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Ideological others and national identifications in contemporary Poland

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Abstract

Sexual minorities in Poland are excluded from the traditional understanding of "Polishness" premised on conservative, Catholic values. This article examines how ethnic Polish citizens who identify as non-heteronormative navigate their relationship to "Polishness" at a moment of heightened nationalism. Through 31 interviews with Polish sexual minorities, I show that while national identification is a struggle for some sexual minorities, others work to reframe what "Polishness" means to them. I argue for further research examining the ways that stigmatised members of the ethnic majority—what I term ideological others—understand and navigate their relationship to national identity. The study contributes to the literature on everyday nationhood and national identity by attending to national identification among stigmatised members of the ethnic majority.

KEYWORDS
everyday nationhood, national identification, Poland, sexual minorities

1 | INTRODUCTION

Research on nationhood and national identification(s) has moved from examining the construction of the "nation" through elite narratives, discourses, and events (Berezin, 1997; Olick, 1998; Spillman, 1997; Zubrzycki, 2006) to probing how common, ordinary individuals understand and interpret the nation and national identity (Bonikowski, 2016; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Hearn, 2007; Kiely, McCrone, & Bechhofer, 2006). Such studies have been helpful in showing the extent to which national identities are evoked in everyday interactions in addition to demonstrating

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when, whether, and why such identities matter (Brubaker et.al 2006; Fenton, 2007; McCrone & Bechhofer, 2015; Skey, 2010). Yet despite the importance of such findings, scholars studying everyday nationhood and national identification have yet to attend to the experiences of what I refer to as *ideological others*:[2] members of the ethnic majority who are symbolically cast as outsiders and/or threats to the nation due to their lack of conformity to prevailing national ideals. For example, and as this paper will demonstrate, while Polish sexual minorities are undeniably ethnic Poles, they are often framed in public narratives as threats to the *status quo* of Catholic Poland and thus are not "truly Polish" due to their sexual orientation.

There is, of course, a long tradition of research that has examined the intersection of nationalism and sexuality (Bunzl, 2004; Graff, 2010; Mosse, 1985; Parker, 1992). However, it has tended to focus on the ways in which non-normative sexualities are construed and constructed as incompatible with the "nation" through policies and discourse. Less research has been conducted on how sexual minorities themselves understand and navigate their relationship to national identity given such exclusion. The primary point of this paper is thus to extend research on everyday nationhood and national identification by focusing on the experiences of sexual minorities. I am also arguing that more research ought to be conducted that focuses squarely on the ways in which sexual minorities and other ideological others navigate their relationship(s) with national identity.[3]

My interviews with 31 Polish sexual minorities reveal the myriad ways in which members of this ethnically included yet socially stigmatised community understand what it means to be Polish. I find that while some respondents struggled to identify with their national identity, such struggles are not necessarily determined by their sexual orientation. Other respondents were able to more easily identify with their "Polishness," but not because they identified with prevailing conservative notions of Polish national identity. Rather, it is because they engaged in a process I refer to as *reframing*, in which they redefined what "Polishness" meant to them in their own terms. Reframing, I argue, is an important strategy by which sexual minorities can find meaning and belonging in their national identity despite a political climate that marks them as enemies of the nation.[4] In addition to reframing, other respondents were able to more easily and comfortably identify with their "Polishness" because they also embraced a cosmopolitan identity.

Before continuing, however, it is important to clarify precisely what is and what is *not* being claimed here. Primarily, I am not arguing nor trying to demonstrate that national identification for Polish sexual minorities is harder and/or easier because of their sexual orientation. In other words, I do not present a causal argument in which I claim that sexual minorities in Poland feel more or less Polish because of their sexual orientation. While one interview subject discussed the ways in which his national identification has changed as he came to terms with being gay, national identification is often too complex of a process to understand as being impacted by any one variable (i.e., one's coming to terms with their sexual orientation). The primary purpose of this article is therefore to demonstrate the processes of national identification among members of a stigmatised community that is also part of the ethnic majority. In the conclusion, I will discuss ways in which such research can be extended to move beyond the current case.

In the following sections, I discuss and critically analyse the everyday nationhood literature and literature that has examined the relationship between nationalism and sexuality. I then move to discuss the interviews, in which I examine the extent to which, and the ease with which, sexual minorities in Poland identify with their Polishness.

2 | EVERYDAY NATIONHOOD, NATIONALISM, AND SEXUALITY

The everyday nationhood perspective seeks to understand nationalism and national identities not as things existing in the world but as perspectives on and ways of seeing the world (Brubaker, Loveman, & Stamatov, 2004; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008). Such research departs from scholarship in which the primary focal point of analysis is the formation and diffusion of the nation-state as a macro-political formation (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 2008; Wimmer & Feinstein, 2010). Yet as Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008) have emphasised, in addition to being understood as the result of macro-level dynamics, nationhood is also something that is practically accomplished in everyday

interactions and situations in the lives of average national citizens. The focus on nationhood and national identity among ordinary members of the nation—how and the extent to which people think about and *with* the nation—has therefore become a central and fruitful endeavour for many scholars studying nationalism in recent years (Bonikowski, 2016; Fenton, 2007; Phillips & Smith, 2000; Skey, 2010; Thompson, 2001).

