

# THE ROLE OF THE VOLHYNIAN MASSACRES IN THE BUILDING OF NARRATIVES ABOUT UKRAINIANS ON THE POLISH INTERNET

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## Abstract

This work is an analysis of historical motives – with special consideration for the problematic nature of the Volhynian Massacres – in the discourse regarding Ukrainians and Ukrainian immigrants in Polish social media. It was realized using CAQDAS tools on the basis of the materials collected in autumn 2016.

Keywords: *Ukraine, Ukrainians, history, Volhynia, discourse, critical discourse analysis, internet*

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## Introduction

“Ukraine’s relationship with Poland is difficult and contradictory. For 500 years they shared a common history, first under the Polish kings, then under the Russian tsars. But like rival siblings they define themselves more by their differences than they similarities – Poland glamorous and self-dramatising; Ukraine inarticulate and put-upon. Ukraine resents Poland for hogging the limelight; Poland resents Ukraine for stealing its lines. Ukrainians, like the Irish, rebelled against their Polish landlords at every opportunity; Poles, like the English, responded with a curious mixture of affection, scorn and fear” – this is how Anna Reid describes the Polish-Ukrainian relationship in her book *Borderline* (Reid 1997, p. 25) This picture, although full of inaccuracies and depicted in a journalistic, slightly provocative manner, is immensely inspiring, because it shows the importance of historical context in Polish-Ukrainian relations.

In light of the current social-political and economic situation in Ukraine, it should be taken into account that the already considerable number of immigrants from this country in Poland is likely to continue growing even larger. Statistics measuring migrations can be strongly underestimated. But even the official data regarding the increment in number of workers in Poland and the quota of Ukrainians in this number show a huge quantitative change since the year 2014. This turning point in time was not coincidental. It is the aftermath of the Revolution of Dignity, that took place in Ukraine from November 2013 until February 2014 (Shveda, Ho Park 2016).

According to the data of the Polish Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, 103,200 Ukrainians were granted work permits in 2016 (annual increase of 115,0%), and this number made up 81% of all work permits granted that year (the previous year it was 73%). Declarations of inten-

tion to entrust work to Ukrainians were submitted 1,3 million times (increase of 65,5%) and this number made up 96% of all submissions, which is a quota analogical to the year 2015 (Department of Statistics, National Bank of Poland 2018).

Observing the attitude of Polish people towards the incomers from the East is important, especially in regard to a certain leniency displayed by a considerable part of the Polish political class for increasingly radical nationalistic and xenophobic sentiment in the country.

The object of this article is to analyze the motif of the Volhynian Massacres in the discourse about Ukrainians on the Polish internet and their significance in building an image of the modern Ukrainian (including Ukrainian immigrants in Poland). Historical strands, especially the topic of the Volhynian Massacres of the 1940's, proved to be the most crucial and emotionally provocative element in the discourse about Ukrainians in Polish social media, analysis of which was undertaken by Marek Troszyński (2018).

The groundwork for the analysis were materials from Polish social media, collected using the commercial platform sentione.com during the initial stage of the project *Ukraine and Ukrainians In Polish Internet Discourse. Qualitative-quantitative Analysis Of Texts Published In Social Media*, realized as part of Collegium Civitas research projects by Marek Troszyński with a grant from the Stefan Batory Foundation.

The analyzed source material initially consisted of about 23,000 logs imported from the internet and randomly chosen for this purpose from about 100,000 logs of this type, that appeared on social media in September 2016. Out of all these logs almost 10,000 were chosen and assigned special codes, which were helpful for analysis. The code sheet consisted of three parts. The first one contained codes which served to define the sentiment behind the statement. According to the hypothesis, every statement was going to have a certain level (or lack thereof) of

negativity, or positivity, although only 2,760 of the 9,906 logs had a defined sentiment. Moreover, significant differences in understanding of levels of negativity were observed – 1 and 2<sup>1</sup>. The second part contained codes indicating subject areas. The third part contained the code “other” – “additional categories were treated as binary variables (does contain/does not contain), that made it possible to code additional information about the specific parts of the statement” (Troszyński 2018, p. 113)<sup>2</sup>.

