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THE 'MEMORIAL CONFLICT' ON POLISH-RUSSIAN BORDERLAND: WARMIA¹

„WOJNA POMNIKOWA” NA POLSKO-ROSYJSKIM POGRANICZU: WARMIA

ABSTRACT: The article discusses the 'memorial conflict' occurring in Warmia (Poland) near the Russian Federation border. The evidence presented in the article is the result of fieldwork from 2018-2022. Based on the research, the following observations were made regarding anthropological aggression: (1) inhabitants consider the destruction of the local symbolic culture as an act of violence; (2) the lack of associations between national and regional cultures exacerbates differences and social stratification; (3) the policies of the national administration contest with the local.

KEYWORDS: Operational Area 6: Culture², Anthropological Aggression, Hybrid operations, Hybrid strikes, Memorial Conflict, Memory conflicts, Polish-Russian Borderland, Warmia

ABSTRAKT: Artykuł omawia „konflikt pamięci” występujący na Warmii (Polska) na pograniczu polsko-rosyjskim. Materiał analityczny przedstawiony w artykule jest wynikiem badań terenowych przeprowadzonych w latach 2018-2022. Na podstawie badań postawiono następujące hipotezy odnośnie do agresji antropologicznej: (1) postrzeganie niszczenie lokalnej kultury symbolicznej jako akt przemocy; (2) brak powiązań między kulturą

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¹ Significant passages from the article were published and discussed on portal Qeios. R. Boroch, *Semiosphere and Anthropological Aggression on the Example of the 'Memorial Conflict' — Polish-Russian borderland: Warmia*. Qeios. doi:10.32388/LF2FMP.

² **Operational Area 6: Culture** is a term proposed by A. Korzeniowska Bihun in December 2023. It is related to the NATO Multi-Domain Operations nomenclature. Later, in 2023, R. Boroch defined operational Area 6: Culture as follows: It refers to military or military-like operations conducted in a social environment. These operations may include, for example, hybrid strikes, such as the crisis on the Polish-Belarusian border in 2021, or hybrid operations, such as separatist activities in Ukraine organised by the Russian Federation aimed at annexing Ukrainian lands. See *Multi-Domain Operations in NATO — Explained*, 2023. <https://www.act.nato.int/article/mdo-in-nato-explained/>; R. Boroch, A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Ukrainian Theater in Exile. A Case Study: Poland*. In print 2024.

narodową i regionalną pogłębia rozwarstwienie społeczne; (3) polityka administracji państwowej stoi w sprzeczności z historią, tradycją, zwyczajami, tj. szeroko rozumianą kulturą lokalną.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Obszar operacyjny 6: Kultura, agresja antropologiczna, operacje hybrydowe, uderzenia hybrydowe, wojna pomnikowa, konflikt pamięci, pogranicze polsko-rosyjskie, Warmia

INTRODUCTION

The 'Memorial Conflict' in Warmia drops light on anthropological aggression in the Polish-Russian borderland.³ Anthropological aggression refers to the aggressive assertion of cultural identity, historical narratives, and remembrance practices by different groups or societies. Notably, Germany, Poland, Russia, and Lithuania were the prominent historical players in Warmia. Nevertheless, the article will focus on the influence of the Russian Federation in this area in the context of a broader hybrid operation known as the 'Monumental War'.

1. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF WARMIA

1.1. Drawing the History

In the period from 1466 to 1772, Warmia was a part of Poland as the Duchy of Warmia – which arose from the dominion of Warmia – with its capital in Lidzbark Warmiński (Ger. Heilsberg).⁴ Following the partition in 1772, the Duchy of Warmia ceased to exist, and its area became a part of the Kingdom of Prussia until the end of the First World War.⁵ As a result of

³ R. Boroch, *Agresja-wojna antropologiczna a nauki o kulturze – wielkie tematy kulturoznawstwa na marginesie krytycznej analizy dyskursu*. 'Kultura Bezpieczeństwa. Nauka-Praktyka-Refleksje,' 2016 Vol. 22, 81-94. Essential terms: '(1) Anthropological aggression and (2) Anthropological defence. The forms of anthropological aggression include informational, ideological, and symbolic conflict. As a result of anthropological aggression, every action taken aims to control the information space and replace existing narratives with ideological ones. In this regard, some protective actions are theoretically taken to consolidate (or spread) the 'existing narration'. Consequently, it is reasonable to assume that the forms of opposing anthropological aggression are protective actions which are ethically justifiable from the perspective of the victim. The term anthropological defence refers to this process. It was Robert Boroch who introduced these terms into the research. In this regard, he works in the field of anthropological aggression. In turn, Anna Korzeniowska-Bihun carries out research on anthropological defence'. See R. Boroch, *Granice agresji i obrony antropologicznej w przestrzeni kultury materialnej Warmii*, In: *Wyzwania bezpieczeństwa międzynarodowego w XXI wieku. Bezpieczeństwo społeczno-kulturowe*. Ed. Gębska M., Majdan P. Akademia Sztuki Wojennej, Warszawa 2018, Vol. 2, p.171-182; R. Boroch, *Poster: Obrona antropologiczna oczami semiotyki*. [Eng. A semiotic perspective on anthropological defence]. IV Seminarium 'Nowej Polityki Wschodniej': Bezpieczeństwo w przestrzeni postradzieckiej, Toruń 2017. <https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/18520/Obrona%20antropologiczna.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y> (2.01.2024); A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, 'Cultural Projects as a Tool of Anthropological Defense. Ukrainian Example'. *Wiedza Obronna* 2021, Vol. 274 NO 1, 35-47.

