



# The New Cold War on the Football Field: .ru vs .pl

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**Abstract:** Russian-Polish relations have had a tumultuous history. Since the advent of the so-called ‘New Cold War’ heralded by Vladimir Putin in his 2007 Munich speech, the two countries have ended up on opposite sides. The New Cold War is fought not only on the governmental level. It is also found in history books, athletic competitions and other events where Poles and Russians can express their post-socialist identities and allegiances. For the most part, the ‘New Cold War’ is a battle for memory. In this paper, we offer a transnational Polish-Russian perspective on one of the memory wars fought in the post-socialist spaces. We propose to analyse how Polish-Russian antagonistic relations translate into online and offline conflicts during and in the aftermath of the UEFA Cup 2012, using big data analysis of new media, notably of *YouTube* and word-frequency software to identify the main themes of online discussions.

**Keywords:** New Cold War, Russia, Poland, memory war, YouTube, history, Katyn, gender

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A famous anecdote from the Yalta conference of February 1945 describes a conversation between Stalin and Churchill about borders in Eastern Europe. In an ultimate attempt to persuade Stalin, Churchill exclaimed that Lwów had never been a Russian city. ‘But Warsaw was’, answered Stalin. This conversation at the dawn of the Cold War is one of many examples that illustrate the complicated nature of Russian-Polish relations.

Russia and Poland share a history that encompasses multiple periods of rivalry and war between Muscovy and the Rzeczpospolita: the Polish invasions during the Time of Troubles at the beginning of 17<sup>th</sup> century; the annexation of parts of Poland during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries; the Polish struggle for independence culminating in the 1919-1920 war with the Bolshevik State; the Soviet invasion after the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact; the Katyn massacre of 1940; and Soviet domination over Poland during the Cold War. These events left scars on Russian and Polish collective memories that surfaced when both post-Soviet Russia and independent Poland struggled to find and assert their new identities.

After the end of the Cold War, Russia lost its influence over the formerly Soviet-dominated geopolitical space. Poland denounced its time ‘under Soviet occupation’ and joined NATO in 1999 and the EU in 2004 – an act that the Russian authorities deemed hostile. When Russian President Vladimir Putin lashed out at the US during the Munich Security Conference in 2007, arguing that the US had ‘overstepped its national borders in every way, [imposing its] policies on other nations. The force’s dominance inevitably encourages a number of countries to acquire weapons of mass destruction’ (Putin 2007), analysts spoke of a ‘New Cold War’ (Sakwa 2008; Mankoff 2009; Lucas 2008). The Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg noted that Putin’s speech was a clear sign that NATO should definitely expand towards the East (RFERL 2007). Polish officials saw in this speech the revelation of Russia’s ‘true face’ (Wprost, 2007).

The ‘New Cold War’ is, among other things, a battle for memory. Both the Polish and the Russian government approach their relations in terms inherited from their historical past – and their populations follow suit. If, for many Russians, the Soviet period was a time of glory, for Poles it was a time of humiliation and suffering. In Russia, the Polish interpretation of the entire socialist period as ‘the Soviet occupation’ is often considered revisionist or even pro-Nazi: the battle for memory becomes a battle for identity.

For Poland, the battle for national identity after the collapse of the Soviet Union was a painful process. In many cases it was connected with the so-called ‘reckoning with the past’ [rozliczenie się z przeszłością], which remains unfinished. President Lech Kaczyński started a broad discussion about anti-communist resistance in Poland and the fate of its ‘cursed soldiers’ (Wiater 2007). Thanks to his efforts, the first of March was declared a ‘Day of Remembrance’ and is particularly intended as a tribute to the underground anti-communist soldiers – [Narodowy Dzień Pamięci ‘Żołnierzy Wyklętych’] (Wieliczka-Szarkowa 2013).

Identity politics is no less important in Russia. The new Russian identity builds on a combination of pre-revolutionary and Soviet grandeur (Etkind 2013). The Russian national anthem has been replaced with the Soviet Union anthem including updated lyrics by the same S. Mikhalkov who wrote its first version; Polish attempts to criticize the Soviet Union are met with fierce reactions from the Russian Foreign Ministry. However, as communism does not play a pivotal role in the new Russian identity it needs to be supplemented with other ‘moments of glory’. In an attempt to change the more than 70-year old tradition of celebrating the October Revolution, the Russian authorities heralded in 2005 a ‘Day of People’s Unity’, commemorating the expulsion of Polish-Lithuanian forces from Moscow in 1612. This is but one example of the Russian-Polish history-ridden confrontation, which affects even seemingly innocuous activities such as football games.

