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“Communism” as an empty signifier in the  
rhetoric of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS)  
party in Poland  
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*[Ilia Liapin, 30.12.2023]*

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# Abstract

The thesis is going to utilize discursive approach and Essex school of discourse analysis and analyse the discourse of Polish populist far-right leaders. The main hypothesis is that in the Polish political discourse, due to certain historical premises and state policies (especially in the area of memory and remembrance) the far-right in their discourse utilize the concept of communism\anticommunism as an empty signifier. I will analyse the speeches of the most prominent PiS members and trace the following markers to prove that it is indeed an empty signifier: Lack of Fixed Meaning, Polysemy, Contextual Dependency, Ideological Investment, Shifting or Contested Meanings, Ambiguity and Indeterminacy.

**Keywords: PiS, far-right, populism, empty signifier, rhetoric, communism**

Praca dyplomowa będzie wykorzystywać podejście dyskursywne i szkołę analizy dyskursu Essex, aby analizować dyskurs liderów polskiej populistycznej skrajnej prawicy. Główna hipoteza zakłada, że w polskim dyskursie politycznym, ze względu na pewne historyczne przesłanki i politykę państwa (szczególnie w obszarze pamięci i upamiętnienia), skrajna prawica w swoim dyskursie wykorzystuje pojęcie komunizmu/antykomunizmu jako pusty znak. Analizować będę przemówienia najważniejszych członków partii Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) oraz śledzić następujące wskaźniki, aby udowodnić, że jest to rzeczywiście pusty znak: Brak ustalonego znaczenia, Polisemia, Zależność kontekstualna, Inwestycja ideologiczna, Przesuwanie lub kontestowane znaczenia, Dwuznaczność i Nieokreśloność.

**Słowa kluczowe: PiS, skrajna prawica, populizm, pusty znak, retoryka, komunizm**

# Introduction

The latest parliamentary elections in Poland, which took place on October 16, 2023, have been characterized by the highest turnout in the history of the country. However, they were also marked<sup>1</sup> by extremely polarized rhetoric, misuse of public resources, and media bias.

While the ruling party has lost<sup>2</sup> to the Civic Coalition, it is obvious that this divide will remain, and PiS will be using all its instruments to regain popular support, including discursive apparatus.

PiS has held power in Poland since 2015, during which time it has implemented several significant reforms. One of its most notable initiatives has involved a comprehensive overhaul of the judiciary. This initiative has involved the appointment of judges sympathetic to PiS and changes to the rules governing the dismissal of judges. These actions have drawn criticism from both the European Union<sup>3</sup> and various human rights organizations<sup>4</sup>, who argue that such measures jeopardize the independence of the judiciary.

PiS has also introduced a range of social welfare policies, including increases in the minimum wage<sup>5</sup> and expanded access to healthcare<sup>6</sup>. While these policies have garnered support among many Poles, they have also faced criticism for their perceived costliness and sustainability concerns.

Furthermore, PiS has adopted a stringent stance on immigration, marked by the construction of a border wall with Belarus<sup>7</sup> to curtail illegal immigration and stricter regulations regarding

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<sup>1</sup> Domenico, A. D. (n.d.). Home. OSCE PA Home. <https://www.oscepa.org/en/news-a-media/press-releases/press2023/poland-s-parliamentary-elections-were-competitive-but-marked-by-misuse-of-public-resources-and-public-media-bias-international-observers-say>

<sup>2</sup> Cienski, J. (2023, October 17). *Poland election results: Opposition secures win, Final count shows*. POLITICO. <https://www.politico.eu/article/poland-election-results-opposition-donald-tusk-wins-final-count-civic-platform-pis/>

<sup>3</sup> Al Jazeera (2023) *President Duda sets Poland parliamentary election date for October 15, Elections News | Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/8/8/president-duda-sets-poland-parliamentary-election-date-for-october-15> (Accessed: 20 August 2023).

<sup>4</sup> *World Report 2022: Rights trends in Poland (2022) Human Rights Watch*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2022/country-chapters/poland> (Accessed: 20 August 2023).

<sup>5</sup> Harper, J. (2019) *Poland: More or less pis? – DW – 10/10/2019, dw.com*. Available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/how-sundays-election-may-impact-polands-economy/a-50763213> (Accessed: 20 August 2023).

<sup>6</sup> Poland's ruling PIS vows to boost public healthcare ahead of vote (no date) euronews. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2019/09/28/polands-ruling-pis-vows-to-boost-public-healthcare-ahead-of-vote> (Accessed: 20 August 2023).

<sup>7</sup> *Poland erects wall on Belarusian border to stop uncontrolled migration* (no date) euronews. Available at: <https://www.euronews.com/2023/06/09/poland-erects-wall-along-belarusian-border-to-stop-uncontrolled-migration> (Accessed: 20 August 2023).

refugee asylum applications. These measures have received praise for their perceived role in protecting Poland's borders but have also faced criticism<sup>8</sup> for their perceived inhumanity and discriminatory nature.

The results of PiS's governance in Poland have yielded mixed outcomes. The party has successfully implemented certain key policies, notably the expansion of social welfare spending. However, their judicial reforms have remained controversial, and their immigration policies have drawn censure from human rights groups.

Additionally, PiS's rhetoric has been polarizing, both within the country and on the international stage. While they enjoy a substantial support base, their policies and discourse have also sparked criticism from various quarters, including the European Union, human rights organizations, and segments of the Polish population.

The PiS has been a subject of extensive scholarly research, which has delved into its far-right and populist characteristics<sup>9</sup>, as well as its role in the democratic backsliding process<sup>10</sup> in Europe. This phenomenon is particularly pronounced in Eastern European countries that underwent post-communist transformations and democratization, such as Poland and Hungary<sup>11</sup>. It's important to note that there are commonalities in the emergence of populism across this region.

It is evident that PiS's populist rhetoric has effectively mobilized its support base and legitimized its policies. In addition to utilizing the typical rhetorical tools employed by other populist parties and politicians<sup>12</sup>, PiS actively engages in politics related to memory and commemoration.

Furthermore, the party incorporates historical narratives and collective traumas into its contemporary rhetoric<sup>13</sup>. This phenomenon can be further examined through the concept of "empty signifiers" used by populist politicians. Empty signifiers are terms intentionally stripped of their fixed meanings and wielded to rally support or discredit opponents and ideas.

This research will specifically concentrate on the use of the term "communism" as an empty signifier in the speeches of PiS members. It will employ a discourse analysis approach to gain

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<sup>8</sup> Gall, L. (2023) 'Die here or go to Poland', Human Rights Watch. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/11/24/die-here-or-go-poland/belarus-and-polands-shared-responsibility-border-abuses> (Accessed: 20 August 2023).

<sup>9</sup> Krzysztof Jaskulowski & Piotr Majewski (2023) Populist in form, nationalist in content? Law and Justice, nationalism and memory politics, *European Politics and Society*, 24:4, 461-476, DOI: 10.1080/23745118.2022.2058752

<sup>10</sup> Cianetti, L. Rethinking 'Democratic backsliding' in Central and Eastern Europe. Routledge.

<sup>11</sup> Lendvai-Bainton, N. and Szelewa, D. (2020) 'Governing new authoritarianism: Populism, Nationalism and radical welfare reforms in Hungary and Poland', *Social Policy & Administration*, 55(4), pp. 559–572. doi:10.1111/spol.12642.

<sup>12</sup> Jansen, R.S. (2011) 'Populist mobilization: A new theoretical approach to populism', *Sociological Theory*, 29(2), pp. 75–96. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9558.2011.01388.x.

<sup>13</sup> Bernhard, M.H. and Kubik, J. (2014) *Twenty years after communism*. New York: Oxford University Press.

a deeper understanding of its role and implications within the party's rhetoric. This investigation aims to shed light on how the past can be weaponized through the use of empty signifiers by populist parties and leaders.

*The research question* can be articulated as follows: Do members of PiS employ the term "communism" as an empty signifier, why and what are the intended outcomes of this utilization? In pursuit of answers to this question, 50 public statements made by PiS members referencing "communism" in the past eight years have been systematically collected and organized. This structured compilation aims to provide a deeper contextual understanding of how this mnemonic instrument has been employed and manipulated within the discourse of the party.

Each statement is followed by a concise critical discourse analysis section, intended to provide additional context regarding the specific communication objectives in each case. This analytical approach also aims to illuminate the broader contextual implications of employing "communism" as an empty signifier. The research seeks to identify the following indicators of an empty signifier: Lack of Fixed Meaning, Polysemy, Contextual Dependency, Ideological Investment, Shifting or Contested Meanings, Ambiguity, and Indeterminacy. The study is grounded in Mudde's definition of populism and Laclau and Mouffe's concept of the empty signifier.

This dissertation complements existing research on populism and populist rhetoric in Poland, while also contributing to the study of challenges in post-communist transformation. It enhances our understanding of how far-right populist parties, such as PiS, employ discourse as a political tool. This comprehension is crucial for researchers, policymakers, and the public in comprehending the strategies utilized by such parties to acquire and maintain support.

Furthermore, this research can form part of broader comparative studies examining far-right movements and their utilization of empty signifiers across various countries. Comparative insights hold significant value in comprehending regional and global political trends

This dissertation also introduces fresh analytical material, which holds particular significance in light of the 2023 elections in Poland and the increasing polarization and division within the Polish political landscape.

The structure of the dissertation is as follows: it commences with a literature review, placing this research within the context of hegemony studies, empty signifiers, and far-right populism. It also provides additional context regarding the utilization of "communism" as an empty signifier in Poland and the broader issue of instrumentalizing historical events and traumas within memory politics in the Polish context. Subsequently, the dissertation delves into the theoretical frameworks of the Essex school of discourse analysis and examines how similar challenges have been addressed by other scholars. The next phase involves an analysis of statements made by PiS members that employ the signifier "communism". Finally, the last chapter of the dissertation presents conclusions regarding how PiS members utilize the empty signifier of "communism."

# 1.Literature overview

## 1.1. Hegemony, language and empty (floating) signifiers

The main theoretical instrument utilized in this thesis is the concept of the empty signifier, which was initially introduced by Levi-Strauss and Jacques Lacan in the field of semiotics and psychoanalysis. This concept provides a comprehensive set of analytical tools for examining the dynamics of meaning creation and transformation. In semiotics, the signifier represents the physical or tangible form of a sign, such as a word, sound, or image, while the signified refers to the concept or meaning associated with the signifier. Over time, the concept of the empty signifier has been further developed within the realm of political analysis, particularly in relation to hegemony studies and the Gramscian paradigm.

Antonio Gramsci<sup>14</sup> introduced the paradigm of cultural hegemony, which explores how the dominant group in a society maintains its power by securing consent and shaping the worldview of the population through various means, including ideology, culture, and religion.

Cultural hegemony delves into the processes by which the dominant group or class in a society doesn't merely rule through brute force or straightforward economic control, but rather by securing the consent of those they dominate. This consent is not passively given; it is shaped and cultivated over time through a web of societal structures and discourses. By presenting their worldview, values, and beliefs as 'common sense' or 'natural', the dominant group essentially frames the societal narrative in a way that their continued dominance seems inevitable, and even desirable.

Central to the mechanics of this hegemonic power is the use of ideology. For Gramsci, ideology is not a mere abstract set of ideas; it is deeply interwoven with the day-to-day lived experiences of individuals. The dominant ideology is constantly reinforced through institutions, educational systems, media, and other cultural apparatuses, rendering it the 'status quo', thereby making any alternatives seem radical or even unimaginable.

Culture, too, plays a significant role. The dominant group propagates its values, beliefs, and practices as the cultural norm, thereby marginalizing other cultures or practices. Over time, this results in a homogenization of culture where alternative cultures are either subsumed or relegated to the periphery.

The Gramscian tradition has inspired numerous scholars who have elaborated upon, criticized, and integrated Antonio Gramsci's ideas into a variety of academic disciplines. Different 'schools' or interpretations have emerged from this tradition, each presenting a distinct understanding of Gramsci's core concepts, especially cultural hegemony.

The Traditional Marxist Gramscians adhere closely to both Gramsci's foundational writings and the broader Marxist tradition. A notable figure from this school is Perry Anderson, whose book

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<sup>14</sup> Gramsci, A., Buttigieg, J. A., & Callari, A. (2011). *Prison notebooks*. Columbia University Press.

"Considerations on Western Marxism"<sup>15</sup> offers a critical examination of Western European Marxist theories, embedding Gramsci within the broader spectrum of Marxist thinkers.

The domain of cultural studies also witnessed the influence of Gramscian concepts, with scholars emphasizing the role of popular culture in shaping and sustaining hegemony. One of the central figures here is Stuart Hall. In his work, "Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order"<sup>16</sup> Hall leans on Gramsci's theories to decode the interplay between popular culture, race, and the political environment of Thatcherite Britain.

The arena of international relations introduced Neo-Gramscians who extended Gramsci's ideas to fathom the intricacies of global politics. Robert W. Cox's "Production, Power, and World Order: Social Forces in the Making of History"<sup>17</sup> epitomizes this approach. Cox navigates the vast world of international relations through the Gramscian lens, emphasizing the pivotal roles of production and power structures.

Gramsci's theories also found resonance in the field of anthropology. Scholars like Kate Crehan, in her book "Gramsci, Culture and Anthropology"<sup>18</sup> bridge Gramscian ideas with anthropological insights, shedding light on the intricate dance between culture and power dynamics.

The realm of postcolonial studies, though not constituting a distinct Gramscian school, has seen the integration of Gramscian principles. Edward Said's "Orientalism"<sup>19</sup> stands out in this context. Drawing inspiration from Gramsci, Said delves into the West's constructed perceptions of the East, intricately woven by the threads of colonial legacies and the dynamics of knowledge power.

The Post-Marxist Gramscians signify a departure from classical Marxism but retain core Gramscian concepts. They place a pronounced emphasis on discourse and the alliance-building potential among diverse social factions. Laclau and Mouffe, in their seminal work "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy"<sup>20</sup>, expanded on and redefined the concept of hegemony. While deeply influenced by Gramsci, they took a post-Marxist approach, emphasizing the importance of discourse in establishing hegemonic relations. Laclau and Mouffe argue that social agents are never entirely subsumed by a particular ideology or discourse. This leaves room for resistance and the possibility of new hegemonic formations. They also introduce the idea of "articulation"

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<sup>15</sup>Anderson, P. (1989). *Considerations on western marxism*. Verso.

<sup>16</sup> Hall, S., Critcher, C., Jefferson, T., Clarke, J., & Roberts, B. (2019). *Policing the crisis: Mugging, the State and law and order*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

<sup>17</sup> Production, power, and World Order: Social Forces in the making of history, Robert W. Cox. 1987. Columbia University Press, New York. 500 pages. index. ISBN: 0-231-05808-X. (1988). *Bulletin of Science, Technology & Society*, 8(4), 442–442. <https://doi.org/10.1177/027046768800800478>

<sup>18</sup> Crehan K. (2002). *Gramsci, culture and anthropology*. University of California Press.

<sup>19</sup> Said, E. W. (2003). *Orientalism: Edward W. Said*. Vintage Books.

<sup>20</sup> Laclau, E., and C. Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

— the process by which different social groups or demands come together to form a collective identity or front.

In essence, while Gramsci laid the groundwork for understanding the subtle ways in which power is maintained through cultural hegemony, Laclau and Mouffe expanded this by emphasizing the fluid, discursive nature of power relations. Both perspectives are crucial in comprehending the complex relations of power, dominance, and resistance in contemporary societies.

Building upon these foundational concepts, Laclau and Mouffe<sup>21</sup> have made significant contributions by merging the concept of the empty signifier with the study of hegemonic discourses. They emphasize the importance of linguistic and mnemonic apparatus in the creation and dissemination of hegemonic discourses that seek to mobilize diverse and heterogeneous social groups.

In his work, Laclau<sup>22</sup> further modifies the concept of the empty signifier and introduces the notion of the floating signifier, particularly relevant in situations where boundaries and frontiers are not stable but rather contested and challenged due to power struggles between different groups. This concept depicts a signifier without a signified, or a name without a concept. Laclau approaches the empty signifier through a differential dialectic, exploring the interplay between negativity and positivity, lack and fullness.

As Laclau defines it, “the general form of fullness shows itself through the discursive presence of floating signifiers that are constitutively so - that is, they are not the result of contingent ambiguities of meaning but of the need to signify the lack (the absent fullness within the structure)”<sup>23</sup>.

He later adds that floating signifier “tries conceptually to apprehend the logic of the displacements of that frontier. In practice, however, the distance between the two [empty signifier and floating signifier] is not that great. Both are hegemonic operations and, most importantly, the referents largely overlap”<sup>24</sup>.

Laclau contends that the need for fullness will always manifest itself through the presence of its absence. It is precisely in this context of radical disorder that the category of the empty signifier assumes relevance. In such a situation, "order" exists as the absence that needs to be filled, functioning as an empty signifier that signifies this absence. Various political forces can then compete to present their specific objectives as capable of fulfilling this lack, thereby seeking to establish hegemony. Laclau further suggests that other signifiers like "unity," "revolution," "justice," "change," and "happiness" can also operate in a similar manner, serving as empty signifiers that represent the lack. In this way, politics is made possible because

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<sup>21</sup> Laclau, E., and C. Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

<sup>22</sup> Laclau, E. 1996. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso.

<sup>23</sup> Laclau, E. 1996. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso.

<sup>24</sup> Laclau, Ernesto. *On Populist Reason*. Verso, 2005.

society's constitutive impossibility can only be represented through the production of empty signifiers<sup>25</sup>.

Laclau and Mouffe's book "Hegemony and Socialist Strategy"<sup>26</sup> explores the concept of hegemony and its relationship to socialist politics. They delve into the significance of the empty signifier in constructing a hegemonic project capable of challenging prevailing power structures. According to their argument, the empty signifier enables the articulation of diverse social demands and the formation of a collective will necessary for social and political transformation.

In Laclau's "Emancipation(s)"<sup>27</sup>, he delves into the concept of emancipation and its connection to political theory. Expanding on the idea of the empty signifier, Laclau emphasizes its role as a vital tool in constructing a radical democratic politics. The empty signifier, in this context, establishes a chain of equivalence that links various social demands and fosters a collective identity among different groups. It enables the formation of a hegemonic project aimed at challenging existing power structures and pursuing social transformation.

Another notable work by Laclau, "The Rhetorical Foundations of Society"<sup>28</sup>, explores the role of rhetoric in shaping social and political life. Laclau argues that the empty signifier plays a fundamental role in constructing social identities and forming political discourses. He highlights the contingent and discursive nature of social reality, where the empty signifier facilitates the articulation of diverse demands and the construction of hegemonic projects.

In "The Making of Political Identities"<sup>29</sup> edited by Ernesto Laclau, the authors provide a comprehensive exploration of the construction of political identities and the intricate relationship between hegemony and collective subjectivities. Laclau delves into the concept of the empty signifier and its pivotal role within hegemonic projects. By examining the ways in which empty signifiers operate, Laclau elucidates how they contribute to the formation of political identities and the construction of meaning within hegemonic discourses. Through his nuanced analysis, Laclau offers valuable insights into the dynamics of power, identity, and hegemonic processes, making his book an essential contribution to the literature on political theory and social analysis.

By employing the concept of the empty signifier, Laclau and other scholars have provided valuable insights into the complex dynamics of meaning creation, hegemony, and political transformation.

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<sup>25</sup> Laclau, E. 1996. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso.

<sup>26</sup> Laclau, E., and C. Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics*. London: Verso.

<sup>27</sup> Laclau, E. 1996. *Emancipation(s)*. London: Verso

<sup>28</sup> Laclau, E. (2014). *The Rhetorical Foundations of society*. Verso Books.

<sup>29</sup> Laclau, E. (2005). *The making of political identities*. Verso.

## 1.2 Memory politics and decommunization in Poland

The scholarly literature on memory politics in Poland provides a nuanced examination of the intricate dynamics between historical memory, political agendas, and national identity. The works explore various aspects, including the prohibition of reflecting on certain events, the strategic manipulation of history by political actors, the clash between modernization and traditionalistic narratives, and the proliferation of memory laws that shape historical discourse.

