Journal of Literary, Cultural and Artistic Studies
Vol. 1 (2026), No. 1, pp. 27-48
DOI: https://doi.org/10.55578/jlcas.2603.003

ARTICLE

Search, Kill and Destroy! —What Does the Marketing of Polish War Shooters Set in the Present Day Reveal About the Ideology Embedded in Their Advertising?

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Received: Jan 28 2026, Revised: Feb 24 2026, Accepted: Mar 2 2026, Published: 16 Mar 2026

Abstract

This article is the outcome of a research grant conducted by the author entitled *American Political and Cultural Hegemony "Made in Poland": Do—and How—Polish War Games Reproduce the U.S. Military Agenda?* It offers a critical ideological analysis of the marketing of Polish war-themed shooters set in contemporary contexts, examining whether and how their promotional materials reproduce American political and cultural hegemony. The study analyzes the marketing frameworks of 32 games produced in Poland between 2002 and 2021, focusing on game titles, front and back box covers, and launch trailers. Grounded in the critical paradigm, the analysis draws on Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony and Louis Althusser's concept of ideological state apparatuses. Six research questions guide the deconstruction of ideological meanings in advertising messages, addressing the construction of the subject of violence, representations of the enemy, the aestheticization of weaponry, the geopolitical localization of conflict, dominant narrative motifs, and the unifying rhetoric linking these elements. The findings reveal a consistent reinforcement of Western- and Americancentric narratives, in which the white Western soldier is framed as a morally legitimate agent of violence, while the enemy is dehumanized and orientalized. The marketing of the analyzed games naturalizes American military interventionism, fetishizes Western technological superiority, applies chauvinistic geopolitical selectivity, and aligns with imperial discourse. The article contributes a new perspective to research on Polish video games by identifying their marketing dimension as a significant, yet previously marginalized, site of ideological reproduction

Keywords: digital games, ideology, american political and cultural hegemony, USA, Polish war-themed shooter games.

INTRODUCTION

This article was produced as the outcome of a research grant conducted by the author, entitled *American Politico-Cultural Hegemony "Made in Poland": Do Polish War Games Reproduce the U.S. Military Agenda, and If So, How?* (Polish: *Amerykańska hegemonia polityczno-kulturowa, "made in Poland". Czy i w jaki sposób polskie gry wojenne reprodukują agendę militarną USA?*) executed by the author of the paper. The aim of the study was to analyze all shooter games produced by Polish development studios that are thematically linked to contemporary military operations.[1] All video games whose core mechanical structure and gameplay are based on shooting opponents and eliminating them were taken into consideration. The pool of analyzed productions comprised two types of games: FPSs (First-Person Shooters) and TPSs (Third-Person Shooters). The distinction between these two classifications lies in the perspective from which the player observes the in-game action. In first-person games (FPSs), the player perceives the game world from the viewpoint of the controlled character's eyes, whereas in third-person games (TPSs), the camera is positioned behind the back of the controlled

https://doi.org/10.55578/jlcas.2603.003
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character. The adoption of the above criteria resulted in the selection of 32 video games, the oldest of which dates back to 2002 and the most recent to 2021, yielding a research sample spanning nearly a quarter of a century.[2]

Works of culture (including video games) function as carriers of certain ideologies and include content which can influence perceptions of reality and the formulation of judgements – they are a means of shaping beliefs and opinions in consumers. When critically deconstructing the ideological content of digital games, scholarly attention is usually drawn primarily to the narrative layer. Ian Bogost—by introducing his original theory of procedural rhetoric—demonstrated that in the case of interactive gameplay mediated through the medium of digital games, the ludic layer, in the context of conveying and reproducing ideological content through video games, is no less important than the narrative perspective [1].[3] This article aims to introduce an additional perspective grounded in ideological deconstruction—this time based on the marketing dimension, which is typically overlooked in studies employing critical ideological analysis. This focus is particularly important, as the primary objective of marketing and advertising is persuasion [2].[4] Such a remark is not seen as *novum*, when speaking of the phenomenon of marketing, however the subject of the ideological influence of advertisement in terms of reproduction of American political-cultural hegemony has not yet been raised in either international or Polish game studies. Hence, within the framework of this study, the author set out to determine whether—and if so, to what extent—the ideological content embedded in the promotional materials of contemporary Polish war shooters reproduces American political and cultural hegemony. This research is also *novum* in terms of the pool of games subjected to the analysis. In previous global game studies discussion, the titles usually subjected to critical ideological analysis have belonged to widely recognized, large franchises of Western military shooter games, including *Call of Duty*[5], *Battlefield*[6] and *Medal of Honor*[7]. In this regard, the Polish video games market is concentrated on simplified versions of the aforementioned franchises rather than on equally recognized and valued equivalents. Because of that, Polish games belonging to the military shooter genre are not a popular subject of analysis in either local or global discussion. This lack of critical attention made them a completely uninvestigated area with enormous research potential in the above-mentioned aspect. It is also worth noting that the application of Marxist critical theory to the medium of video games—in this case, the theory of political and cultural hegemony—represents an approach that is very rarely used in game studies. Although, in English-based scientific literature there are works on ideologisation within military shooters (*The Post-9/11 Video Game[3]…*[8], *Playing War[4]…*[9], *On the Virtual Frontlines[5]…*[10]), none of them investigates Polish video games nor uses the approach of political-cultural hegemony. This is even more evident in Polish discourse which – despite the emergence of singular papers exploring military video games [6-8][11] – completely ignores local titles and game franchises and does not refer to Marxist theory in its analytical approach.[12] Because of that, this article is *novum* in terms of the subject of analysis, the applied methodology and the scope of the investigated layer of the analysed medium.

