to evolution

(Schwartz 1996, 909). Two concepts, introduced by Schwartz (1996, 911) are keying and framing: framing is when “shared memories become appropriate symbols - backgrounds for the perception and comprehension of current events” while keying “transforms the meaning of activities understood in terms of one primary framework by comparing them with activities understood in terms of another”. Essentially, they are mechanisms for interpreting and connecting past events to current experiences. Framing involves using shared memories as symbols to understand current events, while keying is the process of matching public symbols of the past to present experiences. These two concepts will be crucial when I come to the analysis of the official Polish discourse presented in the articles.

However, there is much scholarly debate regarding the definition and usage of the term “collective memory”, as often what is remembered was not experienced personally by members (Zerubavel 1996, 289). Collective memory is made up only of memories that are commonly shared from a single common past (Zerubavel 1996, 293-4). “Collective memory can thus be understood as a collection of traces of events that are accepted and interpreted by a specific community as important for its own historical development; these events can have both tragic and positive significance, including crucial elements like founding myths, successes and traumatic events” (Rheindorf and Wodak 2022, 77-8). Memory can be differentiated from history, as memory is derived from experience (Mink and Neumayer 2013, 5). Assmann (2006) breaks collective memory into four separate categories: individual, social, political, and cultural memory. For this thesis, I will be focusing on political memory, a top-down phenomenon, which is also sometimes referred to as “public memory” by other scholars. For example, Forest and Johnson (2011, 271) define this as a construction of shared memory emerging from current power dynamics that employ symbols and myths that create identities to justify political agendas.

This legitimizes an official history that is promoted by the state and is often reinforced by other institutions such as non-government organizations (Forest and Johnson 2011; Iordachi and Apor 2019). Similarly, Snyder (2004) distinguishes between two forms of memory, one of which is “national memory”. He defines national memory as an “organizing principle” used for national history, which promotes an explicit interpretation of history and any challenging narratives will face opposition (Snyder 2004, 29; 58). This can lead to debates over what is the “true” interpretation of the past (Zerubavel 1996, 295).

Collective memory can be seen as a “subjective” or “social” construction of historical events that can contribute to the formation of national narratives. However, in order to discuss national narratives, I first need to address the ways in which a nation and national identity are conceptualized. I will be using Smith’s (1991; 2009) definition of a nation: a group that shares a social bond, mass culture, and historical myths, and as having symbols that remind members of a common cultural heritage and shared memories. He defines the cultural memory of a nation as an “ethno-history” that refers to “Ethnic members’ memories and understanding of their communal past or pasts, rather than any more *objective* and dispassionate analysis by professional historians” which is a “continuous process of reinterpretation of national identities” (Smith 1991;2009, 16). Nations form social bonds through shared symbols, traditions, and values, reminding members of their common culture, heritage, and identity (Smith 1991;2009, 17). The concept of identity is a human capacity, involving knowing who we are, who others are, and how we relate to each other. It is a process of identification and group identity is the result of collective internal definition (Jenkins 2008, 5;12). Groups create a sense of similarity and membership and define who belongs to that group (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). Groups must define exclusive characteristics to keep others outside their boundaries, which is necessary for

their functioning (Krstić 2022, 64-5). For this thesis, I will be focusing on national groups, specifically the Polish nation. National identity in the public sphere often takes the form of a shared history or narrative (Tilly 1995, 7). As Bell (2023, 69) explains, nations have a form of collective memory that constitutes the nation's shared ideas and values, as well as interpretations of their historical past, that is constantly "reaffirmed and reproduced" through rituals and symbols. This national memory keeps the nation together, distinguishing members from outsiders, and is passed on from generation to generation (Bell 2003, 70).

National memories, also referred to as national myths or national narratives, tell the story of a nation's history in a simplified and selective way, and myths are both constructed and shaped to provide meaning to a nation's place in the world. (Bell 2003, 75). In other words, they are constructed narratives enforced by multiple actors such as state institutions, politicians, and museums (Iordachi and Apor 2019, 4). Although institutions do not in a literal sense have a memory, they construct national identity through physical and visual means using symbols, images, texts, commemorations, and monuments (Assmann 2006, 216).

These national historical myths and narratives may be called 'collective national memories' that incorporate historical events that contribute towards a positive self-image of a nation such as heroic and mythological stories (Assmann 2006, 218). The modern state promotes the study of national history to foster a sense of national identity among its populace which is used to define membership in nations (Zerubavel 1996, 290). Specifically, collective national memory or myths, tend to "remember" historical events that fit into a narrative of heroism or martyrdom, whether they were victorious or not, but exclude events that are associated with shame or guilt which can undermine the positive self-image nations try to project (Assmann 2006, 218).

## ***2.2: Politics of the Past and Victimization***

Collective memories and national narratives may also be manipulated by those in positions of power to create certain identities and narratives by shaping public perceptions of the past. Politics of the past, or memory politics, refers to how collective memory is capitalized on for political purposes. Etkind et al (2012, 8) explain how “Memory persuades us of the significance of our past in order to persuade us of the certainty of our present and of the promise of our future. This rhetorical utility makes memory a powerful, and powerfully efficient, political tool”. Oftentimes, actors will capitalize on such memories by referring to history to mobilize the populace for political purposes, whose goals are focused on the present and the future, rather than the past itself (Rousso 2011, 233). Levow (2006, 13) refers to this as “institutional memory” since politicians, and their supporters, create interpretations of historical events and disseminate them more broadly or enforce them upon other individuals within a society. Likewise, Rheindorf and Wodak (2022, 80) also call this “institutional” or “official” memory that derives from the established interpretations of history by political elites that are made “binding for society”.

Just as collective memories and national myths, memory politics may be based on history, but their motivation lies in the contemporary political climate (Verovšek 2016, 530). Malinova (2021, 998) goes even further to claim that since collective memories are used as instruments for political goals, elites are crucial in building national narratives, making it imperative to study their discourse. Likewise, Verovšek (2016, 535) describes politics of the past as a “communicative paradigm” where the emphasis is on the differing interpretations of historical events put forward by state authorities, as well as how these notions are created, influence, and clash with other accounts that exist.



Bernhard and Kubik (2014, 7) define four types of actors who engage in the politics of memory: warriors, pluralists, abnegators, and prospectives. The most extreme of these is the “warriors” whose policies are defined as drawing a “sharp line between themselves (the proprietors of the ‘true’ vision of the past) and other actors who cultivate ‘wrong’ or ‘false’ versions of history. They usually believe that the historical truth is attainable and that once it is attained it needs to become the foundation of social and political life...tend to espouse a single, unidirectional, mythologized vision of time” (Bernhard and Kubik 2014, 9). Essentially, memory is non-negotiable for the “warriors” and that their version of the past is the only legitimate one, often constructing an Us versus Them dichotomy (Bernhard and Kubik 2014, 13). They also define an “official memory regime” as “a set of cultural and institutional practices that are designed to publicly commemorate and/or remember a single event, a relatively clearly delineated and interrelated set of events or a distinguishable past process...whose formulation and propagation involved the intensive participation of state institutions and/or political society” (Bernhard and Kubik 2014, 14). As I will show later in my analysis, the Polish case is one example of this rather extreme position on memory.

A common form of collective memory utilized in the politics of the past is “collective victimization”. This sense of victimhood on a group level may form from events in which group members suffered from trauma, even when not all individuals experienced it directly, and when there is a perception that the harm towards the group was intentional (Bar-Tal et al. 2009, 234). Such traumatic experiences may include colonialism, genocide, or war, but generally are violent (Bar-Tal et al. 2009, 237). Victimization plays an important role in national memory and can be found in practically every country today (Jasińska-Kania 2007, 33). Because of this, politicians use victimization for mobilization and during uncertain situations (Bar-Tal et al. 2009; Mink and

Neumayber 2013). Victimization in intergroup conflict becomes an integral part of national narratives that provides contrast between the nation's members from the rival group that caused harm during a time of conflict (Bar-Tal et al. 2009, 230).

Victimhood discourse creates not only a sense of community, identity, and unity but is also a source of legitimacy (Lagrou 2011; Bar-Tal et al. 2009). It explicitly differentiates between the suffering victims and the “unredeemable perpetrators” to create a sense of identity (Lagrou 2011, 283). Similar to collective memories and other national histories, victimhood narratives are transmitted by various institutions. Victimization is also utilized in politics of the past, as politicians frequently use it to gain political power, as reminders of the past can be a powerful tool for mobilizing the nation (Bar-Tal et al 2009, 247). Commemorations such as memorial days and national holidays also remind the nation about their victimization. Often, nations will emphasize their victimhood in a conflict while ignoring or denying any responsibility and shifting the blame to other actors (Caramani and Manucci 2019, 7). Trauma from events such as war or genocide may be eased by the idea of a heroic struggle against the enemy but often plays into victimhood that denies any wrongdoing by members of the community by replacing shame with pride (Jasińska-Kania 2007, 33). Lim (2010, 130) defines the term “victimhood nationalism” which stems from the strong ties between victimhood communities. She also explains that victimhood collective memories are a more recent phenomenon, shifting away from heroic martyrdom narratives (Lim 2010, 138). As I will demonstrate, several instances in Poland's past are used in the official discourse as a tool to produce a sense of victimhood.

### ***2.3: Symbolic Boundaries and Prejudice: Russia as the ‘other’ and Russophobia***

As noted earlier, the creation of group identities also prompts the creation of outsiders. National myths are used to define groups and establish group boundaries. This is categorized under the term “symbolic boundaries” which refers to how “individuals or groups categorize different things, people, practices, time, and space based on conceptual distinctions” (Lamont and Molnár 2002, 168). These boundaries also serve to separate people into groups, creating a sense of similarity and group membership among those who share the same symbolic boundaries, in this case, national groups.

The idea of symbolic boundaries highlights how groups interact with each other by examining their shared beliefs. When a group engages in boundary work, they reinforce a particular understanding of reality that has shared meaning among its members (Krstić 2022, 64). However, for boundary work to be fully effective, it must also take into account the differences between groups and establish what sets them apart, especially when there is conflict between groups (Krstić 2022, 65). The out-group, the “others”, are often subject to negative stereotypes or prejudice. People will hold onto ideas based on the history of intergroup relations, even if they were not directly involved. (Bar-Tal 1997, 495).

Russophobia, or anti-Russian sentiment, is a form of xenophobic prejudice directed towards Russia and/or Russian people. Prejudice can be defined as “any attitude, emotion or behaviour towards members of a group, which directly or indirectly implies some negativity or antipathy towards that group” (Brown 2010, 7), while xenophobia is a form of prejudice based on “the perception that they are outsiders or foreigners to the community, society or national identity” (European Commission).

More specifically, Taras (2014, 713) explains potential components of Russophobia which include “anxiety or fear of Russia—its international reach, military might, and grand strategy; prejudice, hostility, or hatred towards Russian political elites, culture, or people; and pathological fascination or mesmerisation by Russia as a result of past trauma inflicted by it, bonding with the oppressor, or self loathing”. He explains that although anti-Russian sentiment may be based on political perceptions, often associating official policy with everyday people, it has become tied with ethnicity or nationality (Taras 2014, 713). Russia is often associated with its imperial past, and in much of Central and Eastern Europe Russophobia is still prevalent (Taras 2014, 713-4). Fear of Russia sometimes traces back to conflicts from the past, but that are still present in collective memory (Balibar 2004, 231).

Other perceptions of Russia are that it is a backwards, corrupt country incapable of change and that it is in stark opposition to Western values, while Russians are often stereotyped as superstitious, lazy, and antidemocratic (Foglesong and Hahn 2002, 6). Russia is seen as the Eastern “other”, stemming from the Cold War, resulting in the idea of a “clash of civilizations” between the West and Russia (Balibar 2004, 167). A very common example of Russophobia is the intentional mislabeling of the Soviet Union as “Russia”. This is a recurring theme in the articles I analyze which will be discussed further in the analysis and discussion chapters of this thesis.

