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Fight for historical truth or political gameplay? Strategic narratives in Polish TV news coverage of the 2018 Polish–Israeli diplomatic crisis

Walka o prawdę historyczną czy polityczna rozgrywka? Narracje strategiczne w polskich relacjach telewizyjnych na temat polsko–izraelskiego kryzysu dyplomatycznego 2018 roku

Abstract

The manuscript explores the escalation of the Polish–Israeli diplomatic conflict in 2018, which was instigated by an amendment of the law on the National Remembrance Institute. The rhetorical analysis draws from TV news content aired by four major Polish TV stations and highlights two prominent strategic narratives: the first asserts “Poland's duty to defend truth and its reputation on the global stage”, while the second underscores the “challenging Polish–Jewish relations, which are often a subject of political maneuvering.” The study maps the uses of frames, metaphors and the Burkean pentad in the collected media materials.

Artykuł poświęcono eskalacji polsko–izraelskiego konfliktu dyplomatycznego w 2018 r. w związku z nowelizacją ustawy o Instytucie Pamięci Narodowej. Analiza retoryczna zawartości serwisów informacyjnych emitowanych w czterech głównych polskich stacjach telewizyjnych ujawniła dwie prezentowane w nich narracje strategiczne: pierwsza eksponuje „zobowiązanie Polski do obrony prawdy historycznej i reputacji kraju na arenie międzynarodowej”, druga natomiast „złożoność relacji polsko–żydowskich, które często stają się przedmiotem bieżących rozgrywek politycznych”. Studium dokumentuje użycie ramowania, metafor i pentady Burke’a w materiałach telewizyjnych.

Key words

strategic narrative, crisis, TV news, metaphor, framing
narracja strategiczna, kryzys, telewizyjne serwisy informacyjne, metafora, ramowanie

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1. Introduction

The paper is devoted to the crisis in Polish–Israeli diplomatic relations at the turn of 2017 and 2018. The mentioned conflict lasted for only a few months; however, Polish–Jewish relations, mostly established in the context of WWII and particularly shaped by the shared history of the extermination by the Nazis, have been a long-lasting issue in the domestic and foreign Polish political agenda. Due to historical conditions, these bilateral relations are so complex that the so--called strategic narratives are increasingly used to cover and shape their ongoing interpretations. Moreover, it can be assumed that strategic narratives can also re--shape the collective memory of the Holocaust to some extent.

2. Theoretical framework

The critical theoretical concepts for this project are strategic narratives, framing and the dramatistic pentad. First, we briefly define the understanding of each of the concepts.

According to Miskimmon et al. (2013), narratives can be defined as means to "construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics to shape the behavior of domestic and international actors" (p. 2). Contemporary strategic narratives provide a space in which the classical rules of rhetoric materialize remarkably, as these narratives play a significant role in shaping public opinion and attitudes (Coticchia, Catanzaro 2020), as well as they are used to affect the behavior of domestic and international actors (Wagnsson, Barzanje 2019). Strategic narratives are a powerful tool used by political actors to shape behavior and construct a shared meaning of the past, present, and future of international politics (Silva et al. 2024; Wagnsson, Barzanje 2019; Roselle 2017).

They provide frameworks that allow people to make sense of the world, policies, events, and interactions (Roselle 2017). They are also employed to construct a shared meaning of governance and state-building (Silva et al. 2024). Strategic narratives can be used and constructed by verbal or written communication, including national newspapers, interviews, and speeches (van Noort 2020). In this study, it is assumed that a strategic narrative can be the "way of describing the world that exposes specific values, meanings and ideas, and at the same time serves to explain and encourage specific actions of political actors" (Gackowski, Brylska 2022) to build a tool of soft power (Nye 2004, 5). Research conducted thus far has highlighted the effectiveness of employing the notion of strategic narratives in the analysis of communications during conflicts and wartime (Manor, Crilley 2018; Khaldarova, Pantti 2016).

The building blocks of strategic narratives are called "frames." Robert Entman (2005, 391) defines framing as "selecting a few aspects of a perceived reality and connecting them together in a narrative that promotes a particular interpretation." Frames have four essential functions: defining problems, diagnosing causes, making moral judgments, and proposing remedies (cf. Entman 1993; 2005; 2007). Framing and strategic narrative building are closely intertwined. For example, framing plays a crucial role in the construction and dissemination of strategic narratives, as it shapes the selection, emphasis, and interpretation of events and issues. The relationship between frames and strategic narratives is dynamic, with different actors contesting and reshaping narratives through framing processes. Livingston and Nassetta attempt to capture the relationship between the two concepts in the following way: "Frames are less ambitious and are situated *within* the contours of strategic narratives; they are to strategic narratives what particular storms are to global weather patterns" (2018, 103).

The third theoretical framework used in this study, the dramatistic pentad provided by Kenneth Burke (1969), originated from rhetoric and can be used to operationalize the concept of strategic narratives as it indicates "questions to be answered in the treatment of a topic: Who, what, where, by what means, why, how, when" (Burke 1969, 228). In Burke's perspective each element represents a different aspect of a situation or event and helps to uncover the motives and meanings behind the presented behavior, so by examining each element of the pentad, one can gain insights into the symbolic and rhetorical dimensions of the action taken. Burke's proposal not only takes into account the classic narrative components, but also draws attention to the relationships between them. Therefore, it can provide a map to construct research tools such as a codebook for rhetorical analysis.

