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Contemporary Lives of the Past



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Attitude Towards Polish People's Republic in Poland and Nostalgia For the Soviet Union in Russia in the Context of Reflections on Historical Consciousness

The attitude towards one's past can be considered a foundation of historical consciousness – it concerns an essential issue which is one's self-identification in the historical reality. Historical knowledge in contemporary society constitutes one of the possible substitutes of myth – it gives a possibility to orientate in a reality; it defines the hierarchy of values; it builds self-esteem: positive, as winners or successful people, or ambivalent, as martyrs or victims. A lot depends on the specificity of historical consciousness and the identity accompanying it, among others such things as the ability to build relationships with other societies (nations), the ability to defend one's own position, to negotiate common goals or the level of demanding attitude in those relationships.

The more dramatic course of history the more delicate and, at the same time, important the question of historical consciousness is. In the case of the countries of Eastern and Central Europe, particularly dramatic was the period of the 20th century. Then, not only the two world wars took place, but also two politically, economically, and to a certain extent also militarily competing superstates were created and divided Europe into two parts being their spheres of influence.

In the 20th century, historical consciousness of Poles had to adapt to several violent changes of the political situation of Poland in the world; equally revolutionary were the changes in the historical consciousness of Russians. The Poles underwent, in the previous century, a long way from being subjects of the three partitioning empires, through their own militarily-won independence, loss of statehood and its regaining

according to the forced alliance with one of their enemies. The political formation which began to emerge in 1944 did not respond to the independence aspirations of wide groups of society. The Polish People's Republic evolved as a state from imitating Soviet examples in the 1940s and 1950s to the attempt at combining socialist economic and social practice with the national-popular ideology. In result, the attitude of Poles to the post-war Poland was ambivalent – on the one hand the consciousness of a “bastard” origin of the Polish People's Republic: from war failure and foreign dominance, but on the other hand a positive acceptance of some elements of social and historical politics of the Polish People's Republic. However, significantly smaller acceptance accompanied forceful activities undertaken against people contesting the politics of the authorities, and, thus, brutal pacification of workers' manifestations (1956, 1970, 1976, 1980) undertaken mostly due to economic reasons focused both manifested as well as silent resistance towards the Polish People's Republic.

The emergence of the Third Republic of Poland in 1989 opened a new chapter in the process of formation of historical consciousness in which the approach to the Polish People's Republic, and to the reforms of the political system ending the previous form of statehood, was one of the more important criteria dividing society. The Polish political scene was quickly marked by the presence of the group emphasizing the positive aspects of socialist period and promising a kind of continuation. On the other hand, at the same time there appeared a distinct, even though internally incoherent, movement proclaiming a need of “decomunization” which meant termination of the political contract concluded at the end of the Polish People's Republic by the authorities and the representatives of so called moderate opposition, the contract which guaranteed the beneficiaries of the People's Republic (members of the Communist Party, military officials, members of militia, and even officers of the security services) maintaining their social position. This question (of the attitude towards Polish People's Republic) divides Polish society up to date, though there are new and new, current problems being attached to this axis of division.

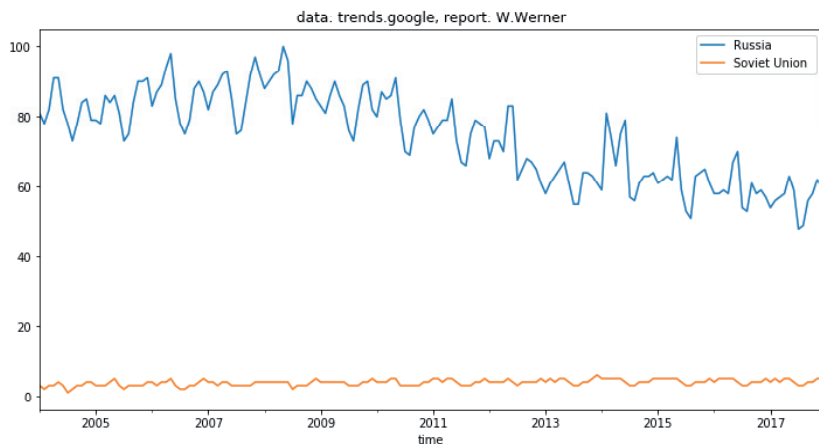
Equally dramatic, and society dividing, was the process of breaking with the Soviet Union undergone by Russians. The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, which had never been consulted with the society in a form of a referendum, dramatically changed the political and economic situation across the huge area of the country. On the one hand it referred to the national inspirations of Lithuanians, Latvians, Estonians, Ukrainians, Belorussians, Moldavians and other communities of the Soviet Union, but also triggered national conflicts, e. g. between Armenians and Azerbaijanis and caused a deterioration of the standard of life in most of the former republics, and even an economic and social collapse in Russia. The attitude of Russians towards the Soviet Union is, therefore, much more strongly marked by nostalgia than the attitude of Poles towards the Polish People's Republic.

The aim of my article is to analyze the question of the approach of Russians and Poles towards their not distant historical past and to indicate the specificity of the argumentation used in support of the positions appearing among them. This problem is interesting to us in the context of reflection over historical consciousness of these two societies.

