The Burden of History and the Search for Truth: Polish-Russian Television News Narratives in the Wake of Smolensk

THESIS

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Hannah Stewart

Graduate Program in Slavic and East European Studies

The Ohio State University

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Thesis Committee:

Yana Hashamova (Advisor)

Theodora Dragostinova

Daniel Pratt
Abstract

This research analyzes television media in both Poland and Russia and their depiction of the Smolensk tragedy. The crash occurred on April 10, 2010, in Smolensk, Russia, as a Polish delegation traveled to a Katyn memorial service to remember the murder of Polish military officers by the Soviet Union in the Second World War. All 96 on board died, including Polish president Lech Kaczyński and many heads of the military, government and clergy. This research argues that Smolensk television narratives, in their characterization of the crash, the investigation and memorialization, show how elites (who produce and influence the media) create sentiments that contribute to perceptions of nationhood. Each country argues for their own “truth” of Smolensk and their political relations through television news. Television news narratives in both countries show the opposing country as an absolute, negative other, therefore enforcing their own righteousness in their political relations and encouraging nationalist ideas. The nationalism that stems from these television news narratives then promotes belonging to the right and truthful nation that produces these television reports. Given the high viewership of television news in both countries, the potential stakes for persuasion are high.

The first portion of this work outlines the history of Polish-Russian relations, which the concept of othering stems from. Then follows a theoretical framework of this research
through the definition of nebulous terms such as the nation and identity. An explanation of the parameters of media, particularly television news, comes after. Next is a description of the importance of media research, especially related to belonging and othering. The subsequent portion of this research considers the particularities of Poland and Russia’s government system and its relationship to the specific media landscape of each country. The bulk of this section details television news clips from several prominent state-owned and privately-owned stations in Poland and Russia. Through content analysis, I evaluate each clip individually, and then draw larger, comparative themes from the entirety. I finally relate this analysis to larger concerns regarding Polish and Russian audiences, Polish-Russian political relations, and nationalism.
Vita

2008..........................................................Waynesville High School

2012..........................................................B.A. International Studies, Kenyon College

2016..........................................................M.A. Slavic and East European Studies,

The Ohio State University

Fields of Study

Major Field: Slavic and East European Studies
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Introduction- The Initial Hope for Improved Polish-Russian Political Relations after the Smolensk Crash

In April of 2010, public and privately-owned television news networks in Poland and Russia presented the first images of the tragic Smolensk air crash to their citizens. The crash occurred on April 10, 2010, in Smolensk, Russia, as a Polish delegation traveled to a Katyn memorial service to remember the murder of Polish military officers by the Soviet Union in the Second World War. All 96 on board died, including Polish president Lech Kaczyński and many heads of the military, government and clergy. In those first televised narratives, the presented imagery and text often possessed many similarities, despite differences in ownership and the varying influence of the state. In these clips, the wreckage still laid strewn across the forest. Investigators and police surrounded the crash site, as both passersby and mourners stopped to reflect. Closeup frames focus on memorial flowers or pieces of debris. The scene of the catastrophe appears haunting, and the lack of narration and variance in frames lets the horror of the crash site speak for itself. The initial shock and trauma of the disaster shows through silence and personal mourning from citizens.

The lack of narration on both Polish and Russian television news soon shifted to increasingly political, nationalist narratives that blamed the other country for the crash and problems in their relations. The Smolensk plane crash portended multiple tensions within Polish-Russian political relations: the Katyn massacre, memorialization of Soviet
atrocities, current conflicts between the two countries and their perceived political and cultural differences. Television news in each country promotes their own “truths” in regards to their political relations and their differences, therefore these various issues quickly came to the fore on television in relation to Smolensk. Issues of investigation and memorialization further precipitated these increasingly nationalist narratives. From 2010 to 2015, these issues intensified poor political relations. Immediately following the crash, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev announced the creation of a joint investigative committee to look into the details and reasoning behind the crash. Both countries also chose to conduct their own investigations. Initial findings, reported in May 2010, found fault with pilots for landing in inclement weather. However, by the publication of the Russian committee’s final investigation in January of 2011, trouble already began. Poland investigators protested the document on the claims that the Russian government did not return the plane wreckage or provide key documents. In June of 2011, Poland’s committee released their own report, placing blame on the Polish crew as the Russian report does but also noting mistakes from Russian air controllers and deficiencies at the airport. The governments of both countries publicly disagree with each others’ crash reports.

Memorialization also proves contentious. Initially, a plaque in Polish stating that the Polish president died enroute to a Katyń genocide memorial stood at the crash site. The Russian government replaced this with a new plaque in Russian that makes no mention of Katyń. Polish protests, from both government officials and families of Katyń victims, prompted Dmitry Medvedev to announce plans for a joint memorial. Still,
further arguments over the size, location and design of the memorial ensue. This leads to Polish and Russian citizens and officials remembering the crash in different locations in Smolensk.

Finally, conspiracy theories abound regarding the Russian government’s potential involvement in the crash. Comments regarding Russia’s culpability existed from the outset of the crash, but increased and intensified during the course of the investigation, following the trajectory of increasingly nationalist narratives from Polish television. These included the production of fog that inhibited the landing, the manipulation of corpses and planting a bomb aboard the plane. Showing the height of anti-Russian sentiment and Polish nationalism, in March of 2016 Polish Defense Minister Antoni Macierewicz called Smolensk an act of terrorism that benefitted the Kremlin.

While the strains of their relations were, and continue to be, leveled at a governmental and political level, citizens and political elites alike are aware of the negative relationship between Poland and Russia. Television news narratives, however, showed the potential for improvement between Russia and Poland’s governments. This perceived turn towards political unity perhaps reflects the initial shock of trauma that accompanies any major tragedy. Polish and Russian politicians used the personal shock of Smolensk among citizens in order to establish a narrative of improved political relations. The first clips in both countries show citizens mourning together and politicians promising increased cooperation during the crash investigation. Through
television news narratives, citizens and politicians alike of Poland and Russia could initially see glimmers of hope for the improvement of their political relations.¹

This research analyzes television media in both Poland and Russia and their depiction of the Smolensk tragedy. I argue that Smolensk television narratives, in their characterization of the crash, the investigation and memorialization, show how elites (who produce and influence the media) create sentiments that contribute to perceptions of nationhood.² Each country argues for their own “truth” of Smolensk and their political relations through television news. Television news narratives in both countries show the opposing country as an absolute, negative other, therefore enforcing their own righteousness in their political relations and encouraging nationalist ideas. The nationalism that stems from these television news narratives then promotes belonging to the right and truthful nation that produces these television reports. Given the high viewership of television news in both countries, the potential stakes for persuasion are high.

The first portion of this work outlines the history of Polish-Russian relations, which the concept of othering stems from. Then follows a theoretical framework of this research through the definition of nebulous terms such as the nation and identity. An explanation of the parameters of media, particularly television news, comes after. Next is

¹ Here, I am using “elite” from Levintova, which focuses on the political relationships between leaders in Ekaterina Levintova, "Good Neighbours?: Dominant Narratives About the 'Other' in Contemporary Polish and Russian Newspapers," *Europe-Asia Studies* 62, no. 8 (September 2010): 1351.

² Elites refer to a purposefully broad term, describing those in a position of economic wealth and relative power. It also refers to potential political ties. Elites in Poland and Russia function, and functioned as early as the 19th century, in creating and disseminating ideas about the nation. As media stake holders, elites often have a political and economic stake in their nation, along with considerations of viewer ratings and profit, contributes to increasingly nationalist television news narratives.
a description of the importance of media research, especially related to belonging and othering. The subsequent portion of this research considers the particularities of Poland and Russia’s government system and its relationship to the specific media landscape of each country. The bulk of this section details television news clips from several prominent state-owned and privately-owned stations in Poland and Russia. Through content analysis, I evaluate each clip individually, and then draw larger, comparative themes from the entirety. I finally relate this analysis to larger concerns regarding Polish and Russian audiences, Polish-Russian political relations, and nationalism.

In 2010, examples from both Polish and Russian news reports presented the glimmers of hope so salient in the aftermath of the Smolensk crash. One clip from the Polish, but internationally-owned station TVN24 opens with an interview of a Smolensk resident, who emphasizes the lack of reason for the tragedy and notes that the crash affects “everyone”, meaning Russians and Poles alike. The reporter then stresses the words, “peace, quiet and prayer” as throngs of mourners pass through the screen. Makeshift memorials, red and white flowers (colors of the Polish flag) and religious imagery also appear. The clip ends with the Russian interviewee’s words: “we will pray for Poland, for all Poles.” The solemnity of the scene, combined with the thoughts and prayers for those affected by the tragedy, proved a level of concern and mourning from Russia citizens for the Polish tragedy. By virtue of frequently using this this kind of

Russian imagery and text in their own television clips, Polish television news makes the whole country appear appreciative of the outreach and support.

Russian television purported analogous sentiments. A clip from station NTV, the acronym for National Television, the state-owned gas company Gazprom’s media holding, initially focuses on the removal of remains from the crash site, but then moves to similar images of crowds placing flowers and stopping to pay respects.\textsuperscript{4} The text supports the imagery, as the reporter narrates that those in Smolensk did leave items at the crash site and also took time to survey the crash scene. The clip finishes with the arrival of Polish officials to the crash site as they also lay flowers. Here, the narrative ends with Polish political, but also personal suffering, and this emphasis further shows the understanding and compassion from Russian citizens for the Polish tragedy. The clips cited present Polish and Russian citizens laying flowers at memorials together, which television news then used to imply hope towards bettered political relations.

Polish newspapers, specifically the liberal Gazeta Wyborcza, highlighted the change in elites as well, emphasizing “the fact that President Vladimir Putin was the first to call on President Lech Kaczyński to express condolences after the tragedy in Katowice. This new, more pragmatic image of the Russian elite represented a departure from the previous discursive patterns of aggression and victimhood.”\textsuperscript{5} The change from aggression and disagreement to sympathy and understanding was not only limited to liberal media. Fifty six other articles in Ekaterina Levintova’s study of the othering of


\textsuperscript{5} Levintova, “Good Neighbours?”, 1352.
Poland and Russia in media cite similar sentiments. The frequency of praise for the Russian government represented a unique shift in their relations.

This admittance of Russian personal and political sympathy reflected a comparatively high point for Polish-Russian relations, as “twenty years after the start of the Great Transition and demise of the division of Europe into East and West, Poland and Russia have made a joint effort to clear their relations of the lies and deceit that have accumulated over the years. Our countries are trying to build a relationship based on partnerlike respect for national interests and on recognizing what is distinct and specific to each partner.” Despite the assertion that East and West divisions dissolved in the fall of the Iron Curtain, the legacy of communism lingers for Russia and Poland’s political identity. The government of Poland, especially, self-identifies with Western Europe, while also making sense of a forced association with East Europe (both in historical, political affiliations and in the perceptions of Poland from outsiders, who often label it as Eastern). Russia’s government, particularly from Putin and his camp, also continue to define itself as a different Europe, one that embraces traditional values such as the nuclear family. In coming to terms with these conflicting pulls from the East and West, Poland and Russia’s governments seemed to reach a place in their relations in which political elites and scholars openly discussed these tensions and met with some understanding. It also reflected a time in which Russia’s government assumed more

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diplomacy, integration with Europe and gave the impression of a more functional
democracy, with Putin as prime minister, rather than continuing to serve as president
beyond the constraints of Russian law.