THE CONCEPT OF POLITICAL-CULTURAL HEGEMONY

Modern understanding of hegemony is rooted in Marxist tradition, however its political-cultural meaning has been elaborated on by Antonio Gramsci. Unlike Marx and Engels, who concentrated on the economical aspects of domination, Gramsci pointed to the fundamental role of culture and ideology. According to him, the ruling class maintains their position, presenting their own world view as obvious and widely accepted [9].[13] In this way, public acceptance of the existing order is achieved without the necessity of openly applying coercive measures [10].[14]

Gramsci links the concept of hegemony with the notion of an integral state encompassing both political and civil institutions [11].[15] The perpetuation of privileged class domination is not restricted only to coercive apparatus such as police or court but also by institutions of civil society – including the Church, family and educational facilities. Thus, the integral state reflects the ability of the ruling class to control the collective life in political, cultural and ideological dimensions. For instance, Gramsci highlighted that the school system – apart from transferring educational knowledge – contributes to the reproduction of class divisions and to the shaping of attitudes aligned with values of dominant groups which begin to be perceived as natural, obvious, apolitical and "within reason" [11].[16]

Beliefs produced in such a way are societally internalised as neutral, despite their visibly ideological

character. A good example of this can be found in the game *SimCity* (2013)[17], in which the rules of play reflect a neo-liberal foundation, e.g. unlimited economic growth as the main goal, the marginalisation of social affairs and a view of homelessness as a problem of aesthetics rather than as a social matter.[18]

Louis Althusser described this mechanism by developing the concept of Ideological State Apparatuses [12].[19] In his opinion, social subordination is first and foremost mediated by institutions considered to be neutral – such as school, religion, family, media or culture – which recreate the existing norms and value systems. As a result, hegemony persists without the need of state-sponsored violence as the individuals themselves, often unaware, contribute to its reproduction.

Some creators operating within these apparatuses deliberately promote a specific ideology, but for many, the hegemonic message functions on an unconscious level—and it is precisely this implicitness that determines its effectiveness [9,13].[20]

Marketing messages fit perfectly within the representations deconstructed by the model of political and cultural hegemony theory. In the case of marketing communications—in this instance, game titles, cover art, and trailers—the primary objective is to persuade the potential consumer to purchase the game. However, in accordance with the essence of the theory invoked in this article, the strength of the ideology embedded in (in this case) advertising lies in the unconsciousness and ubiquity of the process through which it is reproduced and disseminated. An example of such a situation would be a graphic designer working on the cover of a Polish, low-budget FPS set in the context of the so-called war on terror, who likely does not reflect on the ideological dimension of the game's visual packaging. It is probable that they are unaware that the product they created carries a distinct ideological character. This type of situation constitutes the quintessence of political and cultural hegemony.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ANALYSIS OF THE MARKETING LAYER OF THE GAMES UNDER STUDY

Before undertaking the analysis of the marketing dimension of the games in question, the author delineated a specifically defined analytical framework; in this case, it involved specifying which elements of the marketing materials would be included in the study. It was decided to select three components from each of the 32 games: the game's title, the front and back covers, and the launch trailer. These elements were chosen primarily due to their accessibility and because they constitute the core of the marketing and advertising campaign. The game's title and cover are integral parts of the marketing package that cannot be overlooked by anyone encountering the product.[21] The launch trailer, on the other hand, serves as the main promotional tool, debuting shortly before the game's release. Its purpose is to convince as many individuals as possible to purchase the game upon its release. It is relatively short, easily accessible, and designed to reach the widest possible audience. Among the three components, the trailer is the only audiovisual representation, making it a particularly suitable material for analysis, as it typically contains the essence of the represented text. The data used in this study were obtained exclusively from the aforementioned marketing elements. The author did not consider knowledge acquired through playing the games, ensuring that the conclusions drawn from the analysis were not influenced by non-marketing information. Consequently, the results of the study credibly reflect the marketing dimension of the phenomenon examined in this article.

As part of developing a methodological model adapted for the analysis presented in this article, the author formulated six concise and fundamental research questions aimed at deconstructing the ideological underpinnings embedded within the marketing materials of the games. The scope of the answers to these questions will provide a basis for drawing specific conclusions later in the article. They will constitute the conclusion of the analysis and serve as a response to the research problem underlying the study. The fact that one of the central elements of the research questions concerns killing is directly related to the gameplay formula and mechanics of the games analyzed. The 32 games included in the study belong to two gameplay genres: FPS (First Person Shooter) and TPS (Third Person Shooter). In both types of gameplay, the core mechanic revolves around shooting and eliminating opponents.

Completing any of the 32 games requires obligatory killing and extermination of adversaries; none of the games allow the player to decide the fate of the opponent. Therefore, the element of killing constitutes such an important factor within the set of research questions presented in this article. The research questions are formulated as follows:

1. Who kills? – This is one of the main elements of the marketing communication of analyzed video games. It is particularly noticeable on game covers and constitutes one of the key elements of launch trailers. In the context of ideological deconstruction, it is the first and main point: it determines who is designated as the morally righteous side.
2. Who do they kill? – Complementary to the first question, the second key element gives meaning to the former. When a consumer acquires knowledge about who they are going to play as in a given work[22], it is time for them to learn who is going to be their enemy. Analogically to the former point, this one is connected with constructing the opposite moral stance, and more importantly: who is the negatively portrayed side?
3. With what do they kill? – The tools used by protagonists to defeat, or more precisely, to exterminate opponents constitute another central element of game promotion. In direct connection with the visualization of the protagonist, these tools are usually among the first aspects noticed by potential consumers. They are almost always displayed on the front cover of the game, with their context further elaborated on the back cover, representing one of the main selling points of the title. They also typically feature prominently in the game's trailer, intentionally serving as one of the primary components of the audiovisual marketing of the game.
4. Where do they kill? – The locations in which protagonists carry out their actions often form part of the game's marketing layer. This element represents another key link, situating the marketing within a specific ideological framework of the title.
5. Why do they kill? – This question relates to the motivations behind the actions of the protagonist, and the goals set for them. Motivations and goals are often a part of the marketing of the work, strongly positioned in the promotional material including the cover and trailer.
6. What kind of language is used to describe it? – This serves as the overarching question linking all the preceding research questions. It is responsible for determining the tone in which the marketing rhetoric is framed, as well as the interrelated aspects that together constitute its overall composition.

STUDY OF THE MARKETING STRATEGY

In accordance with the framework outlined above—based on the established research questions—a detailed examination of the marketing layer of all 32 games included in the study was conducted. Below, the collective data obtained from the analysis of these games through the research questions presented in the article are described. The results have been organized according to the previously introduced structure, divided into sections corresponding to the research questions discussed above.

1. Who kills?

The analysis of the titles, covers (both front and back), and launch trailers of the 32 examined Polish contemporary war shooters allows for a clear identification of who performs the role of the executor of institutionalized violence within the framework of military operations. In all cases, the marketing layer provides either a direct or indirect answer to the question "who kills?" In a repetitive and consistent manner, the image of a white male as the primary agent of armed action is constructed. The only exceptions are two games from the *Nina* series, in which the protagonist is a white woman—an agent operating within the structures of international counterterrorism services. All other productions construct their protagonists according to the same canon: a white, strong man, often muscular, with visible tattoos, dressed in military attire, and typically equipped with additional tactical gear (such as bulletproof vests, helmets, or sniper camouflage etc.).