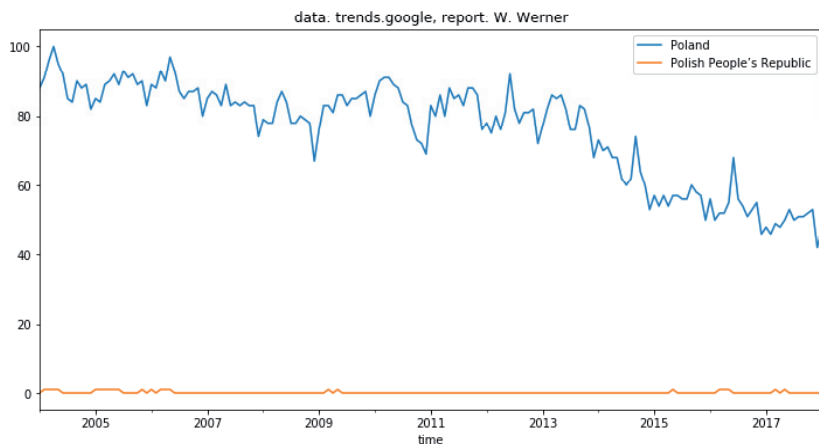
I have used products of mass culture as the repository of my primary sources as they are elements of an active interaction with their recipients – they exist thanks to their popularity. I have also used statistical data referring to the cognitive activity occurring on the Internet (using search engines and on-line encyclopedias), as well as published and available results of surveys.

The first question which I would like to answer is about the general level of interest in the Soviet Union in Russia and similar interest in the People's Republic in Poland. To do so, I will use on-line repositories, mostly statistical data from Google search engine and Wikipedia.

So, if we compare the interest in looking up terms such as "Soviet Union" and "Russia" with the use of Google search engine in the territory of contemporary Russia in 2004-2017, we will obtain the following results:



An analogical test performed for Poland gives us the following result:

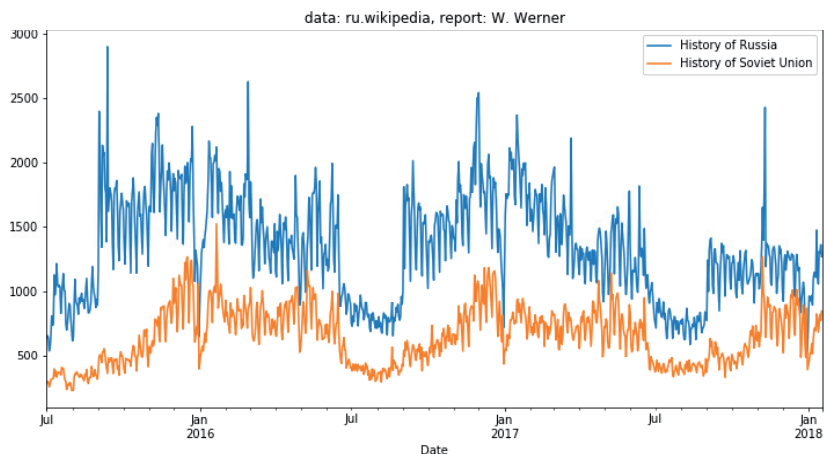


The axis x of the chart shows the time period for which the intensity of search for the words which interest us was researched; the axis y depicts the relative scale of intensity expressed in percents, where the maximum intensity of both searches, which are being compared, marks the level of 100 %. Average monthly intensity of searches for the

word "Russia" is 74 %, while for the Soviet Union it is a little less than 4%. In the case of Poland, the average interest in the topic of "Poland" is 76 %, while for the words "Polish People's Republic" it is 0.14 %.

This disproportion indicates a fundamental difference between the interest in the historical term (for Russia – Soviet Union, for Poland – Polish People's Republic) and in the term having an application in the current discourse. The disproportion is significantly bigger in Poland than in Russia.

The interest in the history of Russia and history of the Soviet Union resulting from the statistics of entries into Russian language pages of Wikipedia answering these questions, is distributed in a slightly different way. Wikipedia, as the most popular on-line encyclopedia (of a community character), is for us also an important indicator of social interest in a given question.



The axis x of this chart shows the researched time period, and the axis y – a daily number of entries into a given web page (absolute values). We can notice here two things. Firstly, the dominance of interest in the history of Russia over that in the history of the Soviet Union occurs but is not as strong as in the case of the difference in the searches for

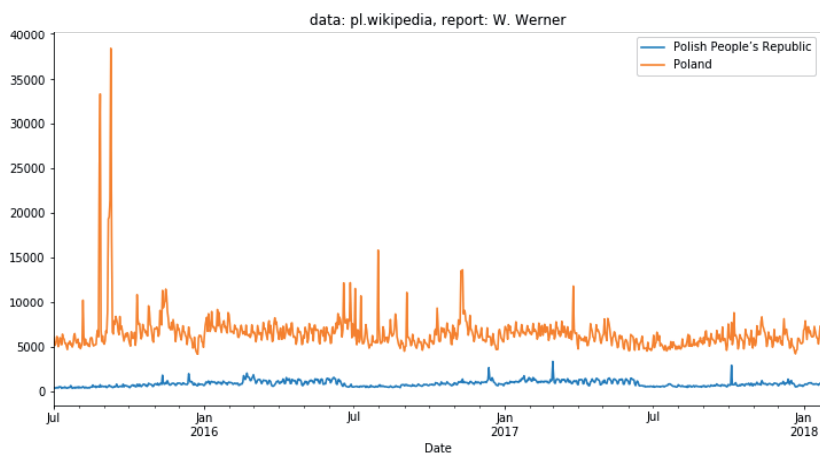
“Russia” and “Soviet Union” according to the data from trends.google. Secondly, we can clearly see a similarity of the charts indicating similar decreases and growths in interests in these two topics. The question of the correlation of the charts can be studied in a more accurate way if we calculate, for the entire set of data, Pearson’s coefficient of correlation¹, which is comprised in the interval between -1 to 1. There, 1 signifies total correlation (identity), -1 negative correlation (reversion), 0 total lack of correlation (data are completely independent), while correlation is understood as a strong one when it is higher than 0.5 and it is approaching 1. For the data of the comparison of the number of entries into Wikipedia pages devoted to the history of the Soviet Union and the history of Russia (daily numbers of entries are compared), the Pearson’s coefficient of correlation is 0.69, thus it is relatively high.