As I will present in the next chapter, Poland has a long, complicated history with Russia and as such tends to have more fear and prejudice towards Russia. Their past as a victim of imperial agendas, especially by Germany and Russia, in the modern era comprises a large part of their collective memory and national mythology, which in turn has been used by the ruling party to garner political support both at home and abroad. The Law and Justice party has been accused

of historical revisionism, victimization, as well as anti-Russian foreign policy (Pankowski 2010, 161).

### 3. CONTEXTUALIZING MEMORY AND POLITICS IN POLAND

#### *3.1: Contemporary Collective Memory and National Narratives*

As briefly mentioned in the introduction, Poland has a long and tumultuous history with Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union. The country was partitioned three times by the Russian Empire in the 18th century, and there was a November uprising in 1831 against Russian rule. Throughout the 19th century, there were struggles over education, language, and religion as Russians attempted to impose their culture on the Polish people in a process known as Russification (Davies 1984, 149). This led to a rise in Polish nationalism "inflamed by foreign oppression" (Davies 1984, 222). Poland went to war with the Soviet Union in the Polish-Soviet War between 1919 and 1921, as the newly established Polish state sought to take control of previously Polish territory, which included most of modern-day Lithuania and Belarus, under the Commonwealth (Davide 1984, 101). The war ended in a treaty that determined the border for the interwar period. In September 1939, the USSR invaded Poland, following a secret agreement with Nazi Germany at the start of World War II. The Soviet government began deporting Polish citizens to Kazakhstan, Siberia, and the Urals, many of whom were former soldiers in the Polish army, subjecting them to forced labor, resulting in many deaths (Kocourková, Kučera, and Saparbekova 2014, 76). It is estimated that at least 500,000 Polish citizens were deported between 1940-1941 (Kochanski 2012, 138). Prisoners of war, intellectual, political, and religious leaders, state employees, the wealthy, and even family members of prisoners all faced deportation (Adler 2020, 107-9). The Katyn massacre, where 22,000 military personnel were killed, was also perpetrated by the Soviets in 1940 (Etkind et al. 2012, 1). Tens of thousands of POWs and officers were executed during this period. When Hitler invaded the Soviet Union, the USSR joined the Allies. After World War II, the Allies left Poland in the Soviet sphere of

influence, and the Soviet Union helped install a communist government as a satellite state to the USSR. This history has led to a deep-seated resentment and lack of trust of Russia in Poland, as there is widespread belief that Russia is still a threat (Davies 1984, 302).

There is a general scholarly consensus regarding the fact that Polish identity is closely tied to a sense of victimhood and martyrdom. Poland constantly fought for its freedom against invaders and perceived itself as the historical defender of Europe against Nazism and communism, which have become hallmarks of the Polish perspective of its past, present, and future. (Orla-Bukowska 2006, 179). For example, Hackmann (2018, 604) describes how the official memory of the Second World War in Poland clearly distinguishes the Polish nation as martyrs, the first victims of Nazis, and then victims of Soviet rule. Poland's national identity is strongly shaped by the assigned role of Germans and Russians as aggressors (Jasińska-Kania 20007, 30) where Poles are martyrs, whose cross-generational experiences derive from this understanding (Lebow 2006, 23-4). Orla-Bukowska (2006, 179) explains that this mythology is comprised of four components: (1) Poles were the first victims; (2) they fought against two invading powers; (3) Poles are heroes who never surrendered or collaborated; (4) Poland saved Europe from Nazism but was sacrificed to the Soviets. During the Cold War, the narrative of victimhood under Soviet oppression was silenced and the real end of occupation only came in 1991 (Kattago 2009, 382). Also attached to this perception of a suffering Polish nation is religious identity, specifically Catholicism, resulting in the idea that Poland is the "Christ of Nations" who was martyred to help save the world (Zarycki 2004, 624). Poland conceptualizes itself as the "bulwark of Christendom" that defended Europe against the "others" (Zubrzycki 2011, 25).

These national myths of victimization, especially regarding the 20th century, have consequences for Poland's relationship with Russia. Zarycki (2004, 607) uses public media in his research and found that in regards to Russia, Poland has viewed it both as a threat to itself and to the whole of Europe, believing it to have imperial tendencies and goals of expansionism. Due to Poland's history with Russia, part of Polish identity is the conception that the nation is a savior of Europe, a unifying factor of Polish identity that also justifies their "special understanding" of the "East" (Zarycki 2004, 613). The oppression endured under Russian and Soviet rule is considered the strength of Poland's moral high ground, especially as they view the West as betraying them at the Yalta conference (Zarycki 2004, 614). The perceived "Russian threat" is one of the "fundamental legitimizations of Polish national identity" (Zarycki 2004, 613-4). Polish expertise on Russia appears to be derived from two main areas: the long history of Russian occupation of Poland and Poland's Western identity, which allows it to interpret its knowledge of the East through its Western lens (Zarycki 2004, 616). There is a widespread belief in Poland that they have a unique and superior understanding of Russia. Many people consider the West's fascination with Russia as naive, often viewing their knowledge of Russia as shallow and distorted, attributing it to the success of Russian propaganda. Zarycki (2004, 617). In Poland, Russia is frequently portrayed in a negative light, depicting it as backward, less civilized, and politically weak, which positions its former colonizer as the "other." (Mayblin, Piekut, and Valentine 2016, 64-5). At the same time, there is an emphasis on the threat that Russia poses both to Poland and to Europe: "A constant motif of Russia's inability to break with its imperial legacy appears in reporting from Russia and is in turn used as a foundation for warnings of the potential threat from Russia's ambitions for Poland and possibly other European states in the future" (Zarycki 2004, 607).



All of these play into the collective memory and national narratives of Poland, in which Russia is the dangerous “other”. On this topic, again, scholars generally come to the same consensus about Russia’s otherness in Poland. The populist, conservative governing party in Poland, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), has openly pursued establishing a new national narrative for years, in which Poland’s role as a victim to their neighbors is especially promoted (Etkind et al. 2012; Hackmann 2018), in particular, as victims of their dual occupation during the 20th century by the Nazi and Soviet regimes. PiS has also led efforts to change its position in the international memory of WWII, emphasizing the need for global recognition of Polish heroism and sacrifice, while on the other hand downplaying problematic events to maintain the image of a martyred Polish nation (Mälksoo 2021, 500).

### ***3.2: Politics of the Past: The Law and Justice Party***

After winning elections in 2015, PiS gained control of the presidency and a majority in the Sejm, ending their opponents’ control of the government since 2007 (Korycki 2017, 518). PiS has been accused of “memory talk”, using the past as a political resource (Korycki 2017, 519). Martín, Paradés, and Zagórski (2022, 1-2) explain that PiS gains support and votes from the populace due to the feeling of national victimhood, which is common among far-right populist parties. (However, there is debate over whether or not to classify PiS as far-right). An example of this is how they tend to “focus on the responsibility of others rather than their own” (Ash 2004, 280). More specifically, PiS has been accused of using a concept referred to as the “education of shame” (Grabowski 2016, 482) which avoids admitting any guilt for past atrocities such as the Jedwabne massacre. Grabowski (2016, 483) describes this approach to the past as false and revisionist, a manipulation of history for political purposes. For example, any discourse about Polish Nazi collaboration or anti-Semitism was disregarded and in 2018 the government

signed a law criminalizing “statements that attribute responsibility for the Holocaust and other Nazi atrocities to ‘the Polish nation’”, the so-called “Holocaust Law” (Charnysh and Finkel 2018).

There is still a lack of serious debate about anti-Semitism in Poland before and during World War II which is justified by the government due to its refusal to ally with the Nazis, but communist collaboration was treated much differently: “In both cases of transition from and to democracy - after the Second World War and after the fall of Communism - there was a strong temptation to present the image of Poland as pure and innocent - a victim of historical circumstances...the external influence of the Nazis and Soviet Communists was emphasized in order to mobilize the society and establish a new sense of common identity” (Gliszczynska-Grabias and Sledzinska-Simon 2016, 5).

In addition to memory laws and victimization rhetoric, PiS has also been infiltrating institutions that help shape national remembrance and promoting not only Polish heroism and victimhood but also “tries to connect with the commemoration of Poles as the largest group of the Righteous among the Nations” (Hackmann 2018, 587). Such institutions include truth commissions, research institutes, and museums. All of these have become battlegrounds for political control over historical narratives and the content of major history museums is fiercely contested, leading to legal and political battles involving various stakeholders (Iordachi 2021, 33). Museum exhibitions are repeatedly revamped to align with the values of ruling parties, sparking controversies around liberalizing or re-nationalizing historical narratives. (Iordachi 2021, 34). In one of the most controversial examples, PiS took control of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk in an attempt to reorganize the preexisting exhibits to focus more on the heroism and suffering of Poles (Charnysh and Finkel 2018). This was accomplished by replacing the

museum's director and including pro-PiS histories on the advisory board (Charnysh and Finkel 2018). Under the new director, the museum made modifications including the role of Catholic priests, the involvement of Poles saving Jews, and war casualty statistics (Iordachi 2021, 36-7). Notably, the museum minimizes instances of Polish perpetration and antisemitism, attributing such actions to German or Soviet totalitarianism to maintain an overarching narrative (Jaeger 2020, 192). Overall, the museum predominantly centers on Poland as a nation caught between two totalitarian invaders, the Nazis and the Soviets (Jaeger 2020, 185).

Poland's truth commission has also come under the control of PiS. It is one of the most influential and important institutions that occupies a role in perpetuating this victim identity: The Institute of National Remembrance - The Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation (Instytut Pamięci Narodowej – *Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu* – the IPN). The IPN is responsible for researching and publishing the history of crimes against Poland during the 20th century. It was established after the end of the communist regime in 1998 by the Polish Parliament (Iordachi 2021, 26). Despite being formally independent from the government, the president of the IPN is selected through a parliamentary majority every five years, enabling powerful governments to wield considerable control over the institution (Mark 2010, 49). Mark (2008, 396-7) explains that the IPN, having specific tasks and responsibilities, is composed of “well-educated historians, archivists and lawyers” and as such “can create a coherent and proper vision of the national past”.

However, PiS has been influencing the IPN since 2005 and now the IPN primarily focuses on offenses committed against Poles, especially by the Nazis and Soviets, while ignoring crimes by Poles (Ash 2004, 277). It has been accused of being a right-wing political organization that uses public funds for political goals (Górny 2007, 103). The IPN's work has been used as a

political tool to mobilize voters by PiS (Charnysh and Finkel 2018). Ultimately, PiS's "historical policy" has manifested itself through museums and the activities of the IPN, concentrating on victimhood and suffering (Finkel 2010). This has given PiS a monopoly on the historical memory and representation of Poland.

Since the start of Putin's invasion of Ukraine, the Polish government has been externalizing this historical victim narrative to the international community, which is analyzed in depth in Chapter 5 through discourse analysis.

## 4. METHODOLOGY AND DATA SELECTION

### 4.1: Discourse-Historical Approach: Legitimation and Argumentation

Discourse is a form of communication and social practice in which social actors create knowledge, situations, social roles, and relationships between different social groups. It also has the ability to construct and shape national identities (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999, 92). Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999, 93) identify four macro-strategies of discourse as social practice:

**Table 1. Macro-Strategies of Discourse**

<b>Constructive strategies</b>	Create and form specific groups by using certain acts of reference that distinguish between an "us" group and a "them" group. This identification leads to a feeling of unity and solidarity within the "us" group but also creates distance and exclusion of the "them" group.
<b>Strategies of perpetuation and justification</b>	Seeks to preserve, strengthen, and reproduce identities
<b>Strategies of transformation</b>	The effort to change an established situation into a new and different one.
<b>Destructive strategies</b>	Used in oppositional discourse as an attempt to change the status quo

The discourse-historical approach (DHA) is a form of discourse analysis that utilizes concepts of critique, ideology, and power and emphasizes the historical dimension of discourse. Therefore, DHA aims to deconstruct discourse by analyzing the underlying ideologies, and the way the discourse aims to gain or maintain power (Reisigl and Wodak 2017, 24-6). DHA is a strategy that focuses on political issues and aims to combine various types of discourse genres related to the issue, along with its historical context (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999, 91). The context required for DHA includes (1) the text or discourse itself; (2) intertextual and

interdiscursive relationships; (3) social variables for context of the situation; (4) broader sociopolitical and historical context (Reisigl and Wodak 2017, 30-1).