Citizens and elites in both countries claimed these ideas when discussing the
Smolensk tragedy, mainly that both Poland and Russia citizens and politicians united
after the crash, and that this unity was unprecedented and portended a larger optimism
for their political relations beyond Smolensk. The history of Polish-Russian relations
proves the significance of these bettered relations, given the context of centuries of
fighting and opposition. Thus, the initial support between Polish and Russian
governments visible in television news narratives must be heavily emphasized because it
represents an absolute break from their tenuous political relationship.
A long, fraught history characterizes Polish and Russian political relations, in which frequent themes of belonging and othering, as Polish and Russian political leaders often characterized the opposing country as the other. Also, television news narratives later evoked this history. As Ekaterina Levintova writes, “if ever there was a tale of two neighboring countries with a long history of uneasy coexistence immortalised in their national literatures, folklore and public discourse, it was the story of Russia and Poland.” Conflict characterized their relationship from the outset of the modern period. While Russia and Poland fought each other in several wars in the 16th and 17th century, the partitions of Poland most accentuates the beginning of their contentious relationship. Beginning in 1772, Poland split into three regions during three partitions, with Russia gaining control of a large portion of formerly Polish territory, including the former capital, Warsaw.

The era of Polish partitions, from 1795 to 1918, meant the end of Poland as a state. However, the idea of a Polish nation and peoples continued, as “absent from the political map of Europe, Poland continued to exist in the minds of those who considered themselves Poles... nationally conscious Poles strove to maintain and foster a sense of

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7 Levintova, “Good Neighbours?”, 1339.
Mainly, a small subset of educated Polish society, who often had a higher socioeconomic status, such as “writers, artists, political activists, philosophers, poets, journalists and military officers,” created and expressed ideas of national identity. This elite led a charge against perceived Russian tyranny and used invented ideas and traditions about the nation in order to advocate for Polish autonomy and independence. Elite’s conceptions of Poland did not always agree, and changed over time, but nonetheless, the struggle for a Polish nation, emblematic in Polish uprisings, against Russia during the partitions remains a salient theme in Polish history.

Two Polish Uprisings, in November of 1830 and January of 1863, protested Russian rule and demanded Polish independence among those who identified with a Polish nation and lived within Russia’s jurisdiction. Their motto, “for your freedom and ours”, set the goal for revolution to not only liberate Poland from tyranny and oppression, but all of Europe. According to Polish writers of the time, through their own independence, the Polish nation would save Europe, as “the mission of the Poles- the nation whose political crucifixion, like the crucifixion of Christ, was in fact the fulfillment of the providential plan of salvation- was seen in the overthrow of the ‘pagan idols’ of European politics...in the Christianization of political life.”

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“Christianization of political life” included “truth, justice, brotherhood, or some other universal goal.” The struggle for independence from the 19th century typifies Polish elites’s desire to associate with European society, values and culture while dissociating from Russia’s political control and remains a lasting dynamic in Polish-Russian political relations. This tension appears not only in the 19th century, but again in the wake of Polish independence and EU accession.

The governments and elites of Poland and the Russian empire in the 19th century also competed with one another. As Poland fought for “our freedom and yours”, elites, including writers and philosophers, also hoped to liberate Slavdom. While many self-identified Poles fought against the Russian Empire for independence, a sense of a connection between the peoples of Poland and Russia still existed. Many Polish elites, but not all, felt Russia’s government was at fault, not the people. In the midst of two failed uprisings, considerations of Poland and Russia working together politically also remained. But, governments and elites saw their own nations as the leaders of Slavdom. Walicki finds, “the idea of a revolutionary Polish-Russian alliance was combined, of course, with a conviction that the leading role in this alliance should belong to the Poles. Poland was seen as a natural leader of Slavonic nations, as a nation whose historical mission consisted in liberating other Slavs, including Russians, from the yoke of political and social oppression.” The Russian government also assumed a leading role for themselves, reflected in imperial policies. While Russian officials, including the czar,

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12 Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism: The Case of Poland*, 82.
often expressed admiration of Poles, they also mistrusted their total loyalty towards the Russian empire. In order to prevent further uprisings, in the latter half of the nineteenth century the Russian empire imposed limitations on Catholic priests, decreased Poles’ ability to own land and replaced Polish teachers with Russian (of both ethnicity and language) teachers in local schools. Russification policies attempted to stifle Polish national ideas, which in turn exacerbated existing tensions.

The culmination of these tensions created a dichotomy of othering between the political elites of Poland and Russia, by which Polish elites often believed “in a world of incessant conflict there was no right and wrong, only us and them.” The dichotomy related not only to politics, but religion as well. The Russian government believed that priests in Poland constantly plotted against them and the empire. Further arguments on the status of Uniates in Poland also highlight the tensions between Russian Orthodoxy and Polish Catholicism. When many of the Uniates abandoned Orthodoxy, the Russian government “saw a Catholic conspiracy at work and complained that such large numbers of conversions could not possibly have been effected in so short a time without advance planning by the local Catholic clergy, in cahoots with local Polish landowners.” Thus, tensions and othering also occurred between Polish and Russian political elites over their

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14 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, 99.
15 Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate*, 212.
15 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, 90.
16 Weeks, *Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia*, 182.
religious differences, as both religions stood as markers of who was Polish, who was Russian and where one’s loyalty laid. The two could not be reconciled, according to the Russian imperial government.

Russian policies from the perspective of the empire, however, perhaps did not seem as repressive or limiting. Theodore Weeks often finds that the historiography of Polish-Russian relations is written “…from the victims’ point of view and to ignore the ‘inner logic’ (however peculiar from our present point of view) of the national mentality of the imperial government.” 17 Censorship and repression were not always effective, and therefore did not always fully impact Poles. 18 In fact, while these policies “unenlightened” and also “confused and uncoordinated”. 19 These policies mainly sought to preserve the empire, and then to promote Russian culture. 21 Despite the disagreements over the degree of effectiveness and repressiveness of Russia’s control against Poland, “Poles have a long list of nationally mythologized moments of suffering at the hands of others…” 20 Thus, the narrativization of oppressive Russian rule becomes significant, even if the degree of domination remains debatable.

With the end of World War One, Allied powers (excluding the Soviet Union, who earlier withdrew from the war) signed off on Polish independence in 1918.

Tensions between the governments of Poland and the Soviet Union persisted, despite

17 Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, 16.
18 Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, 109.
19 Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, 41.
21 Weeks, Nation and State in Late Imperial Russia, 9.
Poland’s recent autonomy. The continued sentiment of “us versus them”, remained during the Polish-Soviet War from 1919 to 1921. The communist party hoped to regain the territory of Poland in order to further a European socialist revolution. Both sides othered the opposing country through propaganda posters, in order to incite citizens to an emotional response against the enemy and fervor for their own country. One Soviet wartime poster reads, “Peasants! The Polish landowner wants to make you a slave. This will not happen! (see appendix, figure 1)” The Pole looks like a bourgeois who overindulges, judging by his clothing and appearance. The Polish government employed similar methods, showing Soviets as sinister, malicious and Jewish, using “…deeply rooted tropes of Jews as the ‘threatening Other’”21 Thus, Polish and Soviet governments both employed the use of imagery and text in order to convince its citizenry of the existence of the other.

The Soviet Union challenged Polish autonomy again in World War Two. In 1939, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany concluded a non-aggression pact, which led to the partition of Poland. This preceeds the Katyń massacre, one of the most contentious moments of Polish-Soviet, and now Polish-Russian relations. After the USSR annexed Polish territories in September of 1939, the NKVD (a law enforcement agency of the Soviet Union) agency executive Beria ordered the control and transfer of Polish national officers, police and soldiers to the Soviet Union. Soviet officials expelled the officers to prisoner-of-war camps, located in the Katyń forest. During the following months, they remained in captivity and subjected to questioning. Those deemed politically

inassimilable to the Soviet Union were labelled for execution. On March 5, 1940, following a note from Stalin, the Politburo signed an agreement authorizing the secret police to carry out the execution of Polish “counterrevolutionaries and nationalists”. The NKVD killed an estimated 22,000 by gunfire and then buried the victims in mass graves in the forest.

Mystery and deceit shrouded much of the information regarding the Katyń massacre. Katyń fell into politicization from the beginning, since in 1941, after the invasion of the USSR, the Nazis found the mass graves and accused the Soviet Union of the massacre in order to drive a wedge between Allied powers and discredit communism. The Polish government-in-exile also found evidence of the executions and asked the International Red Cross for help in the investigation, prompting Stalin to cut ties with the government-in-exile. The government of the Soviet Union denied killing Polish POWs, then staged their own investigation in order to assert their claims. After the war, and until the end of communism in Poland and the Soviet Union, extreme censorship ensured the massacre remained a forbidden topic. However, within larger anticommunist demonstrations, Poland’s Solidarity movement evoked Katyń when they erected a memorial in 1981. Mikhail Gorbachev finally admitted Soviet guilt in 1990. This did not end disagreements over Katyń. One of the largest points of contention over Katyń, and further revived during Smolensk memorialization, is how to classify the deaths of the victims. Many Polish officials want to use the term genocide, and made an

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official declaration of such in 2006. However, the Russian investigation of the massacre, released in 2005, finds that the massacre was not a genocide.\textsuperscript{23} Disagreements over the term genocide show the absolute tension that often characterizes their relationship, in which each side insists upon their own truth. Further, Poland wanted the declassification of all documents related to Katyn, while the Russian government kept some records sealed. These disagreements led to another Polish investigation in 2008, and the further release of more classified documents. Katyn continues to be politicized and evoked in Polish-Russian political relations.

The desire for truth ties the politicized discussions of Katyn and Polish-Russian relations and their improvement in commonality. Both sides cite a desire for open communication and transparency as a key factor for finding “truth”. Both Prime Minister Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Donald Tusk at a Katyn memorial ceremony on April 7, 2010, alluded to the potential of truth to purify and illuminate their relationship.\textsuperscript{24} The truth of Katyn, formerly muddled with politics and a lack of agreement, revealed possibility in the immediate reaction of Smolensk, whereby the governments of Poland and Russia could work together towards a new, better path towards the truth. For those who specifically study Polish-Russian relations:

The events of 7–10 April became a turning point in relations between our countries. This shift occurred not only because a web of lies that had been woven for nearly seventy years was torn down but also, and more importantly, because these events made millions of Poles and Russians

\textsuperscript{23} In the initial statement announcing the decision to begin investigation into the Katyn massacre, the Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation finds that the UN’s legal definition of genocide is applicable to Katyn. Commission for the Prosecution of Crimes against the Polish Nation, “Decision to commence investigation into Katyn Massacre”, The Institute of National Remembrance, https://ipn.gov.pl/en/news/2006/decision-to-commence-investigation-into-katyn-massacre (accessed March 13, 2016).

\textsuperscript{24} Rotfeld and Torkunov, “Introduction”, 1.
realize that thousands of other, nameless victims of Stalinist atrocities are buried in the mass
graves in the forest near Smolensk alongside the Polish officers. Innocent people of different
nationalities and ethnicities—Russians, Ukrainians, Belarusians, Jews, and representatives of
many other nations of the former Soviet Union who suffered from repression and terror during the
period of Stalinist purges—were killed there by NKVD executioners. Poles and Russians believed
that a common plight and truth are together the cornerstone of a new type of relations between
our nations.  

This long history, characterized by lies and deceit, but moving towards truth and
transparency, complicated and intertwines with the current political relationship between
Poles and Russians in light of Smolensk.

