

Monika Napora

(Maria Curie-Skłodowska University, Poland)

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0373-2405>











e-mail: monika.napora@mail.umcs.pl

Lightning War and Lightning Chaos... The Polish Campaign of 1939 in the Collaborationist (“Reptile”) Press (In the Context of Psychological and Information Warfare)

Błyskawiczna wojna i błyskawiczny chaos... Kampania polska 1939 r. na łamach prasy gadzinowej (w kontekście wojny psychologicznej i informacyjnej)

ABSTRACT

The paper discusses the ways of presenting the course of the 1939 Polish Campaign in the collaborationist press (so-called ‘reptile’) of the General-Gouvernement. The course of the defensive war was one of the first subjects used by German propagandists to manipulate public opinions and create public sentiments before, during and after the end of Poland’s defensive war in 1939. The narrative produced by the collaborationist press, concerning the causes of the war and defeat of the Polish army, became a significant element of the psychological and information warfare waged by the Third Reich.

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THE AUTHOR'S ADDRESS: Monika Napora, the Institute of History of the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, 4A Maria Curie-Skłodowska Square, Lublin 20-031, Poland				
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STRESZCZENIE

W artykule omówiono sposoby kreowania przebiegu kampanii polskiej 1939 r. na łamach prasy gadzinowej Generalnego Gubernatorstwa. Przebieg wojny obronnej był jednym z pierwszych tematów wykorzystanych przez niemieckich propagandystów do manipulacji opiniami publicznymi i budowania nastrojów przed, w trakcie i po zakończeniu wojny obronnej 1939 r. Wykreowana przez prasę gadzinową narracja dotycząca przyczyn wojny oraz klęski wojska polskiego stała się istotnym elementem prowadzonej przez III Rzeszę wojny psychologicznej i informacyjnej.

Słowa kluczowe: kampania polska 1939 roku, prasa gadzinowa, wojna psychologiczna, wojna informacyjna

The collaborationist (or 'reptile') press is regarded as the main tool of German propaganda in the territory of occupied Poland¹. Numerous studies conducted by historians, press experts and linguists on this special medium have produced an ample collection of publications containing both synthetic treatments of the press system in the General-Gouvernement [General Governorate, General Government]², and monographs

¹ The conceptual scope of the term *prasa gadzinowa* [literally 'reptile press' – 'rag press', WWII collaborationist press] is far broader and it should be noted that it is historically variable. The origin of the term goes back to the 19th century and is connected with the actions of Otto von Bismarck, who created a secret press fund – Reptilienfond (reptile fund). The fund paid for the publication of newspapers in the Kingdom of Prussia that supported Prussia's unification policy and criticized all decentralist tendencies. During World War One a classic rag newspaper was the pro-German "Godzina Polski" ["Poland's Hour"], contemptuously called a 'reptile' ['gadziną'] by the Poles. The best-known referent of this term is the press openly published in Polish by the German and Soviet occupation authorities during World War Two (also called rags, ragged ['szmatława']). An exceptionally expanded system was created by Germans in the General-Gouvernement. The closed-down Polish press was replaced by 60 collaborationist ('reptile') titles, including information dailies, periodicals, specialist journals, periodicals for primary and vocational schools. Despite the appeals by the Polish Underground State to boycott them, that press was widely read. The collaborators of the 'reptile' rag newspapers were regarded as traitors by the independence Underground. After the end of the war, trials of members of individual editorial staffs were held, in which they were tried for collaboration under the 3 August 1944 decree of the Polish Committee of National Liberation on penalties for fascist-Nazi war criminals guilty of murdering and harassing civilian population and prisoners of war, and for traitors of the Polish Nation. See: *Leksykon terminów medialnych, A–L*, eds. K. Wolny-Zmorzyński et al., Toruń 2024.

² Pioneer works for the studies on the 'reptile' newspapers were: T. Szarota, *Jawne wydawnictwa i prasa okupowanej Warszawy*, in: *Warszawa lat wojny i okupacji. 1939–1944*, vol. 2,

of individual press titles³. There are also many studies devoted to selected aspects of the content of the collaborationist ('reptile') press⁴. The largest group of publications consists of contributory articles⁵. However, no separate study has yet been prepared on the Polish 1939 campaign⁶ and the

Warszawa 1972, pp. 139–165; L. Dobroszycki, *Prasa jawna dla ludności polskiej w Generalnej Guberni*, Warszawa 1967, typescript of the doctoral thesis. The dissertation was published in German and English: idem, *Die legale polnische Presse im Generalgouvernement 1939–1945*, München 1977; oraz angielskim: idem, *Reptile Journalism. The Official Polish-language Press under the Nazis, 1939–1945*, London 1994; M. Tuszyński, *Nazi Political Propaganda in General Gouvernement Hitlerowska propaganda polityczna w Generalnej Guberni*, Warszawa 1976, typescript of the doctoral thesis. Vide also: J. Jarowiecki, *Prasa w okresie okupacji hitlerowskiej w Polsce w latach 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1980; E. Cytowska, *Szkice i dzieje prasy pod okupacją niemiecką (1939–1945)*, Warszawa–Łódź 1986; W. Wójcik, *Prasa gadzinowa Generalnego Gubernatorstwa (1939–1945)*, Kraków 1988; K. Woźniakowski, *W kręgu jawnego piśmiennictwa literackiego Generalnego Gubernatorstwa (1939–1945)*, Kraków 1997; idem, *Prasa, kultura, wojna. Studia z dziejów czasopiśmiennictwa, kultury literackiej i artystycznej lat 1939–1945*, Kraków 2005; T. Głowiński, *O nowy porządek europejski. Ewolucja hitlerowskiej propagandy politycznej wobec Polaków w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie 1939–1945*, Wrocław 2000; L. Jockheck, *Propaganda im Generalgouvernement. Die NS-Besatzungspresse für Deutsche und Polen 1939–1945*, Osnabrück 2006.

³ Vide for example: J. Lewandowski, *"Goniec Krakowski" (27.X.1939–18.I.1945). Próba monografii*, Warszawa 1978; G. Hryciuk, *"Gazeta Lwowska" 1941–1944*, Wrocław 1992; S. Piątkowski, *Okupacja i propaganda. Dystrykt radomski Generalnego Gubernatorstwa w publicystyce polskojęzycznej prasy niemieckiej (1939–1945)*, Lublin–Radom 2013; M. Napora, *Gadzinowe narracje. Mechanizmy i strategie kreowania propagandowego obrazu świata w "Dzienniku Radomskim" 1940–1945*, Warszawa 2017.

⁴ J. Rawska, *Sprawa polska w prasie gadzinowej (lipiec 1944 – styczeń 1945)*, Warszawa 1980; W. Wójcik, *Język prasy gadzinowej lat 1939–1945 na tle metod niemieckiej propagandy*, Kraków 1990; S. Piątkowski, *Życie codzienne Polaków w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie w świetle ogłoszeń drobnych polskojęzycznej prasy niemieckiej*, Warszawa 2021.

⁵ The most recent publications of this type include: K. Majchrzyk, *Events on the Eastern Front as portrayed by "Nowy Głos Lubelski"*, *"Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny"* 2019, 16, 4, pp. 215–230; W. Grott, *Polski rząd na uchodźstwie i Polskie Siły Zbrojne na łamach niemieckiej, polskojęzycznej prasy codziennej Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, *"Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość"* 2022, 32, 1, pp. 249–266; M. Napora, *Strategie ugruntowywania stereotypów antysemickich w propagandzie niemieckiej na terenie Generalnego Gubernatorstwa*, *"Wschodni Rocznik Humanistyczny"* 2023, 20, 2, pp. 181–197. For more, see: M. Napora, *O potrzebie dalszych badań nad prasą gadzinową. Stan obecny i perspektywy badawcze*, *"Dzieje Najnowsze"* 2021, 53, 2, pp. 187–201.

⁶ Aware of the terminological disputes over the names of the fights conducted in the territory of Poland between 1 September 1939 and 6 October 1939, the present article will use the terms: the Polish campaign of 1939 and Poland's defensive war. On terminological issues, see: W. Rezmer, *Problem terminologiczny: kampania wrześniowa – wojna obronna Polski – kampania polska*, *"Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy"* 2009, 3, pp. 118–120; P. Stawecki,

ways of its presentation in the collaborationist ('reptile') press. This subject was also marginalized in monographs devoted to analyzing the contents of individual press titles⁷. Meanwhile, the course of the defensive war became one of the first themes used by German propagandists to distort the war reality and to manipulate society.

The present article will analyze the way and goals of presenting the 1939 defensive war in the 'reptile' press, which appeared already under the Wehrmacht administration in the territories occupied by Germans and in the territory of the General Gouvernement established on 26 October 1939. The main research objective is to show the ways of the use of the accounts about the Polish campaign by the Nazis in the psychological and information war that they waged. The source basis will be the publications from "Goniec Częstochowski"/"Kurier Częstochowski"⁸, "Kurier

W sprawie terminu „wojna obronna Polski”, „Przegląd Historyczno-Wojskowy” 2007, 1, pp. 205–206.