The aforementioned characters are almost invariably portrayed as members of elite military or special forces units, which further legitimizes their actions. The units represented include:
- the US Army (the most common case)
- the SAS (British *Special Air Service*)
- the French Foreign Legion
- the Polish military unit GROM (appearing only once, and solely in the Polish version of the game)
- NATO, represented as a collective military entity
- non-specified "special anti-terrorist units"

The presence of American soldiers is particularly prominent—both in the content of the trailers and

in the cover narratives. These characters are typically portrayed as heroes carrying out missions within morally justified military operations, consistent with American interventionist narratives rooted in cultural representations and in U.S. propaganda related to the country's foreign policy [14].[23] Below are three collages presenting the covers of the games analyzed in this study.

Figure 1. From left to right, Polish and English cover arts of: *Terrorist Takedown* (2004), *Terrorist Takedown*: Payback (2005), *Terrorist Takedown: War in Colombia* (2006), *Terrorist Takedown: Covert Operations* (2006), *Terrorist Takedown 2* (2007), *Terrorist Takedown 3* (2010), *Code of Honor: The French Foreign Legion* (2007), *Code of Honor 2: Conspiracy Island* (2008), *Code of Honor 3: Desperate Measures* (2009), *SAS: Secure Tomorrow* (2008).

Figure 2. From left to right, Polish and English cover arts of: *Armed Forces Corp.* (2009), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* (2010), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2* (2013), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 3* (2017), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior Contracts* (2019), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior Contracts 2* (2021), *Alcatraz: In the Harm's Way* (2010), *Chernobyl: Terrorist Attack* (2011), *Chernobyl 2: Back to Zona* (2012), *Chernobyl 3: Underground* (2013).

Figure 3. From left to right, Polish and English cover arts of: *Manhunter* (2012), *Heavy Fire: Special Operations* (2010), *Heavy Fire: Black Arms* (2011), *Heavy Fire: Afghanistan* (2011), *Heavy Fire: Shattered Spear* (2013), *Heavy Fire: Red Shadow* (2018), *The Mark* (2006), *Hidden Target* (2009), *Nina: Agent Chronicles* (2002), *Global Ops: Commando Libya* (2011).

2. Who do they kill?

In the marketing materials of 29 out of the 32 analyzed games, the enemy—i.e., the object of the protagonist's armed violence—is clearly defined. The marketing communication provides not only information about the opponent's identity but also visual and linguistic cues that allow the attribution of specific ethnic, ideological, and cultural characteristics. The most frequently represented enemy is:

– "terrorist," stereotypically portrayed as a non-white, Arabic or Central Asian man (this is the most frequently occurring case, evident in 17 out of 32 games)

Figure 4. A frame from the trailer of the video game *Terrorist Takedown 3*.

Figure 5. A frame from the trailer of the video game *Terrorist Takedown: Payback*.

Figure 6. A frame from the trailer of the video game *Global Ops Commando Libya*.

– member of a drug cartel (e.g. from Colombia)
– post-communist enemy (e.g. from Eastern Europe, post-Soviet regions)
– a revolutionary fighter, often with an ambiguous yet radical ideological profile (e.g., a "global revolutionary front").

What is most striking is the way in which the games employ racial and cultural profiling of the enemies creating a repetitive and simplified visual coding: balaclavas, turbans, dark complexions, "exotic" surnames, languages other than English. Descriptions used to market the games are dominated by denominators such as "cruel fanatics", "ruthless killers" (cited from the three first parts of the *Terrorist Takedown* series) which dehumanise the enemy and simplify moral frames of conflict.

In three cases (*Armed Forces Corp*., *Manhunter* and *Heavy Fire: Red Shadow*), the marketing messages do not specify who is to be killed by the player. However, the structure of the game itself and the knowledge of "who" to kill is secondary to "who" the player is and the fact that the player has a right to use violence. The presence of weapons, military affiliation and clearly stated roles (white marine,

special agent, NATO soldier) is sufficient to justify the use of lethal force without raising questions regarding context or legal aspects of the objective.

3. With what do they kill?

In all 32 analyzed cases, the marketing layer provides a clear and consistent answer to the question of what the protagonist kills with. Weapons—understood as instruments of violence—are not only present in every instance but also function as a central component of the games' identity and a key selling point. Every single cover features a visual display of weaponry; therefore, it can be stated that this research question received a 100% affirmative response. Nearly every front cover depicts an armed protagonist, usually holding a weapon in a combat-ready stance[24]. The back covers and launch trailers, in turn, systematically emphasize the variety of available weapon types, presenting this diversity as a major commercial advantage. Sniper rifles, assault rifles, pistols, grenades, explosives, tactical knives, rocket launchers, helicopters, tanks, and even stationary turrets are all showcased as resources accessible to the player—and simultaneously as objects of desire, collection, and mastery.

This is particularly visible in the *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* series, where the weapon is used not only to eliminate the opponent but also becomes an almost sensual extension of the protagonist's body. The marketing of these games emphasises "controlled breathing", as well as slowed-down, zoomed-in flight of the bullet or heart beat in the moment of shooting. It aims to present the complete union of weapon and protagonist. Advertising slogans such as "one shot – one kill" (*Sniper: Ghost Warrior*), "taking a shot is both an art and science" (*Sniper: Ghost Warrior Contracts*) or "feel the precision of the shot" (*Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2*) construct the weapon as a tool which is not only effective but also dignifying – giving the player power, precision and unique status.

Figure 7. The English back cover of the video game Sniper: Ghost Warrior.

Figure 8. The English back cover of the video game *Terrorist Takedown: War in Colombia*.

Simultaneously, the weapon is described as technologically advanced, modern and obtained from Western military structures. The remarks often occurring in promotional materials are "authentic American Army weapons…" (*Terrorist Takedown: War in Colombia*) or "the state of the art arsenal of the US Army" (*Terrorist Takedown*, *Terrorist Takedown: Payback*), which gives an aura of technological advantage and suggests that violence with the use of such equipment is professional, justified and morally neutral or even righteous.

4. Where do they kill?

An analysis of the locations depicted in the games under study reveals a tendency to place the military violence outside the West – both geographically and symbolically. In the vast majority of cases, the place where the enemy is eliminated is located on the "periphery" of global geography: the "Middle East [15]"[25], Africa, South America and post-Soviet territories. In total, 27 out of 32 games (84%) places the violence in "exotic" locations or degraded ones, efficiently strengthening the binary opposition between the "civilised centre" and a "chaotic and dangerous peripheral".