One of the strategies of DHA is argumentation, defined as “justification and questioning of claims of truth and normative rightness” that utilizes topoi and fallacies (Reisigl and Wodak 2017, 33). Topoi are “content-warrants” or “building blocks” utilized by actors to persuade or convince their audience by connecting their arguments to claims (Forchtner and Wodak 2014, 31-2; Reisigl and Wodak 2001b, 75).

**Table 2. Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies (Van Leeuwen 2008, Chp 6)**

<b>Strategies</b>	<b>Sub-strategies</b>
<b>Appeals to Authority (Authorization)</b> “legitimation by reference to the authority of tradition, custom, law, and/or persons in whom institutional authority of some kind is vested.” (105)	1. Personal authority 2. Impersonal authority 3. Expert authority 4. Role model authority 5. Authority of tradition 6. Authority of conformity
<b>Appeals to Morals &amp; Values (Moralization)</b> “legitimation by reference to value systems” (106)	1. Evaluation 2. Abstraction 3. Analogy
<b>Appeals to Logic &amp; Reason (Rationalization)</b> “legitimation by reference to the goals and uses of institutionalized social action and to the knowledges that society has constructed to endow them with cognitive validity” (106)	1. Goal orientation 2. Means orientation
<b>Appeals to Stories &amp; Narratives (Mythopoesis)</b> “legitimation conveyed through narratives whose outcomes reward legitimate actions and punish nonlegitimate actions” (106)	1. Moral tales 2. Cautionary tales

**Table 3. Examples of Topoi (Reisigl and Wodak 2001a, 77-80)**

<b>Topos</b>	<b>Warrant</b>
Topos of threat or danger	“If a political action or decision bears specific dangerous, threatening consequences, one should not perform or do it. Or formulated differently: if there are specific dangers and threats, one should do something against them. There are many subtypes of this argument scheme” (77)
Topos of humanitarianism	“if a political action or decision does or does not conform with human rights or humanitarian convictions and values, one should or should not perform or make it” (78)
Topos of burden or weighing down	“if a person, an institution or a ‘country’ is burdened by specific problems, one should act in order to diminish these burdens” (78)
Topos of reality	“because reality is as it is, a specific action/decision should be performed/made” (79)
Topos of responsibility	“because a state or a group of persons is responsible for the emergence of specific problems, it or they should act in order to find solutions to these problems. Although this topos is very often employed to argue against discrimination or for ‘compensation’ or ‘reparations’ for a committed crime (e.g. a Nazi crime), it can also serve the opposite aim – for example, in cases where a government is held responsible for unemployment and required to reduce the quota of immigrants as they are falsely considered to be the cause of unemployment” (78)
Topos of history	“because history teaches that specific actions have specific consequences, one should perform or omit a specific action in a specific situation (allegedly) comparable with the historical example

	referred to...Topoi of history are sometimes also used to warn of a repetition of the past, the historical analogies being more or less adequate” (80)
Topos of culture	“Because the culture of a specific group of people is as it is, specific problems arise in specific situations” (80)

When argumentation is combined with legitimation it can be considered a form of propaganda, whose goal is to persuade an audience to change their beliefs and take action (Walton 1997, 394), which includes the strategies of appealing to authority, morals or values, logic or rationality, and stories or narratives, “mythopoesis” (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999; Van Leeuwen 2008). Legitimation exists in discourse when a powerful group, such as the elite or government, seeks “normative approval for its policies or actions” (Rojo and Van Dijk 1997, 528). Texts not only present social practices but also aims to explain and legitimize them, answering the question “Why?” (Van Leeuwen 2008, 20). Legitimation is an act of persuasion, which is sometimes manipulative, within discourse that justifies or rationalizes actions and policies by portraying them as beneficial for a group or society. This endorses not only the actions but also the dominant group or institution itself (Rojo and Van Dijk 1997, 528). Legitimation works in both directions, the dominant group seeks approval from the dominated group, while the dominated group legitimates the dominant group through approval or acceptance (Rojo and Van Dijk 1997, 528). There are various forms of legitimation such as drawing comparisons (Rojo and Van Dijk 1997, 537) or negative other-presentation and positive self-presentation Rojo and Van Dijk 1997, 539). Vaara and Tienari (2008, 988) define legitimation strategies as the “way in which language functions and is used for the construction of legitimacy”. The process of analyzing legitimation primarily involves the analysis of



argumentation strategies that are used to be persuasive, and as legitimacy is based on social rules, legitimation is a social construction that connects the institutions of discourse to the “accepted cultural framework of beliefs, rules, and values” (Rheindorf 2022, 54).

Oftentimes, legitimation and argumentation can be structured through narratives that embed the argument in the story (Labov and Waletzky 1967; Wodak 2022b). It is goal-oriented, with its aim to get people to believe something they did not before, and provides legitimation to its claims, even if it is through logical fallacies. Discourses about nationalism involve constructing a shared political past, culture, and present, as well as envisioning a shared political future. The way that events from the past are justified and legitimized can have an impact on how national history is narrated and constructed, often using the topos of history. (Wodak 2022a, 25-26). History and the topos of history are often used to establish national mythologies and official narratives that legitimize and reinforce national identities. Wodak (2022a, 33) explains that many right-wing populist parties “reimagine and rewrite” their histories to “legitimize their present agenda and future visions.” Although nationalist conceptions of history can be used to fuel political conflicts by using topoi that appeal to the narratives of the past, the topos of history is not necessarily fallacious: “This is why appealing to and learning from the past could sometimes be a most useful, reasonable and sound argument; in other instances...the topos of history is used in a misleading and simplistic, fallacious way” (Wodak 2022a, 35-6). The issue is that collective history can often be contested, as the history of a nation is accepted and regarded by the nation as the “truth” which is essential to national identity (Rheindorf and Wodak 2022, 76). For the purpose of this research, it is important to specify that I will be looking at the official discourse.

My analysis focuses on argumentation and legitimation strategies, as defined above, but I will also utilize the more specific topos that Krzyżanowski (2009, 103) found which are often employed in Polish discourse: topos of national uniqueness (Poland is unique in that it is an expert on Russia), topos of East and West (Poland understands Russia, “the east” while the west is ignorant and naive), topos of past and future (Russian aggression rooted in history, parallels with WWII), and the topos of European values (Europe built on a “never again” myth). These topoi are more specific and often overlap with many of the traditional, more general topoi (history, responsibility, humanitarianism).

I used the discourse-historical approach, rather than other discourse analysis approaches because I was interested specifically in how the politics of the past utilizes national narratives. This relies on an understanding of the historical context of Poland and the current political situation. These are not necessarily addressed by other discursive approaches, as DHA identifies more applicable methods to my research comparatively speaking.

#### ***4.2 Approaching the analysis of “politics of the past”***

I utilized this approach to analyze Polish discourse about the war in Ukraine by looking specifically at the usage of legitimation and argumentation strategies, as well as topoi for warrants to support the authors’ claims. These are the steps I used to complete my discourse-historical analysis, based on the eight steps outlined by Reisigl and Wodak (2017, 96):

##### **Step 1: Activation & consultation of preceding theoretical knowledge**

I began by researching existing literature related to the national narratives and identity of Poland, as well as the use of politics of the past by the government. I also consulted the government’s and the public’s responses to the War in Ukraine by looking at news articles, social media, and opinion polls. This allowed me to see that Poland as a whole is

overwhelmingly supportive of Ukraine and I questioned whether or not Poland's history plays a role. If yes, I assume the official discourse about the war will make references to Poland's past. If this is already the dominant narrative in Poland, is it being externalized internationally?

### **Step 2: Systematic collection of data and context information**

Step 2 involved deciding on the criteria for my data. The data needed to come from Poland and be published since the beginning of Putin's invasion. As my research is top-down focused, I needed specific actors, namely those who contribute to the official discourse of the ruling party and those associated with PiS. More specifically, the discourse needed to be related to the War in Ukraine, Poland's involvement, and, or the history of Poland. The specific field of political action was the formation of public opinions and attitudes, relating to the media, as the discourse needed to have the purpose of externalization. Finally, I decided the specific genre of discourse should either be articles, speeches, or opinion pieces.

### **Step 3: Selection and preparation of the data for specific analysis**

The next step involved actively searching for and selecting appropriate data that fit the criteria from the previous step. I was aiming to find articles and opinion pieces that were made for an international audience and discovered the magazine *Wszystko co Najważniejsze*. I found many articles that fit and decided to select a total of eight, making sure each author was different.

Both the magazine and the specific articles will be discussed more in-depth in the next section.

### **Step 4: Specification of the research question and formulation of assumptions**

My assumption that much of the discourse regarding the war in Ukraine would involve references to Poland's history was correct, including the discourse broadcast internationally which led me to the following research questions:

- How are Poland's historical narratives being used in the top-down discourse surrounding the war? Do they all follow the same narrative?
- Are there any differences in terms of approaches?
- Which forms of argumentation and legitimation are employed?
- What characteristics are attributed to various events and social actors, such as events in Polish history and famous Polish figures? The War in Ukraine? Zelensky? Putin?
- How are these persons and events referred to?
- What claims are being made? What purpose do they serve?

I assumed there would be similarities in the way Poland's history is referenced, but perhaps different methods of argumentation. Additionally, I also assumed that Ukrainian and Polish figures would be discussed positively, with the claims that are often found in Polish internal discourse: Poland as a historical victim of Russia and Poland as an expert of Russia.

### **Step 5: Qualitative pilot analysis**

I conducted a pilot study for Ruth Wodak and Markus Rheindorf's Discourse Analysis course in March-April 2023. My final project for this course was essentially a mini-version of this thesis, which focused on 3 public opinion pieces written by PiS party members in *Wszystko co Najważniejsze*, which are included in this thesis.

### **Step 6: Detailed case studies**

This part of the process required reading the sources in-depth and looking for references to Poland's past, the War in Ukraine, Russia, and Putin, as well as finding the overall purpose of the article. This included isolating argumentation and legitimation strategies, as well as specific uses of topoi for claims. Descriptions of the articles will be provided in the next chapter.

### **Step 7: Formulation of critique**

The formulation of the critique will be discussed in the discussion chapter of this thesis, following brief descriptions of each piece. The critique is based on the principles of DHA, specifically argumentation and legitimation schemes, and the employment of topoi. The critique is not a criticism of the discourse itself but instead aims to locate and explain the strategies used by the authors.

### **Step 8: Application of the detailed analytical results**

The application of my results is the completion of this thesis.

### ***4.3: Data Selection and Justification***

As this research seeks to see how the official historical narratives of Poland are being externalized internationally in the discourse of the war, I will perform a discourse analysis of eight articles published in the online Polish opinion magazine *Wszystko Co Najważniejsze*. Three of the articles were written by current PiS politicians and the other five by non-political PiS officials. This source was chosen because they translate many Polish articles into other languages, they publish their pieces in various news sources around the world, their opinion pieces are written by a multitude of people such as government officials, scientists, professors, and artists, and their goal is to promote Polish ideas and have their authors reach as wide an audience as possible.

According to their “About our Project” page, *Wszystko Co Najważniejsze* is a registered press title as an online opinion magazine, with over 2000 authors. Their articles are also distributed to other magazines throughout Europe and the United States with translations in English, French, German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, and Chinese with the purpose to promote “Polish thought”. They host debates with historians, economists, and politicians and have a

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**Figure 1. “We Tell Poland to the World: Participating Media”**

The first three articles I will be examining were written by current Polish government officials part of the ruling Law and Justice Party: Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's "Topicality of the World War II History", Polish President Andrzej Duda's "Decades After

WW2, Russian Imperialism at War with Central and Eastern Europe”, and Polish Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and National Heritage, Professor Piotr Gliński’s “Poland. Always on the Side of Freedom”. These articles were published on September 9, 2022, September 16, 2022, and February 24, 2023, respectively. These were chosen specifically because their authors are all high-ranking politicians of Poland’s ruling party, and therefore it is assumed their discourse is representative of PiS.