3. Material and methods

This study concerns the period of escalation of conflict between the Polish government on the one hand, and the Israeli government and Jewish–American Foundations on the other. At the turn of 2017 and 2018, the Polish government proceeded with an amendment of the law on the Institute of National Remembrance (INR). According to the initiators of the amendment, it was expected to help fight disinformation and propaganda that misrepresented Polish history in World War Two, such as the phrase "Polish Death Camps" instead of "German Nazi camps" in occupied Poland. The mentioned bill (finally, after a few months, amended again) was criticized both in Poland and abroad as imprecise and censoring the testimonies of survivors and capable of intervening into the scientific work of historians. During the period of public debates on this amendment, a video was published by the Jewish–American Ruderman Family Foundation, under the working title "Polish Holocaust," calling for the suspension of the US diplomatic relations with Poland. The controversial video provoked a significant discussion in the Polish media.

The analyzed incident, the so-called "Polocaust scandal," is a useful subject of study because, in a relatively short period, it set in motion some typical, schematic ways of describing Polish–Jewish relations in Polish public discourse. These descriptions tend to be resorted to and mainly used instrumentally by political actors. As Kończal states, "prescribing certain interpretations of historical events or processes, memory laws are a major instrument of the politics of memory pursued by states and supra-national institutions. Some memory laws incentivize certain narratives about the past, while others criminalize them" (2020, 457). The unfortunate amendment and the controversial reaction to it, as presented in the Ruderman Family Foundation's video, caused one of the biggest crises in diplomatic relations between Poland and Israel in recent years in just a few days. This is evidenced by the involvement of officials and international bodies in commenting on the course of action in an attempt at resolving the conflict, as well as by the exposure of the issue in both the Polish and foreign media[1].

To analyze the mediated incident, we collected data based on news services and current affairs programs aired by Polish TV stations in February 2018, starting from February 21st (the date of publication of the Ruderman Family Foundation's video) and finishing on February 28th. We assumed that the essential phase of the public debate on this subject would be completed during this period and the observation confirmed this supposition. The selection of TV stations for analysis was based on two criteria: viewership and differentiation in terms of the political

1. Even in January 2024, the combination of the phrases "Polish Holocaust" and "Ruderman Family Foundation" yields more than 106,000 results in a Google search.

alignment. The study included broadcasts from TVP 1 / TVP Info, TVN / TVN24, Polsat, TV Trwam, TV Republika and Superstacja. We decided to qualify for the study the main news bulletins of the news services of the abovementioned TV stations and the accompanying current affairs programs. The news materials and interviews in which the issue of broadly understood Polish–Israeli relations appeared were subject to detailed qualitative rhetorical analysis. Considering the above criteria, 40 editions of news services (52 materials amounting to 02:43:17 of recordings) and 27 editions of current affairs programs (29 interviews amounting to 05:33:17 of recordings) were finally included in the sampling. To study each of the two types of broadcasts, a research tool was created with a codebook that features over 100 categories. Both closed and open-ended questions/codes were included in the key, generating quantitative and qualitative data for further processing. Thus, we indicated the individual actors' argumentation and language structures, and catalogued their characteristic patterns or motifs. We also tried to find forms, meanings, and components within the process of framing of messages accompanying the Polish–Israeli relations and determine their functions. We analyzed the material using content, rhetorical and discourse analysis methods and techniques. This paper presents an excerpt of the results obtained through a rhetorical analysis focusing on the narrative strategies employed in the materials studied.

Here we demonstrate the selected findings based on the content of main news services of four different TV stations: *Wiadomości* (*News*) on TVP 1 (the most important news program from this public broadcaster, which, depending on the context, is more or less influenced by politicians of the ruling party), *Fakty* (*Facts*) on TVN and *Wydarzenia* (*Events*) on Polsat (Poland's largest commercial broadcasters), *Informacje Dnia* (*News of the Day*) on TV Trwam (a social broadcaster – television managed and run by the Catholic Redemptorist Order). This combination ensures that we represent the spectrum of coverage of major news services and reflect the diversity of content, both in terms of the types of broadcasters and their political leaning.

Table 1. Sample characteristics. Source: own research.

TV station	News program	Number of news editions analyzed	Total number of news items devoted to the crisis	How many times the news item on the crisis was aired first in the news	Total time devoted to the crisis (percentage of total time of the news editions analyzed)
TVP 1	*Wiadomości (News)*	8	11	2	37 min. (16%)
TVN	*Fakty (Facts)*	8	12	6	38 min. (19%)

Polsat	*Wydarzenia (Events)*	8	10	7	29 min. (14%)
TV Trwam	*Informacje Dnia (News of the Day)*	6	8	5	29 min. (31%)

Table 1 provides a comparative overview of how different TV stations and their news programs covered the crisis analyzed throughout the week after the Ruderman Family Foundation's video release. The data also demonstrate how various news programs prioritized the coverage of the problem in terms of the number of news items, their prominence as lead stories, and the percentage of overall program time dedicated to the topic. It can be observed that *Informacje Dnia* paid the most attention to the subject: TV Trwam devoted the highest percentage of its news program time to covering the crisis (31%), and also aired the news item on the crisis as the lead story five times (in six editions). *Fakty* allocated the second-highest amount of time (19%) to the situation and chose it as its leading story six times (out of eight editions analyzed). Polsat's *Wydarzenia* news bulletin devoted 14% of its time to the crisis and led the broadcast with this story seven times. *Wiadomości* gave the slightest attention to the issue, allocating 16% of its time to the problem and airing it as the lead story only twice.