⁷ In the literature on the subject, as regards the September and related themes, the best-explored is the propaganda campaign about the escape of the Polish authorities. Probably because this subject was widely present in the 'reptile' (collaborationist) newspapers, also after the end of the defensive war. At the close of 1939, "Nowy Kurier Warszawski" and "Goniec Krakowski" began publishing a thirteen-part reportage series by Rudolf Stachy, tellingly titled: *Ucieczka zbankrutowanych władców, czyli jak zginęło Państwo Polskie skutkiem zdrady Anglii*. [*The Escape of the Bankrupt Rulers or How the Polish State Collapsed as a Result of England's Betrayal*]. In 1940 however, the collaborationist newspapers began publishing the White Paper *Polnische Dokumente zur Vorgeschichte des Krieges (Polskie dokumenty dotyczące genezy wojny [Polish documents concerning the origin of the war])*, which was a fragment of the book prepared by Adolf von Moltke's commission based on the materials found in the archives of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Warsaw. For more, see: T. Głowiński, *op. cit.*, pp. 72–75.

⁸ "Goniec Częstochowski" [hereinafter: "GC"] – appeared from 1 March 1906 (for about a year as "Wiadomości Częstochowskie. Dziennik") to 2 September 1939. The German authorities resumed publishing the newspaper from 14 September 1939. On 4 November 1939 its name was changed to "Kurier Częstochowski" [hereinafter: "KC"], which appeared under this title until the end of the occupation. W. Mielczarek, *Polityczna propaganda goebbelsowska i prasa niemiecka w Częstochowie w latach 1939–1945*, "Zeszyty Naukowe Politechniki Częstochowskiej. Nauki społeczno-ekonomiczne" 1978, 101, 12, pp. 133–164.

Radomski”/”Dziennik Radomski”⁹, ”Nowy Kurier Warszawski”¹⁰, and ”Goniec Krakowski”¹¹.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND INFORMATION WARFARE

The Third Reich’s military aggression against Poland was preceded by actions conducted as part of the psychological warfare¹² and the ac-

⁹ ”Kurier Radomski” [hereinafter: ”KR”] – appeared from 10 October 1939 until 1 March 1940. The name of the newspaper was then changed to ”Dziennik Radomski” [hereinafter: ”DR”]. It was published under this title until the end of November 1944. In December 1944 it merged with ”Kurier Kielecki” under the joint title ”Dziennik Radomski Kurier Kielecki”. The last extant issue of the newspaper is dated 6 January 1945. See: M. Adamczyk, *”Gadzinowa” prasa na Kielecczyźnie w latach okupacji hitlerowskiej*, in: *Polska prasa konspiracyjna lat 1939–1945 i początek prasy w Polsce Ludowej*, eds. M. Adamczyk, J. Jarowiecki, Kielce–Kraków, 1979, pp. 171–178; idem, *Propaganda hitlerowska w dystryktie radomskim*, *”Rocznik Świętokrzyski”* 1977, 6, pp. 215–218.

¹⁰ ”Nowy Kurier Warszawski” [hereinafter: ”NKW”] – appeared from 11 October 1939 to 17 January 1945. For more about ”Nowy Kurier Warszawski”, vide T. Cieślak, *Hitlerowskie czasopismo ”Nowy Kurier Warszawski”*, *”Rocznik Historii Czasopiśmiennictwa Polskiego”* [hereinafter: ”RHCP”] 1968, 7, 1, pp. 162–169; M. Pąckiński, *Komunikacja w izolacji. Maskowanie kłeski w niemieckiej polskojęzycznej prasie gadzinowej w latach 1943–1944 (na przykładzie tekstów z ”Nowego Kuriera Warszawskiego”)*, *”Napis”* 2021, 27, pp. 112–133; K. Grzegorzewski, *Retoryka nazistowskiej władzy w propagandzie ”Nowego Kuriera Warszawskiego” (perspektywa medjoznawcza i retoryczna)*, *”Forum Artis Rhetoricae”* 2022, 1, pp. 11–25.

¹¹ ”Goniec Krakowski” was published from 27 October 1939 to 18 January 1945. It was a newspaper for the whole General Gouvernement, and also had local versions, like ”Nowy Czas” of Jędrzejów, or ”Dziennik Poranny” for the districts of: Będziny, Bielsko, Sosnowiec, Chorzów, Olkusz, Zawiercie and Blachownia. Also ”Kurier Kielecki”, ”Kurier Radomski” and its successor ”Dziennik Radomski” were initially its versions. For more about ”Goniec Krakowski” see: T. Cieślak, *Z historii niemieckiej prasy w języku polskim*, cz. 1, *”Goniec Krakowski”* (27 X 1939 – 18 I 1944), *”RHCP”* 1966, 4, pp. 569–579; J. Lewandowski, *”Goniec Krakowski”* (27.X.1939 – 18.I.1945). *Próba monografii*, Warszawa 1978.

¹² Psychological warfare – the term was first used in 1941 by Ladislav Farago in his book *German psychological warfare*. At present, psychological warfare is defined as a set of all activities undertaken by one side of the conflict in order to destroy the adversary’s morale and the will to win. These operations may include, inter alia, negation of the adversary’s political, and economic capabilities, subversive operations, maintaining/increasing the will of victory in one’s own society and among the allied states, maintaining the favorable neutrality of the states not involved in the conflict. See: M. Olechowski, *”Wojna psychologiczna” – próba zdefiniowania pojęcia*, *”Wiedza Obronna”* 2018, 1–2, pp. 92–93.

companying information warfare¹³. The two extra-military forms of influencing the adversary and its society – but also the citizens of the Reich's own state – were treated in the Third Reich as essential components of its aggressive foreign policy¹⁴. In 1938, Hitler waged an open psychological war with Europe, escalating conflicts and making increasing demands, walking a fine line between war and peace. In the case of relations with Poland, the situation became significantly exacerbated in October 1938 after the Munich Conference, when Hitler concluded that it was time to solve – according to him – contentious territorial questions. It was then that the demands were formulated concerning the annexation of Gdansk, the consent to the extraterritorial highway and railway route from the Reich to East Prussia, and to Poland's accession to the Anti-Comintern Pact against the Soviet Union¹⁵. The intensification of operations conducted as part psychological warfare took place in March 1939 after the invasion of Czechoslovakia. Diversionary operations then began to be conducted in the territory of the Polish Republic. Tomasz Chinciński points out that at that time there was an increase in the cases of spreading defeatism and reviling the Polish nation and state by Polish citizens of German nationality. This caused an increasing number of arrests and proceedings

¹³ Information warfare – it is defined as a sum of operations aimed against the information and information systems of the adversary, with the simultaneous protection and strengthening of one's own information systems. Operations conducted as part of information warfare involve both disinformation (misleading the adversary/international public opinion) and taking over and destroying the enemy's information systems. Information warfare is a broader concept than psychological warfare – psychological warfare is usually an element of waged information warfare. See: Z. Modrzejewski, *Operacje informacyjne*, Warszawa 2015, p. 14.

¹⁴ As J. Kossecki observes, after Hitler took over power in 1933, he quickly started preparations for the conduct of psychological and information operations in external relations, inter alia by establishing German newspapers abroad and by gaining financial influence in foreign newspapers. In German embassies, special sections were set up to spread propaganda. Propaganda operations were conducted according to the directives of Propaganda Minister J. Goebbels. One of his instructions contained the following directives: 'Our propaganda abroad has to strongly emphasize that Germany wishes to peacefully solve all the existing problems [...] The blame for the failure to reach a peaceful solution should be cleverly shifted on those who oppose Germany's just demands [...] This must be stressed subtly and in an always changing form. [...] We have to convince at least part of the world's public opinion that under such circumstances there is nothing else for Germany to do but take what they have the right to.' Quoted after: J. Kossecki: *Totalna wojna informacyjna XX wieku a II RP*, Kielce 1997, p. 22.

¹⁵ S. Żerko, *Stosunki polsko-niemieckie 1938–1939*, Poznań 2020, pp. 93–183

against members of the German minority and growing tensions in social relations, thus resulting in hostile attitudes¹⁶.

Parallel to the actions conducted as part psychological warfare, the German side also conducted information war operations. On 1 April 1939, the Propaganda Department was established at the Armed Forces High Command (Abteilung für Wehrmachtspropaganda im Oberkommando der Wehrmacht). Moreover, special propaganda units (Propagandakompanien – PK) were created with the headquarters of the armies that were to attack Poland. Their task was to provide information and propaganda to their own troops and undermine the morale of the Poles by spreading defeatism via different mass media¹⁷. An example of such activity is a disinformation campaign in which Poland was accused of mass persecution of the German minority. The intensification of such accusations took place in August 1939. According to Stanisław Żerko, the decision to launch a mass campaign against Poland was taken on 10 August 1939. Diplomats and foreign correspondents in Berlin allegedly expressed an opinion at that time that: 'It is only now that Hitler began <a war of nerves>'¹⁸.