However, a shift from hope for improved relations to a devolution into renewed
suspicion and tensions now characterizes media perceptions of the Smolensk tragedy in
Poland and Russia. Emphasis on finding the truth within the investigations remains a
theme, while conspiracy theories abound. The physical memorialization of Smolensk is
just one point of contention. Further, this breakdown in elite relations occurs during the
Ukrainian crisis and renewed fear of Russian military aggression in Eastern and Central
Europe. Television narratives in both countries highlight these tensions in order to other
one another by showing the opposing country as failing in investigations,
memorialization and political relations.

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The Terms of Identity

The assertion that television news narratives, created and controlled by elites, relate to concepts of Polish and Russian identity requires further definition. Smolensk news narratives rely on feelings of belonging and processes of othering in order to construct sentiments that contribute to perceptions of nationhood. Through television news, elites can thus define the nation and who does and does not belong. Here, the nation functions as “...peoples who in the main never meet, never know one another in any ordinary sense, but who none the less identify with one another, assume they possess outlooks in common and whose lives flow, by and large, in steady harmony and uncoordinated coordination.”\(^{26}\) As Benedict Anderson asserts, media facilitates ideas about the nation.\(^{27}\) He refers to print, but television news easily applies. Media creates a “shared reality” in which large groups of people, who otherwise are not related, receive exposure to ideas about the nation.\(^ {30}\) The media often utilizes the imagined and symbolic nature of the nation, therefore Anderson’s definition is especially applicable.\(^ {28}\)


\(^{28}\) Monroe E. Price, Television, the Public Sphere, and National Identity (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 47.
Feelings of belonging and othering help form ideas about the nation. National identity requires feelings of similarity, according to Monroe E. Price. He finds that “definitions of national identity provide the community with a sense of who belongs and who is differentiated, what is the norm and who is the ‘other’.” While identity is a prominent term, the definition of identity is often nebulous. For this particular study of Polish and Russian television news narratives, identity specifically relates to forms of belonging and othering. Belonging relates to the ways one finds similarities with their own group (the nation) while also creating and recognizing dissimilar groups. Belonging and othering work as part of a constructed dichotomy that shows the way nations may relate to other nations, as Poland and Russia do.

The perception of belonging according to similarities also leads to devising and defining what is the “other”. Simplified stereotypes, meaning assumptions about the attributes of the “other”, “…maintain sharp boundary definitions, to define clearly where the pale ends and thus who is clearly within and who clearly beyond it.” Beyond defining the “other”, stereotypes also augment ideas of belonging, but they should not be demoted to merely a reinforcement of belonging and security. According to Richard Dyer, a stereotype:

is not merely a way of substituting order for the great blooming, buzzing confusion of reality. It is not merely a shortcut. It is all these things and something more. It is the guarantee of our self-respect; it is the projection upon the world of our own sense of our own value, our own position and our own rights. The stereotypes are, therefore, highly charged with the feelings that are attached to them. They are the fortress of our tradition, and behind its defenses we can continue to feel ourselves safe in the position we occupy.

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29 Price, *Television, the Public Sphere, and National Identity*, 4.
31 Dyer, “Role of Stereotypes”, 206.
According to Richard Dyer, stereotypes are not inherently “wrong”, but are often controlled and manipulated for specific interests.\textsuperscript{32} The use of “our” in the above quote implies a natural consensus among individuals as to where they belong, but those in power actually create this consensus.\textsuperscript{33} He writes, “who does or does not belong to a given society as a whole is then a function of the relative power of groups in that society to define themselves as central and the rest as ‘other’, peripheral or outcast.”\textsuperscript{37} Those who have a dominant social position, such as elites in television news, can then control stereotypes that define who constitutes a nation.

These stereotypes appear on television news and then the public sphere. The public sphere is “a zone in which there is sufficient access to information so that rational discourse and the pursuit of beneficial general norms is made more likely.”\textsuperscript{34} Media then mediates and influences the public sphere by providing information. It is important to highlight the public sphere because although a viewer may individually watch television, those narratives inform the public sphere and in turn, foreign policy.

A constructivist approach proves particularly useful when thinking about the role of stereotypes in the public sphere. Specifically, Ekaterina Levintova writes that “constructivists, who are interested in ‘social mechanisms by which particular agents acquire their identities and interests’ analyse public discourses because the latter ‘shape people’s mindsets, worldviews, and goals in more-or-less unconscious ways, . . .

\textsuperscript{32} Dyer, “Role of Stereotypes”, 207.
\textsuperscript{33} Dyer, “Role of Stereotypes”, 209.
\textsuperscript{37} Dyer, “Role of Stereotypes”, 209.
\textsuperscript{34} Price, \textit{Television, the Public Sphere, and National Identity}, 24.
influencing their more conscious choices’ and it is ‘societal discourses that make particular foreign policies conceivable.’”

Constructivism especially applies when analyzing the media, as Levintova does with newspapers in "Good Neighbours?: Dominant Narratives About the 'Other' in Contemporary Polish and Russian Newspapers". The importance of this mode of analysis follows that “rather than presuming a direct causal link between normative structures of state identity and foreign policy, constructivists treat discourses about identity as an amplifying or mitigating factor for foreign-policy decisions and preferences.”

Significantly, these identities can change or shift over time.

Studying public discourses of the other, which are often present in television news narratives, is important because these discourses further inform national ideas of belonging, which in turn influence foreign policy. Television news may not always directly impact foreign policy, and vice versa, but the two circularly influence one another. Through this approach, Levintova finds that belonging “…emerges through longitudinal analysis of discourses about the neighbouring 'Other'.” However, using terms of belonging at all may prove limiting. According to Rogers Brubaker, classification of this nature runs the risk of groupism, which is “the tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts and fundamental units of social analysis…the tendency to treat…nations…as

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35 Levintova, "Good Neighbours?", 1340.
36 Levintova, “Good Neighbours?” , 1340.
37 Levintova, “Good Neighbours?”, 1340.
38 Levintova, "Good Neighbours?", 1340.
39 Levintova, "Good Neighbours?”, 1340.
substantial entities to which interests and agency can be attributed.”

Brubaker’s vital criticism of groupism argues that the nation is not natural, but created. Further, the disavowal of groupism also gives voice to individuals. In relation to media, scholars of media and belonging admit that television’s “potency vary according to our individual circumstances.”

Despite the individuality of the television experience, scholars such as Daniel Dayan, Elihu Katz, Roger Silverstone and Monroe Price contend that feelings of belonging and media are related. Further, the elites who create and distribute media narratives about Smolensk also believe in the very groups they perpetuate. The goal of this research lies not with determining whether Poland or Russia exists as a group, but rather how elites in both countries frame ideas about the Polish and Russian nation through television news. However, Brubaker serves as an important reminder to avoid the tendency to resort to groupism as natural, as often occurs with the study of belonging.

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41 Silverstone, *Television and Everyday Life*, preface x.
Television News and Its Potential

Given the popularity and proliferation of television news, elites possess the potential to expose many people to specific ideas about nationhood through programming. This exposure seems particularly alluring given that Poles and Russians alike primarily rely on television in order to obtain news and information. According to Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, “media events have the power to redefine the boundaries of societies”, “media events can integrate nations” and “media agents edit collective memory.”

This potential seems particularly acute in the case of Smolensk, which further evokes the collective memory of Poland and Russia’s poor political relations and disagreements over Katyń. Smolensk is then increasingly nationalized through television narratives, promoting belonging and exclusion of the other. Further, “the millions of images that float through the public mind help determine the very nature of national allegiances, attitudes towards place, family, government, and state.” When elites in Poland and Russia use images of Smolensk, they encourage a changing discourse on Polish-Russian relations that increasingly others the opposing nation.

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44 Price, Television, the Public Sphere, and National Identity, 3.
Television news creates a narrative through the deliberate, simplified interplay of text and imagery. This narrative relates to cinema through presented stories, but television news is “more diffuse, more fragmentary, more episodic and iterative than cinema,” according to Martin Montgomery’s theory on the narrativization of television news. \(^{45}\) Clips, usually just a couple minutes long, comprise the majority of television news. Ideally, the objective of television news rests in presenting information about current events in a concise, clear manner through the relationship between auditory scripts and visuals. These elements reinforce each other. As a reporter details an event, “every still should be used to its maximum advantage by introducing it into the narrative at a point which helps to add emphasis to the story. It must not be allowed to ‘drift’ in, apparently at random, causing momentary but serious confusion for the viewer. The principle applies to the simplest script lines.”\(^{46}\) Thus, given the length of an average news clip, every word and image is exploited for maximum understanding and emphasis. It also means that narratives are abridged, given the limited time for a news report and for ease of understanding.

In a manner similar to the way television news often simplifies identity and belonging into stereotypes, television news clips also reduce stories into basic narratives. Journalists appear “...more interested in the tactics of politics than their substance.”\(^{47}\) Thus, the details of policy or events become de-emphasized in narratives in favor of


generalized conceptions. An event may be presented from only one perspective, without nuance or opposing viewpoints. For example, a diplomatic event between two countries, such as Poland and Russia, will be examined only from a Polish or Russian frame of reference within that country. Further, any internal differences and nuances are often not analyzed, giving the impression that a nation acts as a monolith rather than as competing groups of various actors with differing agendas, such as what may occur in the varying ways political parties approach foreign policy. These simplified, basic, generalized concepts rely on shortcuts “…where actors and events become typified into more general codes (e.g. sacred/profane, pure/impure, democratic/antidemocratic, citizen/enemy) and more generic story forms which resonate with society’s culture.” General coding of the narratives also evokes stereotypes, which are in and of themselves simplifications of the other. One observes these processes of news reports on Polish and Russian television. Ideas of the other present themselves as a dichotomy in relation to the home country. As Jeffrey Alexander and Ronald Jacobs note above, television news utilizes simplification and contrast in the effort to make an event “intelligible” to the audience. But exactly what entails intelligible and relatable to the audience implies a unified frame of reference from the audience. It also promotes a homogeneous understanding as well, by presenting monotonous events and narratives.

The significance of this simplification follows that “even though in practice ethnicity may be flexible and situational, the labeling and description of particular groups in the media or literature tend to produce stable historical representations and to perpetuate old stereotypes.”\textsuperscript{50} As with belonging, issues and identity are often ascribed as oppositional. There is often no nuance. Specifically, with Poland and Russia, television news narratives portray the other country as an absolute opposite. Prior themes of mistrust in both countries, relating to their tense history, repeat themselves in clips. Television news present these ideas about the other, without complications, as the truth, and audiences are expected to relate and understand.

Television news as a simplified, short narrative of current events consequently proves significant in that it reaches an audience of citizens that can potentially feel they belong to the nation. Part of the appeal in both studying television news and creating television news lies in the potential reach of viewership. News media seems especially prevalent, as “television is a central dimension of our everyday lives.”\textsuperscript{51} Television exposure occurs in our homes and in public places. We often discuss television with friends, family, and colleagues. Television news narratives also reach the public sphere and discourse. The scope of television is enormous, as, “...part of the reason ‘television is a medium of considerable power and significance’ is because it has the potential to reach over 500 million people at one particular moment.”\textsuperscript{52} Given the simplification of narratives, it also presents an opportunity to impart a unified message to a large

\textsuperscript{50} Levintova, “Good Neighbours?”, 1340.
\textsuperscript{52} Roger Silverstone, \textit{Television and Everyday Life}, preface ix.
audience, which can reinforce ideas of belonging and othering. Elites, who often possess economic and political ties to the nation, want to push these nationalist narratives for the benefit of television channel and themselves personally.

