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**‘NEW HISTORY—NEW WAYS OF KNOWING AND  
REMEMBERING THE CAUCASUS IN POLAND’**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to reconstruct the knowledge claims and memory politics in Polish public discourse about the Caucasus. As it highlights the importance of history and a production of a ‘New History’ for political use, it illuminates the role of the visual dimension in the symbolic politics of memory in Poland. The special example of the Caucasus, particularly the places of Georgia and Russia, serves to show how peripheral regions can gain prominence in the knowledge struggles and strategies of self-representation and othering of particular nations, regions and states on the geopolitical plane.

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## **‘New History—the New Ways of Knowing and Remembering the Caucasus in Poland’**

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### **Introduction**

This analysis is an examination of discourses that determine how Polish audiences nowadays acquire and order ‘knowledge’ about the Caucasus, particularly Georgia and Russia, by using various mediated messages. The analysis presented here is a qualitative inquiry into the nature and structure of mainstream textual and visual representations used in Poland to make sense of the Caucasus as a geographical and political region after the fall the Soviet Union. I argue that popular knowledge about the Caucasus boils down to ‘knowing mostly only one of the Caucasus countries, namely Georgia; and only one aspect of its history, namely its conflicts with Russia. In addition, the common ‘ways of talking and looking’ that structure this ‘knowledge’ historicize Polish-Georgian relations and can be interpreted as an element of the politics of memory (*Errinerungspolitik*, as first introduced by Reichel).<sup>1</sup>

In an Eastern European context, there is a steady and observable increase in various ‘normatively framed memory policies’.<sup>2</sup> In Poland, memory politics was officially proclaimed a political doctrine by the Law and Justice (PiS) government in 2005–2007<sup>3</sup> and is nowadays again high on the political agenda of the PiS government elected in October 2015. It was even branded as a ‘systemic politics of history’ by PiS MP Jarosław Sellin, and includes ‘more history lessons at school, new museums and a telling of our version of history’.<sup>4</sup> Often, in texts, images and events

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<sup>1</sup>P. Reichel, *Politik mit der Erinnerung: Gedächtnisorte im Streit um die nationalsozialistische Vergangenheit*, München: Hanser, 1995.

<sup>2</sup>G. Mink and L. Neumayer, *History, Memory and Politics in Central and Eastern Europe. Memory Games*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013, p. 2. See also J.B. Michlic, ‘The Path of Bringing the Dark to Light: Memory of the Holocaust in Postcommunist Europe’, in M. Pakier, J. Wawrzyniak, (eds.), *Memory and Change in Europe. Eastern Perspectives*, New York-Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2015, pp. 115–130; A. Nowak, ‘Murder in the Cemetery: Memorial Clashes over the Victims of the Soviet-Polish Wars’, in U. Blacker, A. Etkind and J. Fedor, (eds.), *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 149–172; M. Mälksoo, ‘The Memory Politics of Becoming European’, *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 15, no. 4, 2009, p. 657.

<sup>3</sup>Mink and Neumayer, *History, Memory and Politics*, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup>‘PiS zapowiada systemową politykę historyczną’, *Dziennik.pl* [website], <http://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/historia/aktualnosci/artykuly/502467.prawo-i-sprawiedliwosc-zapowiada-systemowa-polityke-historyczna.html>, (accessed 10 July 2016).

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produced by proponents of this type of memory politics, a geopolitical element comes to the fore, which legitimizes the need for anti-Russian political moves by invoking Poland's geographical location and popular geopolitical representations of conflicts resulting from it.

By pointing to the importance of the visual dimension in the memory politics, I want to contribute to an understanding of Polish discourses of historical policy. The concrete example of Georgia, which stabilized itself as one of the frames of the memory discourse in Poland, illuminates the importance of a very simplistically understood 'geopolitical thinking' on the part of the political and cultural élite in Poland—both conservative and liberal. This geopolitical thinking draws heavily on Polish history, going back in time as far as the 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup>

Visual images are an important element of what constitutes popular knowledge of the Caucasus in Poland. Generalized images of the high Caucasus mountain peaks, war scenes and images of the Kaczyński/Saakashvili political tandem are the most important building blocks that add up to mainstream media representations of the region.

The visual, the geopolitical and the memory perspective all illuminate the process of constructing a New History of Polish-Georgian relations. Combining these three dimensions helps uncover the ultimately very simple games played by relevant actors over the meaning of history in Poland and its connection to the geopolitical understanding of Poland's role in Europe and in the world as a leading Central European country on a crusade against Russian imperialism.<sup>6</sup> In countering this imperialism, Poland claims to possess a special expertise on all Russia-related issues and to be a natural leader for post-Communist and post-Soviet countries,<sup>7</sup> Georgia being a prominent example.

### **Theoretical framework**

The present analysis falls within the framework of memory studies, more specifically into the sub-field that is concerned with the ideological implications of what is remembered in a society, or, in other words, the so-called 'politics of memory'. The

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<sup>5</sup>G. Sanford, 'Overcoming the burden of history in Polish foreign policy', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 19, no. 3, 2003, p. 186.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. Ch. Reeves, 'Reopening the Wounds of History? The Foreign Policy of the 'Fourth' Polish Republic', *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, vol. 26, no. 4, 2010, p. 526 f.

<sup>7</sup>M. Kuus, 'Whose Regional Expertise? Political geographies of knowledge in the European Union', *European Urban and Regional Studies*, vol. 18, no. 3, 2011, p. 280.

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memory examined here is shaped by everyday popular and media discourses on international relations—‘popular geopolitics’ in Dittmer’s terms<sup>8</sup>—as well as the official foreign policy narratives produced by the Polish authorities from 2007 onwards. The discourse positing a Polish-Georgian historical brotherhood is understood as a phenomenon that encompasses various societal fields (journalism, politics, popular culture, film, food culture, NGO activism, tourism etc.). However, its most recognizable claims are found clearly in materials which appear in connection with discourses of journalism, politics and foreign policy.

There is broad scholarly consensus that collective memories strongly influence foreign and internal policies, public discourses and memory politics in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE).<sup>9</sup> The present paper confirms the claim that in CEE after the end of Communism, history has been re-nationalized and national history institutionalized.<sup>10</sup> The analysis argues that the memory battles played out by politicians heavily influence people’s views on the social worlds around them and that ideas once powerfully articulated by persons with authority can be integral to the popular cultural and media production of a given society by means of what Bourdieu calls ‘symbolic power’.<sup>11</sup> Dittmer<sup>12</sup> understands the ability of politicians to set the norms and givens of popular geopolitical knowledge as stemming from the modern institutional structure of societies, for example the huge role of the media in everyday people’s lives. This argument is illustrated through the example of the late Polish president Lech Kaczyński who clearly acted as one of most powerful discourse setters and promoters of the Polish-Georgian brotherhood, and whose ideas were taken up by both powerful state institutions and minor private organizations.

This study examines the ways of constructing a ‘New History’ of a Polish-Georgian metahistorical and ‘metanational’ brotherhood. This particular historical narrative is imbued with meanings derived from the mainstream national identity discourse and specific foreign policy discourses, notably those concentrating on

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<sup>8</sup>J. Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2010, p. 33 f.

<sup>9</sup>I. Prizel, *National Identity and Foreign Policy: Nationalism and Leadership in Poland, Russia and Ukraine*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 14; T. Zhurzhenko, ‘Geopolitics of Memory: Rethinking World War II and the fight for hegemony in the Baltic-Black Sea Region’, *Perekrestki Digest*, no. 6, 2011, pp. 116–133.

<sup>10</sup>T. Zhurzhenko, ‘Geopolitics of Memory’, *Eurozine*, 2007, <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2007-05-10-zhurzhenko-en.html>, (accessed 9 April 2016); Mink and Neumayer, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup>P. Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*, Cambridge, Polity, 1991.

<sup>12</sup>Dittmer, *Popular Culture, Geopolitics, and Identity*, p. 31.