The locations appear in two varieties: existing ones (e.g. Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Iran, Colombia or Georgia) or fictional regions based on the Western image of "wild" and "primitive" places. In both variants the locations are strongly orientalised: the "Middle East" is depicted as a desert, ravaged, wreck-filled, inhabited by fanatical opponents hidden in huts and hovels. In South America, there are jungles, swamps, ruins and ancient temples, which call to mind stereotypical tropical landscapes as imagined by

Western people. Africa is torn by civil wars, extreme poverty and turmoil fuelled by hostile factions serving the local warlords. Post-Soviet locations – such as Georgia, Chernobyl or Siberia – are depicted as deserted, rusted, and forgotten. Advertisements routinely utilize quotes such as: "the wilderness of Siberia" (*Sniper: Ghost Warrior Contracts*), "remote mountains of Afghanistan", "exotic, uncharted land" (*Nina: Agent Chronicles*), "somewhere in South America" (*Terrorist Takedown: Covert Operation*) – such descriptions serve a myth-making function and work to aestheticize violence as an expedition into dangerous, foreign territories.

Figure 9. A frame from the trailer of the video game *Global Ops: Commando Libya*.

Exceptions to this rule – the games located in the West – are scarce. Only several titles take place in "our" modern regions: *Code of Honor 3* in France, *SAS: Secure Tomorrow* in London, *Armed Forces Corp.* in a Western corporation or *IS Defense* on the European coast. Also, the marketing behind *Hidden Target* implies an attack "in your neighbourhood" a modern Western city. These cases, however, do not disrupt the overall structure of the message; on the contrary, they emphasize the exceptional nature of the threat when the West becomes the battlefield. Even in these situations, the setting is not degraded—it consists of modern offices, airports, and cities, contrasting sharply with the ruins and primitive structures of the "hostile world".

In the case of games set in the West, marketing materials typically specify clear, well-defined locations. Conversely, for titles situated outside the default geographic center, the communications often employ very general designations—such as the "Middle East", Africa, or South America—which effectively orientalize, intentionally "exoticize", and generalize those locales. For example, the title *Terrorist Takedown: Conflict in the Middle East* explicitly implies that the entire area subsumed under the Eurocentric and orientalist label the "Middle East" is populated by "terrorists" who must be exterminated.

5. Why do they kill?

The study of the advertising strategies of the games in the scope of this project has clearly uncovered the firmly anchored scheme of justifying military violence. It prevails that the reason to kill is reduced to intervention in the name of defence of the world order, often described as "protection of the free world", "saving the millions" (*The Mark*), "preventing the ecological catastrophe" (*Chernobyl: Terrorist Attack*) or "exterminating the leader of terrorists" (*Terrorist Takedown 3*). Violence has a preventive, rationalised nature for which there is no alternative – the player is acting in the name of necessary intervention and these actions are shown as ethically unquestionable.

In numerous cases the trope of killing is woven into the narrative of the global responsibility of the West, especially the United States and NATO. Characters such as white sniper, "American elite operator"

(*Heavy Fire: Special Operations*), "member of elite special force" (*Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2*) or "soldier of Foreign Legion" (*Code of Honor: The French Foreign Legion*) are portrayed as the one and only person able to intervene in the case of danger: including civil war, terrorism, a takeover of nuclear charges or an attempt to overthrow the structures of Western civilisation. It's often highlighted in the advertisement that the protagonist is exceptional and unique: "we are the only ones who can", "only your skills can restore the order" (*Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2*), "the future of the free world is in danger" (*The Mark*), "This task of infiltrating the terrorists and defusing the charges is given to the best agent in the special force. You" (*Chernobyl: Terrorist Attack*).

Simultaneously, there are numerous cases which lack any clearly specified reason to intervene. In many games the marketing strategy does not explore why "we" kill. This silence is not a result of oversight – on the contrary, it is the manifestation of political internalisation of American domination. From the perspective of advertising said games, there is no need to justify the presence of American soldiers in countries of South America, the "Middle East" or Africa – their presence and violence are validated by default. Such default action suggests that not only is violence the tool, but also the right and duty bestowed upon the West to the outer world.

In numerous instances the reason for Western interventions are dramatically hyperbolised, based on a rhetoric of total threat: an explosion of a reactor in Chernobyl (*Chernobyl: Terrorist Attack*), "dirty bomb" production (*Chernobyl 2: Back to Zona*), ISIS invading Europe (*IS Defense*). The function of these reasons does not lie in the plot but in reassuring the player, providing morality to their violence. You kill because you are the last line of defence from the enemy who not only endangers the individuals but also the "free world" (*The Mark*), "civilisation" (*Global Ops: Commando Libya*) and "mankind" (*Nina*).

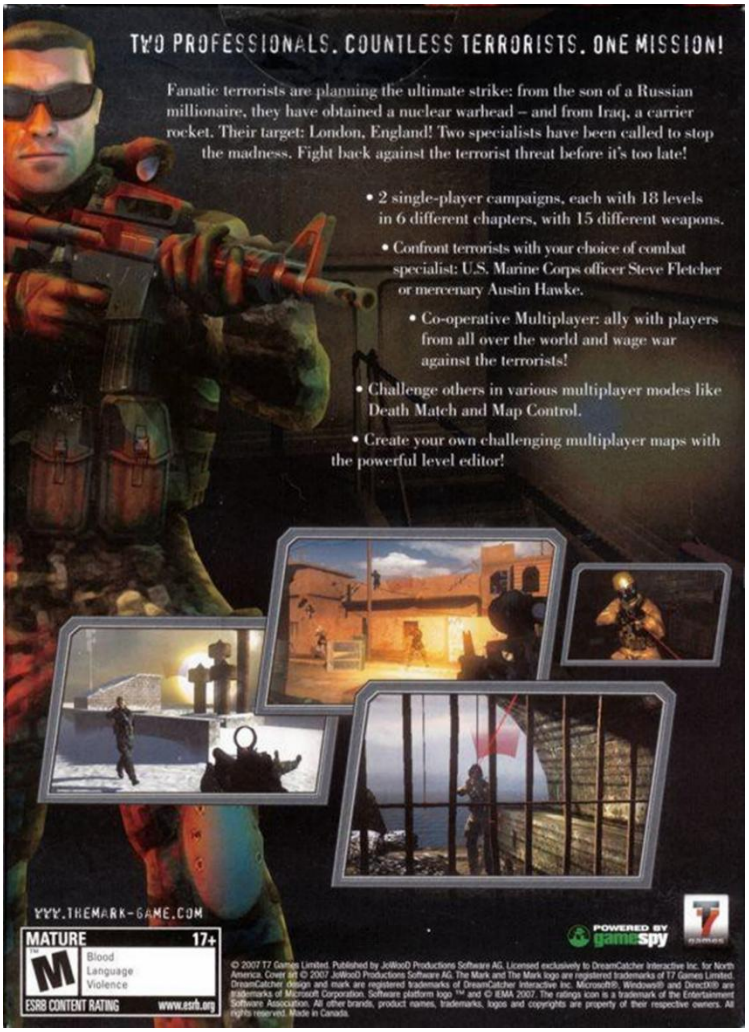

Figure 10. The English back cover of the video game *The Mark*.