The correlation of interest in these two topics may denote that they are the elements of the same process – gaining knowledge on the historical continuum of Russia and the Soviet Union, thus, the Soviet Union actually is not treated (in cognitive practice) as a fundamentally different entity than Russia in historical context. The results described earlier concerning search words “Soviet Union” and “Russia” for Google are practically uncorrelated (Pearson=-0.13).

The interest in the history of the Soviet Union is however (in the light of the data from Wikipedia) treated as an element of the same historical continuum, what confirms my assumption that Russians do not treat the Soviet Union as a foreign and forcibly imposed creature. This is also the opinion which can be found in most historical and journalistic conceptualizations of this question which entertain mass reception.

The comparison of the pages of Wikipedia devoted to the history of Poland and the history of the Polish People’s Republic indicates a significantly weaker correlation (around 0) of the frequency of entries and, at the same time, a bigger disproportion (to the detriment of the Polish People’s Republic):

¹ Maiwada S., Lawrence Okey, The Relevance And Significance Of Correlation In Social Science Research, International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology Research Vol.1, No.3, November 2015, pp. 22-28



There are numerous journalistic and popular-science analyzes concerning causes of the collapse of the Soviet Union on contemporary Russian publishing market, and the conceptions they contain are varied.

Siergiej Kara-Murza, Soviet and Russian scholar, a chemist and the author of many popular-science books concerning Bolshevik revolution and creation and collapse of the Soviet Union, presents the Soviet political system as one resulting from the specificity of Russian culture, especially from such element of it as big significance of rural communities which, according to him, were supposed to have been continued by the “peasants’ workers’ and soldiers’ councils” created during the first world war and the February revolution. In his works, the author emphasizes a synergy between concrete legal-economic-systemic solutions introduced in the Soviet Union and a centuries-old tradition of Russian history. He perceives the collapse of the Soviet Union as a result of mistakes made by individual leaders of that country, eagerly used by the Western countries which were treating the fight with the Soviet Union as a continuation of activities directed against Russia². Similar conclusions are reached by a journalist Aleksey Tschitchkin, who correlates the process of the dissolution of the Soviet Union with

² Кара-Мурза С. Г., Крах СССР, Москва 2013, pp. 19-35

the plans of the Nazis concerning “inciting the nations of the Soviet Union against Moscow”³.

The conception of external enemy is in many works intertwined with an indication of the enemies/traitors/Trojan horses inside the country. It is a standard to suggest here an ambiguous role of the leaders of the Soviet Union of the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s: as conscious agents or at least passive puppets of the forces hostile towards the Soviet Union⁴. Sometimes one can encounter publications containing a presumption about a far-reaching plan both of creation as well as destroying the Soviet Union by the United States. The US’ contribution to the creation of the socialist country was supposed to have been an element of a game of this country against “old” colonial powers of England and France, and a guarantee of a possibility of an easy destabilization of the Soviet Union was supposed to be rooted in legislative “bombs” in its constitution, such as a right to free withdrawal from the federation guaranteed for all Soviet republics. The person who was supposed to be undermining legal foundations of the Soviet Union would have been Ławrientij Beria together with a double agency of security services. Interestingly, despite indicating the participation of agency in designing the systemic foundations of the Soviet Union, the author generally evaluates positively the significance of this country in the world political order⁵. Such position – concerning a positive evaluation of the global role of the Soviet Union – is dominant among journalists. Its collapse is treated as a catastrophe not only from the perspective of the societies and nations being a part of this federation, but also of the entire world. The reason would be the fact that the sheer existence of the Soviet Union would have been exerting pressure on the economic and political elites of the Western world to maintain exploitation on a relatively low level and to care about the well-being

³ Чичкин А., *Анатомия краха СССР. Кто, когда и как разрушил великую державу?*, Москва 2012, pp. 13-25

⁴ Швед В.Н., *Кто вы, гг. Gorbachev? История ошибок и предательств. Мифы и правда истории*, Москва 2016, pp. 180-190

⁵ Шевякин А. П., *Кто готовил развал СССР?*, Москва 2014, pp. 15-14

and satisfaction of the working and the middle classes. The collapse of the Soviet Union, liquidating the sense of danger of world revolution, would have opened the door to an unrestrained exploitation of every natural and human resources performed by a handful of the richest⁶.