The 2012 UEFA Cup, which took place in Poland and Ukraine, presented another demonstration of this reciprocal nationalist *ressentiment*. For Russia and Poland, the Cup culminated in a football match that pitted the two teams against each other on Russia’s Independence Day. The match ended in violent clashes between the respective football fans. Various networks extensively filmed the clashes prior to, during and after the game. Media coverage preceding the Cup was politically and historically charged, particularly in Poland. Manifestations of open animosity were abundant: swearing, denigration, metaphors pregnant

with lewd sexual innuendo and obscenities littered the online field. Reaching a fever pitch, offline clashes spilled over into online fights.

In this paper, we offer a transnational Polish-Russian study of this incident of memory war that has been fought in the post-socialist space. We explore how Polish-Russian antagonisms in the international arena translate into online and offline conflicts, thereby putting memory construction at stake. As a unit of analysis, we have chosen memory models – Polish and Russian cultural constructions that conflate modern events with historical references, in which both sides draw parallels between Russian-Polish history and contemporary events.

### Theoretical and methodological framework

In our paper we regard the UEFA cup as a memory event for its participants and employ the concept of a memory model (Etkind 2013), in which contemporary subjects comprehend the political present by drawing analogies to the historical past. In this process, the digital public sphere renegotiates and remediates both the past and the present (Rutten et al 2013). Various online media, technologies, and platforms play different roles in this process. As Andrew Hoskins pointed out:

[...] the construction of memory in everyday life is ‘imbricated’ not only in digital recording technologies and media but also in the standards and classifications resulting from their growth that inevitably and often invisibly regulate our sociotechnical practices. (Hoskins 2009: 95)

On the Russian segment of the Internet, antagonistic political clashes with historical and religious undertones have been termed ‘Holy war’, or *kholivar* (холливар). It is a specific, digitally-born pattern of phatic communication, i.e. that type of communication whose only function is to perform social tasks, as opposed to conveying information (Malinowski 1923; Waugh 1980). As Vera Zvereva has observed, ‘Holywars’ – protracted arguments where neither side intends to alter their viewpoint – are extremely common in the Russian digital media and blogosphere (Zvereva 2012). *Kholivar* even has its own entry in *Lurkmore*, the Russian encyclopaedia of internet memes (Lurkmore 2013). *Holivar* debates focus on themes that are connected to identity. There are a certain number of comments that clearly fit under Roman Jakobson’s definition of ‘phatic’ with primitive exclamations such as ‘Go Russia!’ or ‘Go Poland!’ However, the more significant body of ‘holy war’ comments that we analysed has identity-building components (cf. Morenkova-Perrier 2012; Rutten et al. 2013).

Focusing on *YouTube*, we selected the most frequently viewed videos about the clashes in Warsaw on 12 June 2012. We have chosen *YouTube* because of its popularity and accessibility, which allows for big data analysis. Due to thousands of comments to the videos, we scraped the data using Python code and processed them via word-frequency software – wordle.net – to reveal the most frequently used words. The audience’s reaction is operationalized by quantitative analysis of the key terms, which are followed by qualitative discourse analysis. For this purpose, we created word clouds (www.wordle.net) out of the comments to

*YouTube* videos. Wordle.net processes the plain text of the webpages and uses the number of times a word appears in a text to determine its relative size, omitting so-called ‘stop words’ (frequently-used, but unimportant words such as ‘the’, ‘and’ or ‘but’ and their analogues in Russian and Polish). Historically meaningful concepts are analysed in their context in order to determine whether their connotations are positive or negative.

Our analysis of visuals is based on an offshoot of semiotics – iconography and iconology (Panofsky 1955), where iconographic analysis is aimed at discerning who is depicted and why he/she is depicted in a particular way. This method can be applied not only to art, as Erwin Panofsky suggested in his works (Hasenmueller 1978), but also to the analysis of contemporary ‘icons’ and artistic objects (Holly 1984: 87; Warburg 1939). As Warburg notes, ‘[a picture] becomes a hieroglyph, not meant simply as a picture to look at but rather as something to be read – an intermediate stage between image and sign’ (Warburg 1939: 279). Thus, the images that we analyse in our paper are interpreted through their iconographic meaning and the particular context within which they are presented.