Those who are in a position of power, as Richard Dyer notes, can create and sustain unified stereotypes and simplifications, which they can then impart on a audience. Thus, the potential scope of television often entices those who control television and its output to a “...deeply held belief...that the medium has an unlimited capacity for persuasion.” 53 This belief is historically significant for Poland and Russia’s media landscape given the importance placed by communist leaders on properly disseminated images and ideology. This belief is also currently salient. In both Poland and Russia, many prominent politicians and those with social power (such as investors) possess ownership in current television news stations and therefore can influence their narratives by producing and overseeing reports.

The dichotomy of the Polish and Russian nation is constructed. In this instance, and in television news generally, the emphasis lies not on the actual reality of events, but on how the narrative can change the reality through television. Further, this can potentially change the way viewers perceive a news event. The majority of viewers will not personally experience or witness the events they watch on television, but they receive information on these events because of television news. Thus, media plays an important role in understanding the world and self because “the media define for the majority of the population what significant events are taking place, but, also, they offer

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powerful interpretations of *how* to understand these events."\(^{54}\) The process of television narrative to audience understanding occurs because “media texts provide a certain flow of cultural material from producers to audiences, who in turn use them in their lifeworld settings to construct a meaningful world and to maintain a common cultural framework through which intersubjectivity becomes possible, even among those who may never come into contact with one another.”\(^{55}\) This common cultural framework provides the basis for the formations of ideas of belonging and othering, and the simplified television news report provides the medium for these messages.

Trying to influence viewers on issues of identity and belonging firstly assumes an identity. “One such background assumption is the *consensual* nature of society: the process of *signification*- giving social meaning to events- *both assumes and helps to construct society as a ‘consensus’*...”\(^{56}\) Thus, “to engender sufficient loyalty to maintain cohesion, or to correct for perceived unfairness, the state can subsidize messages that it deems needed, censor messages that are deemed antagonistic, or itself become a vocal participant in the market.”\(^{57}\) This occurs in both Poland and Russia, although it occurs more frequently in Russia given directly state-ownership and intervention in media. The control of media messages by the elite works in order to engender an appropriately unified understanding.

\(^{54}\) Hall, “The Social Production of News,” 651.
\(^{57}\) Price, *Television, the Public Sphere, and National Identity*, 72.
While the goal of media manipulation is to influence the audience, the ways in which the audience receives television news narratives remains much more difficult to interpret. Still, Poland and Russia’s audiences represent a unique case given the selfreported popularity of television news. Television news mostly presents itself as truth and reality, but viewers often still recognize manipulation and bias. As Martin Montgomery finds, “no-one assumes, watching a news report, that the pictures have been selected randomly and that they have little bearing on the words being spoken.”58 Viewers in Poland and Russia also understand the constructed nature of media narratives. The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding conducted a study on Polish-Russian relations in 2013. When asked how citizens of both countries received information about their relations, both equally pointed to television media as their main source. Both also noted created television narratives. For example, one participant says, “elements of propaganda are quite obvious here. Every story is done at someone’s behest, someone pays for it and someone wants to watch it.”59 This would seem to imply that viewers do not trust and believe in what they see on television.

Further, scholarship on media and affect studies debates the degree to which viewers are directly influenced by media. According to Roger Silverstone, “the history of television studies has been one of constant agitation, quite properly, around the question of the medium’s influence. There have been arguments aplenty. The pendulum has swung between competing positions.”60 However, while much media literature finds an active

59 “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis 2013,” 20.
60 Silverstone, Television and Everyday Life, 132.
viewership, who chooses what to watch and how to interpret messages, it remains important to focus on television news narratives because they echo long-standing stereotypes about Polish-Russian relations, elites manipulate them in order to engender national ideas and audiences watch these narratives frequently and with popularity.

If the interviews above admitted the bias of television news, it did not impact the popularity of television news programming. It remains a citizen’s primary means of obtaining information, with 98.8 percent of Russian households owning a television in 1995.61 Furthermore, within television, news prevails as the most popular genre, with 62 percent of Russians qualifying news as their favorite kind of programming.62 Viewers also trust the veracity of television news over other forms of information, such as internet. Another participant from the Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding notes, “On the internet, there are just plenty of lies; you do not see the other people, and you do not know them.”63 However, “television – they do not give you information which is not fact-checked, and what they broadcast is really credible.”68 Others note that they watch the news in order to stay informed and to know current world events.64 Active viewership in both countries choose to watch television news and receive news narratives in order to stay informed on events they may themselves never witness.

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63 “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis 2013,” 20.
68 “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis 2013,” 20.
The popularity and veracity of television news in Poland and Russia makes their television news narratives particularly intriguing to study. The next section details the particular media landscape of each country. Poland and Russia’s primary difference in television lies in Russia’s directly controlled, governmental media system. However, while Poland may appear to have a democratically freer system of media than Russia, both project nationalist themes into their reports.
Polish and Russian Television News

Polish and Russian citizens alike point to mistrust in media in the “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis” that can be traced to their shared legacy of manipulated socialist media. Socialist media, marked by state-control, functions as the “...dissemination of selected information, partisan political indoctrination, mobilization, and propagandizing.” Under this system, party elites purposely manipulate news events in order to assure loyalty to the state from citizens. Thus, the idea of political elites using media in order to influence their audience stems from a long-standing practice in both countries.

An assumption would be that countries under socialism experience the same kind of state-controlled media system, and that their systems after socialism would not differ significantly. While Poland and Russia’s history of media shares similarities, it also remains important to draw out their differences in order to understand their current media landscape. Many scholars writing on media also complicate these assumptions about the homogeneity of socialist media. According to Colin Sparks:

contrary to the predictions of theory, there were very substantial variations between the media systems of different countries. Far from representing the articulation of the core values of the system, these differences are better explained by the exigencies of political and

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economic pressures upon the communist elite, and by the divisions that grew up between them as the terminal crisis of their system grew ever deeper.\textsuperscript{66}

He further asserts that some Eastern European countries possessed media systems with more plurality and even Western influence than in comparison to the USSR. The differences within media systems is further important to investigate because it defies prior histories in which socialist countries are viewed as monolithic.

For example, Poland’s media development in many ways followed a similar path as the USSR. Beginning with the Stalinist era, Teresa Sasinska-Klas describes Polish media as initially repressive, then less restrictive (coinciding with Krushchev’s thaw), and then later becoming repressive again. In the 1980s, Solidarity voiced demands for greater media transparency. Their hope lied in “media socialization”, in which the public sphere possessed control of media narratives and outlets.\textsuperscript{67} These demands echoed the particularities of the Polish media landscape. As the Polish government accommodated socialist voices with Catholicism and limited private enterprises, “it also showed greater tolerance for independent opinion than had existed elsewhere in the Soviet bloc. This meant...an increased willingness publicly to voice demands and opinions about


the political situation."68 This plurality of voices and opinions, although limited
given the political situation of the communist Polish People’s Republic,
represented Poland’s unique political situation in relation to the USSR and would
have a further impact upon post-socialist Poland’s media landscape.

Poland’s dissidents’ desire for the transparency of media and multiplicity
of media outlets continued in post-socialist Poland, while also adapting to a
capitalist system in which “the formerly subsidized and controlled press is now
dependent on subscription and advertising.”69 This meant that a new outside
influence would factor into the production of news narratives, something
previously nonexistent in the Soviet bloc.

Some functions of media did not change, however. Continuities between
elites (meaning those who worked in media and held political power) and media
still included prior functions such as indoctrination and propaganda, but now also
“...served to define a gatekeeping role for the media, which was to decide what
news items would be selected and the biases from which the items would be
reported and presented, a process tied to the relationship between media and the
political power and interests behind them.”70 Although the influx of capitalism
meant that theoretically media experienced influence from a greater plurality of

68 Teresa Sasinska-Klas, “The Transition of Mass Media in Poland: The Road to Liberalization,” The
69 Sparks, "Media Theory After the Fall of European Communism,” 35.
factors (such as advertising and viewer ratings), the continuity between elite political control of media persisted between socialism and capitalism. Those close to the state still possess the ability to control media narratives. As Peter Gross finds, “a moment’s reflection, however, suggests to us that this situation of close links between political and economic actors is very far from being some strange aberration unique to post-communist societies. On the contrary, it is much closer to being the global norm...”71 Scholarship in this field draws a delicate balance between finding the similarities and differences among countries and between systems.

Scholars and non-governmental organizations alike generally describe Russia’s current media system as not free. According to the European Union definition, often used as a standard, “media freedom will be defined as the people’s right to impart any fact and opinion, however unpopular, and to gather information on matters of public interest through the media. Accordingly, the base criteria for the media to be free consists of lack of censorship and the plurality of accessible sources of information.”72 A well-known measure of media freedom from the non-governmental organization Freedom House finds that in 2014 Russian media rated 81 on a scale of 100 for the freedom of the press, with 100 being the worst possible score.73 Poland received one of the best ratings in the world, with a score of 27. Comparatively, Russian media ranks

71 Sparks, “Media Theory After the Fall of European Communism,” 45.
152 out of 180 nations according to the World Press Freedom Index from Reporters without Borders.\textsuperscript{74} Some common themes among Russian media literature consist of ownership of media channels and companies by those in government or related to the government, the direct control over media narratives by the government and the decrease in local media in favor of national media. Specifically, much of media literature focuses on television, as it is the most popular form of media in Russia.

Today, the government owns, directly or indirectly, all five of Russia’s major television companies.\textsuperscript{75} For example, the government holds 75 percent ownership in Channel One (Первый Канал), Russia’s most popular television channel. NTV (НТВ) falls under indirect government ownership, meaning Gazprom Media fully owns NTV, and the government in turn partly owns the company (50.002 percent). Media ownership also decreases in diversity. Many media companies recently merged, such as when “RIA Novosti merged into RT [Russia Today] in what was described as ‘the latest in a series of shifts in Russia’s news landscape, which appear to point toward a tightening of state control in the already heavily regulated media sector.”\textsuperscript{76} Consolidation of ownership leads to a situation in which “Russian media continues to be used as tools of political control but now these ‘tools’ were no longer distributed among competing political parties and businesses, but remained concentrated in the hands of a closed political circle

\textsuperscript{75} “Russia,” Freedom House.
\textsuperscript{76} “Russia,” Freedom House.
that swore loyalty to President Putin.” Political control is further exercised by influencing television news stories and by decreasing the number of local news outlets. Recently, the Russian government extended this reach of controlled television news internationally through the Russia Today station, created explicitly for the dissemination of positive, pro-Russian news.

Elites, those with political ties and thus access to the majority of Russia’s wealth, can control, both directly and indirectly, narratives in Russian television. One definition of control follows that “power equates to the control of behaviour. Dahl argues that ‘A can be said to have power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.’” Tina Burrett notes that Russian courts used this kind of indirect control in order to intimidate NTV owner Vladimir Gusinsky. In 2000, Gusinsky faced arrest on charges of embezzlement, but many observers suspect he experienced harassment for his involvement in exposing Russian corruption on television. This kind of control, often in the form of legal action, ultimately dictates what plays on television. Intimidation of those in media who paint a negative light on the Kremlin can deter others in media from committing the same acts. As one journalist from TV1 says, “It is very difficult for journalists at state television to express political opinions that do not support the president’s policies.” Further, the Kremlin often directly dictates television news shows. At TV1:

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78 Burrett, Television and Presidential Power in Putin’s Russia, 76.
The editor-in-chief personally watches all reports about President Putin and he alone decides what to cut... The editor-in-chief receives directions on what to show and what not to show from Director General Konstantin Ernst. The director general receives his orders directly from the Kremlin Press Office. Instructions from the Kremlin go to people at a very high level and never directly to the journalists.79

Thus, intimidation tactics, used on an indirect level and government involvement on a direct level, leads to state-controlled television news narratives in Russia.