The significance of the Volhynian Massacres in Polish-Ukrainian history

Participants in the discussion of relations between the two nations, especially regarding the historical context of these relations, would be expected to have good knowledge of their history. The volume of knowledge that would have to be learned for this purpose is rather intimidating<sup>3</sup>. However, especially after the film *Volhynia* by Wojciech Smarzowski<sup>4</sup> entered the theaters, the historical image of the Ukrainian nation and Polish-Ukrainian relations became subject of fervent discussions on the Polish internet.

Although the internet users discussing subjects they don't know much about is not a new phenomenon, the range of this discussion, as well as its language and possibility to become an element of wider discourse about the Ukrainians, is from a sociological point of view, interesting and important.

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<sup>1</sup> The analyzed materials were collected in the initial stage of the research project, hence certain inadequacies in using the tool.

<sup>2</sup> Detailed explanation of the code key, the process of coding and quantitative as well as qualitative analysis of the whole body of the logs can be found in: Troszyński 2018.

<sup>3</sup> Especially regarding the multitude of historians' opinions regarding almost every era in Ukrainian history and proto-Ukrainian state organisms.

<sup>4</sup> The movie by Wojciech Smarzowski is a war drama awarded in many international festivals, about the Volhynian Massacres of 1943. The plot is based on short stories by Stanisław Srokowski and the memories of witnesses. In the autumn of 2016 about 1,5 million people watched it in the theatres.

The Volhynian Massacres of 1943 were actions planned and conducted by an emerging Ukrainian nationalist movement (the leaders of OUN-B, but also UPA members), assisted by Ukrainian peasants, targeted towards Polish civilians living in the Volhyn area. They were particularly bloody and brutal ethnic cleansings which, according to Grzegorz Motyka (2011, pp. 852-853), resulted in about 100,000 victims. Although the Ukrainian government has never officially admitted this, these events are commonly regarded as a crime of genocide<sup>5</sup>.

Although today nobody doubts the reality of the events of 1943, the opinions regarding their reasons, character and source of inspiration are strongly divided. Two radical approaches dominate the discourse: The first idea is that this crime was a display of the murderous nature of the Ukrainian nation, which in the right circumstances carried out its downright demonic desire to kill (Motyka 2016, p. 9). The narration on the opposite end, however, depicts these same events as a righteous rebellion of the Ukrainian peasants, in reaction to oppression and terribly bad treatment, in which their Polish neighbors were held responsible for repressions of the 2nd Republic of Poland and previous displays of Polish domination (*Ibidem*, p. 37). “In a story told this way, it is the Polish victims who should explain themselves for what happened. Merciless conduct of the »Polish lords« resulted in an »asymmetric« social reaction. The perpetrators didn’t actually have a choice, other than opposing the »catholic dehumanization« with force and cruelty. Although the Polish guilt is individual, the perpetrators are just a tiny wheel in an alleged historic necessity machine, only a mindless water drop in a powerful social tsunami, therefore their actions in fact remain beyond the scope of good and the evil”, comments Grzegorz Motyka (*Ibidem*, p. 17).

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<sup>5</sup> On the of 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2016 the Polish Parliament – regarding the 73<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Volhynian Massacres – passed the resolution, which for the first time called these events a crime of genocide – Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland from 22<sup>nd</sup> July 2016 in respect to pay tribute to the victims of the genocide committed by the Ukrainian nationalists on the citizens of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Republic of Poland during the years 1943-1945. In previous years it was called, at the most, “an ethnic cleansing with marks of a genocide” – Resolution of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland from 12<sup>th</sup> July 2013 in respect to commemorate the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Volhynian Crimes and pay tribute to its victims.

