

JOANNA RAK

QUASI-MILITANT DEMOCRACY AS A NEW FORM OF SACRED
IN POLAND DURING THE CORONA CRISIS

Joanna Rak

Adam Mickiewicz University, Faculty of Political Science and Journalism, Poznań,
Poland.

E-mail: joanna.rak@amu.edu.pl

Abstract: This article aims to explore the political mythology created by the Polish government and its subservient organizations with an aim to legitimize quasi-militant democracy as a new form of sacred in the populist discourse during the pandemic. Drawing on theories of political myths and on intertextual qualitative document analysis, the research shows that the sacred appeared in political myths which proved to be an efficient means of gaining public support for all sorts of efforts that undermine democracy. The conspiracy myth established social divisions and produced effects along with the interrelated myths of the savior, unity, and the golden age. The government took on the role of a savior whose mission was to deliver Poles “the people” from the hostile “others” that put their lives and health at risk. Those who desire social and economic help and do not want to be excluded from the community, must submit to the yoke of the savior. The unity myth rested on the vision of Poles as the government’s followers who exposed and reported transgressions for the good of the community. All the limitations to which Poles complied and the denunciatory actions they took were oriented towards the golden age of a strong state, providing social and economic security unique in the post-pandemic world.

Key words: populism; political myths; quasi-militant democracy; anti-democratic measures; legitimacy; state discourse; political communication; Covid-19 pandemic; Poland.

1. Introduction

On 20 March 2020, a state of epidemics was declared in Poland by the Ministry of Health. It was coupled with the regulation that imposed quarantine and restricted constitutional rights and freedoms. This and further government regulations limited freedom of movement, assembly, and religious worship (Chancellery of the Prime Minister 2020). In turn, official orders from the Minister to medical personnel restricted freedom of speech and the public right to information (Aplk 2020).

The Polish Commissioner for Human Rights stated that these anti-democratic restrictions were illegal because the government introduced them in violation of the Constitution of 2 April 1997, the supreme law in Poland, hence bypassing the legislative process (Bodnar 2020). Therefore, enforcement of new restrictions was unlawful. Moreover, according to constitutionalists, human rights, ranging from the principle of equality, rights to personal freedom, education, and electoral rights, were threatened under pandemic regulations. In the context of citizen surveillance, the biggest issue was related to rights to health and privacy due to tracking software used by government institutions (Sewastianowicz and Rojek-Socha 2020).

The government struck populist notes to justify anti-democratic restrictions as necessary and efficient means to combat the pandemic (Maddox 2019, 29). These restrictions were aimed at ensuring health and the survival of the social, political, and legal structures. The government formulated a new reason for closing up borders, prioritizing the interests of the nation, dividing citizens and blaming minorities for socially harmful events (Müller 2020). The slogans thus far preserved in the Polish populist discourse performed a double purpose of justifying and accounting for new restrictions.

The implementation of anti-democratic measures in order to preserve democracy is a critical mechanism of militant democracy. Karl Loewenstein coined the term “militant democracy” (1937) during the rise of fascist and Nazi parties in Europe. He advocated anti-extremist legislation (banning anti-democratic parties and party militias), restrictions of freedom of assembly and speech to defend democracies from fascist groups and parties that sought to overturn them (Loewenstein 1937; Malkopoulou 2019). Nowadays, militant democracy is defined as a political and legal structure whose fundamental objective is to protect democracy from enemies. Enemies of democracy intend to destroy it by using democratic institutions and social support (Pfersmann 2004, 47). The critics of militant democracy argue that instead of protecting democracy, the limitations of rights and freedoms may allow the

government to exclude political competitors from the democratic game arbitrarily and thus undermine the democratic nature of the regime. In reality, enemies cannot be established by democratic means due to the lack of legal ways of defining what constitutes them. Thus, the production of definitions of enemies by the government in public discourse is tantamount to sovereign exercise of nondemocratic power (Invernizzi Accetti and Zuckerman 2017, 183–184, 193–194).

In Poland, the implementation of Covid-related nondemocratic restrictions fell into the pattern of democratic backsliding that has been observed since 2015. Before the pandemic, anti-democratic measures included the transformation of the Constitutional Tribunal into an active supporter of the government, the subordination of courts judges to the ruling party, and restrictions of the right to assembly, privacy, and freedom of the press (Sadurski 2018, 1). The pandemic triggered a new phase of democratic backsliding under the semblance of militant democracy. It should be noted, though, that the legal and political structure constructed by the government was the opposite of militant democracy in terms of the purpose of implementing anti-democratic restrictions. The structure took the form of a quasi-militant democracy as long as it limited human rights and political freedoms in order to weaken democracy. Moreover, the structure became a new form of sacred to the majority of Poles who supported the government and followed its regulations. The level of compliance with the restrictions remained very high (Gołębiowski 2020).