Russia’s current state of media, in which a small, powerful group, such as state-owned energy conglomerate Gazprom, controls the majority of media, especially television, assumes the importance of television news for the Russian viewer. According to Ellen Mickiewicz, that explains exactly why media is Russia is so seemingly fraught with legal issues and pressure for increased ownership and influence from those in power and those related to the government. As she summarizes, “All of the intimidation of journalists, the violent takeover of television stations in the regions and in Moscow, the particular fragility of pre-election periods when televised dissent is out of order, and all of the strong-arm techniques undermining the democratic free press, have been made in the name of viewers.”80

Russia’s Soviet history with mass media propaganda continues in some form today, as those who own television news media possess a “deeply held belief...that the medium has an unlimited capacity for persuasion.”81 While television news stations depend on a certain amount of entertainment value in order to ensure ratings, the primary purpose of television news is “...constructed to please the Kremlin more than to connect

79 Burrett, Television and Presidential Power, 76.
80 Mickiewicz, Television, Power, and the Public in Russia, 5.
81 Burrett, Television and Presidential Power, 1.
Thus, there remains an assumption that television news can persuade viewers and thus should be used to promote the Kremlin’s agenda.

Poland’s media, by comparison, is considered freer by NGO standards. Freedom House ranks Poland’s media on a scale of 27 out of 100, with a score of 0 representing the freest media system possible. By comparison, Russia received a score of 81, one of the worst. Poland’s media then ranks 18 out of 180 nations according to the World Press Freedom Index from Journalists without Borders. By quantitative comparison, Poland’s media system falls under less government control than Russia’s and possesses more plurality of narratives. However, NGO comparisons can not fully articulate the nuances within each country. The Polish system’s better score cannot be used as a narrative in which Polish media is “free” and Russian media is “unfree”. They both face challenges in governmental control of narratives, according to media scholars. Poland’s media, “if the minimum criteria for qualitative change and media freedom are applied (i.e., whether the processes of economic reform, democratization of the media, demonopolization, autonomization, decentralization, and professionalization of journalists have been completed) in an examination of Poland’s ongoing transition then the result is a mixed verdict.”

Similar to Russia’s media, governmental control affects media narratives in

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84 Jakubowicz, "Media in Transition: The Case of Poland", 207.
Poland. Just as in Russia, laws exist that prosecute those who insult religious sentiments in media. There also exists laws against libel, which politicians use against media reporters. The influence of Catholicism and right-wing conservatism also plays a role in media bias. According to Karol Jakubowicz, the result follows that “pluralism of content has remained insufficient and many social groups have been deprived of media that spoke on their behalf.”\textsuperscript{85} Social access to television news does not fall under government controlled, and therefore the only plurality found usually relates to religion broadcasting.\textsuperscript{86} Russian and Polish media thus vary in their degree of government media manipulation, but they both face challenges of similar nature.

Elites also control media ownership and influence in Poland. The three Polish channels used in this research, IPLA, TVN24 and TVP, represent both private and public television news. IPLA is the online platform that uses Polsat’s television news. Cyfrowy Polsat now owns the Polsat television group, along with further technologies in telephone and satellite connections. The owner, Zygmunt Solorz-Żak, is the second richest Polish citizen. While he stumbled into the media business, his further acquisitions in Poland’s electricity plants, banks and pension funds gives him a clear stake in the Polish nation. While he may not have an absolutely clear position on politics and nationalist narratives, maybe of his top employees, now elites in their own right, do.

Thomasz Liz created the television news program used in this research, Wydarzenia. He is now one of the most popular Polish public figures, and is unafraid of bias. In

\textsuperscript{85} Jakubowicz, “Media in Transition”, 208.
\textsuperscript{86} Jakubowicz, “Media in Transition”, 208.
December of 2015 he received the Hyena 2015 award from the Association of Polish Journalists, based on his bias and violation of ethical standards. The current editor-in-chief, Dorota Gawryluk, openly proclaims herself as conservative. Despite these issues, Polsat remains one of the most popular television stations among viewers, who also consider its news program the least biased in Poland. Thus, while their news may present a particular political viewpoint, it also receives high viewership, thus encouraging its nationalist rhetoric.

Jan Wejchert and Mariusz Walter created TVN24, Poland’s first 24 hour news station. Jan Wejchert, a wealthy Polish businessman, also worked on Polish-US business initiatives and spearheaded the first foreign direct investment in communist Poland. His involvement with not only the Polish government but also international business and investment stands in contrast to those who run media empires in Russia, who often prefer to keep their media purely domestic in investment and influence. Mariusz Walter, the other co-founder, is a former communist party member who held ties with the PRL’s media committees. Their close relationship with both socialist and democratic governments allowed an opportunity to begin their own television company. Thus, there exists a mutually beneficial system in which the government benefits from having elites from their own ranks working with television news narratives, while those elites who own television stations receive support from the government.

As of July 2, 2015, Scripps Networks Interactive bought out the media group that owned TVN, ITI Group. Scripps Networks Interactive is an international media holdings group based in London. The owners and Swiss businessmen jointly run ITI, and
although started by Polish businessmen, is now based in Luxembourg. Although the TVN receives international financial support, the leadership in charge of creating Polish news narratives belong to a Polish elite, specifically. Further, their narratives still serve a Polish agenda, while also aligning these narratives within a larger European media landscape.

Telewizja Polska, or TVP, is Poland’s only government-owned television network. Despite this, it still relies on commercials and advertising for a large portion of its earnings, thus making viewer reception key. The current head of TVP, Jacek Kurski, possesses direct ties to the PiS party, in which deceased president Lech Kaczynski’s brother belongs and also promotes many of the increasingly nationalist, anti-Russian narratives in regards to Smolensk. Thus, Poland’s public television news is directly involved with those who other Russia and promote Polish nationalism.

The narratives all also fall under the state’s National Radio and Television Committee’s jurisdiction, which is a theoretically apolitical body designed to ensure compliance with federal regulations. In actuality, it is a group appointed by political elites, such as the president, and often promotes a bias political leaning.  

87 An example is the Rywin Affair in 2002, in which members of the committee manipulated media laws in order to gain control over private media holdings. Thus, the government and those who work within international media conglomerates still ensure a national narrative.

87 “Poland,” Freedom House.
Media scholars observe that politicians in all countries possess a “deeply held belief...that the medium has an unlimited capacity for persuasion.”\textsuperscript{88} Poland and Russia’s governments try to use television news to present their own narratives to persuade viewers. This seems particularly evident in the case of Smolensk, as “more recently, the improved relations have been put to a test following the publication of Moscow’s report into the 2010 plane crash, which has led to a harsh exchange of mutual accusations in the Russian and Polish mass media and political circles regarding Russia’s government or Poland’s flight crew’s responsibility for the crash.”\textsuperscript{89} This renewed tension means increasingly anti-Russian and anti-Polish narratives from both countries. For example, “The Russian report mentioned a high-ranking military Polish official who was in the cockpit shortly before the crash; an autopsy conducted by Russian pathologists concluded he had a high level of alcohol in his blood. The Polish investigation suggested that the actions of the Russian air traffic controllers contributed to the disaster.”\textsuperscript{90} These narratives play out on television news, all in the name of viewer persuasion and in accordance with different national and ideological agendas.

\textsuperscript{88} Burrett, \textit{Television and Presidential Power}, 1.
\textsuperscript{89} Valentina Feklyunina, "Russia's Foreign Policy Towards Poland: Seeking Reconciliation? A Social Constructivist Analysis," \textit{International Politics} 49, no. 4 (July 2012): 441.
Methodology

The following study of Polish and Russian television news finds basis in the description and scrutiny of several news clips from both state-owned and private stations. In order to understand the larger narratives and meanings of television news, it is necessary to start by observing the actual text and imagery of television news. Themes of mutual memorialization or Polish-Russian relations connected to Smolensk form the basis for the selection of clips. They also span five years, from the initial days after the crash to the fifth anniversary in April of 2015. The content analysis considers the text of each clip and its subsequent imagery, while also noting their relationship and timing together. This framing finds basis in Ekaterina Levintova’s work on othering in Polish and Russian newspapers. She writes of her methodology, “framing attribution was based on the presence of specific descriptors associated with detectable themes. Frames were also analysed for their normative content, the presence of non-neutral adjectives, verbs and nouns incorporated into a frame. In doing so, I was able to separate the framing effects from the mere reporting of news.” Through the analysis of several clips, I determine larger themes as the “message system” of television news in each

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92 Levintova, “Good Neighbours?”, 1345.
country.93 Specifically, I use framing effects to find the larger themes of national belonging and othering in both Polish and Russian television news.

The discretion of the author ultimately impacts content analysis. Bias, while inherent, also helps to find and analyze the intent of those who own and create media. While critical study may be rooted in the active search for themes and meaning, television news is a constructed narrative that is meant to confer specific ideas and feelings. As Stuart Hall finds, “…we must recognize that the discursive form of the message has a privileged position in the communicative exchange (from the viewpoint of circulation), and that the moments of ‘encoding’ and ‘decoding’, though only ‘relatively autonomous’ in relation to the communicative process as a whole, are determinate moments…Events can only be signified within the aural-visual forms of the televisual discourse.”94 Television news does not present an objective “truth” but instead produces news through determinate moments. However, these determinate moments present themselves as truth. Those in power create these moments of perceived truth, which are not the sum of the perceptions of all individuals within a nation, but instead constructed images of homogeneity.95 Finding and analyzing these themes is thus a necessary part of media studies.

93 Fiske and Hartley, Reading Television, 9.
95 Fiske and Hartley, Reading Television, 11.
Russian Television News’ Depiction of Smolensk

Russia’s television news presents a narrative trajectory that others Poland’s government and their response to Smolensk. Two prominent and popular Russian television stations, Channel One and NTV, report on Smolensk. Since the crash in April of 2010, both networks commented on memorialization from both Russian and Polish citizens and officials, plus the ongoing investigation. In 2010 and the initial years following, the imagery and text of television news clips point to improvement of relations between the two countries and mutual mourning of the victims. The first reports on the investigation promoted an image of both countries working together. However, tensions grew as the investigation continued. Russian television news media blames the crash squarely on the Polish crew and deflects the responsibility of their air traffic controllers. Disagreements over the size and conception of the Smolensk memorial further exacerbate the tensions between the portrayal of news in the two countries. Recent videos show the height of these divisions. Thus, Russian television news depictions of Smolensk increasingly point to a visual and textual understanding of othering. In the Russian media case, Poland’s government is opposed to Russia’s. Polish television news media’s approach to Smolensk and Polish-Russian relations looks like a dichotomy compared to Russia’s political strategy. In the trajectory of television news
narratives from 2010 to 2015, Poland and Russia increasingly grow apart in their political relations as the Polish government becomes more othered.