Moreover, visuals are an extremely important part of memory construction. As Johnson notes, ‘rather than turning to narrative, memory often figures the past with the immediacy of images’ (Johnson 2012, 4), especially with their psychological evocation, which Warburg called *Pathosformel*, i.e. educing pathos. The images that we are looking at are all invested with the ‘pathos formula’ that helps them remain in the European ‘picture memory’. In Efal’s words,

The ‘Pathos Formula’, which expresses this traumatic encounter between man and the world, is a result of a visual fixation, the source of which is a process of mimicry of some of the bearable (biomorphic) qualities of the threatening force, that then becomes petrified and fixed as an image’. (Efal 2007: 221)

Warburg’s pathos formula for image memory is especially visible in the context of the present analysis: the images that usually make it to the identity narratives are the ones that have a significant traumatic component: wars, occupation and humiliation. Thus, image memory at least in its European context is a sequence of often violent, harrowing visuals that are re-interpreted and re-cycled in an identity construction process often bent on re-living and re-inventing the traumas of the past.

### **The Polish-Russian memory war**

Ever since the fall of the Iron Curtain, Poland and Russia have experienced numerous ups and downs in their relationship (Tsygankov 2012). The antagonism in the international arena over anti-missile systems or Polish support for the Orange Revolution in Ukraine spills over into arguments over the ‘correct version’ of history. The Polish government uses commemorations and anniversaries to bring up the Soviet invasion of 1939 and the Katyn massacre. The Russian government accuses Poland of being aggressive, nationalist and ungrateful for having been liberated from the Nazi yoke (Cheremushkin 2003). Thus, Polish-Russian debates often become memory events, where either or both countries revise historical events

and inscribe them into the contemporary debate. If during the Cold War Poland, *nolens volens*, was on Russia's side, in the New Cold War, Poland and Russia see each other as adversaries.

The 2008 Russian-Georgian war seemed to confirm Polish fears of Russian expansionism in the post-Soviet space. The Polish President Lech Kaczyński compared the diplomatic impasse around the war with the appeasement of Hitler (Nagorski 2008) – a memory model that infuriates Russian officials and is sure to elicit a very stern reaction from Russia. The Polish President went so far as to compare Russian aggression in Georgia to the Hitler-Stalin pact, the Soviet invasion of Poland in 1939, and the subsequent inclusion of Poland into the Soviet bloc. Moreover, Kaczyński stressed that Poland hoped to ensure 'that Americans do not become indifferent to any attempts to include Poland in Russia's sphere of influence' (Nagorski 2008). Consequently, the Polish leadership re-interpreted a distant war as a memory event, reviving the image of an aggressive, colonizing Russia.

Another memory event was created out of the catastrophe on 10 April 2010, when the Polish Presidential airplane crashed near the city of Smolensk in Western Russia, killing all 96 people on board, including president Lech Kaczyński, his wife Maria Kaczyńska, several high-ranking Polish governmental officials, and relatives of the Katyn massacre victims. They were flying from Warsaw to attend the 70th anniversary of the massacre. The catastrophe united Polish society in mourning, but also divided public opinion. Although the Russian and Polish investigators concluded, in separate official inquiries, that poor visibility and human error were the causes of the crash, alternative stories and conspiracy theories emerged. Several Polish politicians accused the Kremlin of pumping artificial fog over the runway or causing an explosion on board. Although the majority of Poles did not share these theories, such rumours increased the level of mutual distrust between Poland and Russia. This tragic event also resulted in a wave of media responses that connected the Smolensk crash with the Katyn massacre and amplified memories of troubled Polish-Russian relations (Etkind et al. 2012; de Bruyn 2013). In the end, the Smolensk crash prompted conciliatory gestures from both President Putin and Prime Minister Tusk – that is, until the 2012 Euro Cup.