The government took advantage of the Corona crisis to intensify the political repression of anti-government activists. Unequal treatment of citizens was visible primarily in the prevention, prohibition, and brutal suppression of anti-government public gatherings coupled with an acceptance of pro-government initiatives. The most vivid example was the pro-government assembly held by the ruling party as part of an anniversary of the Smoleńsk plane crash, which claimed the lives of many prominent political figures. Although the assembly participants did not follow any sanitary measures, they were in no way punished or criminalized. At the same time, government opponents were detained, severely punished and negatively framed as criminals in breach of the law by government-controlled organizations such as the police and state media. This negative framing worked through two interrelated mechanisms. First, the media and the police convinced the public that anti-government public gatherings were illegitimate and endangered human lives and health. Secondly, public discourse was shaped in such a way as to severely hindered the ability of anti-government protesters to acquire public support (Patane 2019, 5).

This article aims to uncover how the Polish government and its subservient organizations erected a political mythology that legitimized quasi-militant democracy as a new form of sacred in the populist

discourse during the pandemic. This conjecture rests on the assumption that political myths allowed these state actors to justify and explain the implementation of anti-democratic measures. The sacred appeared in political myths which proved efficient in mobilizing support for the undermining democracy and provided the quasi-militant democracy with a degree of stability. The secondary goal of the research is to verify the analytical effectiveness of Mihnea-Simion Stoica operationalization of Raoul Girardet's typology of political myths. The analysis reveals to what extent it covers the semantic structures used by state actors in populist discourse.

2. Literature review and theoretical grounds for the research

This study is theoretically grounded in a body of research based on the assumption that people become aware of the sacred due to its manifestations (Eliade 1987, 10). The sacred manifests itself in political mythology (Frunză 2011, 182). Political myths represent the means for grounding political phenomena in specific ideological settings (Stoica 2017, 66). Embedded in political discourse, political myths are a tool for legitimizing political practices and activities (Stoica 2014, 22). In contemporary populist discourses, the lack of ideological substance created a vacuum that is often filled with stories anchored in political mythology. These stories depict individuals and groups as possessing unique features as a means of making political messages commonly accessible (Stoica 2017, 73). Political myths individualize countries by providing behavioral guidelines that determine what is desirable and undesirable in a given society, defining levels of acceptability for individual attitudes, developing expectations, and setting organizational and administrative goals. They validate today's world via an otherworldly prototype that supposedly served as its model (Stoica 2017, 64). Political mythology cannot be verified as truthful, but it facilitates a better understanding of the political motivations of large social groups (Tanasoiu 2005, 115).

Theorists of political myths consider them an efficient basis for the establishment and consolidation of nondemocratic regimes, especially during social crises or such which affect the legitimacy of certain political structures (Svilicić and Pero 2014, 726; 729; Tismăneanu 1998, 10; 16; 26; Kranert 2018, 882). In those situations, large social groups suffer from social insecurity, languidity, feelings of weakness, fear, disorientation, and hopelessness. These social, cultural, and psychological conditions make society liable to uncritically accept project that promise to deliver it from danger or allow it to prosper. A need for meaning has an impact on citizens' susceptibility to promises of political change. Myths serve as a

cohesive factor and substitute for the rational base of political structures (Svilicić and Pero 2014, 726, 729).

Raoul Girardet introduced a typology of myths that comprises several types of discursive legitimization. The typology consists of conspiracy, golden age, savior, and unity myths. The conspiracy myth distinguishes a specific group that tries to disrupt the status quo for individual benefits. The savior myth draws energy from a specific state of emergency that fosters a need for saving. Thanks to its enthusiasm and knowledge, the savior can restore socially desired order. The golden age involves a rejection of the contemporary world and its political developments. It offers the social group a utopian state of prosperity, peace, harmony, and political stability. Finally, the unity myth focuses on the organization of individuals into the collective that is free of internal conflicts (Girardet 1987, 11, 187). This typology allows the researcher to focus on clusters of myths that share subject matters, and raise the level of abstraction of political legitimization analysis.

Mihnea-Simion Stoica made a methodological contribution to the field by operationalizing Girardet's typology as a tool for scrutinizing populist discourses. Stoica considers the conspiracy myth as a core for populist discourse. Populists present the world as a space of uncertainty and insecurity, where others pose a threat to society, which is closely tied to the sacred. "The others" deny the validity of a society founded on well-known rules and established roles for its members. The conspiracy myth produces effects only when coupled with the remaining three myths. According to the savior myth, the populist leader is shown as capable of saving the world, reinstating solidarity among society members under threat, recognizing and solving problems of his or her followers. The unity myth enables the majority to become the people, which is a category that determines the populist rhetoric. The golden age myth establishes an ultimate aim for a given community, which in populist imaginary involves all or the most of those disgruntled with the status quo. Populists treat the present as a moment in time between the golden age and what can be considered to be a revenge of times (Stoica 2017, 71–72). Stoica's tool provides a theoretical basis for codes and coding which underlie this research design.