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Poland as a constant victim of the ‘Russian threat’. It adds to the already vast body of research into the workings of memory in CEE which has mostly concentrated on political mythologies, national identity discourses<sup>13</sup> and ‘historical politics’.<sup>14</sup>

The visual dimension of memory in historical discourses is often omitted from analysis. I argue that the visual, textual and material dimensions are all equally important in understanding the uses of memory within a particular discourse. Lehti, Jutila and Jokisipilä in their analysis of Estonian memory politics argue that ‘visual symbols strengthen collective memories and prevent forgetting’.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, they problematize one specific way of legitimizing a historicized discourse on memory, namely an addition of new groups into the narrative.<sup>16</sup> This is also what happens in the case of Polish representations of Georgia, which are incorporated into the mainstream Polish national narrative as a fully novel element (Pierzynska 2016).<sup>17</sup> This operation can be understood as a legitimization of both the narrative and the postulated role of Georgia and Georgians in the Polish history.

The present analysis concentrates on the so-called ‘geopolitics of memory’, a term coined by Bloxham in the epilogue to his book about the Armenian genocide and its treatment within international politics.<sup>18</sup> The geopolitics of memory concentrates on memory battles which take place within different political camps in one country, or alternatively between states and regions. I argue that such battles ‘trickle down’ from the élite level to the level of popular discourse. In the case analysed here, they realize themselves in the symbolic and material infrastructure of the popular Polish ‘ways of knowing’ the Caucasus, particularly Georgia and Russia. Those ways of knowing encompass political speeches, expert blogs, popular history publications, books and travelogues, Georgian language courses, music and culinary festivals etc.

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<sup>13</sup>E.g., N. Davies, ‘Polish National Mythologies’, in G. Schöpflin, G. Hosking (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 141–157; J. Hackmann, Collective Memories in the Baltic Sea Region and Beyond: National—Transnational—European?, *Journal of Baltic Studies*, vol. 39, no. 4, 2008, pp. 381–391; M. Tamm, History as Cultural Memory: Mnemohistory and the Construction of the Estonian Nation, *Journal of Baltic Studies* vol. 39, no. 4, 2008, pp. 499–516.

<sup>14</sup>Mink and Neumayer; A. Nowak, ‘Murder in the Cemetery: Memorial Clashes over the Victims of the Soviet-Polish Wars’, in U. Blacker, A. Etkind and J. Fedor, (eds.), *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013, pp. 149–172.

<sup>15</sup>M. Lehti, M. Jutila and M. Jokisipilä, ‘Never-Ending Second World War: Public Performances of National Dignity and the Drama of the Bronze Soldier’, *Journal of Baltic Studies* vol. 39, no. 4, 2008, p. 395.

<sup>16</sup>Lehti, Jutila and Jokisipilä, ‘Never-Ending Second World War’, p. 397.

<sup>17</sup>J. Pierzynska, ‘Brothers in Arms. Imagining a Meta-Historical Brotherhood of Georgia and Poland in Polish Media and Political Discourses’, *Journal for Discourse Studies*, vol. 2, 2016, p. 179.

<sup>18</sup>Mink and Neumayer, p.6; T. Zhurzhenko, Geopolitics of Memory: Rethinking World War II and the fight for hegemony in the Baltic-Black Sea Region”, *Perekrestki Digest*, no. 6, 2011, pp. 116–133.

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Mink states that ‘in the new geopolitical framework that emerged in the post-Cold War Europe, opportunities and constraints have come into being that brought the social memory issues to the fore’.<sup>19</sup> In CEE, those memory issues play an important part in everyday politics. In accordance with Mink’s proposition, I understand them as ‘memory games’. The concept of memory games helps grasp the ways in which social and political actors relate to historical events, construct identities and narratives around them,<sup>20</sup> and even establish discourses that may come to dominate the media and politics in a given society. The notion of memory games has a clear advantage of connecting meaningfully and easily to what are known as ‘geopolitical games’ both in lay and scientific discourse.<sup>21</sup>

In order to make sense of the geopolitical memory narratives in CEE, I examine a large body of materials stemming from different sources. In doing this, I follow Dittmer in his idea that in the contemporary media-saturated society, it is necessary to study all ways in which information and knowledge is mediated to the audiences.<sup>22</sup>

My understanding of geopolitical discourse is very broad and incorporates everyday text and talk as well as official foreign policy discourses and mass media. In the case of the intersection of Poland, Georgia and Russia, this mediation is necessarily historical, political and geopolitical at the same time, as it builds on judgments and evaluations of history, the current foreign policy behaviours of state actors as well as strategies and interpretations of Poland’s role in Europe’s historical and political developments, which themselves have a long history and form an indispensable part of the Polish ideology of Messianism and the myth of *Antemurale christianitatis*.<sup>23</sup>

I understand the New History to be a geopolitical imagination<sup>24</sup> and a memory game, and analyze its socially constructed nature using the toolkit adapted from the

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<sup>19</sup>Mink and Neumayer, p. 6;

<sup>20</sup>Mink and Neumayer, p. 4.

<sup>21</sup> The most famous geopolitical game is the “Great Game” between imperial Russia and the British Empire over the supremacy in Central Asia. The notion is widely used by scholars and laymen alike.

<sup>22</sup>Dittmer, p. 34.

<sup>23</sup>J. Tazbir, ‘Poland. Antemurale or bridge?’, *Dialogue and Universalism* vol. 9, no. 5/6, 1999, pp. 71–82; G. Wagner, ‘Nationalism and Cultural Memory in Poland: The European Union Turns East’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture and Society*, vol. 17, no. 2, 2003, pp. 191-212.

<sup>24</sup>Dittmer, p. 37.

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sociology of knowledge approach to discourse, SKAD.<sup>25</sup> It is a ‘memory game’ which establishes a particular understanding of the Polish-Georgian relationship by juxtaposing both countries to Russia, and connecting them by both geopolitical and historical claims.

### **Methods**

Following Berger and Luckmann, I understand language as a broad repository of meanings and experiences which can be preserved in time and transmitted to the following generations.<sup>26</sup> Geopolitical imaginations and memory games are transmitted by means of language and other signification (visual images) which are subsumed under broad categories and become stabilized in the form of social imaginaries which circulate within a society across many societal fields. Equipped with popular knowledge about history, Georgia, Russia and Poland, one can even create ‘imaginary social worlds’, within which imagination is used to create common identities through processes of circulation.<sup>27</sup> In the case of the New History of Polish-Georgian brotherhood, ‘imaginary historical worlds’ have been created based on geopolitical imaginations, memory games and national identity narratives.

Because of the nature of the Caucasus region as the subject of ‘talking and looking’—a remote place unfamiliar to Polish audiences—as well as the historical claims made within concrete discursive practices that connect Polish and Georgian history and postulate its belonging to a certain common category, analysis has to consider the means of knowledge production about the Caucasus. This enables the elucidation of the role of national history in constructing representations of other countries and places. Drawing on elements from the Polish national identity narrative, a new, common Polish-Georgian history is created. I explore the socially available stocks of historical knowledge which are utilized within the discourse, and show how the visual representations of Georgia add to them by using mostly militarized imaginaries of war, blood, freedom fight etc., ultimately stemming from the Polish mainstream historical narrative omnipresent in the media.

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<sup>25</sup>R. Keller, ‘The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD)’, *Human Studies*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2011, pp. 43–65.

<sup>26</sup>P.L. Berger and T.Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality*, London: Penguin Books, 1966, p. 52.

<sup>27</sup> K. Valaskivi and J. Sumiala, ‘Circulating social imaginaries: Theoretical and methodological reflections’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2014, p. 231

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To describe the structure the New History discourse, I use the sociology of knowledge approach to discourse (SKAD). This approach views texts, images, and all other instances through which a discourse is actualized as discursive statements. Discursive statements are concrete actualizations of discourses which contain a typifiable core, characteristic of the claims made within a particular discourse. As a research programme, SKAD is embedded within the tradition of the sociology of knowledge of Berger and Luckmann and examines the discursive construction of symbolic orders of knowledge, conflicting knowledge relationships and politics.<sup>28</sup> It conforms to Foucault's notion of discourse understood as a regulated, structured social practice of sign usage.<sup>29</sup>

Discourse produces a common sense knowledge of certain 'problems', issues or themes which is always socio-historically situated. Within the framework of a discourse we find interrelated discursive fields which result from a constant communicative production of statements. Discursive events themselves constitute particular instances of discourse actualization, composed of mutually interwoven elements that enhance one another. Those elements include interpretative schemes (frames), classifications, phenomenal structures, narrative structures, patterns of legitimization, subject positions and generated model practices<sup>30</sup>.