⁴ *Dominion of Warmia*. In: *Encyklopedia Warmii i Mazur*. http://encyklopedia.warmia.mazury.pl/index.php/Dominium_warmi%C5%84skie (accessed: 15.11.2023).

⁵ *Kingdom of Prussia* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_Prussia (accessed: 15.12.2023).

the declaration of the Weimar Republic (Ger. Deutsches Reich) by the all-German National Assembly on February 6, 1919, Prussia and, with it, Warmia, became a federal state till 1933 to the seizure of power by Nazis – in place of the Weimar Republic, the German Third Reich was established on 15 March 1933.⁶

On November 11th, 1918, Polish independence and statehood were restored. However, a territorial dispute with Germany resulted in the holding of a referendum regarding Warmia, Masuria, Powiśle and Upper Silesia. The referendum was conducted in Warmia, Masuria and Powiśle on 11 July 1920. As a result of this, Warmia was incorporated into the Third Reich.⁷

The Soviet Union captured the Ostpreußen region (Eng. East Prussia) due to the East Prussian offensive – the primary fight of the East Prussian offensive was the Battle of Königsberg, fought between January and April 9, 1945 — the Polish armed forces did not participate in the conquest of East Prussia. After WWII, Ostpreußen was divided between the Soviet Union and Poland, and Warmia became a part of the Polish state.

1.2. Geographical factors

Warmia has 4,500 sq. km.⁸ 12 towns in Warmia were granted town rights between the 13th and 14th centuries (see Figure 1): Braniewo (town rights 1252), Lidzbark Warmiński (town rights 1308), Frombork (town rights 1310), Pieniężno (town rights 1312), Orneta (town rights 1313), Dobrze Miasto (town rights 1329), Reszel (town rights 1337), Jeziorany (town rights 1338), Olsztyn (town rights 1354), Barczewo, (town rights 1364) Bisztynek, (town rights 1385) Biskupiec (town rights 1395).⁹ The largest city is Olsztyn, which, according to GUS data from 2021, has 170,622 people and occupies 88,33 sq. km. (see Figure 1 and Figure 2).¹⁰

⁶ *Weimar Republic* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Weimar_Republic (accessed: 15.12.2023); *Prince-Bishopric of Warmia*: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prince-Bishopric_of_Warmia (accessed: 15.12.2023); *German Reich* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_Reich (accessed: 15.12.2023); *German Third Reich* https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nazi_Germany (accessed: 15.12.2023).

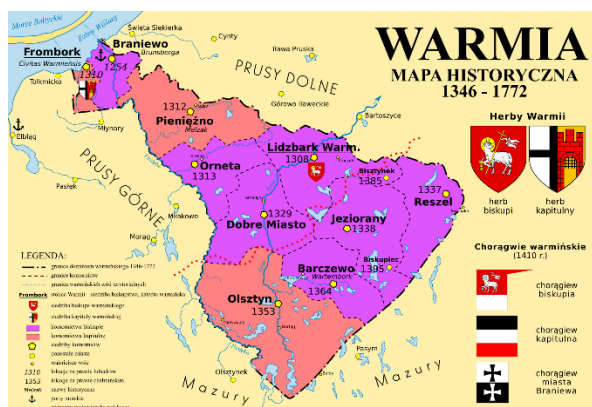
⁷ W. Wrzesiński, *Polska – Prusy Wschodnie. Plebiscyt na Warmii i Mazurach oraz na Powiślu w 1920 roku*. Olsztyn 2010, p. 407-421.

⁸ M. Biskup, *Polska a zakon krzyżacki*, Wyd. Pojezierze, Olsztyn 1983, p. 570.

⁹ *Warmia*: <https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warmia> (accessed: 15.12.2023); *Województwo warmińsko-mazurskie*. In: *Encyklopedia Warmii i Mazur*: http://encyklopedia.warmia.mazury.pl/index.php/Wojew%C3%B3dztwo_warmi%C5%84sko-mazurskie

¹⁰ *Urząd Statystyczny w Olsztynie*: <https://olsztyn.stat.gov.pl/> (accessed: 2.01.2024). Source of GUS Poland data.

Figure 1 Administrative division of Warmia in 1346–1772.



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warmia> (accessed: 15.11.2023)

Figure 2 Warmia within the contemporary borders of the Polish state.



Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Warmia> (accessed: 15.11.2023).

Geographically, the term: ‘Polish-Russian borderland’ refers to the state border with the Kaliningrad region (Rus. Калининградская область). Kaliningrad region is located along the Polish border: the land border of 210 kilometres and a maritime border of 22 kilometres run along the Warmisko-Mazurskie Voivodeship, the Vistula Lagoon, and the Vistula Spit. As of 1 January 2021, 1018624 people live in this Russian enclave within the 15 096 sq. km.¹¹

¹¹ Poland–Russia border: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poland%E2%80%93Russia_border (accessed: 15.11.2023); Granica polsko-rosyjska https://pl.wikipedia.org/wiki/Granica_polsko-rosyjska (accessed: 15.11.2023); Federal State Statistic Service. Предварительная оценка численности постоянного населения на 1 января 2021 года и в среднем за 2020 год <https://eng.rosstat.gov.ru/> (accessed: 15.11.2023); Kaliningrad Oblast: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaliningrad_Oblast (accessed: 15.11.2023).