4. Results

4.1. Strategic narratives

As indicated, each material related to the discussed issue was analyzed according to several dozen research categories. Some of them provide data that proved useful to reconstructing the strategic narratives used by journalists in describing the conflict, namely:

- Headline (content and tone, ticker, negatively charged words and phrases that appeared in the headline);
- In each sample material included in the study, three themes were analyzed (if present):
    - The theme of the Ruderman Family Foundation video (including content and form: the reporter's narration of the theme; critical, neutral, and approving statements about the video and its authors; statements from quoted individuals and other entities mentioned, such as institutions, social groups, organizations).
    - The theme of the INR Act amendment (analogous analytical categories).
    - The theme of Polish–Israeli relations (analogous analytical categories).

- Framing (if present: conflict, human interest, responsibility, morality, economic consequences frame, as defined by Semetko and Valkenburg [2000]).

The data gathered with the aid of these research categories proved that overall the materials fit into two strategic narratives. The first, delineated as "Poland must defend the historical truth and the good name of the state in the international arena," appears in coverage by TVP1 and TV Trwam. The second one – "Polish––Jewish relations have been challenging for centuries and are often a matter of political maneuvering" – is noticeable in Polsat and TVN coverage. The most critical structural elements of these narratives, dissected according to the elements of Kenneth Burke's dramatistic pentad, are indicated in Table 2.

Table 2. Structural elements of two types of strategic narratives, according to Burke's pentad. Source: own research.

	STRATEGIC NARRATIVE NO 1: Poland must defend the historical truth and the good name of the state in the international arena		**STRATEGIC NARRATIVE NO 2: Polish––Jewish relations have been challenging for centuries and are often a matter of political maneuvering**	
Composition part of strategic narrative	*Wiadomości* TVP1	*Informacje Dnia* TV TRWAM	*Wydarzenia* POLSAT	*Fakty* TVN
ACT – what is the action? what is happening?	Poland is fighting for historical truth and wants to engage in a dialogue with Israel on this issue.	There is an ongoing crisis in Polish–Israeli relations, in which Poland is being slandered; the crisis must be resolved in order to effectively fight for historical truth.	There is an ongoing crisis in Polish–Israeli relations caused by the amendment to the INR Act, and there is no unified voice among the Polish authorities in assessing this amendment.	There is an ongoing crisis in Polish–Israeli relations caused by the amendment to the INR law, and the Polish authorities are taking various steps to resolve it.
ACTORS/AGENTS – who is performing the act?	Proponent: Poland, Polish government, Polish delegation, President A. Duda, Prime Minister M. Morawiecki, Institute of National Remembrance, reasonable Jews (personified by e.g., Shevah Weiss, Jonny Daniels, Michael Schudrich) and institutions (Embassy of Israel in Poland, Jewish Community of Warsaw, Yad Vashem), conservative columnists, Righteous Among the Nations. Opponent: states with historical policies that do not expose	Proponent: A. Duda, delegation led by Minister J. Cichocki, M. Morawiecki, Institute of National Remembrance, Righteous Among the Nations. Opponent: one Knesset committee, part of Jewish communities in the US; political opposition in Poland, The Washington Times, Ruderman Foundation,	Proponent/Opponent: A. Duda, Polish delegation of diplomats and scientists, M. Morawiecki, members of the government, members of the Polish parliament (they caused the crisis and are trying to fix it); opposition to the ruling party. Proponent: Embassy of Israel in Poland, Yad Vashem, Jewish Community of Cracow, Righteous Among the Nations, Haaretz Opponent: Ruderman	Proponent/Opponent: A. Duda, Polish delegation of diplomats and scientists led by M. Magierowski, M. Morawiecki, members of the government, members of the Polish parliament (they caused the crisis and are trying to fix it); opposition to the ruling party. Proponent: Embassy of Israel in Poland, Yad Vashem, Jewish Community of Cracow, Righteous Among the Nations, Jewish Community