The SKAD concepts lend themselves particularly well to being guides in the analysis of the ways of making sense of Georgia within specific discursive events that differ from each other in their material aspect. Practices of attending public lectures about Georgia and the Caucasus, purchasing travelogue books on this subject and reading newspaper articles and expert analyses of the political situation in the region differ considerably from other popular varieties of engagement with the Caucasus. Those are, for example, blog writing (mainly practiced by NGO activists and volunteers who travel to the Caucasus countries to perform 'projects'), the planning of the 'projects', establishing cross-border partnerships with Caucasus-based organizations, study trips, budget flights to the Black Sea and package holidays in Batumi, travelogue writing, and last but not least the visits of Polish political delegations to Tbilisi to provide expert advice on 'development into a market

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<sup>28</sup>Keller, *Human Studies*, p. 48.

<sup>29</sup>Keller, p. 51.

<sup>30</sup>R. Keller, 'Analysing Discourse. An Approach from the Sociology of Knowledge', *FQS*, vol. 6, no. 3, 2005.



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economy' and/or 'supporting local democracy'.<sup>31</sup> The above mentioned practices, and many more, all constitute the universe of Polish discourse on the Caucasus. They can be said to form a discursive order, a set of interwoven social practices which refer back to one another.<sup>32</sup>

Polish discourse on Georgia can be classified as a niche or special discourse,<sup>33</sup> as it is centered on a remote country which previously played no role in the formation of Polish historical narrative.<sup>34</sup> Although the subject itself is niche, the effects and content positionings are significant because of their representativeness of a much broader Russophobic discursive formation played out among the intellectual and political élite<sup>35</sup>.

The visual aspect of this discourse has not been analyzed yet. In my analysis, I use van Leeuwen and Kress's multimodal approach to discourse and the social semiotic theory of representation.<sup>36</sup>

### **Poland, Georgia, the Caucasus**

The particular attraction of Caucasus-related books, articles, events, governmental and non-governmental projects has been visible in the Polish public sphere since at least 2008.<sup>37</sup> That year saw Georgia making headlines in the press worldwide due to the Russo-Georgian war which started on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August after the attack by the Georgian military on Tskhinvali, the capital of the Georgian break-away region of South Ossetia<sup>38</sup>. Russia reacted in due course, crossing its borders with Georgia and assuming military operations against the Georgian army in what it claimed was an effort to protect South Ossetian and Abkhaz<sup>39</sup> civilians.

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<sup>31</sup>Citations taken from the website of the Solidarity Fund PL, a government-funded agency which provides development aid mostly to the countries of the so-called Eastern Partnership (Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, Kazakhstan). It is presided by a prominent Caucasus-expert, travelogue book writer and diplomat Wojciech Górecki, whose books and articles were analysed within this study. The full address: [www.solidarityfund.pl](http://www.solidarityfund.pl)

<sup>32</sup>Keller, *Human Studies*, p. 53.

<sup>33</sup>Keller, p. 52.

<sup>34</sup>Pierzynska, *Brothers in Arms*, p. 179.

<sup>35</sup>M. Domagała, *Percepcja konfliktu kaukaskiego w polskich mediach w 2008 r.*, Warsaw: Europejskie Centrum Analiz Geopolitycznych, 2014, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup>Kress and van Leeuwen, *Reading Images*, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup>Pierzynska, p. 178.

<sup>38</sup>S.E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers. A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, London & New York: Routledge Curzon, 2001.

<sup>39</sup>Abkhazia is the second, along South Ossetia, of the two Georgian break-away republics, which first declared its independence in 1992. A bloody Georgian-Abkhaz war followed.

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These developments provoked a very harsh reaction in Poland. It resulted in a wave of mobilization of political and material resources to help Georgia, a country which was by then in the process of being discursively framed as a ‘brotherly nation’, against an ‘imperial’ Russian attack. Today, it is hard to establish the particular chronology of the emergence of this brotherhood discourse; what is beyond doubt, though, is that Russophobic and otherwise anti-Russian elements in Polish society were fully present by then,<sup>40</sup> and that the Georgia-related hysteria in the media and the political mobilization of the Polish president Lech Kaczyński fell on a fertile, pre-prepared ground, substantiating the already emerging discourse on the special nature of Polish-Georgian historical connections.

Kaczyński’s trips to Tbilisi to support the Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, the speeches he gave there and his attempts to mobilize all the former post-Communist and post-Soviet countries into one block that would oppose Russia in the international arena, as well as numerous events such as concerts and fundraising campaigns organized in Poland after the break out of the war produced a great abundance of textual and visual material that dealt with Georgia and the Caucasus.

These various materials included posters, logos, newspaper articles, blogs, books, statements of various NGOs and associations etc. Some of the organizations that produced such material also existed before the war, and many more sprang up in its aftermath, on the wave of increased interest in the subject. The communications of the Chancellery of the President, who was actively involved in the developments in Georgia and Russia, as well as the mainstream pro-Georgian and anti-Russian line of virtually all newspapers and news channels irrespective of their political orientation,<sup>41</sup> created a favorable atmosphere for the production and dissemination of Georgia-related materials.

In spite of their various origins, nature and purposes, the Georgia-related materials examined here show an overwhelming prevalence of one specific type of discourse on Georgia and the Caucasus. It deploys a geopolitical frame of Polish-Georgian-Russian relations and simultaneously offers historical legitimizations for it. Domagała asserts that a new geopolitical code was created during the Georgian-Russian War in the media with the help of a multitude of tendentiously selected

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<sup>40</sup>T. Zarycki, ‘The embarrassing Russian connection. Selective memory of the Russian heritage in contemporary Poland’, in R. Taras (ed.), *Russia’s Identity in International Relations. Images, Perceptions, Misperceptions*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 133 f.

<sup>41</sup>Domagała, *Percepcjakońfliktu*, p. 105, p. 172.

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‘experts’ whose ‘knowledge’ was imposed as the only possible view on the issue.<sup>42</sup> According to my understanding, an existing geopolitical imagination was mobilized and elevated to the status of the dominant discourse; historical memory being a crucial component that enabled this operation. The interpretive schemes, classifications, phenomenal and narrative structures and subject positions enabled by, and generated, by this dominant discourse were so uniform that it begs a further analysis of their ideological and political underpinnings. My analysis combines various types of materials (visual, textual, audio etc.) to explore this discourse and its material and ideological effects.

### **Russia—the problem and its causes**

The New History of Polish-Georgian brotherhood is an element of a broader discursive field which problematizes Russia as a constant threat to Polish independence and sovereignty.<sup>43</sup> Such perceptions of Russia are virtually omnipresent in the Polish media and political discourse nowadays; it was powerfully confirmed in the aftermath of the NATO Summit in Warsaw 2016. In connection with Georgia, the ‘problem’ was first formulated by the late president Kaczyński in Tbilisi in 2008, when he promised a common Polish-Georgian fight against Russia. Recently, especially after the Ukrainian crisis, his words have been used once again as a legitimization of the strongly anti-Russian foreign policy of the new Polish government. The ‘issue’ is encapsulated in a comment made in 2014 by the current Minister of the Interior and Administration and published on the website of the Polish state TV broadcaster tvp.info:

*Things stand as the late president Kaczyński predicted in Georgia: first Georgia, then Ukraine, later the Baltic countries, and next it will be our turn (...). If the Russian invasion is not stopped in Ukraine, Putin will go further. (‘Błaszczak: Najpier w Gruzja’, 2014)*

This stance is presented as a ‘no alternative’ truth claim based on Poland’s ‘geopolitical location’ between Germany and Russia, which is not problematized any

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<sup>42</sup>Domagała, p. 363.

<sup>43</sup>T. Zarycki T., *Russia’s Identity in International Relations. Images, Perceptions, Misperceptions*, pp. 133–149.