On 1 September 1939, the abovementioned forms of exerting influence on the Polish state and society reached a higher level and became essential tools for the fight for victory in the commenced war. Striving to achieve information superiority, already on the first day of invasion the Germans began taking over local editorial offices¹⁹. In Pomerania, Silesia, and in Great Poland there began the takeover of Polish printing and radio industry. This process was accompanied by the shutdown of newspapers because of the movement of the front line. The editorial staff also began to destroy editorial documents and records. The seats of some editorial offices and printing houses were also destroyed as a result of bombing²⁰.

¹⁶ See: T. Chinciński, *Niemiecka dywersja w Polsce w 1939. w świetle dokumentów policyjnych i wojskowych II Rzeczypospolitej oraz służb specjalnych III Rzeszy*, cz. 1, (Marzec-sierpień 1939.), "Pamięć i Sprawiedliwość" 2005, 4/2 (8), p. 186. Vide also: idem, *Forpoczta Hitlera. Niemiecka dywersja w Polsce w 1939*, Gdańsk 2010.

¹⁷ M. Napora, *Gadzinowe*, pp. 22–23.

¹⁸ S. Żerko, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

¹⁹ According to Alina Słomkowska, on 1 September 1939 the offices of inter alia "Gazeta Olsztyńska", and Opole's "Nowiny Codzienne" were taken over. For more, see: A. Słomkowska, *Straty dziennikarstwa polskiego w wyniku drugiej wojny światowej*, "Kwartalnik Historii Prasy Polskiej" 1977, 16/3, pp. 5–6.

²⁰ On 1 September 1939 the Poznań seat of the the Polish Printing House/Drukarnia Polska S.A. was destroyed as a result of an air raid, as were the premises occupied by the editorial offices of local periodicals, inter alia "Kurier Poznański" and "Wielkopoleanin". *Ibidem*, pp. 7–8.

As early as on 4 September 1939, the Chief of the Wehrmacht 8th Army's Civil Administration, Harry von Craushaar, issued an order forbidding the production and distribution of Polish newspapers in the occupied area²¹. On 15 September 1939, a similar decree was issued by the Chief of Civil Administration of Upper Silesia Otto Fitzner, introducing a requirement of obtaining a special permit to continue publishing newspapers and periodicals. Failure to comply with the regulation was punishable by 15 years of imprisonment²².

To sum up, most of the 2600 Polish newspapers and magazines published before the war were closed down already under the Wehrmacht administration. The professional organizations and trade associations of journalists and publishers were also banned²³.

The occupiers quickly started to create their own press system. Initially, local newspapers were re-established with pro-German editorial staffs, and the names of the newspapers/magazines were subsequently changed. On 14 September 1939 the publication of "Goniec Częstochowski" (with the subtitle: "Z urzędowymi ogłoszeniami władz [With Official Announcements of the Authorities]") was resumed, which began the process of issuing German daily newspapers for the Polish population. The inauguration of next press titles took place later – in October 1939, at that time next dailies appeared on the emerging publishing market in the General Gouvernement: "Kurier Radomski", "Nowy Kurier Warszawski", and "Goniec Krakowski"²⁴. The proclamation of the General Gouvernement of 26 October 1939 was accompanied by the regulation about printing matter, which introduced the requirement of permits to conduct any kind of publishing activity²⁵. Official supervision was also introduced over

²¹ S. Nawrocki, *Hitlerowska okupacja Wielkopolski w okresie zarządu wojskowego. Wrzesień–październik 1939 r.*, Poznań 1966, p. 228.

²² L. Dobroszycki, *Prasa w Polsce w okresie kampanii wrześniowej (1–28 września 1939 r.)*, "RHCP" 1966, 5/1, p. 32.

²³ S. Lewandowska, *Polska konspiracyjna prasa informacyjno-polityczna 1939–1945*, Warszawa 1982, p. 31.

²⁴ In early 1940, "Nowy Głos Lubelski" began to be issued in the Lublin District, and after the creation of the Galicia District in 1941, "Gazeta Lwowska" appeared. In this way, each district had at least one information daily.

²⁵ The regulation on publication of printing matter of 26 October 1939, "Verordnungsblatt des Generalgouverneurs für die besetzten polnischen Gebiete – The Journal of Regulations of General Governor for the Occupied Polish Areas/Dziennik Rozporządzeń Generalnego Gubernatora dla Okupowanych Polskich Obszarów" [hereinafter: "Verordnungsblatt"], 1939, no. 1, p. 8. The occupation publication law was created by numerous decrees and complementary executive provisions. For more, Vide for example: B. Góra,

musical, artistic, theater, film, literary and press activity²⁶. Moreover, all publishing activity regarding books, periodicals, calendars and musical scores was prohibited by way of a directive²⁷.

It clearly follows from the above decisions and practice that the Germans sought to create a situation of communicative coercion through an information monopoly and isolation from other information sources.

The information situation of Polish society in September 1939 was dramatic. Local press titles, which appeared until about mid-September²⁸, implemented strategies of defense propaganda and urged readers to cooperate with the army to defend the mother country, trying to kindle patriotic feelings and calling for perseverance in the hour of trial²⁹. Already on the first day of the war, the Polish authorities decided that the press and radio would inform about the course of the war exclusively by announcing the communiqués issued by the Headquarters of the Commander in Chief, transmitted via the Polish Telegraph Agency³⁰. Pre-

K. Woźniakowski, *Bibliografia jawnych druków polskojęzycznych Generalnego Gubernatorstwa 1939–1945*, Kraków 2008, pp. 6–12.

²⁶ The regulation about the cultural activity in the General Gouvernement, of 8 March 1940, "Verordnungsblatt" 1940, part 1, no. 21, pp. 103–104.

²⁷ The first executive provision to the regulation of 31 October 1940 r., "Verordnungsblatt", part 2, 1940, no. 67, pp. 513–514.

²⁸ For example: "Expres Lubelski" appeared intermittently until 17 September, "Dziennik Polski" in Lvov until 20 September. An exceptional situation arose in Poland's capital. In the fighting Warsaw, "Expres Poranny", "Dobry wieczór! Kurier Czerwony", "Kurier Warszawski", "Polska Zbrojna", and "Gazeta Polska" appeared with varying frequency. On 17 September a temporary press agency was set up, which published "Biuletyn Prasowy dla użytku pism warszawskich" ["Press Bulletin for the use of Warsaw newspapers"] between 11 and 20 September 1939. Warsaw's last dailies were issued on 23 September. On 27 September 1939, "Gazeta Wspólna" was established through the merger of five editorial offices. It managed to publish three issues of this newspaper. L. Dobroszycki, *Prasa jawna*, pp. 157–161.

²⁹ An example can be "Kurier Poznański", which, in the last issue of 9 September 1939, in the face of the Germans approaching the city, assured the readers about a complete readiness to defend the motherland and the belief in victory: 'All Polish hearts are beating right now in a concordant rhythm with the heart of each soldier, holding back the enemy's further advance [...] We will grit our teeth with true Great Poland fortitude and will hold out, trusting in God's grace and power, and the awareness of the fact that the ultimate decision will be not be made in Poland but on the western front'. Quoted after: *ibidem*, pp. 153–154.

³⁰ The Commander in Chief's Headquarters issued eight official communiqués.

ventive censorship was also enforced. In practice, the Polish press often carried out misinformation activities, giving false information³¹.

THE 'REPTILE' PRESS REPORTING ABOUT THE POLISH CAMPAIGN OF 1939.

During the defensive war, the collaborationist 'reptile' press did not yet appear except for the above-mentioned "Goniec Częstochowski". Information dailies began to be published from October 1939, already after the end of the Battle of Kock and the defense of the Hel Peninsula, when the defensive war came to an end. For that reason, the news items about the course of military operations published in the 'reptile' papers are mostly retrospective and fragmentary. Only "Goniec Częstochowski" could provide current information from mid-September. On the basis of the 'reptile' press of 1939, it is possible to show how the course of military operations was used for the needs of the concurrent psychological and information war. The course of the defensive war became the first subject used by the occupier in the process of changing the society's perception of the then current events. These measures were meant to gradually transform convictions and opinions, as well as to shape the desired attitudes. The Germans were aware that the efficacy of propaganda depends, inter alia, on presenting the subjects that would draw people's attention – the subject matter of war was without doubt such a theme. Using the information chaos, they therefore tried to sow the seeds of doubt by presenting a different point of view. At this stage of both the psychological and conventional warfare, it was entirely sufficient. And since the picture of the war as presented by the 'reptile' press was clearly opposed to the official Polish picture created on the basis of the communiqués of the Commander in Chief's Headquarters, the seeds of doubt were sown with each issue of the newspaper.