	the truth; Ruderman Foundation; [implicitly] previous governments that neglected to promote historical truth.		Family Foundation	Centre, Haaretz Opponent: Ruderman Foundation
PURPOSE – why is the act happening?	For many years the common history of Poles and Jews has not been adequately discussed, and this should change.	Some Jewish circles want to thwart and block Poland's efforts to fight for historical truth and genuine, constructive Polish––Jewish dialogue.	The controversial amendment was received critically by the Israeli side, Polish politicians from the ruling camp have different opinions on the matter, so there is confusion.	The actions are meant to repair the damaged Polish–Israeli relations caused by the crisis surrounding the amendment to the INR Act.
SCENE – when and where is the act happening?	The sphere of diplomacy and science.	The sphere of diplomacy.	The sphere of diplomacy, the Polish political scene.	The sphere of diplomacy, law and science.
MEANS/AGENCY – what instruments are used to perform the act?	Recalling the true history (e.g., plans for a museum of the Pilecki family), ensuring that Polish authorities include the phrase "Nazi German camp" in the names of camp museums, dialogue between historians, experts, but also politicians (visit of a Polish delegation to Israel).	Talks, visit of a Polish delegation to Israel, work of historians, presidential draft law on establishing a national day of remembrance for Poles who saved Jews during World War II.	Gestures and words: statements of Polish politicians in important, meaningful places and contexts, visits of Polish diplomats and experts to Israel.	Diplomatic tools: visit of Polish delegation to Israel; communication and political tools (e.g., visit of President Duda and his wife to Cracow)

The first strategic narrative is based on the assumption that Poland should protect the historical truth and the country's reputation around the world. This narrative encompasses Poland's fervent efforts to engage in constructive dialogue with Israel, and addresses the ongoing crisis in Polish–Israeli relations, marked by offensive accusations. The key proponents in this narrative are the Polish government and the Polish president, along with supportive opinion leaders from the Jewish community in Poland, whereas its opponents consist of states with opaque historical policies and some individuals within the Jewish circles, as well as the political opposition in Poland. The overarching goals are twofold: to rectify the long-term neglect in discussing the shared history of Poles and Jews and to counter efforts by certain factions to hinder Poland's pursuit of historical truth and constructive Polish–Jewish dialogue. The narrative unfolds in diplomatic and academic spheres, driven by a spectrum of actions to recall World War II history accurately. This strategic narrative remains more coherent and constructive than the narrative number 2, but at the same time fails to engage with the problematic nature of the amendment, which has contributed to the conflict. This perspective presents the government of the time as the primary causal agent, one that is acting

with determination, but also fails to acknowledge the problematic legal regulation of which this government and parliament was the initiator.

The second strategic narrative unfolds with a focus on the centuries-old tensions and conflicts between Polish and Jewish communities, which is currently evidenced and manifested by the ongoing scandal connected to the an amendment to the INR Act. Polish authorities and opinion leaders are actively taking steps to resolve this conflict. The primary actors exposed in this narrative include such prominent figures as the main Polish politicians, the President and the Prime Minister included, who have played pivotal roles in both triggering the crisis and attempting to repair it. These actions unfold in the domains of diplomacy, the Polish political scene, law, and science. They are characterized by symbolic and determined actions, such as statements, gestures and visits of Polish diplomats and experts to Israel. This narrative is considerably more nuanced, taking into account, among other things, the inconsistency of opinions on the matter on the proper course of action within the ruling political force itself. However, it is also based on the implicit assumption that it will be difficult to resolve the issue with such a problematic historical background. It situates the crisis in Polish–Jewish diplomatic relations within a broader critique of the government, presenting the politicians of the ruling party as disharmonious both in action and in communication.

4.2. Frames used

The analysis of the linguistic layer allows us to identify the frames contained in the examined materials. The fundamental frame for both presented narratives is the "conflict frame." It is understandable, considering the current situation described in the news services, that we are dealing with a diplomatic conflict between two countries, which manifests itself in critical, offensive statements of the main actors, their actions and behavior. However, what is essential is that the conflict frame serves to describe and interpret not only the Polish–Jewish relations themselves at that moment, it also points to tense relations within the Polish political scene (the conflict between the ruling camp and the opposition) and, in some cases, to the concerns within the ruling camp itself. Also commonly and similarly invoked in both strategic narratives is the "human interest frame," which refers to the consequences of the scandal for those Poles (and their families) who helped Jews during World War II.

Moreover, the "morality frame" appears mainly in the first strategic narrative, with the most important value for this narrative – the truth. The struggle for historical truth becomes the moral obligation of the Polish authorities, and any attempts to depreciate this struggle or to prevent it become labelled as a fundamentally immoral act. This is directly connected with the attribution of "responsibility frame," which

governs the description of the actions of the Polish authorities, or more precisely, the historical memory policy conducted by these authorities. The responsibility of the people who govern Poland now is to preserve the memory of the unappreciated heroes of the Polish history, while the responsibility of the contemporary leaders of states is to relate to history honestly and truthfully. In narrative number 2, the responsibility frame serves a different purpose, namely it governs the interpretation of the actions of the ruling camp, which implemented a flawed amendment to the INR law and must be faced with its negative consequences. Similarly, with the morality frame, it is evident in the statements that emphasize the concerns of the Jewish community, which deems it (particularly the Ruderman Family Foundation video) inappropriate to divide the nations that share such a significant common history.

4.3. Metaphors and persuasive definitions

The next step in examining the construction of the two strategic narratives is to analyze the language used to describe key narrative components in terms of meaning construction. In our study, these components include the rhetorical choices used to name and define the amendment of the INR law, the current ongoing situation, and the actions taken by the protagonists. The research demonstrated that metaphors and persuasive definitions were the common tools in this context. The top metaphors are presented by broadcast and narrative.