These studies shed light on the complexities and controversies surrounding memory governance, emphasizing its instrumental role as a political tool, the safeguarding of dominant narratives, and the pivotal influence of memory in mobilization, discreditation, and the construction of political identities. Engaging with these scholarly perspectives deepens our understanding of the multifaceted nature of memory politics and its profound impact on the socio-political landscape of contemporary Poland.

The starting point of the discussion on memory politics in Eastern Europe in this work presented by the work "Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe"<sup>30</sup> edited by Uilleam Blacker and Alexander Etkind. Their exploration underlines the immense impact of Poland's decision to prohibit reflections on specific historical events. Such prohibitions have not only crafted a unique landscape for contemporary memory politics but also ignited an intense desire among Poles to bridge this historical gap, demanding justice and actively seeking connections between these suppressed memories and current political events.

Taking a more nuanced approach, Marta Bucholc's paper, "Commemorative Lawmaking: Memory Frames of the Democratic Backsliding in Poland After 2015"<sup>31</sup> positions itself somewhat contrarily. Leveraging the anthropological concept of "bricolage" from Levi-Strauss, Bucholc critically assesses the Polish government's tactics. She suggests that rather than genuinely engaging with history, the government selectively rearranges historical narratives for political advantage. In doing so, she posits that the government's strategy has been to propagate a vision of a unified and homogenous nation. She underlines this with her sharp critique of how the past, especially the communist era, has been repurposed to provide context for constitutional reforms. The article further contends that PiS has succeeded in establishing a clear and persuasive vision for memory politics, which contrasts with the inconsistent and weak approaches of previous Polish governments.

Attila Ágh's perspective in "Cultural War and Reinventing the Past in Poland and Hungary"<sup>32</sup> broadens the conversation. He delves into the external influences and pressures, particularly from the European Union. Ágh presents a complex scenario where memory politics in Poland appears to be torn between the forces of modernization and traditional narratives. He attributes

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<sup>30</sup>Blacker, U. (2013). *Memory and theory in Eastern Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>31</sup>Bucholc, M. (2018). Commemorative lawmaking: Memory frames of the Democratic backsliding in Poland after 2015. *Hague Journal on the Rule of Law*, 11(1), 85–110. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40803-018-0080-7>

<sup>32</sup>Ágh, A. (2016). Cultural War and reinventing the past in Poland and Hungary: The Politics of Historical Memory in east–Central Europe. *Polish Political Science Yearbook*, 45(1), 32–44. <https://doi.org/10.15804/ppsy2016003>

the growing prominence of the latter to the broader economic and political fractures within the EU. This, he believes, has led to a resurgence in stark, binary narratives that position nation-state building as a defiant stand against perceived foreign oppressors.

The compilation "Poland's Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism"<sup>33</sup> offers diverse views. Joanna Średnicka delves deep into Polish political culture, identifying its roots in Polish romanticism—a tradition emphasizing idealistic images of society, historical figures, and their valiant struggles. This perspective fosters the cultivation of new generations of patriots based on the glorified yet tragic past. The notion of a besieged fortress and messianism, rooted in a sense of national superiority, shapes contemporary Poland. In stark contrast, Jan Darasz zooms in on the activities of the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN). He observes a systematic effort to diminish the historical significance of the People's Republic of Poland (PRL) and its communist roots. Darasz questions why there is no left-wing history in Poland and suggests that the connection to the tradition of independence and the rejection of the post-communist heritage are necessary for national stabilization.

The volume "Memory Laws and Memory Wars in Poland, Russia, and Ukraine"<sup>34</sup> co-authored by Uladzislau Belavusau and others takes a panoramic view. They draw a compelling parallel between the surge in memory legislation in Poland and the rising tide of far-right sentiments across Europe. Within this broader context, the authors critique the Polish ruling party, PiS, for crafting laws that propagate a mono-dimensional version of history, favorable to their political agenda. The laws and amendments proposed by PiS promote a single version of history beneficial to their own agenda, while denouncing communists and Ukrainian nationalists. These laws prohibit discussions about collaboration with Germans and participation in the Holocaust.

Belavusau's independent article "The Rise of Memory Laws in Poland: An Adequate Tool to Counter Historical Disinformation?"<sup>35</sup> delves even deeper into this critique. By examining the nuances of Poland's memory laws, he identifies inherent contradictions, suggesting these legislations are steeped in revisionist ideologies, crafted with the primary intent of bolstering nationalism and solidifying support for PiS, particularly by reinterpreting World War II memories.

Nikolay Kaposov, in his analysis "Populism and Memory: Legislation of the Past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia"<sup>36</sup> skilfully interweaves populism with memory governance. Drawing from Laclau and Koselleck, Kaposov asserts that the populist movements have fundamentally transformed the manner in which historical concepts are interpreted. He suggests that in this new age, the significance of memory legislation is not just to uphold history but to safeguard

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<sup>33</sup> Harper, J., Harper, J., Rychard, A., Ost, D., Porter, B., Lipiński, A., Stępińska, A., Richardson, N., Muś, J., Średnicka, J., Darasz, J., Stańczyk, E., Czaja, D., Chowaniec, U. M., Basiuk, T., Adekoya, R., Gross, J. T., Ascherson, N., Kunicki, M. S., ... Pease, N. (2018). *Poland's memory wars: Essays on illiberalism*. CEU Press.

<sup>34</sup> Belavusau, U., Gliszczynska-Grabias, A., & Mälksoo, M. (2021). Memory laws and memory wars in Poland, Russia and Ukraine. *SSRN Electronic Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3806091>

<sup>35</sup> Belavusau, U. (2018). The rise of memory laws in Poland. *Security and Human Rights*, 29(1–4), 36–54. <https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02901011>

<sup>36</sup> Kaposov, N. (2021). Populism and memory: Legislation of the past in Poland, Ukraine, and Russia. *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures*, 36(1), 272–297. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325420950806>

the symbols and myths that are pivotal to contemporary populist narratives. Given that populism operates more in the realm of myths and symbols, it seeks to protect the tools used to create those myths.

These legislative measures also contribute to the trend of imposing emotional taboos on discussing and criticizing certain events. This trend facilitates the use of specific symbols and signs to discredit counter-narratives or political opponents in the public sphere of politics.

Kate Korycki's notion of "mnemonic capital", introduced in the article "Politicized Memory in Poland: Anti-communism and the Holocaust"<sup>37</sup> encapsulates the potency of memory politics. Mnemonic capital refers to the ability to employ mnemonic apparatus and historical references as instruments of internal homogenization, mobilization, and discreditation of opponents. Korycki highlights the significance of historical narratives in Poland. In her work "Memory, Party Politics, and Post-Transition Space: The Case of Poland"<sup>38</sup> she further develops this idea, asserting that by equating communism with Poland and presenting it as existentially anti-Polish, the state provides one party with a "discursive weapon" to discredit its adversaries. According to Korycki, since programmatic positioning is similar among all parties, political positioning becomes crucial. The three main participants in the Polish political scene employ the past and their interpretation of communism's evil in different ways, thereby establishing enduring political identities for themselves and their adversaries. Anti-communism becomes the organizing paradigm of the political field, distinguishing these clusters from one another and specifying their relations. Overall, the past becomes the language of politics.

In conclusion, the literature on memory politics and decommunization in Poland offers valuable insights into the intricate relationship between historical memory, political agendas, and national identity. Through the analysis of various works, we have observed the prohibition of reflection on certain events, the opportunistic use of history by political actors, the clash between modernization and traditionalistic narratives, and the rise of memory laws that shape historical discourse. These studies highlight the complexities and controversies surrounding memory politics in Poland, emphasizing the significance of memory governance as a political tool, the protection of master narratives, and the role of memory in mobilization, discreditation, and the construction of political identities. By engaging with these scholarly perspectives, we deepen our understanding of the multifaceted nature of memory politics and its profound impact on the socio-political landscape of contemporary Poland.

### 1.3 Populist usage of empty signifiers

The formal discursive approach to understanding populism, as conceptualized by Laclau, offers insights into the operative logic employed by populist movements. This approach focuses on

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<sup>37</sup> Korycki, K. (2019). Politicized Memory in Poland: Anti-communism and the Holocaust. *Holocaust Studies*, 25(3), 351–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17504902.2019.1567669>

<sup>38</sup> Korycki, K. (2017). Memory, party politics, and post-transition space: The case of Poland. *East European Politics and Societies: And Cultures*, 31(3), 518–544. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0888325417700263>

how populism articulates its demands and mobilizes support through the use of specific discursive apparatus and the logic of antagonization within the political space. Laclau contends that populist leaders accumulate their demands and claims under symbolic "umbrella" constructions, which undergo constant transformation and changing of meanings.

At its core, the Essex school emerges as a foundational analytical framework, upholding the formal discursive approach. It meticulously probes the intricate fabric of political antagonisms, with a keen focus on the articulation of these conflicts through signifiers. This emphasis on the communicative aspect of politics sets the stage for subsequent inquiries.

Laclau's "On Populist Reason"<sup>39</sup> examines populism and its political reverberations. The crux of his argument resides in the centrality of empty signifiers within populist rhetoric. These elusive signifiers, lacking fixed meanings yet malleable to an array of interpretations, become focal points for diverse societal demands, ultimately fostering the emergence of comprehensive political movements. This conceptualization provides a lens through which the various works navigate the complex terrain of populism.

According to Laclau and Mouffe, populist movements capitalize on the articulation of different social grievances into a unified discourse, thereby creating a "chain of equivalences" that connects diverse demands. Their approach emphasizes the contingent and context-dependent nature of populism and its potential to challenge existing power structures.

Ernesto Laclau's definition of populism is centered around the notion of constructing a political identity for the masses in opposition to an established elite. He views populism as a discursive strategy used by political actors to create a chain of equivalences that links various social demands and identities into a coherent collective identity. This collective identity, often referred to as the "people," is framed in opposition to the existing power structure.

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, in "Populism: A Very Short Introduction"<sup>40</sup> draw from Laclau's insights to illuminate the capacity of populism in constructing collective identities and engaging broad audiences. Their spotlight on shared identities as bridges between disparate demands harmonizes with Laclau's narrative of signifiers as unifying agents. While aligned in this trajectory, their work diverges in its focus on the pragmatic application of these concepts to contemporary political phenomena.

Cas Mudde places more emphasis on the ideological dimensions of populism. He defines<sup>41</sup> populism as a thin-centered ideology that divides society into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite." Mudde's definition focuses on the exclusionary nature of populism and its tendency to depict the "other" as the enemy.

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<sup>39</sup>Laclau, E. (2018). *On populist reason*. Verso.

<sup>40</sup> Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2019). *Populism a very short introduction*. MTM.

<sup>41</sup> Mudde, C. (2021). Populism in Europe: An illiberal democratic response to undemocratic liberalism (the government and opposition leonard schapiro lecture 2019). *Government and Opposition*, 56(4), 577–597. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2021.15>

Aalberg, Esser, Reinemann, Strömbäck, and de Vreese, as editors of "Populist Political Communication in Europe"<sup>42</sup> pivot towards a scrutiny of discourse strategies employed by populist entities. Their examination of far-right populists' penchant for exclusionary and delegitimizing discourse serves as a contrast to the more abstract discussions of empty signifiers. Here, the common ground lies in the exploration of the rhetorical arsenal wielded by populist movements.

Encarnación Hidalgo-Tenorio, Miguel-Ángel Benítez-Castro, and Francesca De Cesare, in "Populist Discourse: Critical Approaches to Contemporary Politics"<sup>43</sup> dovetail with Laclau's theorization by underscoring the consistent deployment of empty signifiers in populist discourse. This recurrent utilization to evoke emotions, galvanize support, and mold collective identity echoes Laclau's contention. The commonality of exploring the performative power of these signifiers weaves through both works.

Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser's editorial feat, "The Oxford Handbook of Populism"<sup>44</sup> unfurls as a comprehensive compendium investigating the operational aspects of empty signifiers across diverse contextual backdrops. Its emphasis on the populist leader as a triumphant signifier mirrors Laclau's conception. The conceptual innovation and the identification of criteria for discerning populist discourse parallel Laclau and Mouffe's conceptual framework.

Grego Fitzi, in "Populism and the Crisis of Democracy Volume 1: Concepts and Theory"<sup>45</sup> delves into two pivotal dimensions of empty signifiers within populist discourse: their versatility in addressing diverse social and cultural groups and their susceptibility to historical and cultural influences. This emphasis on context is a pivot where Fitzi's work diverges from Laclau's broader theoretical framework.

Müller's "What Is Populism?"<sup>46</sup> and Mudde's "The Populist Radical Right: A Reader"<sup>47</sup> converge in their skepticism toward the durability of central arguments in populist rhetoric. This shared lens through which they examine the semiotic fluidity within populist discourse resonates with Laclau's perspective on the malleability of signifiers.

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<sup>42</sup> Aalberg, T., Esser, F., Reinemann, C., Strömbäck, J., & de, V. C. H. (2018). *Populist political communication in Europe*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

<sup>43</sup> Aalberg, T., Esser, F., Reinemann, C., Strömbäck, J., & de, V. C. H. (2018). *Populist political communication in Europe*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

<https://www.routledge.com/Populist-Discourse-Critical-Approaches-to-Contemporary-Politics/Hidalgo-Tenorio-Benitez-Castro-Cesare/p/book/9781138541481>

<sup>44</sup> Kaltwasser, C. R., Taggart, P. A., Espejo, P. O., & Ostiguy, P. (2019). *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*. Oxford University Press.

<sup>45</sup> Fitzi, G. (n.d.). *Populism and the crisis of democracy: Volume 1: Concepts and theory*. Routledge.

<sup>46</sup> Mudde, C., & Kaltwasser, C. R. (2017). 1. what is populism? *Populism: A Very Short Introduction*, 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780190234874.003.0001>

<sup>47</sup> Mudde, C. (2017). *The populist radical right: A reader*. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Ruth Wodak's edited volume, "Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse"<sup>48</sup> undertakes an intricate analysis of the communication strategies employed by diverse right-wing populist movements. This exploration of rhetoric's impact on identity formation and mobilization aligns with the collective investigations into the discursive strategies of populist entities.

In "Populism In Global Perspective: A Performative And Discursive Approach"<sup>49</sup> Ostiguy, Panizza, and Moffitt introduce a performative-relational approach that builds upon Laclau's foundation. The shift from "empty signifiers" to "overflowing signifiers" engenders a novel perspective. Here, the common thread lies in the exploration of the performative nature of populist discourse, yet the departure into "overflowing signifiers" signifies a distinctive trajectory.

In conclusion, the usage of empty signifiers serves as a central element in populist discourse and political communication. Scholars across various disciplines have explored the strategic deployment of empty signifiers by populist leaders and movements, emphasizing their role in constructing collective identities, mobilizing support, and delegitimizing opponents. The analysis presented in this subchapter provides a comprehensive understanding of the concept of populist usage of empty signifiers, drawing on significant theoretical works and empirical studies. By examining the implications and discursive practices associated with empty signifiers, we gain valuable insights into the complexities of populism as a political phenomenon.

## **1.4 Essex school and methodological approach to discourse analysis**

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<sup>48</sup>Wodak, R., KhosraviNik, M., & Mral, B. (2013). *Right wing populism in Europe: Politics and discourse*. Bloomsbury Academic.

<sup>49</sup> Ostiguy, P., Panizza, F., & Moffitt, B. (2021). *Populism in global perspective a performative and discursive approach*. Routledge.

When we talk about discourse theory we refer to the body of works of post-structuralist and post-marxist researchers inspired primarily by Laclau and Mouffe work<sup>50</sup>, but was further developed by Carpentier<sup>51</sup>, Torfing<sup>52</sup>, Marchant<sup>53</sup>, Glynos and Howarth<sup>54</sup>, Smith<sup>55</sup>.

Laclau and Mouffe focus on hegemony, discourse, and radical democracy. Their approach involves identifying "nodal points" and "empty signifiers" in discourse to analyze how different social groups construct their identities and establish power relations. Their methodological process often entails dissecting political speeches, media debates, and policy documents to reveal the articulation of diverse discursive elements into broader political strategies.

Carpentier's work often revolves around media and communication studies. In his research, he might employ a methodological approach that combines critical discourse analysis with fieldwork. For instance, he could analyze media texts (news articles, advertisements) using discourse analysis techniques to uncover underlying power structures and ideological influences. Additionally, he might conduct interviews or surveys with media professionals, audiences, or stakeholders to complement his analysis with real-world perspectives.

Nico Carpentier is known for his work in media and communication studies, often exploring the intersections of communication, power, and social change. Carpentier could employ critical discourse analysis to analyze media texts, such as news articles or advertisements, to uncover underlying power structures, ideologies, and framing techniques. This might involve examining linguistic choices, metaphors, and rhetorical strategies used to convey specific meanings and influence public perception. Carpentier has emphasized participatory approaches in his work. He might engage with communities or marginalized groups to collaboratively analyze media representations that affect them. Participatory approaches involve dialogues, workshops, and co-creation of knowledge to ensure that research outcomes are relevant and empowering to the communities involved.

Simon Torfing is recognized for his contributions to collaborative governance and network theory. Torfing might conduct detailed case studies of collaborative initiatives or policy networks. He could analyze documents, policies, and agreements related to the collaboration, as well as interview key stakeholders to understand how discourses are negotiated and influence decision-making. Torfing might also use social network analysis to visualize and analyze the relationships between different actors within a policy network. This approach helps uncover power dynamics, information flows, and patterns of influence within the network.

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<sup>50</sup> Laclau, Ernesto, and Chantal Mouffe. 1985. *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*. London: Verso.

<sup>51</sup> Carpentier, Nico. 2017. *The Discursive-Material Knot. Cyprus in Conflict and Community Media Participation*. New York: Peter Lang.

<sup>52</sup> Torfing, Jacob. 1999. *New Theories of Discourse: Laclau, Mouffe and Zizek*. Oxford: Wiley.

<sup>53</sup> Marchant, Oliver. 2018. *Thinking Antagonism: Political Ontology After Laclau*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

<sup>54</sup> Howarth, David. 1998. "Discourse theory and political analysis." In *Research strategies in the social sciences*, edited by Elinor Scarbrough, and Eric Tanenbaum, 268-293. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

<sup>55</sup> Smith, Anna Marie. 1998. *Laclau and Mouffe. The Radical Democratic Imaginary*. London/New York: Routledge.

David Howarth's work spans European politics, discourse theory, and critical political economy. He might analyze political speeches, policy documents, and media narratives to understand how discourses contribute to the construction of political identities and the legitimation of power. His approach involves identifying key signifiers and the logics through which they articulate. Howarth's research might also include comparing discourses across different countries or contexts. By comparing how discourses are constructed differently or similarly, he could reveal underlying power structures, normative frameworks, and ideological influences. Howarth's work often considers historical contexts. He might use historical analysis to trace the development and transformation of discourses over time, highlighting shifts in power dynamics and ideological formations.

However, despite of the fact that the discourse theory has been developing for a several decades now, there is still no concrete practical toolkit to be applied and the Essex school itself promotes the idea that there cannot be a universal methodological framework.

This thesis will be following the Glynos and Howarth approach presented in *Critical Explanation in Social and Political Theory* which consists of 5 steps: problematization, retrodictive explanation, logics, articulation, critique.

**Problematization:** involves identifying a specific issue, phenomenon, or concept that requires analysis and explanation. The researcher outlines why the chosen topic is significant and relevant for investigation. In practice, this could mean selecting a particular social or political problem, such as populist discourse in contemporary politics.

**Retraductive Explanation:** the researcher provides an initial overview of existing explanations, theories, or understandings of the problem. This helps establish a basis for further analysis. For instance, the researcher might review existing literature on populism, exploring different theoretical perspectives and explanations that have been offered in the academic discourse.

**Logics:** involves identifying and describing the various underlying logics that contribute to the problem at hand. These logics can include social logics (how society functions), political logics (how power operates), and fantasmatic logics (underlying imaginaries and desires). For instance, in the case of populism, the researcher might identify the social logic of discontent with the status quo, the political logic of anti-establishment rhetoric, and the fantasmatic logic of restoring a mythical past.

**Articulation:** involves showing how the identified logics are interrelated and mutually reinforcing. This step focuses on how these logics come together to form a coherent narrative or discourse. In the context of populism, the researcher might analyze how the social, political, and fantasmatic logics are woven together in populist speeches and communication strategies to create a compelling narrative that resonates with certain segments of the population.