Most East European countries feel uneasy about their Soviet bloc history. In 2011, the Polish Constitutional Court amended legal regulations that banned 'fascist, communist or other totalitarian symbols'. It remains legal to use these symbols only in relation to artistic, educational or scientific pursuits (Polska Agencja Prasowa 2012). Nevertheless, before the 2012 UEFA Cup, Polish officials recommended to football fans that they not bring Soviet symbols to Poland: 'A vot izobrazhenie serpa i molota priravnivaetsia v Pol'she k fashistskoi simvolike i zapreshcheno zakonom' ['The hammer and sickle symbol is an equivalent of Fascist symbols and is banned by law in Poland'], Interfax reported quoting Poland's vice-ambassador to Russia, Jarosław Książek ('Varshava razreshit "serp i molot"' 2012). But he added: 'k maikam s nadpis'iu "SSSR" nikto pridirat'sia ne budet.' [(...) nobody will take issue with t-shirts with the inscription "USSR"] The Russian fans sported exactly this kind of Soviet paraphernalia. Comparisons of the Soviet Union with Fascism or Nazi Germany caused an outcry both in Russia's governing circles (MID RF 2009), and, according to our findings, also among the general (internet) public.

## Politics and sports

Since antiquity, sport and politics have made a successful pair. In modern times, the prime example of ideology mingling with sports is the competitions organised by the Third Reich, especially the Berlin Olympics of 1936 (Walters 2006), where athletic victory was considered an integral part of racial superiority. Equally interesting are the relations between politics and sport during the Cold War. Tensions developed on two levels – between the communist and capitalist blocks on the one hand, and among different representatives of each on the other. After the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the Czech hockey victory over the USSR in 1969 was celebrated throughout the country as a moral achievement as well. When Poland was close to rebellion in 1980, Władysław Kozakiewicz was booed at the Olympic Games in Moscow after he set a new world record; in response, he showed the Soviet audience an offensive gesture, which is now called ‘gest Kozakiewicza’ [the Kozakiewicz gesture] (Szerszunowicz 2008).

As Tomlinson and Young note (2006: 3), ‘the Olympics and the World Cup as media events have continued to stimulate fierce competition among nations for the right to stage such events and to fuel discourses and narratives of international competition and national rivalry.’ Combining sport, politics and mass culture, such events revivify old grievances and produce new identity constructions (Smith and Schaffer 2000). Even though it is often argued that the international nature of these events is ‘a bulwark against ignorance, chauvinism, and war’ (MacAloon 1981: 263), large sporting events have not failed to spark outbursts of violence and xenophobia (Blacker 2012; Peucker 2009). For football fandom the concept of ‘narrative identity’ is particularly relevant, since football teams and clubs produce polysemic texts, which allow supporters to construct their own individual narratives (Crawford 2008).

The UEFA Cup 2012 did not avoid the pitfalls associated with mass sporting events. The controversy began with the feminist group ‘FEMEN’ demonstrating against human trafficking in Ukraine. FEMEN members referred to the drastic increase in forced prostitution during sport competitions and the male chauvinistic ethos associated with them (‘Femen vs Euro2012’ 2011). There was also a threat of the Cup’s boycott by European leaders because of Ukraine’s human rights record and former prime minister Iuliia Tymoshenko’s arrest (Harding 2012). This controversy before the UEFA cup provoked a micro-battle in a larger memory war. Polish pre-emptive protests against the use of Soviet insignia during the Cup were met with an opposite reaction from Russians. This was an example of ‘self-inflicted’ identity construction, which internalises the hostile discourse about the Other. Even though Russians do not routinely wave Soviet flags or wear fur-hats, this is a common stereotypical image of Russians. In this instance, the Russians attending the event appropriated their pejorative portrayal and amplified it, with disastrous consequences.

Before the Polish-Russian match, a Polish politician from the party ‘Law and Justice’ [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS], Marek Suski, said that the feelings of Polish fans were fully justified, because they resulted from historical events. The Polish fans’ behaviour, he explained, stemmed from the temptation to punish Russians for the Bolshevik invasion of 1939, the Katyn massacre of 1940 – which, in his opinion, aimed exterminating the Poles – and the plane crash in Smolensk of 2010 (Suski 2012).