A key example of this approach is Rogers Brubaker and colleagues' account of national identity and "everyday ethnicity" among Hungarians and Romanians in Cluj, Transylvania (Brubaker, Feischmidt, Fox, & Grancea, 2006). Through in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, they found that the nationalistic rhetoric of political entrepreneurs was seldom salient to those they interviewed and observed. Such observations led them to conclude that the ways in which people think "with" the nation may not have much to do with how the nation is constructed in elite discourse by political entrepreneurs. Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2006, 2009) took a similar approach in her empirical work comparing levels of national identification among German vocational schoolteachers and their students. Through interviews and ethnographic observation, she found that while older generations were still averse to the notion of German nationalism due to its association with Nazism, their students were more likely to embrace their national identities as a source of strength and pride. Generational differences, then, played a major role in citizens' national identifications.

In the British case, Michael Skey (2010) showed how an individual's strong attachment to their nation and national identity can provide what he, following Anthony Giddens (1991), calls a sense of ontological security. This taken-for-granted sense of national belonging is particularly salient, Skey argues, in times of economic and social unrest (2010, p. 731). Finally, Fenton (2007) demonstrated that many of the British youths he interviewed showed indifference to the idea of having a British or English identity. Such findings led him to argue that national identity may not be as important as some scholars (cf. Calhoun, 1997; Greenfeld & Chirot, 1994) make it out to be. Overall, research on everyday nationhood has been helpful in elucidating the myriad ways in which the members of a national community understand national identity and their relationship to it, as well as the significance of it in their day-to-day lives. Yet despite the valuable insights of the everyday nationhood tradition, it has not explicitly focused on the ways in which sexual and other ideological others navigate their relationship with national identity.

There is, however, a robust body of scholarship that has emphasised the relationship between sexuality and the nation. One of the exemplars of this tradition is George Mosse, who in *Nationalism and Sexuality* (1985) explicitly placed dominant visions of sexuality at the forefront of his theory of nationalism. Mosse demonstrated how the rise of the modern nation-state entailed a politics of respectability (1985, p. 4), which categorised homosexuality (seen as the antithesis of the "manliness" needed to forge strong nations) as threatening to the nation. Yet Mosse's take on the relationship between nationalism and sexuality centred on the creation of a politics of respectability and the formation of social norms concerning sexuality and less on how sexual minorities themselves understand their relationship to the nation and national identity. His focus, therefore, was more on the *creation* of national norms through the construction of sexual others rather than on the *navigation* of national identity by those others.

Much research mining the intersections of nationalism and sexuality has followed in Mosse's footsteps and demonstrated the significant role that sexual and gendered norms have played in the formation of exclusionary forms of nationalism. An early take on the relationship between nationalism and sexuality came in a collected volume of case studies written by comparative literary scholars (Parker, 1992). This collection of essays discussed the various ways in which gender and sexuality tie into nation-building projects in various national contexts. The contributing authors discussed (among other things) how literatures, fashions, and films helped solidify certain ideas of what the relationship between the nation and sexuality ought to be. This early work examining the relationship(s) between nationalism and sexuality thus clearly showed how national values—particularly how they relate to sexuality—are communicated clearly through various modes of art and culture.

Similarly, a number of feminist scholars (Yuval-Davis, 1993; McClintock, 1995; Nagel, 1998) have argued that narratives of masculinity, gender, and sexuality, particularly those that celebrate patriotic masculinity and the woman's roles as the exalted mother of the nation, have been essential to nearly all national projects. Such narratives frame the ways in which people understand how to belong to their given national community, as well as what ought

to be considered deviant from and hazardous to the status quo of the nation. Building on these studies, Sam Pryke (1998) argued for a more robust conceptualisation of the relationship between nationalism and sexuality, suggesting three focal points for scholarship: national sexual stereotypes, the role of sexuality in national conflict, and the role of sexuality in nation building.

These earlier studies then helped set the stage for more empirical work that mined the relationship between nationalism and sexuality in specific national contexts. Through in-depth archival research, Matti Bunzl (2004) showed both how sexual minorities and Jews served as outsiders, which the newly reconstructed Austrian nation strived to define itself against, and how these communities began to advocate for themselves in the public sphere in the latter part of the 20th century. More recently, Richard Mole (2011, 2016) has examined how what he refers to as "political homophobia" operates in the Central and Eastern Europe. Mole's research has demonstrated the ways in which politicians in Latvia, Serbia, and Russia have instrumentally used homophobic discourses to frame homosexuality and homosexuals as foreign threats to the nation (2016, p. 111). These discourses, Mole argues, serve to reinforce the idea that homosexuality is a foreign import—an unwelcome consequence of Europeanisation—that can and should be resisted. Thus, in the Latvian case, some politicians have gone so far as to claim that homosexuality did not exist in their country until joining the European Union (EU).[5]

Similar themes have also been explored in scholarship focusing on Poland. In Section 2.1, I will describe some important context regarding the Polish case before reviewing the ways in which scholars have examined the relationship between nationalism and (homo)sexuality in Poland. I will then proceed to my analysis.