Already in the first issue of the "Goniec Częstochowski" of 14 September 1939, one can observe the key elements of the strategy adopted by the occupier for informing and telling about the war, placing the war events in the designed storyline and giving them specific meanings. Its

³¹ For example: newspapers wrote about the bombing of Berlin by Polish airplanes, See: *Bombardowanie Berlina*, "Wieczór Warszawski" 6 September 1939, p. 2; On the beginning of the allied offensive in the West, vide for example: *Zwycięski pochód armii francuskiej w głąb Niemiec*, "Dobry wieczór! Kurier Czerwony" 14 September 1939, p. 1; *Niemcy wzięci w dwa ognie. Porty niemieckie zbombardowane przez lotników angielskich. Kawaleria polska wkroczyła do Prus Wschodnich. Wojska francuskie rozpoczęły akcje na morzu, lądzie i w powietrzu*, "Dzień dobry!" 5 September 1939, p. 1.

first and probably most important element was writing about the war as if it had already been won. Bilingual titles informed about Adolf Hitler's visit to Lodz (Łódź)³² and about the escape of the Polish government to Romania³³. The titles, especially the one concerning the Polish government, were meant without doubt to shock the readers, weaken the morale and present the war as already decided. The contents referring to those titles assumed the form of short journalistic paragraphs and contained false information. According to "Goniec Częstochowski", Hitler arrived in Łódź (Lodz) on 13 September and received enthusiastic welcome by the crowds of Łódź inhabitants, who were allegedly: '[...] proud that their city, which is one of the largest in Poland, was honored with the presence of the Führer and Reich Chancellor'³⁴. On the contrary, that visit was a closely kept secret. The Łódź German minority indeed cheered in honor of the German troops entering the city but this took place on 9 September 1939, when Hitler had not yet come to Łódź³⁵. In turn, the article devoted to the Polish government informed that allegedly as early as on 13 September 1939: 'The Polish government left Lublin and went to Romania in order to find shelter in a secure place in case of approaching danger'³⁶. The rumor about 'the Government's escape' and the one about the presence of the Government in Lublin, in which they in fact never arrived, reflect to some extent the information chaos at the beginning of the war but also the social panic, fear and anxiety about the future. In social memory there were lasting assurances about the readiness of the Polish Army to repulse the German attack. The information given by the Polish press about successes in fighting the invader and the commencement of an armed offensive by the allies was widely believed³⁷. At the same time one could observe evacuations of local authorities and

³² Adolf Hitler u żołnierzy w Łodzi, "GC" 14 September 1939, p. 1.

³³ Rząd polski opuszcza okłamany naród, "GC" 14 September 1939, p. 1.

³⁴ Adolf Hitler u żołnierzy w Łodzi, "GC" 14 September 1939, p. 1.

³⁵ J. Wróbel, *Mniejszość niemiecka w Łódzkiem we wrześniu 1939 roku*; in: *Rok 1939 w Łodzi i w województwie łódzkim. Losy ludności cywilnej*, eds. A. Kuprianis, E. Ślęzak, Łódź-Warszawa, 2016, pp. 51–67.

³⁶ Rząd polski opuszcza okłamany naród, "GC" 14 September 1939, p. 1.

³⁷ Examples of such articles: *Dwie dywizje niemieckie rozbite. Wolska polskie wzięły 100 jeńców, wiele czołgów i sprzętu wojennego. W 2 dni Niemcy stracili 35 samolotów, "Dobry wieczór! Kurier Czerwony"* 14 September 1939, p. 1; *Urządowe potwierdzenie odbicia Łodzi przez polskie wojska, "Dobry wieczór! Kurier Czerwony"* 15 September 1939, p. 1; *Przed generalną ofensywą na Zachodzie. Wojska francuskie na przedmieściach Saarbrücken. Forsowanie drugiej linii Zygfryda, Ibidem*.

of the Government in Warsaw carried out in front of the people's eyes³⁸, mass escapes of the civilian population from the battle-stricken areas and the marches of defeated units of the Polish Army. The exodus of different social groups was accompanied by the sharing of people's own experiences, observations, and conveyance of rumors and hearsay information. It was difficult to assess which of that information was true. Although the information communicated by the Germans was not trusted, it was advantageous from the viewpoint of the occupation authorities to fuel rumors about the escape of the Polish government. The Germans hoped to initiate the process of polarization of attitudes and feelings. The target group was the politically less conscious part of Polish society. It was expected that – in the face of information/rumors about the collapse of the Polish state/escape of its authorities³⁹ – at least some part of this group would soon adopt the attitude of submission to the more powerful in order to survive⁴⁰.

News from the front in the form of dispatches were to confirm and lend credence the claim about the Third Reich's certain victory in the still ongoing war, by informing about the rapid progress of the German offensive in all sections of the front. The first communiqué of the German Armed Forces High Command that was published by the 'reptile' press informed about the victorious end of the battle of Iłża and about the forward units reaching the outskirts of Lvov⁴¹.

The complement to the created picture of the already won war was the texts of editorial character, which presented the German standpoint on the causes of the outbreak of the conflict. The Polish authorities were

³⁸ The attitudes of representatives of the authorities were also different. Not all of them decided to leave. Some stayed in their towns, organized defense, mutual aid, and mobilized local communities. A symbolic figure for this type of attitudes is Warsaw's President (Mayor) Stefan Starzyński.

³⁹ The next issue again publicized the escape of the Polish Government. This time, at least partly, the information about the evacuation to Romania was withdrawn. It reported about the retreat to "unknown places in the east of Poland, and even partly abroad". This was to settle the fate of the Polish state: "Thus the fate of the Polish army and the previous rulers is settled". But it did not speak about the fate of the society for whom obedience and reason were to ensure "a better future". *Obecna sytuacja wojenna*, "GC" 17 September 1939, p. 1.

⁴⁰ The dangers of German propaganda already in the early period of the war are pointed out by Jacek Chrobaczyński in the monograph devoted to the attitudes of Krakow inhabitants towards the war and occupation. In his view this might have weakened the fighting spirit and resulted in the adoption of narrative about the permanent fall of the Polish state see: J. Chrobaczyński, *Postawy, zachowania i nastroje – społeczeństwo Krakowa wobec wojny i okupacji 1939–1945*, Kraków 1993, p. 59.

⁴¹ *Kłęska wojsk polskich pod Radomiem*, "GC" 14 September 1939, p. 1.

criticized for their prewar foreign policy. The articles explaining the causes of the outbreak of the war used the framework of conflict and moral responsibility, thereby trying to transfer responsibility for the outbreak of the war from the invader onto the victim⁴². For this purpose, the narrative was used constructed as part of psychological and information measures preceding the outbreak of the war. To present the way of defining the causes of war, the following quotation will be used 'The errors of the Warsaw government committed in the recent months are simply terrifying in their consequences. The Polish population fell victim to simply a historical crime committed by the government authorities together with the lodges of Jewish-English Freemasons. As late as in the last days of August, the leader and chancellor of the Great Reich Adolf Hitler proposed to solve the contentious issue together with the competent Polish authorities. The conditions he proposed were so far-reaching and simply the only ones. Regrettably, the Warsaw gentlemen did not show the least willingness to negotiate. The Polish population was incited against the German population living in Poland to such a degree that this minority was outrageously oppressed and terrorized. [...] The Great German Reich was compelled to protect its compatriots in Poland by armed action'⁴³. This short excerpt clearly shows that the narrative was focused on the conflict and its parties. The Polish side was presented as intransigent, unwilling to negotiate, yielding to bad advisers, and also as aggressive and provoking crimes against the German minority. In the end, Poland was totally blamed for the outbreak of the war. In contrast, the German side was presented as inclined to compromise and trying to save peace. Worth noting is the construction of the individual elements of the message: the emphasis on the peaceful aspirations of the Third Reich and belittlement of the importance of facts significant from the Polish viewpoint, and only a vague mention of them, whereas the German demands towards Poland assumed the form of the 'far-reaching and only conditions'. Due to the abovementioned linguistic devices, the Third Reich's invasion of Poland

⁴² The theory of interpretive frames assumes that in communicative texts, by selecting information and highlighting it, definitions of given problems/events are constructed in such a way as if they were commonly interpreted in this way. See: K. Wasilewski, *Framing i analiza ramowa – stan badań we współczesnym metaloznawstwie. Przegląd stanowisk badawczych*, "Media-Kultura-Komunikacja Społeczna" 2018, 14, p. 94. Holli Semetko and Patti M. Valkenburg have distinguished five main interpretive frames: those of moral superiority, economic consequences, conflict, human affairs, and the frame of responsibility. See: H. Semetko, P.M. Valkenburg, *Framing European Politics: A Content Analysis of Press and Television News*, "Journal of Communication" 2000, 50 (2), pp. 95–96.

⁴³ *Uwagi wstępne*, "GC" 14 September 1939, pp. 1–2.

was interpreted as a conflict into which the Third Reich was thrust. On the interpretive level, the war was thereby to become a just war.

The narrative presented here, explaining the circumstances of the outbreak of the war, was repeated by successive newspapers. In its first issue, "Nowy Kurier Warszawski" presented a more detailed description of the circumstances that led to the Polish-German conflict. In this case, the text spoke openly inter alia of the demands to return Gdansk and establish an extraterritorial corridor to East Prussia, calling them, however, euphemistically 'wishes': 'The Polish government was notified about the German wishes already from 24 October 1938 and informed in at least four talks not only about their nature but also about the German intentions to normalize the situation on Germany's eastern frontier as part of friendly relations and by way of PEACE [...] Therefore in no way can one speak about some German ultimatum or threats of attack'⁴⁴. In comparison with the earlier article from "Goniec Częstochowski" the narrative was broadened, specifying the essence of the conflict. The conflict in turn, because of the strong polarization of stances and lack of good will on the Polish side could not be settled in a peaceful way, contrary to the intentions of the Third Reich⁴⁵.