3. Methods and materials

The research addresses two questions: What types of political myths were used to justify and explain the implementation of anti-democratic measures? How were these myths used to legitimize quasi-militant democracy? While the first one delves analytically into the structure of political mythology produced within state discourse, the second focuses

on the practical use of political myths and processes of manifesting the sacred.

The research uses the intertextual qualitative document analysis of texts distributed by state actors spanning the period from the detection of Covid-19 in Poland up until the lifting of lockdown measures (4 March 2020 – 31 May 2020). The iterative process of document analysis includes skimming, thorough examination and interpretation. It combines components of content analysis and thematic analysis. The first step of content analysis entails identification of passages of texts that contain direct references to restrictions of freedom of movement, assembly, and religious worship. The second step involves the organization of information into categories related to the research questions and embedded in the theoretical framework: conspiracy, golden age, savior, and unity myths. Thematic analysis enables the researcher to pinpoint themes pertinent to specific myths. Re-reading and reviewing selected data involves thematic analysis that consists in coding and category construction based on the data's characteristics (Bowen 2009, 31–32). The coding of the document content is founded on four groups of search terms: (1) for conspiracy: social, political division, exclusion, outcasting, others, opponents, violators of social norms and law, (2) for the savior: unsymmetrical relation of power, the helping and the helped, protection, rescue, (3) for unity: the people, majority, solidarity, unity, social cooperation, responsibility, (4) for the golden age: future, aspirations, development directions, promises, and change.

Data analysis is buttressed by a constant comparative method which draws upon an inductive approach adapted to determine the myth-related theoretical properties in the data. A back-and-forth interplay with the data allows the researcher to examine the codes and concepts. Data is mutually juxtaposed while codes are used to organize ideas and identify clustering concepts (Bowen 2009, 37).

In order to achieve validation, convergence, corroboration, and representativeness for state discourse, the analysis draws on three sources, which are government, police, and state media discourses. If certain documentary evidence is contradictory rather than corroboratory, the researcher investigates further. Convergence of information from different sources contributes to a greater confidence in the credibility of findings. This procedure reduces the impact of potential biases that can occur in a single case study. It also triangulates data at the level of discourses to provide a confluence of evidence that assures credibility (Bowen 2009, 28, 30). The sources are treated as equivalent vehicles for political myths and are detailed in the study report. There is no discrepancy between data from sources included in the corpus. However, data is uneven since media are responsible for the lion's share of myth creation. The Prime Minister and the Minister of Health used mainly state media, rather than their own social media channels, to justify the

restrictions. The police also played a special role in this process, mostly in terms of establishing models of acceptable and unacceptable behavior in the public sphere. An important element of their rhetoric was reporting on successfully apprehending and punishing criminals. Data gathered across three datasets allows the researcher to identify consistent themes and patterns across myths, and find outliers and themes unique to individual datasets.

The first set of texts comes from the government's official website (www.gov.pl – 4 entries) which was a primary source of information about the government's policy towards combating the coronavirus, new regulations, and guidelines for dealing with the pandemic. The set also includes a verified government Twitter profile run by Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki (@MorawieckiM – 9 tweets) directly responsible for new regulations. The profile presented current comments on changes made within the political system, law, and social and political responses to them. Minister of Health Łukasz Szumowski (@SzumowskiLukasz) did not publish any tweet during the pandemic. The corpus of texts omits Facebook posts as they played second fiddle to website entries and tweets. Only verified Twitter accounts are considered authentic.

The second set covers official websites and Twitter profiles of law enforcement, the Police and the Warsaw Police. The former presented news from the whole state. The latter was directly responsible for securing public gatherings considered illegal during the pandemic. Its police officers' statements contributed to the state-authorized vision of relationships between police and society. The police websites (www.policja.pl – 3 entries, www.policja.waw.pl – 4 entries) and Twitter official profiles (@PolskaPolicja – 4 tweets, @Policja_KSP – 42 tweets) served to inform the public about potential threats, police activity, and published recommendations concerning behavior in everyday situations.

A marketing agency conducting independent surveys, the Institute for Media Monitoring, indicated that a state-owned television news channel TVP Info was the most opinion-forming state media during the pandemic (IMM 2020). Therefore, the third set comprises materials released by TVP Info (271 news). This partisan media broadcasted government press conferences, accurately reported statements and interviews with representatives of the ruling camp, while supporting their claims. Due to a substantial range of media influence, the government could reach out to a wider public.