2.1 | Sexual minorities and Polish national identity

In contemporary Poland, sexual minorities are increasingly excluded from articulations of national identity that are promoted by conservative, nationalist groups. This prevailing notion of Polish identity is based on a national mythology that envisions Poland as an essentially Catholic nation whose mission is "defending Europe against the infidel (however defined)" (Zubrzycki, 2011, p. 55). In this struggle, the primary axis of disagreement centres on whether Poland should embrace the more liberal and progressive "Western" values embodied by the EU or remain tied to traditional, conservative, and nationalistic understandings of Polish national identity. On the right, there is a highly conservative faction that is intimately tied to the Church and stands in staunch opposition to the directives of the EU. This group opposes the EU primarily because they see it as a corrupt Western institution that is trying to enforce certain norms and values that are contrary to the traditional values of Poland, namely Catholicism and traditional family models (Gaisbauer, 2007; Machaj & Białas-Zielińska, 2014; Porter, 2001). The proponents of this vision therefore believe that Polish national identity ought to be tied to the Church and to traditional social norms and values (Davies, 1997; Zubrzycki, 2006). On the left stands the pro-EU, progressive and liberal faction, which believes that Poland's national identity should promote pluralism and openness.

At the core of this cleavage, then, is a battle over Polish national identity, between maintaining tradition and embracing progressive social changes (Koczanowicz, 2014; Mach, 2007). Recent manifestations of the national mythology just discussed posit sexual minorities as one of the primary threats to Polish national identity,[6] as they are often understood as being representative of the progressive ideologies that stand in firm opposition to traditional Polish values that are deeply rooted in conservative Catholicism.

This is not to say, however, that sexual minorities and Polishness are framed as mutually exclusive at all times and in all contexts. As Łucasz Szulc (2011) has pointed out, it is not sexual minorities *in general* that are criticised but those who openly demonstrate and celebrate their diversity. The issue, therefore, is not with one's sexual orientation but with their queerness. This observation then leads Szulc to claim that while Poland may be open to tolerating sexual minorities (insofar as they keep to themselves and assimilate to the heterosexual status quo), it is still far from being open to accepting their queerness (2011, pp. 170–171). Nor is it to claim that religion is always seen as antithetical to queerness or that all sexual minorities in Poland are hostile towards

Catholicism. Indeed, there is a prominent organisation in Poland known as "Faith and Rainbow" (*Wiara i Tęcza*) that advocates on behalf of sexual minorities that also maintain strong religious faith and dedication to the Catholic Church.[7] The intersection of (homo)sexuality, religion, and Polishness is therefore quite complex. However, the primary point I wish to underline here is that for the Church and the Polish far right the issue is what sexual minorities—to them—*represent*, a deviation from and threat to conservative, Catholic values that are understood as the immutable pillars of Polishness.

Given this reality, a number of Polish scholars have written about the ways in which Polish nationalism has specifically targeted sexual minorities. In a series of essays, Agnieszka Graff (2006, 2009, 2010) examined how nationalistic discourses in Poland are not only strongly gendered but also laden with derogatory references to non-heteronormative sexualities. The various "political uses of homophobia," she argues, came in the wake of Poland's EU accession and have served as a means by which nationalistic Poles can draw firm boundaries between what is "truly Polish" and what is simply an undesirable European import (Graff, 2010). Among these undesirable imports are LGBT and "gender ideologies," which nationalists believe pose a grave threat to traditional Polish values (Graff, 2010, p. 585).

In another insightful study, Adam Ostolski (2007) compared right wing periodicals from the pre-war and contemporary eras to show that the discourses of exclusion operated similarly against Jews in the 1930s as they do now against sexual minorities. His analysis demonstrated how both groups were characterised as "conspirators, corruptors, and pariahs," and, similar to Graff, Ostolski argued that the logics of anti-Semitism and homophobia in Poland share a similar structure. More recently, Robert Kulpa's discursive analysis of a speech given by Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of the conservative Law and Justice party, revealed that sexual minorities are also often construed as an "enemy within" Polish borders (2019, p. 12). Such research has thus been important in unveiling the ways that the far right in Poland talk about sexual minorities in relation to the nation, and much like the research in other national contexts, it tends to underline the idea that non-heteronormative sexualities are very often framed as foreign threats (be they internal or external) to the well-being of the nation. Yet in all of these studies, the analytic focus rests on the *construction* of sexualities and sexual others through policies and discourses, and not on how members of these constructed categories (Brubaker et al., 2004) interpret and understand their relationship to national identity.