6. What kind of language is used to describe it?

Marketing of the studied games uses extremely ideological language which simultaneously dehumanizes the opponent, fetishises the violence and naturalises the intervention as morally necessary and civilising. There are three main language strategies: binarity and moral absolution of conflict, orientalisation and racial profiling of the enemy and glorification of violence as a necessary tool of protecting the "free world".

The first key feature of advertising language is the construction of a dichotomy between "us" and "them". On "our" side there are "elite units" (*SAS: Secure Tomorrow*), "heroes" (*The Mark*), and "defenders of order and freedom" (*Sniper: Ghost Warrior*). On the contrary the opponents are described using extremely negative terms such as "ruthless killers", "cruel fanatics" (*Terrorist Takedown: Payback*), "brutal cartels" (*Terrorist Takedown: Covert Operations*), "unknown fraction of terrorists" (*Chernobyl: Terrorist Attack*), and "genocidal ideology of ISIS" (*IS Defense*). The enemy is inherently non-individual: anonymous, collective, numerous, thoughtless, lacking any intrinsic motivation – terrorists exist solely to enact crimes and violence, with no need for further explanation or motivation. De-individualisation and depersonalisation are paired with brutalisation – the opponent has no properties of the person, represents only evil and has to be eliminated. Marketing slogans such as: "destroy terrorists" (*Terrorist Takedown 3*), "shoot to kill", "elimination of terrorism threat", and "we don't negotiate with terrorists" (*Terrorist Takedow*n) clearly exclude the possibility of solving the conflict in a way that does not require the complete elimination of the enemy.

Secondly, this discourse conforms to the framework of orientalist encoding of the enemy, a mechanism deeply rooted in both popular culture and political communication [16].[26] Sometimes, the enemy is not even named as "terrorist", but presented solely by appearance – which is enough to be coded as "alien" through marketing messaging. Linguistically, this coding is accompanied by the following collocations: "mow down waves of enemy forces", "non-stop high-intensity firefight" (*Heavy Fire: Red Shadow*), "blast as many invaders as possible" (*IS Defense*), which serve to not only excuse mass violence, but also to present the game as intensely-paced and satisfying.

Thirdly, rhetoric within promotional material also engages with language of heroism, service, duty and saving the world. Killing is always necessary: "the future of the free world is in danger" (*The Mark*), "only you can stop them" (*Chernobyl: Terrorist Attack*), "you need to destroy the danger before the innocent suffer" (*Terrorist Takedown 3*). Even when there is no sound reason to use violence, the necessity to resort to it is not questioned – it is permanently embedded in the default structure of Western intervention. It is not uncommon that the language of marketing is deprived of rationalisation, given that the belief that violence is righteous is already sufficiently internalised. There is no need to know why you kill – it is sufficient that you do it while on "our side". In this setting, the poetics of ruthless fight and dehumanised effectiveness is essential: "fast, deadly and unrelenting combat" (*Heavy Fire: Afghanistan*), "it's time to show them that war is a real hell" (*Terrorist Takedown: War in Colombia*), "do a n y t h i n g to escape unharmed and complete the mission" (*Terrorist Takedown: Covert Operations*). The enemies are "destroyed", "blown up", "exterminated", "eliminated" – language does not establish the fight with another human, but with the function: the enemy (usually deemed a "terrorist") exists not as a person to defeat but a "threat to be eliminated". As the slogan visible on the box of *Terrorist Takedown: Covert Operations* says: "Master a wide range of weapons in the Special Forces arsenal. If a knife or a machete won't work – a handgun, crossbow, assault rifle, machine pistol, or a well-thrown grenade will!".

Figure 11. The English back cover of the video game *Terrorist Takedown: Covert Operations*.

OBSERVATIONS FROM THE ANALYSIS

Following a thorough examination of the 32 titles included in the study, answers were provided to the six research questions formulated for the analysis. The comprehensive responses thus obtained served to identify the particular ideological properties in the marketing framework of Polish military shooter games set in the present day. Based on them, six conceptual categories were formulated, chronologically answering the research questions posed during the analysis.[27] The constituted features serve both as the conclusions drawn for each of the six research questions and as the definitive answer regarding the extent to which the ideological content embedded in the promotional materials of Polish contemporary war shooters reproduces American political-cultural hegemony, as well as the form in which this ideology materializes within the marketing framework of these games.

1. World as a territory subjugated to the violence of the white Western man [17-20][28]

In the marketing presentation of the games under study, a clear hegemonic figure emerges: a white male serving as a soldier in Western special forces, predominantly American. The high frequency and dominance of this pattern across the analyzed set of games suggest a pronounced reproduction of the American cultural code, in which patriarchal archetyping, "masculinity", militarism, and white identity converge to construct the figure of the global-order defender [21].[29] The actions of this character are justified by the all-encompassing need to protect the Western world and interests of the world centre. In the advertising messages, a specific template materializes, clearly illustrating the Machiavellian assumptions underlying the ideological rhetoric employed by the promotional framework: the hero

(controlled by the player) is obliged to do whatever is necessary to achieve the designated objective, while everything else is deemed irrelevant. The marketing consequently follows this discourse. In the analyzed productions, local contexts have been entirely marginalized (only one of the 32 games features Polish military units, and then solely in the version released for the Polish market) in favor of reinforcing a universal Western, or more specifically, American model of the "military hero".