As highlighted in the introduction, the first Russian reports on Smolensk present solemnity and empathy towards Poles. On NTV, the clip “residents of Smolensk lay flowers at the wreckage” chooses to forgo much textual analysis in favor of emphasized visuals. Still, the reporter discusses recovering the wreckage and describes the details of the crash. He says that the citizens of Smolensk showed support after the crash as women lean to lay flowers while men walk past and discuss the tragedy. He ends with the arrival of Polish authorities.

The choice of accentuated visuals over text gives the viewer an emotional response to initial mourning at Smolensk. The visuals in this clip reinforce the reporter’s text; as he talks about the women and men of Smolensk, specific frames show women laying flowers and men walking past the site, the exact actions described by the reporter. This reinforcement gives proof to Russian citizen’s empathy and mourning. The shots linger, and the clip proceeds at a slow pace. For example, scenes of the wreckage and surrounding nature last from about four to seven seconds. In another clip from the same network showing similar scenes of the crash site, shots last for a maximum for four seconds. The choice of alternating shots of nature and wreckage is also telling. A long shot of bare tree branches and the grey sky a frame of a piece of debris. The decrease in

96 “Жители Смоленска несут цветы на обломки”, http://rutube.ru/video/b1fc368143fe93b9bc62b21a4028b1e1/?ref=search.
text and the increase in long nature shots speaks for itself, as if the gravity of the tragedy needs no explanation. This reporting invites the Russian viewer to reflect and mourn themselves, just as the Smolensk citizens in the clip. The invitation to reflect is also individualized, as Jarosław Kaczyński identifies his deceased brother (see appendix, figure 2). Empathy then further extends when the final shots of the clip show Polish officials at the crash site, leaving viewers to linger on Polish mourning.

Not all television news at this time deemphasize text. Channel One’s interview with Polish Ambassador Jerzy Bahr uses text, specifically from a Polish plenipotentiary, in order to also legitimize Russian personal and political empathy and bettered relations. Ambassador Bahr, with surprise, says that he “saw tears” from the Russian people and that there was solidarity. Channel One uses these feelings of raw truth and mourning as the truth of improved relations. There exists a beam of light that appeared in the darkness of Smolensk, and it is the possibility of bettered relations. By using a Polish political voice to make these statements, the Russian coverage of the tragedy affirms its empathy and gives credence to their mutual mourning.

Two years later, television news still highlights mutual mourning and empathy, but also presents Polish politicization through the crash investigation, showing the trajectory of othering narratives. Text becomes deemphasized in favor of imagery in NTV’s “Poland Remembers the Victims of the Disaster Near Smolensk”. The clip

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reports the basic facts of the tragedy. The news anchor describes the crash and the victims. She notes that memorial services will be in Poland and in Russia. However, interestingly, she names the location of the Russian memorial as Katyń, rather than Smolensk. Katyń, of course, evokes the memory of the Katyń Massacre and incredible tensions between the Soviet Union and Poland. By openly stating Katyń, the Russian station acknowledges a formerly silenced source of pain for the Poles. This portends what Polish officials view as progress towards greater truth and bettered relations, as cited by many Polish scholars in White Spots/Black Spots: Difficult Matters in Polish-Russian Relations, 1918-2008. The report ends with a reminder of the construction of the Smolensk memorial, further showing the Russian government’s concern towards Poland and a desire to publicly acknowledge Polish suffering.

If the text of the report implicitly empathizes with Poland by using Katyń, the visuals also show empathy through shots of memorialization. Specifically, shots of flowers and wreckage are again the focus, as with the prior clip. Here though, the clips portrays Russian authorities as more active than in the initial clips after the crash. In the clip, they clean up debris. As with Smolensk citizens in the first clip, the story shows Russian authorities as emphatic, but also active mourners and helpers. The effect of their activity attempts to prove a Russian political initiative in cooperating after the crash and promotes unity between the two countries.
Politicization of the investigation continues with NTV’s “the wreckage of the crashed airliner returned to Poland”, aired on the same date.\textsuperscript{100} Again, the reporter describes the crash and the planned memorials. In the description of the crash, the reporter also notes that perhaps the Polish crew’s decision to land in the fog precipitated the crash. He also says that Polish officials decided to extend the investigation. While the statements may independently seem innocuous, the narrative juxtaposes them with Russian political initiative and the apparent willingness to work with Polish authorities. The Russian authorities offer the wreckage to the Polish government. They also send crash data and analysis to Poland. This report still shows unity, in the mention of mutual memorials in both countries, but cracks of tension begin to show as the investigation continues.

If the text reveals the beginning of disagreement among Poland and Russia’s governments, the visuals present otherwise. Although the network televises the clips “Poland Remembers the Victims of the Disaster Near Smolensk” and “the wreckage of the crashed airliner returned to Poland” on the same day, from the same network, they present slightly differing themes. In the first clip, the focus falls more on citizens and their shared mourning. The sentiment is one of unity and understanding. In the second clip, the viewer can see some politicization of Smolensk through the ongoing investigation. There is tension between the two countries in this report. When piecing together both clips, the viewers obtain the impression that the problems with

\textsuperscript{100}“Обломки разбившегося лайнера вернут Польше,” НТВ, filmed April 10, 2012, 0:45 minutes, http://www.ntv.ru/novosti/287200/.
Polish-Russian relations lie with the Polish government, and not Polish citizens. Imagery of mourning, employed by both reports, promote citizen unity, although governmental parties may not agree with one another. For example, the majority of the second clip shows footage of memorials. Specifically, mourners wear Polish scarves and hold flowers, walking to the crash site. Close-up shots of the memorial reveal large bouquets from the Russian Federation. Russian soldiers guard the memorial. This shows the level of support the Russian government has towards Poland. The second half of the clip presents footage of the crash. Any shot of the crash includes an active Russian investigator, who runs water over the wreckage or studies the site. Rather than emphasize tension, the visuals in this clip promote Russian officials and investigators as an active participant in the betterment of Polish-Russian relations. The use of mutual mourning and active Russian investigators places disapproval on the Polish government, by presenting both citizens and the government of Russia as understanding and cooperative. If the initial results of the investigation portended some tensions, the disagreements about the memorialization of Smolensk proved a clear break in renewed relations. As far as news media, Russia reports portray Polish governmental demands are shown as emotional, and the Russian government’s responses as logical. On April 10, 2013, the third anniversary of the crash, NTV released “Russia and Poland have bumped heads over the memorial near Smolensk.”

NTV announces unconfirmed reports that the Polish government wants the monument to stand on 10 hectares of land. The comparison of the perceived outlandish demands versus the seemingly reasonable responses from Russian officials (one interviewee states that the size of the memorial does not matter, so long as we remember) indicates a separation between the two nations. The story points to economic interests as something to consider, while it characterizes the Polish government as disorganized. According to one official, they cannot even agree among themselves. Further rational Russian governmental requests include the desire for balance. This separates characteristics of both countries, as they seem diametrically opposed in memorialization.

NTV then promotes the idea of Russian governmental reasonability and Polish governmental irrationality through imagery of conflict and memorialization in both countries. Memorial services in Smolensk (which presumable include Russian and Polish citizens and officials) are solemn, serene and orderly. The clips presents the wall with victims names with a solitary Polish flag blowing in the wind. A close frame shows candles. Mourners file in a singular line to lay flowers. Meanwhile, Poles lay flowers at the candles and not at the stone memorial because they do not agree with the text on the plaque (see appendix, figure 3). Thus, NTV presents the Russian government as the already reasonable and balanced country.

In the extended interview with the governor of Smolensk in NTV’s “The Governor of Smolensk Asked the Poles Not to Look Black Cats, but for Balance”, the reports again characterize the Polish government as displeased and demanding more of the Russian government than can possibly happen (specifically, the allotment of 10
hectares of land for a Smolensk Memorial). Also, Poland’s government seems argumentative. A part of the Governor’s interview states, “Do not look for a black cat in a dark room, where there is none. The monument will happen. But how to solve the interstate problem. I would say, on behalf of Smolensk’s opinion that there must be a balance. What will be the balance, time will tell.” In another sign of Russian media’s attempted goodwill, the reporter describes the site as Katyn and states that this is the site where Polish officers died. However, the shooters remain unnamed. Finally, the report makes the memorialization political, as the end of the clip references Lech Kaczyński’s brother Jarosław Kaczyński. The reporter notes that the Polish politician is unhappy with the investigation. The clip presents the Polish government as uncooperative with Russian political efforts. The same visual footage as “Russia and Poland have bumped heads over the memorial near Smolensk” reinforces Russian governmental order and mourning. Orthodox priests praying during the memorial appear in the absence of images of Catholic priests. Invoking this religious imagery also evokes one of Russia and Poland’s biggest perceived differences: their national religions.

NTV’s “birch and stone: the Poles and the Russians apart remember crash Near Smolensk” also depicts the Polish government’s politicization of Smolensk. Although it opens with a statement that Poles and Russians citizens do come together, the story quickly turns to opposition between the two governments. Poland’s government’s

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dissatisfaction with the crash investigation and ongoing arguments over the memorial seemingly led to separate Polish and Russian events at Smolensk. Polish official also allude to traces of explosives found in the plane wreckage. Here, the clip finds fault with the administration of Poland, not citizens. Citizens ask to leave the politics to politicians. Interestingly, NTV uses interviews with Poles in order to assert these sentiments, thus further alienating the Polish government as at fault and using Polish citizens to speak “the truth” about their government.

If the long shots of nature and flowers from “residents of Smolensk lay flowers at the wreckage” speak for solemnity in the wake of the crash, similar frames now reveal tension. Almost still shots of the memorial now replace the initial views of Russian and Polish citizens’ mourning. The shots of mourning appear at the end of the clip, still reinforcing that Russian citizens and officials alike memorialize and remember Smolensk despite the problems between the two countries. But emphasis shifted from the mutual mourning of both countries’ citizenry to the increasingly politicization of Smolensk by the Polish government and politicians.

Five years after the tragedy, in 2015 Channel 1 airs a report, “Smolensk airport ground services five years ago acted in accordance with the instructions”, which from the start blames the Polish government for its unreasonable accusations and shows a marked difference between assigned negativity to actions ascribed to the Polish government with more positive, direct action ascribed to Russian workers and
investigators.\textsuperscript{104} For example, in the script reporters describe that the Russian controllers work, while the Polish crew ignore instructions.\textsuperscript{111} This report puts a more positive note on the Russian workers, despite the fact that the investigation implicates both Russian workers and the Polish crew in the cause of the crash. In regards to the investigation, the only positive verb assigned to Poland is the prosecutors’ admittal of the Polish crew’s guilt in the crash. Again, the report uses direct action verbs to describe the government of Russia’s role in the investigation, such as when they published a report. Lastly, the report is most negative towards Poland’s government when describing “a loud statement by the prosecutor [regarding the charges against the Russian air traffic controllers], made five years after the catastrophe, coincides with an election in the country: in May Poland will elect a president.”\textsuperscript{105} In general, the television news clip verbally applies guilt to Poland’s workers and government and positive action to Russian investigators and workers.

The corresponding visuals assigned with the news clip affirm Russia’s political, positive, direct action as shown in the text of the report. When the reporter first announces that two Russians have been implicated in the crash, the focus moves from the reporter in the newsroom to scenes of the crash. As she describes the charges and the Polish crew, who she says repeatedly ignored instructions regarding visibility, the scenes


of the crash also focus on Russian forces, who investigate the scene and take notes on the crash (See appendix, figure 4). Later, the description of the loud statements from the Prosecutor’s office plays with footage of Russian investigators studying wreckage and listening to recordings. Lastly, during a description of the results of the Russian investigative report, in which the fault lies with the Polish crew, visuals of Russian air traffic controllers show onscreen. All of these images work in tandem with the text to portray Russian workers and officials as consistently in action and working to properly investigate the crash.