Starting with the first strategic narrative, *Wiadomości's* persuasive definition of the dispute was dominated, especially in the first part of the week under review, by war metaphors. There was talk of "striking at Polish–American relations," "a publication hitting Poland," "massive attacks on Poland," "a campaign against Poland," "the need to fight for memory," "fighting against the falsification of history," "fighting arguments," "defending the truth," "defending Poland's honor and image," that "Poland is not going to give up," that it is necessary to "protect the Polish state and nation," and "winning the battle for the truth." In the second part of the week, when the TV stations reported on the Polish delegation's trip to Israel, the optics changed somewhat and started to focus on the metaphors related to conversation. The station's journalists speak of "the beginning of a real, good and constructive dialogue," of a planned "meeting" of "talks," of an ongoing "dialogue." This repeatedly indicated "dialogue" seems to be a natural consequence of "winning the battle" and is expected to lead to a happy ending, almost like peace negotiations after a war.

Similarly, in *Informacje Dnia* the war metaphors also seem crucial, and the most important value indicated in this discursive war is the truth. The station repeatedly

speaks of "fighting for historical truth" – this phrase appeared as many as three times on the ticker announcing journalistic materials. The journalists also speak of "attacks on Poland that do not cease," "the vilification of Poland," "provocations against Poland," the need to "defend historical truth," and attempts to "destroy Poland's image." The program also notes the departure of a Polish delegation, which "travels [to Israel] to engage in a dialogue" that offers "a chance for a mutual understanding" and may be a "harbinger of normalization of relations." The editors thus see "an attempt to patch up the dispute" and "repair relations," while noting that it will be a "test of intentions" for the Israeli side.

Thus, in this strategic narrative, we have a clear situation in which Poland and Poles are under attack and must, in the name of some higher-order values, especially the protection of their honor and historical truth, defend themselves and be victorious. The fight is "against something" (falsification of history) and "for something" (honor and truth).

Regarding the second strategic narrative, in *Fakty*, metaphors of nature and the physical world present themselves as the most important. Journalists talk about the "hot bill," the "eruption of a diplomatic crisis," the "extinguishing of more fires" and the "wave of negative comments" reminiscent of a "tsunami." They also decried the "freezing of the bill" and thus the "unfreezing of dialogue" and the "unfreezing of relations" which are "the coldest in years."

In *Wydarzenia* the situation was explained similarly with the metaphors of nature and the physical world often dominating. Journalists reported that the Polish government was trying "not to inflame" the situation, there was a discussion of "freezing" and "not freezing" the bill. It was mentioned that a "thaw" was being felt in Israel, and attention was drawn to the "waves" of criticism against the bill. It should be added that such a way of representing the situation was supplemented by the metaphor of a game. For example, one editorial spoke of the Civic Platform's "sharp attack on the government" and that "the opposition suspects the government of playing a double game," as well as the metaphor of war: it was suggested that the Polish side in the conflict "tries not to respond too sharply to the taunts," and then plans a "diplomatic offensive," "serious negotiations" and "defense of the Polish position" under the "pressure from abroad."

In brief, the second strategic narrative exposes the multifaceted nature of the ensuing crisis, much more often setting it in the context of Polish–Jewish relations, which have been complex for hundreds of years, and have gained new visibility in the context of current Polish political disputes inside the country with Polish external partners.

One should note that strategic narratives discussed above have a purpose not only (or not at all) to inform, as the format of the news service might suggest.

Their goal is also (or exclusively) to persuade, convincing the public opinion to accept a specific worldview presented by a particular political party. The rhetorical maneuvering is rooted in the political leaning or editorial lines adopted by the services. As the research showed, TVP and TV Trwam favored the ruling camp and largely followed the government's official information policy. Utilizing the first strategic narrative, TVP and TV Trwam supported messages of the ruling camp, portraying their course of action as correct and justified. At the opposite pole of this spectrum there was TVN, which pursued an overtly anti-government information policy, particularly when criticizing the government frequently and presenting the negative social, political, and economic effects of the Law and Justice cabinet's actions. Polsat (which was rated by Poles as the most reliable at the time; cf. CBOS 2017), tried to avoid stark polarization and present the issue discussed here as factually as possible. Thus, Polsat and TVN, operating with the strategic narrative number 2, once again pointed out (though to an uneven extent) the incompetence of the ruling camp and its lack of understanding of complex contemporary issues, including the principles of international relations and diplomacy. What should be underlined here is the imbalance in this regard. The rhetorical overlay of the content presented by TVN, and especially Polsat, is not as clear-cut and intense as in the case of the other two stations – probably also because the second strategic narrative, by definition, does not have such a clearly defined enemy and unambiguous goal (in line with Burkean dramatistic framework).