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further; neither is the present NATO security infrastructure in Europe nor Poland's membership of the Alliance. In 2008, Georgia was classified as an indispensable component of Poland's 'Eastern policy', which, in turn, constituted the essence of Polish foreign policy in general. In the midst of the Georgian-Russian war, this conviction was summarized by the Polish Radio Programme 1, which asked in the lead to an interview with a PiS politician about Georgia 'Russia will not like our engagement in the East, but if Polish foreign policy is not East-oriented, what can it ever become?' ('Dobryprzyklad', 2008).

This geopolitical imagination represents Georgia as part of the 'East', and Russia as a 'bear' which has shown its true face and will attack its weaker neighbours until it restores the former military might of the Soviet Union.<sup>44</sup> Interestingly, the left-wing weekly *Przegląd* was the only media outlet that engaged critically with this demonized image of Russia in an analysis of the Western media reporting on the Georgian-Russian war published in September 2008 by a renowned Polish Russia-scholar Andrzej deLazari.<sup>45</sup> The rest of the media reproduced images and metaphors of the bear, some even adding telling illustrations (see Image 1).

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<sup>44</sup>Cf. Domagała, p. 131.

<sup>45</sup>A. de Lazari, and O. Riabow, 'Niedźwiedzia Metafora Rosji w dyskursie o konflikcie gruzińsko-rosyjskim', *TygodnikPrzegląd* [website], 14 September 2008, <http://www.tygodnikprzeglad.pl/misza-niedzwiedz/>, (accessed 7 July 2016).



*Image 1. Russian bear flexing its muscles. Image by Artur Krynicki, Wirtualna Polska, 6.03.2008. Source: <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,40354,title,Rosyjski-niedzwiedz-prezy-muskuly,wid,9728844,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=11758e>*

Another example of how the discursive field was shaped by the media is the Cracow regional TV channel which aired a documentary covering one specific demonstration against the Russo-Georgian war. In the film itself, the war is called ‘Russian aggression against Georgia’ and is narrated as one event in a chain of Russian and Soviet aggressions (Soviet aggression against Poland in September 1939, the events in Hungary 1956, Czechoslovakia 1968 and Afghanistan in the 1980s). This chain is a classification, a form of knowledge typification which configures our knowledge of the world<sup>46</sup> and puts the particularities of events into a meaningful perspective. Here, the Russo-Georgian war is classified as one of many examples of Russian imperialist aggression against sovereign countries, and Georgia as an innocent victim of its murky plans. Such classifications are widely reproduced by all kinds of media, sometimes with explicit references to the nature of history which ‘tends to repeat

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<sup>46</sup>Keller, p. 57 f.

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itself', referring to August 1968 in Czechoslovakia and August 2008 in Georgia.<sup>47</sup> The events of August 2008 in Georgia are sometimes interpreted by constructing even more far-reaching classifications, e.g. on the website of the Polish Journalists' Society, which proclaims their equivalence with the partitions of Poland in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Soviet attack on Poland in 1939 and the Soviet wars against Finland.<sup>48</sup>

The actual event which started the conflict—the Georgian shelling of Tskhinvali—is not addressed in the film—and neither are debates about whether the Tskhinvali attack was an aggression or a response to Russian activities.<sup>49</sup> This fits well with the reporting trend identified by Domagała<sup>50</sup>, which always depicts Russia as a barbaric aggressor irrespective of how conflict actually started. What is more, Russia is referred to as an aggressor against both Georgians and Ossetians. It is hard to escape the impression that the most important point made here is that Russia is the true aggressor, while it is less important which country, region or province is targeted by it: *It is a very special moment. The Olympics, a holiday of peace, has started, but it does not prevent (...) the aggressors from (...) killing the innocent civilians in Ossetia and in Georgia.*

The simplified vision of Russia as an imperialist power solely interested in perpetuating aggressions against its neighbours has a strong foothold in Polish historiography.<sup>51</sup> The Georgia discourse draws on an already broad body of interpretative historical knowledge. It makes its claims not only about history and the past, but also projects them into the future. Characteristic of this are placards held by the demonstrators which are showed in close-up in the film; they read: *Today it is Georgia, tomorrow Poland.*

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<sup>47</sup>M. Ostrowski, 'Co z tą Rosją. Polska a konflikt gruzińsko-rosyjski', *Polityka*, 22 August 2008, <http://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/swiat/265668,1,polska-a-konflikt-rosyjsko-gruzinski.read>, (accessed 10 July 2016).

<sup>48</sup>M. Orzechowski, 'Rusyjska chora potrzeba wojny i cierpienia', *Stowarzyszenie Dziennikarzy Polskich* [website], 1 December 2015, <http://www.sdp.pl/felietony/12092,rosyjska-chora-potrzeba-wojny-i-cierpienia,1448998949>, (accessed 30 May 2016).

<sup>49</sup>Cf. M. Malek, 'Georgia & Russia: The Unknown Prelude to the Five Day War', *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 3, no. 2, 2009, pp. 227–232; S.E., Cornell, J. Popjanevski and N. Nillson, *Russia's War in Georgia: Causes and Implications for Georgia and the World*, Washington: Central Asia—Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program, 2008.

<sup>50</sup>Domagała, p. 174.

<sup>51</sup>M. Bohun, 'Oblicza obsesji—negatywny obraz Rosji w myśli polskiej', in A. De Lazari, (ed.), *Katalog wzajemnych uprzedzeń Polaków i Rosjan*, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, Warszawa, 2006, pp. 203–302; R., Stobiecki, *Rosja i Rosjanie w polskiej myśli historycznej XIX i XX wieku*, in A. deLazari, (ed.), *Katalog wzajemnych uprzedzeń Polaków i Rosjan*, Warszawa, Polski Instytut Spraw Międzynarodowych, 2006, pp. 159–201.

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Such future-related claims were best exemplified in the speech given by Kaczyński during a rally in Tbilisi on 12th August 2008. The rally featured the presidents of Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Ukraine and Poland, with Kaczyński being the *spiritus movens* of the event. In his widely discussed speech, he said that after attacking Georgia, Russia would in the foreseeable future move to attack the Baltic countries and Poland; he also announced that the united post-Communist and post-Soviet countries represented in the rally would take up the fight against those anticipated aggressions. Interestingly, after the events in Ukraine he is regarded by part of the Polish public as a political visionary; the Ukrainian conflict is largely framed as a Russian war against Ukraine in the Polish media and by Polish politicians of all political orientations. The claims made in 2008 are based on historical references, and function as a memory game: by selecting particular historical events one can construct a narrative compatible with the already existent Russophobic discursive field in the media. It is important to note that not only the right-wing leaning, but also the liberal and left-wing media actively take part in producing this type of knowledge about Russia and Georgia. For instance, *Polityka*, a liberal weekly, states that Russia's responsibility for the conflict with Georgia is *obvious*.<sup>52</sup>

Drawing its initial energy from the view of Poland as an endangered and encircled nation, the Polish discourse on Russia has produced a distinct narration that incorporates Georgia into the most significant symbolic events of Polish history. This New History is the base for solutions to Polish and Georgian problems with Russia which are proposed by the discourse bearers.

### **The Polish-Georgian Alliance based on New History—the Solution**

The special role ascribed to Georgia can only be understood if we take into account its political and ideological dimensions. It may seem that Georgia emerged in the public space virtually 'from nowhere' in 2008 when the Russo-Georgian war broke out. However, this discourse is deeply rooted in the foreign policy principles of the late Polish president Lech Kaczyński. His hostile attitude towards Russia and Germany was part of the 'great comeback' of 20th century history into everyday politics in Poland. His foreign policy moves and unconditional support for the Georgian side during the Russo-Georgian war, up to the point of travelling to the region and heading

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<sup>52</sup>M. Ostrowski, *Polityka*.

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political rallies there, were openly historically motivated.<sup>53</sup> The rationale behind them was to fight back against Russian ‘domination’ and ‘imperialism, with whatever allies one might find. The most suitable allies for this purpose were of course countries who themselves had unresolved issues with Russia, and the Polish-Swedish authored Eastern Partnership Policy of the EU, launched in 2009, has—right up until today—addressed precisely them: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine<sup>54</sup>.