However, the author of *Volhyn '43* is not in agreement with the first point of view, with its claims about the criminal nature of the Ukrainians or demonic character of this crime. On the contrary – he claims that the two mentioned approaches are, contrary to appearances, very similar, because “in both narrations the perpetrators of the mass murder are common peasants, who allegedly, and quite spontaneously, grabbed axes against their Polish neighbors” (*Ibidem*, p. 18). Motyka, in his works, analyzes abundant historical sources proving that this is not the true picture – the Volhynian Massacres were planned actions of the leaders of nationalist movements. Their astonishing brutality, as well as their alleged spontaneity were intentional: “mass murders of Polish people were conducted so brutally, because the perpetrators of this organized crime planned them to be like that, rightfully assuming that nothing would better mask the character of their actions than »dressing them as« a peasant rebellion” (*Ibidem*, p. 19).

Critical discourse analysis – main principles  
and theoretical-methodological status

Due to the popularity that the term “discourse” has gained in recent years, it is a crucial task for my research work to adopt one of the many very different definitions of the word. “Discourse” used to be used in regard to speech (spoken statement). It was sourced from classic linguistic theories, that called written statements “text”, and regarding spoken language used names such as “statement”, “discourse” or “talk”. Although, as Barbara Jabłońska claims, referencing Anna Duszak, “The modern approach in researching discourse includes speech and text equally as constituent elements of analysis” (Jabłońska 2006, p. 55).

Assuming that the area of interest of my research is going to include statements formulated in so-called “written spoken language” (Herma 2015), I decided to adopt a definition of discourse that would be open

enough to consider this type of statement appropriate for the research, and at the same time precise enough to be a solid starting point for theoretical speculations about what a discourse analysis should be.

I consider that the most convincing understanding of a discourse is the one adopted by Teun van Dijk (1997, pp. 2-3), who believes that in researching discourse, as much attention should be paid to spoken language (speech), as to written language (text). Van Dijk emphasizes that in both forms of language we can find similar means which the sender uses to try and influence the recipient. He believes that activity of both sides of the communication process is important. Regardless of whether the communication is direct or indirect, and if it proceeds with the use of written language, all parties put some effort into sending and reading the message: "Therefore we can talk about written communication, even though its participants don't communicate face to face, and readers take part in the interaction more passively. Aside from an exchange of correspondence or a media debate, they rarely have an opportunity to reply to the authors. However, it doesn't mean that by reading and understanding texts, they are less active than participants of spoken communication" (*Ibidem*, pp. 2-3).

Inspired by Van Dijk's concept, I consider discourse to include a spoken statement or text existing in a certain cultural, political, social and economic context. It is created by texts or statements that have a form and an outline, behind which meanings are hidden, and their decoding leads to discovering ideas shared by participants of the discourse (Malewska-Szałygin 2004: 83). The important thing is that discourse is a process, and therefore has a dynamic character (Dijk 1997, p. 28). From a sociological point of view, the interaction between discourse and a society is also significant (Krzyżanowska 2013, p. 66), because, according to Norman Fairclough and Ruth Wodak, "discourse reproduces society and culture, while being reproduced by them" (*Ibidem*).

In my analysis, I decided to take on a critical perspective (Jabłońska 2006, p. 56), in accordance with my perception of the social role of a scientist. The fundamental difference between sociological analysis and critical studies is that in the former we observe only a descriptive-explaining level; while the latter is extended to the normative level (Grzymała-Kazłowska 2004, p. 31). Therefore, taking on a critical approach, I assume that one of the objectives of my work is an attempt to influence the reality. The end goal is not to simply identify problems, but to find ways to solve them as well.