1.3. Cultural Environment

1.3.1. Anthropological determinant of material and symbolic culture development

As a result of the inaccessibility of communication routes due to watercourses, lakes, and dense forests, local folk cultures developed in a specific way; climate – heavy rainfall, heavy snowfall, and harsh winters – forced residents to be inventive in construction and building shelters using locally available materials such as gravel, stones, clay, and wood.¹² The area's topography also helped the relative separation. The abovementioned factors have shaped Warmia's material as well as symbolic culture. A distinctive architectural style and typical buildings are also worth mentioning – Warmia is famous for its chapels or traveller shrines at crossroads, towns, or habitats (See Photography 1, 2, 3).¹³

Photography 1 Several shrines are located in the village of Wilimy (Voivodship Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Poland).



Source: Robert Borocho

¹² See E. Sukertowa-Biedrawina, *O niektórych bogactwach mineralnych na ziemiach Mazur i Warmii, eksploatowanych w przeszłości*. „Komunikaty Mazursko-Warmińskie, 1959, nr 4, p. 435-441.

¹³ See S. Kuprjaniuk, I. Liżewska, *Warmińskie kapliczki*. Olsztyn 2012.

Photography 2 Shrine dedicated to Pope John Paul II – Wilimy (Voivodship Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Poland).

localization N53° 53.827' E20° 51.316'



Source: Robert Boroch

Photography 3 On the road to Wilimy (Voivodship Warmińsko-Mazurskie, Poland).



Source: Robert Boroch

The culture of Warmia was historically shaped with substantial links to the Catholic religion.

1.3.2. Changes — towards Anthropological Defence

There are several aspects of anthropological defence in Warmia. Restoration of tradition is one of the most significant. For example: ‘Park Strazydeł’ in Węgoj (Pol. Węgój) originated

on the initiative of Teresa Kacperska, a teacher and social activist. It also needs to mention the folklore band 'Węgojska Strużka', also run by Teresa Kacperska with the support of the villagers. Another cross-cultural project is a private open-air museum in Borki Wielkie (Mazury), run by writer, philanthropist, and social activist Edwin Banaszewski.¹⁴

1.4. Cultural naturalisation and the state border after 1945

Since 1945, Poland-USSR's border has separated historically and culturally united communities. When setting the border, the Soviet authorities did not consider topographical factors, changing it according to their policy; an example of such action is the takeover of Elua (Rus. Багратионовск; Pol. Iława Pruska; Germ. Preußisch Eylau) despite the Polish administration operating in the city in 1946.

Forced resettlement was an essential factor in cultural naturalisation – forced settlers from other parts of Poland and other countries, mainly the Baltic States. Also, the so-called 'Operation Vistula' (28 April – 31 July 1947) resulted in the forced resettlement of some 150,000 Ukrainians.¹⁵ Moreover, deportations of the German population to Germany are being carried out at the same time.¹⁶

It was also possible to observe the processes of cultural naturalisation implemented by the Polish communists by destroying existing material culture and altering historical narratives using a change of memorials, for example, a monument in Reszel.¹⁷ Another example is the sale of tombstones from Beżławki (Ger. Bäslack, localisation N54° 00.995' E21° 16.247'). Currently,

¹⁴ More on this in a separate article.

¹⁵ Contrary to the opinion of historians, mixed Polish-Ukrainian marriages were also subjected to forced resettlement, as narrators spoke about during unstructured interviews conducted by the author of this article in 2018-2022 in Warmia. The main criteria for classification were language, religious beliefs, and human malice. The direct participant in these events – the narrator – recalls (in Polish), "[...] a neighbour reported my father because our land lay next to his [...] then he took it over." (interviewed in April 2020). During the Vistula action in 1947, the narrator's family arrived in Warmia, where the transport was unloaded was Sątopy (Ger. Santoppen) – Currently the municipality of Bisztynek.

¹⁶ Several settlers from other countries, including France, also came to Warmia. See R. Borocho, *Salvation from Oblivion: Teofila Bobko-Jankowska (1920–2009)*, 'Roczniki Kulturoznawcze', 2019, No 10, p. 147-153 <https://www.ceeol.com/search/article-detail?id=850240> (accessed: 15.11.2023).

¹⁷ See R. Borocho, *Poster: Obrona antropologiczna oczami semiotyki*. [Eng. A semiotic perspective on anthropological defence]. IV Seminarium 'Nowej Polityki Wschodniej': Bezpieczeństwo w przestrzeni postradzieckiej, Toruń 2017. <https://depot.ceon.pl/bitstream/handle/123456789/18520/Obrona%20antropologiczna.pdf?sequence=1&isAllo wed=y> (access 2.01.2024).

the cemetery is being reconstructed. Among the participants are American researchers (for example, Katherine Gaddis, University of Nevada USA)¹⁸ and local history enthusiasts.