The themes connected with the Soviet Union appear in popular Russian literature in a number of ways. From the perspective of the problem with interests us – nostalgia for the Soviet Union – curious are the novels in the field of alternative history in which the collapse of this country does not happen. Particularly distinctive is here alternative-historical adventure romance by a young writer Maria Czepurina entitled “S.S.S.M” being an abbreviation – of the official name of an alternative Soviet Union – here “The Happiest State In The World” that is *Sama Szczęśliwaja Strana Mira*. The book is a kind of “1984” à rebours, which means that the author introduces us via her narration into a state of total, all-encompassing, and excessively sweet happiness – generally into a country where communism did not only win but also fulfilled all its promises beginning with the smallest things such as 10 kinds of soup in the workers’ canteen, and ending with the liberation of the citizens from all constraints: both those of the traditional petty-bourgeoisie morality (there is a full erotic freedom) as well as of the physical ones (in the S.S.S.M. gravitation does not weight as much as elsewhere and its citizens can freely fly using their artificial wings).

The author do introduce from time to time elements of ironic exaggeration, letting the readers know that she does not treat the described idyll seriously, but still, the whole work gives an impression as if it was sated with a kind of nostalgia not exactly for a reality where all the dreams of communism were fulfilled, but for a world which at least did not give up those dreams⁷.

The book by Michaił Koroliuk, entitled ‘Spastii CCCP’ – „To Salvage the Soviet Union” [this, and further translations of titles from Russian to Polish: W. Werner; from Polish to English: A. Topolska] – is written

⁶ Калашников М., СССР Версия 2.0, Москва 2014, pp. 25-40

⁷ Чепурина М., С.С.С.М., Санкт-Петербург 2010, pp. 30-98

in a completely serious manner, without ironic emphasis. The author uses here a motif, popular in alternative history, of going back in time in order to change historical events. The main character of the novel meets in a train a mysterious old man with whom he lively discusses the question if the collapse of the Soviet Union was necessary. The discussion is an occasion for presenting beliefs on an accidental and defectuous character of the crash of the state just before its expected bloom. This bloom was supposed to happen thanks to the rising generation of people educated on the ideals of communism, altruistic and, at the same time, not stained with blood of the civil war and Stalinist repressions. Because the disputants are drinking cognac while conversing, our protagonist falls asleep soundly to wake up in 1977 in his own, but still teenage, body. The transmission of the main character into the past, into the times of the Soviet Union, gives the author a possibility to compare them with the situation of contemporary Russia. The comparison is not favorable for the present times. The past period appears here as a time of simplicity, purity of customs, social kindness and solidarity, of responsible work and honesty. There are black clouds on the horizon, but the novel's character having the awareness of the contemporary man and knowledge on the course of events, makes in "his" version of history an attempt to perform his life mission which is to salvage the Soviet Union...⁸

We can notice, in the popular Russian literature of the recent years, an increase in the number of novels combining the features of fantasy and history. Besides the mentioned alternative history, readers are more and more interested in the publications in so called "combat fantasy" and "historical fantasy" what is expressed in, among others, the number of downloads of free e-books from popular readers' portals such as e.g. www.litmir.me. The period of the Soviet Union is present in these novels mostly as a period of "great fatherland war". A frequent pattern in these novels is a history of a protagonist or of protagonists who, in a fantastic way, are transported back in time into critical moment of the world war II, situated usually during the German offensive

⁸ Королёк М.,(2014), Спасти СССР. Инфильтрация, Москва 2014, pp. 1-52

of 1941 or 1942. Time travels are therefore made by experienced soldiers of contemporary Spetsnaz: both equipped with heavy armament as well as without it, but also by students, businessmen, school youth, teachers, engineers, etc. Let us list the most popular ones:

1. "The Memory Will Not Be Sold" by Stanisław Sieriejew, which describes adventures of a major of Russian special forces transported with the entire division back to June of 1941⁹ (Сепреев С., 2013, pp. 1-50). Let us add that mentioned author has published an entire series of books on this topic entitled "We Are Worthy For Fathers and Ancestors" including, up to date, 10 positions (litmir.me, 2018-1).¹⁰
2. „The Main Task” by Władysław Konjuszewski, which protagonist: a scientist – geophysicist, transported back in time from 1992 to 1941 has to not only contribute to the victory over fascism, but also to prevent “the Cold War”. The book is a part of a cycle consisting of – currently – four titles¹¹.
3. „The Black Infantry. A Soldier of Penal Battalion of the Future” by Aleksander Kontorowicz, which main character – a combatant of a contemporary diversionary unit “alfa” – is transported back to 1941, to a penal battalion and its task is to prevent the Nazi offensive of Stalingrad... The book is a part of a cycle consisting of five titles¹².
4. „The Oath of Commando” by Oleg Wiereszagin, where a group of Russian youth from 21st century is transported to 1941 in order to be included into elite units of “combat scout”¹³. The book is a part of a bigger cycle “New heroes” – ‘Nowije Gieroi’

⁹ Сепреев С. С., Памяти не предав, Санкт-Петербург 2012, pp. 5-50

¹⁰ https://www.litmir.me/books_in_series/?id=7382

¹¹ Конюшевский В., Основная миссия, Санкт-Петербург 2009, pp. 1-80

¹² Конторович А., Черная пехота. Штрафник из будущего, Москва 2010, pp. 1-90

¹³ Верещагин О., Клятва разведчика, Москва 2010, pp. 1-120

-- consisting of 82 books written by various authors, but kept in a similar, patriotic mood¹⁴.