The New History narrative, a new kind of historical knowledge about Poland and Georgia is both textually constructed and further enhanced in visual representation. Not only the visual images *per se*, but also the visual semiotic elements that surround this subject in the media or otherwise appear in connection with it, constitute the universe of Polish discourse on the Caucasus.

The following excerpt from the summary of a popular history book ‘The Unknown Georgia. Common Fortunes of Georgians and Poles’ encapsulates the historical dimension of Polish discourse on Georgia:

*(The book presents) ...almost 100 past years of common fortunes, history and loyal friendship between Georgians and Poles. We explore the histories of Georgian officers who emigrated to Poland after the Soviet aggression against their country in 1921, and were admitted to the Polish Army by Marshal Piłsudski with unchanged military ranks. We discover the drama of the common fight in the September Campaign of 1939 and later in the Home Army. We follow the history of Georgians who were murdered in the Katyń forest for their loyal service to the new motherland.*<sup>55</sup>

In fact, it is a list of historical events which all form the most important milestones of the narrative of modern Polish national identity. Marshal Piłsudski, the iconic figure of the Polish fight for independence, the hero who managed to defeat the

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<sup>53</sup>M. Szczepanik, ‘Between a Romantic ‘Mission in the East’ and Minimalism: Polish Policy Towards the Eastern Neighbourhood’, *Perspectives*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2011, p. 64 f.

<sup>54</sup>M. Łapczyński, ‘The European Union’s Eastern Partnership: Chances and Perspectives’, *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2009, p. 148.

<sup>55</sup>D. Kolbaia, P. Hlebowicz and P. Warisch, *Gruzjanieznana. Wspólne losy Gruzynów i Polaków*, Kraków: Rafael, 2011, backcover.



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Red Army on its march to Europe in the legendary Battle of Warsaw in 1920<sup>56</sup> and hence ‘saved’ the continent from the spread of Communism; the September 1939 Campaign, which is depicted as a heroic fight against a much mightier enemy in both popular and official political discourse (the iconic image being attacks by the Polish cavalry against German tanks<sup>57</sup>); the Katyń massacre of Polish prisoners of war by the Soviet NKVD, which became a significant Polish identity marker and was incorporated into the official historical narrative after the break-up of the Communist Block and the abolishment of censorship in Poland.

Those ideologically loaded elements are combined together in a short book description, linking it to the existing stock of representations (books, films, comic books, TV programmes, historical report, judicial investigations) of the Polish fight for independence. The fight for independence motif is not limited to the actual events of 1918; it also emerges with reference to the Second Polish Republic and its political support for the ‘subjugated’ peoples of the Soviet Union (the so-called ‘Promethean project’), and later is linked to opposition towards the new world order after the Jalta conference and the socialist People’s Republic of Poland (PRL).

Such references are found in the book in the form of invoking, for example, *the Soviet occupation*, which is a term so vaguely applied as not to make clear whether it refers to the actual Soviet occupation of 1939–1941, or to the whole socialist period until 1989.<sup>58</sup> Domagała in his analysis of media reporting on the Russian-Georgian war identified *the Soviet occupation* as a phrase used to construct a direct link between the war in Georgia and the Soviet interventions in Prague 1968 and Budapest 1956.<sup>59</sup>

The historical connection between Poland and Georgia is further enhanced by statements having Russia as the ultimate referent. Historical facts of, for example, the emergence of the Polish colony in Georgia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (which was composed

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<sup>56</sup>The legendary status of this battle was recently exemplified in the film production *Bitwa Warszawska* (*The Battle of Warsaw*) in 2011. Jerzy Hoffman, the director of the film, is known for his historical productions invoking the Polish historical myths of Sarmatism, Messianism and the 20<sup>th</sup> century martyrological narratives. They are often based on the classics of Polish Romance literature (*Colonel Wolodyjowski 1968*, *The Deluge 1974*, *With Fire and Sword 1999*, *An Ancient Tale 2003*). He also directed a documentary about the Ukrainian national awakening in 2008 (*Ukraine, the Birth of the Nation*).

<sup>57</sup>The historical truth of whether such attacks actually took place or not is a much disputed subject in itself. Websites and discussion boards abound with threads discussing this issue; there is even a Wikipedia entry entitled ‘Polish cavalry attacks on German tanks’.

<sup>58</sup>Kolbaia, Hlebowicz and Warisch, *Gruzja nieznaną*, p. 5.

<sup>59</sup>Domagała, p. 141.

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in part of Polish insurgents against the Russian Empire banished to this region, but mostly Polish officers serving in the Russian Army, and, from the 1840s, Polish engineers, doctors and other specialists hoping for quick career success thanks to the Caucasus's economic boom)<sup>60</sup> is represented as the *resettlement of 3000 Polish patriots to Georgia* in the aftermath of the uprising in the 1830s. The memory of the 1830 November Uprising is very much alive today, but details of the Russian repressions that followed it are hardly known in detail; the fragmentary nature of popular historical knowledge makes such misrepresentations—memory games—possible.

The New History, which is in fact a particular ideologically motivated viewpoint absolutized as the only true reading of historical events, is linguistically and visually militarized. The main narrative structure which connects various statements is the construction of a common fight against Russia. Opposition to the Russian annexation of eastern Polish territories and Georgian opposition to Russia's policies in the Caucasus at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are largely unconnected historical events which are merged discursively. The act of connecting those processes serves as a legitimizing device. By constructing the brotherly connection between the two nations, it legitimizes Poland's modern policies towards Georgia, Poland's engagement in the Russo-Georgian war in 2008 and also, to some extent, the interest for Georgia in Polish popular culture.

Visually, the new common history takes the image of an officer. The officer is either Polish or Georgian; the fact that in order for individuals to pursue a military carrier in 19<sup>th</sup> century Poland or Georgia it was necessary to join the Russian Army (as there was no Polish or Georgian military) is ignored completely. In *The Unknown Georgia*, which consists of 128 pages, there are officers in uniforms depicted on 61 pages, with sometimes more than one photograph per page. The book is richly illustrated; in most cases, the actual text is printed over a very large photograph or a set of photographs which often covers the whole page. The reader may, in fact, feel overwhelmed by the sheer number and size of the images. It almost seems as if the suggestive power of the image was overestimated by the authors.<sup>61</sup> The number of

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<sup>60</sup>A. Woźniak, 'Z badań nad Polonią gruzińską drugiej połowy XIX i początku XX wieku', *Etnografia Polska*, vol. 40, 1996, p. 39.

<sup>61</sup>A. Kuhn, 1985, *The Power of the Image. Essays on Representation and Sexuality*, New York: Routledge, 1995; D. Freedberg, *The Power of Images: Studies in the History and Theory of Response*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991.

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photographs may be seen as a legitimization tool for the new historical narrative: the new reading of events needs to be backed-up by ‘historical proof’, and the photographic medium, because of its supposed indexicality, lends itself best to that kind of discursive operation.<sup>62</sup> The story of Polish officers in Georgia and Georgian officers in Poland is undoubtedly a real story, but its incorporation to the wider narrative of a “freedom fight” seems to be a memory game, an ideological move made possible by the emergence of the political discourse of the ‘Polish and Georgian brotherhood’ and, at the same time, co-constructing and legitimizing this discourse.

The Polish national mythology is, to a great extent, composed of a martyrological ‘freedom fight’ narrative which has been the subject of some interesting research.<sup>63</sup> Zubrzycki in her study of Polish national myths defines national mythology as ‘a specific telling of history, one that overemphasizes some aspects of the past while glossing over others, which weaves various historical threads into a coherent fabric, and blends historical facts with more or less accurate interpretations’.<sup>64</sup> The modern Polish discourse on Georgia and Russia is an example of a struggle for a correct reading of history, which builds its claims using the available textual and visual material taken from mainstream national identity discourse. The image of an officer is a case in point: it comprises the notions of freedom fight, patriotism and honour (reverence for the uniform) and is therefore loaded with meanings that transcend its mere denotative reading. The stereotypical popular image of a Polish officer from the interwar period emphasizes his patriotism, righteousness and the values of tradition and honour, as well as elegance, responsibility and respect towards his superiors and chivalrous behavior with the ladies.<sup>65</sup> That is how the popular imagination constructs officers and positions the new Georgian element of the historical narrative in the right Polish-national context.