**Image 1.** Banner unfolded by Russian fans during the Euro 2012 football game in Warsaw on 12 June 2012



Source: Public domain

**Image 2.** Screenshot from the movie '300' that is frequently employed in caricatures



Source: Zack Snyder's '300'

The controversy surrounding Soviet insignia goaded Russian fans. Many waved USSR flags; others wore T-Shirts or fur-hats with red stars, the hammer and sickle or Soviet flags. The game in Warsaw was scheduled for 12 June, Russia's Independence Day, which many Russian fans decided to commemorate with a march through Warsaw. Moreover, the game took place in a new National Stadium (Stadion Narodowy), as opposed to the old and ill-reputed Stadion Dziesięciolecia that used to be the venue for communist meetings and festivities. Like many other football fans around the world, Russian supporters are infamous for their violent behaviour. Clashes between fans of different football clubs have made headlines in the Russian press, and the violent Manezhnaia Square riots in Moscow in 2011, with an almost 10,000 strong rally, were also in part organized by the football-fan network (Hutchings and Tolz 2011) after one of the fan club activists was killed in a street fight.

During the Russian-Polish game, Russian fans unfurled a giant banner with a picture of a red-coloured medieval Russian knight in armour with a sword and an inscription in English 'This is Russia' (see Image 1 above). The fact that Russian fans chose a medieval knight could be a consequence of the 2005 Unity Day celebrations, which commemorated the defeat of the Polish enemy by Russian knights in 1612. The construction of a new Russian identity that combines both medieval and Soviet history is obvious here. While the inscription is in English, the red colour makes a reference to the Soviet era (red flag, Red Scare). Even though the banner is red, blue, and white like the current Russian flag, the main figure is still red, which could be an allusion to the Soviet past and the period of Communist rule in Poland, which is regarded as Soviet colonisation. The pre-modern armour evokes the Time of Troubles, when Russians drove the Polish army from Muscovy. The poster is a double entendre simultaneously referring to two historical periods when Russians subjugated Poles. By alluding to an ancient Russian victory over the Poles irrelevant to the contemporary events but well-understood by all, this poster presented an aggressive provocation.

Russian football fans identified the knight in the poster as Dmitrii Pozharskii, the head of the Russian army that drove the Polish-Lithuanian forces out of Muscovy in 1612. Thus, this image depicted Poland as already defeated, a common way of 'trash talking' before a competition. The banner was also based on a widespread 'This is Sparta!' meme that parodies the scene from the 2006 motion picture '300' (see Image 2 above), in which the main protagonist, Leonidas, King of Sparta, declines peace with the Persians by shouting at the Persian Messenger 'This is Sparta!' and kicking him into a well (the caption itself is not from the same scene however). This scene from the movie can be considered an identity construction event: not only does Leonidas overpower his enemy, he also shapes the identity of his people.

In Poland, images of the EURO 2012 and the Polish-Russian match frequently reference Soviet-Polish relations. For instance, Image 3 below depicts Polish football players with sabres and army uniforms from the Polish-Soviet War (February 1919 – March 1921), which ended in a Polish victory. This particular picture also refers to the deeply-rooted romantic World War II myth of the Polish cavalry attacking enemy tanks with sabres. It is worth mentioning that those myths were recently re-examined in the highly controversial Polish-Lithuanian historical film directed by Paweł Chochlew, *Tajemnica Westerplatte* [*The Secret of Westerplatte*].

**Image 3.** Photomontage ‘Lance do boju, szable w dłoń! Rosjanina goń, goń, goń!’ [‘Lances for the battle, sabers in hand, Chase the Russian, chase, chase, chase!’]) from the newspaper ‘Gwizdek24’



Source: [www.gwizdek24.pl](http://www.gwizdek24.pl), published online 11 June 2012 (accessed 13 September 2013)

**Image 4.** Photomontage from the Polish newspaper Super Express, 11 June 2012



Source: Super Express, 11 June 2013. <http://m.se.pl/multimedia/galeria/87792/na-moskala/> (accessed 13 September 2013)

This picture's caption is a well-known reference to *Żurawiejka* – a two-line couplet, used by cavalry regiments of the Polish Army and popular during the Polish-Soviet War and in the interwar period. Some historians trace the Polish *Żurawiejka* back to the 'Uhlan March', written in 1863, during the January Uprising. The original text of *Żurawiejka* from the 1920s reads: 'Lance do boju, szable w dłoń: Bolszewika goń, goń, goń' ['Lances for the battle, sabres in hand,/ Chase the Bolshevik, chase, chase, chase']. In the above image, the author changed only one word, replacing 'Bolshevik' with 'Russian' (Odziemkowski 1996; Kaczmarek 2010; Brzoza 2011).