A number of scholars, however, have also focused more directly on the experiences and actions of Polish sexual minorities. In a recent examination of the websites of several LGBTQ organisations in Poland and Turkey, Łukasz Szulc (2016) argued that by utilising national symbols in conjunction with those of the LGBT community, these groups engaged in the practice of "domesticating the nation online." Utilising Billig's (1995) concept of "banal nationalism," Szulc demonstrated that many of these organisations, though not self-consciously nationalistic, still engage in banal "flaggings" of the nation on their webpages. Although many of these websites still tended to "reaffirm the world as a world of nations" (Szulc, 2016, p. 318), they would also queer national symbols, thereby attempting to make the nation a more hospitable and inclusive space for queer identities. Yet while Szulc's study usefully shifted focus from discourses *about* the LGBT+ community to the actions *of* LGBT+ groups, his primary emphasis was on the organisational level and not the micro-level experiences of sexual minorities.

Some research has, however, specifically relied on in-depth interviews in order to examine the experiences of Polish sexual minorities. Joanna Mizielińska's (2001) study of Polish lesbians included both a critical discursive analysis of Polish nationalist discourse and interviews with Polish lesbians. However, her interviews were primarily focused on these women's relationship to the Church and Catholicism, not how they navigated their sexual and national identities. Similarly, Gregory Czarnecki's (2006) interview-based study showed how the experiences of discrimination of both Polish Jews and sexual minorities led to similar feelings of being "in the closet." Yet his study was primarily focused on the comparative experiences of Polish sexual minorities and Jews and thus did not take as its primary departure point the ways in which Polish sexual minorities interpret and navigate their relationship to national identity. The latter is the primary focus of this paper.

3 | DATA AND METHODS

The primary data source for this study is 31 in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted with Polish sexual minorities between March and June of 2017. The interviews were conducted both in Polish and English, depending on the respondent's level of fluency with English. In order to allow for the most direct and honest responses, the researcher only conducted interviews in English if respondents felt comfortable expressing themselves and talking about intimate subject matter in their non-native language. When interviews were conducted in English, the researcher let respondents know that they could switch to Polish if they felt it necessary to better express themselves. Given that the researcher speaks Polish conversationally but not fluently, interviews conducted in Polish were recorded, transcribed, and translated from Polish to English by a transcription service.

Initial respondents were recruited through an advertisement on the website of the Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH), Poland's largest LGBT rights organisation. Following other scholars studying nationhood and national identity among "ordinary" individuals (Condor, 2000; Miller-Idriss & Rothenberg, 2012; Phillips & Smith, 2000), my solicitation was focused on recruiting average Polish citizens, the only specified criteria for interview subjects being that they are Polish citizens, over the age of 18, and that they identify as either, gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Those who responded to my advertisement then helped me find other willing participants.

Given the broad criteria, the characteristics of respondents varied greatly. Twenty-one were male and 10 were female. The youngest was 19, and the oldest was 64. They spanned a wide range of careers, from artists and computer programmers to lawyers and educators, and nearly all of them were highly educated or pursuing higher education. Although some respondents were in some way affiliated with an LGBT rights, NGOs, or similar organisations in their city, only one was formally employed by such an organisation. Only four respondents were regularly involved in LGBT activism or advocacy. While the majority of interviews were held in Krakow, I also conducted interviews in Warsaw, Wroclaw, and Poznan. Interviews lasted an average of 75 min, but ranged from 1 to 3 hr, and consisted of very few formal questions. The focal point of each interview was on the idea of Polishness, or what it meant to be Polish, and the extent to which each respondent felt Polish and identified with a Polish national identity. Respondents were also asked to describe the prototypical Polish citizen, as well as to describe and characterise current political issues in Poland.

3.1 | Struggles over national identification

A number of interview subjects struggled to identify with their Polishness. Such difficulties were evident in my conversation with Beata, a 38-year-old translator living outside Warsaw. Beata, now divorced, was once married to a man and has two young children. She confided to me that she has always had a sense of being "different," yet given her strict Catholic upbringing, it was not until her late 20s that she could truly understand why.

> So, I was - in my - my family was very, very Catholic. We lived with my grandma since I was six. I was an only child, and basically my grandma set the rules. So I was forced to go to church and to pray every day and I just took it as whatever it was. It was my life … so, I did not really entertain the thought of different sexuality or sexual orientation … . I remember in high school, I really had a big crush on my English teacher who was a female, and my friends -- my girlfriends -- they actually had a nickname for me which basically meant a lesbian. I was so ashamed and so angry at them, I completely did not associate myself with being a lesbian at all. I just didn't see -- I just liked the teacher, but nothing else.

Although her narrative began with reference to herself, "I," Beata quickly changed the subject of the conversation from herself to her family. This hesitation suggests that the sense of religiosity felt in her youth was not something embraced independently, but rather something imposed upon her that she had to consciously work to separate

herself from. Yet even several years later, her immediate response was to state that she was religious in her early life. Beata's statement regarding her former crush on a female English teacher is also telling. Although she was feeling strong emotions towards her instructor, in her mind, the idea that her attraction might have been stemming from her sexual orientation did not occur to her. Instead, she was simply left with confusing emotions, as her strict religious upbringing and the pressures of peer ridicule precluded her from even entertaining the idea that she might be a lesbian. Our conversation then shifted towards her feelings regarding Poland and what Polish national identity meant to her.

I: From your understanding, what does it meant to be Polish?