The officer image, imbued with the values discussed above, is an example to be strived towards. The glorious traditions of the Second Republic’s military present

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<sup>62</sup>N. Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1999; T. Gunning, ‘What’s the Point of an Index? Or, Faking Photographs’, *NORDICOM Review*, vol. 25, no. 1/2, 2004, pp. 39–49.

<sup>63</sup>N. Davies, ‘Polish National Mythologies’, in G. Schöpflin, G. Hosking (eds.), *Myths and Nationhood*, New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 141–157; G. Zubrzycki, ‘Polish Mythology and the Traps of Messianic Martyrology’, in G. Bouchard (ed.), *National Myths. Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*, New York, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 110–132; T. Zarycki, *Russia’s Identity in International Relations. Images, Perceptions, Misperceptions*, London: Routledge, 2013, pp. 133–149.

<sup>64</sup>Zubrzycki, *National Myths. Constructed Pasts, Contested Presents*, p. 112.

<sup>65</sup>P. Jaźwiński and J. Eisler, *Oficerowie i dżentelmeni. Życie prywatne i służbowe kawalerzystów Drugiej Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa: Instytut Wydawniczy Erica, 2011, backcover.

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themselves as an opposition toward the *Homo sovieticus*—a product of the Communist and Soviet domination ‘hidden in the souls of all citizens of post-Communist countries’ which should be defeated.<sup>66</sup> The New History and new brotherhoods based on it are one of the means of achieving this goal.

The recontextualization of historical events within this discourse can be further illuminated if we understand the scientific discipline of history itself as a discursive field, a social arena where various discourses compete with each other, shaping their ‘issues’, ‘problems’ to be solved and ‘historical lessons’ to be learned.<sup>67</sup> The struggle is about stabilizing a particular symbolic order for a given context and making sure it achieves a dominant position either in public discourse or within various special discourses.<sup>68</sup> The Polish media and political discourse on the Caucasus can be viewed as a special discourse because of the relative rarity of the subject; however, this special discourse is linked intimately with the public sphere by the resources it draws on and its evident attempt to legitimize its claims using historical knowledge. In fact, it has already produced numerous experts, who in turn continue to produce numerous publications on the subject; it has also spread to other societal fields and resulted in the emergence of such practices as visiting Georgian restaurants, flying on budget holidays to Georgia etc.

Novelty, therefore, in the discourse on the Caucasus, lies in its knowledge claims. The visual dimension stays within the long-established frame of freedom fight, oppression and messianic martyrdom.<sup>69</sup> One could attempt to build a chronology of images that belong to this ‘discursive universe’ and constitute the boundaries of discourse which are not crossed. The first image on this chronological line will be a visualisation of ancient past materialized in ancient objects and engravings (e.g., on the book cover of *The Unknown Georgia*), connoting the continuity of the shared Georgian-Polish past going a long way back in time. There follow images of freedom fight, epitomized by the generalized ‘officer’ image. Examples of this are found in the book discussed here, but also, for example, in Jerzy Lubach’s documentary film ‘Wearing the four-cornered cap and a tiger skin’ (W

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<sup>66</sup>T. Zarycki, ‘From Soviet to a Western-dominated political scene: the geopolitical context of politics in Poland’, in B.Törnquist-Plewa, K. Stala, (eds.), *Cultural Transformations after Communism: Central and Eastern Europe in Focus*, Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2011, p. 84.

<sup>67</sup>Keller, p. 58; O.J. Daddow, ‘Euro-scepticism and the culture of the discipline of history’, *Review of International Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, 2006, pp. 309–328.

<sup>68</sup>Keller, p. 58.

<sup>69</sup>Zubrzycki, p. 112.

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*rogatywce i tygryziej skórze*).<sup>70</sup> This production was included in the Polish Film Festival in Los Angeles in 2008; its description on the Festival website was illustrated with a photo of seven officers in full gear sitting and standing in two rows (see Image 2). Their arrangement in this symmetrical composition clearly suggests a covert taxonomy in the sense van Leeuwen and Kress give to this term.<sup>71</sup> The photo, together with the accompanying text stating that the Georgian officers *quickly embraced the techniques of the Polish military and the new country was soon to become their motherland. Many of (them) became totally immersed in all aspects of life in Poland* constructs a taxonomy of the legitimate members of the Polish Army, the implied ‘Polish’ Poles and the explicit ‘Georgian’ Poles (later called the *Polish Georgians*), incorporating the latter into the superordinate category of the Polish Military.

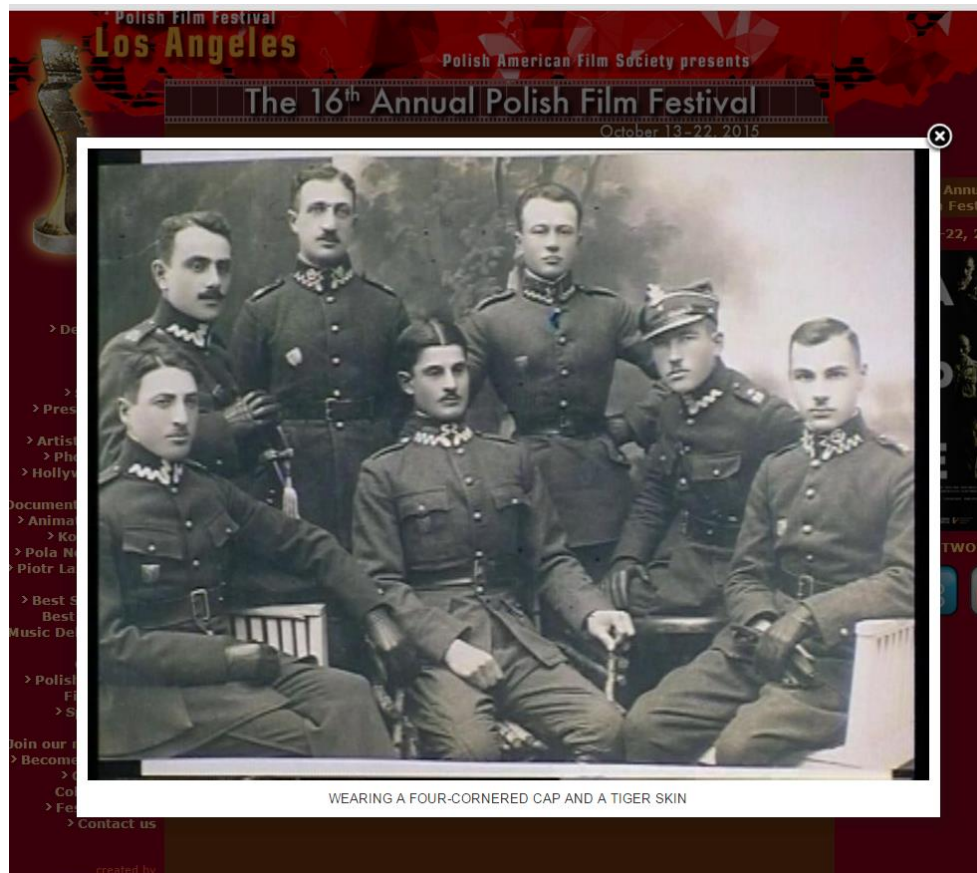


Image 2. Polish Film Festival in Los Angeles, *Wearing a four-cornered cap and a tiger skin*. Source: <http://www.polishfilmla.org/wocms.php?siteID=12&ID=306>

<sup>70</sup>Four-cornered cap is the traditional cap of the Polish military; tiger skin refers to the Georgian national epic ‘The Knight in the Panther’s Skin’.

<sup>71</sup>Kress and van Leeuwen, p. 81.