Channel One’s “The fifth anniversary of the plane crash near Smolensk transcript published in talks with the Polish Air Force One” makes implicit Polish inaction into clear blame upon the Poles for the crash. There are multiple references to the Polish crew drinking before the flight, and the reporter notes the investigation committee (made of both Poles and Russians) found fault with the crew. The release of the full transcript and the scientific study makes blame on the Poles seem fully objective. An interviewee states, “everyone can learn the truth”, and this truth is objectively against the Polish crew. Despite these seemingly objective findings, the clip finds that the Polish committee still find fault with Russian air traffic controllers. Again, the Polish government seem unreasonable. As these negativities present themselves textually, the clip shows Russian political activity visually, with investigators checking the crash site and doing further

work. Many other Channel One videos reinforce these visuals. Four similar videos play in the same time period.

In a manner similar to Channel One, NTV’s “death in the fog: restored picture of the crash of Kaczynski” continues to negatively emphasize the Polish government’s criticism of Russia’s government. The reporter notes that they insist on blaming Russian air traffic controllers despite knowing the pilots’ fault. The clip then mentions Polish politicization, as the Polish president uses the crash to place negativity on the Russian government. This even occurs on a day of mourning. The reporter also notes the Polish crew’s drinking. Transcripts and crash footage play at the same time, proving the scientific and objective knowledge that confirms the Polish crew’s guilt.

The trajectory of the narrative of Smolensk in April of 2015 stands with open, negative admissions of the Polish government’s politicization and guilt in Smolensk. Both NTV and Channel One present similar texts and images that place blame on the Polish government and flight crew in regards to memorialization and the investigation. From the initial themes of unity, Russian television news increasingly shows Poland as Russia’s opposite in governmental relations. Poland’s media presents similar othering in regards to Russia’s government.

Polish Media and Its Depiction of Smolensk

Polish media, in contrast to Russian media, possesses a wider variety of investors both state and private ownership. However, this does not necessarily facilitate a wider variety of television news narratives in regards to Smolensk. In fact, Polish news narratives follow a similar trajectory to the Russian news narratives because of increased nationalism. In the initial aftermath of the crash, the clips seem to promote Polish and Russian personal and political unity and understanding. However, during the course of the investigation, these clips increasingly other the Russian government and negatively portray their role in Smolensk, contributing to the currently icy conditions between the two nations.

The clip mentioned in the introduction, “Smolensk, the day after the catastrophe”, encourages Polish and Russian personal and political cooperation. The description makes this evident. Under the video, the summary reads “the Catholic Church in Smolensk visits Orthodox residents of the city. At the airport are white and red carnations on the spot, which already laid a stone commemorating the victims. Residents and city authorities are doing everything possible to show their solidarity with the Poles.”108 The text in the clip confirms this, with a resident promising to pray for

Poland and with imagery that clearly shows all residents either stopping to pay respects or laying flowers (see appendix, figure 5).

Russian empathy also extends from the government. TVP’s “reconstruction of events” recreates the crash.109 While the clip details the crash, the text below notes that Russian investigators found the plane’s black box, and that the Russian president already created a committee to explore the reasons behind the tragedy, headed by Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. This committee will work in close cooperation with Polish authorities. A Russian official also verbalizes empathy, who calls the crash a tragedy (see appendix, figure 6). While the style of this video is less personal and emotional than “Smolensk, the day after the catastrophe”, it still shows Russia’s government’s commitment to cooperation and bettered relations.

Another among many of the first reports from Smolensk may seem unique in comparison to the usual news reports from both Poland and Russia, but is telling in the ways Poland’s media generally frames the Smolensk narrative and their initial relations with Russia’s government after the crash.110 The clip, TVN’s “more than a plane crash” from April 11, 2010 compiles various Smolensk reports from around the world on other television news stations, including Russia’s station RT, Russia Today. The text reaffirms and reinforces the gravity of the tragedy. The words of Donald Tusk, that “this is the worst tragedy of non-war Poland” plays on Britain’s Sky News. Each station repeats the

details of the tragedy and the number of those killed. Meanwhile, the same frame shows several reports and reporters, giving authority to their analysis about the crash and to the outpouring of support. The same frames of crash wreckage footage repeat, again reinforcing international support.

The coverage also emphasizes the improvement of political relations between Poland and Russia. Several stations site the crash happening in Katyn, rather than Smolensk, alluding to the Katyn massacre and past tensions in Soviet-Polish relations. Allusions to a bettered future between the countries are then expressed when the Polish reporter notes that Smolensk may be a chance for the first understandings between the countries. Still, this stance is hesitant, noting that the somewhat improved relations are put into question by Smolensk. Nonetheless, by placing Russian media within the other reports, ultimately the news report gives the impression that the Russian government is a part of the larger, Western, European community, committed to recognizing the tragedy and mourning with Polish citizens and government. Many other search results reveal other news items from TVN about shared European mourning.

Another video places Russian personal and political mourning clearly with Polish mourning. TVN’s “nine days in tears: mourning day after day”, from April 19, 2010, provides a compilation of the channel’s reports from the first week of mourning after the disaster.111 Here, text is mostly sparse, while melancholic music, black and white footage of the recently deceased president, and many varying shots of mourning plays

instead. From the first reports of a crash, to the announcement that no survivors exist, the reporters show the feeling of absolute disbelief and shock. Their emotion is clearly visible, as they cry or place their heads in their hands. The lack of text supports this visible mourning, and even the reporters announces that absolutely nothing can be said about the tragedy. While most of the visual of Smolensk itself consists of crash footage, a few shots of Russian police and officers play at 2:20. Their expressions reflect a similar disbelief as do the reporters in Poland, and thus a shared sense of emotion at the tragedy. Later, the relationship between Katyn and Smolensk draws out, with one commenter calling it a dramatic symbol. But, in the ultimately symbol of the potential for renewed relations and hope for the two nations, the end of the compilation highlights a moment between Donald Tusk and Vladimir Putin. Both leaders, during services in Smolensk, walk together to place flowers at the memorial. Donald Tusk leans down in a moment of emotion, while Putin places a hand on his shoulder, following by an embrace. This occurs within a larger narrative of mourning in Warsaw. The selection of this clip and its placement is highly significant. A compilation inherently means the highlights from a larger array of narratives. That the clip focuses on moment between Tusk and Putin, given prominence in the news report, and placed among other Polish mourning shows just the amount of appreciation the Polish media attributes to Russian governmental mourning. Many of TVN’s other reports also highlights this appreciation, based on search results of Smolensk.

Despite this initial unity, signs of strain show by the first anniversary of the disaster. Just as in Russian television networks, disagreements over memorialization
begin to overshadow any shared mourning. In TVN’s April 21, 2011 clip, "in the Russian language there is no word genocide", the narrative follows the disagreements between Poland and Russia’s governments over the memorial plaque at Smolensk.\footnote{“W języku rosyjskim nie ma słowa ludobójstwo,” TVN24, filmed April 21, 2011, 3:01 minutes, http://www.tvn24.pl/wiadomosci-z-kraju,3/w-jezylku-rosyjskim-nie-ma-slowa-ludobojstwo,168597.html.} Just one year ago, the two nations expressed hope for understanding, referenced in the text of on TVN clip. Now, the clip opens by saying that between Russia and Poland there no trust exists. The argument over the Smolensk memorial and the word genocide highlights this tension. Russia’s government changed the memorial to exclude mention of Katyn without the Polish government’s permission. Poland’s government wants to use genocide in reference to Katyn, but apparently Russia’s government disagrees. Using this term would not be accusatory, according to one interviewee. It acknowledges that the Soviet Union, through the NKVD, and not Russia, committed these atrocities, and that Russian citizens also suffered at the hands of Stalin. The wording of the plaque, according to another interviewee, should not reflect emotion, but the facts and truth.

However, if the text of this clips argues for the need for impartiality and a lack of emotion, the imagery presents something quite different. TVN frames the style of the clip as though it is a film. The visuals play through a soft-light filter, and music is in the background throughout the clip. Moreover, many of those interviewed are actors and directors, those who directly create narratives. The effect of this kind of film style shows that although interviews may point to a lack of emotion, there is ultimately a lot of pain and suffering tied to not only Smolensk, but Katyn, and their relationship to one another.
Further, images of Stalin and the Katyn Massacre tie the events together with Smolensk, as if the two atrocities relate to one another beyond the reason for the trip to Smolensk in 2010. The imagery of the cold, harsh weather, and a single memorial flower lying in the mud points to a lack of remembrance, and perhaps a neglect for proper memorialization. With this plaque in Smolensk, the ultimate, if unsaid blame, lies with the Russian government for this neglect.

Still, this clip is not expressly anti-Russian. Although it hints at tension, it points to a future in which both governments can agree on the proper wording for the memorial, and thus come to an agreeable place with their relationship. Polsat’s clip, “it’s been almost a year”, released at the same time as the TVN clip, presents a much more hostile attitude towards the Russian government in the wake of Smolensk. The clip opens with a jarring confrontation between Polsat reporters and Russian police in Smolensk. The police announce that there is no filming or unnecessary viewing of the crash site. Even local citizens do not see what is happening. The problem with this is that there are so many tragic events between Poles and Russians in this area, according to one historian. This means that relations quickly deteriorate.

Imagery then reinforces deteriorating relations. If TVN provided contradictory imagery and text related to the Russian government, which showed criticism but some hope for possible reconciliation, Polsat’s imagery leaves little room for future cooperation. Again, this blame falls to Russia’s government. Polish reporters desperately

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113 “To już prawie rok…,” iplaTV, filmed April 4, 2011, 2:45 minutes, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_LfaAN00Yc.
attempt to reach the crash site, and Russian police aggressively block them. The following shots of the memorial look isolated, almost overcast by snow. If a new memorial represents understanding between the two nations, this clip makes that memorial seem distant and unattainable, by framing shots of a road leading to nowhere. While the memorials seem isolated, the construction of a new hotel around the forbidden crash site seems lively and active. This shot contrasts with another make-shift memorial, with pictures taped to trees. Again, the memorials, as with TVN, seem neglected. A shift occurred from the first reports of Smolensk, in which Russian citizens and officials have an outpouring of support and mourning, to the neglect and disregard they show a year later.

Besides memorialization, the ongoing investigation is also a source of discontent between Poland and Russia’s governments. Both sides possess differing views as to the highest contributing factors of the crash. Russian clips from NTV and Channel One show investigators as always in motion, and note how many volumes of research they conducted to in order to legitimate the Russian committee’s findings that the Polish crew was at fault. Similarly, Polish television also tries to legitimate their own ideas about Smolensk. TVN’s “solidarity 2010, divided 2013”, reports highlights from a recent press conference.114 If a common theme among both governments in their relationship is the search for the “truth”, this clip proves that the Polish government commits itself to the truth. There are multiple mentions of the facts related to the investigation and the crash

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itself. Polish experts, specifically, discuss these facts, another word that is emphasized just as much as fact. As one expert presents his findings, he makes a joke about Russian investigators, further antagonizing the objectivity of Polish research versus Russian. Images of scientific reports, charts, and official conferences give the impression that Poland’s investigative work is objective and detailed.