The next picture of Polish football players depicted as flying hussars (the cavalry of the first Polish army), conflates Polish prowess on the football field with military victories on the battlefield.

The game finished 1:1, but what happened inside the stadium was only the beginning. That evening, clashes between Russian and Polish supporters left 11 people injured. Both Polish and Russian Football Unions were fined for the behaviour of their fans. In the following sections, we analyse the 'holy wars' provoked online by *YouTube* videos that depicted the clashes between Russian and Polish fans.

### Transnational resonance

A 'Video of brutal clashes between Russian & Polish fans in Warsaw' (Russia Today 2012) was published online on *YouTube* by the Kremlin-backed *Russia Today* and targeted an international audience. As of 25 of March 2013, the video had 1,709,749 views and almost 9,889 comments from all over the world. In the video, one can see several violent clashes, most notably a person in a black jacket attacking a Russian fan with a Russian flag, as well as physical confrontations with the police. During these clashes, the popular Russian military song 'Katiusha' blares in the background – another memory model that connects Russia's Soviet days of glory (in this case, the Great Patriotic War) with modern times. Quantitative analysis of the comments revealed several discussion threads with history-laden discourses (see fig. 1).

Apart from Polish and English curses, there are multiple references to Soviet times with keywords such as 'Soviet' and 'USSR' that usually included accusations of repression and further criticism. Pro-Russian commentaries were also in English, but Russian-language comments were not statistically significant.

There was also a lengthy discussion in various languages about the comparison between Soviet and Nazi insignias – a clear overspill from the 'offline' debate that took place before the Euro 2012. The words 'Germany' and 'Germans' were also used frequently. Looking at these words in context, it becomes clear that most commentators are referring to the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact. Thus, this debate can be placed within the on-going European memory war over the ethics of equating Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia. Russian officials have invariably met this thesis with strong objections, and the resulting discussion is reflected in the comments responding to the *YouTube* video.



## The Russian reaction

The ‘This is Russia’ banner and the clashes before and after the game provoked much digital reaction. With a Cyrillic title, the same video appeared as ‘Draka mezhdu pol’skimi i rossiiskimi fanatami v Pol’she’ [Clashes between Polish and Russian fans in Poland] (RT Russian 2012, 12 June), which, as of 25 March 2013, had 544,297 views and 4,913 comments. Figure 2 displays a word cloud generated after scraping the comments to the video.

An interesting feature of the comments is their transnational dynamics. Even though the majority of the discussion took place in Russian, there are statistically significant English, Polish and (less so) Ukrainian language components, which reveal a predominant anti-Russian content (e.g. the Cyrillic word ‘кацап’ (katsap) – a derogatory reference to Russians in Ukraine and some other countries). Given the controversy surrounding the status of the Russian language in Ukraine, the explicit use of derogatory Ukrainian terms towards Russians is especially important. In this case, language acts as a tool of identity construction, emphasizing the independence of Ukraine even from the Russian language.

Apart from multi-lingual Russian-Polish-Ukrainian swearing, there are many references to Stalin and the USSR and denigrating comments that imply a subordinate position of Poland in regard to Russia. This war of words spilled across borders, with Ukrainian commentators siding with Polish ones in their opposition to Russian behaviour. Frequently used words such as ‘СССР’ [USSR], and ‘история’ [history] are just a fraction of other historical references to ‘красная кацапская чума’ [red katsap plague] and murdered Polish officers (Katyn). At the same time, Russian-language commentators insulting Polish fans make few references to history: most of their hate speech is just obscene. Occasional commentators also mock the plane crash at Smolensk and remind other commentators that Poland was previously under Soviet dominance.

Domestically, discussions of Russian identity involve a memory war, which is often similar to the polemics surrounding the ‘This is Russia’ banner. People who prefer not to overlook gruesome pages in the Soviet Union’s history are often called ‘либерасты’ (a pejorative conflation of ‘liberal’ and ‘pederast’) – those who allegedly ‘brought Russia to its knees’ or ‘broke up the Soviet Union’ – while those emphasizing Russia’s glorious past are often seen as patriots, not least by the Russian authorities (Etkind 2013).