5. „Manager of 3rd Rank” by Anatolij Drozdow, the first part of a duology, where the person transported back in time – of course to 1941 – is a major of reserve, currently a bank clerk Wiktor Krascew, who, while getting in touch with Soviet intelligence, undertakes an important mission...¹⁵

Of course, we could evoke much more examples as the literary production in contemporary Russia is very rich. Of course, there are also numerous books where the protagonists are transported to different times than the second world was, and are creating an alternative reality where the Soviet Union is not created at all and the war with Germany does not happen. We should indicate here books where appropriate people and technologies are transported to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries and cause a situation in which, instead of a crisis of the authority of state and monarchy in Russia, its bloom occurs. One of such books is “Rule For Confusion of the Enemies! Progressor on the Throne” by Alieksiej Marchow¹⁶. The book is one of the six parts of a cycle “The Ruler From Tomorrow”¹⁷, thematically associated with another, also six-part cycle of books by Roman Zołotnikow, entitled “Admiral”¹⁸.

We have here a story similar to the previously described books, with this difference that the protagonist is transported in time not with his body but with his spirit which falls into the body of known from history Nicolaus Romanov II, causing a total change of the historical role of this ruler. The new monarch does not appear weak and unstable as he is brought back to life by a man from the 21st century, the man who, of course, is a soldier and, in addition, an amateur historian, who knows how to accelerate civilization progress. The subtitle

¹⁴ https://www.litmir.me/books_in_series/?id=8407

¹⁵ Дроздов А., Интендант третьего ранга, Москва 2010, pp. 1-66

¹⁶ Махров А., Царствуй на страх врагам! «Прогрессор» на престоле, Москва 2010, pp. 1-15

¹⁷ https://www.litmir.me/books_in_series/?id=4932

¹⁸ https://www.litmir.me/books_in_series/?id=7164

of the book is here meaningful. The term "progressor" was introduced into literature by popular soviet science-fiction writers Arkadij and Borys Strugacki. In their novels it denoted agents situated in times of luminous future of communism, who were being sent to remote planets with the mission of instilling progressive ideas in the civilizations inhabiting those places. Regardless the fact that Strugackis brothers were often approaching this question with skepticism, and that their books include not only descriptions of successes of "progressors", but also numerous questions and doubts – contemporary writers adapting this idea of Strugaskis to the conditions of alternative history are still more confident about how to make society happy and lead it towards luminous future by correcting improper turns of history. The position of the writers towards the Bolshevik revolution appears here as a negative one as it cut certain historical continuum of Russia's development directed towards, according to the authors, hegemonic position in the world. The Soviet Union is evaluated differently than the October Revolution – as a return on the right path. A sign of situating historical events in a proper "rut of history" is the victory over fascism which significance is strongly underlined not only as an avoidance of extermination, but also a sacrifice of blood made in intention of rebirth of the Russian empire which new incarnation would be the Soviet Union. The spectacular failures of the Red Army in the first months of the war are still seen as shameful, thus so strongly expressed – in the literary imagination – need for "correction" of this mistake of Clio.

Taking a closer look at Russian cinematography, one can notice that the period of the second world war is strongly represented in the blockbusters. Although there is a number of films referring to other times, the titles such as "Stalingrad"¹⁹, „Panfilov's 28"²⁰, „Brest Fortress"²¹, „The Dawns Here Are Quiet "²² undoubtedly attract attention, like TV

¹⁹ Сталинград, Rež. Фёдор Бондарчук, 2013

²⁰ Двадцать восемь панфиловцев, rež. Андрей Шальопа, 2017

²¹ Брестская крепость 2010, rež Александр Котт

²² А зори здесь тихие, rež Ренат Давлетьяров 2015

series such as "Leningrad", "Night Swallows", "Pilots of Fighter Jets", "Combat Recce", "Kill Stalin", etc.

On the other hand, not rare are also films and series about revolution and civil war – here we can see certain dualism in the Russian historical politics. Contemporary Russia is represented in the film production both as a heir to tsarist Russia as well as to the Soviet Union. Some points are given to both sides of this conflict what is visible in such productions as "Admiral" – both the film and the series, and "Gentlemen Officers. Save the Tsar", where the emotional significance of the movie is on the side of "white" officers, but where Bolsheviks' atrocities are not emphasized – there is rather an assumption that "the logic of history" is on their side. Such position of the historical politics needs to emphasize even more the defensive war with Nazis as a period when communist authorities "redeem" their sins by defending the country and the nation against extermination. The unity of the nation in fight against the Nazi invader is, therefore, underlined in particularly strong way, while the problem of Stalinist terror occurring simultaneously with the fight against the enemy, is rather absent – though sometimes there are mentions about labor camps or an evil-minded figure of NKVD. Even here, however, we encounter a process of "softening" of the image of Stalin and Beria, as well as of the 'SMIERSZ' formation – acronym for "smiert szpionom" – which was shrouded with horror, and to which an entire TV series was devoted. The series presented the formation as fighting only with Nazi spies.

The Soviet Union appears not only on the occasion of showing the period of the second world war, though in cinema productions such appearances are more rare. In this case, two movies about the conquest of the universe: "Gagarin, The First in Space" and "The Time of The First Ones", "Salut-7" and the movie "Legend No 17" about soviet victory over the representation of Canada in hokey composed of professional hokey players, are attracting our attention in particular. In these movies, not only the successes of the Soviet Union are emphasized, but also snapshots from life in that time are creating a positive