#### Rhetoric of exclusion in theory of discourse

Publishing posts or comments dedicated to Ukrainian immigrants or the Ukrainians in general, their history, national identity etc. is undoubtedly a display of public, or even political activity of the internet users and fits into the identity discourse. Importantly: “[d]iscourse and political rhetoric always require contradistinction »us vs. them«, which enables the creation of a positive image of the tellers/writers, as well as negative description of the opposition as »strangers«” (Wodak 2008, p. 186). Dichotomic division of the world into an “us” (implicitly – good) and “them” (implicitly – bad) duality allows the recipient/sender to strongly identify with one of the groups, and at the same time to blame the other for failures or injustices of their own group. Such opposition of two groups and the use of rhetorical tools in order to emphasize it are displays of a persuasive discourse (*Ibidem*).

Depending on what the aforementioned message is concerned with and in what context it exists, it requires the use of different tools. Statements dedicated to difficult historical relations between nations can serve to blame one of the sides (in this case, the Ukrainians), and at the same time to filter their image through the lens of their past crimes. The



false impression of anonymity provided by the internet makes comments published there more likely to contain rhetoric of difference and exclusion (Wodak 2008, p. 187). Moreover, according to Ruth Wodak, we should consider the “discursive establishment of the category »us« as the most significant operation in the area of the discourse of identity and difference, as the most striking characteristic of political discourse” (*Ibidem*, p. 196).

#### Ukrainians in the eyes of Polish internet users

Among almost 10,000 quotes, extracted from the whole body of texts by coders, the subject category “history” was one of the three most commonly indicated (1,117 quotes marked with it), after “politics” (1,531) and “society” (1,426). The code “Volhynia” was marked 334 times, although it was interpreted in different ways by the coders, so the *de facto* this number doesn’t indicate statements dedicated to the aforementioned movie by Wojciech Smarzowski, nor the ones dedicated to the Volhynian Massacres in general (these statements were significantly more numerous, but didn’t always contain the phrase “the Volhynian Massacres” or even “Volhynia”).

Marked with the code “politics”, were statements dedicated to current political situation in Poland, political and economic international relations and domestic situation in Ukraine and its relations with Russia. The code “society” was most often assigned to posts regarding economic immigrants in Poland (their position and attitude toward the Polish people, quality of their work, and the ways their presence influences everyday life in Poland), as well as the living standard in Ukraine. Obviously, these sentences frequently contained many subjects.

Although the “history” category was not the largest, it contained the most emotional statements, which were very often negative in tone. The problem mentioned in the introduction, regarding the coders not being

able to mark the sentiment in the test stage of the research, doesn't allow for a thorough quantitative analysis of the sentiment of statements in each category. However, I believe that this image is well reflected by the data collected in the consequent stages of the research. According to the report by Marek Troszyński, among the statements from the period between December 2016 and November 2017, the percentage of negative statements in the "politics" category was 32,7%, in the "society" category – 39%, and in the "history" category – 48,1% (Troszyński 2018, p. 110). Therefore, we can see even on the quantitative level that subjects regarding the past bring in the most negative emotions. However, only the qualitative analysis can fully explain the character of the problem.

The spectrum of topics occurring in statements dedicated to historical issues is comparatively narrow. Essentially, the internet users addressed three basic topics:

- the sources of Ukrainian statehood and the roots of the Ukrainian nation;
- collaboration with Nazi Germany during the World War II;
- the Volhynian Massacres.

The historical motif which significantly appears the most often in the internet users' statements are the Volhynian Massacres, and the related subjects of Stepan Bandera, the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and Ukrainian nationalism. Posts related to this subject have an especially strong emotional character. The tone of discourse present in the Polish internet is perfectly reflected by the lyrics of an amateur hip-hop song titled *Hostile blood*, that appears in fragments or as a whole in many of the analyzed materials. The mentioned text criticizes the social actions and political declarations referencing the brotherhood of Polish and Ukrainian nations that have had a significant impact on the discourse about Polish-Ukrainian relations since the outburst of the Revolution of Dignity (Euromaidan) in November 2013. According to the author, it is

“propaganda”<sup>6</sup> that confounds the historical truth. He presents the Ukrainians in the context of the Volhynian Massacres as people with a predisposition to crimes “that even an animal wouldn’t do”: “They raped, killed women, and impaled little children on fucking fence rails”. He refers to Euromaidan as “neo-Banderite”, and accuses the Polish politicians present there of “robbing the viciously murdered Poles of dignity”. This statement not only blames contemporary Ukrainians for the acts committed by their ancestors in 1943, but also positions them as enemies, and even dehumanizes them.