**Critique:** involves critically engaging with the articulation of logics. The researcher questions the assumptions, implications, and potential limitations of the discourse under examination. In the case of populism, the researcher might critically assess how the interplay of logics contributes to the exclusion of certain groups, the simplification of complex issues, or the potential for demagoguery.

## 2. Methodological framework of research

This research entails the analysis of speeches delivered by the most prominent leaders of the Law and Justice Party (PiS). The primary objective is to scrutinize the utilization of empty signifiers, specifically exemplified by the term "communism," within the discourse of the prevailing right-wing political faction. These linguistic constructs serve as instruments of populist rhetoric. Each instance will undergo an analytical assessment, focusing on the articulation of both political logic and the fantasmatic logic. Deployment of empty signifiers within populist discourse is a strategic means to attain distinct political objectives in relation to the target audience. This manipulation is achieved through the incorporation of mythical and historical constructs, ultimately culminating in the restoration of a particular narrative.

Given Poland's stable political landscape and the absence of a substantial anti-elite movement, Mudde's framework of populism finds practical relevance. In this context, the concept of the "empty signifier" primarily functions as a tool for political maneuvering and manipulation. It is employed to rally supporters and undermine opponents within the populist group. The methodology described earlier is well-suited to examine how this signifier is utilized and serves the goals of the populist faction. It also provides context for the effectiveness of the term "communist" within the Polish political context.

Subsequently, a critical analysis of these instances will be conducted, aimed at illuminating the underlying intentions and power dynamics enmeshed within the narratives. The selection of speeches is driven by their orientation toward a general audience, serving to underscore the inherent populist motives underpinning the speakers' rhetoric. Moreover, this choice intends to underscore the adaptable nature of this rhetorical mechanism across diverse contextual frameworks and circumstances. The substantial volume of represented speeches underscores the recurrent and systematic manifestation of this phenomenon. In order to provide enhanced contextualization and to demonstrate the nuanced evolution or even dissolution of semantic significance across distinct scenarios, the illustrative examples will be systematically categorized into thematic clusters within dedicated subchapters. This approach not only furnishes a more comprehensive vantage point but also accentuates the consistent application and associated implications of the empty signifier within the realm of power dynamics.

At the end of each subchapter, text segments are amalgamated, constructing corpuses that encapsulate thematic content, which later are analyzed by several methods. AntConc, a distinguished corpus analysis tool developed by Laurence Anthony, is then deployed to examine corpuses. This software empowers researchers to explore patterns within extensive bodies of text through various linguistic analyses, including concordance and co-occurrence analysis.

Co-occurrences, referring to the simultaneous appearance of two or more words or concepts within a specific context, are central to the study. The analysis involves identifying patterns of association between terms within corpuses. AntConc's concordance and co-occurrence tools enable the identification of words that frequently appear together, shedding light on potential relationships and semantic connections.

The analysis of co-occurrences assumes particular significance when exploring the concept of an empty signifier—a linguistic or symbolic entity devoid of fixed meaning. The empty signifier gains significance through associations with other elements, and co-occurrence analysis provides a method to decipher the contextual dependencies and semantic networks surrounding it. By identifying patterns of co-occurrence, the aim is to discern how the empty signifier acquires meaning through its relational dynamics with other terms, thereby contributing to a more nuanced understanding of its role within the studied context.

Framing and tone also play a significant role in shaping the perception and interpretation of the empty signifier in a text. The way information is framed can influence how the empty signifier is perceived and interpreted, making it essential to consider the context in which it is used.

The tone of a text contributes to its overall persuasive power. The tone can convey the author's attitude and emotions toward the empty signifier, influencing the reader's perception. Understanding the tone is key to evaluating the persuasive impact of the empty signifier.

Analyzing framing and tone helps uncover power dynamics within the text. The way the empty signifier is framed can reveal who has the authority to define its meaning and control its narrative. Tone, in particular, can signal power imbalances by indicating the author's stance and the intended effect on the audience.

Framing and tone influence how the audience responds to the empty signifier. Different audiences may interpret the same text in varied ways based on their background, beliefs, and experiences. Analyzing framing and tone helps predict and understand potential audience reactions, shedding light on the text's impact on diverse perspectives.

Framing will be measured with the help of a special Python algorithm. The decision to employ Python for this analysis was predicated on the language's versatility, extensive libraries for NLP, and its widespread adoption in computational linguistics research. In the development of the code for text sentiment analysis, the initial step involved the selection of a pertinent natural language processing (NLP) library. The spaCy library was chosen for its comprehensive functionality in text processing.

Subsequently, the requisite modules and functions were imported from the spaCy library. Code segments were integrated to facilitate the loading of textual data for analysis, with the data source being either a file or obtained through web scraping, contingent upon its origin.

Following the loading of the text, a systematic preprocessing procedure was undertaken. This entailed the elimination of stop words, punctuation, and special characters. Tokenization was then performed, effecting the segmentation of the text into discrete words or tokens. This preparatory step was imperative for optimizing the data for subsequent analytical processes.

The code incorporated the utilization of a pre-trained sentiment analysis model. SpaCy provides a model proficient in categorizing text as positive, negative, or neutral. Application of this model to the preprocessed text yielded sentiment scores.

To augment the analytical depth, supplementary features were integrated into the code, encompassing emotional tone analysis, subjectivity assessment, and the incorporation of domain-specific lexicons. These augmentations facilitated a more nuanced understanding of the emotional tonality inherent in the text.

To comprehend the emotions conveyed in the texts under examination, the AFINN scoring system is employed to measure the tone of the text. This system assigns numeric scores to words based on their positive or negative connotations, aiding in the analysis of emotional tones within individual words.

This algorithm functions as a set of rules that assess the cumulative impact of AFINN scores in a message, determining whether the overall sentiment is positive, neutral, or negative.

Subsequently, the outcomes of the framing, tone, and co-occurrence analyses will be amalgamated into a comparative sheet, which allows for better conclusions and a deep analysis of each text separately and all combined.

### **3. Analytical part**

#### **3.1. Environmentalism, “green communism” and investments**

This chapter will compile the speeches of PiS leaders concerning specific environmental and economic initiatives. These speeches hold relevance for the research due to several reasons. They aptly demonstrate the ability to shift meaning and the semiotic flexibility of the signifier depending on the context. The same signifier is used both to criticize and support certain decisions and policies within the same sphere, employing identical rhetorical instruments. Moreover, this approach effectively mobilizes support from the target audience while delegitimizing the opposing stance by manipulating the narrative of the discussion.

The provided examples also serve as representative markers of an empty signifier, exhibiting characteristics such as lack of fixed meaning, polysemy, contextual dependency, ideological investment, shifting or contested meanings, as well as ambiguity and indeterminacy.

Beyond their linguistic and rhetorical functions, these signifiers serve as powerful tools for ideological reinforcement and consolidation of political power. The consistent employment of certain signifiers in relation to specific environmental and economic issues helps establish a distinctive political identity for the PiS party. By consistently framing policy debates within the context of these signifiers, they cultivate a sense of collective belonging among their supporters, reinforcing a shared worldview and fostering loyalty to the party leadership. Additionally, these empty signifiers contribute to the perpetuation of ideological hegemony, as they steer public conversations away from nuanced discussions and suppress alternative perspectives that may challenge the prevailing political narrative.

On 23.04.2023 The leader of PiS Jarosław Kaczyński criticized the «Fit for 55» EU plan aimed at reduction of gas emission by 55% by 2030 as “green communism” in his letter published at «Gazeta Polska»:

*"What the left-liberal majority in the EP is doing, guided only by ideological premises - is green communism"<sup>56</sup>, he also blamed the EU for "the desire to impose a new way of life", from which the more economically strong and less fossil-dependent western european countries would benefit the most, whilst eastern european countries would become less economically independent and economically attractive".*

The potential empty signifier in this text is "green communism." This term is highly emotive and symbolic but lacks a clear, precise definition. It is used by Kaczyński to evoke powerful emotions and associations without providing a concrete referent. The term "green communism" combines the broad definitions of environmentalism ("green") and communism, which historically carries negative connotations in many contexts, especially in Poland with long story of communist occupation. By using this term, Kaczyński seeks to associate the EU's environmental policies with something that is feared or disliked, tapping into people's fears of radical ideologies and their desire to preserve their way of life.

Kaczyński's discourse in this passage demonstrates several power dynamics and ideological stances. Firstly, it is an opposition to "Fit for 55" Plan: Kaczyński criticizes the "Fit for 55" EU plan aimed at reducing gas emissions by 55% by 2030. By labeling it as "green communism," he seeks to discredit the plan by associating it with a feared and negatively perceived ideology

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<sup>56</sup>Krzysztożek, A. (2023, April 24). "Zielony Komunizm". *Kaczyński O Unijnej decyzji*. [www.euractiv.pl](http://www.euractiv.pl). <https://www.euractiv.pl/section/energia-i-srodowisko/news/zielony-komunizm-kaczyński-o-unijnej-decyzji/> (Accessed on: 09.06.2023)

and historical memory inside the country. Kaczyński portrays the European Parliament's actions as guided solely by "ideological premises" and implies that the left-liberal majority is imposing its beliefs on others without considering alternative perspectives. He suggests that the EU's environmental policies would disproportionately benefit economically strong and less fossil-dependent Western European countries while negatively affecting Eastern European countries' economic independence and attractiveness.

In this passage he also uses several overlapping rhetorical and manipulative strategies:

- a. Emotive Language: The use of "green communism" triggers emotional responses, evoking fear of radical ideologies and change, which may resonate with certain segments of the population.
- b. Vagueness: By using the term "green communism," Kaczyński creates a vague and imprecise critique of the EU plan, allowing individuals to interpret it based on their pre-existing beliefs and fears.
- c. Othering: The distinction between economically strong and less fossil-dependent Western European countries versus Eastern European countries creates an "us versus them" dynamic, framing the issue as a struggle between different groups with conflicting interests.

In this passage Kaczyński makes an associations line: left-liberal , green communism, impose new way of life. Which resonates with the critique in Poland of the communist era for the attempt to create a “new man” and change the traditions and beliefs of the Poles. He tries to equalise the attempts of the communist regime to control the public sphere with the “left-liberal” presumed attempt to impose new policies based on “ideological premises”.

On 19.04.2023 PiS MEP Anna Zalewska comments on the adoption of "Fit for 55" by the European Commission, using the same term “green communism” that will be used by PiS president Jarosław Kaczyński.

*“This is green communism, which is nothing but a pyramid scheme. We are used to the fact that people like Bernard Madoff are usually behind such scams, and not European institutions, but the effect will be the same: a spectacular fall. There is no other option. This pyramid is working for now, because it is expanding at the base - it is taking money from more and more companies and people for a supposed carbon footprint. These funds are used to finance green technologies, which are unprofitable and will never be. However, the possibilities for expanding the base of the pyramid are limited - eventually people will run out of money and the last fossil fuel-based enterprises will fail. And with it the whole system....”<sup>57</sup>*

Similar to the previous text analyzed, the term “green communism” is emotionally charged and lacks a clear, well-defined meaning. By using "green communism," Zalewska attempts to create a negative association with the "Fit for 55" policy adopted by the European Commission. It functions as a rhetorical device to evoke fear, opposition, and skepticism towards the proposed policy without providing a precise explanation of what "green communism" entails. Zalewska's discourse demonstrates several power dynamics and ideological stances. First is opposition to "Fit for 55" Policy: Zalewska is critical of the "Fit for 55" policy adopted by the European Commission, and by labeling it as "green communism," she attempts to delegitimize and discredit the policy proposal. Second is associating with Scams and Failure: Zalewska uses the term "pyramid scheme" to draw a parallel between the "Fit for 55" policy and fraudulent financial schemes, such as the Bernie Madoff scandal. This comparison seeks to portray the

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<sup>57</sup> wGospodarce, Z. (2023, April 19). *“to Zielony Komunizm!” Najpierw Zabiorą Europejczykom.* wGospodarce.pl. <https://wgospodarce.pl/informacje/126545-to-zielony-komunizm-najpierw-zabiora-europejczykom> (Accessed on: 11.06.2023)

policy as deceitful, destined for failure, and harmful to its participants (in this case, companies and people). Third is doubting Green Technologies: By referring to "green technologies" as "unprofitable" and asserting they "will never be," Zalewska attempts to create doubt and skepticism about the viability and effectiveness of environmentally friendly technologies.

**Manipulation and Rhetorical Strategies:** Zalewska employs several rhetorical strategies to manipulate public opinion:

a. **Negative Associations:** The use of "green communism" and "pyramid scheme" invokes negative connotations and emotions, especially amongst Polish audience, where references to communism, as well as to economical instability factors like pyramid scheme, can provoke general distrust and confusion.

b. **Simplification and Oversimplification:** The comparison of the policy to a "pyramid scheme" oversimplifies the complexity of environmental policies and their potential benefits, disregarding their broader societal and environmental implications.

c. **Appeal to Fear:** Zalewska's rhetoric uses fear-based language, such as the idea of a "spectacular fall" of the policy, to create a sense of impending doom or disaster associated with the "Fit for 55" policy.

Zalewska is underlying the connection between "green communism" and the "taking money from more and more companies and people" which is potentially a reference to the expropriation of the properties conducted by multiple communist regimes. This creates a strong emotional bias of the audience.

On 3.03.2023 PiS Spokesman Rafał Bochenek on the press-conference also used<sup>58</sup> "communism" label to attack the opponents of PiS but now on the municipal level, he also brings up a C40 initiative which is an alliance of cities around the world that is focused on climate change and reduction of greenhouse emissions:

*"The C40 project to which Rafał Trzaskowski refers is a revolution that the opposition dreams about. This is an open limitation of freedom and choice in everyday life for Polish citizens. These restrictions may appear throughout Poland if PO wins. We will not allow communism to return again. The world has gone mad, and the restriction of our freedom is promoted by Rafał Trzaskowski."*

Empty signifier in this text is "communism." Bochenek associates the C40 initiative, focused on climate change and reduction of greenhouse emissions, with "communism," suggesting that it represents a limitation of freedom and choice for Polish citizens. The term "communism" is meant to evoke fear and opposition among the audience without offering specific evidence or details about the connection between the initiative and communism.

Bochenek uses the "communism" label to attack the political opponents of PiS, specifically Rafał Trzaskowski and the Civic Platform (PO) party. By associating the C40 initiative with communism, he attempts to discredit the opposition's ideas and policies, framing them as dangerous and undesirable. The use of terms like "communism," "restriction of freedom," and "the world has gone mad" aims to create fear and anxiety among the public, portraying the opposition's policies as threatening and irrational. Bochenek's discourse also implies that the C40 initiative is synonymous with communism and represents a threat to Polish citizens'

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<sup>58</sup>*Po chce decydować O Naszej Wolności.* Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/po-chce-decydowac-o-naszej-wolnosci> (Accessed on: 16.06.2023)

freedom. This stance could indicate a skepticism or resistance to climate change initiatives, potentially due to concerns about their impact on economic interests or traditional values.

Bochenek employs several rhetorical strategies to manipulate public opinion:

- a. Loaded Language: The use of terms like "communism" and "restriction of freedom" carries strong negative connotations, framing the C40 initiative and the opposition's policies as undesirable and dangerous.
- b. Associative Fallacy: Bochenek associates the C40 initiative with communism, without providing concrete evidence or a logical explanation for the connection. This fallacy seeks to create a negative perception of the initiative based on an emotionally charged association.
- c. Appeal to National Identity: By using terms like "Polish citizens" and suggesting that communism should not be allowed to return, Bochenek appeals to national identity and fosters a sense of patriotism, positioning the PiS party as protectors of Polish values and freedoms.

Bochenek establishes a robust line of associations, replete with emotionally charged triggers such as "revolution," "limitation of freedom," and the "return of communism." The purpose of this approach is to alter the narrative surrounding the content of the initiative and invoke a negative historical context. This rhetorical strategy possesses the potential to be highly divisive and may effectively mobilize individuals who are receptive to such persuasive techniques.

On 03.06.2023 City Councilor and a member of PiS Rafał Lipiec gave the following comment on C40 initiative:

*"I remember the times of communism and rationed meat. I remember darned clothes. The proposed program is like taken from Korea. C40s are worms that we've been eliminating all our lives because we treated them like pests. Today it turns out that it is not, he said during the conference..."*<sup>59</sup>.

In this passage, Lipiec strategically deploys the empty signifier of "communism" to criticize the C40 initiative focused on climate change and greenhouse emissions reduction. Lipiec's discourse is characterized by the use of emotional language and historical associations to discredit the initiative and demonize his political opponents. By invoking "communism" Lipiec aims to instill fear and apprehension among the audience, framing the C40 initiative as a threat to individual liberties and free-market principles. The lack of a clear, precise definition linking the initiative to communism leaves the term open to interpretation, allowing individuals to project their own fears and concerns onto the initiative, regardless of its actual content or objectives. Through the use of vagueness and ambiguity, Lipiec manipulates public opinion, relying on the power of the empty signifier to evoke strong emotions and pre-existing beliefs about communism, without offering a substantive argument against the C40 initiative.

Utilization of "communism" as an empty signifier also allows him to discredit and dismiss the C40 initiative without engaging in a substantive critique of its goals or objectives. By drawing on historical memories of rationed meat and darned clothes, Lipiec further contributes to the negative perception of the initiative, appealing to emotions of hardship and scarcity. His discourse involves fear-mongering and negative labeling, associating the initiative with a feared ideology and demonizing those who support it.

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<sup>59</sup> Emilian Kuleta, www. kuleta. pl. (n.d.). *Nowoczesny komunizm W wykonaniu platformy obywatelskiej?*. Gazeta Starachowicka. <https://www.starachowicka.pl/pl/starachowice/nowoczesny-komunizm-w-wykonaniu-platformy-obywatelskiej-,37735.html> (Accessed on: 16.06.2023)

Lipiec is loading the empty signifier "communism" with very specific emotionally charged references to rationed meat and darned clothes. This tactic is targeted at a particular segment of the Polish audience who have vivid memories of scarcity during the communist regime in Poland. Additionally, he draws a parallel to North Korea, a country commonly associated with poverty, famine, and totalitarian governance, further appealing to popular sentiments. Undoubtedly, this communication strategy proves highly effective in influencing the audience. Nevertheless, it lacks a substantial foundation and fails to establish any meaningful connection with the contextual aspects of the C40 initiative.

Krzysztof Stasiak, chairman of Law and Justice in Łódź, in his remarks on 03.03.2023 continued using the term green communism and simultaneously attacking the opposition:

*"The PO program is to introduce in Poland, under the pretext of fighting the climate of green communism, the civic platform wants to influence our everyday life"*<sup>60</sup>

In this passage Stasiak labels the opposition's climate program as "green communism," suggesting that it entails undesirable and radical changes that would intrude upon the everyday lives of Polish citizens. By associating the opposition's policies with communism, he taps into historical memories of repressive regimes and restrictions on individual freedoms, aiming to create fear and apprehension among the audience. However, the empty signifier "green communism" lacks a specific explanation of how the opposition's policies align with communism or what they entail precisely, leaving it open to interpretation and allowing individuals to project their fears and concerns onto the opposition's proposals. This lack of clarity enables Stasiak to avoid engaging in substantive debates on the actual content of the opposition's climate program and instead relies on the emotional resonance of the empty signifier to discredit it.

The use of the empty signifier "green communism" in this context serves as a rhetorical strategy to demonize the opposition and portray them as a dangerous and undesirable force. By characterizing the opposition's climate policies as intrusive and radical, Stasiak seeks to mobilize public sentiment against the opposition and its proposals.