A permanent element included in 'reptile' (collaborationist) narratives was also the criticism of the Polish military commanders and officer corps, which was obviously aimed at weakening the morale of the still fighting country. Numerous texts emphasized the unpreparedness of the Polish Army for the war, cowardice and poor training of officers. This was to be confirmed by the texts of diaries found on battlefields, which spoke of demoralization, desertion, as well as difficulties with communication, logistics and supplies from the first days of the fights⁴⁶. Only privates were spared criticism, while their commitment and readiness for utmost sacrifice were appreciated⁴⁷. However, the words of recognition

⁴⁴ *Ważne wyjaśnienia wypadków poprzedzających konflikt niemiecko-polski*, "Nowy Kurier Warszawski" 11 October 1939, p. 1. Vide also: „Co wypisywano przed wybuchem konfliktu <JAK WYGLĄDA GOTOWOŚĆ NIEMIECKA> W jaki sposób wprowadzano w błąd społeczeństwo polskie. Przypomnienie na czasie, *ibidem*, p. 2.

⁴⁵ In another text with a derisive title "Children at the helm", the Polish authorities were accused of lack of knowledge of the international situation and political naivety: "The Polish nation perished because the Reich's political strength and military advantage was not properly assessed by the Polish government, and secondly, we did not want to believe that Poland had been used for the purposes of English foreign policy". See: *Dzieci u steru!*, "GC" 24 September 1939, p. 1.

⁴⁶ Dr Vogel, *Z pamiętnika polskiego oficera. Dokument stwierdzający przyczyny upadku polskiej armii*, "GC" 27 September 1939, p. 2.

⁴⁷ *Polskie okręty zatopione*, "GC" 17 September 1939, p. 1.

for the valor of Polish soldiers concealed the covered-up difficulties that the Germans had to cope with while attempting to break through the Polish defenses.

Out of many publications on the subject, especially interesting – because of the propaganda techniques utilized – appear the articles in which General Janusz Gąsiorowski⁴⁸ and Commander in Chief himself, Edward Rydz-Śmigły⁴⁹ allegedly express their critical opinions about the war. After being taken German prisoner as a result of the defeat of the 7th Częstochowa Infantry Division, which he commanded, Gąsiorowski reputedly said during a conversation with a German officer that he ‘went to the war he never approved’, only fulfilling his duty towards his Fatherland. In contrast, he reportedly spoke of the German army with high regard⁵⁰. Rydz-Śmigły, in turn, while talking to ‘a high church dignitary’ already after his escape to Romania, allegedly admitted that ‘as early as on the second day of the war he became convinced that the war would be lost. All communication between groups of military units was broken. Each army fought battles on their own’⁵¹. It was then that he considered capitulation but he ultimately did not do so, believing that the United Kingdom would fulfill its allied obligations. In these articles one can see the attempt to back up the propaganda message about the disastrous preparation for the war by reference to oral testimonies. In addition, in the case of Rydz-Śmigły’s account, we are also dealing with the use of church authority.

On 17 September 1939, the article *Obecna sytuacja wojenna* suggested the possibility of attack from the Soviet Union: ‘The powerful Russia, which never recognized Poland’s eastern borders as legitimate, also strengthened its border by stationing a huge military army, the use of which after the conclusion of the latest German-Russian treaty can be aimed exclusively against Poland’⁵². On that day, a Soviet propaganda communiqué was published about the encroachment of Soviet airspace by Polish airplanes⁵³. Those communiqués were probably not interpreted as a signal of attack. It can be supposed that greater attention was probably

⁴⁸ Gen. J. Gąsiorowski’s biographical entry, see: P. Stawecki, *Słownik biograficzny generałów Wojska Polskiego 1918–1939*, Warszawa 1994, pp. 119–120.

⁴⁹ See: M. Jabłonowski, P. Stawecki, *Następca Komendanta Edward Rydz-Śmigły. Materiały do biografii*, Pułtusk 2013.

⁵⁰ *Jak wzięto do niewoli generała Gąsiorowskiego. Najstarszy współpracownik marszałka Piłsudskiego w niewoli*, “GC” 27 September 1939, p. 2.

⁵¹ *Rydz-Śmigły chciał zawrzeć pokój. Perfidna Anglia nie dopuściła do pokoju*, “GC” 29 September 1939, p. 1.

⁵² *Obecna sytuacja wojenna*, “GC” 17 September 1939, p. 1.

⁵³ *Polskie samoloty naruszyły granicę Rosji Sowieckiej*, “GC” 17 September 1939, p. 2.

drawn by the information about the course of the front line: at that time there were reports that the attempts of the Polish troops at Kutno to fight their way in the south-eastern direction were thwarted, and about the fights in Brest-Litovsk and the capture of Gdynia⁵⁴.

The way of reporting the fight for Warsaw revealed that the German troops encountered difficulties and the whole operation lasted longer than expected. This was signaled by the elaborate smear campaign against the Polish authorities and the extension of its scope with moral and ethical aspects. In the context of fights for the capital, the newspapers regretted that the Polish authorities had not followed Czechoslovakia's example and not decided to capitulate but chosen the path of war: '[...] Czechoslovakia's government spared the civilian population the terror of war, casualties and bloodshed. However, the Polish government with imprudent potentates led the army to pointless fights, drawing the poor civilian population, for which they will bear terrible and ruthless consequences'⁵⁵. The calls on the population to resist were condemned as signs of irresponsibility and cruelty. Examples were given of cities – Lodz, Krakow, Częstochowa – in which life was going on normally, because they surrendered without fighting⁵⁶. It was announced that: '[...] a part of Warsaw will be reduced to ruins'⁵⁷, thus revealing frankly that decisions had been taken to force the city to capitulate by using heavy artillery and airforce, regardless of the civil population.

The presented praise of passivity as the only sensible attitude towards the dynamically changing socio-political and military reality was at the same time a warning the Germans would have no mercy towards any attempt to resist. The example of Warsaw was to serve as a caution. The warnings were addressed to Lvov: 'In Małopolska [Lesser Poland] German motorized units are reaching Lvov – if they [defenders] do not surrender, they will suffer the same fate as Warsaw did'⁵⁸. The texts thereby show the readers the next city that tried to defend itself and with the capture of which the Germans had problems. Contrary to the publisher's intentions, this could let the readers cherish hopes that not everything was yet lost.

An example of disinformation measures can be the information that on 17 September 1939 the Command Headquarters of Warsaw's defense

⁵⁴ *Gdynia w posiadaniu wojsk niemieckich*, "GC" 17 September 1939, p. 1; *Polskie okręty zatopione*, *ibidem*, p. 1.

⁵⁵ *Obecna sytuacja wojenna*, "GC" 17 September 1939, p. 1.

⁵⁶ *Z miasta i okolicy: Częstochowa wróciła do normalnej pracy*, *ibidem*, p. 2.

⁵⁷ *Ważny komunikat*, "GC" 17 September 1939, p. 2.

⁵⁸ *Lwów wezwany do poddania się*, "GC" 20 September 1939, p. 1.

sent a radio request to the German Army Command to receive a peace envoy⁵⁹. No information was given, however, about what the negotiations would be about, although one may expect that they would be about the terms of surrender. Despite the favorable reception of request, the Polish side eventually withdrew from this idea and did not send an emissary. This theme was developed in the next issues. The criticism for 'failure to send an emissary' fell on General Walerian Czum⁶⁰, commander of the defense of the capital⁶¹. The negotiations which, according to the "reptile" press, did not take place were to concern the evacuation of the civil population. It appears that in this story, apart from the obvious charges of responsibility for the massacre of civilians and attempts to transfer responsibility from the perpetrator (invader) onto the victim, we are also dealing with the total falsification of the events of 16 September 1939, when it was the Germans who sent their envoy to Warsaw with a mission to negotiate the terms of surrender. General Juliusz Rómmel⁶², Commander of the Army "Warszawa (Warsaw)", refused, however, to hold talks⁶³.

On 20 September 1939 the papers published the official Soviet note addressed to the Polish ambassador to the Soviet Union, Wacław Grzybowski, and informed about the entry of the Red Army into Poland⁶⁴. The text of the note, which spoke of the collapse of the Polish state, as well as the fact of the entry of the Soviet troops into Poland, appeared to confirm what the German propaganda tried to convince people about from the very beginning: that the war had already been settled. This message was strengthened by reference to the opinions of the foreign media.⁶⁵ On the basis of the news item from Bucharest, the information was confirmed about the 'escape' of the supreme Polish authorities to Romania⁶⁶. Communiqués from the front once again reported further successes of the Wehrmacht. The information was published about the fall of the Brest Fortress, the occupation of Lublin, and the complete encirclement of Lvov.