The statement above, as well as a large number of posts in the same subject, are characterized by a radically negative sentiment apparent in both the content and form of the statement (using curses and offensive denotations and comparisons – “damn scumbags”, “even an animal doesn’t do that”), and also in calls for action (“Imagine this, sister, brother, before you sympathize with Ukrainians!”, “Stop supporting”). Insults, dehumanization and humiliating zoomorphizing serve to depict the “otherness” of Ukrainians. They are being pictured as significantly different from the Polish in their particular inclination towards violence. Such explicit indication of an “other” and an urge to distinct oneself from them are indicative of a discourse of exclusion based on the opposition “us vs. them” (Witosz 2010, p. 16).

Also significant are the visceral pictures of cruel torture described in the aforementioned and similar statements, such as repeated in the chorus: “Woman raped in front of her father”, “Dying children impaled on fences”, “Dead man with bayonets in his eyes”, “Slaughtered mother with her guts on the outside”. They emphasize the degree of cruelty and serve to raise outrage, dissent and active protest. Worth observation and more thorough analysis are suggestions, appearing on the Polish internet, that “we will avenge our ancestors” and “we will reclaim lost

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<sup>6</sup> The quotes from the internet were translated from Polish to represent as closely as possible the original character and tone of the statements, as well as their orthography and spelling.

lands” (“Where the statues stand without heads, there had always been Poland and Poland will be again!”). They are characterized by openly calling for aggression towards Poland’s Eastern neighbors, who – apart from being called numerous offensive epithets – are described as “enemies”.

Klaus Bachmann, discussing similar discursive practices in the context of the refugee crisis in Poland and Europe, proves that shock tactics with alleged inborn tendency for aggression and savagery of the others are a display of xenophobic discourse (Sydow 2016). Their foundation is built on fear of the unknown, trepidation for national sovereignty, cultural purity and economic safety. These types of narrations are not only characterized by derogative statements about the Ukrainians, but also include warnings against internal danger in the form of the Polish people who are presented as stupid, under-educated, manipulated and sometimes even as traitors, because of their friendly attitude towards our Eastern neighbors. Such shock tactics which suggest that danger awaits around every corner, serve to greatly amplify the strength of the message.

The Ukrainian people, due to their alleged “otherness”, are presented as a danger that needs to be avoided or even eliminated. It is apparent in frequently appearing calls for action displayed in protest slogans against Ukrainian immigration:

Don't let the banderites in!  
We, Poles, don't want YOU here!  
get out of Poland russian-ukrainian scum

Another discriminative fact is that the entire modern Ukrainian society is being burdened with the responsibility for the crimes of 1943. The justification for this rhetoric is that the particular cruelty of these crimes indicates an inherent savagery and some kind of murderous or thuggish

nature as a national trait. Furthermore, those who adhere to this line of thinking are motivated by a feeling of nationalistic responsibility to remember the nameless victims of the Volhynia.

Comments regarding the lack of an official apology and admittance of guilt by the Ukrainian authorities are very frequent in this context:

The Ukrainians had 25 years to settle up for the Volhynian Massacres! Why didn't they do that? They're cowards! Now they're hiding behind the "war" with Russia... Nothing has changed! A coward and genocidal murderer will never take responsibility for their acts! NO TO UKRAINE!!!