PiS members also use references to communist past to promote certain investment and development projects, for example Kaczyński in his speech on 2.10.2022<sup>61</sup> dedicated to the opening of the baltic pipeline claimed that::

*"It was not that big, but it was very important from the point of view of our sovereignty, because the Russians wanted to block it, and under communism they forbade it. We did it. Now we have opened the pipeline (Baltic Pipe), which ensures our energy sovereignty."*

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<sup>60</sup>S.A, T. P. (n.d.). *Kontrowersyjny Program Wyborczy platformy obywatelskiej uderzy W żołądki polaków*. lodz.tvp.pl. <https://lodz.tvp.pl/68274534/kontrowersyjny-program-wyborczy-platformy-obywatelskiej-uderzy-w-zoladki-polakow> (Accessed on: 19.06.2023)

<sup>61</sup> M.werra. (2022, October 3). *Jarosław Kaczyński Przedstawia wizję gospodarczą na najbliższe lata. "DLA NAS najpierw jest polska."* Radio Gdańsk. <https://radiogdansk.pl/wiadomosci/polska-swiat/2022/10/02/jaroslaw-kaczynski-przedstawia-wizje-gospodarcza-na-najblizsze-lata-dla-nas-najpierw-jest-polska/> (Accessed on: 19.06.2023)

By invoking the communist era as a point of comparison, Kaczyński seeks to imbue the project with a sense of historical significance and national pride, framing it as a symbol of reclaiming sovereignty. The use of the empty signifier "communism" in this context allows Kaczyński to evoke emotions and associations related to past restrictions and foreign interference while presenting the Baltic Pipe as a triumph of Poland's independence and energy sovereignty. However, the lack of specific details regarding the project's merits or benefits obscures the substantive arguments in favor of the pipeline, relying instead on the rhetorical power of the communist reference to garner support.

By characterizing the pipeline as something that "we did" in contrast to what was forbidden under communism, he creates a sense of national achievement and autonomy. This framing is intended to appeal to public sentiments of patriotism and pride, evoking historical memories of a struggle for independence and self-determination. However, the text lacks specific details about the pipeline's economic, environmental, or strategic benefits, relying primarily on the emotional resonance of the empty signifier "communism" to garner support for the project.

The use of the empty signifier "communism" in this context not only serves to promote the Baltic Pipe pipeline but also taps into broader political narratives and ideological agendas. By referencing the communist past, Kaczyński appeals to a specific segment of the population that have negative perceptions of that era, presenting his political party and its projects as defenders of national sovereignty and protectors against external threats. This type of rhetoric can be effective in mobilizing support and shaping public opinion, as it capitalizes on historical memory and emotional associations to elevate the significance of the project in the eyes of the public. However, it also raises questions about the substantive merits and implications of the Baltic Pipe pipeline, as the focus on the communist reference overshadows a more comprehensive evaluation of the project's benefits and drawbacks.

At the speech dedicated to the opening of the Radom Airport on 27.04.2023 PiS Polish Prime Minister Morawiecki claimed the decision to build it:

*"was ridiculed by many. Few believed that the investment would be completed",*

but it was important to build it because:

*"this is proof that we are lifting the curse from Radom, which was imposed on this city by the communists after June 1976"<sup>62</sup>*

Prime Minister Morawiecki employs references to communism as an empty signifier to justify the construction of the Radom Airport and present it as a symbol of progress and liberation for the city. By evoking the notion of a "curse" imposed by communists after a historical event, Morawiecki seeks to create a narrative of overcoming past oppression and reclaiming the city's identity. This rhetorical strategy enables him to appeal to emotions and historical sentiments, portraying the airport as a significant achievement without engaging in substantive discussions on the project's merits or economic feasibility.

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<sup>62</sup> Walków, M. (2023, April 27). *Lotnisko Warszawa-radom oficjalnie otwarte. premier: Zdejmujemy Klątwę rzuconą Przez Komunistów*. [www.money.pl. https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/lotnisko-warszawa-radom-oficjalnie-otwarte-premier-zdejmujemy-klatwe-rzucona-przez-komunistow-6891846770043488a.html](https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/lotnisko-warszawa-radom-oficjalnie-otwarte-premier-zdejmujemy-klatwe-rzucona-przez-komunistow-6891846770043488a.html) (Accessed on: 21.06.2023)

Morawiecki justifies the construction of the Radom Airport by highlighting the skepticism and ridicule faced during the decision-making process. By framing the airport as an investment that defied doubters, he emphasizes its importance and symbolic value. The reference to a "curse" imposed by communists after June 1976 aims to tap into historical grievances and emotions associated with past oppression, fostering a sense of solidarity and national pride in reclaiming the city's identity. However, the lack of specific details on how the airport project addresses or "lifts" this purported curse obscures the substantive justifications for the investment, relying instead on the emotional resonance of the empty signifier "communists" to justify the endeavor.

Morawiecki seeks to garner support and evoke positive sentiments about the project. The reference to the "curse" implies that the airport is a transformative force, symbolizing a break from the past and a step towards a brighter future.

On 16.10.2022, PiS president Kaczyński in Sieradz answered questions from residents. One of them concerned the construction of the Central Communication Port and compensation for expropriation of real estate under the CPK (Central Communication Port):

*"We are not communists who took property from people in a brutal way and practically for free, nor are we even those who abandoned such practices, because they were even weakened in the later phase of communism"<sup>63</sup>.*

By invoking the term "communists" and attaching negative connotations to it, Kaczyński employs an empty signifier to distance his party, PiS, from a perceived undesirable past while projecting an image of moral superiority. This rhetorical strategy serves to shape public opinion, construct a favorable narrative for PiS, and create a contrast that portrays the party's policies in a positive light.

The lack of specificity regarding which communists are being referred to or the particular practices attributed to them allows individuals to interpret this term based on their preexisting beliefs and biases. As a result, the empty signifier not only polarizes public opinion but also enables Kaczyński to present PiS as a virtuous alternative, free from the negative associations attached to communism.

Another significant aspect of the empty signifier employed in the text is its emphasis on what PiS is not. By stating that "we are not communists who took property from people in a brutal way and practically for free," Kaczyński distances his party from the alleged brutality and unfairness associated with property expropriation. However, the term "brutal way" and "practically for free" are not explicitly defined, leaving room for subjective interpretation. This ambiguity enables Kaczyński to construct a narrative that portrays PiS as a party that values property rights and is sensitive to the concerns of residents affected by expropriation. The empty signifier works effectively in this context, as it allows PiS to claim moral high ground without the need for concrete evidence or specific policy details, thus leaving the audience to fill in the gaps with their own perceptions and emotions.

Moreover, the empty signifier in the text serves a rhetorical purpose by reinforcing a sense of continuity and historical narrative. Kaczyński asserts, "nor are we even those who abandoned such practices, because they were even weakened in the later phase of communism." This tactic

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<sup>63</sup> *Prezes Pis O Odszkodowaniach WS. CPK: Nie jesteśmy komunistami, Którzy Zabierali Ludziom własność.* Strona główna. (n.d.). <https://dlapilota.pl/wiadomosci/prezes-pis-o-odszkodowaniach-ws-cpk-nie-jestesmy-komunistami-ktorzy-zabierali-ludziom> (Accessed on: 21.06.2023)

enables Kaczyński to imply that PiS represents a break from undesirable historical practices while simultaneously suggesting that some aspects of communism still persist in contemporary political contexts. By skillfully deploying this empty signifier, Kaczyński reinforces the notion that PiS is an alternative to past political ideologies and regimes while framing the party's policies in a positive and forward-looking manner. The audience is encouraged to view PiS as a transformative force that has moved beyond undesirable practices, appealing to those seeking change and progress.

PiS's utilization of the term "communism" in the context of European environmental policies is aimed at tapping into historical memory and leveraging negative associations with the country's communist past. By framing certain environmental regulations and initiatives as "communism," the party creates a sense of threat to Polish sovereignty and national identity. This rhetoric resonates with a segment of the population that still remembers the hardships and restrictions imposed during the communist era, fostering skepticism and resistance towards European environmental regulations perceived as impinging on Poland's autonomy.

Moreover, the concept of "green communism" is a novel construction used by PiS to further emphasize their opposition to European environmental policies. This term paints a vivid picture of radical environmentalism merged with the specter of communism, conjuring fears of an authoritarian and repressive regime that stifles economic growth and individual freedoms. By portraying European environmental policies as synonymous with this fictional notion of "green communism," PiS successfully steers public discourse away from substantive debates on environmental sustainability and instead stokes apprehensions about perceived ideological threats.

It becomes evident that PiS strategically manipulates public perceptions of environmental policies and economic decisions to consolidate their support base and maintain political control. The use of the empty signifiers "communism" and "green communism" allows the party to construct a dichotomy between patriotic defenders of national interests and those allegedly advocating for European-imposed constraints. This binary narrative serves to rally public support for PiS's policy choices, positioning them as protectors of Poland's sovereignty and economic growth against perceived external interference.

The term "green communism" functions as an empty signifier, strategically employed to disparage liberal attempts to address the climate crisis, portraying them as ideologically charged and foreign influences benefiting Western powers while exploiting Poland, much like the historical experiences under communism.

Consequently, the use of "green communism" aims to present progressive approaches as regressive, malevolent, and a menace to Polish sovereignty. This pejorative language is further amplified by the symbolic significance of colors, where green is juxtaposed with the association of communism with red. Such a rhetorical device effectively appeals to the general Polish public.

Moreover, the discourse capitalizes on evoking memories of specific aspects of the communist regime, such as resource scarcity and restricted freedoms, resonating with the audience and fueling negative sentiments towards the progressive climate initiatives.

By employing the empty signifier "communism" to label practices that require reversal, the proponents of this discourse seek to portray these practices as lingering remnants of communism, which must be discarded as a burdensome legacy.

As such, the empty signifier of "green communism" encapsulates both external threats to Polish sovereignty and an internal legacy that must be rejected to safeguard national identity and independence.

Another intriguing aspect of this discourse lies in its all-encompassing connotation, wherein even minor initiatives are interpreted through an expansive ideological lens, exaggerating their significance and depicting them as formidable and comprehensive threats.

**Table 1.**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Framing</b>	<b>Co-occurrence</b>
What the left-liberal majority in the EP is doing	Negative	Critical, Blaming	"green," "ideological," "EP," "left-liberal," "majority"
This is green communism, which is nothing but a pyramid scheme	Negative	Alarmist	"green," "pyramid," "scheme," "Bernard," "Madoff"
The C40 project to which Rafał Trzaskowski refers is a revolution that the opposition dreams about	Negative	Accusatory	"green," "opposition," "freedom," "choice," "PO"
I remember the times of communism and rationed meat	Negative	Nostalgic, Critical	times," "rationed," "meat," "darned," "clothes"
The PO program is to introduce in Poland, under the pretext of fighting the climate of green communism	Negative	Accusatory, Skeptical	"green," "PO," "fighting," "climate," "everyday"
It was not that big, but it was very important from the point of view of our sovereignty	Negative	Celebratory, Proud	"communists," "property," "practices," "Russians," "Baltic"
this is proof that we are lifting the curse from Radom	Neutral	Triumphant, Defiant	"ridiculed", "proof", "few", "investment", "curse"
We are not communists who took property from people in a brutal way and practically for free	Negative	Accusatory, Defensive	property," "people," "brutal," "free," "weakened"

In the examined corpus of texts, which is informed by framing, emotional tone, and co-occurrence data, several indicators of an empty signifier are discernible. These include **contextual dependency**, a **lack of fixed meaning**, **ambiguity**, and **ideological investments**. Notably, there is an attempt to reframe "red communism" as "green communism" and depict the initiative as a threat to the sovereignty of a country, as well as the well-being and way of life of its people. However, there is no logical explanation provided for any of these assertions or their interconnections.

Additionally, the texts equate liberalism with communism and subsequently introduce negative elements of communism in a logical sequence to accentuate their detrimental impact

on the public. Consequently, embracing "communism" is synonymous with embracing all the negative elements presented in a cohesive manner. This strategic maneuver proves to be a highly effective instrument in the discourse.

## 3.2. Attacking political opponents

This chapter compiles and analyzes speeches delivered by PiS politicians, in which they employ the empty signifier "communism" to launch attacks on their political opponents both within the country and abroad, targeting political parties, news channels, and individuals.

The utilization of this empty signifier proves particularly potent in this context, as it serves multiple purposes simultaneously: labeling the opponent and their position, discrediting the opponent's stance, and homogenizing their adversaries. This is achieved by invoking intense emotions through the utilization of specific vocabulary and evoking a traumatic historical context associated with the empty signifier. The markers of the empty signifier, such as lack of fixed meaning, polysemy, contextual dependency, ideological investment, shifting or contested meanings, as well as ambiguity and indeterminacy, are especially pronounced due to the already highly charged language and situations in which the empty signifier is employed, each context varying significantly.

By engaging in such discourse, PiS politicians are able to construct a persuasive narrative that aligns with their political objectives. The deliberate use of the "communism" empty signifier serves to create a stark dichotomy between their own positions and those of their opponents, thus consolidating their own political identity and drawing support from like-minded individuals. Furthermore, by tapping into the emotions evoked by historical associations with communism, they effectively tap into a deep well of collective memory, making it challenging for opponents to defend against these attacks effectively.

During the press-conference on 03.03.2023 PiS MP Bartosz Kownacki claimed that:

*"What PO politicians are planning is a dictatorship of the 21st century. This is to create two groups of people: the rich and privileged and the rest of the people who are to be obedient and limited in their daily choices and lives. As in the times of communism, going abroad was something dreamed of and very difficult to achieve, when meat or clothes were sold on ration cards and fuel was allocated at stations - PO politicians want us to go back to these times"<sup>64</sup>*

By employing "communism" as an empty signifier, Kownacki aims to criticize the political opposition, PO (Civic Platform), and create fear among the public by invoking historical connotations of oppression and authoritarianism. This allows Kownacki to construct a narrative that positions PO as a threat to freedom and prosperity, without providing specific evidence or policy details.

By labeling PO's plans as akin to "a dictatorship of the 21st century," Kownacki invokes the negative historical connotations of communism, a term associated with oppressive regimes and restricted freedoms. However, the term "communism" is not explicitly defined in the context of

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<sup>64</sup>*Po chce decydować O Naszej Wolności.* Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/po-chce-decydowac-o-naszej-wolnosci> (Accessed on: 25.06.2023)

PO's policies or actions, leaving room for subjective interpretation. He also uses this empty signifier to draw parallels between PO's intentions and the negative aspects of historical communist practices. By suggesting that PO aims to create "two groups of people: the rich and privileged and the rest of the people who are to be obedient and limited in their daily choices and lives," he evokes memories of social and economic inequality under past communist regimes. However, Kownacki does not offer direct evidence or specific policy proposals from PO to support this claim. The ambiguity surrounding the term "communism" allows Kownacki to construct a narrative that portrays PO as a party that would lead to a loss of individual liberties and economic hardship, without the need for factual substantiation.

On July 16th Kaczyński delivered<sup>65</sup> a rally speech in Tarnow, where labeled his opponents from PO as "commune":

*"No, ladies and gentlemen, we are pro-Polish and ladies and gentlemen, yes, here you say: 'Don't give in to the commune and the Platform.' Ladies and gentlemen, today the Platform is simply an old commune."*

*"Know this, the SLD is already dead, the organized left is so-so, barely breathing, and the real commune today is PO..."*

*"Ladies and gentlemen, only those were Moscow, and these were Berlin, but it comes to the same thing.."*

Kaczyński attempts to delegitimize and vilify his opponents from PO (Civic Platform), presenting them as a threat to Polish identity and values. The term "commune" remains ambiguous and lacks concrete definitions, enabling Kaczyński to construct a polarizing narrative that appeals to emotions and prejudices rather than engaging in substantive policy debates. By labeling them as such, Kaczyński draws upon historical connotations linked to communism, which often evoke negative emotions and are associated with oppressive regimes. However, the term "commune" is not clearly defined in the context of PO's policies or actions, allowing Kaczyński to generalize and homogenize his opponents without providing specific evidence or concrete examples. This enables Kaczyński to create a divisive discourse, positioning his party, PiS as the defenders of Polish values and identity while portraying PO as a threat to these ideals.

Furthermore, Kaczyński tries to delegitimize his political opponents. By characterizing PO as a "real commune," Kaczyński implies that the party represents a continuation of oppressive ideologies, without providing specific evidence or elaborating on the alleged similarities to historical communist regimes.

By asserting that "only those were Moscow, and these were Berlin, but it comes to the same thing," he sustains an associative connection between the PO and communists as dependent entities linked to external powers seeking to manipulate Poland. Consequently, he categorizes the adversaries as adversaries of Polish sovereignty. This rhetorical maneuver reinforces the notion of the opponents' alignment with foreign interests, thereby portraying them as threats to the nation's autonomy and independence

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<sup>65</sup> YouTube. (2023, July 16). *Jarosław Kaczyński: My jesteśmy pro-polscy! Dziś platforma Obywatelska, to Po Prostu Dawna Komuna*. YouTube. (Accessed on: 26.07.2023)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBC4cGDH1Is&t=42s&ab\\_channel=TelewizjaRepublika](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JBC4cGDH1Is&t=42s&ab_channel=TelewizjaRepublika)

On 05.07. 2020 during a rally speech in support for Duda in Bytow, Morawiecki attacked the KO candidate Rafał Trzaskowski by making a direct analogy between liberals and communists:

*"It's not like a liberal, a turbo liberal, then a leftist, some kind of communist, because this is partly his nature"<sup>66</sup>*

By using terms like "liberal," "turbo liberal," "leftist," and "some kind of communist," Morawiecki creates a chain of associations that links his opponent to negative connotations associated with communism and left-wing ideologies. However, the terms used lack clear definitions or specific evidence to support the analogy, allowing Morawiecki to generalize and homogenize Trzaskowski without providing concrete examples of his supposed communist tendencies. This lack of specificity enables Morawiecki to construct a polarizing discourse that positions his candidate, Duda, as the better choice while portraying Trzaskowski as a threat to conservative values. Morawiecki's relies on the ambiguous and emotionally charged term "communist." This allows Morawiecki to create a narrative that portrays Trzaskowski as a threat to conservative values and Polish identity.

The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in Morawiecki's characterization of Trzaskowski as a "liberal" and a "turbo liberal." Morawiecki appeals to the emotions and biases of his supporters, reinforcing the idea that liberalism is equivalent to communism and poses a threat to conservative values. Morawiecki constructs a narrative that appeals to conservative voters and fosters a sense of unity among his supporters while dismissing the complexity of political ideologies and the nuances of Trzaskowski's platform.

This passage elucidates the logic of delegitimization employed against the opponents, wherein the intricacies of political liberalism are homogenized, and terms such as "liberal," "leftist," and "communism" are equated, rendering them all unsuitable and foreign to the Polish political landscape due to the nation's historical association with communism. Consequently, this tactic seeks to discredit and marginalize these ideologies by linking them to a contentious and perceived negative aspect of the country's past.

In October 2022 Kaczyński during the rally speech compared the possibility of PO coming to power with the "return of communism"<sup>67</sup>:

*"...they will immediately abolish democracy. This is what they are talking about: that this formation (PiS) or this type of formation can never come to power again. They say it... This is a harbinger of a return to communism, and communism at that early stage, when there was still some political opposition, this is a harbinger of something really extremely dangerous..."*

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<sup>66</sup> Mateusz Morawiecki W Bytowie O Rafale Trzaskowskim: *Wilk W Owczej Skórze*. Polskie Radio Koszalin. (n.d.). (Accessed on: 26.06.2023) <https://prk24.pl/48834060/mateusz-morawiecki-w-bytowie-o-rafale-trzaskowskim-wilk-w-owczej-skorze> (Accessed on: 26.06.2023)

<sup>67</sup> Piotrowska, A. (2022, October 23). *Jarosław Kaczyński W Zamościu: To, Co Robi Po to Jest Zapowiedź Powrotu do Komunizmu*. Portal i.pl. <https://i.pl/jaroslaw-kaczynski-w-zamosciu-to-co-robi-po-to-jest-zapowiedz-powrotu-do-komunizmu/ar/c1-16984431> (Accessed on: 29.06.2023)

This is another example of how PiS representatives use the term “return of communism to deligitimize their opponents. By associating PO with communism, a term historically associated with oppressive regimes and authoritarianism, Kaczyński evokes negative emotions and fears among the audience. This allows Kaczyński to generalize and homogenize the political opposition without providing concrete evidence or specific examples. This lack of specificity enables Kaczynski to construct a polarizing discourse that positions PiS, as the defenders of democracy and Polish values, while portraying PO as a threat to these ideals. The lack of specificity in the use of the term "abolishing democracy" allows Kaczyński to create a divisive discourse. By associating PO with the "return of communism" and immediate threats to democracy, Kaczynski constructs a narrative that appeals to conservative voters, fosters a sense of unity among his supporters, and dismisses the complexities of political ideologies and the nuances of PO's platform.