2. Western-centric de-individualisation and dehumanisation of the enemy [15,22-24][30]

In the marketing materials of these games, a specific enemy is positioned whose identity is constructed through a dichotomous, binary racial and cultural opposition to the protagonist. The image of the "Other" predominates—non-white, fanatical, and posing a threat to the Western order. This structure aligns with a culturally entrenched binary model: "us"—white, developed defenders of peace, democracy, and civilization—versus "them"—wild, incomprehensible, fanatical "terrorists"[21].[31] As an effect, the marketing of such games naturalises the violence towards the "Other" and plays into the trope of American political-cultural hegemony solidifying and legitimising violence based on the prevention and interventionism in the names of "safety [25]".[32]

3. Fetishisation of military-technological aesthetics [26-28][33]

The weapons seen in game marketing are aestheticised, glorified and fetishised – they become a symbol of "masculinity", effectiveness and Western military domination. It is prevalent that marketing tries to persuade the potential player that not only may they possess the weapon but they may also become one. Apart from its obvious functions, the weapon becomes a symbol of power, control and a right to violence. It is presented as an object of desire, technological awe and military perfection. The promotion of these games is suggestive of the construct of *gun porn* present in Western culture, often seen in video games and American movies [29].[34] Such a presentation is embedded into American hegemonic military discussion, in which firearms are the equivalent of "freedom" and order [30].[35] In a global context, it suggests advanced operations connected with international interventionism, symbolised by advanced espionage and military technologies [26].[36]

4. Geopolitical selectivity of space and narrative[25,31,32][37]

An analysis of the marketing materials of the games in relation to the presented locations reveals a distinct pattern: the player kills "there", in spaces that are unknown, distant, incomprehensible, "exotic", and potentially threatening. In this way, a trajectory of violence emerges, subordinated to imperial logic and operational modalities. The space in which violence is executed is not accidental: they are inscribed within the discourse of Western and American hegemony, where aggression is framed within a template of fulfilling civilizing and preventive missions. The opponent becomes not only an ethnic and cultural contrast but also belongs to another degraded space which needs to be controlled, pacified or even exterminated. Such a scheme of presenting geopolitical violent actions corresponds with an American (and Western in general) hegemonistic, Orientalistic *modus operandi*, in which military violence towards a foreign, distant territory is not merely acceptable but deemed imperative in the name of the established order, security, and the defense of civilization [33].[38] It is precisely this geopolitical rhetoric that is most commonly employed across the digital games included in the study.

5. Geopolitical internalisation of American domination [34-36][39]

The marketing communication of the games included in the study systematically reproduces the American-hegemonial construct of military interventionist violence and solidifies its legitimacy. The West – in majority represented by the US – holds not only an absolute right to kill but is depicted as compelled to do so in order to save the world. This violence does not require an explanation because over time it has become a hegemonic *perpetuum mobile*, a canon supporting the narrative structure of the subsequent texts of culture, in this case, video games. Thanks to cultural patterns being deeply rooted and encoded, geopolitical phenomenons (such as American interventionism in military shooter games) do not need to be explained, they become perceived as natural, are not questioned, and establish a widely accepted *status quo*. Because of this, the portion of games in this selection do not provide any reasoning or arguments supporting American (or Western in general) military interventions depicted in their marketing materials. These interventions have come to be seen as self-evident and in need of no further explanation. This way, marketing not only recreates but also systematically solidifies the logic of

imperial domination. The fact that this applies to games produced in Poland is another vital example of global influence of American political-cultural hegemony.

6. Unreflective binarism, Orientalization, and the normalization of imperial-military violence [37-39][40]

The advertising of games included in this study utilizes language which is derivative of global American political-cultural hegemony, reproduced across multiple domains of both politics and culture, with the latter reflecting the former like a mirror. The analyzed linguistic messages consist of three main hegemonic components. The first is a dichotomous division between the crystalline good "us" and the thoroughly evil "them." The second, directly corresponding to the first, aims at chauvinistic Orientalization, directly linking the opponent to their place of origin, race, and ethnicity, thereby providing a seemingly natural argument within the game's ideological rhetoric, which utilizes these traits as negative attributes of the adversary. The third component constitutes the final key hegemonic element, integrating the preceding components into a coherent whole and presenting the sole conceivable resolution to the "problem": military interventionism that brings violence and the uncompromising elimination of the opponent. In the analyzed messages, violence is portrayed as morally unambiguous, necessary, and effective, while the enemy is represented as "exotic" and inherently evil. Such communication not only legitimizes violence but also normalizes its presence as an integral aspect of "saving the world". Symptomatic of the phenomenon examined in this article is the fact that the "world" is equated solely with the United States and the broadly conceived West, as if only these parts of the globe were worthy of that designation.

CONCLUSION

The analysis conducted within this study of the marketing materials of Polish military shooter games set in the present day reveals a clearly systematized ideological narrative, whose central element is the legitimization of violence executed by a white, Western (most often American) male representing Western (predominantly American) special forces and military units. The promotional materials—including game titles, covers, and launch trailers—consistently depict the world as a space of conflict in which Western (primarily American) intervention appears morally justified, necessary, and unquestionable. In direct proportion to the spotlessly presented protagonist, the enemy is presented in unambiguously negative, dehumanising terms. They are often without a specified origin, which is replaced by vividly characterized, stereotypical, chauvinistic and racist representations in the name of ideological tropes and archetypes of "Middle Eastern terrorist", South American members of drug cartels or African mercenaries of a local warlord as constructed by Western and American cultures. The reproduction and solidification of this chauvinistic division of the world into "center" and "periphery"—through the Orientalization of in-game locations, the fetishization of killing instruments and military technologies, and the use of rhetoric echoing American foreign policy and its associated nomenclature—constructs an image of a geopolitical order in which Western hegemony (with the United States serving as its central and most powerful representation in the analyzed cases) is not only assumed but also presented and reinforced as natural and desirable. As a result, the marketing materials of the games under study do not serve merely a promotional function but also serve as a vehicle for a specific ideology that produces values represented by American political-cultural hegemony and aligned with its political agenda. Given that the discussion concerns games produced in Poland by developers affiliated with Polish digital game studios, further stages of the research should involve a direct examination of the mechanisms through which the American politico-cultural hegemony described in this article has exerted its influence. As indicated in the present study, this hegemony has had a substantial impact on both the development of the analyzed games and the construction of their marketing layers. It may be preliminarily assumed that the shape of the marketing strategies of the examined titles, as well as the selection of motifs and patterns identified in this article, were strongly conditioned by the particularly close relations between Poland and the United States. In 1999, Poland joined NATO, and in the following years Polish soldiers actively participated in missions conducted by the United States and NATO as part of the so-called War on Terror, including operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. This period marked an especially intense phase of the global dissemination of American propaganda, and with it, political-