Differences in mourning between Poland and Russia’s governments reach new heights in ipla’s “the memory of Smolensk” from April 10, 2015.\(^{115}\) The report opens with a reminder of the painful division. Top officials, including the president, mourn on this day in Poland. The country unites in pain. This text presents the emotional, and highly important process of remembrance for Poles. The clip characterizes Russian governmental memorialization, in contrast, by a lack of emotion and lack of remembrance, described as modest. A reporter in Smolensk lists the number of Russian political figures who did not attend the Smolensk memorial. The Minister of Culture did not come, but the Minister of Transportation did. This method implies the level of importance the Russian government places towards Smolensk. More minor governmental officials made it to the ceremony in small numbers, while the rest of the government did not attend.

The report then articulates the clear division between the two nations through separate images of memorial ceremonies in Poland and Russia. The second half the report, dedicated to a conversation between ipla’s main reporter, and two field reporters

in Warsaw and Smolensk, visibly gives a difference in the way both nations remember Smolensk (see appendix, figure 7). The clip presents the scene in Smolensk as deserted and isolated. There are some flowers laid at the memorial, but no one seems present besides the reporter. The frame in Warsaw, however, fills with many people present for the memorial holding Polish flags. Other memorials in Poland show a similar scene, with copious amounts of flowers laid next to graves. The implication is clear: the Polish nation remembers Smolensk, while the Russian government does not.

In this news coverage, the Russian government’s guilt in Smolensk is not limited to memorialization. IplaTV’s “responsibility for Smolensk”, from March 28, 2015, directly attributes blame on Russian air traffic controllers for their role in the crash. This statement opens up the report. They are also at fault for not properly returning the wreckage, although there is little chance they will face legal repercussions for these issues. The clip mentions the small chance of Russian legal consequences several times, and highlights this again at the end of the report.

The imagery then draws upon prior themes from both TVP and ipla. Ipla shows the isolated memorial and the aggressive Russian guards. The picture behind the reporter in the newsroom is an altered, darkened picture of a cross at Smolensk. Like the other frames of the memorial, it appears neglected. The frame following shows the area surrounding the crash site. There is little to be seen, besides one moving truck. This is a stark contrast to what NTV and Channel One presents in Russia, in which investigators

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are constantly in action. Here, when Russian officials are the police, blocking the crash site from journalists. One of the final frames shows the Smolensk memorial, with a shriveled flower. Russian officials, again, are not only neglectful, but works against the Polish government’s search for truth through journalism and also works against memorialization.

Lastly, Russian and Polish governments not only disagree on Smolensk and Katyń, but also connect recent memorializations to events even further in Polish-Russian history. TVP’s report called “Russia: memorial for memorial” from April 1, 2015 summarizes a proposal from the Russian government on the memorial in Smolensk.117 The Russian Minister of Culture promises to move forward on the monument in Smolensk without bureaucratic delay, in the hopes that discussions on a Soviet memorial in Poland can begin. The Polish government consider removing a memorial to World War Two Soviet General Chernyakovsky. The Polish Minister of Culture and National Heritage responds by stating that the equivocation of a memorial to Soviets and a memorial to Smolensk is not justifiable. Disagreements also ensue over the Polish-Soviet War of 1919-1921. The Russian government wants to erect a monument that specifically memorializes those who died in Polish death camps during the war. They further disagree over the number who died in the war.

The imagery focuses on the imposition of Soviet memorialization in Poland and the lack of such structures in Smolensk. Most of the clip shows the Soviet memorial. The

columns, framed from a low camera angle, appear tall and impressive. The entire memorial, with graveyards, is large (see appendix, figure 8). By comparison, one frame in the beginning of the report presents a Smolensk memorial, that has many flowers, but otherwise is a small, unassuming cross. Here, Russia seemingly receives more memorialization than Poland. The images of the Smolensk at the end of the clip reinforces the tragedy and reminds the viewer that while the crash occurred, the memorial remains to be seen.

Just as with Russia’s media, Poland’s television news depictions of Smolensk follow a trajectory, from initial unity to complete disjuncture. Poland’s government is grieving, while Russia’s is callous. This further evokes the narrativization of victimhood that Michael Meng argues is an integral part of Polish ideas of their national identity.\textsuperscript{118} While the Polish government searches for the truth in the crash through the investigation, Russia’s government bars access to the crash site and doesn’t return the wreckage. Poland’s media others Russia’s government in light of Smolensk.

\textsuperscript{118} Meng, \textit{Shattered Spaces}, 27.
Conclusion- Viewer Responses and Predictions for Polish-Russian Political Relations

Political elites in Poland and Russia construct television narratives around Smolensk that portray the opposing country as the other. These narratives portray other country as diametrically opposed, and unwilling to compromise. Disagreements arise over details of the crash, the investigation and memorialization. Poland and Russia level these arguments at the government of the other country. Further, these narratives become increasingly nationalist from the onset of the crash to the present day.

Although the disagreements between Poland and Russia lie with their governments, elites in both countries use television news in order to influence the viewer. Their narratives serve as the primary means of information for citizens and establishes a message system, a center point of views from which citizens form their own opinions. Particularly, in Russia, “all of the intimidation of journalists, the violent takeover of television stations in the regions and in Moscow, the particular fragility of pre-election periods when televised dissent is out of order, and all of the strong-arm techniques undermining the democratic free press, have been made in the name of viewers.”119 Poland, too, although possessing a more democratic media system, also attempts to control

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119 Mickiewicz, Television, Power, and the Public in Russia, 5.
television narratives. All of this occurs in the hopes that viewers will be convinced by the themes seen on news reports that promote exclusion of the other.

Ultimately, television news interpretation is an individual, biased experience. As Gabi Schaap finds, television news “meanings are intangible, consisting of hard to communicate things such as emotions, pictures, even sounds and smells. Only through intense conversation it may be possible to get an idea of what someone really means, to approach all the complex and different dimensions.”120 While we may not get a full sense of the way viewers react to the news, through studies such as the “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis Study”, responses on social media and television station websites and current political polling, we can get a sense of how people relate to media and to Polish-Russian relations.

Generally, the “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis” finds that Poles and Russians consistently characterize the other as an opposite, not only in politics but also in values. They also perceive an innate difference in culture between the two countries. The study on self-reported values finds that “For Poland, the most important are: freedom, individualism, right of choice, national independence, and for Russia, these are: unity, shared experiences, subordination of one’s own interests to the interest of the community, collectivism, imperialism.”121 These values find roots in history as well as current politics and conflicts, the very same themes that television news promoted.

121 “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis 2013,” 37.
Comments from social media seem to echo these same themes of othering as well. While social media cannot perfectly indicate viewer response, it can prove useful because it requires the viewer to express agency in posting about the subject while also allowing for complete personal interpretation, as opposed to research-led questionnaires. This allows for a more nuanced interpretation on behalf of the viewer, as “this means giving viewers the freedom to communicate to the researcher in their own idiom, as opposed to the researcher’s how they interpret a news event.”

Although it difficult to draw tone from internet responses, it is possible to note the plurality of opinions. In response to Russia’s Channel One’s clip “Smolensk airport ground services five years ago to act in accordance with the instructions” user @TkachNikolay writes, “And we blame all of Poland for the burning of Taras Bulba!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!” While his comment may have been in jest, he refers to an early 19th century work by Gogol with heavy anti-Polish overtones. Another user, seemingly using humor, says “Yes, and apples are in Panama”, followed by several smiling emoticons. He points to how obvious it is that some Russians would be implicated in the crash. Other responses are more serious in nature. Twitter user @galsakova writes, “For five years the Poles look for something that would prove the guilt of Russia in the death of their president-Russophobe. And now they’ve found it…” Here, mistrust against Polish media remains a recurring theme.

Polish citizens also does not trust Russia. In 2013, a BBC

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124 “Польша предъявила обвинения двум диспетчерам РФ по делу о самолете Леха Качиньского.”
125 “Польша предъявила обвинения двум диспетчерам РФ по делу о самолете Леха Качиньского.”
World Service Poll, only 19 percent of Poles found Russia’s influence to be positive.126 Forty nine percent consider Russia a negative influence. In the “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis”, those polled in Poland consistently found the Russian government and politics to be “unfriendly towards Poland, not eliciting trust, governed in an authoritarian manner, and at the same time, poorly organised, ineffective, full of contrast and pathology.”127 Specifically, in regards to Smolensk and the investigation, “the Russian authorities are seen as foot-dragging, or even overtly reluctant.” Poland’s citizens, too, seems cautious about Russia’s government, just as Russia’s citizens do not trust Poland’s government and policies.

A variety of sources and influence by multiple factors form opinions about Polish-Russian relations and Smolensk. Still, with the influence of television in everyday lives in Poland and Russia, attention to the potential relationship between television narratives and viewer response must fall under consideration. It seems as though viewership opinion often aligns with the patterns of othering that television news purports.

The consequences of othering portend the continuation of negative political relations between Poland and Russia. As the Polish government continues to move to farther to the conservative right with the election of Andrzej Duda as president, Russia’s

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127 “Poland-Russia Social Diagnosis 2013,” 8.
government grows more hostile to the EU and the West. Their increasing polarity will continue to play out on television news.

Russia and Poland’s policies towards Ukraine may perhaps serve as the best example of the dichotomy between the two countries. Russia’s government disapproved of Ukraine’s potential EU accession, and forcibly continued their economic relationship and dependency through military intervention. Many Polish officials, meanwhile, supported the protests at Euromaidan. The press used the term "powstańcy" to describe the protestors, a word used to mean freedom and resistance fighters. It also invokes, according to Marci Shore, Poland’s battle cry, “for our freedom and yours”.128 Just as in the 19th century, Poland and Russia’s governments again find themselves fighting for the role of the saviour of Slavdom.

Within their assertion that each is the saviour of Slavdom, Poland and Russia’s governments argue for their own interpretation of what is right and true. Their values and their politics, as it seems to both nations and to their television media, seem on opposite ends of a spectrum. But, despite their differences in state intervention and media landscape, both promote increasing nationalism and other the opposing country by portraying them negatively. Both employ “a mindset steeped in stereotypes, conservatism, and the inertia of some administrative authorities, deeply rooted in both societies, along with the need to preserve an “external enemy,” do not help the leaders of either country to achieve their objectives. It is important that the chosen direction of the

march has met with the approval of millions of Poles and Russians.” Both also search for the truth in their relations. However, with the continued polarization of their relationship in light of Smolensk, their “truths” will continue to oppose one another.

References


“To już prawie rok…” iplaTV. Filmed April 4, 2011. 2:45 minutes. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k_LfaAN00Yc.


Appendix: Television News Clip Frames
Figure 1. Soviet propaganda poster depicting Polish landowners from the Polish-Soviet War.
Figure 2. From Russian clip “residents of Smolensk lay flowers at the wreckage”.
Figure 3. From Russian clip “Russia and Poland have bumped heads over the memorial near Smolensk”. Mourners separately pay respects.
Figure 4. From Russian clip “RF IC- Smolensk airport ground services five years ago acted in accordance with the instructions”. Investigators survey the crash site.
Figure 5. From Polish clip “Smolensk, the day after the catastrophe”. Smolensk resident lays flowers near crash site.
Figure 6. From Polish clip “reconstruction of events”. Russian official calls Smolensk a tragedy.
Figure 7. From Polish clip “the memory of Smolensk”. Differences between Polish and Russian memorialization are shown.
Figure 8. From Polish clip “Russia: memorial for memorial”. A Soviet memorial in Poland is contrasted to Smolensk.