In his speech on 24.07.2022 in Gniezno Kaczyński making comparison<sup>68</sup> that in the communist era those who called themselves democrats were not in fact democrats, making comparison between PiS and the current opposition:

*“Back then, those formations that introduced communism here in the Stalinist version (...) they called themselves democrats, and those who fought with them - whether politically or with weapons in their hands - were the reaction, the enemies of democracy... Today we keep hearing from those parties that they are democratic, that it will be an alliance of democratic parties. This, ladies and gentlemen, will be an anti-democratic alliance if it is created. Because the only large, strong democratic party in Poland today is Law and Justice and the United Right”*

By suggesting that the opposition's claims to democracy will result in an "anti-democratic alliance," Kaczynski evokes historical connotations associated with the communist era, when formations introduced oppressive communist regimes under the guise of democratic principles. Furthermore, Kaczynski's use of the empty signifier serves the rhetorical purpose of delegitimizing the opposition's claims of being democratic. By implying that those who fought against the communist formations were "the reaction, the enemies of democracy," he associates the current opposition with the negative connotations of communist regimes. However, Kaczynski does not provide specific evidence or examples of how the opposition's actions align with communist practices. Instead, he relies on the emotionally charged term "communism" to create a narrative that portrays the opposition as a threat to democracy without engaging in substantive policy debates or providing reasoned arguments.

The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in Kaczynski's characterization of PiS as "the only large, strong democratic party in Poland today." By employing this claim without specific evidence or context, Kaczynski appeals to the emotions and biases of his supporters, reinforcing the idea that PiS is the only true defender against communism. The lack of specificity in the use of the term "communism" allows Kaczynski to create a divisive discourse that polarizes public opinion without the need for substantial evidence or reasoned arguments. By positioning PiS as the sole democratic party and implying that the opposition may lead to a return to communism, Kaczynski constructs a narrative that appeals to

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<sup>68</sup>Ads/kg. (2022, July 24). *Kaczyński: Musimy Zorganizować Wielki Ruch Społeczny dla Ochrony Wyborów*. TVN24. <https://tvn24.pl/polska/jaroslav-kaczynski-w-gnieznie-musimy-zorganizowac-wielki-ruch-spoleczny-dla-ochrony-wyborow-5888928> (Accessed on: 29.06.2023)

conservative voters, fosters a sense of unity among his supporters, and dismisses the complexities of political ideologies and the diversity of democratic representation in Poland.

On 13.11.2022 Jarosław Kaczyński delivered a speech in the Polish city of Żywiec<sup>69</sup>, which was dedicated to the upcoming elections.

*"I urge you to mobilize yourself before next year's elections. Our formation deserves a third term. We need to know that our opponents want things to stay the way they are. We have been in power for 7 years. But the previous governments did not come out of communism, even though our society did it thanks to the largest movement in the history of the world, i.e. "Solidarity"*

*"It is necessary to build the Election Protection Corps, here it is necessary to involve party members and supporters. The security services must be active, because it is possible that the other side will make a fuss on election day. (...) It takes a lot of effort to break down the wall of lies on the other side. I am asking you to get involved, because we are "Solidarity" and the communist camp"*

By suggesting that "the previous governments did not come out of communism," the speaker creates a contrast between their party's identity and the perceived history of the opposition's origins. However, the term "communism" is not explicitly defined in the context of its relevance to the previous governments or the current opposition's policies or actions. This lack of specificity enables the speaker to generalize and homogenize the opposition without providing concrete examples or specific historical references. Consequently, the speaker constructs a narrative that portrays their party as the embodiment of the historic "Solidarity" movement, fostering a sense of historical pride and positioning themselves as the true defenders of democracy and the values associated with the movement. By aligning their party with "Solidarity" and contrasting it with the "communist camp," the speaker associates themselves with the legacy of this historic movement, reinforcing the idea that their party is the rightful heir of "Solidarity."

The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in the speaker's call to build the "Election Protection Corps" and involve party members and supporters in the security services. By suggesting that the opposition might "make a fuss on election day" and promoting the idea of a "wall of lies on the other side," the speaker reinforces the notion of the opposition as the "communist camp," without providing specific evidence or context for these claims. This call to action serves as a rallying cry for their supporters, appealing to emotions and reinforcing the idea of a polarized political landscape with their party being the only true defender against perceived communist threats. By positioning their party as "Solidarity" and contrasting it with the "communist camp," the speaker constructs a narrative that fosters a sense of unity among their supporters while dismissing the complexities of political ideologies and the diversity of historical interpretations.

During a rally speech held on the 5.10.2022 in Ełk, Kaczyński made a direct comparison between his opponents and communists:

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<sup>69</sup>My jesteśmy "solidarnością", a oni obozem komunistycznym. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-a). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/my-jestesmy-solidarnoscia-a-oni-obozem-komunistycznym> (Accessed on: 30.06.2023)

*"We are solidarity, they (political opponents) are communists and they hardly hide it today. Of course, all this is a bit in quotation marks, because we are neither Solidarity in the strict sense, nor are they communists in the strict sense, but when it comes to a certain ideological path, a system of values, it can be said that it is"*<sup>70</sup>

Kaczyński employs an empty signifier to create a vague ideological path and system of values that polarizes the discourse and positions PiS as the embodiment of "Solidarity" and the true defenders of its ideological principles.

By asserting that "they hardly hide it today," Kaczyński implies that his opponents' ideology aligns with communism, which carries historical connotations of oppressive regimes and authoritarianism. He leaves the term "communists" open to interpretation, allowing his supporters to connect the opposition with negative historical connotations while positioning PiS as the party that upholds the values associated with "Solidarity." This rhetoric seeks to mobilize his supporters, fostering a sense of historical pride and reinforcing their belief in the importance of PiS's continued governance. The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in Kaczyński's acknowledgment that the comparison is not in the strict sense. By leaving the term "communists" open to interpretation and stating that it is "in quotation marks," he creates a vague ideological path and system of values that allows him to generalize and homogenize the opposition without providing concrete definitions or evidence. and enables him to construct a divisive discourse that polarizes public opinion.

On 23.10.2022 Jarosław Kaczyński delivered a speech in the Polish city of Zamość<sup>71</sup>

*"In a year, elections will be held and either the United Right or the anti-PiS camp will win. We pursue a sovereign policy, the center of power in Poland is independent, but if the opposition won, it will no longer be so. The opposition believes that our supporters can go to the polls and vote for us, but we cannot win the elections, because if this happens, they say there is no democracy. What the PO is doing is an announcement of a return to communism"*

In this case Kaczyński's use of the empty signifier serves the rhetorical purpose of positioning PiS as the defenders of Poland's sovereignty and independent power. By contrasting his party's approach with the perceived threat of a return to communism, he implies that PiS represents the opposite, i.e., a sovereign and independent force. This dichotomy fosters a sense of loyalty and unity among his supporters, reinforcing the belief that PiS is the only party capable of safeguarding Poland's democracy and sovereignty. Lack of specific definitions or evidence regarding the opposition's alleged ties to communism undermines the credibility of the accusation and makes the characterization of the opposition's policies as "a return to communism" a hollow and inflammatory statement.

This empty signifier tactic enables Kaczyński to construct a narrative that seeks to delegitimize the opposition and portray them as a collective threat to democracy and Poland's sovereignty.

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<sup>70</sup> wPolityce.pl, Z. (2022, November 5). *J. Kaczyński: My jesteśmy "solidarnością", oni "komunistami."* Wiadomości z Polski i ze świata. <https://wpolityce.pl/polityka/620947-j-kaczynski-my-jestesmy-solidarnoscia-oni-komunistami> (Accessed on: 30.06.2023)

<sup>71</sup> *Warto Być Polakiem*. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-c). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/warto-byc-polakiem> (Accessed on: 30.06.2023)

On 29.05. 2023 Mateusz Morawiecki delivered a speech commemorating the day of Święto Niepodległościowego Ruchu Ludowego (Independence of the Peasant Movement). During his address, he employed the concept of communism both as a historical parallel to criticize his political opponents and as a means to connect it with contemporary challenges in the agricultural sector. Furthermore, he used this rhetoric to resonate with the PiS countryside electoral base. Morawiecki aimed to invoke shared historical memories and sentiments to bolster support for his political agenda and align it with the concerns of the rural electorate:

*“When the war ended, St. Mikołajczyk was not afraid to tell the communists that "you are spitting on everything that was still sacred yesterday". Doesn't that remind us of something? Isn't this similar to the activities of PO and TVN?”<sup>72</sup>*

By referencing St. Mikołajczyk's statement that "you are spitting on everything that was still sacred yesterday" in the context of the communists after the war, Morawiecki implies that his political opponents, PO and TVN, engage in activities similar to those of the past communist regime. Morawiecki's use of the empty signifier serves the rhetorical purpose of linking communism with current problems in the agricultural sector and addressing PiS's (Law and Justice) countryside electoral base. By implying that the activities of PO and TVN are reminiscent of the communist past, he seeks to position PiS as the party that protects the interests of the countryside and defends Poland's values against the perceived threat of a return to communism. This rhetorical strategy fosters a sense of loyalty and unity among his supporters, reinforcing the belief that PiS is the only party capable of safeguarding Poland's values and protecting the agricultural sector. . This empty signifier tactic enables Morawiecki to construct a narrative that seeks to delegitimize his opponents and portray them as a collective threat to Poland's values and democratic principles.

Another trait of this speech is construction of the argument tailored for the specific audience. Notably, Polish peasants bore a significant burden during the communist era, and invoking references to this historical period can prove to be an exceedingly effective communication strategy. So we see how the signifier can change its meaning also when applied to different audiences.

At the same event, the Polish Minister of agriculture from PiS Robert Telus added:

*“The Polish peasant was able to give his life for a free Poland. There were many popular movements. We pay tribute to all Polish peasant heroes, including those who did not surrender to the communist regime. It is the sons of the Polish countryside who have freedom and independence in their hearts”*

By using terms like "freedom," "independence," and "communist regime" without specific definitions or context, Telus creates a vague and emotionally charged narrative that pays tribute to Polish peasant heroes and associates them with values of freedom and independence. This rhetorical strategy allows Telus to evoke emotions and sentiments, foster a sense of unity and pride among his supporters, and avoid substantive policy discussions. The empty signifier tactic enables him to construct a discourse that portrays the Polish countryside as the embodiment of freedom and independence and appeals to emotions and sentiments, without engaging in reasoned arguments or providing a nuanced analysis of contemporary agricultural policies or challenges.

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<sup>72</sup> *Ruch Ludowy Walczył O Wolną Polskę*. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-c). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/ruch-ludowy-walczyl-o-wolna-polske> (Accessed on: 31.06.2023)

In his interview on 15.06.2022 Kaczyński commented<sup>73</sup> about the war in Ukraine and European actions that are required to help Ukraine's defence. He blamed Germany in playing along with Russia and commented it in the following manner:

*"In my opinion, in relation to Germany, it is extremely reasonable to ask about the degree of infiltration of the local elites by the communist services."*

By employing this empty signifier, Kaczyński attempts to create a sense of suspicion and mistrust towards Germany, implicating its local elites in some form of collusion with a shadowy communist influence. The vagueness and lack of specificity surrounding the term "communist services" make it a potent tool for insinuation, allowing Kaczyński to frame Germany's actions or policies in a negative light without providing concrete evidence or factual basis.

The use of an empty signifier allows Kaczyński to tap into historical memories and emotions related to the communist era, particularly in Poland, where the communist regime was perceived as oppressive and detrimental to national interests. By evoking this historical reference, Kaczyński seeks to create a narrative that positions Germany as potentially aligned with forces that undermine Ukraine's defense and by extension, threaten Poland's security and regional stability.

It is worth to notice that leveraging the historical connotations of communism is used to delegitimize and undermine the credibility of both internal and external opponents.

Kaczyński continued<sup>74</sup> his rhetoric further of using post-communism as a way to discredit his opponents:

*"when PO came to power in 2007, post-communism returned, we had 8 years of post-communism, which I described here, with all its features"*

In the context of Kaczyński's rhetoric, "post-communism" serves as a rhetorical tool to discredit his opponents from the Civic Platform (PO) party by implicating them in some form of continuation or revival of undesirable elements associated with the communist era. The use of "post-communism" as an empty signifier enables Kaczyński to tap into historical memories and emotions related to the communist regime in Poland. The term conjures notions of corruption, inefficiency, and authoritarianism associated with the past era, thereby positioning PO as a continuation or resurgence of those undesirable characteristics. By leveraging the ambiguous and emotionally charged nature of the term "post-communism," Kaczyński seeks to create a narrative that discredits his political opponents and positions his party as a more favorable alternative.

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<sup>73</sup> Wywiad Z Prezesem pis jarosławem kaczyńskim. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-e). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/wywiad-z-prezesem-pis-jaroslawem-kaczyńskim-10> (Accessed on: 31.06.2023)

<sup>74</sup> Niezależna.PL, mk |, Mk, Liziniewicz, J., Siwek, A., Tomaszewski, M., & Gradus, M. (2022, October 15). Jarosław Kaczyński W Myszkuwie: Za Czasów Po-PSL mieliśmy 8 Lat Postkomunizmu. Niezależna.pl. <https://niezalezna.pl/461193-jaroslaw-kaczyński-w-myszkuwie-za-czasow-po-psl-mielismy-8-lat-postkomunizmu> (Accessed on: 01.07.2023)

Furthermore, the term "post-communism" itself implies that it is a construct devoid of any direct connection with communism. Instead, it can be employed with various negative connotations to describe real-world situations. The ambiguity of this term allows it to serve as a flexible linguistic tool, adaptable to different contexts and utilized to evoke negative associations without explicitly attributing them to the communist ideology.

On 10.08.2022 Morawiecki reacted<sup>75</sup> to the critic of MEP Leszek Miller regarding Poland not meeting the milestones regarding the rule of law in the following way:

*“Miller is a communist, a post-communist, used to agreeing with Moscow, agreeing with Russia and the Kremlin in everything. This is the subordination learned to the East and Russia, which is dormant to this day in the head and, unfortunately, also in the heart of Leszek Miller...For liberals and communists, I have this message: Poland pursues its own interest, does not look at anyone, will not react to any footsteps from Brussels bureaucrats, only with dignity implements its policy in the best Polish interest”*

By labeling Miller as a "communist" and a "post-communist" who used to agree with Moscow and Russia, Morawiecki associates him with negative historical connotations and suggests that his opinions are influenced by a pro-Russian agenda. Furthermore, Morawiecki's use of the empty signifier "communist" serves the rhetorical purpose of positioning Poland as a sovereign and independent nation. By asserting that Poland pursues its own interests and will not be influenced by Brussels bureaucrats or anyone else, he presents Poland as a strong and assertive country that stands on its own, free from external influence. This rhetoric fosters a sense of loyalty and unity among his supporters, reinforcing the belief that Poland's interests are best served by a government that resists external pressures and makes decisions based on what is perceived as best for the country. The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in Morawiecki's attempt to create a dichotomy between "liberals and communists" on one side and Poland's best interest on the other. By associating Miller with "liberals and communists," he seeks to cast his criticism as being aligned with an opposition that is against Poland's best interests. This binary framing allows Morawiecki to dismiss Miller's critique as merely driven by political ideology, rather than engaging in a substantive discussion of the rule of law concerns raised. The empty signifier tactic enables Morawiecki to construct a narrative that portrays Poland as a sovereign and independent nation with a government that prioritizes the country's interests above all else.

An intriguing aspect here is the juxtaposition of Brussels' influence and Moscow's influence as equal threats to Polish sovereignty, with the former being associated with liberalism and the latter with communism. This comparison elicits a potent emotional response from the Polish audience, particularly those who still remember the era of communist rule in Poland. Consequently, when presented with a new threat to their sovereignty backed by a different ideology, this segment of the population may respond strongly, drawing parallels with past historical experiences and raising concerns about potential implications for their nation's autonomy and independence. The ability to evoke such historical memories and emotions allows this comparison to resonate deeply with the Polish audience, making it a powerful tool in shaping public sentiment and garnering support for certain viewpoints or political agendas.

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<sup>75</sup> Morawiecki O Byłym Premierze Polski: "komunista. Nawykł, by przytakiwać ... (n.d.). <https://wiadomosci.radiozet.pl/polska/polityka/Morawiecki-o-bylym-premierze-Polski-Komunista.-Nawykł-by-przytakiwac-Moskwie> (Accessed on: 01.07.2023)

01.07.2023 Morawiecki criticized TVN channel for misrepresentation in covering the protest in France:

*"TVN today behaves like communist television when there was an explosion at the Chernobyl nuclear power plant in 1986. Television at the time did not show Chernobyl, and now on TVN we only have small snapshots of what is happening in France"*<sup>76</sup>

Morawiecki's use of the empty signifier "communist television" serves the rhetorical purpose of portraying TVN as an untrustworthy and biased news source. By comparing TVN to communist media, he seeks to create a perception that the channel is influenced by a particular political ideology, rather than providing objective and accurate news coverage. This rhetoric fosters a sense of distrust among his supporters towards TVN's reporting and reinforces the belief that the channel is not to be relied upon for reliable information.

The reference to the coverage of the Chernobyl catastrophe by the communist media, in the context of TVN, suggests that not only deceitful media outlets exist but also ideologically biased ones. Consequently, these ideologically biased sources cannot be trusted under any circumstances.

In June 2023 in the rally speech for the industrial workers Morawiecki compared the "elite" of today's Poland, against which PiS is supposedly fighting, with the communist elite during the Polish People's Republic, which was subordinate to a foreign power:

*"One country will conquer - and I say this in quotation marks, because it can be a mental conquest - the elite of the other country (...), those who are decision makers in various areas of social, economic and political life. If one state does so, it simultaneously deprives the other state of some or all of its sovereignty....in the times of the People's Republic of Poland, the entire communist elite was on a leash in Moscow."*<sup>77</sup>

In this quoted text, the empty signifier is "communism." Morawiecki compares the "elite" of present-day Poland, against which PiS is supposedly fighting, with the communist elite during the Polish People's Republic. By using "communism" as an ambiguous term, Morawiecki evokes historical emotions and associations, positioning PiS as the defender against a perceived threat from the past regime. This rhetorical maneuver shapes public opinion without providing specific evidence or clear identification of the actors involved. The term "communism" serves as a powerful tool in constructing a compelling discourse that resonates with the audience and supports Morawiecki's political objectives.

The term "communism" serves as an empty signifier in conjunction with another populist term - "elites" - representing a group of individuals benefitting at the expense of the people. However, the definition of this group remains highly fluid, and identifying its members and their exact means of profiting is subject to constant variation.

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<sup>76</sup> Morawiecki Znow zaatakował TVN. „Jak Komunistyczna Telewizja Po Czarnobylu”. WirtualneMedia.pl. (n.d.). <https://www.wirtualnemedial.pl/artykul/morawiecki-znow-zaatakowal-tvn-jak-komunistyczna-telewizja-po-czarnobylu> (Accessed on: 02.07.2023)

<sup>77</sup> Prpb, F. /. (2023, June 7). Premier Morawiecki: Uważajcie na tych Farbowanych Lisów. TVN24. <https://tvn24.pl/polska/mateusz-morawiecki-premier-o-farbowanych-lisach-i-podboju-umyslowym-elit-7165689> (Accessed on: 02.07.2023)

20.04.2023 Morawiecki reacts<sup>78</sup> on the material published on TVN regarding the events of Holocaust on the territory of Poland:

*"in the People's Republic of Poland, which was known for its top-down communist anti-Semitism, and later in Poland after 1989, the topic of Poles' help for Jews was neglected and too little exposed... Other countries used this to spread their unfavorable narrative for Poland and disseminate false historical policy. The effects are such pseudo-historical statements that we could hear yesterday on TVN24,"*

Morawiecki's use of the empty signifier "communist anti-Semitism" serves the rhetorical purpose of associating anti-Semitism with the communist era and post-1989 Poland. By suggesting that anti-Semitism was a top-down policy during the communist era and later neglected after 1989, he creates a negative association between communism and the issue of anti-Semitism. This rhetoric fosters a sense of historical guilt and a negative perception of the communist era and post-1989 Poland, while positioning PiS as the party fighting against such historical legacies. By associating the communist era with anti-Semitism and suggesting that TVN is spreading false historical narratives, he seeks to discredit the channel's reporting and portray it as unreliable. This empty signifier tactic enables Morawiecki to construct a narrative that portrays TVN as untrustworthy and biased.