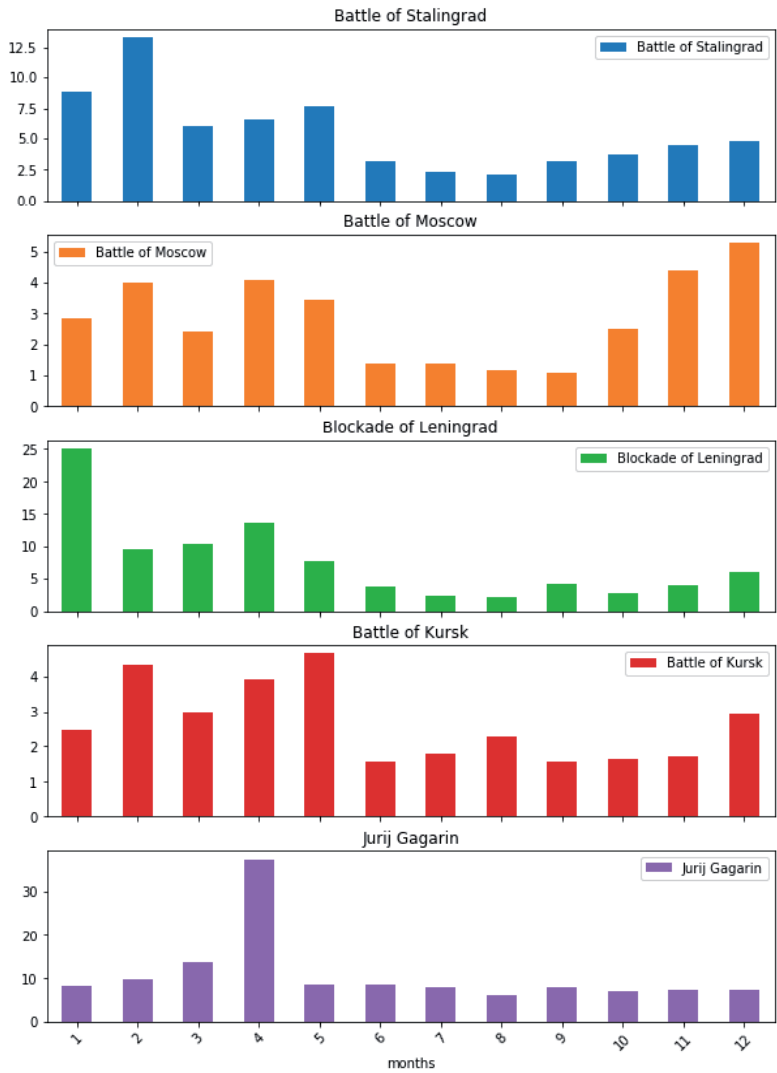
image of it, marginalizing the many problems scourging the country's inhabitants.

Another test which I performed with the use of data drawn from search engines was to check to what extent cognitive activities performed with them were connected with the calendar of Russian national holidays established in the times of the Soviet Union and referring to the historical events related to the Soviet Union. Besides the Day of Cosmonautics celebrated on 12th April and commemorating the first human flight in space, these are mostly events connected with the history of the second world war: the Holiday of the Glory of the Russian Army, celebrated on 27th January and commemorating liquidation of the blockade of Leningrad; celebrated on 2nd February anniversary of the victory over German army at Stalingrad; celebrated on 9th May the Day of Victory commemorating the capitulation of the Third Reich, and on 23rd August – the anniversary of the victorious battle of Kursk; on 5th November – “the holiday commemorating the military procession on the Red Square”, which took place on 5th November 1941, and which participants went, straight from there, to fight with German troops approaching the outskirts of Moscow. Another question is the fact that on 5th November the anniversary and the holiday of the October Revolution used to be celebrated, and that the mentioned new holiday of the procession seems to be its “substitute”. On 5th December Russians celebrate the Holiday of War Glory of Russia which falls in the month of the anniversary of the counteroffensive of the Soviet Army at Moscow.

In order to check if the dates of the holidays and anniversaries correlate with the practice of obtaining information on the historical events in the Internet, I have collected data from the search engine Google from the time period of 2004-2017 – we did not use here the search engine Yandex because it allows only to obtain data from one year period. Then, I summed up data from each month of each year separately for the entire period studied and I have drawn average values. In result, I obtained averaged data showing intensity of interest calculated with relative, percentile parameters for all first, second, etc. months for the entire time period of 2004-2017.

The results can be seen on the following chart:

Data: trends.google, report: W. Werner

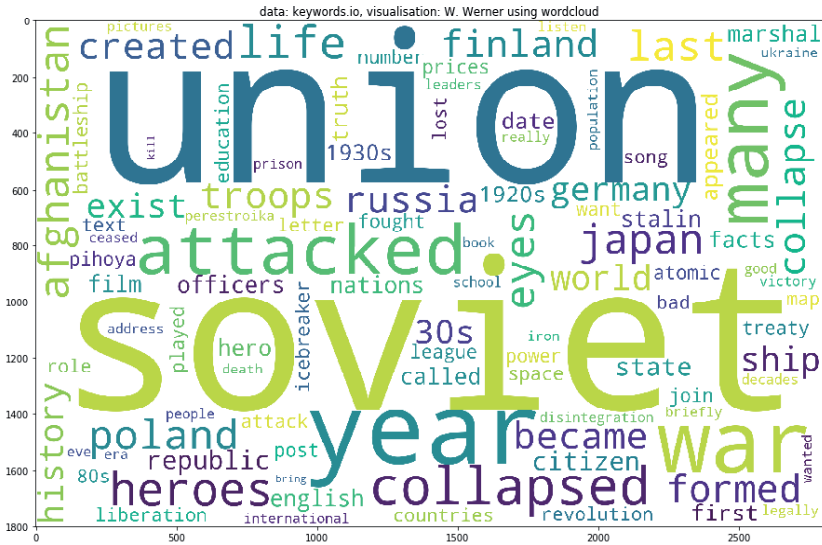


As we can see in the chart above, the distribution of interest in three of the tested historical topics clearly coincides with the calendar of national commemorative celebrations: it is the interest in the figure of Gagarin – a significant increase in April when the Day of Cosmonautics is celebrated; looking up the information about the blockade of Leningrad coinciding with the months of celebrating anniversary of its liquidation in January, and the interest in the Battle of Moscow increasing significantly in December. Less clear, but still visible in the increase of interest in the Battle of Stalingrad in February, while the interest in the Battle of Kursk is clearly distributed among several “anniversary” months.