Mateusz Morawiecki is the current Prime Minister of Poland. Before entering politics, he was a successful businessman and CEO. Morawiecki joined PiS in 2016. He served as Deputy Prime Minister from 2015 to 2017 before assuming the role of Prime Minister in 2017.

Andrzej Duda has been serving as the President of Poland since 2015 and was reelected in 2020. He holds a Ph.D. in Law and has held various positions in the Polish government, as a member of PiS. Duda is also responsible for signing into law a controversial bill criminalizing accusations of Polish complicity in the Holocaust, the so-called “Holocaust Law”.

Professor Piotr Gliński is a Polish politician and historian who has been serving as the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Culture and National Heritage since 2015, after joining PiS in 2010. Before his political career, he was a professor of humanities and sociology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, having a Ph.D. in humanities.

All three of these right-wing politicians were involved with the European Union with their prior roles, Morawiecki having been involved in the accession of Poland and Duda and Gliński being members of the European Parliament. Their discourse is representative of the government, as their similar political backgrounds and important roles in the Polish government and the EU have shaped their political opinions and policies.

The last five articles I analyzed were not written by PiS officials. First, Eryk Mistewicz’s “We know what will happen next”, Professor Wojciech Roszkowski’s “Freedom is indivisible”, Jan Rokita’s “Abandonment and obliteration”, Professor Andrzej Nowak’s “Ukraine and the rejection of imperial enslavement”, and lastly Michał Kłosowski’s “The Third Wave of Solidarity”. The first was published on May 11, 2022, the next three all on February 24, 2023, and the last one on April 28, 2022. These opinion pieces were selected specifically because they were written by non-PiS Polish figures that could still be considered “experts” given their occupations and status in society. All figures published on *Wszystko co Najważniejsze*, which has ties to PiS, indicates that their political opinions lean more conservative. The variety of their occupations provides a more broad perspective on how the politics of the past can be utilized by non-governmental figures. Similar to the first three pieces, all of these articles were published in *Wszystko co Najważniejsze*, and elsewhere, and were translated into multiple languages including English, intending to reach a global audience.

First, Eryk Mistewicz is a Polish journalist, publicist, and political advisor. He is also a writer and chief editor of *Nowe Media* and is the President of the Institute for New Media, which is the publisher of *Wszystko co Najważniejsze*.

Next, Wojciech Roszkowski is a Polish economic historian and writer, with a specialization in the history of Poland and Europe during the 20th and 21st centuries and has written many books on Polish history. He is a former Member of the European Parliament from 2004 to 2009, representing PiS before they became the ruling party. He has written multiple articles as part of the global project “We tell Poland to the World”.

Jan Rokita is a retired Polish politician and lawyer who held various positions in government and public service. He was a Member of the Polish Parliament, Minister of Labor



and Social Policy, and he served as a Member of the European Parliament, for the Civic Platform, a center-right party.

Professor Andrzej Nowak is a historian of Central and European history and an opinion columnist. He is also a member of multiple institutes in Poland and the European Union regarding remembrance. He was nominated by the President to the National Development Council and is on the Council for the IPN.

Michał Kłosowski also works for *Wszystko co Najważniejsze* and the Institute of New Media, as well as being a journalist and columnist with a background in history. He helped create the project “We tell Poland to the World”.

All eight of the selected articles were published in both English and Polish, as well as having translations into multiple other European languages. For my analysis, I used the English translation provided by the source. Each piece is related to Putin’s invasion of Ukraine, Poland’s role in the war, or Polish history, and was chosen in particular due to the variety of their authors. The first three are the highest-ranking members of Poland’s government and the other five Polish “experts”, including two historians, one retired (non-PiS) politician, and two editors of the magazine *Wszystko co Najważniejsze*.

Additionally, the source of these articles, *Wszystko co Najważniejsze*, is published to broadcast to both Poland and an international audience by translating each article into multiple languages, including English. The following chapter will present my analysis of each piece through the discourse-historical approach, particularly strategies of argumentation and legitimation.

## 5. CASE STUDIES: RESPONSES TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

This chapter will present a brief description and summary of the selected articles, as well as point out the use of legitimization schemes and general topoi.

In the following chapter, I will be analyzing all eight articles in conjunction with one another, their common themes and strategies, and overall underlying claims. Additionally, as previously mentioned, I will look more closely at the specific topoi used in Poland's official discourse, identified by Krzyżanowski (2009).

### *5.1: Topicality of the World War II History by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (September 9, 2022)*

This article, written by Poland's prime minister, mainly describes the history of WWII and how it affected Poland, as well as emphasizes the appeasement policies towards Nazi Germany before the outbreak of the war. Morawiecki characterizes Poland as "outstanding" by refusing to accept Hitler's proposal. He illustrates the horrors that the Poles suffered under the double occupation, what is described as a fourth partition by Germany and the USSR. He then moves on to discuss the war in Ukraine, describing Russia as an empire and Putin's propaganda that has blamed victims for years.

His main purpose is to remind his audience of WWII and draw parallels between it and Putin's invasion. The fourth partition of Poland, and its suffering, is used to highlight Poland's understanding of Ukraine's current position. These illustrate the usage of the topos of history and mythopoesis, where the national narratives of Poland's identity are being externalized to shape contemporary discourse. In other words, the historical events of WWII are being interpreted and framed in a way that influences the present and future. In this example, Poland as a victim during

the Second World War has been made into a reference point for the victimization of Ukraine under Russian occupation, equating WWII with the war in Ukraine today.

**Table 5. Examples of Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies Used by Morawiecki**

**1. Appeals to stories and narratives (mythopoesis)**

- “The two totalitarian countries shared the wish to destroy the Polish state.”
- “Poland became the first blood-soaked victim of the war...[WWII]”
- “Poland was the first to refuse submission. It chose to be faithful to freedom, faithful to the founding values of western civilization. And it was betrayed by its allies.”
- “I recall these basic facts on the 83rd anniversary of the outbreak of World War II because this time distance makes European societies increasingly less aware of the origin of the events that proved decisive to the present shape of Europe.”
- “The present Europe is built on the memory of victory over Nazism, and at the same time on a shameful repression of truth about passivity in the first phase of the war.”
- “The ability to face the truth about World War II is our duty not only with respect to the past, but also with respect to the future.”

**2. Topos of history**

- “If we recall this history, it is not just to remember it but not to make the same mistakes again.”
- “If we were to rewrite the origin of World War II to the present conditions, the climax would involve Russian invasion in Ukraine.”
- “Historical comparisons are treacherous but cannot be avoided today.”
- “The fact that it happened means that many countries did not do their homework or forgot the lessons from the 20th century.”
- “We are facing a reviving empire with totalitarian ambitions.”

**3. Topos of responsibility**

- “The ability to face the truth about World War II is our duty not only with respect to the past, but also with respect to the future.”
- “Politics offers little space for moralizing, but when it comes to assessing totalitarianisms, we cannot have any doubts.”
- “Yet the stake of that responsibility is nowadays greater than ever in the post-war history.”

**5.2: Russian Imperialism at War with Central and Eastern Europe by President Andrzej Duda**  
**(September 16, 2022)**

Polish president Andrzej Duda's article highlights a largely unknown date in the West, the date the Soviet Union invaded Poland, which he uses to explain that Poland understands Russia due to their historical experiences. He describes Polish suffering under German and Soviet Occupation during the Second World War, mentioning massacres and deportations. His description of Soviet occupation does not end with World War II as he states that the Soviets imposed communism on Poland. Referring to modern times he discusses Russia's geopolitical actions since the dissolution of the USSR such as Georgia in 2008, its relations with Belarus, the annexation of Crimea, and the 2022 "full-scale genocidal war" of Ukraine. He concludes his article by appealing to security.

President Duda references the history of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union extensively. His consistent misuse of the USSR as Russia seems to equate Putin's Russia as acting the same way as the Soviet Union, also using terms to describe Russia such as "genocidal" and "imperial". At the same time, he uses this history to claim Poland as an authority of Russia, which allows Poland to know Russia better than the West. These historical analogies are often used to appeal to concerns about security and safety, suggesting that the lessons of history need to be learned to prevent further aggression from Russia. This is both a topos of history and security. Duda also repeatedly describes Ukraine using words such as "independent", "free", and "sovereign".

**Table 6. Examples of Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies Used by Duda**

**1. Appeals to stories and narratives (mythopoesis)**

- "Under German occupation, Poland suffered enormous human and material losses."
- References the following: Katyn Massacre, extermination, deportation, forced settlements, NKVD terror, and attempts to crush Polish national identity
- "In others, Russia installed puppet governments made up of local communists"

completely subservient to Moscow.”

- “The subjection to the Russian empire continued until the fall of communism.”

## **2. Appeals to authority (authorization)**

- “If today we, Poles, and other peoples of our region, repeat that we know Russia and understand its imperial ambitions better than the West, we do so because of our historical experience symbolized by 17 September.”
- “But a free Poland, free Ukraine and all the other independent states of our region will never agree to this.”

## **3. Topos of history**

- “There is no doubt that imperial Russia is seeking to enthrall other countries yet again. It wants the same thing it wanted in 1939 and 1940...and between 1945 and 1991, when it ruled our countries on its own.”
- “Russia has always wanted power over all of Central and eastern Europe.”
- “Nazi Germany’s crimes were at least morally condemned by the entire free world. Unfortunately, this does not apply to the crimes of Communist Russia, which went unpunished and often forgotten.”
- “The independence of any country from our region has always been a thorn in the Russian imperialists’ side.”

## **4. Topos of threat or danger**

- “For our peoples, it is a matter of life and death, preserving identity and survival. It is a matter of our future, security, and prosperity.”
- “Thus, as soon as Moscow recovered from the shock of losing its Stalinist sphere of influence, it started moving toward restoring the empire.” [References Georgia, Belarus, and Ukraine]
- “Russia’s hostile policy towards independent Ukraine, the military annexation of Crimea and Donbas...the ongoing full-scale genocidal war against the sovereign Ukrainian state...”
- “We also remember several brutal suppressions of the freedom movements in Belarus and Ukraine.”

### ***5.3: Poland. Always on the Side of Freedom by Deputy Prime Minister Professor Piotr Gliški (February 24, 2023)***

Professor Piotr Gliški begins by outlining how helpful, and exceptional, Poland and Poles have been for Ukraine since the early days of the war. He describes Poland’s history going back to the 15th century and explains that for 123 years Poland was not a state. He argues that during the 20th century, Poland’s love of freedom can be seen throughout its involvement in

conflicts where they fought for independence. He then moves on to the War in Ukraine and compares it to Moscow's conflict with the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in the 15th century. He explains in the early 1900s, after regaining its state, Poland pursued an "anti-imperial eastern policy" that aimed to "avoid the domination of Russia". Gliński again refers back to history with specific examples from the 13th, 17th, and 20th centuries of Poles protecting Europe. Finally, he concludes by bringing it back to the War in Ukraine and calling for help to defend Ukraine and emphasizes that Poland will not give up.

Professor Gliński's article emphasizes Poland's moral superiority through its history of resistance against external threats, Russia in particular, presenting Russia as the ultimate enemy due to its history of aggression. This is used to explain Poland's "love of freedom" which is demonstrated through its unwavering support of Ukraine, as Poland views Ukraine as a fellow victim. Poland's national history is used to trigger a sense of solidarity with Ukraine and to stress Poland's moral authority. These arguments are grounded in a strong sense of national identity and pride based on Poland's national narratives.

**Table 7. Examples of Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies Used by Gliński**

**1. Appeals to stories and narratives (mythopoesis)**

- "For 123 years, between late 18th-century and 1918, Poland was deprived of its statehood and sovereignty...Our national mentality was shaped by the propensity to offer armed resistance to violence. In the 20th century, this manifested in the WWI push for independence, redeeming lost territories (1918-21), hampering the progress of Bolshevism (1920), and combating the Third Reich (1939)."
- "The Poles have protected the European civilisation from the eastern menace on many occasions, acting as the bulwark of Christianity...fought for a civilization of solidarity, freedom, and human dignity."
- "The republican and freedom-loving spirit was part and parcel of the Polish genotype."
- "Freedom manifested in the WWI push for independence, redeeming lost territories (1918-21), hampering the progress of Bolshevism (1920), and combating the Third Reich (1939)."