R: Right now, right now, I do feel Polish. The fact is that I criticise my government, my country, a lot, but I'm allowed to do it … So, that's my sort of being Polish. But to tell you the truth, any sort of patriotic feelings are being hijacked by extreme nationalist groups. And it's almost, it's almost shameful for me to carry a Polish flag, or to have any sort of Polish symbols on my clothes, because that's basically what I associate with hooligans … I had a friend from Brazil who lived here with me for eight months, and she wanted to get something typically Polish. They had baseball caps with the Polish emblem and she asked me to buy one for her and I refused. I said, "Absolutely not. You're not going to be wearing that because this basically is being associated with so many things that we both were against." With xenophobia, with homophobia, with anti-Semitism, with any sort of basic phobia to anything that is a little bit different.

The first four words of Beata's statement here are telling. Although she claims to feel Polish *right now*, the implication here is that her subjective sense of Polishness is not a given. A consistent sense of national identity, which some argue can be essential to feelings of ontological security (Skey, 2010) appears to be absent. Although she claimed to still feel Polish and thus did not fully eschew her national identity, Beata's identification with Polishness took some justification.

Further, according to Beata, traditional Polish symbols had been hijacked and transformed into icons of extremism. For her, the symbols being discussed—Polish baseball caps with the national emblem—carried with them the idea that being Polish meant being a hostile, xenophobic nationalist, and therefore they were seen as offensive and alienating. Yet her Brazilian friend, who did not understand these products as being associated with such exclusionary ideals, instead simply saw them as mere souvenirs. Beata therefore noted a sense of shame that accompanied the utilisation of traditional Polish symbols that are accompanied by feelings of patriotism and national pride. Yet for her, any involvement with national symbols given their association with far right nationalism—be it carrying a flag or wearing a "patriotic" article of clothing—could be understood as an assault on her sexual identity, one that was at odds with prevailing articulations of Polish national identity.

Waldek, a 30-year old artist living in Krakow, told me something similar.

I: What, in your view then, does it mean to be Polish?

W: Um to be honest, I never, I never felt … okay, I know that I'm Polish and I live here, but I never felt like, I'm not a nationalist person, let's say. I'm not nationalist, there's a better word … I'm not patriotic. Because I don't … I would like to be. I really would like to be, and I would like to be proud of my country. I would like to, I don't know, feel that I want to fight for my country, but I don't, because I don't have any reason to do that.

This sentiment is telling, as it implies that despite some yearning to feel strongly Polish, Waldek has been unable to find any justification to do so. Even though the initial question was about what, in general, it meant to be Polish, his response did not address this inquiry. Rather, Waldek immediately moved into a discussion of how he himself has never felt a strong sense of Polish identity, even though he would like to feel, as he states, proud of his country. Although he

did not articulate precisely why he struggled with his connection to Polishness, Waldek's decision to be so forthright about disavowing any relation to nationalism and patriotism, despite his professed desire to be patriotic, implies a strong sense of alienation from Polish national identity, an identity to which he cannot easily connect himself.

Karol, a 30-year-old travel agent and tour guide living in Krakow, expressed a similar sentiment in our conversation.

> I: In your view, what do you think it means to be Polish?
>
> K: Right now, I'm really ashamed that I'm Polish, given what's been going on in the last couple of months. So, it is also a difficult question and would have been definitely easier to respond to that question a couple of years ago.
>
> I: Do you think that your sexuality has anything to do with this?
>
> K: To some extent, yes, but on the other hand, I still have friends who are not gay and they also see it more or less the same way as I see it. I actually never really suffered much from being a member of this oppressed minority, but still I think that in a lot of cases, it helped me to think in a more positive way about other people. But, even if I was straight, I'd be seeing most of the cases more or less the same way. But, it's also hard to say because I'm gay and am not straight and I will never be straight.

Taken together, my conversations with Beata, Waldek, and Karol illustrate the sometimes alienating effects of prevailing, conservative understandings of national identity for sexual minorities in Poland. Yet this is not to say, of course, that it is simply because of their sexual orientations that they struggled to identify with Polishness, as there are numerous possible explanations for why some people might experience difficulty feeling part of this collective, national identity. It is certainly possible that a number of heterosexual Poles feel similar constraints, and as Karol states, he has many heterosexual friends who feel the same way as him. Thus, while these individuals do indeed struggle to identify with their Polishness, it would be hasty to claim that their sexuality is the driving force behind these struggles. Instead, such cases demonstrate that sexuality may actually *not* play a major role in national (dis-) identification for some sexual minorities, suggesting that while citizens with marginalised identities may indeed have trouble identifying with their national identity, one cannot assume that such struggles are determined by the aspect of themselves that is marginalised. As the cases of Beata, Waldek, and Karol demonstrate, such dis-identification may be more circumstantial or tied to more general liberal leanings.

One respondent—Marcin, a 28-year-old computer programmer living in Warsaw—however, made it clear that coming to terms with his sexuality *did* make it more difficult to identify as Polish.