## The Polish reaction

We have selected a video of the Russian-Polish clashes titled ‘Zamieszki w Warszawie przed meczem Euro 2012 Polska – Rosja’ [‘Riots in Warsaw before the Euro 2012 match Poland – Russia’] (KibicPolskiPL 2012) posted on 12 June 2012, which gathered 386,120 views and 2,392 comments as of 25 March 2013. Among the most popular vocabulary are ‘kurwa’ (a vulgar Polish word equivalent to ‘whore’) and ‘jebać’ – (‘to fuck’). In addition to offensive insults, we noted the specially coined ‘СССРадам’ – a portmanteau that begins with the abbreviation of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (СССР) in Cyrillic, while the last Cyrillic letter of the word, ‘Р’, is also the Latin letter for the word ‘Padam’, which means ‘col-



**Image 5.** Górnik Walbrzych supporters in the memory of ‘cursed soldiers’, 1 March 2013



*Source:* Follow my Freedom Blog ‘01.03.2013 – Żołnierze wykłęci/Cursed Soldiers’ <http://followmyfreedom.wordpress.com/2013/03/04/1-03-2013-zolnierze-wyklecicursed-soldiers/> accessed 18 September 2013

**Images 6 and 7.** Left: Jan Matejko ‘Polonia – Rok 1863 (Zakuwana Polska)’ [‘Polonia – Year 1863 (Chained Poland)’], Right: Poster: ‘Czy chcecie dopuścić do tego, by tak się stało i z Waszymi kobietami i dziewczętami? Brońcie się wszystkimi siłami przed bolszewizmem!’ [‘Do you want this to happen to your children and girls? Protect them from Bolsheviks’], Poland (1921)



*Source:* Public domain and <http://tipolog.livejournal.com/51039.html> (accessed 13 September 2013)

In many cases, flags and banners at sport stadiums include anti-Semitic slogans. They are associated with anti-communist views, prominent among football supporters, and the idea of ‘Żydokomuna’ [‘Jewish Commune’, i.e. Jewish influence], which arose during the interwar period and blames Jews for introducing Communism in Poland. The idea is also related to the post-war period and accusations that Polish Jews cooperated with the Soviet regime (Shore 2005; Michlic 2006; Śpiewak, 2012).

### ‘Russia is a whore!’ and ‘Poles can suck it’

The fact that large sporting events are associated with a male chauvinist ethos was especially visible in our online material. Both Russian and Polish fans resort to gendered metaphors in their insults, which is, in itself, very common at a football match. In this case, however, it can be traced to historical traditions of Polish/Russian representations. In both cases, there is a notable shift in gendered representation of the self. After the partitions of Poland and especially after the anti-Russian insurrection of 1863, Polish patriots frequently used the motif of a woman victimized by invaders (Images 6 and 7).

In the 1920s, Russia was depicted by Polish state propaganda predominantly as a male barbarian trying to rape female Poland. In addition, the ‘Russian’ protagonist often displays ‘Semitic features’ (cf. Satjukow, Gries 2004), which reflects the popular Polish attitudes towards the Bolshevik Revolution and the alleged Jewish influence on it.

**Image 8 and 9.** WWII Poster ‘Motherland calls’ by Irakly Toidze and a photograph of Evge-nii Vuchetich’s sculpture commemorating the battle of Stalingrad



Source: <http://www.plakaty.ru/posters?cid=1&part=%2525D0&thumbs=1&id=40>, public domain

Anti-Semitic swearing is still present among the Polish commentators online, as we identified previously, but it no longer carries gender overtones.

In Russia, depicting the nation as a woman was also common (Cheauré 2002; Rutten 2010), e.g., during and after the Great Patriotic War when themes such as ‘Родина-Мать зовет [Motherland Calls]’ became popular in posters and sculptures (see above). According to some authors, these were ‘phallic woman’ representations (Sarlin 1963; Kennedy 2002), which featured an un-feminine image of a woman with a weapon and which suggested not victimization, but rather a ‘male’, ‘active’ role. Thus, in the current Russian identity discourse, Russia (as exemplified by the ‘This is Russia’ banner) is no longer associated with a female image. On the contrary, the female role is assigned to Russia’s adversaries.