- “In light of all this [history], it becomes obvious why the Poles have so much understanding for the continued need to defend freedom and the right to self-determination.”

## **2. Appeals to Authority (authorization)**

- “...Poles, a nation that, like none other, can relate to those who are ready to pay the highest price for their freedom.”
- “Poland shall not give up this struggle and we will always stand in solidarity to defend freedom.”
- “The world looked on in disbelief. This should come as no surprise, given that the world did not know about Polish history. It did not know that the Poles value most of all freedom and a sense of community and that, in the face of unprecedented criminal aggression against the country with which we share some past grievances, solidarity in defense of those values comes first. This attitude has been the hallmark of the Polish culture for generations.”

## **3. Topos of responsibility**

- “Yes, the Poles treat solidarity and the love of freedom not as an empty catchphrase, but as a geopolitical concept that is one of the pillars of their foreign policy. It is not only a source of pride, but also a duty.”
- “The strategic interest of Poland include freedom, sovereignty and independence for our eastern neighbors.”
- “To prevent the defeat of Ukraine, we need to pool our efforts and act in solidarity. Poland shall not give up this struggle and will always stand in solidarity to defend freedom.”

## **4. Topos of history**

- “...Russian onslaught on Ukraine is also rooted in history.”
- “Russia kept foraging a separate identity and resurrecting imperial ambitions.”
- “It becomes obvious why Poles have so much understanding for the continued need to defend freedom and the right to self-determination.”

### ***5.4: We Know What Will Happen Next by Eryk Mistewicz (May 11, 2023)***

Mistewicz’s article discusses the possible division of Ukraine and draws parallels to Poland’s partition by Germany and Russia in the past. He describes the atrocities committed during WWII and compares them to the current situation in Ukraine, including the rape of women and attacks on civilians. He equates Mariupol to Warsaw in 1944, the Bucha Massacre to the Katyn Massacre, and the Russification of Ukrainian children to the deportation of Poles to Siberia. Mistewicz states that the people of Central Europe have “seen it all” and that specifically

Poles have “witnessed it all” when referring to concentration camps and gulags, and that Poland knows “what is going to happen next” and because of this, Poland will not allow their fate to happen to their neighbor. He also draws a comparison between the lack of response from the Allies during WWII to Poland to the way that allegedly, the West does not believe Zelensky.

Mistewicz also highlights the ideology “of the past” that fuels these crimes and warns of the dangers of “herd behavior”. Poland's response to the war is also mentioned, including its support for Ukraine and welcoming of refugees. He argues that the way Poland has supported Ukraine since the beginning of the war is the way Europe should have reacted in 1939 when Nazi Germany invaded Poland. He also mentions how the West “handed over” Poland to the “Russian orbit” in 1945 at the end of World War Two. Mistewicz concludes by calling on Europe to impose sanctions on Russia and provide military aid to Ukraine. He states we must prevent history from repeating itself and for Europe to take decisive action to protect Ukraine and stop Russia.

This article relies heavily on comparisons between Poland’s past and Ukraine’s present while appealing to emotions and humanitarianism. Mistewicz frequently implies that Poland, and Central Europe overall, are familiar with Russia and therefore know better than the West. He also blames Europe for Poland’s fate after 1945 and infers that the West will essentially be handing Ukraine over to Russia without proper support. He repeatedly refers to the Soviet Union as Russia, a total of seven times. Poland’s national narratives provide a strong foundation for his arguments, which are rooted in a deep sense of national identity and victimhood.

**Table 8. Examples of Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies Used by Mistewicz**

**1. Appeals to Stories & Narratives (Mythopoesis)**

- “Despite the tremendous loss of human life and enormous losses in the 1939-1945 war, despite the heroism of Polish soldiers on all fronts, and fighting



alongside the Allies, Poland received no zones in Germany. What is worse, in 1945 the West handed Poland over to the Russian orbit, where it would remain, as it turned out, until 1989.”

- “We have already lived through it all. We know those photos very well. Every Pole knows them. Every Polish family lost someone...”
- “The Russians killed 25,000 Polish officers, professors, doctors, and priests by shooting them in the back of the head. And it was not the only mass crime committed by the Russians at the time.”
- “Some even managed to get into the German concentration camps and Russian Gulags and raised the alarm with the Americans and the British, saying: help us. Volodymyr Zelensky, the president of Ukraine, is doing the same thing now. His appeal is similar to those of Poles – Witold Pilecki and Jan Karski – who asked for the railway line to Auschwitz to be bombed.”

## **2. Appeals to Authority (Authorization)**

- “I think that today our support of Ukraine (by aiding Ukrainians in Poland, but also by supporting the Ukrainian military) proves to the world how important it is to show our human face in moments like these.”
- “The worst part is that we know very well what is going to happen next.”
- “What is most important is that we were not forced to do this in any way by the European Union. On the other hand, it is rather unfortunate that the EU has not provided us with any financial support in this endeavour!”

## **3. Topos of History**

- “If you look closely at the photos of the Polish capital, razed to the ground after the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, and Mariupol, razed to the ground in 2022, you will spot no differences.”
- “This is how the world should have acted in September 1939, when Germany attacked Poland.”
- “The only solution that can check the expansion of an aggressor and its attempts to subjugate other countries of the free world is demilitarisation, a process that Germany underwent post 1945.”
- “In the past, Poland found itself similarly partitioned four times by Germany and Russia. I can assure you that today we Poles will do everything in our power to help Ukraine escape our fate, to make sure it is not erased from the map of Europe by the same forces.”
- “If Western Europe had helped Poland back then, no gas chambers and German death camps would have ever been built. There would have been no Siberia, no Gulags, no division of Europe into zones of influence in 1945-1989, akin to how Poland was repeatedly divided in the past.”
- “Russian soldiers who in 2022 unashamedly stole domestic and audio video appliances from conquered Ukrainian towns and later sent them to their families deep in Russia are no different from the soldiers who did the same thing in Central Europe, including in Poland, over half a century before.”

## **4. Topos of humanitarianism**

- “Today, more than 3 million refugees have been warmly welcomed to Poland and without the need to build camps for immigrants, as today every refugee has found a place in a Polish home, a job in a Polish company, a bed in a hospital, and an education for their children in Polish schools, despite the overcrowded classes. We have shared the enormous success that Poland has achieved in the last few years with our Ukrainian guests. Ukrainians are receiving the same social help for mothers and support for families as Poles.”

#### **5. Topos of responsibility**

- “We call on you, Europe - unequivocal sanctions on Russia and military aid to Ukraine are the only solution.”
- “No, we will not accept such a repetition of Poland’s fate, which on this occasion it is the Ukrainians misfortune to face.”
- “If the civilized world had come together and thrown its collective weight behind Poland it could have put a halt to the hecatomb of German and Russian madness. If Western Europe had helped Poland back then, no gas chambers and German death camps would have ever been built. There would have been no Siberia, no Gulagas, no division of Europe...”

#### **5.5: *Freedom is indivisible* by Professor Wojciech Roszkowski (February 24, 2023)**

Professor Roszkowski discusses the different hierarchies of values within Europe exposed by the Russian aggression against Ukraine. The author highlights the “mad love of freedom” of Ukrainians and Eastern Europe and emphasizes the importance of understanding their politics, history, and culture to comprehend their stance. He questions whether freedom is a divisible value and criticizes the West's “lack of imagination” and empathy in realizing that the same fate could befall the West. He refers to Russia’s motives as “imperial” and “barbaric” and that the West cannot see this. He asks, “Why is no one listening?”. Due to this, he claims that “freedom” is defined differently in Central Europe compared to the West. Roszkowski stresses the special value of freedom in Poland and the countries between Germany and Russia due to history which he used to explain the “sacrificial help of the Poles”. Roszkowski ends by calling on the Western public to consider the war and its implications themselves, as he fears the leaders of the West never will.

His article argues that the West's limited understanding of Eastern European history and values has led to a naive perception of the situation in Ukraine. Roszkowski appeals to the value of freedom, which holds a special significance in Poland and the countries between Germany and Russia due to their history of oppression. Poles are portrayed as heroes who have sacrificed to defend freedom in the past, and their historical experience gives them authority on the subject. The author suggests that the West's lack of empathy and imagination makes it difficult for them to comprehend the gravity of the war. He repeatedly blames the West, especially Germany, accusing them of caring more about money than security.

**Table 9. Examples of Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies Used by Roszkowski**

<p><b>1. Appeals to stories and narratives (mythopoesis)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Freedom has a special value in Poland and the countries between Germany and Russia because we remember the price so often paid for it. Despite the change of generations, the memory of the mass deportations to Siberia or the German concentration camps for children still lives in the minds and hearts of Poles.”</li> </ul> <p><b>2. Appeals to morals and values (moralization)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “And that is leaving aside the motives of Russia, which is pursuing its imperial dreams using extremely barbaric methods (but is still often perceived illusively in Western Europe).”</li> <li>• “The Russian aggression against Ukraine began a year ago. It has once again exposed the different hierarchies of values and importance in Europe. Many people in the West wonder why the Ukrainians and their Eastern European neighbours have such a mad love of freedom.”</li> <li>• “Perhaps this is because the word ‘freedom’ has a very different flavour in Western Europe and Central Europe, let alone Russia. Western thinkers have perpetuated the view that there is only the ‘freedom from’, that all restrictions must be removed. The ‘freedom to’, i.e. concern for the common good and other positive values, threatens to spawn coercion, and coercion is the last thing anyone wants. Western freedom is thus mainly associated with affluence, health, pleasure and enjoyment without obligation.”</li> </ul> <p><b>3. Topos of history</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “So yes, in Poland, we can imagine how a Ukrainian woman feels with her house razed to the ground and her child killed by the Russians. In most Lithuanian, Latvian or Estonian families there was someone who died in the depths of the Gulag. They also understand the pain of thousands of Ukrainian</li> </ul>
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children being deported to the east and the dread of not having a roof over the heads of those who remain.”

- “...the sacrificial help of the Poles despite the difficult and sometimes bloody history of Polish-Ukrainian relations...”

#### **4. Topos of responsibility**

- “Reportedly, Putin has told the Former British Prime Minister Boris Johnson that he didn’t want to hurt the latter, even though with missiles, this would be a matter of moments. Perhaps that is why the British are supporting Ukraine. President Macron or Chancellor Scholz might not have had anything of the sort said to them, but does that mean they never will? If such a scenario is difficult for them to imagine, perhaps it is time the broader Western public thought about it themselves.”

### ***5.6: Abandonment and obliteration by Jan Rokita (February 24, 2023)***

Jan Rokita’s article discusses the trauma of Poland’s abandonment by the Allies during World War II and how it has influenced their sensitivity to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. He argues that the West does not fully understand the gravity of the situation in Ukraine and the historical significance of these events. He portrays the Poles as heroes and having authority due to their history. He draws parallels between the invasions of both Ukraine by Russia with Poland during WWII whose invaders were aimed at destroying the young countries. Rokita’s article regards Ukraine’s freedom as Poland’s national cause and claims that the Polish reaction to the invasion was swift due to the collective mood of enthusiasm among the people, which he compares to the slow, confused reaction in some other European countries. He states that without Poland’s experience of “abandonment”, they might have viewed Ukraine’s situation like Germany or France. He draws a comparison between Poland being “abandoned” by its allies during the 20th century with Ukraine being abandoned by the West today and explains Poland’s perspective. Rokita goes on to explain that Ukraine and Poland have also had a complicated history and that the two neighbors were not necessarily friends with one another, but Poland’s aid and support is a mission to prevent Ukraine from the same fate that Poland had. He states this

is evident in the “enthusiasm in Poles” to help refugees. He concludes by reiterating that Poland’s greatest trauma is its abandonment by the Allies and Poland’s occupation, which is the reason Poland has such a unique perspective on the situation in Ukraine.

His main arguments are that the West must understand Poland’s history to understand the Polish mentality, and Poland’s duty to help and protect Ukraine. Rokita calls for help appealing to emotions and responsibility, while at the same time being critical of the West’s reluctance to help.