⁵⁹ *Czwarta część armii polskiej osaczona*, "GC" 20 September 1939, p. 1; *Nowy komunikat wojskowy. Lwów wezwany do poddania się*, *ibidem*.

⁶⁰ Gen. W. Czum^a's biographical entry, see: Z. Mierzwiński, *Generałowie II Rzeczypospolitej*, Warszawa 1990, pp. 65–69.

⁶¹ *Straszna nędba w Warszawie. Okropna odpowiedzialność generała Czumi*, "GC" 22 September 1939, p. 2.

⁶² Gen. J. Rómmel's biographical entry, see: P. Stawecki, *op. cit.*, pp. 284–286.

⁶³ The German envoy was Major Kiewitz, who was awarded the Iron Cross for his mission. See: T. Szarota, *Misja mjr. Kiewitza. Niemiecki parlamentarzysta w Warszawie w przeddzień sowieckiej agresji*, "Dzieje Najnowsze" 1994, 26, 4, pp. 61–72.

⁶⁴ *Jak brzmi nota sowiecka*, "GC" 20 September 1939, p. 1.

⁶⁵ *Ostatni akt polskiego dramatu*, "GC" 20 September 1939, p. 1.

⁶⁶ *Prezydent Mościcki i Rząd Polski uciekli do Rumunii*, "GC" 20 September 1939, p. 1.

The Wehrmacht units in the eastern part of the country were reportedly on the Lvov – Volodymyr Volynsky – Brest-on-the-Bug – Białystok line⁶⁷.

The prevalent reports and information in next issues of “Goniec Częstochowski” were about the ending of the largest battle of the campaign – the Battle of Bzura as well as about the rapid progress of the Soviet offensive and German-Soviet cooperation in the region of Lvov⁶⁸. There was an account of Hitler’s Gdansk speech, emphasizing the historic moment: ‘It is the memorable day for all times, the day which was engraved in letters of gold in the history of the City of Gdansk. On that day the Führer incorporated the ancient German city into the Great Reich’⁶⁹. Like earlier in Lodz, crowds reportedly cheered Hitler. In the speech itself, Hitler repeated the narrative (already known from the prewar period) about the disgrace of the Versailles Peace Treaty, the artificial nature of the Polish state and the persecution of the German minority in Poland

On 1 October 1939, the information was announced about the unconditional surrender of the capital⁷⁰. The surrender of the Hel Peninsula was announced on 4 October⁷¹. Also the information was made public about the new Treaty of Borders and Friendship between the Third Reich and the Soviet Union⁷². On 11 October 1939, a report appeared about the end of the Battle of Kock⁷³.

In “Goniec Częstochowski” an information item appeared about the death of Werner von Fritsch⁷⁴, who died in Zacisze on 22 September 1939.

⁶⁷ *Czwarta część armii polskiej osaczona; Nowy komunikat wojskowy. Lwów wezwany do podania się; Co pisze Moskwa; “GC” 20 September 1939, p. 1.*

⁶⁸ *Największa bitwa – niezliczona zdobycz. Ponad 100.000 jeńców polskich w bitwie nad Bzurą; “GC” 22 September 1939, p. 1; Wiadomości frontowe, Ibidem; Nieustanny marsz Armii Czerwonej, Ibidem; Pińsk zajęty przez oddziały sowiecie, “GC” 24 September 1939, p. 1*

⁶⁹ *Mowa Adolfa Hitlera w Gdańsku, “GC” 22 September 1939, p. 2.*

⁷⁰ *Warszawa i Modlin skapitulowały, “GC” 1 October 1939, p. 1.*

⁷¹ *Ostatni punkt oporu – Hel, skapitulował, “GC” 4 October 1939, p. 1*

⁷² *Wyniki wizyta min. Ribbentropa, “GC” 1 October 1939, p. 1; W Spokój i porządek w obszarze dawnego państwa polskiego, ibidem. The approval of the treaty was reported by “Kurier Radomski”, The Fuhrer of the Reich ratified the German-Russian Pact “KR” 29 October 1939, p. 6.*

⁷³ *Kapitulacja pod Kockiem, “GC” 11 October 1939, p. 1.*

⁷⁴ Werner von Fritsch – born 4 August 1880 was one of the most influential German commanders in the interwar period. In 1934 he was appointed Chief of the Supreme Command of the Ground Forces. In that capacity he introduced numerous reforms and modernization of the German army. However, his career was broken in 1938 when he was accused of homosexuality and alleged sabotage. Despite lack of evidence, von Fritsch was dismissed from his post and transferred to the reserve. It turned out later that accusations against von Fritsch were a part of a political intrigue and action of the SS Security Service.

According to the quoted account of a witness, he was probably wounded twice in the thigh, which caused his death⁷⁵. The circumstances of General Fritsch's death remain unclear⁷⁶. The scope of the present article compels the author to leave the signaled doubts concerning General von Fritsch's death on the margin of the discussion and to focus attention on the very fact of the appearance of the news on that subject in the newspaper. In view of the German propaganda objectives, one of them being to break the morale of the Poles, that publication may appear controversial. It could heighten the morale rather than weaken it. The fact should however be noted that the same number of "Goniec Częstochowski" also published the photograph showing General Władysław Bortnowski, Commander of the Army 'Pomorze [Pomerania], taken captive'⁷⁷. The juxtaposition of the news items – about the heroic death of the German general and of the capture of Gen. Bortnowski together with his subordinate Polish troops – was a deliberate move that was to show the difference in the attitude of military commanders. German generals lay down their lives on the battlefield whereas Polish generals surrender. In addition, in the case of General Bortnowski, his picture was published with a short but meaningful caption stressing the success of the German offensive⁷⁸. The material about General Bortnowski was better exhibited despite the fact

The general was restored to the Supreme Command but during World War Two von Fritsch did not regain his position in the army. During the Polish campaign he held advisory functions as the honorary chief of the 12th Artillery Regiment. See: R. Nowak, *Werner baron von Fritsch: śmierć niemieckiego generała w pierwszych dniach II wojny światowej*, in: *Spojrzenie na polski wrzesień 1939 roku*, ed. T. Kondracki, Warszawa 2011, pp. 79–93.

⁷⁵ *Generał – major von Fritsch zmarł śmiercią bohatera*, "GC" 4 October 1939, p. 1. In 1940 the war chronicle published in "Nowy Kurier Warszawski", the death of the general was mentioned only in one sentence that he fell in battle near Warsaw on 22 September 1939. See: *Rok temu...*, "NKW" 21/22 September 1940, p. 2.

⁷⁶ The Polish literature on the subject contains information that von Fritsch was killed on 15 September 1939 in Cechówka. In contrast, the Germans deliberately falsified the date of the general's actual death. See: S. Kazimierski, *Niepokorny generał Werner von Fritsch i jego tajemnicza śmierć we wrześniu 1939*, "Mars. Problematyka i Historia Wojskowości. Studia i Materiały" 2003, 15, pp. 225–249. In the German literature the date of death is not challenged but there are different theories about its circumstances. According to some sources the general committed suicide while others suggest that that he was murdered by the SS. The propaganda campaign that made von Fritsch a hero is interpreted as counteracting the British propaganda, which openly suggested that the German Headquarters falsified the circumstances of the general's death. See: G. Brausch, *Der Tod des Generalobersten Werner Freiherr von Fritsch*, "Militaergeschichtliche Zeitschrift" 1970, 7, 1.

⁷⁷ Gen.W. Bortnowski's biographical entry, see: P. Stawecki, *op. cit.*, pp. 85–86.

⁷⁸ *Generał Bortnowski w niewoli (fotografia)*, "GC" 4 October 1939, p. 1. Vide also: *Rok temu...*, "NKW" 21/22 September 1940, p. 2.

that the two information items were placed on the same, front page. Owing to the two measures, possible undesirable reactions to the death of one of German commanders were weakened and the image of German heroism was created.

The September war came to an end but the September subject was still present in "Goniec Częstochowski", whereas the daily papers that began to appear from October 1939 published articles summing up the finished campaign as well as discussing its selected events⁷⁹. They were not free from mistakes and inaccuracies. "Kurier Radomski" wrote about a general who was never a member of the Polish Army – a certain general Prystol, Commander of the Army "Południe" ("South")⁸⁰. Furthermore, this invented general was one of the few whom the 'reptile' press presented in favorable terms. He won recognition from German propagandists for the alleged surrender of Krakow without resistance⁸¹.

Articles continued to appear about the drama of the civil population during the defense of Warsaw⁸². They tried to show the scale of disinformation of the Polish society by the Polish authorities and the media, including the London radio⁸³. References were made to the oral accounts told by defenders of Warsaw who were taken prisoner. According to one such account, a Polish officer reportedly told a German soldier 'Aren't you reading newspapers, men? We surrendered Warsaw only under pressure from the civil population and because we did not have enough ammunition. The English have taken Gdansk and our troops will soon meet the

⁷⁹ See: *Wojna niemiecko-polska. Jakie były plany polskiego sztabu generalnego? Ofensywa niemiecka*, "KR" 29 October 1939, pp. 1–2; *Wydobycie polskich okrętów. Prace nad podniesieniem okrętów w zatoce gdańskiej*, "KR" 25 December 1939, p. 5; *Kierownicy polityki polskiej służyli celom imperialistycznym*, "GK" 31 October 1939, p. 1; *Eden głównym winowajcom. Dokument stwierdzający, że winę rozpetania wojny ponosi Anglia*, "GK" 3 November 1939, p. 1; 1939, *rok wielkich sukcesów niemieckich*, "KC" 31 December 1939, p. 7.