> M: From the start, I was raised like – maybe not like extremely to be focused on nationality, but generally, I was like – I would say I was patriotic, I was proud of my country, its achievements, and all that comes with that. But, I've got to say that when the years went on and I was more aware of the political situation, *I was more aware of my own sexual identity* [emphasis added], it's like I feel that the right-wing extremists are really – they're like stealing, or like taking for themselves the national symbols… they're supposed to be for everyone. I tend to identify national symbols with them … so whenever I see a Polish flag, I like wonder is it going to be something about hating gays or hating, I don't know, Muslims, or whatever. And it usually is, which is sad.

Marcin's emphasis on how his perceptions changed over time is important as it underscores his evolving understanding of what it means to be Polish. Further, it shows how, given these changes, the ease with which he could identify with his Polishness has also changed. As he states, throughout his childhood, he was raised to be proud of the various achievements of his country, and he therefore felt patriotic. Although not ardently focused on nationality, he could claim his Polish national identity with pride, and he therefore embraced national symbols. In these times,

national symbols and the national identity they represented were reinforced by feelings of patriotism and pride, and thus the national icons that symbolised these patriotic ideas were not seen as oppressive.

However, as he became more politically aware and, most importantly, conscious of his own sexual orientation, Marcin's understanding of what it meant to be Polish, in addition to how easily he could identify with Polishness, began to change. As his understanding evolved, national symbols and the national identity they buttressed were harder to imbue with positivity and pride and were increasingly interpreted as brands of far right nationalists, ones he could no longer brandish. Identifying with his national identity, one that he claims he used to be proud of, therefore became more difficult with time. While as a child Marcin's understanding of his Polish national identity brought with it feelings of national pride and belonging, as he became more in touch with his sexual orientation, one that, according to traditional Polish mythology is both a threat to Poland and in stark opposition to true Polishness, these positive associations began to diminish. Marcin made this point even clearer in the following exchange.

> I: Do you feel Polish in your daily life?
>
> M: I'd say it definitely changed. I find myself not really associating myself with Poland that strongly. I feel more like I was born here, but this country doesn't really care about me and I've got to say I don't really care that much about this country, either. *So, yeah, it changed. I remember that it wasn't like that from the start*. So, I guess just this constant reminder of not being equal to heterosexual persons, *I guess it made me just not really associate with that as much as I would normally do or as I would like*. It's still in the back of my head just to move out from Poland someday and live a normal life in a country that would appreciate me for who I am [emphasis added].

Marcin's desire to identify as Polish has been hampered by the constant reminders that homosexuality and Polishness are commonly framed as mutually exclusive categories. Given the widespread narratives that marked him as being "less Polish" due to his sexual orientation, Marcin has grown increasingly alienated from his national identity. This is particularly troubling for him because, as he states, he would like to associate himself more with Polishness. However, the "constant reminder" of being an unequal part of the national community makes the process national identification a far more difficult task.

Such struggles, however, were not unanimously felt among all respondents. In Section 3.2, I will discuss a strategy that respondents have engaged, which I have named reframing, in order to make their relationship with Polish national identity easier to navigate.

3.2 | Reframing Polishness

Although a number of respondents struggled to identify with their Polishness, to say that all respondents struggled to the same degree would be an exaggeration. Some were able to avoid the same kinds of struggles that were evident with Beata, Marcin, Waldek, and Karol, but not because they identified with the traditional model of Polish national identity. Rather, it was because they either reframed Polishness as being premised on more general and inclusive criteria or reframed their own relationship to Polishness more generally, often by also identifying more strongly with a cosmopolitan identity. The following excerpt from my conversation with Adam, a 20-year-old university student and activist living in Poznan, is a clear example of the latter approach.

> I: How would you describe or define what it means to be Polish?
>
> A: So, I don't feel Polish. I think that I am cosmopolitan. But, some of the habits, some of the traditions, some of the other schemes of behavior and of opinions and routines in my mind are without question Polish … but I try to not to identify as a Polish person because I think that it's too oppressive … I prefer to create a world without barriers, and I think that by

doing that, or in wanting this world, I should refuse my Polish identity … but I don't want to do that, yeah?

Like Waldek above, Adam is quick to answer the initial prompt by claiming that he does *not* feel Polish, even though my question asked how he would define or describe what it means to be Polish. However, as he continues in his response, it becomes clear that such a dissociation is not easy for him. As he states, there are basic mental schemas and tendencies that, having grown up in Poland, are impossible to avoid. Therefore, in some ways, he is "without question" Polish. However, despite these deeply engrained schemas, Adam also feels the need to actively disengage from his Polish identity, as he believes it to be oppressive and contradictory to the barrier-free world he envisions and desires. He therefore first and foremost identifies as cosmopolitan, while also acknowledging that he does not desire to denounce his Polishness.

Thus, while identifying strictly as Polish might prove difficult for Adam, thinking of himself as also being cosmopolitan is a strategy that gives him the ability to maintain a more stable sense of identity. Much like an individual navigating familiar streets is able to walk more calmly and easily than one navigating an unfamiliar neighbourhood, Adam is able to more easily navigate life as a gay man in Poland by reframing his identity as being more intimately tied to cosmopolitanism than Polishness, even though doing so is by no means an easy task. As Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg (2012) have aptly pointed out, people often have complex and at times contradictory relationships to the nation and their national identity.