In visuals related to the football match, however, neither Russia nor Poland is depicted in female form. Moreover, football fans of both countries strove to embody their countries in a militarized masculine form, exaggerated by means of phallic objects (sabres, swords etc.). In these football-connected manifestations of the so-called ‘New Cold War’, both sides are trying to feminize the opponent, while preserving male and active forms for themselves.

According to numerous studies (Dreizin, Priestly 1982; Zhel’vis 1997; Kon 2011), Russian curses have a potent gender aspect, suggesting master-slave relations. In these obscenities, the very sexual act proclaims dominance of males over females. Feminizing the other signifies the implied loss of virility of the Other (Mikhailin 2000). By sexually assaulting the opponent in the commentaries, the enunciators threaten the target group, which is rendered submissive through the proclaimed sexual action (Kon 2011; Zhel’vis 1997). For example, Russian-language commentaries feature obscene statements demanding that Poles perform oral sex on Russians.

Both sides of the debate tried to portray the Other as a female, which explains the extensive use of the term ‘kurwa’ in Polish and ‘bliad’ (‘whore’) in Russian, but in the Russian case the sexual metaphors were predominantly based on an active denigration of the opponent. Even ‘the Kozakiewicz gesture’ had a similar message: the sportsman showed the audience that he was in the masculine, superior position vis-a-vis the booing public. Even though gendered metaphors are ubiquitous in everyday speech and among fans during sporting events, the Polish and Russian usage seems significant and linked to memories of their military past. Moreover, the New Cold War context provided both Poles and Russians with the opportunity to rattle their (virtual) sabers in the quest to affirm their masculinity.

## Conclusion

The notion of a New Cold War seems not so far-fetched when one looks at Russian-Polish relations.<sup>2</sup> Foreign policy seeps into far-reaching areas like the football fields. The Polish-Russian game on 12 June 2012 in Warsaw illustrated the complicated relationship that these

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<sup>2</sup> This article was written in spring 2013 and could not take into consideration the events in Ukraine in winter 2013/14, which constitute a memory war on their own. Nevertheless, in the context of Polish-Russian relations we still argue that the term ‘New Cold War’ is appropriate, as both Russia and Poland were seen as members of opposing (military) blocs that took an opportunity to spill over their *ressentiment* on the football field

two peoples have with their common history. The UEFA Cup generated a ‘memory boom’ (cf. Winter 2006), not on an academic but on a popular level, which resulted in clashes and offensive behaviour that had hardly any relation to sport. The online clashes revealed patterns of behaviour similar to those observed offline: obscene language, insults, and references to the past are a logical continuation of the violence on the streets of Warsaw.

In order to analyse the memory event of the football game, we selected the most viewed *YouTube* video clips that featured the report of the clashes between Russian and Polish fans. As we scrutinized different audiences, we chose the most frequently viewed videos under Cyrillic, English and Polish headlines. We discovered that both Russian and Polish actors employ memory models, making references to the glorious periods of their respective histories related to war victories: in the Russian case it was the Time of Troubles (‘This is Russia’) and the Soviet period when Poland was under Soviet dominance, while in the Polish case the historic references included ‘flying hussars’ and the victorious 1919-1920 war with Bolshevik Russia. The iconographic analysis of the images used by both sides reveals that Russian memory models merge a medieval knight who defeated the Poles in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with a hammer and a sickle on a fur-hat. Russian memory models deal mostly with historical references, while Polish models make clear connections not only with historical events, but also with the history of sport during the Cold War.

In general, we describe the patterns of communication under all three videos on the *YouTube* platform as ‘holy wars’. An overwhelming part of the digital material consists of multilingual, obscene and highly gendered language. This hate speech does not include a significant amount of ethnic stereotyping that was prevalent during the Russian-Polish war of 1919-1920, but mostly concentrates on the events of the more recent past relating to Russian-Polish antagonism during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In all three videos, a statistically significant portion of the Ukrainian and Ukrainian-speaking audience side with the Polish perspective. The surprising result of our findings is the fact that even a transnational audience uses memory models for the ostensibly innocuous purposes of football fandom, making references to the Soviet past and to the alliance between the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany.

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