**Table 10. Examples of Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies Used by Rokita**

**1. Appeals to stories and narratives (mythopoesis)**

- “The abandonment by the allies and the subsequent obliteration of a nation and its culture by occupying powers is the Poles’ greatest collective trauma, reaching even deeper than the events of the Second World War. It is also the very core of Polish sensitivity to the world.”
- “Notably, before the invasion began, Poland had strong alliances with and military guarantees from the democratic powers: France and Great Britain. But these alliances and guarantees turned out to be purely formal. Paris and London made an explicit declaration of being on Poland’s side, but they did not lift a finger to help their invaded ally. And when in the fifth year of occupation, a Polish uprising broke out in Warsaw, the Western Allies – by then joined by America – debated and argued about how to support the insurgents until the uprising collapsed and the Polish capital was destroyed.”

**2. Appeals to authority (authorization)**

- “After a year of war, we know with absolute clarity that the invasion of Ukraine was part of a larger plan: the destruction of the Ukrainian patriotic elite and the obliteration of Ukrainian culture.”
- “Nor was it a surprise that Poland offered its air force to help rescue Ukraine already in February, even though the Americans blocked this initiative.”
- “The Polish reaction to the invasion was different in that the moment of hesitation was brief. It lasted only a few dozen hours after 24 February, during which the whole Europe was dumbfounded, not quite able to comprehend that the Russian army was really trying to take the capital of a neighbouring country by military force and kill its leader.”
- “In Poland, without much debate or doubt, we quickly decided that we must not allow Ukraine to share our fate from almost a century ago. More than that, preventing this from happening became part of our Polish mission in the modern free world. And this was no political decision of the government but a nationwide fact that the Polish authorities quickly recognised and from which

they drew the right conclusions.”

### **3. Topos of history**

- “For us in Poland, it was different from the beginning – the first images of Ukrainians coming to the heroic defence of bombarded Kyiv brought back the memories of our fathers and grandfathers fighting in Warsaw in 1939 and 1944. And there is no stronger collective emotion in Poland than the one born of the loneliness and abandonment by the free world that we experienced in our time of need. The abandonment that resulted in the collapse of the state and an attempt to erase Polish culture and national identity.”
- “Were it not for the Polish experience of abandonment and obliteration, we would probably look at Ukraine’s current situation much the same way as the Germans or the French do: with admiration for the nation’s courage and disgust for the brutality of the invader but also with a strong doubt lurking in the back of our minds as to whether, at some point, it might not be better to leave Ukrainians to their fate because the risk in defending them from an invading nuclear power might seem too great. So if anyone in Europe or America wants to really understand the Polish attitude towards this war, they must comprehend the reason why such a doubt never lurks in the back of a Polish mind.”
- “When the Russians invaded Ukraine in 2022, the revived Ukrainian state was only a few years older than reborn Poland was in 1939. In both cases, the political aim of the invasion was to destroy a state that was only just beginning to stand on its own feet after years of captivity. It was then, and is now, all about undermining the state’s right to political existence before it can build and strengthen itself anew.”

### **4. Topos of responsibility**

- “Albeit with great reluctance as both Europe and America took a long time to decide whether proper military aid to the invaded country was worthwhile. After a long hesitation, America and Europe decided that, like it or not, they had to risk sending in heavy weapons.”
- “On the Ukrainian side, there was a moment of collective enlightenment. In a matter of days, the entire nation, which suddenly found itself under the bombs and rockets, realised it had a neighbour across its western border who regarded Ukraine’s freedom as its national cause.”
- “Ukrainians are bleeding themselves to death because we have helped too little, too carefully and too late”

#### ***5.7: Ukraine and the rejection of imperial enslavement by Professor Andrzej Nowak***

**(February 24, 2023)**

Professor Nowak’s article takes a different approach by discussing the history of Ukraine and its political traditions and highlighting the role played by Catherine the Great of Russia in

erasing those traditions. He argues that the concept of freedom was a fundamental value in the political tradition of Ukraine. Nowak argues that Poland is responsible for the transmission of Western ideals to Ukraine and that Poland gave Ukraine (Ruthenia) “European identity” through the transmission of Western values such as freedom. The author also notes that Catherine II, who is admired in Europe for her enlightenment ideals, was an imperial expansionist who put an end to the self-government of free Cossacks, and the last remains of Ukraine’s political tradition. He also mentions the partitions of Poland and explains that this has had an impact even today. Nowak ties this historical assessment to the present by mentioning contemporary Ukraine and the breakup of the “Soviet empire”. Finally, he states that Poland and other countries of the region do not want to be “Putin’s *Russkiy mir*” or a ‘pawn’ of other European powers, which he declares as a rejection of imperialist expansion over former communist countries.

Nowak’s article discusses the erasure of Ukraine from the political map and from memory by Catherine II and alludes that her reverence today is wrong as she instead should be remembered as an imperial expansionist who took away freedom from Ukraine and Poland. He seems to be indirectly comparing Catherine the Great and Putin, and “enlightened Europe” to Western Europe today. He also talks about the symbols of Western influence on Ukrainian traditions, such as freedom, and directly claims Poland brought these ideals to the region, as freedom flourished under the Commonwealth, which Ukraine was part of, before the partitions. He appeals to values by mentioning democracy, self-determination, civic freedoms, and autonomy.

**Table 11. Examples of Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies Used by Nowak**

**1. Appeals to stories & narratives (mythopoesis)**

- “Similarly, the Poles and Lithuanians never came to terms with having their independence taken away by Russia, Prussia and Austria. They fought for it

with sword and pen from the late 18th century until 1918, when they finally regained their independence.”

- “The conflict between the Cossacks and the Polish nobility provided the foundation for Russia’s first great success during its western expansion: the seizure of the eastern half of Ukraine in 1667.”
- “Importantly, it was also in the name of “modernisation” that Catherine put a violent end to the Sich, the last refuge of the government of the free Cossacks under her rule and the last trace of Ukraine’s political tradition. But what were the origins of that Ukraine which Catherine wanted to erase from the map and from memory, just like she did with Poland.”
- “Enlightened Europe admired Catherine as she could not only conquer neighbouring countries, but also buy the then ‘trendsetters; of ideas: Voltaire and Diderot in France and Baron von Grimm in Germany. They would go on to convince Europe that the lands Catherine seized were but a source of chaos, anarchy and backwardness in enlightened Europe and that, east of Germany, all that counted was Russia and its modernisation. Conquest as modernisation.”

## 2. Topos of history

- “The voice of the Poles, Ukrainians, Lithuanians and other nations of the region that wants to be neither Putin’s *Russkiy mir* nor a pawn in the game played by other European powers...”
- “At that time Ukrainians did not succeed. They had to continue fighting until 1991 and the break-up of the Soviet empire, before their independent state could be restored. Throughout their struggles they would sometimes confront the Poles, but the common tradition of freedom, opposition to imperial enslavement and the memory of those who perished in the clashes with the tsarist and then Stalinist systems of oppression proved stronger.”
- “after all, Catherine earned the moniker “the Great” among the Russians because she managed to see through the most efficient westward expansion of her empire in the entire 18th century...”
- “Western civilisation moved through Poland to change the Ruthenian traditions, completing and reshaping them”
- “[The Cossacks are] free people of independent spirit who defended their liberty”.
- “[Poles] never come to terms with having their independence taken away.”
- “...the common tradition of freedom, opposition to imperial enslavement and the memory of those who perished in the clashes with the tsarist and then Stalinist systems of oppression proved stronger”.

### 5.8: *The Third Wave of Solidarity by Michał Kłosowski (April 28, 2022)*

Kłosowski begins this piece by noting that each country has its own “DNA”. For Poland, this is solidarity while Russia’s DNA is based on imperialism. He backs up this claim by



mentioning Poland's openness to Ukrainian refugees and helping Ukraine which is fighting for freedom from Russia. He states that Poland understands Ukraine because it too is familiar with Russian aggression. He supplements this by describing the last 200 years of Polish history as a period where Poles constantly fought for independence and the right to self-determination, which is, as he says, exactly what Ukraine is fighting for now. Kłosowski describes how regular Poles and the Polish government are aiding Ukraine through transportation, shelter, medical assistance, and education, which he calls the "third wave of solidarity". He also makes references to religion when he states that the church is a strong Polish institution. He ends his article by stating Polish solidarity is in direct defiance of Russian imperialism and egoism "*Russkiy mir*". He emphasizes sovereignty, community, and democracy as values that must be upheld against the Russian invasion. He claims that all the countries that experienced the "Red tyranny" in the past put these values above all else.

Kłosowski's article emphasizes morality and values, based on historical experiences. He focuses mainly on how Poland has helped Ukraine and justifies Poland's actions. He also appeals to religion and explains that Polish Catholic ideals are part of the reason why Poland has been so willing to help Ukraine. He is inferring that Catholic ideals of hospitality and charity are deeply ingrained in Polish culture which has served as a motivation to aid Ukraine. He also suggests that Poland's past of fighting for freedom and independence has instilled a strong sense of morality and values which guide Poland's actions.

**Table 12. Examples of Argumentation and Legitimation Strategies Used by Kłosowski**

**1. Topos of history**

- "The Polish history of the last two hundred years is one of incessant fights for freedom and independence, the right of self-determination, and maintaining distinctiveness from the surrounding powers – the exact same things that Ukrainians are fighting for today; deeply human values."

- “With Poland becoming a hub of support for Ukraine, through which humanitarian aid can reach the war-torn country. All because we understand very well that Ukrainians are the people who are fleeing from war and what it brings: death and destruction, the brutality of Russian aggressors, murders and rapes brought upon the civilian population. Poles have opened their hearts and homes on a mass scale, invited their Ukrainian neighbours to schools and universities.”

## **2. Topos of responsibility**

- “Poland is created by something completely different: subsidiarity and solidarity, which are currently once again seeing the light of day. The best examples are the openness to Ukrainians fleeing war zones and the help offered by our country to those fighting for independence and freedom.”

## **3. Topos of humanitarianism**

- “Poles have both welcomed and invited those who seek help: they are publishing information on how many people they can host and feed, how many people they can help, they drive to the border and neighbouring Lviv, they organise humanitarian transports, and endangering their own health and lives – they act. Regular people are helping”
- “The third wave of Polish solidarity has emerged just now, when the success of Polish transformation of the last thirty years is divided into two, when we share with Ukrainians everything we have.”
- “For the church is above all the people. Ukrainians were met with typical Polish hospitality, expressed in the proverb ‘A guest in the house is God in the house’”.

Drawing on the examples of legitimization schemes and topoi presented above, I will further analyze them comparatively as well as discuss how national narratives are being politicized and the use of different types of appeals to the audience.

## 6. DISCUSSION

In the top-down discourse surrounding the war, Poland's historical narratives are strategically employed for various purposes. They draw parallels between past events and the present conflict, highlighting similarities and emphasizing Poland's position as a leader and authority figure. These narratives serve to garner support for Ukraine by appealing to emotions and security concerns. While there may be differences in approaches, such as the use of historical narratives in different strategies, overall, the authors favor mythopoesis as a common approach.

The primary purpose appears to be to position Poland as an authority and leader in the War in Ukraine, and by extension Europe and the West. This can be derived from the fact that the authors focused more on Poland and Russia than on Ukraine. Although the overarching theme of the articles was the War in Ukraine, the focus was also on cementing Polish national identity abroad, using the international crisis to promote the Polish narrative.

To legitimize their arguments, mythopoesis, moralization, and authorization are employed. The topoi of history, threat/danger, responsibility, and humanitarianism are used as forms of argumentation and legitimation. Through these methods, the characteristics attributed to various events and social actors are highlighted. For example, Putin is often compared to Stalin or Hitler, portraying him as a dangerous figure, while Russia is inferred as a new Tsarist Russia, USSR, or Nazi Germany. Zelensky is likened to Witold Pilecki and Jan Karski, emphasizing his need for help, similar to how they appealed to the Allies to intervene during World War II. Ukraine is often compared to occupied Poland, highlighting the shared experiences of destruction by an occupying power, while Ukrainians are referred to sympathetically, often as refugees and people in need of assistance.