2. Memorial conflict in the Warmia region – brief

From the very beginning, the Soviet Union used the commemoration of fallen Red Army soldiers as a means of social influence and cultural dominance. The location principles were as follows: (1) the monument is in a central location; (2) convenient transportation facilities; (3) a location with a strong symbolic meaning for the local community, for example, the combination of religion and ideology — those mentioned above influence collective consciousness, allowing modelling collective self-awareness in the desired direction; (4) development sustainable security: no radicalisation of historical narratives; omitting imperial language; emphasising commonality of values, etc.

On 17 September 2015, the monument of Iwan Czerniachowski was disassembled at the initiative of the Mayor of Pieniężno Kazimierz Kiejdo. Consequently, this act provided the Russian side with a propaganda tool to portray the Polish side as violating the 22 February 1994 interstate agreement in Kraków: ‘Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Russian Federation on graves and places of memory of victims of war and repression’ (Dz.U.1994 nr 112 poz. 543).¹⁹

The Russian Federation exploited the lack of legislation on the Polish side to conduct a successful propaganda campaign in international and domestic politics. Consequently, it became possible for the Russian Federation to introduce 2023 the topic of Warmia and Mazury as a war trophy of the Red Army and the making of territorial claims against Poland.

¹⁸ Katherin Gaddis's MA dissertation is titled ‘Stress and Frailty in Medieval Prussia: Interpretations from Skeletal Remains at Bezlawki’; her PhD dissertation is in progress and is titled ‘Revising the Narrative: Increasing Representation of the Elderly in Bioarchaeology’, expected in Spring 2025—source: K. Gaddis email from 9.01.2024.

¹⁹ See in Polish: *Dz.U.1994 nr 112 poz. 543*. Agreement between the Government of the Republic of Poland and the Government of the Russian Federation on graves and memorial sites of victims of war and repression, which was based on an earlier agreement of 22 May 1992. Article 1 of that agreement states: ‘This Agreement regulates the cooperation of the Parties in resolving all matters related to the establishment, registration, arrangement, preservation and proper maintenance of memorials and resting places – Polish in the Russian Federation and Russian in the Republic of Poland of soldiers and civilians of the fallen, murdered and martyred as a result of wars and repressions [...]’. Translation RB. Article 17 of the Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Republic of Poland on Friendly and Good-Neighbourly Cooperation of 22 May 1992 states: ‘Cemeteries, burial sites, monuments and other memorials, being objects of reverence and remembrance of the citizens of one of the Parties, whether military or civil, situated now or arranged, based on mutual agreements, in the future on the territory of the other Party shall be preserved, maintained and surrounded by legal protection, by international norms and standards and national and religious customs.’ Translation RB.

2.1. A brief overview of Russian hybrid operations in the region

2.1.1. The Night Wolves Bikers – Operations in Warmia

The best-known event was the entry into Poland of the Night Wolves bikers (Rus. Ночные Волки) on 30 April 2016. The arrival of motorcyclists in large numbers and the presence of Russian state authorities was an apparent provocation: 'The Governor of Kaliningrad and the Russian Ambassador to Poland paid tribute to the Red Army men buried in the war cemetery in Braniewo (Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship). 200 Kaliningrad motorcyclists also attended the ceremony.'²⁰

The motorcyclists' arrivals continued until the Coronavirus Disease 2019.

2.1.2. Junarmia (Rus. Юнармия) – 'Ops' in Warmia²¹

On 27 April 2019, a group of 400 Russians, with Governor of the Kaliningrad region Anton Alikhanov and Russian Ambassador to Poland Sergei Andreyev, assisted by Junarmia, lay flowers at the war cemetery in Braniewo.²² From the Ambassador's speech – Sergei Andreyev:

Without the past, there is no future. We cannot and will not forget the suffering of our people and our mighty victory, more so because it is a memory that should unite and strengthen our two peoples. We should remember history as it was. It should not be bent to suit the modern environment but tailored to suit its needs. Our peoples have lived side by side for centuries; they know each other well, and whatever happens, this deep history memory cannot be changed. Our shared history. Some things unite us, and this victory is the most important of these values.²³

The next event on 9 May 2019, Junarmia laid flowers at the Red Army Memorial of Gratitude in Olsztyn.²⁴

²⁰Night Wolves from Kaliningrad in Braniewo, 30 April 2016, In 'dziennik.pl'<https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/wydarzenia/artykuly/519468,nocne-wilki-z-kaliningradu-w-braniewie-rosyjscy-oficjele-i-motocyklisci-oddali-hold-czerwonoarmistom.html> (accessed 2.01.2024). Translation RB.

²¹Junarmia (Rus. Юнармия) Young Army Cadets National Movement. The correct name is 'Всероссийское военно-патриотическое общественное движение «Юнармия», what means: 'All-Russian military-patriotic public movement Yunarmia'.

²²Rosjanie uczcili w Braniewie poległych: <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/rosjanie-uczcili-w-braniewie-poleglych-w-ii-wojnie-swiatowej-rodakow> (accessed 2.01.2024).

²³Ibid. <https://dzieje.pl/aktualnosci/rosjanie-uczcili-w-braniewie-poleglych-w-ii-wojnie-swiatowej-rodakow> (accessed 2.01.2024). Translation RB.