"Poland apologized for "Operation Vistula" almost immediately after 1989. Ukraine doesn't have to apologize for the 1000x more brutal event of Volhynia, because "it's young"

The lack of a firm, unambiguous statement and apology from the Ukrainian authorities, the allegation that the Ukrainian education policy does not involve teaching about the Volhynian events and the reviving of the cult of Bandera, are for many Polish internet users proof that the modern Ukrainians can be burdened with responsibility for the events of 1943, because since that time nothing has really changed. It is also a reason for using the words "Ukrainian", "UPAinian" and "Bandерite" interchangeably. On account of historical events, the modern Ukrainians are refused the right to statehood:

I will add that the state that builds its national awareness on a sea of vicious bloodshed, cannot expect even a favorable attitude towards itself

Suggestions are also appearing regarding possible "restoration of the just order", that is *de facto* an armed intervention in Ukraine and opin-

ions that Poland cannot invade Ukraine or in some other way take control over its territory, but only because that would endanger Poland's domestic security due to the cultural inferiority of the citizens of Ukraine:

Banderites, I know Polish people who after the war stayed in Polish Lviv and told me that when the Banderites came to Polish homes, they couldn't be taught to not drink water from a lavatory

they cannot be Polish protectorate due to their personalities being infected with the soviet mentality. Soviet occupation since 1939 turned Ukrainians into thieves, embezzlers, deadbeats and demanding cosmopolitans – that is people who don't care about their fatherland (...) For Poland it would be a complete chaos that could cause a civil war

Evaluation of the stereotype of a Ukrainian perpetuated in this kind of statements is explicit and strong enough that it brings up questions about the reasons for such a state of affairs. Its sources need to be searched – in my opinion – in the revival of nationalistic movements in Europe. Even if we assume that Poland was not affected directly by the world financial crisis of 2008, there is a noticeable growth, caused by the crisis, of support for radical right-wing ideologies, calling for a return to so-called traditional values and restoration of strong nation states.

“Painful experiences, injustices suffered from a dominating group or neighbors cement a nation”, argues Małgorzata Budyta-Budzyńska (2013, p. 84). Therefore, referring to the experiences of 1943 can be an attempt to build a modern version of national tradition, in which the main enemy of the Polish people would be the Ukrainians themselves. “To tradition belongs that part of the cultural heritage of a group that

has a special significance for it and an exceptional value in a given moment. (...) There are many historical examples showing how a change of a value system, ideology, allies and political situation reevaluated the tradition” (*Ibidem*, p. 103). It’s conceivable that this is currently taking place, after all a creation of a conflict, even a non-genuine one, serves to build the identity of one’s own group, consolidation of its unity through an extortion of engagements of its members and emerging of leaders (Coser 2001). Presence in Poland of immigrants from Ukraine facilitates making them “the enemies of the Polish nation”.

The author of the hip-hop song lyrics quoted above attempts to adopt the role of a teacher and mentor who, in the situation of a growing social support for our neighbors as they face a difficult domestic situation, warns his compatriots against uniting with the Ukrainian people due to the memory of the Volhynian Massacres. This memory should, in his opinion, build Polish unity and reluctance to the Ukrainians (“We, the Polish people, carry in our hearts scars of the Volhynian history”). Such didactic tone appears in many statements.

and if you want to refer to the history then you should educate yourself  
whether the Ukrainians can have thousand year old problems when  
Ukraine was created in the 1920s???

Good knowledge of history is presented as a responsibility of not only a patriot, but “every thinking” person. It is supposed to protect the Poles from future dangers, especially in a situation of falsifying the historical truth, which – according to the internet users whose comments I analyzed – is taking place in Ukrainian schools. Historical knowledge is also supposed to build national awareness and be a weapon in the internet discussions:

to the thinking people: don’t give in to the Ukrainian/Banderite trolls

An important trait of the statements posted in social media is also an apparent unambiguousness of historical evaluation. According to the Polish internet users, the reason for the Volhynian Massacres was the inborn Ukrainian predisposition for crime and cruelty (“They didn’t kill just like that, they enjoyed it”). Although the names of nationalistic organizations, like OUN or UPA appear, they fuse with the whole picture of society. It is assumed that they were created as a result of the radicalization of views and demeanor of all Ukrainians, rather than (what is closer to the historical truth) the fact that they conducted political operations in order to bring out a national identity built entirely upon reluctance or hatred towards the Poles.