We can think to what extent historical politics realized with, among others, such tools as film productions or the holidays celebrated on the state level have an influence on the historical consciousness of contemporary Russians? If we can consider the practice of looking for the information about the world as an indicator of the historical consciousness, then the data from the Internet search engines can be here very useful.

Let us take a closer look at the most frequent questions accompanying key words „the Soviet Union” entered in Russian language with the use of a web browser yandex, popular in the post-soviet sphere. For visualizing the frequency of the data obtained (the list of the most frequently entered key words), I have prepared a ‘word cloud’, for which I used the English translations of the most frequent key words. This and the next visualizations have been prepared with the use of a script written in python language with the modulus ‘word_cloud’ authored by Andreas Mueller²³. The size of the words in the visualization represents the frequency of its occurrence in the data:

²³ <https://github.com/amueller>



As we can see, we can encounter frequent evoking of the war history of the Soviet Union also in the case of the questions in Google, but there are also other topics from the history of the Soviet Union.

The difference in data obtained from Yandex and Google are a sign of diversification in the ways of usage of these web search engines connected with different kind of questions or different group of people using each of these services. Google web browser would be then used by people with a more flexible, open attitude towards the history of the Soviet Union, while the Yandex web browser would be used by people looking for a confirmation of their sentimental approach to this country.

The selection of key words obtained from yandex shows the specificity of understanding of the significance of the Soviet Union for Russians. A fundamental element is here a kind of foundation myth of this country which is based on war memory and narration, in its heroic (in the foreground) as well as martyrological aspects. Another component which builds the socially significant sentiment towards the Soviet

Union in Russian society²⁵ (present both in the data from Yandex and from Google) is a conviction about ideological character of this country presented by a comparison to the Jelcyn's period devoid of ideals. Such image of the Soviet Union is emphasized in popular literature which authors actually could not have contact with the reality of the Soviet Union, and who draw their knowledge from literature, soviet movies (interest in them is also mirrored in the practice of web searching²⁶) and from the memories of their parents and acquaintances who remember that period from the perspective of painful experiences of the 1990s (lost of economical stability, jobs, social degradation, increase of burglaries, etc.). Finally, a very important element of social sentiment towards the Soviet Union is a conviction about its unlawful dissolution due to an external conspiracy and internal betrayal. These convictions are confirmed by the authors of popular books on this topic²⁷.

The attitude of Poles towards the Polish People's Republic is based not only on a different foundation of real historical events, but also on narration which has its accents distributed in a different way. Let us begin with acknowledging the fact that propaganda and mass culture of the communist Poland did not manage to create a common acceptance for the foundation myth of this country. Narrations about war effort of the communist underground did not change significantly Polish historical consciousness – they did not change positive evaluation of the Home Army and Warsaw Uprising. The narration about the war combat of the Polish People's Army was struggling with explaining the causes of relocation of huge number of Polish population to the inland Soviet Union in 1941, and the euphemisms used, such as “the fate of war threw..” were ineptly hushing the fact of forced deportations of

²⁵ According to the respondents, 73% of Russian society in 2011 evaluated the dissolution of the Soviet Union negatively. Compare: *Двадцать Лет Реформ Глазами Россиян. Опыт Многолетних Социологических Замеров. Аналитический Доклад*, Москва 2011, pp. 38-45

²⁶ Compare the table of key words from yandex search engine included in this chapter.

²⁷ Publications previously quoted in this chapter.

Poles (both soldiers and civil population) to labor camps which was commonly known in Poland. For this reason, the narration about the heroism of Polish soldiers fighting in the East was accepted – mostly in the form of attractive movies, but was not commonly accepted as the justification for the existence of the Polish People's Republic. The collapse of the communist authorities was treated by a significant part of society as the culmination of a long fight for independence. The first accord of the process, which led to regaining by Poland full sovereignty was (in common reception) the fight of Polish soldiers on the front lines of the second world war, and its continuation were workers' protests and strikes in Poznań, Tricity, Radom from 1956 to 1988, and a meaningful period was 1980-1981. Therefore, a black legend of the collapse of the Polish People's Republic did not emerge. This collapse was to a large extent awaited, or at least expected. However, there emerged a black legend of the creation of the Third Republic of Poland as a fruit of an "excessive" compromise between the camp of old authorities and "submissive" part of the opposition, or even as a bastard of a betrayal made by the oppositionists corrupted by the Security Service. The attitude towards the "Round Table Talks" and accompanying "secret" talks in the governmental center in Magdalenka²⁸ constituted, in the first 30 years of the history of free Poland (1989-2009), the fundamental axis of ideological division in Polish society. This attitude towards the genesis of the Third Republic of Poland resulted in an evaluation of the social-political reality perceived or as coming from objective conditions or as an expression of agent conspiracy accompanying the creation of the foundations of the new form of Polish statehood and shaping social and economic elites in Poland after 1989²⁹. In consequence, the attitude towards communist Poland was a derivative of the attitude towards the Third Republic: "pragmatic", which proclaimed

²⁸ Compare the data from the announcement of CBOS: Poles on Magdalenka, Round Table and sense of betrayal, Warsaw 2010, pp. 5-7.