cultural hegemony. At the same time, Poland, following its systemic transformation and the collapse of the Eastern Bloc, became deeply embedded within the network of American influence, which amplified the impact of these factors. As Polish military units were deployed and casualties were incurred, Polish public opinion became strongly engaged with events in the "Middle East," which were extensively covered by the media and also addressed in domestic television and film productions, such as the series *Misja Afganistan*[41] and the film *Karbala*[42]. This highly resonant and emotionally charged thematic field, centered on military operations in specific regions of the world in which Polish soldiers also took part, proved to be exceptionally effective promotional material. It reached particularly receptive audiences whose perceptions had already been shaped by media narratives saturated with emotionally laden content related to these conflicts. These conditions likely exerted an organic and decisive influence on the prevailing political-cultural climate, the effects of which continue to resonate within the broadly understood public sphere. The marketing of digital games appears to skillfully draw upon this climate in order to reach the widest possible audience susceptible to such themes. Confirming this diagnosis requires further research. In seeking more definitive answers, a historical-materialist perspective could prove especially valuable, as it would allow for the deconstruction of the relationships between specific material conditions shaping the Polish political and cultural reality—conditions that remain deeply dependent on global, and particularly Western conjunctures.

Funding Statement: This work was supported by the Excellence Initiative – Research University (Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań) under Grant Study research 155 (155/34/UAM/0043).

Contribution: The authors contributed to the research and writing of this article and have read/agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: The raw data supporting the conclusions of this article will be made available by the authors, without undue reservation.

Conflict of Interest Statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

NOTE

1 In conducting the selection process, the author included all Polish shooters depicting or referring to contemporary military operations. Consequently, shooters set during the Second World War, the Vietnam War, or other conflicts not taking place in the twenty-first century or at the turn of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries were excluded from the sample.

2 The list of games in question (divided by publishers): City Interactive: *Terrorist Takedown: Konflikt na Bliskim Wschodzie* (English edition: *Terrorist Takedown*) (2004), *Terrorist Takedown: Payback* (2005), *Terrorist Takedown: Wojna w Kolumbii* (English edition: *Terrorist Takedown: War in Colombia*) (2006), *Terrorist Takedown: Tajne Operacje* (English edition: *Terrorist Takedown: Covert Operations*) (2006), *Terrorist Takedown 2* (2007), *Terrorist Takedown 3* (2010), *Code of Honor: Francuska Legia Cudzoziemska* (English edition: *Code of Honor: The French Foreign Legion*) (2007), *Code of Honor 2: Łańcuch Krytyczny* (English edition: *Code of Honor 2: Conspiracy Island*) (2008), *Code of Honor 3: Stan Nadzwyczajny* (English edition: *Code of Honor 3: Desperate Measures*) (2009), *SAS: Secure Tomorrow* (2008), *Najemnicy* (English edition: *Armed Forces Corp.*) (2009), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior* (2010), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior 2* (2013), *Sniper Ghost Warrior 3* (2017), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior Contracts* (2019), *Sniper: Ghost Warrior Contracts 2* (2021); *Silden: Alcatraz: In the Harm's Way* (2010), *Czarnobyl: Terrorist Attack* (English edition:

Chernobyl: Terrorist Attack) (2011), *Czarnobyl 2: Powrót do Zony* (English edition: *Chernobyl 2: Back to Zona*) (2012), *Manhunter* (2012), *Czarnobyl 3: Underground* (English edition: *Chernobyl 3: Underground*) (2013); *Teyon: Heavy Fire: Special Operations* (2010), *Heavy Fire: Afghanistan* (2011), *Heavy Fire: Black Arms* (2011), *Heavy Fire: Shattered Spear* (2013), *Heavy Fire: Red Shadow* (2018); *T7 Games: The Mark* (2006); *Gingerbread Studios: Hidden Target* (2009); *Detalion Games: Nina Kroniki Agenta: Tunele Afganistanu* (English edition: *Nina: Agent Chronicles*) (2002), *Nina Trylogia* (English edition: *Nina Trilogy*) (2002); *Spectral Games: Global Ops: Commando Libya* (2011); *Destructive Creations: IS Defense* (2016).

3 I. Bogost., *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*, The MIT Press, Cambridge 2007, pp. 28-40.

4 E. Szczęsna, *Poetyka reklamy*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2003, pp. 13-15.

5 Call of Duty (series), US, multiple studios, 2003-2023.

6 *Battlefield* (series), Sweden, US, multiple studios, 2003-2023.

7 *Medal of Honor* (series), US, multiple studios, 1999-2020.

8 M. A. Ouellette, J. C. Thompson, *The Post-9/11 Video Game, A Critical Examination*, McFarland & Company Inc Publishers, Jefferson 2017.

9 M. T. Payne, *Playing War, Military Video Games after 9/11*, New York University Press, Nowy Jork 2016.

10 T. Riegler, *On the Virtual Frontlines: Video Games and the War on Terror*, [in:] *Videogame Cultures and the Future of Interactive Entertainment*, red. R. Fisher, D. Riha, Inter-Disciplinary Press, Oxford 2010.

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12 Although P. Olszewski in his article (cited above) incidentally mentions Gramsci and the theory of hegemony and refers to critical theory stemming from Marxism, firstly: the article is not aligned with the Marxist paradigm, secondly: the author refers to the mentioned concepts only contextually, he does not apply such a model in the analysis of any particular title, thirdly: his reasoning is general in character and does not aim to analyse the matter in detail, but to point to the wider discussion on the political aspect of video games as a medium.

13 M. Wróblewski, *Hegemonia i władza, Filozofia polityczna Antonia Gramsciego i jej współczesne kontynuacje*, Wydawnictwo naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, Toruń 2016, pp. 296-298.

14 K. Morawski, *Dyskurs Hegemonia Demokracja, Analiza krytyczna projektu demokracji radykalnej E. Laclau i Ch. Mouffe*, Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2016, pp. 107-108.

15 L. Fusaro, J. Xidias, A. Fabry, *An Analysis of Antonio Gramsci's Prison Notebooks*, Routledge, Londyn 2017,pp. 12.

16 Ibidem, s. 11-12.

17 *SimCity*, USA, Maxis, 2013.

18 To illustrate the discussed theory, this example was chosen for several reasons. Firstly, *SimCity* (2013) belongs to a widely recognized series of video games. Secondly, it is the newest addition to the series. Thirdly, due to a lack of violence, bad language or sexual content, it received a PG rating, allowing it to be played by a large group. Fourthly, the game is not associated with politics or

perceived as a "political game" in public discourse. Fifthly, it functions as a medium which conveys a complex ideological load so subtly that it's generally undetected by either players or industry media.