²⁴Rosyjska Młoda Armia pod olsztyńskim pomnikiem: <https://radioolsztyn.pl/rosyjska-mloda-armia-pod-olsztynskim-pomnikiem-junarmia-oddala-hold-czerwo> In earlier years, graves of Red Army soldiers have been destroyed in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, for example in Lubawa in 2014.[noarmistom/01449204](https://radioolsztyn.pl/noarmistom/01449204) (accessed 2.01.2024).

2.1.3. Diplomatic strikes

A crucial diplomatic objective in the 'monuments war' is to maintain a list of monuments that have been disassembled, for example:

- Pieniężno, Braniewo district. In September 2015, the belief of the Russian commander Ivan Chernyakhovsky was removed from the monument.
- Lidzbark Warmiński. The Red Army Gratitude Monument was dismantled in February 2018.
- Reszel. The Monument to the Gratitude of the Soviet Army was dismantled in March 2018.
- Kisielice. In 2018, the monument commemorating Soviet soldiers in Mickiewicza Street was dismantled.²⁵

Russian military anthropologists document the disassembly's historical, current, and moment in visual sources. A discourse of historical and cultural harmony is promoted in the public debate. These steps are supported by academics from, for example, the University of Warmia and Mazury of Belarusian origin.²⁶ In scientific and journalistic discourse, specific language that stirs up emotions and emphasises destruction; for example, 'demolition' is used instead of 'disassembly'—the performative function of language changing social reality using words.

2.1.4. Anthropological espionage

Russian military anthropologists have intensified their activities in the region since 2015. Between 2015 and 2020, anthropologists have focused on the following: (1) the search for memorial sites related to the East Prussian offensive in 1945; (2) the identification of community leaders, e.g. doctors, priests, and teachers; (3) the identification of development plans of the border municipality, e.g. planned investments, properties for sale, etc.; (4) the attitude of the local population towards local and state authorities; (5) the search for ideological supporters, e.g. at the University of Warmia and Mazury, mainly among lecturers of Belarusian nationality, etc. Moreover, a field survey in terms of the cultural security of the region was carried out in 2018–2019—the research aimed to detect the potential activities of military anthropologists. During the research, the following localities were studied: Barczewo, Biskupiec, Bisztynek, Braniewo, Dobre Miasto, Frombork, Jeziorany, Lidzbark Warmiński,

²⁵ Source: *Ambasada Rosji w Polsce*: <https://poland.mid.ru/pl/> (accessed 2.01.2023).

²⁶ The article's discussion revealed this type of attitude (see footnote 1).

Olsztyn, Reszel. Below are some of the results of the study. The first source of information for anthropological espionage is official data, e.g. provided by Tourist Information Offices. These offices are also the first line of alarm about the interests of so-called tourists. The results of the study are as follows. Tourist Information Office in Frombork, Braniewo and Lidzbark Warmiński confirmed the Russian tourists' inquiries about medical practices, properties for sale, and communication infrastructure. However, no records were kept. The Tourist Information Office in Biskupiec is the only one in the region to keep records of enquiries. Thus, the Biskupiec Tourist Information Office response: (1) 'We keep records of visitors. This includes the number of tourists, the town or country they came from, the time of their visit, their age and the questions they come to us with; (2) The most frequent visitors are from Germany and England; (3) The main questions: 'what can you visit?'; 'Where can you eat regional dishes?'; 'Canoe trails?'; 'Bike trails?'; 'What are the attractions for children?'.²⁷

During private conversations with a few office employees, it was learned that severe personal conflicts over posts exist—with a high unemployment rate, competition for stable work is common. Therefore, any data provided by any Tourist Information Office relating to tourists is unreliable.

To sum up, it is evident that local authorities are unaware of the seriousness of the threat of a hybrid attack – no security monitoring procedures are in place.

However, analysing Russian websites, such as the 'Electronic Book of Memory of the Kaliningrad Region',²⁸ there are up-to-date topographical details on Warmian towns, memorials, logistics, etc. As can be figured out by analysing the data's precision, these activities are targeted with a well-developed method of documenting ethnographic data.

Potential provocations to test the public's reactions and local authorities' operational ability must not come as a surprise. All this reveals the operation procedures and allows the identification of the social and political leaders. In earlier years, graves of Red Army soldiers have been destroyed in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship, for example, in Lubawa in 2014.

²⁷ Biskupiec Tourist Information Office officially responded in writing.

²⁸ *Electronic Book of Memory of the Kaliningrad Region* <https://www.kpko.ru/warrior.php?wid=106368> (accessed 2.01.2024); Another portal of military history in 2012 features materials from tours of the historical sites in Warmia where the Red Army battles. <https://forum.vgd.ru/post/108/43264/p1234746.htm> (accessed 2.01.2024). Since 2017, another portal has had a thread dedicated to Olsztyn, where you can find historical information, maps from his travels, and locations of memorials or places where the grandparents of those discussing this portal fought. <https://www.sgvavia.ru/forum/549-1859-5> (accessed 2.01.2024).

The public discussion that began at the time revealed elements of a strategic culture in the region. It also identified personal sources to be monitored or neutralised.

2.2. The Night Wolves Bikers and Junarmia – counter-counterculture

2.2.1. The Night Wolves Bikers – socio-cultural performance on foreign territories

The Night Wolves use a simple technique: ‘ride in a large number’. The Warmia rides were conducted using this strategy—the Polish police face a severe challenge regarding securing the passage of, for example, 400 motorcyclists. Night Wolves are always there where festivals or demonstrations support Russian cultural policy. Many motorcyclists represent support, strength, organisation, and readiness.