²⁹ Compare: A. Zybortowicz, *W uścisku tajnych służb. Upadek komunizmu i układ postnomenklaturowy*. Warsaw 1993, pp. 19-65

that both Polish People's Republic as well as the Third Republic of Poland are the best forms of statehood which can exist in concrete social and geopolitical reality, and "ideological" where proponents claimed that the Polish People's Republic was a form of oppression of Poles by a hostile regime in the interest of a hostile country, and that the compromise between a part of the camp of authorities and a part of the opposition was a way of maintaining this oppression in a veiled or softer form where direct violence, impossible to be kept, was substituted by economic and political (placed in the framework of a system of declaratively free market and democracy) and ideological oppression thanks to the corruption of part of elites unable, or unwilling, to judge the situation properly³⁰.

Symptomatic is the fact that a coherent narrative, which would praise the Polish People's Republic actually does not exist in Poland. Of course, there are fragmentary narrations which defend some of the achievements of this country, confronting them with darker sides of life in the Third Republic (unemployment, more frequent divorces, etc.)³¹ or which indicate examples of concrete honest people who were, in the communist Poland, performing their work: physicians, engineers, militiamen (including those working on crimes).

Similarly, there does not exist a coherent narrative which would completely justify forceful implementation of the socialist system in Poland and at the same time would negate independence aspirations of the Polish nation fighting with Nazi invader and opposing the restriction of its liberty in the communist period. However, there are numerous, fragmentary narratives indicating concrete people or activities of Home Army soldiers, National Armed Forces, or later democratic opposition activists on the basis of: "there were also bandits among your people", "there are also swines among you"³².

³⁰ Compare: R. Ziemkiewicz, *Michnikowszczyzna. Zapis choroby*. Fabryka Słów 2016, pp. 30-69; A. Zybortowicz, *W uścisku...*, pp. 110-130; W. Łysiak, *Rzeczpospolita kłamców. Salon*, Warszawa 2004, pp. 120-175.

³¹ *T.Z., Czas Bękartów*, Tygodnik „Nie” 5(2011)

³² e.g. compare: B. Dunat, *Patrioci we krwi*, Weekly „Nie” 4(2011)

As far as the image of the Polish People's Republic in post-1989 mass culture is concerned, we can see a generally negative picture, focusing on the question of violence, difficulties of everyday life, corruption of the authorities, etc. An important example can be here "Man of Hope" (2013) by Andrzej Wajda. It is a third part of a triptych devoted to the fight with authorities in the communist Poland.

In the examples where the image is a bit warmer, we can see subjectivations of the picture of the Polish People's Republic. Here a symptomatic example is "How Much Does the Trojan Horse Weight?" by Julisz Machulski (2008), a romantic comedy which main character is transported back in time from 1999 to 1988. Unlike the previously discussed Russian novel, the character does not think here about saving Polish People's Republic, but endeavors only to solve private matters. The image of the Polish People's Republic is warm because it is almost devoid of politics and subjective – a colorful figure is for example the husband of the main character – a typical depiction of "a smarty private operator" from that period.

A subjective perspective does not always protect from politics which were intervening into average people's life anyways. It is showed in the movie "Little Moscow" (2008) by Waldemar Krzystek, describing the presence of soviet troops on the Polish territory, characteristic for communist reality, generally not from political perspective, but via life of average people, with their preoccupations and joys – here unfortunate love of the main character of the movie, a Russian Wiera Swietłowa, towards a Polish officer. However, the message of the movie is that in a not normal world it is difficult to find normal happiness: the main character is under constant surveillance of the communist Security Service as there was, against the slogans about "Polish-Soviet friendship", a strict isolation maintained between Polish society and soviet troops quartering on the Polish territory.

A historical irony is the fact that the films about the Polish People's Republic which are most clear, raw (so far) and at the same time deepest in their analyses, were actually created in the communist period – it is enough to list here the two first parts of Wajda's triptych: "Man of

national pride in a small extent, they do not look for information about the achievements of this country. They do not associate Polish heroism during the second world war with the activities founding the Polish People's Republic. Warmer tones appearing in the reflection on communist times are often linked with subjective realities of life – they have a character of memories from young age for the generation remembering life from before 1989, and, for younger people – a character of an interest in a kind of exoticism of queues for meat, problems with buying toilet paper (as well as other commodities of everyday use), life in large estates of blocks of flats, the climate of the films from that period (very often critical towards the Polish People's Republic), etc.

Polish narrative about the Polish People's Republic is therefore very critical and generally devoid of pride. The pride accompany Polish activities for gaining independence from soviet custody and liberal market and democratic changes in the country, so the activities described in the communist times as anti-state. Poles are not proud of the Polish People's Republic, but rather of the activity against this state –which was embodied by fighting against the Red Army and communist authorities, at the beginnings of that state, “cursed soldiers” and later activists of the anti-communist and democratic opposition – activists of Workers' Defense Committee, Movement for Defense of Human and Civic Rights, Confederation of Independent Poland and, most of all, of Solidarity.