4. Political mythology of quasi-militant democracy

4.1. Conspiracy

The conspiracy myth enabled state actors to organize a mythical universe for quasi-militant democracy. The government presented a new

political and legal order that drew upon the restrictions to constitutional rights and freedoms. Thereby, it determined criteria for the social exclusion of individuals and groups (Government 2020; TVP Info 2020c; 2020g; 2020h; 2020j; Policja 2020n; 2020o; 2020t; Polska Policja 2020a; 2020b). On the one hand, the community of citizens accepted the restrictions and complied with the new law. The behavior of these Poles was both an expression of their responsibility for themselves and others as well as a sign of trust they laid in the government. On the other hand, there were “the others” excluded from the community because they questioned the restrictions and did not obey the new law. In many cases, these were criminals who had been notoriously breaking the law for many years (Policja 2020e; 2020h; 2020i; 2020u). They personified the various offences and crimes the media constantly reported on. During the pandemic, “the others” broke the ban on assembly, movement, and religious worship and thereby endangered human lives and health, which was a manifestation of extreme irresponsibility. In contrast to the community of Poles, “the others” did not observe sanitary regulations, such as keeping social distance and wearing face masks in public places. State media emphasized that behavior of that sort stood in defiance towards government guidelines, being not only dangerous but also highly immoral.

The government took the opportunity to put opposition politicians and the civic movement opposing the weakening of democracy in Poland under the category of “the others” (TVP Info 2020k; 2020l; 2020m; Policja 2020u; Morawiecki 2020b). The status of enemies, which had been produced before the pandemic, was confirmed after its outbreak. It was assigned to the representatives of the opposition parties, organizations, and civic movements. Allegedly, these activists consciously and deliberately acted to the detriment of society by breaking government restrictions.

A particular threat was posed by the Committee for the Defence of Democracy (CDD) (TVP Info 2020j; Policja 2020b). The CDD is a civic organization that speaks against limitations on democracy and human rights. As the state actors argued, activists who continued to protest during the pandemic confirmed their hostile attitude towards society. These protesters pursued their particular political goals while Poles fought for their lives in hospitals or worked for the common good. The lack of respect for human life was contrary to Polish social norms. Moreover, the participants of assemblies that were illegal under the applicable law were accused of hidden intentions (TVP Info 2020k; Policja 2020f; 2020l; 2020k; 2020p) expressed in conflict initiation, attacking and injuring police officers. The presumed aim of protesters was not to oppose government policy, but to fight the police, cause public disorder, and damage public property.

All those who opposed the government's position in public were accused of distributing fake news and misinformation (TVP Info 2020a; Policja 2020g; Morawiecki 2020c). The assumed goal of perpetrators was to cause personal tragedies, unpleasant events, social panic, unrest in the society, and lower the level of stability of the political system. The Prime Minister claimed that fake news was a pandemic of sorts, which supposedly accelerated the spread of the coronavirus – a deliberate act of hostility.

The state actors directly excluded and castigated fraudsters who desired to unfairly capitalize on the fears brewing during the pandemic (TVP Info 2020e). “The others” collected funds for an alleged fight against the coronavirus, sold unproven miracle drugs, vaccines, and fake tests to detect the coronavirus. Anyone who feared for their health and life could fall victim to fraud.

Populist rhetoric served to generate fear of an environment in which certain groups of people had bad intentions and threatened the peaceful existence of the people. The most important effect of the conspiracy myth was the creation of deep social divisions in the collective consciousness. Close proximity of the enemy and his constant presence jeopardized the sacred (Stoica 2017, 71). In Poland, not only was the coronavirus the source of uncertainty and insecurity but also broadly defined “others.” “The others” conspired against Polish society and thus posed a threat to it. Society that uncritically followed the government's recommendations, complied with the law, and did not present opinions that contradicted the state narrative, constituted a stable social structure for quasi-militant democracy.

4.2. Savior

The government appeared as the savior of Poles thanks to the restrictions of constitutional rights and freedoms, which were intended to protect and save Poles' lives and health in the era of coronavirus. The Minister of Health emphasized that, as assumed, the restrictions were an efficient and necessary means allowing the government to fight the pandemic (TVP Info 2020f; Morawiecki 2020d). Those European states that did not restrict the right to assembly have knowingly contributed to the spread of the coronavirus. TVP Info presented opinions of government-dependent experts and politicians to support this thesis.

The police, under the authority of the Minister of the Interior and Administration, took measures to protect the people from threats posed by “the others.” Police officers, supported by gendarmes, soldiers, and city guards, controlled the level of compliance with the provisions of the Prime Minister's regulation. The police had the right to interpret the law and decide to what extent citizens complied with it. Officers dealt with all manner of violations, even the least serious ones, such as casual groupings of young people at benches near apartment buildings. In most cases, the

police identified and arrested perpetrators, as well as secured evidence (TVP Info 2020e; 2020l; Policja 2020b; 2020c; 2020j; 2020m; 2020u). The police blocked scam websites and reached out to people who uploaded false information and “tried to cheat our citizens” (TVP Info 2020e; Policja 2020a; 2020d; 2020e). The police expressed a commitment to ensure safety and order through education, prevention, and repression directed especially against perpetrators who breached the provisions of this regulation in a particularly disrespectful manner.