The claims made in this discourse aim to establish Poland's historical expertise in dealing with Russia and position Ukraine as a country in need of help. They depict Russia as a threat and emphasize that history is repeating itself. The purpose of these claims is to position Poland as a leader and authority in Europe and the West, while also seeking to convince the international community to continue supporting Ukraine in its conflict.

Throughout these articles, there are recurring themes in the discourse such as Poland's history with Russia, Poland as a victim, and drawing parallels between the War in Ukraine and the Second World War. These themes are often framed as arguments, using the topos of history, invoking the responsibility of Poland to fight against Russian aggression, as well as appealing to morals through humanitarianism and security over concerns about the threat of Russia. Central to these arguments are the narratives portraying Poland as an authority on Russia, a form of mythopoesis that highlights Poland's history and victimization under Russia, bolstering its expertise and knowledge of Russia. Overall, these are utilized to justify Poland's support for Ukraine and to assert its role as a leader in the war.

While many claims overlap between the various legitimization strategies and argumentation topoi, for example, one can appeal to history and morals at the same time, each of the authors had a primary focus:

1. Prime Minister Morawiecki mainly utilized mythopoesis by telling the narratives of Poland's history, especially from WWII. While not directly drawing comparisons, he instead used the past as a sort of warning for the future.
2. President Andrzej Duda focused on the topos of danger by appealing to claims of security and preservation of identity with Russia as the main threat.

3. Deputy Prime Minister Gliński drew upon authorization and the topos of responsibility together, his principal point being that Poland is a leader in the war.
4. Eryk Mistewicz relied on the topos of history by explicitly comparing Poland during the Second World War to Ukraine today.
5. Professor Wojciech Roszkowski depended on moralization by appealing to values by shaming the “naive” West, Germany in particular. At the same time, he attempts to convince the Western public by extensively discussing freedom and what it means throughout Europe.
6. Jan Rokita used the topos of history to support the authorization of Poland by portraying Poland as a moral authority throughout its history and today in the wake of the Ukraine invasion. In other words, Poland’s past is the reason that they have become the leading figure in supporting Ukraine.
7. Professor Andrzej Nowak combined mythopoesis and the topos of history to infer that Ukraine has a history of Western values including freedom and sovereignty which have been suppressed by Russia.
8. Finally, Michał Kłosowski relied mainly on the topoi of responsibility and humanitarianism. He did this by appealing to morals and values including self-determination and solidarity, as well as emphasizing Poland’s role in aiding Ukraine.

Although each author favored a specific strategy or topoi, almost all made appeals to the authority of Poland based on its historical relationship with Russia, while mythopoesis is employed by invoking Poland's national narratives and emphasizing the significance of its history with Russia in establishing its legitimacy:

**Table 13. Common Usage of Mythopoesis and Authorization**

<b>Mythopoesis</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “Poland was the first to refuse submission. It chose to be faithful to freedom, faithful to the founding values of western civilization. And it was betrayed by its allies.” (Morawiecki)</li> <li>• “The subjection to the Russian empire continued until the fall of communism.” (Duda)</li> <li>• “The Poles have protected the European civilization from the eastern menace on many occasions...” (Gliński)</li> <li>• “Despite the tremendous loss of human life and enormous losses in the 1939-1945 war, despite the heroism of Polish soldiers on all fronts, and fighting alongside the Allies, Poland received no zones in Germany. What is worse, in 1945 the West handed Poland over to the Russian orbit, where it would remain, as it turned out, until 1989.” (Mistewicz)</li> <li>• “Freedom has a special value in Poland and the countries between Germany and Russia because we remember the price so often paid for it. Despite the change of generations, the memory of the mass deportations to Siberia or the German concentration camps for children still lives in the minds and hearts of Poles.” (Roszkowski)</li> <li>• “The abandonment by the allies and the subsequent obliteration of a nation and its culture by occupying powers is the Poles’ greatest collective trauma, reaching even deeper than the events of the Second World War. It is also the very core of Polish sensitivity to the world.” (Rokita)</li> <li>• “Similarly, the Poles and Lithuanians never came to terms with having their independence taken away by Russia, Prussia and Austria. They fought for it with sword and pen from the late 18th century until 1918, when they finally regained their independence.” (Nowak)</li> </ul>
<b>Authority of Poland</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “If today we, Poles, and other peoples of our region, repeat that we know Russia and understand its imperial ambitions better than the West, we do so because of our historical experience symbolized by 17 September.” (Duda)</li> <li>• “The world did not know about Polish history. It did not know that the Poles value most of all freedom and a sense of community and that, in the face of unprecedented criminal aggression against the country with which we share some past grievances, solidarity in defense of those values comes first. This attitude has been the hallmark of the Polish culture for generations.” (Gliński)</li> <li>• “The worst part is that we know very well what is going to happen next.” (Mistewicz)</li> <li>• “In Poland, without much debate or doubt, we quickly decided that we must not allow Ukraine to share our fate from almost a century ago. More than that, preventing this from happening became part of our Polish mission in the modern free world. And this was no political</li> </ul>

	<p>decision of the government but a nationwide fact that the Polish authorities quickly recognised and from which they drew the right conclusions.” (Rokita)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “The idea of Polish solidarity gives hope for a different organisation of our part of the world – one that is contrary to the so-called “Russkiy mir” characterised by imperialism and egoism. Solidarity against imperialism.” (Kłosowski)</li> </ul>
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Several authors emphasize Poland's resistance to submission and its commitment to freedom and Western civilization, illustrating Poland as a betrayed nation. Poland's subjection to the “Russian empire” until the fall of communism, is also brought up to highlight Russia's historical imperial policies. Some of the authors also describe Poland as protecting European civilization from the "eastern menace," portraying Poland as a defender against Russian aggression throughout history. Mythopoesis has been drawn from the collective memory and national narratives in Poland. In particular, the victimization of Poland by drawing attention to the sacrifices made by Poland during World War II, the heroism of Polish soldiers, and the lack of recognition or territorial gains for Poland despite its contributions and suffering. They discuss the West's perceived abandonment of Poland, leading to its incorporation into the “Russian orbit” until 1989. The memory of mass deportations to Siberia and German concentration camps is portrayed as deeply ingrained in the collective memory of Poles, emphasizing the significance of historical experiences in shaping Polish identity.

The use of mythopoesis is largely tied to the strategy of authorization. The authors assert that Poland, and the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe, understand Russia and its imperial ambitions better than the West due to their historical experience, particularly under Soviet domination. They claim that Polish culture is characterized by a strong value for freedom, community, and solidarity in defense of these values, positioning Poland into a position of moral superiority, all resulting from its past. They argue that Poland's historical knowledge and

commitment to these principles provide the authority to speak out and take action against Russian aggression. By highlighting Poland's resistance, sacrifices, and experiences, they aim to establish Poland's historical expertise and position it as a leader in defending freedom, community, and solidarity against perceived Russian imperialism and aggression.

Mythopoesis is also used in conjunction with the topos of history. Using these together performs the following functions: (1) tells a narrative that legitimizes the author or claim; (2) uses history to learn from the past to either draw parallels to the past, warn about the future, or convince the audience to make certain actions in similar situations. In the table below, I summarize the main points made by the authors using mythopoesis and the topos of history to make underlying claims about Russia, the West, and Poland which were not always explicit in the text:

**Table 14. Examples of Mythopoesis and the Topos of History**

	<b>Mythopoesis (Narrative)</b>	<b>Topos of History (Comparisons &amp; Warnings)</b>	<b>Underlying Claim</b>
<b>Morawiecki</b>	Poland was the first victim of the Second World War, invaded by Germany and the USSR, and then abandoned by its allies.	If WWII was rewritten to reflect present conditions, then the Russian invasion of Ukraine would be analogous to the invasion of Poland.	If Europe does not learn from the lessons of the past, it will make the same mistakes and allow Ukraine to be defeated.
<b>Duda</b>	Poland suffered under the Nazi and Soviet invasions and was then left to be occupied by the USSR until the fall of communism.	Ukraine is now suffering under Russian occupation, similar to Poland during the 20th century.	Russia's invasion of Ukraine is part of a historical pattern of seeking control and power over Central and Eastern Europe.



<b>Gliński</b>	Poland fought for its freedom against Russia since the partitions in the 18th century, making freedom their highest value.	Russia's attack on Ukraine is rooted in history as Poland has fought against Russia and other imperial powers many times.	Poland's historical relationship with Russia justifies Poland's strong support for Ukraine.
<b>Mistewicz</b>	During WWII Poland tried to warn the West about concentration camps, but they did not listen, and then the Allies left Poland to be occupied by the USSR.	President Zelensky is doing the same thing as the Poles did during WWII, appealing for help from the West.	If the West does not support Ukraine, it will effectively be repeating its abandonment of Poland, allowing Ukraine to suffer the same fate under Russia.
<b>Roszkowski</b>	Poland, and other countries in the region, paid the price for freedom due to their history with Germany and Russia.	Poland, and Central and Eastern Europe, understand Ukraine's situation today.	The West does not support Ukraine as much as Poland does because it does not understand freedom in the same way.
<b>Rokita</b>	The Allies abandoned Poland and let its nation and culture be destroyed by the Nazis and Soviets.	Again, the West is not helping an invaded country against its occupier as much as it should be.	Poland's history as a victim allows it to understand Ukraine's position, which is why its commitment to aid Ukraine is unwavering, unlike that of Western nations.
<b>Nowak</b>	Tsarist Russia took away freedom from the Cossacks and Ukrainians, leading to a prolonged struggle for independence until 1991.	Ukraine is fighting for freedom against Putin's Russia, mirroring its historical fight for independence.	The historical struggle of Ukraine against Russian dominance is rooted in history in which Ukraine is a separate nation and Russia has imperial ambitions.

Based on all the examples discussed in the table above the two dominant claims follow these patterns:

1. This [historical event] took place in Poland, and this [event] is repeating in contemporary Ukraine, therefore the war in Ukraine is the same as Poland's past.
  - a. Some sub-claims include:
    - i. Poland understands best and is an authority on Ukraine's situation.
    - ii. Poland has moral superiority.
    - iii. The West does not understand the situation in Ukraine.
2. Russia did [something] in history, Russia is doing [something] today, therefore Russia's actions are rooted in history.
  - a. Some sub-claims include:
    - i. Russia needs to be stopped.
    - ii. Russia will never change.
    - iii. Russia is a modern-day Tsarist Empire, Nazi Germany, or the Soviet Union.

One sub-claim applicable to both is Poland's special expertise on Russia. This expertise is derived from history and as such contemporary Russia is repeatedly compared to its historical predecessors. To draw such comparisons between Russia and the Soviet Union, several authors incorrectly, and repeatedly, used misnomers when discussing the USSR. For example, President Duda consistently refers to the USSR as "communist Russia" "Russian", "Stalin's Russia" and the "Russian Empire" throughout his article. Similarly, Rokita mentions that in 1939 "Russians" invaded Poland and that post-Communist states freed themselves from "Russian domination" in 1989, while Gliński states that Poland during the interwar period wanted to prevent "the domination of Russia". Mistewicz also repeatedly uses the tactic, claiming "Russia" partitioned Poland four times, "Russians" watched while Nazis burned Warsaw in 1944, and "Russians"

committed mass crimes against humanity in Poland during WWII. This is a common form of Russophobia, the “othering”, by associating contemporary Russia with the Tsar Empire and the Soviet Union. Also, repeatedly referring to “Russia” and “Russians” instead of “Stalin” or “Putin” places the blame on Russian society as a whole rather than the Russian government which is demonizing.

The topos of threat or danger is underlying in most of the articles, by drawing connections between Russia and Putin with the USSR and Stalin, as well as making appeals to stop Russia and help Ukraine, and using emotional language to portray Russia as an evil empire. These all infer that Russia is dangerous and a threat to Europe. However, President Duda in particular utilizes this approach by highlighting Russia’s actions across the Caucasus and Eastern Europe since the breakup of the Soviet Union. He describes their involvement, militarily or politically, in Georgia, Belarus, and Ukraine prior to the 2022 invasion. By focusing on countries other than Poland, he wants to show that Russia’s aggression was not, and will not be, limited to Ukraine. This underscores the broader pattern of Putin’s expansionism to emphasize its threat across the region, something that Central and Eastern Europe already understand. He suggests that Russia wants to reclaim its old empire and that this threat to identity, prosperity, and survival in the future.