A number of respondents echoed Adam's sentiments. Mateusz, a 26-year-old doctoral student living in Wrocław, told me (after I asked him what it meant to be Polish)

M: So, I'm cosmopolitan. I don't view myself as very Polish. I love Poland because I love the people I know in Poland, I love Polish cities, I love Polish literature and culture and so on and so on, and maybe this is being Polish. Being involved and being engaged in Polish culture, Polish society and so on. *In those terms*, I am Polish [emphasis added].

Much like Adam, Mateusz does not completely eschew his Polishness. Yet despite acknowledging strong and positive emotions for particular aspects of Polish culture, he very clearly identifies first and foremost as cosmopolitan while still retaining a sense of his Polish identity. However, as his statement shows, it took a great deal of conscious deliberation to arrive at this conclusion, as he initially claims to not view himself as very Polish. Though Mateusz can and does identify as Polish, this process requires some redefinition in which he reframes what being Polish means on terms of his own choosing. His immediate response, however, is still to state that he identifies as cosmopolitan.

Romek, a 37-year old lawyer living in Krakow, shared similar ideas, yet claimed that his Polish identity came first. "My identity is as a Pole in the first place. But equally or maybe just lower, I think I'm just a person of Western culture … a person who really shares the views of an open society with open values."

Although Romek does not use this term in his response, he still underscores the importance of living in an "open society," which is one of the primary tenets of cosmopolitanism. Therefore, while Adam, Mateusz, and Romek all have their own unique responses to the questions regarding their national identification, they all share a commitment to cosmopolitan values.

A similar logic is evident in the following excerpt from my conversation with Kuba, a 30-year-old museum curator living in Wroclaw.

I: Would you say that you feel Polish?

R: Yes. I think … I think yes. I feel Polish, but my Polishness is written with a small letter, not with a big letter, like Polish Poland and you even have to, you know, stand up when you say Poland. No, for me Polishness is like the everyday life … so this is the way I would like

> to understand Polishness. Like that you know people and people know you, and you are not available but eager to help some other people and to do something together.

Although Kuba does not identify as cosmopolitan, he has found a way to comfortably associate with Polishness by reframing what it means to be Polish. Given this reframing, he is able to easily and quickly say that he feels Polish when asked. As his statement makes clear, being Polish does not require displays of patriotism or national pride. Rather, for Kuba, it is enough to be a good neighbour and everyday citizen, traits that he believes what should constitute Polishness in the first place. Similar to Mateusz above, changing the stakes in this way makes it easier for him to more easily and tacitly identify as Polish. Ewa, a 40-year-old former academic who now works at a small bank in Warsaw, said something similar:

> There are two purposes of patriotism … one is, you know, that national one, that sort of a big one. And the other one is let's pay taxes, let's care about environment, let's be good to our neighbors, let's support local, let's say, schools, libraries, communities. Let's support good causes and so on. And those are forms of, let's say, they called modern patriotism, not war patriotism. And I could support it, but it isn't specifically Polish … .so it's a citizen approach.

As Kuba and Ewa emphasise, being Polish can simply mean being a thoughtful and caring citizen, an idea that is not, as Ewa states, specifically Polish. Ewa's sentiment is important, as it illustrates how one's Polishness need not be constituted by one's adherence to a conservative and mythologised ideal, and emphasises instead the crucial place of everyday actions happening in the present, actions nearly anyone can engage in. Reframing the basis of Polish national identity in this way may therefore serve as a means by which Polish sexual minorities can find new meaning in their national identity. With this newfound, reframed meaning, they can more easily and proudly identify with their Polishness because it is now an identity they have defined on their own terms.

Such efforts at reframing national identity may also involve the strategic use of national symbols. Irma and Maria, a lesbian couple living in Warsaw who both volunteer for a prominent local LGBT rights organisation, claimed that embracing and reframing national symbols was one of the most important mechanisms by which sexual minorities could salvage Polish national identity for themselves as well as other excluded minorities. However, as Irma's statement makes clear, engaging national symbols in this way was not always easy for her.

> I: My mother got me a Polish flag a few years ago, and I got it and put it in the back of room, like the end of the basement. Because I didn't … like it was in my mind, I only imagined, you know, the Right being nationalist with the flag. *I didn't have the connection in my head that I could actually hang it or hold it somewhere.* And then a few years passed and I'm marching with a flag [emphasis added].

Irma had initially seen the Polish flag as an icon of exclusion, which did not elicit any positive emotions nor afford any positive actions. Yet after some time, she found new meaning in the flag, which then allowed her to more easily identify with and utilise it in public demonstrations. This reframing of a formerly oppressive symbol therefore encouraged her to approach both the Polish flag and what it means to be Polish differently.

Irma and Maria then informed me that they had taken their mobilisation of the Polish flag even further by stitching it to a rainbow flag, which they now display at various parades and pride marches. By reframing national symbols in this way, Irma and Maria are also attempting to reframe Polish national identity to be more inclusive of sexual minorities. Thus, in addition to finding ways to reframe what it means to be Polish in their own minds, some are working to reframe the boundaries of Polish national identity through activism.