Discussing the rhetorical context of the analyzed phenomenon, it is essential to note that the attractiveness of the strategic narratives as a tool of persuasion is also linked to the modalities of contemporary media. Specifically, this pertains to the struggle for the attention of the already cognitively overloaded audiences drowning in the vast sea of information. In such conditions, there is a high likelihood of reaching audiences with content that is not only comprehensible but also emotionally engaging. In order to make the materials as attractive as possible to viewers and draw their attention, which is not easy with a hard-news historical-political issue, the news bulletins gravitated toward unambiguous, clear, and sometimes controversial terms, phrases, and metaphorical nominations (as presented above). In other words, they tried to tell a complicated story in a simple, understandable, and engaging form, which, as should be noted, the viewers increasingly prefer. Well-communicated strategic narratives meet this challenging requirement.

4.4. Strategic narratives in practice – the cover stories of the 27th of February

The final phase of the presentation of the obtained results involve an exemplification of how the strategic narratives unveiled in the study were employed in the news broadcasts aired on 27th of February 2018. This date holds significance in the context of the crisis, as it coincided with the Polish government's announcement of an impending Polish delegation's departure to Israel in order to continue the discussions regarding the ongoing crisis. This development provided the news editors with an opportunity to furnish a preliminary overview of the progression of the conflict and to explore some potential pathways toward its resolution.

Almost every service featured one piece on the subject (only in TVP1 the traditional reporter material was supplemented by a separate report from the TV station's correspondent present in Jerusalem. In each of the materials, the reporters dealt with the issue of the amendment to the INR Act, as well as with the Polish––Jewish relations themselves. The structure and content of the exemplary materials are described briefly below.

On the 27th February 2018, the edition of the *Wiadomości* on TVP1 lasted 29 minutes and 18 seconds and consisted of 11 reports. Two of them were related to the topic under discussion, and the second material was brief and consisted only of a connection between the studio and a correspondent in Jerusalem who made a short comment. Both materials lasted altogether 5 minutes 13 seconds (approx. 18% of the service), but were aired at the end of the bulletin, as the 7th and 8th material. The announcement was accompanied by a ticker reading "Poland defends the truth about its tragic history." The material highlighted the theme of historical policy, beginning with a quote from the statement of Home Army soldier Colonel Witalis Skorupka and recalling the figure of Captain Witold Pilecki. Only then was the issue of the amendment to the INR law introduced and its repercussions, including the planned visit of the Polish delegation in Israel, presented. It is worth mentioning that this part includes conciliatory statements from professor Shevah Weiss and Michael Schudrich.

TV Trwam's *Informacje Dnia* lasted 14 minutes and 37 seconds and consisted of 4 materials. The analyzed material was aired first and lasted 4:17 (which constitutes almost 30% of the duration of the entire broadcast). The announcement was accompanied by a ticker reading "Polish–Israeli relations." The following issues were raised in the material: President Andrzej Duda's visit to Krakow and meeting with the Jewish community, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's meeting with the delegation of the Righteous Among the Nations of the World the day before, the amendment to the INR bill, the planned visit of the Polish

delegation to Israel and the presidential bill to establish the Day of Remembrance for Poles who rescued Jews during World War II.

In the two bulletins mentioned, the situation is called rather descriptively. For *Wiadomości*, the defining phrase for the current situation is: "The Polish authorities began to fight against the blurring of the truth and historical lies, but Israel reacted negatively to the amended INR Act," whereas for *Informacje Dnia* it is "a time when, mainly in Israel and the United States, Poland is accused of involvement in the Holocaust and of attempts to limit research into the history of World War II, which, according to some Jewish circles, is made possible by the amended INR Act." The journalists speak of "tension" and "tense relations," while the word "conflict" does not appear at all in journalistic statements in these two TV stations. More categorical terms appear incidentally in the statements of the quoted people, for example, an opposition MP, Katarzyna Lubnauer, says that it is "an incredible diplomatic conflict (which should be) extinguished as soon as possible," the lawyer Tomasz Koroluk speaks about "conflict (which) the Israeli side does not want to escalate," and the right-wing columnist Bronisław Wildstein calls the situation "an exchange of blows." Meanwhile, professor Shevah Weiss uses the health metaphor of "a certain wound [that] has been opened." The actions taken by the Polish authorities are, in turn, "an announcement of the normalization of relations," a "symbolic meeting" (of Andrzej Duda with the Jewish community in Cracow), "another gesture of the highest Polish authorities," "a good signal" (the announcement of the departure of a Polish delegation to Cracow), "a chance to talk without emotions about our common tragic history from almost 80 years ago" and the opportunity to "break this exchange of blows" (Bronisław Wildstein). The amendment to the INR Act itself was called a "Polish law prohibiting the propagation of historical lies," which somehow became a "bone of contention." Andrzej Duda stated instead: "My heart breaks when I hear someone say that in Poland we want to rewrite history. We do not want to rewrite any history. We only want historical truth to be defended at every possible step."

At this point, let us examine examples of news items presenting the second strategic narrative. *Fakty* of TVN that aired on the 27th of February 2018 lasted 26 minutes and 30 seconds and consisted of ten materials. The Polish–Jewish relations were discussed in one material lasting 3:15 (12 % of the whole broadcast), which it was the second news item on the agenda. The material covers the meeting of the presidential couple with the Jewish community in Krakow, a tweet from the Israeli embassy in Poland on the anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries, the visit of the Polish delegation to Israel, the amendment of the INR bill and a mention of Prime Minister Morawiecki's speech in Munich.