2.2.2. Junarmia – Ideological Control

Hybrid operations require ideological impact as an essential component. The following is an example of an organisation's influence on Junarmia members. Here are extracts from the proclamation:

There is no forgiveness for such atrocities. The ‘UNARMYA’ movement expresses its sincere condolences to the residents of the city of Belgorod and to all those who suffered from Nazi Ukraine's rocket attacks. Inhumans who cannot achieve results on the battlefield take out their powerlessness by shelling peaceful people who were preparing to celebrate a bright family holiday - the New Year. The worst thing is that children were killed. We, the Children and Youth Movement are constantly attacked by the West, Japan, USA, and Canada for teaching children to love their Motherland by the example of the exploits of their ancestors. But our ancestors never went to conquer someone's land and commit crimes against humanity. They fought honourably for the freedom and peaceful skies of their people. And we will continue to confidently educate our children without the advice of those unfamiliar with the words honour, dignity, and goodness. We will support our little citizens, the inhabitants of Russia, and the soldiers at the front. The enemy will never be able to break our people. We are stronger than ever. First Deputy Head of the General Staff of Junarmia Victor Kaurov Viktor Kaurov.²⁹

As a result of the Russian Federation's armed aggression against Ukraine, the proclamation is written in a warlike tone. A primitive but effective form of propaganda communication from the period of Nazi Germany was employed, including a comparison of Ukraine with non-humans, calls for revenge, belittling the heroism of Ukrainian soldiers, etc. A new element is the use of metaphors comparing the Ukrainian population with the Nazis.

²⁹ *Junarmia* <https://yunarmy.ru/press-center/news/yunarmiya-vyrazhaet-soboleznovaniya-rodnym-i-blizkim-zhertv-tragedii-v-belgorode/> (accessed 2.01.2024). Translation RB.

2.2.3. Junarmia – Cyberoperations: Video Games – Building a Leading Edge

The psychological impact of overt cyber-operations is significant among young people—introducing the negative gamification factor, for example, competitive spirit, a sense of belonging to a group, pride of victory, commitment, leadership, organisational tradition, etc. Junarmia has been holding regular esports competitions since 2020. In 2023, competitions in the following disciplines were planned: World of Tanks (3x3), Dota 2 (5x5), Valorant (5x5), Tanks Blits (3x3), StandOFF 2 (5x5), PUBG Mobile (single).³⁰ Moreover, Russian players' presence on EU servers sends a clear message about the ineffectiveness of sanctions and the lack of international isolation.

2.3. Semiotics as a weapon of cultural warfare

Semiosphere is one of the terms used to describe the sociocultural terrain in which sign and sign systems networks work together. The term itself leans from Yuri Lotman's semiotics of culture and helps understand the human social environment denoted by the sign and sign systems.³¹

The semiotic aspects of such an environment represent three correlated scopes: (1) semiotics — refers to the structure of the sign and its material or non-material representation; (2) semantic — refers to the proposition content carried by sign or sign systems; and (3) pragmatics — refers to usage sign and sign systems by an intelligent agent for example in communicating abstract ideas. Considering Lotman's semiotic terminology, these three collapsible components — semiotics, semantics, and pragmatics — constitute what this scholar refers to as the Semiosphere. In addition, the sign system represents interconnected signs. From this combination, the logic of its connectivity can be deduced — what in Lotmanian terminology is called the system's grammar — and the system's essential elements, the smallest semiotic entities — called a lexicon.

Lotman's semiosphere proposal highlighted the mechanisms of semiotic influence on social structures, referred to as information influence, information warfare, or propaganda

³⁰ See <http://yunarmyeesports.ru/> (accessed 2.01.2024). 'It is better to put this process on the right rails and organise it correctly. Here I am on your side; I will try my best to make sure that cybersports are represented in schools, in secondary schools, in the best possible way so that it leads to the possibility of participation of our cyber sportsmen not only in regional, Russian but also in international competitions.' Vladimir Putin answered the question of schoolchildren. See also: <https://vk.com/un.armia> (accessed 2.01.2024)—translation RB.

³¹ Yu. Lotman, B. A. Uspensky. 'On the Semiotic Mechanism of Culture', *New Literary History*, 1978, 9(2), 211-232.

in the context of the social sciences. Unsurprisingly, the contemporary impact of information on society mainly occurs through sign systems as information carriers. In Lotman's view, the semiosphere is a spontaneous formation, but it seems incorrect if we look at things from a modern perspective. According to research, using the natural properties of human nature to fill in the gaps in stories that describe reality tends to result in entirely inadequate narratives.