A concomitance of an enemy figure, along with promulgating one’s own version of history and attempting to “bring it to people’s homes”, are characteristic for the nationalistic discourse (Wrzosek 2015, p. 352). A feeling of danger serves to build national unity, and teaching one’s own version of history, in its nationalistic interpretation, is a tool in a kind of work at the grassroots, laying the foundation for development of radical right-wing movements.

Attention should also be paid to the language of the posts, which is characterized by a very high level of vulgarity (“Banderite scum”, “whorejews”, “And a campaign against the Polish Patriots, no matter what, is a real MOTHERF...ING SH\*T”), and also contempt and open aggression towards the Eastern neighbors of Poland:

you are a fake nation forever raped by Russia (...) even African countries have a longer history, both Cossacks and the current Banderites were fucked in a fake country that should never exist that is Ukraine, a country of murderers, rapists (...) and by the way I hope that Russia will rape you pretty like before :)



We can see here an attempt to build a historical narration with the use of expert discourse, because the author considers themselves to be a person who knows history, unlike their opponent, whose statement they are referring to. Leaving aside the fact that it is a collection of not even simplifications, but historical falsities, we can observe here not only anti-Ukrainian, but also xenophobic discourse – the author suggests that it is a shame to have a history shorter even than the African countries', which implies a certain contempt for those as well.

Despite the characteristics of the language of the internet users, who very often have a rather casual approach towards the rules of proper orthography and spelling, even on this level we can observe operations that are intended to be insulting for the Ukrainians. For example, writing the name of their country and nationality with a small letter. Very often we can find in one sentence "Poland and Ukraine", or "the Polish and the ukrainian person". Very often a small letter is used in writing names of famous Ukrainians or names of the participants of internet discussions, who revealed that they were Ukrainians:

One more thing, learn the beautiful Polish language because you have serious problems with it, mykola.

This operation is meant to be humiliating towards the Ukrainians, and in the same time suggest the superiority of Poland and the Poles. A similar function to using dehumanizing terms like "savagery", "scumbags", "animals", "beasts" etc.

Undoubtedly, an important impulse for discussions about the historical topics in Polish-Ukrainian relations was the premiere of the film *Volhynia* by Wojciech Smarzowski. Although the internet users mention that it is fortunate that the movie was created and that somebody finally took on this subject, it is difficult to find comments directly referencing scenes from the movie. Therefore, we can get an impression

that not many of the participants of the internet discussions have actually seen the film. I suppose that some of the pictures of torture or methods of killing that are described in the internet posts actually come from the movie itself or the media coverage of the premiere, but there is a lack of statements that would suggest that the film *Volhynia* has enriched the author's knowledge. Instead, there is simply the general statement said that it's good that the movie was created, because (some other) Poles and Ukrainians, unaware of their history, will finally learn the truth.

Usually, the participants of a debate, when bringing up fragments of their knowledge, and sometimes even statistical data, don't refer to any sources. When the sources are indicated, they happen to be links to articles from the website of a right-wing TV Republic, portals of nationalistic character or YouTube videos. Some refer to stories heard from their grandmothers, uncles or neighbors, and sometimes simply posts they read during previous internet debates. Interestingly, the novels by Henryk Sienkiewicz are often indicated to be a source of knowledge about the history of Ukraine and the Ukrainian mentality<sup>7</sup>.

It needs to be noted though, that the opponents of the people sharing the views mentioned above are also calling for an enrichment and activation of historical knowledge:

I only see here a general lack of historical knowledge and weak examples. We are not saints in case of Ukraine either, say operation Vistula.