The Prime Minister declared war against fake news related to the pandemic. Any statement that was incompatible with the state’s narrative gained the “fake news” status (TVP Info 2020i; Morawiecki 2020c). The government made efforts to eliminate fake news from circulation, reach out to criminals responsible for misinformation, and punish them accordingly. This justified an attempt to monopolize information distribution channels. The state actors encouraged society to get verified information on the coronavirus from official government profiles in social media and websites with the domain gov.pl. The Prime Minister argued that society expected resolute and sharp precautions, including limitation of freedom of speech, and praised the penalties imposed for distributing fake news. He knew about these expectations because citizens allegedly sent him private messages through social media. The government made deliberate efforts to create an impression of acting responsively on behalf of the people whose direct requests and recommendations it fulfilled by means of restrictions.

The government embraced the role of a savior also in the economic sphere by showing that its anti-crisis shields provided the state with a significantly lower economic slump than expected and reduced unemployment (Morawiecki 2020e; TVP Info 2020f). The Prime Minister emphasized that Poland was in a more advantageous economic position than other European Union member states due to efficient government regulations.

In the private sphere, Poles took advantage of the opportunities brought on by restrictions (TVP Info 2020d). The productive use of free time consisted in self-development by using e-learning and the development of social bonds online. Media attempted to interfere with citizens’ privacy by establishing a model of spending free time during the pandemic. It went as far as proposing specific activities one can perform to show gratitude towards a government that saved them from social isolation and the inhibition of self-development.

In the Polish context, a collective body fulfilled the role of a populist leader embedded in Stoica’s framework. The government acted as a savior capable of reviving and delivering the state, reinstating solidarity of Poles under threat, identifying, and solving problems of its followers (Stoica 2017, 72). The government was supposed to save Poles from the undesirable economic and social effects of the crisis caused by the

pandemic. By enforcing guidelines and regulations, the government created a set of rules that were supposedly best suited for dealing with the coronavirus crisis. The savior claimed to know what was good for its people and what avenues should they pursue to safely navigate the “new normal” of the Covid era. Being delivered from evil and danger rested on the stern commitment of people towards respecting government-imposed restrictions.

4.3. Unity

According to the state narrative, Polish society united in the face of the coronavirus (Policja 2020r; 2020s; Morawiecki 2020a; 2020b). Poles showed solidarity and responsibility for their own and others' lives, manifested in the almost complete absence of the new law violations (TVP Info 2020n). Moreover, citizens used trustworthy government information sources and adhered to recommendations. The information source monopolization limited the possibility of confronting government positions with counterarguments. The lack of alternative images of current political situations and development prospects made it possible to unify the interpretation of political events and goals.

The police urged poles to actively report any and all violations of newly imposed laws and regulations (Policja 2020a; 2020q; TVP Info 2020g). Civic cooperation with the police resulted in fines and penalties being imposed on violators. Unity, therefore, did not pertain to society in general, but rather solely to those who subordinated themselves to the will of the government.

The President underlined that Poland was a strong country, pointing to the various alleged victories in fighting the pandemic, and used the latter as arguments against a potential regionalization in the future (TVP Info 2020b). Andrzej Duda claimed that central control of a united political structure was the only efficient way of managing a state and maintaining its prosperity.

The unity myth enabled the majority to become the people, which was a category that determined populist rhetoric (Stoica 2017, 72). Defying pre-crisis divisions and quarrels, Poles were capable of uniting in a situation of danger. However, differences of opinion related to government activity still played a key role. Affiliation with the government and acceptance of regulations were essential identity-forming factors. This unity was shaped and imposed by the government, aiming to create an obsequious society. Unity was not a grass-roots initiation, but rather something forced and achieved primarily through fear of the virus and economic repercussions.

4.4. Golden age

Anti-democratic measures were recognized as factors that could accelerate the development of Poland. The government declared that it

would use all available means, including repression, to support the implementation of quasi-militant democracy and, in the long term, defeat the pandemic (TVP Info 2020n). The desired future state could be achieved only thanks to social sacrifice and commitment, which consisted in consenting to restrictions of constitutional rights and freedoms. The state was supposed to be strong so as to effectively fight potential threats, and thus ensure safety. This specific view of future Poland that the government decided to embrace was a response to the communicated citizen expectations. The latter demanded further limitations of constitutional rights and freedoms, claiming such restrictions contribute to the development of the social structure.

In post-pandemic Poland, the government was the guarantor of future economic security. As promised, the economic situation was to improve, and the unemployment rate was to decrease. Thereby, the government indirectly discouraged Poles from emigrating to popular destinations, especially Great Britain (TVP Info 2020a; 2020f). As announced, Poland was to become a much more attractive place to work and live thanks to expected economic growth.

The golden age myth was rooted in primordial desires of prosperity, peace, harmony, and political stability. Populists treated the present as a moment in time preceding the golden age (Stoica 2017, 72). The pandemic created a context conducive to the reception of the golden age myth, as people wished to end the stage of social isolation, become free of preventive measures hampering daily life, and inefficient democratic rules. With this myth, the state actors established an ultimate aim which catered to a social group demanding protection and security. Promises of improving the economic situation and the possibility of giving up economic emigration were the stakes for which Poles were ready to make sacrifices.