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### **Values and the *dispositifs* of discourse**

The officer-images are closely connected to the narrative of the heroic Polish fight against the German invasion of September 1939 and the already mentioned legendary attacks of Polish cavalry against German tanks. The September Campaign is explicitly invoked in the texts; so is the Warsaw Uprising and the Katyń massacre, historical events which may rightly be called founding myths of the modern Polish national identity and historical narrative. The visual production surrounding the subject of the Warsaw Uprising is manifold and includes films, books, historical analyses, documentaries, comic books, table games, clubs, rock concerts, discussion boards, posters and, last but not least, the monumental Museum of the Warsaw Uprising inaugurated in Warsaw in 2004 by the late president Lech Kaczyński. The Museum is largely identified with Kaczyński's foreign policy and the right-wing historical politics of Law and Justice (PiS), the winner of the recent Polish parliamentary election.

The popularity and cult-status of the Warsaw Uprising and its manifold manifestations in popular culture are subject to discussion in the Polish press<sup>72</sup> and academia<sup>73</sup>. The most debated notion is the so-called 'historical policy' (*polityka historyczna*), a political project of institutionalizing a 'correct' version of history in schools, among the judiciary and in public discourse, as voiced by PiS and exemplified in the establishment of institutions which construct and guard the new policy, as the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising (the discursive bearer of ideological power) and the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN), with powers extending beyond the ideological realm, employing real historians-prosecutors in a special body whose task is to charge people with 'communist crimes'. According to Antoni Dudek, only eleven trials were opened against individuals accused of politically-motivated crimes during the PRL period before the establishment of the IPN, whereas in the first

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<sup>72</sup>K. Pilawski, 'Historia i polityka', *Przegląd socjalistyczny*, undated [website], <http://www.przegladsocjalistyczny.pl/opinie/aziemski/48-historia-i-polityka>, (accessed 15 November 2015); M. Wąsowski, 'Szał na Powstanie Warszawskie. Czemu nagle stało się tak popularne?', *Natemat.pl* [website], 2012, <http://natemat.pl/25617,szal-na-powstanie-warszawskie-czemu-nagle-stalo-sie-tak-popularne-przez-muzeum-muzyke-i-pis>, (accessed on 20 November 2015).

<sup>73</sup>E. Wiącek, 'In the labyrinth of memory. Images of the Warsaw Uprising of 1944', *Journal of Urban Ethnology*, vol. 11, 2013, pp. 85–103; D. de Bruyn, 'Patriotism of Tomorrow? The Commemoration and Popularization of the Warsaw Rising Through Comics', *Slovo*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2010, pp. 46–65.

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9 years of its existence the Institute managed to bring as many as 385 people to court.<sup>74</sup>

Interestingly enough, it is precisely the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising which houses a monument dedicated to the memory of the Georgian officers in the Polish Army, inaugurated by the Polish president Lech Kaczyński and Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili in the Freedom Park next to the Museum on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007 (see Image 3). It also hosted a presentation of the album *The Unknown Georgia* in 2011, which was advertised on its website using a wording very similar to the one cited already from the book cover. In 2008, after the outbreak of the Georgian-Russian War, the Museum co-organized a rock concert entitled ‘Solidarity with Georgia’, which featured many famous Polish rock groups and was awarded the honorary patronage of the president of Poland. The event was transmitted live by the Polish National Television Channel 1 (TVP1).



*Image 3. The monument dedicated to the Georgian officers in the Polish Army, inaugurated by Polish president Lech Kaczyński and Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili in the Freedom Park next to the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising on 10<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Photo taken from the Polish discussion board about the Caucasus: <http://www.forum.kaukaz.pl/viewtopic.php?t=627>*

<sup>74</sup>A. Dudek, ‘Political Assessment of the Past in Poland’, in R. Stemplowski, (ed.), *Europe and Latin America: Looking at Each Other?*, Warsaw: Polish Institute of International Affairs, 2010, pp. 314.

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During the concert, performers wore T-shirts with an image of the Georgian flag and the inscription ‘Peace for Georgia’; some of them had sewn-on badges with the image of the Georgian flag. The fortunate coincidence that the Georgian and Polish flags are both composed of only two colours, white and red, makes it possible to perform interesting visual operations with them. For example, they can be combined or merged together in different ways, their images can be superimposed against each other etc. This is what happens, for example, on the cover of *The Unknown Georgia*: the upper part of the cover which occupies more than half of the page shows the Georgian and Polish national flags blown by the wind which, due partly to their colours and partly to the page design seem to smoothly fuse into each other.

This fusing operation is often performed on posters which announce events connected to Georgia (see Image 4). For example, a 2010 poster advertising a ‘Georgian evening’ in Warsaw placed Polish and Georgian flags in one row next to each other. Such visual ordering creates an equivalence between them. According to van Leeuwen and Kress, putting participants together in a syntagm establishes a classification and effectively means that they are judged to be members of the same class and should be read as such.<sup>75</sup> What is more, this poster uses an image of the Tbilisi rally of 2008 which was attended by president Kaczyński and passed down into history as a symbolic event marking the official pronouncement of the Polish-Georgian brotherhood and a strategic partnership. In other words, it uses an event which structures the internal chronology of Polish discourse on Georgia and provides a stock of frames, classifications and subject positions which become available within the discourse.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Kress and van Leeuwen, p. 81.

<sup>76</sup>Cf. Keller, p. 57.



## **"Pozdrowienia z Gruzji"**

**Klubokawiarnia Republikańska i Solidarni 2010  
zapraszają na Wieczór gruziński**

**Cafe Mozaika, niedziela, 20 marca, godz. 19**  
ul. Puławska 53, 02-508 Warszawa



- rozmowy o Gruzji dawnej i współczesnej
- pokaz zdjęć
- wystawa obrazów Davida Pataraiia
- zacieśnianie przyjaźni polsko-gruzińskiej przy winie Marani

RSVP: [kawiarnia.rep@gmail.com](mailto:kawiarnia.rep@gmail.com)

*Image 4. Poster announcing a 'Georgian evening' in Warsaw. Source: <http://warszawa.koliber.org/pozdrowienia-z-gruzji-wieczor-gruzinski/>*

This discourse appropriates already available historical knowledge and structures it according to its own logic. Not only events from the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century are reworked; similar memory games are played with much more recent symbols. This is the case with the Solidarność-logo, the symbol of the Polish anti-Communist opposition (see Image 5). The website entitled 'Citizens' of Cracow solidarity with Georgia' features a re-worked logo which now also incorporates a Georgian flag, whereas the original font and style remain unchanged. The logo is placed next to the announcement of a demonstration entitled 'Czechoslovakia 1968—Georgia 2008'. Again, the classification process uses the similarity of numbers here, as it would otherwise be perfectly possible to convey the same message by using, for example, 'Hungary 1956' instead of 'Czechoslovakia 1968' in this equation.



Szanowni Państwo,

**21. sierpnia (czwartek)** w 40. rocznicę agresji wojsk sowieckich na Czechosłowację Krakowski Klub „Gazety Polskiej” organizuje demonstrację

pod hasłem „Czechosłowacja 1968 – Gruzja 2008”. Demonstrację zaczynamy o **godzinie 19. pod konsulatem Rosji, Plac Biskupi 7.**

*Image 5. Solidarity with Georgia. The logo is a stylization of the original logo of the Polish opposition movement Solidarność in the 1980s. Source: <https://gruzjakrakow.wordpress.com/2008/08/18/krakowski-klub-%E2%80%9Egazety-polskiej%E2%80%9D-organizuje-demonstracje-pod-haslem-%E2%80%9Eczechoslowacja-1968-%E2%80%93-gruzja-2008%E2%80%9D/>*

The monument, concert and book presentation mentioned earlier, all co-organized by and held within the premises of the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising, testify to the institutional means that the Polish discourse on Georgia has at its disposal and which it forms part of. Following Keller, I use Foucault’s notion of *dispositif* to make sense of the institutional infrastructure in which this discourse is embedded: ‘*dispositifs* are the real means for the realization of the external power-effects of a discourse’, that is the changes it introduces or elicits in the situation being addressed.<sup>77</sup> The historical claims made within the discourse are legitimized by the authority of the above mentioned institutions.