The analyzed edition of *Wydarzenia* lasted 26 minutes and 13 seconds and consisted of ten materials. The material on Polish–Israeli relations was aired first and lasted 3:21 (approximately 12.5% of the broadcast). The teaser was accompanied by the ticker "Gestures and words," and the announcement by a ticker reading "Attempts to repair." The material referred to the meeting of President Andrzej Duda and his wife with Jewish circles in Krakow, the planned visit of the Polish delegation to Israel, the amendment of the INR law and Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's speech in Munich.

In these two reports, the situation is called mainly a "crisis," "a diplomatic crisis," "a crisis caused by the amendment of the INR Act," "a troublesome situation" (former Minister of Foreign Affairs Witold Waszczykowski). In *Wydarzenia* the reporter represents the essence of the crisis as follows: "Legally the situation is clear, but it's all about politics. Everything indicates that the Poles hear something different, and the Israeli side hears something different." The actions taken by the protagonists are described in these services as follows: "a political gesture," "an attempt to change reality," "a symbolic gesture," "taking extreme care not to damage relations with Jewish circles," "an attempt to improve relations strained after the adoption of the INR law." It is also worth noting that both TV stations quoted an important statement by Andrzej Duda, which attempted to define the situation: "I would prefer to call it dissonance. I do not want to say that it is a crisis. I do not want to say that it is a disaster, because, in my opinion, it is not. And I am trying to do everything so that this issue is clarified and resolved."

In the materials of the TVN and Polsat stations, emphasis was given to the amendment to the law itself, which was also persuasively called: "disastrous regulations" (opposition MP Rafał Grupiński), "erroneous law," "a law to be thrown in the trash" (Tadeusz Jakubowicz, President of the Jewish Community in Cracow), "absurd provisions" (opposition MP Jan Grabiec). Meanwhile, the Israeli reaction to the amendment was described as "harsh" and it was mentioned that "the Israeli embassy had sent out bulk amounts of warnings." In addition, *Wydarzenia* picked up on Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki's unfortunate statement on "Jewish perpetrators" during Munich conference, quoting criticism from MP Kornel Morawiecki, privately the prime minister's father, and President Duda's comment on those words: "Today, above all, one should not make, well, further mistakes in these, in these, in these, well, in this entire debate that is going on, a wide one, and absolutely avoid awkward statements, such that can offend."

5. Discussion

In the Polish public debate, especially in the last 20 years, one can observe two currents in discussing the Holocaust. One of them, utilized as a tool of historical policy by the Law and Justice government, is based on the assumption that Poles were exclusively victims and heroes of World War II. According to this perspective, any message that could harm the "good reputation" of Poland and Poles should be combated in this context because it is deemed "hypocritical of historical truth." One can assume that it was in the spirit of this policy that the amendment to the INR law was initiated. The second trend demonstrates that, in addition to the many commendable behaviors of Poles (worth noting, for example, that among those with the title of Righteous Among the Nations, Poles constitute the largest national group), there were instances of crimes committed by Poles against Jews during World War II and in the post-war years (Machcewicz, Persak 2002; Engelking, Grabowski, 2018). These two ideologies clash in the public debate and draw on two types of research, which, however, divide Poles' attitudes towards Jews during the war in a manner that differs significantly. While both strands of research acknowledge the existence of all documented attitudes – passivity (which can be attributed to fear and the dramatic nature of the war), active support for Jews, and criminal attitudes towards Jews – their proponents differ in their emphasis on the proportions of these attitudes and in their narrative and interpretive approaches. The discrepancies in the emphases on the actual proportions of criminal attitudes contribute to the stereotype that represent Poles as anti-Semites, even partly responsible for the Holocaust. However, this stereotype lacks support from historical evidence and current public opinion surveys. Nevertheless, it is challenging to resist the impression that the two strategic narratives proven to be reproduced in the media in this study draw appropriately from each of these currents.

The Polish–Jewish relations are noted for their complexity, duration, even personal experience for the vast majority of Poles, and so are a natural candidate for constructing politically charged strategic narratives. Situating journalistic material within a larger strategic narrative, which is relatively easy to interpret for the majority of viewers, provides an opportunity for an attractive and comprehensible presentation of this complex topic. The analysis presented above confirms this mechanism in practice with a case study: strategic narratives provide a recurring pattern for structuring the presentation of upcoming events.

The first strategic narrative situates the current conflict within the broader issue of the importance of historical policy in building the strength and image of the state. According to this narrative, Poland has two interrelated tasks: it must

fight for the visibility of historical truth (internally and externally) and defend its good reputation in the international arena. This image is based on a certain paradox, namely that Poland should, according to the historical truth, be perceived as a victim (one of the biggest victims) of World War II, and at the same time it should be seen as a hero in the fight for freedom (due to the heroic attitudes of many Poles). Communicating these narrative elements requires taking up various threads, as well as widening the range of heroes, events and processes referred to, which is exactly what happens in the materials by *Wiadomości* and *Informacje Dnia*. In the narrative number 1, there is also a juncture: a new opening in Polish––Jewish relations, the beginning of a "constructive dialogue" and the beginning of work on a previously neglected area. In other words, this narrative devalues the achievements made so far in building the Polish–Jewish relations, postulating the need for a new, better opening, based on the truth.