An intelligent agent can be utilised to guide the narrative creation process in an appropriate or ideologically motivated direction. Doing so gives individuals the impression of 'independent thinking' and objectivity in assessing apparent social phenomena. Many basic cognitive processes are based on this mechanism. This mechanism develops individual judgments as 'false independent decisions' based on thought processes. Although this is not true, the whole process is triggered in the first place by semiotic media. In the past, the aggressor developed narratives to prepare a hybrid strike against the local community using propaganda or long-term information shifting. The assailant needs to exploit this fundamental human semiotics sense. It is possible for agents, such as states, intelligence agencies, cultural institutions, religious associations, or ethnic-social associations, to influence the content of the semiosphere by introducing sign systems that represent a particular ideology or culture, for example, those that are carriers of a specific historical memory. To model the semiosphere in a particular ideological direction, new sign systems will be aggressively substituted for existing ones, which will explicitly carry a proposition promoting the vested interests of the attacker. As a result of such actions, a social group will be disintegrated, ethnic relations will be blown apart, historical and cultural ties will be broken, local officials' authority will be undermined, etc. Unfortunately, the statements above cannot be viewed as theoretical.

3. Anthropological aggression

It was in 1999 when Russian military anthropologists utilised the socio-cultural ground as a battlefield for the culture war, which was supposed to be a preparation for armed conflict—the Russian military anthropology united social psychology, sociology, history, ethnography, security studies, cultural studies, and narratology.³² As a result of such comprehensive socio-cultural and historical knowledge, deep cultural impact operations could be successfully prepared with enhanced efficiency and accuracy. This phenomenon has been described

³² R. Borocho, *Military Anthropology — Specialisation Frame*, 'Wiedza Obronna', 2021, Vol. 274. Issue 1, p. 63–73.

as a hybrid threat.³³ The fieldwork of Polish military anthropologists — Boroch and Korzeniowska-Bihun — has quickly shown that there is a countermovement to such violent acts — what has been called anthropological defence.³⁴

4. Monuments and memorials: dissenting viewpoints

The process of cultural naturalisation is closely related to advancing social factors such as identity, moral values, attitude towards the state and its laws, sense of belonging to the nation, etc. A cultural naturalisation process may occur independently, or a state actor may initiate the process as has been known since ancient times. Modelling of semiotic slots—the semiosphere—has become a widespread technique in recent years—to describe this phenomenon; the term symbolic violence is used.

It is essential to understand that symbolic violence has a discreet character—the sign systems are altered, so the semiosphere is changed in a less detectable way. In that shifting process, memorials, monuments, war cemeteries, and plaques are all significant spoilers. Organising social practices around memorials, monuments, war cemeteries, and plaques can mark social behaviours that manifest values and beliefs in a particular community.

5. Historical narrative construction

The construction of the commemoration of the heroes of the Red Army supported the process of cultural naturalisation through supremacy in the historical narrative — ‘liberation (not conquest)’; ‘liberation is what the local population expects’, etc. However, the hidden narrative was the treatment of Warmia and Mazury as wartime conquests. Ideas of conquest and unification of the lands belonging to Greater Russia appeared in Soviet propaganda of the 1930s. Such propaganda included the conquest of East Prussia, which may partly explain the use of only Soviet troops.

In a propaganda film entitled *Иван Грозный* (Ivan the Terrible), directed by Сергей Михайловича Эйзенштейна (Sergei Eisenstein) from 1944–1945, during the coronation scene (part I), a question is raised concerning Russia's right to lands illegally taken from it — the ‘Pribaltic’ — the Baltic states.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ R. Boroch, A. Korzeniowska-Bihun, *Conflict and Performing Arts — Class Act Project — Ukrainian Theater as an Anthropological Defense*, ‘Wiedza Obronna’, 2021, Vol. 274. Issue 1, p. 119–136.

Strong power is needed to bend the spines of those who oppose the unity of the Russian state. Only with a united, strong kingdom on the inside can one be firm on the outside. However, what is our fatherland if not a body cut off at the elbows and knees? The upper reaches of our rivers — the Volga, the Dvina, the Volkhov — are under our control, but their access to the sea is in foreign hands. Our fathers' and grandfathers' coastal lands have been torn away from our land. Therefore, on this day, we are crowned with possession of Russian lands under other sovereigns. Two Romans have fallen, but the third is Moscow. The third Rome, Moscow, I will be the sole master from now on, alone!³⁵

Roger Ebert, a prominent American critic, gave the film an outstanding rating in his review of it published in 2012.³⁶ In this case, it shows a misunderstanding of Russia's strategic culture.

When the Polish state regained its sovereignty in 1989, the question of the legacy of the Red Army re-entered the public discourse. Russian supporters portray the Polish side as a destroyer of the memory of the Red Army soldiers, which indicates a resurrection of Polish nationalism, and this threatens Russian existence as an empire-state.

6. Gratitude to the Red Army and communist culture in Poland

The Red Army Memorial of Gratitude in Olsztyn (Ger. Allenstein) disassembly has been put on hold (see Photography 4). In local jargon, the monument is known as the gallows, which refers to the war crimes against both Polish and German civilians committed by the Red Army in Olsztyn in 1945.

³⁵ *Ivan the Terrible*, Director Sergei Eisenstein, USSR, 1944, 8:50-12:10. The original text for the above passage: 'Нужна сильная власть, дабы гнуть хребты тем, кто единству державы Российской противится, ибо токмо при едином, сильном, слитном царстве внутри, твёрдым можно быть и во вне. Но что же наша отчизна, как не тело по локти и колени отрубленное. Верховья рек наших — Волги, Двины, Волхова под нашей державой, а выход к морю их в чужих руках. Приморские земли отцов и дедов наших от земли нашей отторгнуты. А посему, в день сей, венчаемся мы на владение теми Русскими землями, что ныне до времени под другими государями находятся. Два Рима пали, а третий Москва — стоит, и четвёртому Риму не быть! И тому Риму третьему, державе Московской единым хозяином отныне буду я, один!'