> I: …We're mainstreaming the rainbow, showing that the Polish flag and Rainbow flag do not exclude each other.

M: That we are citizens as well.
I: We thought this was a great idea and mostly bigger demonstrations happened here in Warsaw. So we basically --- really all of them wear their Polish flag and the rainbow flag showing that we're here and we support you.

By engaging critically with salient national symbols, Irma and Maria are effectively doing what respondents like Beata and Marcin believe needs to be done, reclaiming those national symbols and the national identity that they represent that have supposedly been hijacked by the far right (Bourdieu, 1991; Verdery, 1993). For activists like Irma and Maria, such acts of reframing are an important way to demonstrate that national symbols need not be understood as signifying a strictly conservative national identity, but can be framed and understood as being inclusive of sexual and other minorities.

4 | CONCLUDING REMARKS

While research on everyday nationhood has been instructive in showing the ways in which ordinary individuals navigate and interpret the nation and national identity (Brubaker et al., 2006; Fox & Miller-Idriss, 2008; Miller-Idriss & Rothenberg, 2012), it has not focused explicitly on how more vulnerable and stigmatised members of the ethnic majority—what I have termed *ideological others*—navigate their relationship with national identity. My examination of the experiences of Polish sexual minorities and their relationship to Polishness therefore serves as an initial attempt to help broaden this literature. The interviews presented in this article call attention to the various ways in which the nation is experienced and engaged with by a specific community of ideological others and demonstrate that while national identification can indeed be a struggle for some, many others are working to reframe what their Polish national identity means to them. Such reframing(s) can therefore make it easier for them to openly embrace their Polishness and thus in some cases contribute to a renewed sense of ontological security (Skey, 2010), while also directly challenging traditional and exclusionary models of national identity.

Although the analysis here is of a single target population (Polish sexual minorities), research focused on national identification among ideological others is certainly not limited to this particular case. In addition to focusing on different national contexts, research could also take a comparative perspective. In the case of Poland, for example, fruitful comparisons could be made between levels of national identification among ideological others and other members of the ethnic majority (such as Catholic Poles) or between different ideological others (such as Polish feminists and controversial academics or activists). Further, the current study did not focus on the extent to which other facets of people's identities (such as their social class and education levels) might have impacted the ways in which they identified with the nation. By including these criteria, further studies might be able to tease out whether and why certain communities struggle more or less than others with their national identification.

Research could also move beyond examining a single case and examine the processes of national identification among ideological others in different national contexts (such as sexual minorities in Poland and those in Hungary). Such studies could also examine how these communities experience and interpret stigmatisation and discrimination. Michele Lamont and colleagues (2016) have already made some very useful steps in this direction by examining responses to stigmatisation in the United State, Brazil, and Israel among ethno-racial minorities. The primary difference between their work and what I am proposing, however, is that I am emphasising a focus on the experiences of those who are stigmatised on ideological grounds, not due to their ethnicity and/or race.

Finally, research focusing on ideological others is not limited to exploring these communities' relationships to national identity. While my aims here were to understand how Polish sexual minorities navigated their relationship with Polishness, future researchers may want to examine the ways in which national projects create ideological others, who is lumped into these groups, and why. A possible example could be an analysis of Turkey's recent purge

of academics. In this case, scholars could focus primarily on elite-level discourses used to frame intellectuals and academics as being threats to the Turkish nation. Another relevant site of research would be contemporary Brazil, as president Jair Bolsonaro has recently taken aim at intellectuals and academics who are at ideological odds with his plans for the future of Brazil.

Of course, the chosen focal point of analysis will depend on the larger national context.

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ENDNOTES

[2] In using the term "ideological" here, I do not mean that sexuality is meant to be seen as an ideology. What I am saying is that the basis of exclusion for some, including but not limited to sexual minorities, is based on the idea that they do not conform to traditional ideologies of the nation. They are therefore turned into *ideological others*. I am grateful to a reviewer for helping me elucidate this distinction.

[3] Thus, as Michael Skey has claimed, "a further issue that requires greater scrutiny is the notion of the ethnic majority" (2010, p. 731).

[4] This point follows McCrone's claim that "those on the margins…whether in national or ethnic terms, offer the social scientist much better opportunities for understanding that identities are, in essence, negotiation codes used as people attempt to steer paths through processes of acceptance and affirmation" (2002, p. 31). While this argument is well taken, such research has yet to focus on ideological others.

[5] Such "political homophobia" has become a focal point of research in political science concerned with the impact of Europeanisation on a number of recent EU member states, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (Ayoub, 2016; Mole, 2016; O'Dwyer, 2010).

[6] Polish feminist activists and the "gender ideology" that they and others represent are therefore also often the targets of such debates.

[7] A recent article by Magdalena Mikulak (2019), however, has argued that despite the importance of the organisation, Faith and Rainbow is largely assimilationist and therefore does little to challenge heteronormativity and traditional patriarchal structures.

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