The strategic narrative number 2, meanwhile, assumes that Poles and Jews are both united and divided by a difficult history. This means that the current Polish––Jewish relations are based on constant discussion, in which disputes often arise despite many efforts at reconciliation. The agreements reached in this bipolar system are fragile and prone to destabilization. An example of such destabilization is the controversy caused by the 2018 amendment to the INR Act. Thus, it can be said that the first strategic narrative to some extent situates the difficult Polish––Israeli relations within a broader issue (the struggle for historical truth and Poland's image), while the second strategic narrative focuses on the bilateral relations themselves and their nature.

As this study proves, the contemporary media modalities and mediatization of politics foster the possibilities for the instrumentalization of history for current political purposes through rhetorical tools by various political parties and media corporations. In a situation where we cannot take the audience's in-depth knowledge and critical thinking for granted, the ways in which even historical conflicts are narrativized will influence the interpretation of past and current behavior of political and social actors. Therefore, it can be assumed that the effect and, in some cases, even the purpose of using strategic narratives are strictly persuasive: by explaining history in a certain way, we gain support for certain political parties.

Kornelia Kończal, who also analyzed the case of the INR law, confirmed that the coverage of the issue resembled a primarily political dimension of the scandal. She describes the scandal as proving the concept of "mnemonic populism," which she understands as "poll-driven, manifestly moralistic, and above all anti-pluralist imaginings of the past" (2020, 458). It is hard to imagine a better vehicle for such a practice than television coverage, which, on the one hand, gives the broadcaster a multimodal means of expression and, on the other, provides a wide reach.

The use of narratives for political persuasion, especially in conflict situations, is also highlighted by Cezary Ornatowski. The researcher postulates the notion of "weaponized rhetoric" that "compels submission" by echoing or attacking meaning. The goal of this communicative practice is to gain a certain symbolic capital, an advantage in a discursive dispute (2021, 16). Armed rhetoric works through images, actions, or, as here, with narratives. Established narratives, together with the frames that build them, allow us to think about the largely unordered or entropic reality around us in an organized and comprehensible way. They suggest logical connections between events, cast roles, and assign motivations to characters. In the case of the material analyzed, the clear division of roles in the narratives helps the viewer to take a stand about "responsibility," or "morality" and make them feel as belonging to some community. Ornatowski points out that our sense of identity stems largely from the roles we feel we play in narratives, including those familiar, well-known identity positions we assimilate from the media we consume. As the researcher points out, "this applies even more to collective identity, which is not a function of being in its own right (i.e., the experience of a particular individual) but an idea that exists only in the consciousness of community members (but is reflected in and often shapes their experience of reality)" (2021, 18).

6. Conclusion

This study contributes to our understanding of how media coverage is driven by strategic narratives, shedding light on the dynamics of public discourse in the context of complex historical issues and contemporary political conflicts. Strategic narratives became a popular subject of research in political science. Meanwhile, given the space in which they are now very effectively distributed, i.e. both traditional media and social media, it seems natural to develop the study of strategic narratives also within the perspective of media studies. In this case, rhetorical analysis appears to be attractive and useful methodological approach to capture the specifics of this mode of communication. Rhetorical analysis is a method used to examine the persuasive and communicative elements within a narrative. It involves scrutinizing the language, structure, and persuasive techniques used to convey a specific message. In the context of constructing strategic narratives, it is essential to understand how language and persuasive strategies are employed to shape and influence public perception. The classical rhetorical features, such as the Burkean dramatistic framework, help in crafting a narrative that is coherent, compelling, and relatable to the intended audience. They enable communicators to craft narratives that are both compelling and understandable, thereby influencing public perception and interpretation of complex issues like political and social conflicts and scandals.

When considering the consequences of disseminating strategic narratives through media, it is essential to remember their impact on the formation of collective memory. A thorough discussion of this phenomenon would require a separate research study primarily on the reception and understanding of these narratives where the general direction of this relationship could be grasped. The concept of collective memory has been defined in various ways, but Maurice Halbwachs points out that it consists of reconstructing the past by the subject in relation to the social frames that give meaning. Roediger and Abel argue that "at its core is a form of memory that is shared by a group and of central importance to the social identity of the group's members" (2015, 359). Collective memory performs several functions, including the transfer of values, behavior patterns or attitudes, but, above all, the identity and legitimacy function. Thus, on the one hand, it is the binder of the community, which creates a bond of values and patterns, but on the other hand, it legitimizes the existing social and political system. But collective memory has an unsystematic, selective, multi-threaded character, as it consists of individual ideas about the past of one's group. As Szacka (2006) notices, these ideas are selected and transformed according to the cultural standards applicable in a given group, and thus they are standardized. Therefore, as the media remain a crucial sphere for shaping collective memory (cf. Neiger, Meyers, Zandberg 2011; Edy 1999), the uncovering of strategic narratives in the media allows for a standardized understanding and interpretation of past events. Strategic narratives presented in media by exposing material symbols of events, actions, heroes, and phenomena contribute to the unification of the understanding of the past, thus shaping collective memory and collective identity.

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