³⁶ Ebert R., 'Terrible' may be great, but not especially good movie'. 2012
<https://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/great-movie-ivan-the-terrible-parts-i-and-ii> (accessed 10.06.2023).

Photography 4 'Monument to the Gratitude of the Soviet Army' — 'Olsztyn gallows' — 2020.



Source: Robert Borocho

Commemorating Polish communist fighters appears to be another highly controversial issue.

As an example of cultural modelling by the Polish communists, monuments are not viewed negatively by the local population — Photography 5, 6 and 7.³⁷

Photography 5 Olsztyn — "To the heroes of struggles for national and social liberation of Warmia and Mazury" — 2020.



Source: Robert Borocho

³⁷ According to: Sierocki R., Kleśta-Nawrocki R., Kowalewski J., *Praktykowanie pamięci. Olsztynianie – rekonesans antropologiczny*, Olsztyn 2014.

Photography 6 Biskupiec: Monument on Plac Wolności — 2020.



Source: Robert Borocho

The monument bears the inscriptions: '1945 return of Warmia and Masuria to the Motherland' and 'To the Poles who fought for the Polishness of these lands. Above the eagle — a crown added in 1990 — there is a sign of the Rodło representing the Union of Poles in Germany since 1922. Rodło sign was also the badge of the Chemical Officers Training Centre soldiers in Biskupiec (Germ. *Bischofsburg*).

Throughout the semiotic space, the 'fighters for Poland...' have been commemorated by monuments—polonisation (cultural naturalisation) of the Warmia.

Photography 7 Olsztyn: War cemetery of Polish soldiers, Soviet Army, and Free French airmen — 2021.



Source: Robert Borocho

The inscription on the plaque reads: 'In this cemetery lie 4262 soldiers of the Soviet Army killed in the fight against the Nazi invaders during the victorious offensive in 1945 in the cities and districts of Olsztyn, Szczytno, Reszel, Jeziorany, Biskupiec, Nidzica, Dobre Miasto, Barczewo. Their memory will be preserved forever among the inhabitants of this land as an enduring symbol of the brotherhood of nations in the struggle for the most beautiful ideas of mankind—socialism, freedom, and peace.'

The importance of cultural participation and positive reinforcement in communal group activities can influence semiotic transparency. The most significant is positive reinforcement in social acts, metaphorically referred to as *cultural participation*. By this, respondents mean days off due to mass marches, such as May Day parades involving funfairs, lake trips, etc. There is little or no interest in the history of social life in the Polish People's Republic, and it will probably remain that way. This explains the peculiar indifference to monuments perpetuating the memory of the socialist era of the Red Army. Such carelessness can, however, be very costly.

Conclusion

The scope of the term 'monument warfare' refers to the problem of disassembling Soviet World War II memorials commonly built as monuments of gratitude to the Red Army, monuments to soviet commanders, or monuments commemorating significant soviet battles. It must be made clear that the issue of disassembling does not involve the Soviet war cemeteries of World War II. Removing monuments commemorating Soviet commanders seems proper—Ivan Chernyakhovsky (Rus. Иван Черняховский, Ukr. Іван Черняхівський) in Pieniężno. However, it should be considered that a different approach is required when it comes to ordinary soldiers whose personal data is identified along with their area of activity or place of death. Many family members and relatives of the fallen attempt to find out what happened to their relatives and where they have been buried. In many cases, Soviet propaganda kept relatives in the dark about the failure to take proper care of the burial—an example is Polikarp Polovinko (Rus. Поликарп Александрович Половинко) who had fallen on January 28, 1945, in the battle of *Bischofsburg* (Pol. Biskupiec). The circumstances of his death were supposed to be well-known and documented. According to the Decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR on June 26, 1945, Polovinko was posthumously awarded the title Hero of the Soviet Union. His surviving son and relatives cherish the memory of Lieutenant P. Polovinko. On 22 June 2020, a memorial plaque was unveiled on the Railway Transport

Technical School building in Batajsk, of which he was also a graduate in 1934. Relatives are still convinced that his grave is near *Bischofsburg* (Pol. Biskupiec) — but that was not confirmed by field research. Other figures of the Battle of *Bischofsburg* were Ivan Kotov (Rus. Иван Котов), Sergei Mukin (Rus. Сергей Мукин), Ivan Yegorovich Rybinskiy (Rus. Иван Егорович Рыбинский) — all fallen on 29 January 1945 in or near *Bischofsburg* (Pol. Biskupiec); also, Nikolai Timofeyevich Bogdanov (Rus. Николай Тимофеевич Богданов) lost near Najdymowo — his relatives, looking for information about the place of burial, contacted the author of this work by letter.

The total losses in the battle of Bischofsburg, according to Soviet archival sources, amounted to 191 name-identified Red Army soldiers, who were buried in the war cemetery in Olsztyn — this does not apply to the aforementioned.

In the Warmia region, hybrid attacks are unlikely. Still, analysing the scenarios shows how polarised society is, how low the population's resistance to hybrid threat is, and how helpless the local authorities are.

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