It is also within institutions that images are produced and circulated; for the production and circulation of images one needs to possess at least some financial or other material means, which are most easily available in institutions. The national

<sup>77</sup>Keller, p. 56.

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television channel is able to afford enough valuable airtime to transmit a full rock-concert, while local channels transmit smaller events, e.g. the documentary on the demonstration against the Russo-Georgian war in Cracow.

The Polish institutions that guide the ‘correct’ version of history and contribute to the production of the New History of Polish-Georgian relations do it in the name of specific values: fighting for freedom, honour and patriotism, all of which as a rule are not problematized further. They are embodied by Polish and Georgian officers; the Polish national broadcaster TVP.info calls them ‘values which need to be paid for with life’.<sup>78</sup>

### **Conclusion—Knowledge struggles**

The following table, adapted from Keller<sup>79</sup>, summarizes the phenomenal structure of the Georgian-Russian issue within Polish discourse on the Caucasus. The problem of ‘the Georgian-Russian issue’ includes various layers (dimensions) which are realized through statements (discursive events) and declared goals.

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<sup>78</sup>‘Są wartości, za które płaci się życiem. 70 rocznica powstania [relacja minuta po minucie], *TVP.info* [website], 1 August 2014, <http://www.tvp.info/16264033/sa-wartosci-za-ktore-placi-sie-zyciem-70-rocznica-powstania-relacja-minuta-po-minucie>, (accessed 1 July 2016).

<sup>79</sup>Keller, p. 59.

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<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Discursive statements and material goals</i>
<i>1. Problem</i>	Imperialist Russia threatening its neighbours, especially Georgia. Poland and the Baltic countries will be attacked next.
<i>2. Causes</i>	Russia's imperial tradition, barbarity, autocracy; Russia's 'Soviet mentality'; wish to regain power in its near abroad; Russia's irritation at Poland's support for Georgia and Poland's opposition against Russian policies.
<i>3. Solutions and responsibilities</i>	forming a regional alliance of post-Communist and post-Soviet countries to counter Russia's imperialism; rediscovering the forgotten and censored common history of Poland and Georgia; providing development aid to Georgia through projects oriented towards developing democracy and market economy, with Poland in an expert-role ('Europeanization').
<i>4. Knowledge struggles</i>	establishing the correct interpretations of history and institutionalizing them; promoting the newly discovered common Polish and Georgian history; combating the Communist discourse on friendly Polish-Soviet relations.
<i>5. Values</i>	Patriotism; heroic tradition of Polish and Georgian officers; love of freedom: 'for our freedom and yours'.

*Table 1. Phenomenal structure of the 'Georgian-Russian issue'.*

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What I call anti-Russian phenomenal structure refers to the way the ‘Russian issue’ is constructed as a constant problem on the public agenda in Poland. Russia is seen as a constant threat which one has to respond to adequately, an inferior Other ‘imbued with an innate disposition to conduct aggressive behaviours’ against its neighbours.<sup>80</sup> In view of this, it is clear why it is precisely Georgia which is raised discursively to the status of a brotherly nation and strategic partner. Since 2003, Georgia has been framing its own history of belonging first to the Russian Empire, and later to the Soviet Union, in a way which resembles the Polish martyrological narrative.<sup>81</sup> These policies were embodied in the person of the Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, active and visible not only on the regional, but also the international plane. Had Armenia and Azerbaijan adopted similar policies, they might have been subject to analogous treatment within the Polish media and political discourse.

Polish discourse on the Caucasus, specifically Georgia and Russia, produces specific power-effects in the material world. The most visible is the appearance of *dispositifs* that aid the spread of discursive claims and are themselves co-constructed by them. In the case of Poland, such institutions are the Museum of the Warsaw Uprising and the Institute of National Remembrance on the state level, and many associations and NGO’s whose status (state-financed? private? national? international?) sometimes is not easy to establish clearly, as is the case with the Solidarity Fund discussed in this paper.

This discourse established itself heavily in the Polish public sphere. The Georgian-Russian issue is only one component of the memory games and politics which have virtually deleted any trace of Polish-Soviet or Polish-Russian connections other than those that confirm the needs of the Russophobic foreign policy and rhetoric.<sup>82</sup> The geopolitical imaginations employed to legitimate such positions are simple black and white oppositions to each other and do not problematise the actual possibilities and constraints of the geographical location of the country.

Visual images add to the general message of this Russophobic discourse, and legitimate its knowledge claims, e.g. by the common belief in the indexicity and

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<sup>80</sup>T. Zarycki, *Russia’s Identity in International Relations. Images, Perceptions, Misperceptions*, London: Routledge, 2013, p. 133.

<sup>81</sup>N. Batiashvili, ‘The “Myth” of the Self: The Georgian National Narrative and Quest for Georgianness’, in A. Assmann, L. Shortt, (eds.), *Memory and Political Change*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012, pp. 186–200.

<sup>82</sup>Zarycki, p. 133.

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verifiability of photographs as historical documents. The New History of the Polish-Georgian brotherhood is built by long-existing stocks of historical knowledge which are reworked and supplied by a new, Georgian element. The case of writing the Georgians into the mainstream historical narrative of the Polish struggle for independence against Russia can be read as a memory game and confirms the observation that old narratives can be revised and enliven by ‘writing new ethnicities or groups into the drama’.<sup>83</sup>

The power-effects of the discourse encompass a broad set of social fields. Although this paper is concerned with the production of a new type of history, examples found in the materials suggest that the historical and ideological claims were transferred to fields as distant from history as tourism and co-operation in non-governmental projects. Even in the touristic representations of Georgia as a holiday destination there is talk about the Russo-Georgian war and Poland’s significance in supporting Georgia against Russia (e.g., in Tripadvisor discussions). The notion of a special community of the Polish and Georgian national spirits is present in the travelogue books about the Caucasus as well as in numerous Caucasus-related blogs, set up mostly by volunteers sent to Georgia to perform various projects. Interestingly, the authors of all such blogs which I have seen up to now, are based in Georgia, although Polish development aid policy is said to cover the whole of the Caucasus region.<sup>84</sup>

Discursive statements are aided by the production of images aimed at providing an instant reaction in the viewers. Common knowledge has it that ‘a picture is worth a thousand words’, and it seems that in the context of producing historical knowledge, it may really be easier to induce a desired response in the audience using a well-known Solidarność-logo than discussing at length the similarities of the Georgian and Polish geopolitical situations in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

What remains to be investigated are representations of other Caucasus countries and republics within the Russian Federation, notably Chechnya. However, it is important to bear in mind that Georgia is the country which often seems to be

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<sup>83</sup>Lehti, Jutila and Jokisipilä, p. 397.

<sup>84</sup>*Wieloletni Program Współpracy Rozwojowej 2012-2015 [Longstanding Development Aid Programme 2012-2015]*. Available at: <https://www.polskapomoc.gov.pl/Wieloletni,program,wspolpracy,rozwojowej,przyjety,1364.html>, (accessed 19 July 2016).

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equated with the Caucasus region as a whole in Polish media.<sup>85</sup> Popular knowledge of the Caucasus is limited to knowledge about Georgia. Georgia is the only country which has made it into the mainstream Polish historical narrative, and which has become an object of memory games played out by various actors involved in Polish public discourse. Armenia and Azerbaijan are much less present, both in popular discourse and in official political statements. Based on the materials gathered so far, my intuition is that the absences of Armenia and Azerbaijan are caused by those states' foreign policies which are much less (if at all) hostile toward Russia and therefore cannot be easily incorporated into the anti-Russian phenomenal structure characteristic of the discourse in question.

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<sup>85</sup>E.g. 'Georgia, in other words the Caucasus', a book review published by *New Eastern Europe*, vol. 1, 2009, a Polish bi-monthly specializing in Eastern European issues.

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Image 1. ‘Rosyjski niedźwiedź pręży muskuły’, *Wirtualna Polska* [website], 6 March 2008, <http://wiadomosci.wp.pl/kat,40354,title,Rosyjski-niedzwiedz-prezy-muskuly,wid,9728844,wiadomosc.html?ticaid=118165>, (accessed 10 July 2016).

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