5. Concluding remarks

By creating a populist political mythology, the government and its subservient organizations legitimized quasi-militant democracy as a new form of the sacred. Political myths were to justify a departure from existing, though waning, democratic structures. The conspiracy myth established social divisions and produced effects along with the interrelated myths of savior, unity and golden age. The eternal existence of hostile forces that knowingly and deliberately harmed the majority justified the creation of social divisions. These divisions resulted from a specific attitude towards the government and its regulations. "The others" who expressed disregard for health and life were excluded from the community. Conciliation with such a total enemy was deemed impossible. "The others" generated anxiety, uncertainty, and insecurity. The

government took the role of a savior whose mission was to deliver Poles from the hostile forces' negative influence. The threat came from within, not from the outside, which heightened fears of social integration and joint initiatives. Such a prospect could weaken the potential of civil society.

The legal and political structures of quasi-militant democracy were supposed to provide security at a time of crisis. The government could justify actions in line with anti-democratic tendencies present before the crisis by an exceptional situation and convince the people that all resistance was pointless. Poles had to and desired to submit to the savior's will in order to deserve a reward, social and economic help, and avoid the punishment of exclusion from the community. The unity myth was based on the vision of Poles who were the government's followers and exposed and reported transgressions for the good of the community. A factor that united citizens and allowed them to become the people resulted from the golden age myth. All the limitations to which Poles complied and the denunciatory actions they took for the benefit of the community were oriented towards achieving the ultimate goal of a strong state, providing social and economic security unique in the post-pandemic world. These myths provided a coherent and comprehensive picture of cause-and-effect relationships during the pandemic. Moreover, this mythology drew its energy from the pre-pandemic period as well. Statistics and reports raised the credibility of newly implemented measures.

The empirical contribution of this research to studies on political myths is twofold. First, it enriches our understating of ways quasi-militant democracy is legitimized in Covid-driven Poland. The structure of political mythology uncovers populist rhetoric that was an efficient way to win support and produce a new form of the sacred. Second, it provides the first empirical verification of Stoica's operationalization of Girardet's typology of political myths. Stoica's conceptual framework made it possible to classify all references to restrictions of freedom of movement, assembly, and religious worship and penetrate into semantic structures that are universal for contemporary populists.

Acknowledgments: *This work was supported by the National Science Centre, Poland under Grant 2018/31/B/HS5/01410 [Contentious Politics and Neo-Militant Democracy].*

References:

Aplk. 2020. "Ministerstwo Zdrowia chce kontrolować wypowiedzi wojewódzkich konsultantów medycznych."
<https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,173952,25823872,ministerstwo-zdrowia-chce-kontrolowac-wypowiedzi-wojewodzkich.html>.

Bodnar, Adam. 2020. "List do Prezesa Rady Ministrów."

<https://www.rpo.gov.pl/sites/default/files/Rozporz%C4%85dzenia%20MZ%20COVID-19%2027.03.2020.pdf>.

Bowen, Glenn A. 2009. "Document Analysis as a Qualitative Research Method." *Qualitative Research Journal*, vol. 9, no. 2: 27–40. doi: 10.3316/QRJ0902027.

Chancellery of the Prime Minister. 2020. "Rozporządzenie Ministra Zdrowia z dnia 20 marca 2020." <https://www.gov.pl/web/rpa/rozporzadzenie-ministra-zdrowia-z-dnia-20-marca-2020-r-w-sprawie-ogloszenia-na-obszarze-rzeczypospolitej-polskiej-stanu-epidemii>.

Invernizzi Accetti, Carlo and Zuckerman, Ian. 2017. "What's Wrong with Militant Democracy?" *Political Studies*, vol. 65, no. 1S: 182–199. doi: 10.1177/0032321715614849.

Eliade, Mircea. 1987. *The Sacred and The Profane: The Nature of Religion*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Frunză, Sandu. 2011. "Media Communication and the Politics of the Symbolic Construction of Reality." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 10, no. 29: 182–202.

Girardet, Raoul. 1987. *Mitos e mitologias politicas*. Sao Paulo: Companhia das Letras.

Gołębiowski, Kamil. 2020. "Policja: sporadyczne przypadki łamania obostrzeń związanych z koronawirusem."

<https://radio.lublin.pl/2020/04/policja-sporadyczne-przypadki-lamania-obostrzen-zwiazanych-z-koronawirusem/>.

Government. 2020. "Aktualne zasady i ograniczenia."

<https://www.gov.pl/web/koronawirus/aktualne-zasady-i-ograniczenia>.

IMM. 2020. "The most opinion-forming media in 2020."

<https://www.imm.com.pl/tag/najbardziej-opiniotworcze-media/>.