On 11.03.2023 Morawiecki denounces<sup>79</sup> the report on child abuse in Catholic Church published on TVN<sup>79</sup>:

*"In this TVN24 pseudo-reportage, the authors refer to SB and communist sources. It's like accusing Mr. Popieluszko based on lampoons by Jerzy Urban"*

By suggesting that the report's authors refer to "communist sources," Morawiecki implies that the report is influenced by biased and unreliable sources, similar to those associated with the communist era. However, Morawiecki does not provide specific examples of which specific sources the report used or how these sources might have compromised the credibility of the report. This lack of specificity allows Morawiecki to make unsubstantiated accusations and invoke historical fears of communist propaganda, without engaging in substantive discourse on the specific issues with the report. He creates a perception that the report may be driven by a particular political agenda, rather than presenting objective and accurate information. This rhetoric fosters a sense of distrust among his supporters towards the report's findings and reinforces the belief that it may not be a reliable source of information.

Another line of association emerges from the historical context where the Catholic Church, during the communist regime in Poland, acted as a formidable opponent, playing a crucial role in the downfall of the Polish People's Republic (PPR) and safeguarding Polish national identity and values. By drawing this comparison, Morawiecki redirects the focus of the discussion away from the report's primary content, emphasizing a historical parallel involving the clash between

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<sup>78</sup> Gp. (2023, April 20). *Morawiecki Reaguje na Słowa Engelking: Polska i Polacy Byli Barięą dla holocaustu*. PolskieRadio24.pl. <https://polskieradio24.pl/5/1222/artykul/3154147,morawiecki-reaguje-na-slowa-engelking-polska-i-polacy-byli-bariera-dla-holocaustu> (Accessed on: 02.07.2023)

<sup>79</sup> Dp. (2023, March 11). *Mateusz Morawiecki Reaguje na sprawę Jana Pawła II. Padło Ostre Porównanie*. Onet. <https://www.onet.pl/informacje/onetrzeszow/morawiecki-reaguje-na-sprawe-jana-pawla-ii-padlo-ostre-porownanie/jgg9ddt,79cfc278> (Accessed on: 03.07.2023)

the church and the state. However, this historical parallel lacks any direct connection to the current situation at hand.

On 03.03.2023 PiS councilor Radosław Marzec in an interview claimed that:

*"PO, by limiting freedom, tries to influence what our tradition, everyday life, the right to make choices, what we are supposed to eat look like; PO attacks cities by promoting modern communism, and all this happens under the guise of climate protection."*<sup>80</sup>

By suggesting that PO promotes "modern communism" and limits freedom, Marzec implies that the party's actions are driven by a radical and totalitarian ideology, similar to historical connotations associated with communism. However, Marzec does not provide specific examples or evidence of how PO's policies resemble "modern communism" or in what ways they limit freedom. Marzec's use of the empty signifier "modern communism" serves the rhetorical purpose of positioning PO as a party that is supposedly against traditional values and everyday life. By suggesting that PO tries to influence aspects of daily life and choices, he creates a negative association between the party and interference in personal freedoms. This rhetoric fosters a sense of opposition and distrust among his supporters towards PO's policies, reinforcing the belief that the party is not aligned with the interests of the people.

The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in Marzec's attempt to dismiss PO's stance on climate protection as a guise for "modern communism." By making this comparison, he seeks to create a negative association between the party's environmental policies and communism, invoking historical fears of totalitarian control. This empty signifier tactic enables Marzec to construct a narrative that portrays PO's climate protection efforts as deceptive and radical, without engaging in a nuanced analysis of the specific environmental policies or addressing the concerns raised by the party.

On 17.06.2017 PiS MP Adam Andruszkiewicz on TV Show claimed <sup>81</sup> that:

*"From what I remember, the Penal Code clearly provides that the organization of a coup, i.e. a forceful or armed change of the state system, is punishable by imprisonment in Poland. Unfortunately, the PO leader gets away with it. The main propagandists of communism, such as Jerzy Urban, support PO today"*

By suggesting that the PO leader is supported by "main propagandists of communism," Andruszkiewicz implies that the political opponent is aligned with an ideology known for oppression and authoritarianism, similar to historical connotations associated with communism. Furthermore, Andruszkiewicz's use of the empty signifier "main propagandists of communism" serves the rhetorical purpose of positioning the PO leader as supposedly aligned with an ideology known for its oppressive tactics. By suggesting that the PO leader "gets away with" organizing a coup, he creates a negative association between the political opponent and forceful, undemocratic actions. This rhetoric fosters a sense of opposition and distrust among his

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<sup>80</sup> Łódź: PIS: 600 korków I Niedokończonych Remontów na 600-lecie miasta. wnp.pl. (n.d.). <https://www.wnp.pl/parlamentarny/wydarzenia/lodz-pis-600-korkow-i-niedokonczonech-remontow-na-600-lecie-miasta,736297.html> (Accessed on: 03.07.2023)

<sup>81</sup> Zpk. (2017, July 16). *Andruszkiewicz: Główni propagandziści Komunizmu Popierają Dzisiaj platformę obywatelską*. TVP Info - najnowsze informacje z kraju i ze świata, wideo, transmisje on-line i relacje na żywo. <https://www.tvp.info/33237304/andruszkiewicz-glowni-propagandzisci-komunizmu-popieraja-dzisiaj-platforme-obywatelska> (Accessed on: 03.07.2023)

supporters towards the PO leader's political stance, reinforcing the belief that the leader is not to be trusted due to perceived alignment with oppressive ideologies.

The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in Andruszkiewicz's attempt to create a negative association between the PO leader and historical communist figures like Jerzy Urban. By comparing the PO leader to "main propagandists of communism" and suggesting that they receive support from figures associated with communism, Andruszkiewicz seeks to discredit the political opponent's stance and portray them as aligned with an ideology that has a negative historical connotation.

PiS MP Joanna Lichocka said on Polish Radio that the Civic Platform "*does not represent intelligentsia*" and is an "*anti-democratic party*" with a "*communist*" attitude towards the media.<sup>82</sup>

Lichocka implies that the party employs media practices akin to historical communist regimes known for controlling and censoring the press. This rhetoric fosters a sense of opposition and distrust among her supporters towards PO's media policies, reinforcing the belief that the party may not uphold democratic principles. The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in Lichocka's attempt to delegitimize PO's representation of the intelligentsia. By suggesting that PO "does not represent intelligentsia," she seeks to discredit the party's intellectual and cultural influence. The combination of associating PO with an "anti-democratic party" and a "communist attitude towards the media" reinforces the narrative that PO is unfit to represent the intelligentsia, further alienating potential supporters and portraying the party as lacking in intellectual rigor and democratic values. However, the lack of specificity regarding the term "communist attitude towards the media" and its relevance to PO's representation of the intelligentsia allows Lichocka to make sweeping generalizations and unsubstantiated claims, relying on historical connotations to discredit PO's standing.

The selected examples demonstrate the frequent and effective use of the empty signifier by PiS representatives to label and discredit their opponents. The associations and connotations linked to communism construct an image in the audience's mind, portraying the opposition as a hostile force against Polish national identity and interests, and even as agents of foreign powers. This strategy reinforces the image of PiS as successors of the Solidarity movement, fostering an adversarial framework within Polish public discourse and establishing strong associations with PiS's target audiences.

Furthermore, the empty signifier is wielded to discredit attempts to reassess certain elements of Polish history and identity, branding alternative opinions as unpatriotic and communist. Its adaptable nature allows for flexibility in catering to different audiences, each with varying memories and associations concerning the communist past, necessitating distinct approaches.

These examples illustrate how the empty signifier "communism" serves both immediate practical purposes, such as discrediting opponents, as well as broader functions within the realm of hegemony and discourse control. By strategically deploying this loaded signifier, PiS effectively shapes and maintains a dominant narrative, exerting influence over public perceptions and solidifying its political position. As with any analysis of linguistic and rhetorical tools, it is important to approach the study of the empty signifier with critical discernment, recognizing its potential implications in shaping public opinion and discourse.

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<sup>82</sup> Czermiński, J. (2023, April 7). *Lichocka O Platformie Obywatelskiej: Bardzo Prostackie środowisko, postkomuna*. Rzeczpospolita. <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art38286621-lichocka-o-platformie-obywatelskiej-bardzo-prostackie-srodowisko-postkomuna> (Accessed on: 04.07.2023)

**Table 2.**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Framing</b>	<b>Co-occurrences</b>
What PO politicians are planning is a dictatorship of the 21st century	Negative	Critical	"times," "rich," "privileged," "obedient," "limited"
No, ladies and gentlemen, we are pro-Polish and ladies and gentlemen	Negative	Sarcastic	"commune," "Platform," "Moscow," "Berlin," "real"
It's not like a liberal, a turbo liberal, then a leftist	Negative	Accusatory, Dismissive	"liberal," "turbo," "leftist," "nature," "partly"
...they will immediately abolish democracy	Negative	Alarmist	"democracy," "formation," "harbinger," "return," "dangerous"
Back then, those formations that introduced communism here in the Stalinist version	Negative	Defensive, Assertive	"democratic," "alliance," "anti-democratic," "Law and Justice," "United Right"
"I urge you to mobilize yourself before next year's elections	Positive	Encouraging, Proud	"Solidarity," "communism," "world," "movement," "history"
It is necessary to build the Election Protection Corps	Positive	Urgent, Encouraging	"Solidarity," "communist," "camp," "Election Protection Corps," "security services"
We are solidarity, they (political opponents) are communists and they hardly hide it today	Negative	Accusatory, Dismissive	"solidarity," "communists," "ideological," "path," "values"
In a year, elections will be held and either the United Right or the anti-PiS camp will win	Negative	Accusatory, Distrustful	"opposition," "elections," "United Right," "anti-PiS," "announcement"
When the war ended, St. Mikołajczyk was not afraid to tell the communists	Negative	Critical, Comparing	"war," "Mikołajczyk," "communists," "PO," "TVN"

The Polish peasant was able to give his life for a free Poland	Neutral	Respectful, Commemorative	"Polish," "peasant," "free," "independence," "communist regime"
In my opinion, in relation to Germany, it is extremely reasonable to ask about	Neutral	Curious, Investigative	"Germany," "infiltration," "local elites," "communist services," "degree"
when PO came to power in 2007, post-communism returned	Negative	Disapproving	"PO," "power," "post-communism," "features," "described"
Miller is a communist, a post-communist, used to agreeing with Moscow, agreeing with Russia and the Kremlin in everything	Negative	Accusatory, Dismissive	"Miller," "communist," "subordination," "Moscow," "Russia"
TVN today behaves like communist television when there was an explosion at the Chernobyl	Negative	Comparing, Critical	"TVN," "communist television," "Chernobyl," "nuclear power plant," "small snapshots"
One country will conquer - and I say this in quotation marks, because it can be a mental conquest	Neutral	Analytical, Descriptive	"country," "conquer," "elite," "state," "People's Republic of Poland"
in the People's Republic of Poland, which was known for its top-down communist anti-Semitism, and later in Poland after 1989	Neutral	Analytical, Critical	"People's Republic of Poland," "communist anti-Semitism," "Poland after 1989," "Poles' help for Jews," "historical policy"
In this TVN24 pseudo-reportage, the authors refer to SB and communist sources	Negative	Accusatory, Dismissive	"TVN24," "pseudo-reportage," "SB," "communist sources," "Mr. Popieluszko"

PO, by limiting freedom, tries to influence what our tradition, everyday life, the right to make choices	Negative	Accusatory, Critical	"PO," "freedom," "influence," "tradition," "climate protection"
From what I remember, the Penal Code clearly provides that the organization of a coup	Negative	Accusatory, Disapproving	"Penal Code," "coup," "PO leader," "propagandists," "Jerzy Urban"
Civic Platform "does not represent intelligentsia"	Negative	Accusatory, Critical	"intelligentsia," "anti-democratic," "communist," "attitude," "media"

Based on the analysis of tone, framing, and co-occurrences, it can be observed that the provided corpus of text exhibits several indicators of an empty signifier. These include a **lack of fixed meaning, contextual dependency, contested meanings, and indeterminacy**. The vast majority of the texts convey a negative and accusatory tone, wherein communism serves as an empty signifier strategically employed to criticize political opponents, media, positions, and personalities.

The term "communism" and its associated words undergo significant variations in different contexts, making them easily adaptable for different scenarios. This flexibility proves highly efficient as a tool for accusation and rhetorical dominance, eliminating the necessity for detailed explanations.

### 3.3. Brussels = Moscow

The following segment analyzes selected excerpts from PiS speeches that utilize the empty signifier "communism" in conjunction with other populist empty signifiers linked to foreign rule, economic ideas, or ideological influences. This rhetorical strategy proves effective as it resonates with the historical memory of the Polish audience, thereby enhancing the reception of typical populist analogies and rhetorical instruments.

Moreover, the effectiveness of this approach is heightened by Poland's current membership in the European Union, where countries like France and Germany assume leading roles. This situation can be readily interpreted through the lens of the historical Eastern Bloc, where the Soviet Union exerted significant control and influence over other countries within the region.

Additionally, employing rhetorical devices that attribute certain foreign ideas or groups as antagonistic and detrimental to the nation is a widely employed populist tactic globally, which, in the context of Poland, gains even greater efficacy.

By skillfully employing these rhetorical strategies, PiS politicians tap into prevailing sentiments and historical references, enabling them to construct a compelling narrative that appeals to the emotions and perceptions of the Polish audience. However, it is essential to critically evaluate the implications of such rhetoric in shaping public opinion and discourse, as these populist tactics may oversimplify complex issues and foster divisions within society.

In his address to the citizens of Elk<sup>83</sup>, Kaczyński once again drove a parallel between European policies and the communist occupation of Poland:

*"We want to have the right to what is sacred to us, we will defend our sovereignty in the European Union and we will not allow ourselves to be despised. Because Poland is a serious and developing country. We do not impose our views or beliefs on anyone. We are a government that helps its citizens. We have limited the great robbery of our country that has been taking place in Poland since the 90's. That's why there's money in the budget. In the past, Poland struggled with great problems and many compatriots suffered through wars and partitions. Finally - in 1989, we regained our freedom through the fall of communism"*

Kaczyński's use of the empty signifier "the fall of communism" serves the rhetorical purpose of positioning Poland as a country that has overcome historical hardships and is now facing new challenges from European policies. By invoking the historical event of "the fall of communism" in his speech, Kaczyński seeks to create a sense of unity and national pride among the citizens, portraying Poland as a resilient and independent nation that will not be undermined by external influences. By juxtaposing the historical context of "the fall of communism" with contemporary issues of economic development and budget management, Kaczyński seeks to present the government's actions as a continuation of the fight for Poland's sovereignty and prosperity.

Kaczynski stated<sup>84</sup> that that EU institutions are more oppressive towards Poland than the USSR authorities during the communist dictatorship:

*"Even under communism, certain spheres of human freedom, the possibility of choice, were defensible. (...) And today the institutions of the European Union (...) demand from us that we verify our entire culture, reject everything that is extremely important to us*

*"We will defend our identity, our freedom, our sovereignty at all costs. We will not be terrorized by money. Our answer to these actions will be clear: no."*

By making this comparison, Kaczyński attempts to establish a historical parallel that portrays the EU as an entity with even more severe demands and constraints on Poland's freedom and culture than the oppressive regime of the USSR during the communist dictatorship. By invoking the historical context of the communist dictatorship, Kaczyński seeks to create a sense of unity and nationalism among the citizens, portraying Poland as a country that will not be intimidated or coerced into compromising its values and culture. The use of the empty signifier in the quoted

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<sup>83</sup>*Polska poważna I rozwijająca się - to Nasz Cel.* Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-c). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/polska-powazna-i-rozwijajaca-sie-to-nasz-cel> (Accessed on: 04.07.2023)

<sup>84</sup>Danielewski, M. (2023, August 24). *Jarosław Le Pen-Kaczyński. prezes porównał UE DO ZSRR. to Język Polexitu.* OKO.press. <https://oko.press/jaroslaw-le-pen-kaczynski-prezes-porownal-ue-do-zsrr> (Accessed on: 05.07.2023)

text is also seen in Kaczyński's attempt to rally support and opposition against the EU's demands. By framing the situation as a struggle for identity, freedom, and sovereignty, Kaczyński seeks to mobilize public sentiment in favor of resisting perceived threats from the EU. The use of the empty signifier "more oppressive than the USSR authorities during the communist dictatorship" contributes to the emotive tone of Kaczyński's speech, fostering a sense of urgency and solidarity among his supporters.

Kaczynski in his interview combined this dichotomy of communism\anti-communism and external dependance (from Germany, like it was from Soviet Union before)<sup>85</sup>:

*"Then it was a choice between the road to democracy, although some imagined it as described above, and maintaining some form of communism... Today, it is a choice between a truly independent, secure, militarily strong, ambitious, developing Poland, and one deprived of independence, exploited, driven by various ideological madness to slow down development, subordinated to Germany"*

By mentioning "communism" in the context of past choices between democracy and communism and juxtaposing it with Poland's current situation, Kaczyński creates a dichotomy that contrasts Poland's historical struggle for democracy with its current dependence on Germany. However, he does not provide specific explanations or examples of how Germany's influence on Poland resembles the historical context of communism, nor does he clarify the "ideological madness" driving the supposed subordination to Germany. The use of the empty signifier in the quoted text is also seen in Kaczyński's attempt to rally support for a strong, ambitious Poland. By framing the situation as a choice between independence and subordination, he seeks to mobilize public sentiment in favor of a more assertive and self-reliant stance in international affairs. The use of the empty signifier "communism" contributes to the emotive tone of Kaczyński's interview, fostering a sense of urgency and unity among his supporters.

In an interview of 14.10.2020 Kaczynski once again is making a comparison between the European Union and its attempt to "take away sovereignty and culture".

*"I will call these actions by name: we are dealing with an attempt to take away our sovereignty, even in the sphere of culture. To make it clear to everyone what the dispute with the EU is about, I will use the example of the People's Republic of Poland... Poland, of course, was completely subordinated to Moscow, but a certain separation was maintained. And today the institutions of the European Union, its various officials, some politicians, whom Poles have never chosen anywhere, they demand from us that we verify our entire culture, reject everything that is extremely important to us, because they like it that way"*<sup>86</sup>.

Thesis: The quoted text can be subjected to a critical discourse analysis with an emphasis on the utilization of an empty signifier - "communism" - by Kaczyński. By drawing a comparison between the European Union's actions and the historical context of communism, Kaczyński employs an empty signifier to create negative associations and to frame the EU's demands as attempts to undermine Poland's sovereignty and culture. Kaczyński seeks to create a sense of unity and nationalism among the citizens, portraying Poland as a country that will not allow its

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<sup>85</sup>Forsal.pl, R. (2023, February 20). *Kaczyński: To Będą Wybory o niepodległość polski*. forsal.pl. <https://forsal.pl/gospodarka/polityka/artykuly/8664570,kaczynski-wybory-polska.html> (Accessed on: 05.07.2023)

<sup>86</sup> *Wywiad z prezesem PIS, WICEPREMIEREM Jarosławem kaczyńskim*. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-g). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/wywiad-z-prezesem-pis-wicepremierem-jaroslawem-kaczynskim-19> (Accessed on: 05.07.2023)

culture and values to be dictated by external forces. .By drawing a comparison between the European Union's actions and the historical context of communism, Kaczyński employs an empty signifier to create negative associations and to frame the EU's demands as attempts to undermine Poland's sovereignty and culture.

These speeches offer a compelling illustration of how the logic of empty signifiers can be modified and interwoven with other populist semiotic instruments and rhetoric to enhance its persuasiveness, particularly when targeting specific audiences. Leveraging the notion of foreign influence and dependence provides a fertile ground for invoking negative emotions and sentiments, allowing the speakers to tap into existing apprehensions and grievances. By combining the empty signifier "communism" with other populist elements, PiS politicians effectively craft a discourse that resonates deeply with certain segments of the population. This amalgamation of rhetorical strategies enables them to cultivate a powerful narrative that reinforces their political agenda and galvanizes support from those who harbor concerns about foreign interference and its potential impact on national identity and sovereignty. Nevertheless, it is essential to critically assess how the blending of these rhetorical techniques may oversimplify complex issues and perpetuate divisive narratives within society. The strategic fusion of empty signifiers and populist semiotic instruments raises questions about the construction of meaning and the potential manipulation of public perception, underscoring the importance of vigilant scrutiny and a nuanced understanding of the ways in which language and rhetoric shape political discourse.