19 L. Althusser, *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation), [in:] L. Althusser, Positions*, Editions sociales, Paris 1976, pp. 8-11.

20 The thesis is compatible with the theory of organic intellectualists, authored by Antonio Gramsci. According to the Italian Marxist, content creating hegemony and contra-hegemony is produced on the daily basis both by ordinary citizens supporting the hegemony in a non-intentional way as well as by the constructors designing masterful hegemonic properties with belief and specified intention. The described case is most probably the first case, in which the specific messages are reproduced and replicated almost by sheer momentum and the individuals behind them are unaware of the non-trivial political aspects and considerable ideological content that they produce. P. Śpiewak, *Gramsci*, Wiedza Powszechna, Warszawa 1977, pp. 80-81; M. Wróblewski, op. cit., pp. 180-190.

21 Even if the given consumer buys the digital edition of the game, the aforementioned elements are transferred to the online shop and to the software used to launch the game (launchers such as *Steam*, *GOG Galaxy* or *Epic Games Launcher*).

22 Usually, it is enough to look at the front cover of the game, supplemented by a short description on the back cover.

23 N. Snow, *Propaganda, Inc.: selling America's culture to the world*, Seven Stories Press, New York City 1998, pp. 9-12.

24 The exceptions are *Hidden Target* and *IS Defense*. In the first case, the cover depicts two main characters placed in the target of a sniper rifle (it cannot be stated whether the protagonist is armed as their hands are out of sight in the cover). In the second game case, the front cover does not contain any human characters, only the firearms, so it cannot be qualified as a presentation of the armed protagonist.

25 "The popular notion 'Middle East' is a part of colonialism-influenced vocabulary which places Europe in the centre. Instead, the new approach is to use the precise geographic names such as Western Asia or South-Western Asia or SWANA (South-West Asia and North Africa). [...] This is the Eurocentric construct used mostly in political discourse and not the objective specification of geographical location." S. Manzoor-Khan, *Tangled in Terror: Uprooting Islamophobia*, translated by: A. Szymczyk, Tajfuny, Warsaw 2025, pp. 49.

26 The opponent usually comes from "Middle East", Africa or South America and is characterized with established visual and lingual stereotypes: balaclavas, turbans, dark complexion, fanaticism, chaos. E. Shohat, R. Stam, *Unthinking Eurocentrism: Multiculturalism and the Media*, Routledge, Nowy Jork 2014, pp. 198-204.

27 The concepts answering the research questions were developed by the author on the basis of the relevant literature (R. Dyer, G. Lipsitz, Ch. I. Harris, E. Said, S. Manzoor-Khan, G. Ch. Spivak, H. K. Bhabha, A. Kundnani, R. Stahl, J. Der Derian, P. Corgan, H. Zinn, P. Frankowski, N. Chomsky, M. Parenti, S. A. Bonn, D. Valentine, R. Jackson, T. Witkowski, M. C. Dorf, D. Smith), with references provided in the footnotes for each corresponding conclusion.

28 R. Dyer, *White: Essays on Race and Culture*, Routledge, Nowy Jork 2017, pp. 145-183.; G. Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness. How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, Temple University Press, Filadelfia 2018, pp. VII-XIX.; Ch. I. Harris, *Whiteness as Property*, "Harvard Law Review", vol. 106, no. 8 (1993), pp. 1715-1745.; E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, Vintage

Books, Nowy Jork 1994, pp. 34-49.

29 R. Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism*, Manchester University Press, Manchester 2005, pp. 76-88.

30 S. Manzoor-Khan op.cit., pp. 45-50.; G. Ch. Spivak, *Can the subaltern speak?*, [in:] *Can the subaltern speak? Reflections on the History of an Idea*, edited by: R. C. Morris, Columbia University Press, Nowy Jork 2010, pp. 36-108.; H. K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, Routledge, Londyn 1994, pp. 66-84.; A. Kundnani, *The Muslims Are Coming! Islamophobia, Extremism, and the Domestic War on Terror*, Verso 2015, pp. 1-54.

31 R. Jackson, op. cit. pp. 62-76.

32 N. Chomsky, *Hegemony or survival America's Quest for Global Dominance*, Holt Paperbacks, Nowy Jork 2004, pp. 8-10.

33 R. Stahl, *Militainment, Inc.: War, Media, and Popular Culture*, Routledge, Nowy Jork 2010, pp. 20-48.; J. Der Derian, *Virtuous War: Mapping the Military-Industrial-Media-Entertainment Network*, Routledge, Nowy Jork 2009, pp. 151-176.; P. Corgan, *Gameplay Mode: War, Simulation, and Technoculture*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2011, pp. 1-18.

34 Witkowski, Terrence. *The Visual Politics of U.S. Gun Culture*, [in:] "Research in Consumer Behavior" 2013, vol. 15, pp. 3-23.

35 M. C. Dorf, *What Does the Second Amendment Mean Today?*, [in:] *The Second Amendment in Law and History*, edited by: C. T. Bogus, The New Press, Nowy Jork 2002, pp. 247-282.

36 R. Stahl, op.cit. pp. 28.

37 H. Zinn, *Ludowa historia Stanów Zjednoczonych, Od roku 1492 do dziś*, Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, Warszawa 2016; P. Frankowski, *Hegemonia Stanów Zjednoczonych Ameryki w warunkach turbulencji*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2006, pp. 60-61.; N. Chomsky, op.cit.

38 D. Smith, *Endless Holocausts, Mass death in the history of The United States Empire*, Monthly Review Press, Nowy Jork 2023, pp. 210-257.

39 N. Chomsky, *Interwencje*, Wydawnictwo Sonia Draga, Katowice 2008.; M. Parenti, *Against Empire*, City Lights Books, San Francisco 1995, pp. 29-43.; M. Parenti, *The Terrorism Trap, September 11 and Beyond*, City Lights Books, San Francisco 2002, pp. 55-96.

40 S.A. Bonn, *Mass Deception, Moral Panic and the U.S. War on Iraq*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick 2010, pp. 1-16.; E. Said, *Orientalizm*, translated by: M. Wyrwas-Wiśniewska, Wydawnictwo Zysk i S-ka, Poznań 2024, pp. 10-19.; D. Valentine, *The CIA as Organised Crime. How Illegal Operations Corrupt America and the World*, Clarity Press, Atlanta 2017, pp. 182-193, 510-535.

41 *Misja Afganistan*, directed by Maciej Dejczer, Poland, 2012.

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Misja Afganistan, directed by Maciej Dejczer, Poland, 2012.