Let's remember that it was our gentry who impaled.

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<sup>7</sup> Henryk Sienkiewicz – Polish journalist, writer and novelist, who in 1905 was awarded the Nobel Prize in literature for lifetime achievements. At the time when Poland didn't exist on world maps, during occupation, Sienkiewicz wrote historical novels glorifying the heroism of Polish people in previous ages, in order to sustain in his compatriots the love and respect for their fatherland.

Statements like these need to be noticed, even though they are significantly less numerous and are usually confronted with a harsh criticism and accusations of a bias or a lack of proper knowledge. There is also a presence of voices defending Ukrainians and an attempt to appeal to the conscience of especially aggressive participants:

We are the same! But we forget about it as usual.

But they are – especially in topics regarding history – relatively spare.

### Discussion

The internet is a distinctive medium. Due to a false feeling of anonymity, users find it very easy to express radical opinions which they would never say out loud offline. It needs to be taken into consideration that this kind of statements, especially if they're present in large numbers, can find susceptible ground. Even if the nationalistic movements don't grow strong enough to endanger the social order, the level of aggression presented on the internet can motivate groups or individuals into "defending" their fatherland from the "strangers", using violence against the Ukrainian immigrants or people supporting their migration to Poland. An example of a possible result of such hostility towards individuals of certain groups, was the terrorist attack committed in 2011 in Norway by Anders Breivik.

In Poland, we too have encountered displays of aggression towards immigrants from Ukraine – a list of such crimes and offenses in the whole country, a depiction of a particularly difficult situation in the cross-border town of Przemyśl and information regarding a planned profanation and destruction of graves and memorials of the Ukrainian minority in Poland are described in *Rapport. The Ukrainian Minority*

*and the Immigrants from Ukraine in Poland. A discourse analysis. A joint publication* (2018, pp. 30-80).

In narration about Ukrainians on the Polish internet we can observe a dangerous meeting of xenophobic, nationalistic and expert discursive tools. The citizens of Ukraine have become the new enemy, which is essential for increasing the strength of nationalistic movements. Moreover, it is an enemy much more convenient than the feminists or leftist groups, “used for this purpose” in recent decades (Wrzosek 2015, p. 5). The attractiveness of the Ukrainians as the new enemies of the Polish nation is rooted in the potential that comes from the difficult and undiscussed Polish-Ukrainian history. The events from 75 years ago serve the Polish nationalists as a validation for presenting the modern Ukrainians as a direct threat. Symbolic violence showed in the language of narration about the Ukrainians is one of the tools that the nationalistic groups reach for in attempt to gain real power.

Apparent is the interest of the internet users in historical knowledge, and at the same time – a lack of skill to gain and critically approach said knowledge. This situation is on one hand a danger, because it allows people whose intention is to build their own political strength on the fear of others, to play the role of experts. On the other hand, it creates a strong potential for promoting fact-based knowledge. However, it requires the engagement of institutions that would be interested in changing the current situation, and at the same time ready to act in the grounds of the new media – educators, who understand the specifics of interactive tools and the internet language. Discourse and society mutually affect each other, thus action directed towards participants will have a strong influence and will cause further changes, serving to lower the level of aggression and to soften the “us vs. them” division.

Undoubtedly, it will not be an easy task, due to the durability of stereotypes; according to Budyta-Budzyńska, “often enough it is hard to change a stereotype, because it’s hard to distinguish the real experience

of a group from the symbolic interpretation. Events are overgrown with such myths and legends that it is difficult to investigate how it really was, what really happened, and what was later added or retouched – what is a description, and what is a product of imagination and group resentments. Essentially, stereotypes are rooted in tradition, oral history and literary works, which is why they are difficult to modify with the proof of academic knowledge” (Budyta-Budzyńska 2009, p. 118).

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