**Table 3.**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Framing</b>	<b>Co-occurrence</b>
We want to have the right to what is sacred to us	Positive	Patriotic, Proud	"defend," "European Union," "despised," "Poland," "developing"
Even under communism, certain spheres of human freedom, the possibility of choice	Negative	Defiant, Assertive	"defend," "identity," "freedom," "at all costs," "terrorized"
then it was a choice between the road to democracy	Positive	Patriotic, Ambitious	"independent," "secure," "militarily strong," "ambitious," "developing"
I will call these actions by name: we are dealing with an attempt to take away our sovereignty	Negative	Assertive. Defensive	"take away," "culture," "dispute with the EU," "People's Republic of Poland," "subordinated to Moscow"

In the provided corpus of texts, particular attention is focused on how the term "communism" is employed to assert patriotic claims regarding the defense of national liberty, sovereignty, and

uniqueness against external threats. The external threat is identified through references to communism, linking it with associated notions. Leveraging this facet of Polish historical memory and trauma proves highly effective, exerting additional emotional pressure on the audience.

In this context, communism is juxtaposed against EU authorities, which is an evident exaggeration as these two elements are not remotely interconnected.

Within this framework, several indicators of an empty signifier are evident, including a **lack of fixed meaning, contextual dependency, and ambiguity.**

### 3.4. Post communism

This segment presents a distinct semiotic construct, akin to "green communism," known as "post-communism." This construct is designed to encompass all the negative aspects attributed to the communist era, perpetuating a negative legacy that must be eliminated. It is noteworthy that "post-communism" is employed in contexts where direct labeling as "communist" may be perceived as excessive or hyperbolic, acknowledging the constructed nature of this rhetorical apparatus. As such, it allows for broader definitions, but typically finds usage within similar contexts to discredit opposition and critique broader ideas associated with the left or liberal spectrum, such as anti-clericalism, LGBTQ+ rights, and other forms of dissent.

The strategic use of "post-communism" serves multiple purposes. On one hand, it exploits negative sentiments linked to the communist past to portray opponents and their ideas as outdated or irrelevant, reinforcing a narrative that presents the left or liberal viewpoints as inherently flawed. By attributing negative traits to "post-communism," proponents seek to create a perception that certain ideologies and critiques associated with these ideas are inherently problematic and should be disregarded.

Furthermore, this rhetorical construct can be employed as a tool to homogenize various political oppositions, unifying them under a single umbrella term that can be easily discredited. In this sense, "post-communism" functions as an effective device to delegitimize and diminish the impact of dissenting perspectives and critical voices, ultimately reinforcing the dominant narrative favored by the proponents of this construct.

Kaczynski also in his speeches uses a lot a term "post-communism" which coincides broadly with the broader populist term "elites" and the attempt "to give the power to the people". In his own definition:

“the post-communism was a specific method not so much of power as of domination, i.e. a permanent social advantage of a certain group”.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> *Konsekwentnie Odbudowujemy elementarną sprawiedliwość.* Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-a). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/konsekwentnie-odbudowujemy-elementarna-sprawiedliwosc> (Accessed on: 07.07.2023)

The use of the empty signifier "communism" in the context of "post-communism" allows the speaker to create a dichotomy between communism as a historical regime and "post-communism" as its aftermath. By characterizing "post-communism" as a method of domination, the speaker implies that the remnants of communist ideologies and practices persist in the post-communist era, potentially perpetuating negative stereotypes associated with communism. This dichotomous framing can hinder constructive debates and impede efforts to address the complex challenges faced by post-communist societies.

In another speech of 18.09.2020<sup>88</sup>, he added that:

*“Law and Justice stopped the path of post-communism”*

The demolition of this post-communism model is, according to Kazcynski, is an essential part of the PiS political program<sup>89</sup>.

*“The implementation of the PiS program is spread over many years. Only in this way will we be able to change Poland, to move away from the model adopted after 1989, which is to some extent burdened with the remnants of communism”*

By referring to the post-communism model without explicitly defining it or providing specific examples, Kazcynski leaves the concept open to interpretation and susceptible to negative associations with communism. This lack of specificity allows him to associate the post-communism model with negative connotations without offering a thorough explanation of what exactly needs to be changed or why it is burdened with remnants of communism. Consequently, the audience is left to draw their own associations between "post-communism model" and the historical experiences of communist regimes, potentially shaping public opinion and attitudes towards this model. Furthermore, the use of the empty signifier "post-communism model" allows Kazcynski to create a clear dichotomy between PiS's political program and the existing post-communism model. By characterizing the post-communism model as burdened with remnants of communism, he positions PiS as the party seeking to move away from this model and implement their vision for Poland. This strategic use of the empty signifier enables Kazcynski to present PiS as a force for change and progress, while portraying the post-communism model as outdated and associated with negative historical experiences. The use of the empty signifier "post-communism model" in Kazcynski's statement can also contribute to the polarization of political discourse. By invoking negative connotations associated with communism, he may reinforce divisions between those who view the post-communism model as an opportunity for progress and those who perceive it as burdened with remnants of oppressive ideologies.

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<sup>88</sup> *Liczy się nasza mobilizacja I Liczy Się Każdy Głos.* Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-b). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/liczy-sie-nasza-mobilizacja-i-liczy-sie-kazdy-glos> (Accessed on: 08.07.2023)

<sup>89</sup> *Realizacja Programu Pis jest rozłożona na Wiele Lat.* Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-f). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/realizacja-programu-pis-jest-rozlozona-na-wiele-lat> (Accessed on: 08.07.2023)

13.11.2022 Kaczyński gave a speech in Bielsko-Biała and claimed that <sup>90</sup>:

*"those who were well placed in communism had an advantage in this new system"  
"post-communism was in fact an exploitative system, " mechanisms that should protect people from exploitation did indeed  
work, but poorly." "We decided to change it. Have we succeeded? I dare say that, at least to a very high degree, we have,"*

The use of the empty signifier "post-communism" enables the speaker to create a dichotomy between the flaws of this system and the corrective actions taken by their party. By characterizing "post-communism" as exploitative and mentioning that mechanisms to protect people from exploitation worked poorly, the speaker positions their party's decisions as a response to these flaws. The strategic use of the empty signifier allows the speaker to present their party as successful in achieving positive changes and overcoming the shortcomings of the post-communist system. The use of the empty signifier "post-communism" in the context of describing an exploitative system can also contribute to the polarization of political discussions. By invoking negative connotations associated with "post-communism," the speaker may reinforce divisions between those who view this era as a period of exploitation and those who perceive it as a time of transition and change.

On 02.07.2016 during the 5th PiS Congress in 2016, Kaczyński claimed<sup>91</sup> that:

*We need to repair the state - calm, sometimes even cautious, but consistently moving towards a quality that can be described  
as a new state, which will no longer have anything to do with communism or post-communism. "*

The use of the empty signifier "communism or post-communism" allows Kaczyński to create a clear dichotomy between the current state and the new state he envisions. By characterizing the current state as having some elements related to communism or post-communism, he positions PiS as the party seeking to move away from these aspects and work towards a state that is fundamentally different in nature. This strategic use of the empty signifier enables Kaczyński to present PiS as a force for change and progress, while portraying the current state as burdened with remnants of undesirable historical eras. Kaczyński's statement can also contribute to the polarization of political discourse. By invoking negative connotations associated with these historical eras, he may reinforce divisions between those who view the current state as burdened with remnants of past ideologies and those who see it as a continuation of positive progress.

On 23.10.2022 Kaczyński commented on the division inside Poland in the following way:

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<sup>90</sup> GazetaPrawna.pl, R. (2022, November 13). *Kaczyński: Polska Przestała Być Krajem Niskich PŁAC. Jesteśmy Tuż za japonią*. GazetaPrawna.pl. <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/8586382,kaczynski-niskie-place-japonia.html> (Accessed on: 08.07.2023)

<sup>91</sup> *V Kongres Prawa I sprawiedliwości*. Prawo i Sprawiedliwość - Internetowy Serwis Informacyjny. (n.d.-h). <https://pis.org.pl/aktualnosci/v-kongres-prawa-i-sprawiedliwosci> (Accessed on: 09.07.2023)

*“the division has always been there, it grew out of communism”<sup>92</sup>*

By invoking "communism" as the source of the division, Kaczynski employs the empty signifier to attribute negative connotations and historical baggage to the concept. This tactic allows him to simplify the complex issue of division within the country by framing it as an enduring legacy of the communist era. The use of the empty signifier in this context serves to shift the focus of the discourse away from the intricacies of present-day divisions and towards a broad and emotionally charged historical context.

The vagueness and ambiguity inherent in the empty signifier enable Kaczynski to elude specifying the exact factors contributing to the division. Instead, "communism" becomes a catch-all term that can evoke a range of associations and emotions, depending on the audience's historical memory and understanding. This allows him to resonate with different segments of the population, each of which may interpret "communism" differently based on their individual experiences and perspectives.

On 12.20.2022 Kaczynski criticized the “attack from the left” on universities:

*“When I hear about some things that are happening today at the university, I sometimes have the impression that in the years when I studied, in a sense - because then there was communism - there was more freedom, a sense of freedom than today”<sup>93</sup>*

By utilizing the empty signifier "communism" to compare past and present university experiences, Kaczynski evokes historical associations and emotions linked to that era. The use of the empty signifier is effective in this context, as it allows him to tap into collective memories and impressions of the communist past, which may vary among different audiences. It also allows him to paint the "attack from the left" on universities as a regressive force that threatens the freedom once enjoyed during the communist period.

An intriguing point here is that Kaczynski employs references to the communist era as a period during which there were more academic liberties in universities than there are today, creating a reverse positive example. This serves as further evidence of the flexibility in utilizing an empty signifier in rhetoric.

On 13.05.2023 during the PiS party conference in used “communism” in a context of the presumed manipulations from the side of the “elites” and party’s political opponents:

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<sup>92</sup> Czermiński, J., & Mikulski, J. (2022, October 23). *Kaczyński: Niemcy to nie światowe mocarstwo. Stany Zjednoczone by Je Jednym palcem zmiażdżyły*. Rzeczpospolita. <https://www.rp.pl/polityka/art37283951-kaczynski-niemcy-to-nie-swiatowe-mocarstwo-stany-zjednoczone-by-je-jednym-palcem-zmiazdzyly> (Accessed on: 09.07.2023)

<sup>93</sup> *Prezes PIS: W Pewnym sensie wolności I poczucia swobody na uczelniach Było Więcej, Gdy Studiowałem*. [www.portalsamorzadowy.pl](https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/polityka-i-spoleczenstwo/prezes-pis-w-pewnym-sensie-wolnosci-i-poczucia-swobody-na-uczelniach-bylo-wiecej-gdy-studiowalem,411064.html). (2022, October 12). <https://www.portalsamorzadowy.pl/polityka-i-spoleczenstwo/prezes-pis-w-pewnym-sensie-wolnosci-i-poczucia-swobody-na-uczelniach-bylo-wiecej-gdy-studiowalem,411064.html> (Accessed on: 09.07.2023)

*"We don't want manipulation. We've had enough of manipulation, there was manipulation in communism and also after 1989"*<sup>94</sup>

In this speech, Kaczynski utilizes the term "communist times" as an empty signifier to elicit associations with the dissatisfaction of the Polish population towards the communist elites before 1989. Given that Kaczynski himself identifies with the Solidarity movement, this rhetorical tactic enables him to portray himself as the successor to this movement and a steadfast advocate against the elites and their alleged dishonesty. Simultaneously, it discredits the opposing stance by equating it with ambiguous "communist lies," relying primarily on emotive appeals rather than substantive arguments.

By employing "communist times" as an empty signifier, the speaker capitalizes on the term's historical and ideological connotations, resonating with the collective memory of past grievances. This strategic association seeks to mobilize public sentiment and garner support for the speaker's position. Furthermore, aligning himself with the Solidarity movement strengthens his political legitimacy by presenting a narrative of continuity in the struggle against the perceived corrupt elites.

The deliberate vagueness of "communist lies" in the context of the opposing position serves to undermine the credibility of the opposition without providing concrete evidence or reasoned analysis. This rhetorical move highlights the speaker's reliance on emotional manipulation to influence public opinion, rather than engaging in substantive debates or presenting factual information. By employing such persuasive techniques, the speaker attempts to consolidate his position and delegitimize dissenting views, creating a dichotomy between himself as the champion of the people and the opposition as proponents of elusive and misleading ideologies.

Kaczynski comments<sup>95</sup> on the decision of the Regional Court in Warsaw that prohibits a journalist from GP from writing for a year about Zbigniew Bońek, the chairman of the Polish Football Association in almost every respect:

*"In some respects, this beats the censorship of the communist times. This decision is incredible, in conflict with the constitution and common sense. It is difficult not to get the impression that, when deciding on this, one way or another, the court was acting in some interests."*

By making this comparison, Kaczynski positions the court decision as an attack on freedom of the press and implies that it resembles the oppressive censorship seen during communist times. This strategic use of the empty signifier allows Kaczynski to criticize the court ruling as a potential infringement on press freedom, while simultaneously reinforcing the idea that actions reminiscent of communism should be vehemently opposed. The use of the empty signifier" in Kaczynski's comments can also contribute to the polarization of discussions about press freedom and the independence of the judiciary.

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<sup>94</sup>DoRzeczy.pl. (2023, May 13). *Kaczyński: Poprzednie Rządy to zmarnowanych 8 lat*. Do Rzeczy. <https://dorzeczy.pl/opinie/438555/jaroslav-kaczynski-poprzednie-rzady-to-zmarnowanych-8-lat.html> (Accessed on: 10.07.2023)

<sup>95</sup>Kaczyński threatens judges in Poland with disciplinary proceedings for court judgments – rule of law. (n.d.). <https://ruleoflaw.pl/kaczynski-judges-disciplinary-responsability/> (Accessed on: 10.07.2023)

On 7.09.2022 at 31st Economic Forum in Karpacz in 2022<sup>96</sup>, Kaczynski makes a parallel between sovereignty and achieving sovereignty with “getting rid of all that was after communism”. equalizing whatever is communism with losing sovereignty:

*"The basic thing for us was to ensure sovereignty, that is, to reject everything that was after communism"*

*"This value for us was the sovereignty, subjectivity of the community. How is it fought for, what is realistic here. Three things have to be distinguished. The first is the issue of military security, but also economic and energy security. Our political formation has always tried to take care of this in various ways"*

By equating whatever is associated with communism with losing sovereignty, Kaczynski positions the rejection of post-communist influences as a necessary step towards ensuring the sovereignty, subjectivity, and security of the Polish community. By suggesting that achieving sovereignty is tied to rejecting everything that was after communism, he leaves the term "communism" open to interpretation and susceptible to negative associations. By characterizing the rejection of all that was after communism as essential for ensuring sovereignty, he implicitly suggests that post-communist influences continue to pose a threat to Poland's independence and security. This strategic use of the empty signifier allows Kaczynski to emphasize the importance of prioritizing national interests and security while framing the rejection of elements associated with communism as a patriotic duty. However, the lack of specific details or examples of the elements that need to be rejected weakens the argument's persuasiveness and makes it primarily a symbolic and rhetorical reference, without engaging in a detailed analysis of the specific challenges and actions required to achieve sovereignty.

Jarosław Kaczyński spoke about the relationship between the Polish state and the Church at the Congress of Catholics in Częstochowa and made a parallel<sup>97</sup> between liberal western values and leftists and communists and made a direct analogy:

*"Today we are dealing with a new situation and with the most powerful attack so far, with the left-wing ideology and left-wing political entities radically strengthened by the entire liberal sphere,"*

*"The more so that there is support here, reference to a financial resource, but also various kinds of political benefices. We are dealing with the most difficult situation after communism"*

By suggesting that these entities are radically strengthened by the entire liberal sphere, he leaves the term "left-wing ideology and left-wing political entities" open to interpretation and susceptible to negative associations. This lack of specificity allows Kaczyński to create a dichotomy between liberal western values and the perceived threat posed by the leftists and communists. Consequently, the audience is left to draw their own associations between these entities and potential challenges to the Polish state and its relationship with the Church, potentially shaping public opinion and attitudes towards the perceived threat. Furthermore, the use of the empty signifier "left-wing ideology and left-wing political entities" enables

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<sup>96</sup> Wiktor, T. (2022, September 7). *Kaczyński O Przywództwie w PIS: Do 2025 Roku ja jestem prezesem*. dziennik.pl. <https://gospodarka.dziennik.pl/news/artykuly/8532248,jaroslaw-kaczynski-karpacz-forum-ekonomiczne.html> (Accessed on:11.07.2023)

<sup>97</sup> mar, P. (2013, June 16). *Kaczyński: Trwa Wojna Z kościołem*. Fakt24.pl. <https://www.fakt.pl/polityka/jaroslaw-kaczynski-trwa-wojna-z-kosciolem/73eps82> (Accessed on:11.07.2023)

Kaczyński to emphasize the seriousness of the situation by comparing it to the most difficult time after communism. By characterizing the current situation as the "most powerful attack" and the most challenging after communism, he implicitly suggests that the influence of these entities poses a significant threat to the Polish state and its values. This strategic use of the empty signifier allows Kaczyński to frame the issue as a critical concern that requires immediate attention and action.

Kaczynski claimed<sup>98</sup> that teachers are not context with ministry of education policies and payment because ther are oenetrated by communists:

*"When it comes to the conflict (teachers with the minister), every normal country conducts its educational policy, historical also within the framework of the educational policy, which is to shape certain attitudes of young people, pro-state attitudes, patriotic attitudes,"*

*"Unfortunately, some people working in education oppose it, because they have a different, left-wing option. Here, especially the Polish Teachers' Union, it was an organization from the interwar period of a clearly left-wing character with a significant penetration of communist forces - this tradition unfortunately continues"*

By associating these teachers with a vague notion of "communists," Kaczyński attempts to delegitimize their opposition and portrays them as opposing pro-state and patriotic attitudes. The use of the empty signifier lacks specific evidence or examples of the alleged communist influence, making it primarily a symbolic and rhetorical reference without substantial factual support.

By suggesting that some people working in education have a "penetration of communist forces," he implies that their views are inherently opposed to pro-state and patriotic attitudes. This strategic use of the empty signifier allows Kaczyński to categorize dissenting teachers as belonging to a vague ideological group, potentially shaping public opinion and attitudes towards their opposition. Furthermore, Kaczyński's use of the empty signifier "communists" to describe the Polish Teachers' Union's alleged left-wing character from the interwar period and its continuation today lacks concrete evidence of the actual communist influence. Without providing specific examples or instances of how this alleged communist influence manifests in the union's actions or positions, the argument relies on symbolic association rather than verifiable facts. This reliance on the empty signifier "communists" serves to discredit the teachers' opposition. The use of the empty signifier "communists" in Kaczyński's statement may contribute to the polarization of discussions about educational policies and the role of teachers in shaping attitudes among students. By framing the conflict as a clash between opposing ideologies associated with communism, he may reinforce divisions between those who support the government's educational policies and those who critique them.

14.06.2020 Duda compared<sup>99</sup> LGBT+ with communist ideology:

*"Throughout the period of communism, communist ideology was pushed into children in schools. - It was Bolshevism. Today, too, they try to push ideology into us and our children, only a different, completely new one. This is neo-Bolshevism. children and set their view of the world, if only by sexualizing them in childhood, this is contrary to the deepest logic of human maturation in a calm, balanced way"*

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<sup>98</sup> GazetaPrawna.pl, R. (2022, November 20). *Prezes Pis: To nie jest moment Na Wielką podwyżkę DLA nauczycieli*. GazetaPrawna.pl. <https://www.gazetaprawna.pl/wiadomosci/kraj/artykuly/8591298,podwyzki-dla-nauczycieli-wynagrodzenia-edukacja-jaroslaw-kaczynski-pis.html> (Accessed on: 12.07.2023)

<sup>99</sup> YouTube. (2020, June 14). *Andrzej Duda Porównuje LGBT do Sowieckiej Indoktrynacji: "to Jest Taki neobolszewizm!"* YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=on2RYICwaSY> (Accessed on: 12.07.2023)

By using the term "neo-Bolshevism," President Duda attempts to evoke negative emotions associated with the historical oppression and totalitarian practices of the communist regimes. The term aims to create fear and suspicion around the LGBT+ movement, suggesting that it is an insidious force attempting to impose a dangerous ideology on society.