⁸⁰ *Od Odry do Dniestru i Bugu. Walki niemiecko-polskie na południowym froncie. Z cyklu "Wojna Niemiecko-Polska"*, "KR" 12 November 1939, pp. 5–6. In the fonds: Generals and Higher Personages in the Central Military Archive the only person with the surname Prystor is Aleksander Prystor. An infantry colonel of the Polish Army, associate of Józef Piłsudski. Poland's Prime Minister from 27 May 1931 to 9 May 1933. When the war broke out, he was not in the active service. See: *Kolekcja generałów i wyższych osobistości CAW*, https://wbh.wp.mil.pl/pdfviewer/?f=c/scans/KGiO/I_480_702.pdf [access: 15.12.2023].

⁸¹ Cracow was surrendered by the then Mayor of the city, Stanisław Klimecki, on 6 September 1939. S. Klimas's biographical entry, see: https://www.poczetkrakowski.pl/tomy/show_article,stanislaw-klimecki-1125.html [access: 15.12.2023].

⁸² *Milionowe miasto fortecą. Tragiczne skutki bezsensownej obrony Warszawy*, "GC" 7 October 1939, p. 1.

⁸³ *Żołnierze warszawscy opowiadają*, "GC" 8 October 1939, p. 2.

French near Berlin'⁸⁴. Hearing the news that neither the French nor the English crossed the German border, the officer allegedly burst out crying.

The information given by the Polish newspapers⁸⁵ about the destruction of Częstochowa's Jasna Góra sanctuary was also denied by the "reptile" press⁸⁶.

After the end of the military operations the newspapers began to bring up the subject important for the social history of the beginning of the war and occupation – the mass exodus of the population⁸⁷. "Kurier Radomski" published reprints of reports from German newspapers such as: "Völkischer Beobachter" and "Deutsche Allgemeine Zeitung"⁸⁸. These reprints are interesting because, despite their propagandistic nature and probably also contrary to the intentions of the publishers, they show the human dimension of the experience of war, its horrors and brutality. When describing people's returns home, it was observed: 'Here and there shocking scenes can be seen. Here's a woman digging in the ruins of her former house, which burnt down during fights. Many abodes are reduced only to stoves and chimneys, all the rest is rubble and charred wreckage. Further on, children are playing inside a burnt-down bus, or they are playing pounding the walls of a shot-down plane to the point of thundering! They have already forgotten about the war'⁸⁹. Notice was also taken of the problems of overpopulation in larger towns, problems concerning food and difficulties connected with journeys, often on foot, over hundreds of kilometers across the war-afflicted country. The traces of war were visible at every turn. 'Everywhere there are traces of fights all the way and first of all the traces of bombing by German airplanes, which

⁸⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁸⁵ Przykładowe artykuły z prasy polskiej, see: *Zbrodnicza ręka hitlerowskiego barbarzyńcy nie zawahała się obrzucić bombami Jasną Górę – święty relikwiarz Polaków*, "Expres Poranny" 4 September 1939, p. 1; *Śmierć i zniszczenie złoczyńcom, którzy zbombardowali Jasną Górę*, "Wieczór Warszawski" 4 September 1939, p. 1; *Falę gniewu w całym świecie wzbudziło bezecne sprofanowanie Jasnej Góry przez barbarzyńskie hordy germańskie*, "Goniec Warszawski" 5 September 1939, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁶ *Kłamstwa o zniszczeniu Jasnej Góry przez wojska niemieckie*, "GC" 1 October 1939, p. 2; *Na plebanii w Rogowie. Wizyta u polskiego proboszcza*, "GC" 8 October 1939, p. 1.

⁸⁷ *Wracamy do domu. Masowe wędrówki w Polsce nad nową granicą niemiecko-rosyjską*, "KR" 24 November 1939, pp. 3–4; *Fotografia – Uciekinierzy wracają do domów*, "GC" 20 October 1939, p. 1.

⁸⁸ "Kurier Radomski" also reprinted texts on general war subjects from the military newspapers "Soldaten Zeitung": *Trzeci miesiąc wojny. Nowe możliwości*, "KR" 7 November 1939, pp. 1–2.

⁸⁹ *Wycieczka nad nową niemiecko-rosyjską granicę. Wrażenia specjalnego wysłannika "Völkischer Beobachter"*, "KR" 29 October 1939, p. 4.

continued to impede the Polish retreat⁹⁰. For the 'reptile' (collaborationist) picture of the war, dominated by the military presentation of clashes in individual battles, the problem of the suffering of civilian population did not actually exist. This was thus a thematic novelty, which, however, was never continued or presented more broadly in the later period.

Another important subject brought up by the "reptile" newspapers and German press at the same time was the issue of the use of war gases by Polish soldiers near Jasło. The information on the subject appeared on 13 October 1939, while mustard gas was reportedly used on 8 September 1939. The propaganda campaign connected with mustard gas was aimed mainly against England, which was accused of supplying Poland with this warfare agent banned by international law. "Goniec Częstochowski" published photographs of alleged victims of the use of mustard gas by Polish troops and reports on the work of special commission appointed to investigate the matter. Some inaccuracies can be noticed in these reports: two different surnames of the head of the commission were given: at one time the team was reputedly headed by Professor Couller⁹¹ from Switzerland, and some other time by Professor Rudolf Stachelin⁹². The discovery of more stocks of mustard gas in Poland was also revealed⁹³.

Historiography and specialist literature on chemical weapons and military science knows this theme of German propaganda⁹⁴. Nevertheless, it has not been finally explained even today what happened on the bridge in Jasło on 8 September 1939. The propaganda campaign itself also raises certain doubts and prompts questions. Why was the matter revealed so late? Why were the accusations focused on England as the supplier rather than Poland, which allegedly used the prohibited agent? The issue of "Goniec Częstochowski" preceding the one that disclosed

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁹¹ *Użycie gazów bojowych pod Jasłem. Przygwożdżone kłamstwo angielskiej propagandy*, "GC" 13 October 1939, p. 1. Vide also: *Żołnierz niemiecki zatruty iperytem (fotografia)*, "GC" 18 October 1939, p. 1.

⁹² *Anglia dostarczyła Polsce gazów trujących! Złamanie prawa międzynarodowego*, "GC" 17 October 1939, p. 2. Stachelin's name also appears in the articles in the German press about the use of mustard gas at Jasło, see: "Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung" 14 October 1939, pp. 1–2.

⁹³ *Nowe składy z angielskim iperytem w Polsce*, "GC" 20 October 1939, p. 1.

⁹⁴ Vide for example: Z. Witkiewicz, Z. Makles, K. Szarski, *Broń chemiczna na ziemiach polskich*, "Wojskowy Przegląd Historyczny" 1995, 40, 1–2, pp. 163–171; W. Włodarkiewicz, *Lwów 1939*, Warszawa 2007; M. Kloske, Z. Witkiewicz: *Broń chemiczna w XX i XXI wieku*, part 1, *Bojowe środki trujące do czasów odkrycia środków fosforoorganicznych*, "Biuletyn WAT" 2019, 3, pp. 95–118.

the use of gas published the information that the Third Reich informed England through the Swiss envoy in London about its readiness to obey the provisions of the Geneva Convention of 1935, which prohibits the use of toxic gases and bacteria. However, the Third Reich laid down a condition that England and France would also have to obey these regulations⁹⁵. Consequently, the interpretation seems justified that the disclosure of the Jasło incident could have been an element of psychological warfare and a warning addressed to England concerning the possibility of using chemical weapons against it.

In 1940, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Third Reich's aggression against Poland, the collaborationist ('reptile') press published numerous anniversary texts which presented the origin of the war and its course⁹⁶. The invasion of Poland then became part of the narrative of the realization of ancient, centuries-old German traditions aimed at broadening the cultural domination over Europe's east. It was also announced that in order to commemorate Hitler's accomplishments, the most representative squares in all towns and cities of General Gouvernement would be called "Adolf Hitler Platz"⁹⁷. The analysis of the anniversary texts enables a conclusion that one of the aims lying behind them was to demonstrate the scale of disinformation perpetrated by the Polish government. The 'reptile' press tried thereby to make itself credible as a source of reliable information and sought to gain the confidence of readers⁹⁸.

New light was shed on the visit of Field Marshal William Edmund Ironside in July 1939. The Polish press devoted considerable attention

⁹⁵ Niemcy przestrzegać będą postanowień protokołu genewskiego, "GC" 7 October 1939, p. 1.