It could be argued that by discussing the fate of Poland during WWII, and by equating Putin’s Russia with historical Russia and the USSR, the authors try to appeal to emotions through morality, values, and humanitarianism. The use of these is another strategy used to evoke certain emotions which in turn may evoke specific reactions. These appeals are used through the strategy of moralization and often combined with the topoi of responsibility and humanitarianism. The authors employ this approach by claiming helping Ukraine will prevent a

repetition of the past, where the current situation in Ukraine and the past are described using certain words and phrases to invoke an emotional reaction in the audience:

- “blood-soaked victims”, “bleeding themselves to death”
- “full-scale genocidal war”, “onslaught”, “mass slaughter”, “terror”, “brutal suppressions”, “barbaric methods”, and “imperial enslavement”
- “Death and destruction, the brutality of Russian aggressors, murders and rapes brought upon the civilian population...”
- References to: refugees, children, women, and the elderly, the destruction of homes and communities, as well as gas chambers, death camps, gulags, and deportations
- Appeals to certain values including religion, sovereignty, community, democracy, self-determination, independence, solidarity, and freedom

Kłosowski specifically focuses on the humanitarian efforts taken by Poland and the Polish people at the very beginning of the war. He discusses how Poland has become a “hub of support” and that Poles have opened both their homes and their hearts to Ukrainians.

These emotional appeals are used as a warrant to claim that the West has a responsibility to help and the following table demonstrates some of their calls to action:

**Table 15. Examples of Topos of Responsibility**

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● “The fewer witnesses of those events among us, the more fragile the memory about wartime, the greater responsibility to care about the truth...” (Morawiecki)</li> <li>● “The ability to face the truth about World War II is our duty not only with respect to the past, but also with respect to the future.” (Morawiecki)</li> <li>● “To prevent the defeat of Ukraine, we need to pool our efforts and act in solidarity.” (Duda)</li> <li>● “If the civilized world had come together and thrown its collective weight behind Poland it could have put a halt to the hecatomb of German and Russian madness. If Western Europe had helped Poland back then, no gas chambers and German death camps would have ever been built. There would have been no Siberia, no Gulagas, no division of Europe...” (Mistewicz)</li> </ul> |
|---|

- “After a long hesitation, America and Europe decided that, like it or not, they had to risk sending in heavy weapons.” (Rokita)

The topos of responsibility is often directed towards the West, urging them to take action. However, they also make statements about Poland’s own sense of responsibility, emphasizing their moral values and commitment to helping Ukraine. Kłosowski focuses on the responsibility of Poles to their neighbors by explaining that the Polish sense of morality and values derived from history with Russia have made them feel responsible for helping Ukrainians, while Rokita states that this sense of responsibility in Poland has become a “national cause”. Mistewicz asserts that Poland refuses to let their fate be repeated in Ukraine. This suggests that responsibility in Poland is seen as a shared obligation among the populace, which is again related to Poland’s past.

Some of the more Polish-specific discursive topoi identified by Krzyżanowski (2009, 103) are also visible in these articles. Themes such as the uniqueness of Poland’s expertise on Russia, the West as ignorant or naive, the belief of Russian aggression rooted in history, and using European values such as the “never again” myth are all found in the articles:

**Table 16. Examples of Polish-Specific Discursive Topoi**

<b>National Uniqueness</b>	Poland has a unique understanding of Russia due to their historical relations. This has also given them a unique understanding of Ukraine which is now in the same position as Poland once was.
<b>East and West</b>	The East (Russia) is a backwards, aggressive, imperial power that needs to be stopped, but the West is naive and lacks understanding. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poland versus Russia</li> <li>• Poland versus the West (especially Germany)</li> </ul> Poland has defended the West from the East throughout history
<b>Past and Future</b>	The past is repeating itself, the invasion of Ukraine is parallel to the invasion and occupation of Poland during the 20th century. The Allies abandoned Poland and now Europe must help Ukraine to stop

	history from repeating itself in the future.
<b>European Values</b>	Poland holds European values more than any other: freedom, independence, sovereignty, etc.

While these topoi are already embedded within the previously discussed topoi, these Poland-specific topoi illustrate how Poland's narratives are so explicit in the top-down discourse surrounding the war. They are used to externalize very specific beliefs that are widespread within Poland, as discussed in Chapter 3. Although each article highlights different aspects of Poland's history and the War in Ukraine, ultimately all of them had the same agenda: using Poland's national narratives for political purposes. The political purposes are (1) to present Poland as an emerging leader; (2) to highlight the threat of Russia; (3) to convince the West to support Ukraine.

The articles revolve around the War in Ukraine and its significance, but they also delve into Polish national identity, aiming to solidify specific narratives internationally. Poland strategically utilized the crisis as an opportunity to position itself within the global community. While Ukraine is mentioned, the focus primarily lies on Poland, with Ukraine being marginalized and serving as a mere springboard to propel the Polish narrative forward. For example, all of the articles mentioned Poland's history with Russia, and Poland's response to the War in Ukraine, with only brief references to Ukraine. When Ukraine was discussed more in-depth, for example in Mistewicz's article, it is constantly compared to Poland. The only article whose main focus was Ukraine was Nowak's, but throughout Poland was still referenced, such as the claim that Poland Westernized or Europeanized Ukraine during the Commonwealth era. However, when they do mention Ukraine explicitly, they tend to use words such as "independent", "free", and "sovereign". The use of such adjectives implies support and

sympathy towards Ukraine, as well as a subtle way to convince the audience to support Ukraine. Although many call for action in the West, hoping to convince them that the threat of Russia and the destruction of Ukraine must be stopped, there is often evidence of a belief in moral superiority over the West. Poland “knows best” and “understands” Ukraine and Russia and due to their history they have a different definition of “freedom”. These are the reasons that Poland had responded so quickly and so thoroughly to the War in Ukraine, unlike Western nations who seemed reluctant to get involved and support Ukraine.

These narratives are now being used for policy decisions by the Polish government, as they shape Poland’s stance towards Russia, Ukraine, and the EU. Poland, along with many other countries in the region, invoked NATO Article 4 in February 2022 right after the invasion. Poland has also taken in more Ukrainian refugees than any other country and has emerged as one of the largest contributors of military aid to Ukraine in terms of per capita, apart from the Baltic states. Additionally, Poland has taken a leading diplomatic stance by consistently advocating for stricter sanctions against Russia and pressuring Germany to provide tanks to Ukraine, even threatening to export German-made tanks in defiance of re-export restrictions (Francis 2023). In March 2023, President Duda announced Poland would be transferring fighter jets to Ukraine, making it the first NATO member to do so since the invasion (DW 2023).

The claims made center around Poland’s expertise on Russia due to their history, to get support for Ukraine, to show Russia as a threat, and to convince the audience that the War in Ukraine is a repetition of history. The purpose of these claims is to position Poland as a leader and authoritative figure in Europe and the Western world, while also seeking to persuade the international community to continue their support for Ukraine in its ongoing battle.

## 7. CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis was to examine how Poland's reinterpretation of the past was politicized to establish itself as a leading force in the Western world in relation to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This study aimed to investigate how the right-wing Polish government utilized national histories to cultivate a sense of victimhood and how various actors also adopted this narrative in response to Putin's invasion, ultimately garnering support for Ukraine while undermining Russia. Specifically, the study sought to address two primary questions: (1) How were the historical narratives of Poland, propagated by PiS, utilized within the top-down discourse surrounding the invasion? (2) What forms of legitimation and argumentation were employed in this discourse?

By using collective memory, national narratives, and victimization as my theoretical framework, I applied DHA to eight public opinion pieces published in the online magazine *Wszystko Co Najważniejsze* written by members of PiS and affiliates for an international audience concerning Poland's past and the war in Ukraine. My analysis highlighted how the top-down discourse uses Poland's national narratives for political gain by presenting Poland as the protector of Europe, as the official authority on Russia, and as leaders, appealing to their history as victims under Russia. This also serves to justify their unwavering support of Ukraine and to convince the international community to agree with their rhetoric. I argued that the official discourse depicted Poland, along with the ruling Law and Justice party, as defenders of Europe and authoritative figures on Russia. This was accomplished by leveraging Polish history, particularly their victimhood narrative concerning their historical relations with Russia, to rationalize their steadfast endorsement of Ukraine and to persuade other nations to align with their rhetoric.



Poland's historical narratives were used strategically in the discourse surrounding the war, pursuing similar goals. The discourses aimed to garner support for Ukraine, drawing parallels between the past and present, and positioning Poland as a leader. The various authors utilized mythopoesis to tell compelling stories and employed different strategies but conveyed a unified message. The use of authorization and moralization was also widespread. The topoi of history, danger/threat, responsibility, and humanitarianism were also utilized by some of the authors. They drew parallels between the war and contemporary actors to historical events and people. Ukrainians were portrayed sympathetically as refugees in need, while Russia and Putin were demonized by being compared to the USSR and Nazi Germany and their leaders. By emphasizing Poland's turbulent history, including its dual occupation during the 20th century by the Nazi and Soviet regimes, and by omitting any discourse about Polish collaboration, the government perpetuates a narrative of victimhood and portrays Russia as a continuous threat. The major claims revolved around Poland's unique understanding of Russia and Ukraine, the need to support Ukraine, and the assertion that history is repeating itself. Poland's history with Russia has provided it with the knowledge to make it an expert, giving it legitimacy to discuss these issues and act as a liaison between the West and Ukraine, emphasizing its role as an emerging leader.

I aimed to critically analyze and examine the potential implications and underlying assumptions and goals of the discourse investigated through DHA. My purpose was not to take a political stance.

The research gap that my study filled lies in the investigation of how Poland uses the politics of the past to position itself as a leader. While there has been extensive scholarship on collective memory, national narratives, and memory politics in Poland, my study specifically

focused on the role of the right-wing Polish government, particularly the Law and Justice Party (PiS), in shaping these narratives in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. By employing DHA in the articles, I offered an examination of how the historical narratives are strategically utilized in an international context to legitimize Poland's authority, get support for Ukraine, and portray Russia as a continuous threat. As mentioned in the discussion the real-life implications go beyond just rhetoric by influencing policy in Poland. This sheds light on the implications of memory politics in international relations, especially in the context of a contemporary war (i.e. the War in Ukraine).

My research was limited to opinion pieces, rather than official political discourse such as speeches or official statements, as these sources were more readily available in the English language, rather than Polish. The study only considered top-down discourse published for an international audience and did not look at the Polish national discourse of the war or the bottom-up discourse of the Polish populace. Moving forward, future research may include this bottom-up discourse surrounding the invasion of Ukraine and internal discourse within Poland. It could also delve deeper into the societal impact of these historical narratives and memory politics in Poland, exploring how they shape public opinion and Poland's foreign policy decisions.

Overall, this study shows how national narratives can shape memory politics and influence the political sphere. Collective memory and national narratives can be used as a tool for political gain. It highlighted the current political situation in Poland by shedding light on how Poland's history is being used to reinforce its role as a leader in the West's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The manipulation of collective memory, the promotion of victimhood, and the utilization of historical narratives by the PiS government serve to rally support for Ukraine

and justify its position as the authority on Russia. It is crucial to critically examine these narratives and understand their implications for international relations.

## APPENDIX



**Figure 2. Support for Ukraine Graffiti. December 2022, Gdańsk, Poland**



**Figure 3. Solidarity Sign on National Commission Building. January 2023, Gdańsk, Poland**



**Figure 4. Wspólnota Polska Association Sign Organizing Aid for Poles in Ukraine. January 2023, Warsaw Poland**



**Figure 5. Ukrainian Flag on Parliamentary Commission Building. January 2023, Warsaw, Poland**



**Figure 6. Ukrainian Flags in the windows of the Polish National Bank. January 2023, Warsaw Poland**



**Figure 7. “No to war”, “No human being is illegal” and, “We are with you”. January 2023, Warsaw, Poland**

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