The text does not provide a precise definition or explanation of what exactly "neo-Bolshevism" entails in the context of LGBT+ rights and awareness. It remains an empty signifier because it lacks a specific, well-defined meaning and instead leaves room for interpretation and projection of negative connotations.

By associating LGBT+ rights with "neo-Bolshevism," the text seeks to link the movement with past regimes that were perceived negatively by some, potentially marginalizing and stigmatizing the LGBT+ community by equating their struggle for equality with oppressive ideologies.

The text further uses an appeal to traditional values, asserting that sexualizing children in childhood contradicts the "deepest logic of human maturation in a calm, balanced way." This implies that the LGBT+ movement threatens traditional family values and portrays it as a destabilizing force.

Duda seeks to delegitimize and marginalize the LGBT+ community and portrays their advocacy for rights and awareness as a potential threat to societal norms and traditional values. Critical discourse analysis helps us unpack the underlying rhetorical strategies and ideological implications present in the text.

On 14.08.2019 PiS MP from Wielkopolska, Zbigniew Dolata explained his desire to remove the terms "before our era" and "our era"<sup>100</sup>

*"Removing from the public space the terms "before Christ" and "after Christ" or "Anno Domini" related to the Christian sources of our culture and used in all countries of Western civilization was intended to serve the Soviet-style atheization of Poland - writes Zbigniew Dolata in his interpellation and adds: - Despite the passage of 30 years since the fall of the People's Republic of Poland, the terms "BC" and "NE" imposed by the communists are still present in curricula, school and academic textbooks. Their replacement with the terms "before Christ" and "after Christ" (or "Anno Domini") appropriate for our culture cannot be treated as a sign of strengthening the influence of religion on public life, but as an expression of respect for tradition"*

By equating the terms "BC" and "NE" with Soviet-style influence and atheization, Dolata seeks to advocate for a return to traditional Christian terminology and culture, viewing it as a sign of respect for Poland's historical roots. This discourse reveals the ongoing influence of historical debates and ideological tensions surrounding the use of religious and secular references in public discourse in Poland.

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<sup>100</sup> Kowalski, N. (2019, August 13). *Posel Pis z Wielkopolski Zbigniew Dolata Chce usunięcia zwrotów "przed naszą erą" i "Naszej ery". "to jeden Z Ostatnich Reliktów komunizmu."* plus.gloswielkopolski.pl. <https://plus.gloswielkopolski.pl/posel-pis-z-wielkopolski-zbigniew-dolata-chce-usunienia-zwrotow-przed-nasza-era-i-naszej-ery-to-jeden-z-ostatnich-reliktow/ar/c1-14347379> (Accessed on: 13.07.2023)

The proposal to replace "BC" and "NE" with "before Christ" and "after Christ" is framed as an effort to restore Poland's Christian heritage and culture, which was allegedly undermined during the communist era through atheization policies. This discourse taps into the historical memory of communist influence on Polish society and portrays the terms "BC" and "NE" as relics of that era, associating them with a forced secularization that was against traditional Christian values. By advocating for the use of "before Christ" and "after Christ," Dolata seeks to reestablish a connection with Poland's Christian past and align public discourse with the country's historical religious identity. Dolata frames the proposed change as an expression of respect for tradition, rather than an attempt to strengthen the influence of religion on public affairs. This framing is likely aimed at garnering broader support for the proposal, as debates over the role of religion in public life can be polarizing in a diverse and pluralistic society. By emphasizing the cultural significance of the proposed changes, Dolata seeks to appeal to a sense of shared history and identity among Poles, positioning the replacement of the terms as a natural and necessary move to preserve Poland's cultural heritage. By linking the terms "BC" and "NE" to Soviet-era atheization policies, Dolata seeks to use history as a tool to advocate for a particular vision of Poland's cultural and religious identity, one that is deeply rooted in its Christian heritage.

The presented samples vividly illustrate the strategic logic of semiotic construction and the versatility of empty signifiers. By observing how the term "communism" is deftly wielded and modified to suit various situations and contexts, we can discern how these empty signifiers act as powerful rhetorical instruments to manipulate and redirect the focus of discussions.

The mere introduction of "communism" within the discourse can instantly alter the trajectory of the conversation, drawing attention away from substantive issues and steering it toward the desired narrative favored by PiS. Through this manipulation, the empty signifier "communism" becomes a potent tool for framing the opposition as an adversary force and delegitimizing their viewpoints.

This tactic allows PiS politicians to tap into historical associations and negative sentiments connected with communism, effectively triggering emotional responses and biases among the audience. By doing so, they are able to cultivate a distinct "us versus them" mentality, consolidating support from their base while alienating and discrediting those who hold opposing viewpoints.

Furthermore, the seamless interchangeability of empty signifiers, such as "post-communism," highlights how these constructs can be tailored to suit specific contexts and accommodate varying degrees of subtlety. This adaptability enables PiS to engage in discourse manipulation, shaping public perceptions, and establishing a dominant narrative that aligns with their political objectives.

**Table 4.**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Framing</b>	<b>Co-occurrence</b>
the post-communism was a specific method not so much of power as of domination	Negative	Analytical, Descriptive	"post-communism," "power," "domination," "permanent," "social advantage"
Law and Justice stopped the path of post-communism	Positive	Assertive, Proud	"Law and Justice," "stopped," "path," "post-communism"
The implementation of the PiS program is spread over many years	Neutral	Ambitious	"PiS program," "many years," "change Poland," "1989," "burdened," "remnants"
those who were well placed in communism had an advantage in this new system	Negative	Analytical, Descriptive	"well placed," "advantage," "exploitative system," "mechanisms," "protect people," "change"
We need to repair the state	Negative	Calm, Cautious	"repair the state," "new state," "nothing to do with," "post-communism"
the division has always been there, it grew out of communism	Neutral	Descriptive and Historical	"division," "always been there," "grew out of," "communism"
When I hear about some things that are happening today at the university	Negative	Reflective, Comparing	"sense of freedom," "years when," "studied," "communism," "more freedom," "impression"
We don't want manipulation	Negative	Assertive, Resolute	"manipulation," "enough of," "manipulation in," "communism," "1989"
In some respects, this beats the censorship of the communist times	Negative	Critical, Distrustful	"beats the censorship," "communist times," "in conflict with," "constitution,"

			"common sense," "court"
the basic thing for us was to ensure sovereignty	Negative	Patriotic, Protective	"basic thing," "ensure sovereignty," "after communism," "value for us," "sovereignty," "community"
Today we are dealing with a new situation	Negative	Assertive, Concerned	"new situation," "most powerful attack," "left-wing ideology," "political entities," "liberal sphere," "most difficult situation after communism"
When it comes to the conflict	Negative	Accusatory, Dismissive	"conflict," "normal country," "educational policy," "shaping certain attitudes," "young people," "left-wing option," "left-wing character," "communist forces," "tradition continues"
Throughout the period of communism, communist ideology was pushed into children in schools	Negative	Disapproving, Concerned	"period of communism," "communist ideology," "Bolshevism," "neo-Bolshevism," "children," "sexualizing"
Removing from the public space the terms "before Christ" and "after Christ"	Negative	Analytical, Historical	"public space," "before Christ," "after Christ," "Anno Domini," "Christian sources," "Western civilization," "Soviet-style atheization," "People's Republic of Poland," "influence of religion," "respect for tradition"

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Within this corpus of texts, and drawing from framing, tone, and co-occurrence data, the primary function of employing "communism" as an empty signifier is to critique Poland's current socio-economic and political system. It is depicted as tainted with elements of communism that proponents argue should be eradicated from the societal fabric. Those utilizing this signifier assert that any element of society can be labeled as tainted by the legacy of communism. Consequently, the use of the signifier in this context manifests indicators such as **contextual dependency, ambiguity, and ideological investment**.

### 3.5. Justification of Political decisions

The final segment serves as a demonstration of how the empty signifier "communism" is utilized to support specific legal decisions and reforms. Similar to the emphasis observed in the chapter on economic policies, the objective is to eliminate remnants of the communist past. This provides yet another example of the comprehensive and adaptable nature of the "communism" signifier in various contexts.

In this instance, the empty signifier is harnessed to bolster the legitimacy of legal changes and reforms by framing them as necessary steps to rid the country of lingering communist influences. By invoking the negative associations linked to communism, proponents of these legal decisions seek to create a sense of urgency and public support for their initiatives. The use of "communism" in this context serves as a rhetorical device to solidify a narrative that portrays the proposed legal changes as a means to safeguard the nation's identity and values.

Moreover, this application of the empty signifier demonstrates its role as a unifying force, capable of rallying public opinion behind a particular political agenda. By positioning these reforms as a collective endeavor to distance the nation from its communist past, proponents aim to foster a sense of national identity and pride in the proposed legal changes.

On 29.03.2023 Morawiecki commented on the proposed law on the liquidation of the regulations on perpetual usufruct as:

*"another step towards the liquidation of a certain relic of the communist era".<sup>101</sup>*

On 11.02.2019 Morawiecki commented the necessity of the judiciary reform:

*"Our judicial system is rife with corruption, it is filled with judges who have on their conscience various crimes committed under communism, and in addition - it is famous for its inefficiency."<sup>102</sup>*

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<sup>101</sup> DoRzeczy.pl. (2023a, March 29). *Nowe Decyzje Rządu. Morawiecki: Kolejny Krok Ku Likwidacji Reliktu Po Komunizmie*. Do Rzeczy. <https://dorzeczy.pl/ekonomia/422134/morawiecki-kolejny-krok-ku-likwidacji-reliktu-po-komunizmie.html> (Accessed on: 13.07.2023)

<sup>102</sup> Adamski, M. (2019, February 11). *Morawiecki w "Le Figaro" O korupcji w polskich sądach. „iustitia" Oburzona*. Rzeczpospolita. <https://www.rp.pl/sady-i-trybunaly/art1492491-morawiecki-w-le-figaro-o-korupcji-w-polskich-sadach-iustitia-oburzona> (Accessed on: 14.07.2023)

On 17.09.2020 During his commemorative speech in front of the Fallen and Murdered in the East in Warsaw in 2020, Morawiecki directly used the trauma of communist occupation of Poland to justify the judiciary reform:

*“with the murders of Polish patriots, the deportations of over a million Poles to Siberia, the terrible tortures of those dying in Siberia, and later the victorious communist system that destroyed Polish patriots until 1989 - this, dear European friends, we must fight all the time - with deposits of this communist system. That is why a reform of the judiciary is needed”<sup>103</sup>*

Communism as a justification<sup>104</sup> for judicial reform:

*“to remove people who were found to have a compromising communist past...”*

The comments made by Morawiecki highlight the recurring use of communism as an empty signifier in justifying political actions, particularly in the context of judiciary reform and the liquidation of certain regulations. By associating the judiciary with corruption, inefficiency, and individuals with a "compromising communist past," Morawiecki positions communism as a convenient scapegoat to justify and legitimize the need for reforms and changes in the system. In Morawiecki's comment on the liquidation of regulations on perpetual usufruct, he refers to it as a "relic of the communist era." Here, communism serves as an empty signifier to signify outdated and undesirable elements in the legal system.

By labeling the regulations as communist relics, Morawiecki associates them with negative connotations and historical baggage, creating a context in which their removal is justified as a step towards modernization and progress. In discussing the necessity of judicial reform, Morawiecki paints a critical picture of the judiciary, characterizing it as rife with corruption and inefficiency. He further connects the judiciary to individuals who had a role during the communist era, implying that their past affiliations might have influenced their behavior within the judicial system. Here, communism acts as an empty signifier to stigmatize certain judges and justify the need for a reform that would allegedly cleanse the judiciary of any undesirable elements linked to the communist past. Morawiecki's commemorative speech in front of the Fallen and Murdered in the East employs a historical narrative that links communism to the suffering and trauma experienced by Poland under the occupation. He argues that the remnants of the communist system must be fought and that the reform of the judiciary is necessary to achieve this goal. This narrative positions the judiciary as an institution that requires cleansing from the lingering influence of communism, aligning the reform with a historical struggle against past oppressions. By associating communism with negative connotations and historical baggage, Morawiecki creates a narrative that fosters public support for the proposed reforms. The notion of communism is employed to stigmatize certain elements within the judiciary and position the reforms as a necessary step towards modernization and progress. Additionally, the use of a historical narrative that links communism to past suffering and trauma reinforces the idea that the reform is essential to cleanse the system from any remnants of the communist era.

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<sup>103</sup> Polsat News. (2020a, September 17). *Można powiedzieć, że to początek Komunistów w Polsce - Polsat News*. pilsatnews.pl. <https://www.pilsatnews.pl/wiadomosc/2020-09-17/mozna-powiedziec-ze-to-poczatek-komunistu-w-polsce/> (Accessed on:14.07.2023)

<sup>104</sup> 26, (PAP) mr/md/mb August. (n.d.). *President says some members of Polish judiciary are discredited*. – The First News. <https://www.thefirstnews.com/article/president-says-some-members-of-polish-judiciary-are-discredited-24288> (Accessed on:14.07.2023)

The final examples shed light on a crucial aspect of the empty signifier's usage: it extends beyond mere labeling and rhetoric. Instead, it becomes an instrumental tool in guiding real decisions and policy-making processes. This underscores the continuity of the empty signifier's resonance with historical practices of decommunization and lustration.

By aligning current decisions with past practices of decommunization and lustration, proponents of these policies draw on the enduring emotional charge associated with the term "communism." The historical context of decommunization and lustration, which aimed to distance post-communist nations from their communist pasts, enhances the perceived legitimacy of present-day decisions and reforms. It allows for the framing of current actions as logical extensions of earlier efforts to rid the country of its communist legacy.

This continuity also highlights the significance of historical memory in shaping contemporary politics. The enduring relevance of the empty signifier "communism" indicates how deeply ingrained historical events and their associated emotions continue to influence decision-making and policy implementation.

However, it is crucial to approach this usage with a critical lens. While historical context can provide a framework for understanding certain decisions, it is essential to examine the substantive implications and motivations behind current policies. Relying solely on past practices to validate present decisions may overlook the complexities of modern challenges and limit opportunities for nuanced solutions.

Thus, the interplay between the historical significance of decommunization and lustration and its influence on contemporary politics calls for a thoughtful analysis that considers both the historical context and the present-day realities to arrive at comprehensive and informed policy outcomes. Such an approach will facilitate a more well-rounded understanding of the impact of the empty signifier in shaping decision-making processes and the broader political landscape.

**Table 5.**

<b>Text</b>	<b>Tone</b>	<b>Framing</b>	<b>Co-occurrence</b>
another step towards the liquidation of a certain relic of the communist era	Negative	Descriptive	"liquidation," "certain relic," "communist era"
Our judicial system is rife with corruption	Negative	Accusatory, Critical	"judicial system," "corruption," "filled with judges," "crimes committed," "under communism," "famous for," "inefficiency"
with the murders of Polish patriots, the deportations of over	Negative	Urgent, Emotional	"murders," "Polish patriots," "deportations,"

a million Poles to Siberia			"Siberia," "terrible tortures,"
to remove people who were found to have a compromising communist past	Negative	Descriptive	"remove people," "found to have," "compromising communist past"

This corpus of texts adheres to the strategy of employing communism as a signifier, symbolizing elements that demand demolition and change. The addressees of these speeches are individuals who are highly receptive to the notion of accumulating both real and imagined impacts and traumas associated with communism, seamlessly transferring them into the present political context without providing an explicit explanation. Consequently, these speeches predominantly exhibit a negative tone and a descriptive-like framing, facilitating the identification of the following indicators of an empty signifier: Lack of Fixed Meaning, Ambiguity, and Ideological Investment.

## Conclusions

This dissertation is set out to answer the following research question: Do members of PiS employ the term "communism" as an empty signifier, why and what are the intended outcomes of this utilization?

To answer this question, the research utilized advanced qualitative approach to analyze 50 speeches drawn from the PiS members's public addresses. To lay the ground for the analysis, the researcher provides a thorough presentation on the theoretical positioning of this study in terms of the broader context of problems of post-communist transition, populism and its rhetoric, empty signifiers. It also provides an overview of how different approaches to critical discourse analysis have been played out before and why there is no unified approach to this endeavor and argues that for this research the Glynos and Howarth approach will be used to critically analyze and compare text, with an emphasis on finding and reflecting on the following indicators of an empty signifier: Lack of Fixed Meaning, Polysemy, Contextual Dependency, Ideological Investment, Shifting or Contested Meanings, Ambiguity and Indeterminacy.

The data has been organized in a specific thematic chapter in order to represent indeterminacy and utilitarian nature of an empty signifier "communism" in the rhetoric of the PiS members and to better demonstrate the systematic exploitation of it in different contexts and with different desired outcomes. As result, it allowed to provide a comparative perspective on how the same set of deliberate manipulation with empty signifier "communism" is repeatedly executed under new contexts and how each individual case of use falls under broader process of semiotic manipulation.

The data have also been analyzed using digital instruments such as AntConc, the AFINN algorithm, and the TextBlob Python library to examine tone, framing, and co-occurrence in relation to the usage of the signifier in each individual case. This analysis facilitated a more

precise understanding of the incorporation of the signifier into the broader lexical fabric of the narrative.

Subsequently, the data have been merged into comparative sheets, allowing for a more effective portrayal of the meta-level usage of the signifier.

Based on the data, the study has been able to trace at least three indicators of an empty signifier in each individual group of speeches, with all five present across all subsets of texts. This provides a positive answer to the research question and also offers a better context for understanding how the signifier can be transformed and integrated into the narrative depending on the goals, audiences, and contexts.

The analysis of the data allowed to come to the conclusions that there is a systematic use of the “communism” signifier, that is intended to archive two desired goals: to evoke traumatic memories of communist regime in Poland in the audience and redefine in in the contemporary context in order to archive two main goals; rally support among the target audience and discredit positions of the PiS opponents or critics.

Lack of fixed meaning and polysemy allows to use the “communism” signifier in broad range of different contexts, from European environmental initiatives to LGBTQ+ rights and even calendar system. With the constant change of content or even voiding of the content from the term communism, in different cases it follows the same instrumental pattern.

It is also with noting that often the signifier “communism” is used in contexts that are very important for the populist and right-wing parties and politicians: protection of ‘traditional values’, anti-globalism, anti-establishment, protectionism in economics, national unity, national sovereignty, cultural identity, environmental skepticism. This is an indicator that the signifier “communism” is tied to these broader populist rhetoric positionalities, and it implies that this is a specific ad-hoc instrument for Polish political landscape to undergo populist hegemonic strategy.

This dissertation comes to the conclusion that the term “communism” became an populist empty signifier because of the specific Polish context, connected with the trauma of communist occupation and thorny transition process, as well as a deliberate policies of the Polish governments in democratic period in the sphere of memory and commemoration, that would create a certain one-sided view of Polish history, that later got utilized by the far-right and populist politicians and movements.

However, this dissertation only touches on it rather briefly in the opening chapters and also it is mentioned in the analytical parts. It is a huge limitation of this dissertation, since this could be better covered in this research, as the dissertation is mostly focuses on the analysis of the practical material to establish the fact of existence and usage of this signifier in the current political system in Poland,

So the results of this research could be further developed in the future in two ways. The first one is to undergo a deeper analysis of the effects of the memory politics in the post-communist era on the populist rhetoric in Poland in order to establish more solid factual and correlational base. The second way is to transfer and test this theoretical and empirical base on other post-

communist Eastern European countries, especially Hungary, but also Baltic states and former Yugoslavia space.

Continuation of this work is particularly significant due to the ongoing expansion of populist and right-wing movements in Europe and their heightened representation across European and national institutions. This is especially pertinent in the context of the escalating political divides and polarization evident in European public discourse.

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