⁹⁶ M. Środowski, *W pierwszą rocznicę wojny polsko-niemieckiej*, "GK" September 1940, pp. 3–4; Rob., *Rok wojny*, "DR" 1 September 1940, p. 2; *Minister Beck a polityka polska*, *Ibidem*, p. 3; *Powrót Sudetów do Rzeszy przysporzył Polsce Zaolzie*, *Ibidem*, p. 3.

⁹⁷ *Uroczystości w rocznicę wybuchu wojny*, "DR" 3 September 1940, p. 4.

⁹⁸ The emphasis on the 'deception' of society by the Polish press and authorities was essential in so far as the Germans failed to achieve one of the priority objectives of the information warfare – cutting off people from other sources of information and isolating them from other points of view. Already in September 1939 the first underground newspapers began to appear. Publication of underground papers, reading them and distribution was a crime punishable by death penalty or imprisonment in a concentration camp. Despite such penalization, the underground press developed successively throughout the period of World War Two. Therefore, the unmasking of the pre-war Polish media was an element of the then current information warfare. In this way the seeds of uncertainty were sown against the credibility of the information sources other than the official press. On the underground press, vide for example: S. Lewandowska, *op. cit.*

to this visit, emphasizing its great importance⁹⁹ and also the interest in it of the European media¹⁰⁰. Poland's readiness to repel a possible attack was clearly emphasized at the time¹⁰¹. The 'reptile' "Goniec Krakowski" revealed meanwhile that Field Marshal Ironside critically assessed Poland's preparation for war, stating that: 'Poland is unable to resist the German impact for...two weeks'¹⁰².

Particularly crucial, because contributing a certain novelty to the subject, were certainly the initiatives realized in "Kurier Częstochowski", "Goniec Krakowski" and in "Nowy Kurier Warszawski". "Kurier" and "Goniec" published a series of articles containing a comparative juxtaposition of German and Polish war communiqués¹⁰³. The aim of the publication of the communiqués was obviously to show the readers that it was the 'reptile' press that provided 'true' information about the September fighting whereas the Polish side 'overwhelmed by failures tried to improve the feelings of the population by providing information at variance with reality'¹⁰⁴. "Nowy Kurier Warszawski" in turn presented the war chronicle¹⁰⁵, which reconstructed the day-by-day course of the September

⁹⁹ Vide for example: *Sir Edmund Ironside w drodze do Polski na rozmowy sztabowe*, "Dobry Wieczór! Kurier Czerwony" 17 July 1939, p. 1; *Współpraca wojskowa polsko-brytyjska. Gen. sir Edmund Ironside dziś w południe u Naczelnego Wodza*, "Dobry Wieczór! Kurier Czerwony" 18 July 1939, p. 1; *Generalny inspektor wojsk brytyjskich sir Edmund Ironside przybył specjalnym samolotem do Warszawy*, "Express Poranny" 18 July 1939, p. 1; *Gen. Ironside na ćwiczeniach w Rembertowie i Modlinie*, "Express Poranny" 21 July 1939, p. 1; *Gen. Ironside wrócił do Londynu specjalnym samolotem*, "Express Poranny" 22 July 1939, p. 1.

¹⁰⁰ See: *Doniosłe narady wojskowe polsko-angielskie ośrodkiem zainteresowania opinii brytyjskiej*, "Ilustrowany Kurjer Codzienny" 19 July 1939, p. 1.

¹⁰¹ Vide Marshal Rydz-Śmigły's famous interview: *Raczej umrzeć niż żyć bez wolności*, "Dobry wieczór! Kurier Czerwony" 20 July 1939, p. 2; *Oświadczenie Rydza-Śmigłego dla prasy zagranicznej*, "Express Poranny" 20 July 1939, p. 1.

¹⁰² Ron., *Rok wojny*, "GK" 1 September 1940, p. 2. On Ironside's critical opinions about Poland's military readiness, see: R. Głowacki, *Marian Kukiel a Wincenty Witos*, in: *Historia – Wojsko – Polityka. Marian Kuliki (1885–1976) i jego działo*, eds. T. Siewierski, Z. Zielonka, Warszawa 2019, pp. 253–354.

¹⁰³ *We wrześniu 1939*, "KC" 13 September 1940, p. 5; 14 September 1940, p. 5; 15 September 1940, p. 4; 8 komunikatów wojennych. *Działania wojenne we wrześniu 1939 r.*, "GK" 10 September 1940, p. 3; 11 September 1939, p. 3. In 1940 a separate propaganda pamphlet was also published: *Uwaga! Uwaga!... podajemy Komunikat Wojenny: komunikaty wojenne krajowe i zagraniczne oraz głosy prasy i radia Paryż – Londyn – Berlin – Warszawa*, Warszawa 1940.

¹⁰⁴ *We wrześniu 1939*, "KC" 13 September 1940, p. 5

¹⁰⁵ See: also 'the war chronicle' written in a telegraphic style in "Dziennik Radomski": *Kronika wojny polsko-niemieckiej*, "DR" 3 September 1941, p. 3.

and October battles¹⁰⁶. This thematic series also compared the contents of the communiqués of the two warring parties. This retrospective reconstruction of the course of military operations, especially the initial ones, allows obtaining a complete picture of the defensive war.

To sum up, it should be observed that a natural consequence of the defeat of the defensive war was the initiation of the processes of social rationalization of what took place between 1 September 1939 and 6 October 1939. In the face of the lost war, millions of Poles and Polish citizens asked the question about how this occurred? They tried to understand what happened. Jacek Chrobaczyński calls this phenomenon the 'September syndrome'¹⁰⁷. In one of his publications devoted to the analysis of the problem he illustrates it with a telling quotation from Stanisław Rymar's diary¹⁰⁸, which we take the liberty to cite: 'the feeling of pain, bitterness and shame floods the heart, the shame that our regime allowed such a disgraceful defeat and predicted nothing, and deluded the nation and society'¹⁰⁹. Chrobaczyński estimates that the mood expressed in this short excerpt from the diary can be regarded as characteristic of the Polish society at the end of the defensive war and the beginning of the occupation. The German strategy for shaping the narrative about the causes of the outbreak of the war and for unmasking the Polish propaganda and the reasons why the Polish army was defeated intended to use the confusion of some part of Polish society for its (German) own purposes. The Germans expected that there would be feelings of disappointment because of the September defeat and the attitude of the Polish authorities, and they tried to exploit those feelings¹¹⁰. By using their accessible propaganda tools, they tried to weaken the mental condition of Polish society, thus shaping the attitude of submission and acceptance of the new reality imposed by the military resolution. It should be also remembered

¹⁰⁶ The thematic series *Rok temu...* [A Year Ago...] began from no. 206 of "NKW" of 2 September 1940 and ended on 8 October 1940 in no. 237 of the newspaper.

¹⁰⁷ See: J. Chrobaczyński, *„Nie okrył się niestawą naród polski”. Społeczne aspekty września 1939 roku*, Kraków 2002; idem, *Dwie klęski. Wrześniowy syndrom 1939 i klęska Francji 1940 w postawach, zachowaniach i nastrojach społeczeństwa polskiego. Próba retrospekcji i komparatystyki. Kontrowersje i dylematy*, Kraków 2015.

¹⁰⁸ S. Rymar's biographical entry, see: *Słownik biograficzny polskiego obozu narodowego*, vol. 1, ed. K. Kawęcki, Warszawa 2020, pp. 281–286

¹⁰⁹ S. Rymar, *Pamiętnik, cz. 3 (II wojna światowa)*, Biblioteka Jagiellońska, ref. no. 9798, p. 33, quoted after J. Chrobaczyński, *Już nie pokój, jeszcze nie wojna. Koncept wolności i zniewolenia*, in: *Pola wolności*, ed. A. Bartuś, Poznań 2020, s. 20.

¹¹⁰ This is pointed out inter alia by T. Cieślak, *Z historii niemieckiej prasy w języku polskim: I. „Goniec Krakowski” (27 X 1939–18 I 1945), II. Hitlerowska „Gazeta Żydowska” w Krakowie (23 VII 1940–30 VIII 1942)*, „RHCP” 1969, 8/4, p. 577.

that the psychological and information war waged against Polish society consisted also in emphasizing Germany's own successes, in concealing difficulties and omitting losses.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Monika Napora – PhD, assistant professor, Department of Methodology and Research on the 20th and 21st century, UMCS Institute of History. Scholarly interests: press science, narrativism, theory of propaganda, historical politics. Author of the monograph: *Gadzinowe narracje. Mechanizmy i strategie kreowania propagandowego obrazu świata w „Dzienniku Radomskim” 1940–1945* [“Reptile” (Collaborationist) Narratives. Mechanisms and Strategies for Creating the Propaganda Picture of the World in “Dziennik Radomski 1940–1945] (Lublin 2017).

NOTA O AUTORZE

Monika Napora – doktor, adiunkt w Katedrze Metodologii i Badań nad XX–XXI w. IH UMCS. Zainteresowania naukowe: prasoznawstwo, narratywizm, teoria propagandy, polityka historyczna. Autorka monografii: *Gadzinowe narracje. Mechanizmy i strategie kreowania propagandowego obrazu świata w „Dzienniku Radomskim” 1940–1945* (Lublin 2017).