Kranert, Michael. 2018. "Political Myth as a Legitimation Strategy: The Case of the Golden Age Myth in the Discourses of the Third Way." *Journal of Language and Politics*, vol. 17, no. 6: 882–906.

Loewenstein, Karl. 1937. "Militant Democracy and Fundamental Rights, I." *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 31, no. 3: 417–432. doi: 10.2307/1948164.

Maddox, Graham. 2019. "One Nation and Militant Democracy." In *The Rise of Right-Populism*, edited by Bligh Grant, Tod Moore, and Tony Lynch, 29–41. Singapore: Springer.

Malkopoulou, Anthoula. 2019. "Militant Democracy and Its Critics." In *Militant Democracy and Its Critics: Populism, Parties, Extremism*, edited by Anthoula Malkopoulou, and Alexander S. Kirshner, 1–12. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Morawiecki, Mateusz. 2020a. "Jestem w kontrakcie z..." March 4
<https://twitter.com/MorawieckiM/status/1235160847187677184?s=20>.

Morawiecki, Mateusz. 2020b. "Proszę Państwa - rząd..." March 12
<https://twitter.com/MorawieckiM/status/123810004878273312?s=20>.

Morawiecki, Mateusz. 2020c. "Panika i plotki nie..." March 12
<https://twitter.com/MorawieckiM/status/1238102865085902848?s=20>.

Morawiecki, Mateusz. 2020d. "Dziękuję Panu Profesorowi Marianowi..." March 24
<https://twitter.com/MorawieckiM/status/1242461656388718598?s=20>

Morawiecki, Mateusz. 2020e. "Chcemy, żeby po zakończeniu..." April 2
<https://twitter.com/MorawieckiM/status/1245610844571893760?s=20>.

Patane, Christopher F. 2019. "Regime Rhetoric and Protests: How Government Statements Can Repress." *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 1–42.
doi:10.1080/09546553.2019.1598384

Pfersmann, Otto. 2004. "Shaping Militant Democracy: Legal Limits to Democratic Stability." In *Militant Democracy*, edited by Andreas Sajó, 47–68. Utrecht: Eleven International Publishing.

Policja. 2020a. "Na tego typu postawę..." May 8
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1258554821046566912.

Policja. 2020b. "Niestety dzisiaj po raz..." May 8
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1258787347254185991.

Policja. 2020c. "W przypadku nocnego protestu..." May 8
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1258554819289198594.

Policja. 2020d. "Wiele możemy powiedzieć o..." May 8
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1258787347254185991.

Policja. 2020e. "Duża część osób uczestniczących..." May 9
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1259021654316986368.

Policja. 2020f. "W czasie wczorajszego protestu..." May 9
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1259021651141935106.

Policja. 2020g. "Kolejny #FakeNews i manipulacja..." May 11
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1259836625607184386.

Policja. 2020h. "Stołeczni Policjanci zatrzymali mężczyznę..." May 12
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1260169110664683522.

Policja. 2020i. "W trakcie zatrzymania wskazał..." May 12
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1260169111897866242.

Policja. 2020j. "Kolejne osoby są zatrzymywane..." May 16
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1261664363632627712.
Policja. 2020k. "Niestety mamy do czynienia..." May 16
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1261671884720091136.

Policja. 2020l. "Niestety pomimo obowiązującego zakazu..." May 16
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1261647790989627393.

Policja. 2020m. "Policjanci rozpoczęli legitymowania osób..." May 16
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1261649168868806656.

Policja. 2020n. "Przypominamy, że w myśl..." May 21
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1263420131172061187.

Policja. 2020o. "Informujemy, że żadne zgromadzenie..." May 23
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1264102509385338880.

Policja. 2020p. "Nie będzie przyzwolenia na..." May 23
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1264199327733420033.

Policja. 2020q. "Niestety konieczne jest działanie..." May 23
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1264189917778915328.

Policja. 2020r. "Od samego początku przekazujemy..." May 23
https://twitter.com/Policja_KSP/status/1264174026311811072.

Policja. 2020s. "Policjanci cały czas kierują..." May 23
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1264177085217755136.

Policja. 2020t. "Pomimo licznych przekazów dot..." May 23
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1264166458545901568.

Policja. 2020u. "Uczestnicy tego nielegalnego zgromadzenia..." May 23
https://twitter.com/policja_ksp/status/1264175458825969664.

Polska Policja. 2020a. "Rząd podtrzymuje zakaz zgromadzeń..." May 22
https://twitter.com/MSWiA_GOV_PL/status/1263845419441885188/retweets/with_comments.

Polska Policja. 2020b. "Minister Mariusz Kamiński w..." May 24
https://twitter.com/MSWiA_GOV_PL/status/1264647854792028161/retweets/with_comments.

Sadurski, Wojciech. 2018. "How Democracy Dies (in Poland): A Case Study of Anti-Constitutional Populist Backsliding." <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3103491>.

Sewastianowicz, Monika and Rojek-Socha, Patrycja. 2020. "Nowa rzeczywistość bez prawa do prywatności." <https://www.prawo.pl/prawo/ograniczenia-praw-czlowieka-w-zwiazku-z-epidemia-koronawirusa,499972.html>.

Stoica, Mihnea-Simion. 2014. "The Corrosion of an Ideological Identity? Differences between the Christian-Democratic Discourse and the Attitude of the Faithful Electorate." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 13, no. 38: 21–38.

Stoica, Mihnea-Simion. 2017. "Political Myths of the Populist Discourse." *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 16, no. 46: 63–76.

Svilicić, Niksa, and Maldini, Pero. 2014. "Political myths and totalitarianism: an anthropological analysis of their causal interrelationship." *Collegium Antropologicum*, vol. 38, no. 2: 725–738.

Tanasoiu, Cosmina. 2005. "Post-Communist Political Symbolism: New Myths – Same Old Stories? An Analysis of Romanian Political Mythology." *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, vol. 5, no. 1: 111–128.

Tismăneanu, Vladimir. 1998. *Fantasies of Salvation: Myths and Legends in Post-Communist Politics*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

TVP Info. 2020a. "The First News: W walce z epidemią Polska wykonała lepszą robotę niż zamożniejsze kraje UE." May 3 <https://www.tvp.info/47856178/the-first-news-w-walce-z-epidemia-polska-wykonala-lepsza-robote-niz-zamozniejsze-kraje-ue>.

TVP Info. 2020b. "Andrzej Duda." June 1 <https://www.tvp.info/47653470/andrzej-duda>.

TVP Info. 2020c. "Dodatkowe ograniczenia w przemieszczaniu się." March 24 <https://www.tvp.info/47254028/nowe-ograniczenia-w-przemieszczaniu-sie-poznaj-szczegoly-wieszwiecej>.

TVP Info. 2020d. "Izolacja wywołała rewolucję w komunikowaniu." April 15 <https://www.tvp.info/47574280/koronawirus-polska-wirtualne-zycie-toczy-sie-bez-dystansowania-spoelnego-wieszwiecej>.

TVP Info. 2020e. "Koronawirus przepłoszył większość przestępców, ale nie oszustów." April 1 <https://www.tvp.info/47373193/koronawirus-przeploszyl-wiekszosc-przestepcow-ale-nie-oszustow>.

TVP Info. 2020f. "Minister Szumowski komentuje zachowanie brytyjskiego rządu ws. epidemii." March 16 <https://www.tvp.info/47142704/szumowski-o-rzadzie-wielkiej-brytanii-i-ich-dzialaniach-wz-z-koronawirusem-wieszwiecej>.

TVP Info. 2020g. "Nastolatki złamały zakaz zgromadzeń w związku z koronawirusem." March 27 <https://www.tvp.info/47301137/koronawirus->

malbork-zakaz-wychodzenia-z-domu-nastolatki-zlamaly-zakaz-zgromadzen-wieszwiecej.

TVP Info. 2020h. "Nielegalne zgromadzenie Obywateli RP przed Sejmem." May 7 <https://www.tvp.info/47927445/protest-obywateli-rp-przed-sejmem-policja-nielegalne-spontaniczne-zgromadzenie-sa-mandaty-i-wnioski-do-sadu-wieszwiecej>.

TVP Info. 2020i. "Poseł KO mówi o zamkniętych sklepach i wojsku na ulicach." March 13 <https://www.tvp.info/47112848/koronawirus-politycy-opozycji-powtarzaja-nieprawdziwe-informacje-wieszwiecej>.

TVP Info. 2020j. "Poseł KO o koczowisku KOD przed Sejmem." March 31 <https://www.tvp.info/47359253/koronawirus-nawet-politycy-opozycji-twierdza-ze-dzialacze-kod-powinni-zawiesic-protest-wieszwiecej>.

TVP Info. 2020k. "Protest przedsiębiorców." May 8 <https://www.tvp.info/47953515/protest-przedsiębiorcow-kilku-uczestnikow-zatrzymanych-dwoch-policjantow-rannych>.

TVP Info. 2020l. "Sanepid nałożył kary na uczestników protestów przedsiębiorców." May 12 <https://www.tvp.info/48008267/sanepid-nalozyl-kary-pieniezne-na-niektorych-uczestnikow-ubieglotygodniowych-protestow-przedsiębiorcow-w-warszawie-wieszwiecej>.

TVP Info. 2020m. "Szef MSWiA o wczorajszych działaniach policji." May 17 <https://www.tvp.info/48089664/mariusz-kaminski-podstawowym-jej-zadaniem-jest-egzekwowanie-prawa-wieszwiecej>.

TVP Info. 2020n. "Szumowski: Jest szansa na ograniczenie tempa wzrostu zakażeń." March 16 <https://www.tvp.info/47140845/minister-zdrowia-lukasz-szumowski-jest-szansa-na-ograniczenie-tempa-wzrostu-zakazen-koronawirusem-wieszwiecej>.