Ideological Others and National Identifications in Contemporary Poland

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Sociology)
in the University of Michigan
2021

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my brother, Adam.

Acknowledgements

I have many people to thank and acknowledge. My friends and family in Poland helped to make all of my research trips feasible and enjoyable. Thank you Wojciech Ćwiertniewicz for the many great walks and conversations and for always having a comfortable couch for me to sleep on. Thanks to Romuald Szoka for many helpful conversations and for joining me at Warsaw's 2019 Pride. I must also acknowledge and thank the staff at the Campaign Against Homophobia and Love Does Not Exclude for their many meetings with me and always welcoming me to their events.

My wonderful advisors and colleagues at Michigan helped make this dissertation possible. Sandy Levitsky helped push me to refine and strengthen my arguments time and time again. Rob Jansen was always available to help me think through my many convoluted ideas, and his writing course helped me attain my first publication. My many long walks and conversations with Michael Evangelist helped me to clear up muddled ideas and also provided me with much needed release when pressures were at their highest. Geneviève Zubrzycki was perhaps the best dissertation chair one could ask for, as she was not only helpful with questions regarding my work, but clearly cared deeply for my well-being and interests. Her support and kindness throughout the whole process helped get me to the finish line.

Finally, I must thank my wonderful and supportive family. My parents, Joe and Elżbieta, were always there when I needed reassurance and I can never thank them enough for all that they have done for me. Thank you, dad for all the late night and/or early morning talks. Thank you, mom, for helping me with my Polish and always reminding me to relax.

Above all, however, I must thank my wife Madison Goforth for all of her continued support and encouragement. These last few years were not easy ones, but despite the challenges you helped me persevere. Thank you for all of your love and support.

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Abstract

This dissertation examines how Polish sexual minorities understand and navigate their national identities in the context of recently renewed nationalist sentiment that has framed them as enemies of and threats to Poland. Ever since the election of the conservative, nationalist Law and Justice party in 2015, sexual minorities have become the primary target for Poland's Right and Far-Right who frame non-heteronormative sexualities and all things "LGBT" as threats to Poland and Polish national identity. This framing relies on the idea that Polish national identity is, and always has been, determined by one's adherence to Catholicism and conservative social values. As such, the Polish Right and Far-Right have been narrowing the symbolic boundaries of Polish national identity to include only those who adhere to this constricted conception of "Polishness". Thus, although Poland remains one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in the world, Polish sexual minorities continue to be framed as external threats to the Polish nation and in some cases not truly Polish. The author introduces the term "ideological others" in order to describe those that are ethnically included in, but symbolically excluded from, the national community. Through the use of 60 in-depth interviews with Polish citizens who identify as non-heteronormative, archival materials, images, and ethnographic fieldwork, this dissertation demonstrates how Polish sexual minorities both navigate their own sexual and national identities given such widespread exclusion as well as how they challenge exclusionary notions of "Polishness". Findings show that while some of those interviewed struggled to identify with their national identity given the current strength of the Polish Right, most respondents were able to identify with their "Polishness" because they had reframed what being Polish meant to them.

Reframing, it is argued, is an important strategy by which ideological others can find meaning in their national identity and continue to feel an attachment to their national community despite a political and social climate that often marks them as enemies of the nation and therefore outside the symbolic boundaries of national belonging. In addition, findings show that in order to contest the Polish Right's framing of Polish national identity as being premised on conservative Catholicism, sexual minorities and their allies have begun an aesthetic revolt (Zubrzycki 2013) in order to expand the symbolic boundaries of "Polishness". These actions, it is argued, represent a form of aesthetic revolt that does not entail a wholesale rejection of Polish national identity and its attendant symbols, but rather seeks to reframe and reimagine traditional Polish symbols in ways that are more inclusive of sexual and other minority communities. The inclusion of in-depth interviews helps to demonstrate the important role that intrapersonal processes can play in the eventual realization of aesthetic revolt. The dissertation concludes by analyzing the career of openly gay Polish politician Robert Biedroń, who has been fighting to expand the symbolic boundaries of Polish national identity through activism and vocal criticism of the Polish Catholic Church and its strong and pervasive presence in Polish society

Introduction

In February of 2019, mayor of Warsaw Rafał Trzaskowski signed the first ever LGBT protections bill in Poland. Known locally as the "LGBT Charter," the local legislation was adopted in order to provide services and assistance to Warsaw's LGBT community, such as an intervention hostel for LGBT youth who have been shunned by their families, a community center for members of the LGBT community to gather and share experiences, as well as a clause elaborating the importance of allowing symbols representing the LGBT community in the public sphere. Given that the International Lesbian and Gay Association of Europe (ILGA) has consistently ranked Poland as one of the most difficult places to live as a sexual minority in Europe, passing such legislation was an important step towards realizing equal rights and protections for Poland's LGBT community as well towards mitigating the social stigma around non-heteronormative sexualities in this highly Catholic country[1]. It was also an important symbolic gesture which signaled that, at least in the nation's capital, Poland has a vocal and motivated community that advocates for progressive social changes.

While the developments in Warsaw were optimistic, residents and officials of several smaller Polish cities and towns began actively protesting similar protection bills in their communities. In order to protect their communities from what they understood as threatening and increasingly pervasive 'LGBT ideology', numerous cities began declaring themselves as "LGBT

[1] Although Church attendance has declined over the years, approximately 93% percent of Poles still identify as Roman Catholic (CBOS 2012).

Free Zones" in the summer of 2019. During the same summer, the Far-Right weekly newspaper *The Polish Newspaper* (Gazeta Polska) included stickers featuring an image of a rainbow flag crossed out and surrounded by the slogan "LGBT-Free Zone" (Strefa Wolna od LGBT) in an effort to further mobilize their readers in their anti-LGBT cause. Several of these stickers have since been found on kiosks, automobiles, and private businesses throughout the country[2].

Figure I.1: "LGBT Free-Zones" Sticker. These stickers were found in issues of *The Polish Newspaper (Gazeta Polska)*. Image taken from: www.gaytimes.co.uk/life/polish-town-becomes-first-to-rescind-lgbt-free-zone-claiming-it-was-misunderstood/. Accessed 12 Apr. 2021.

Perhaps most disturbing, however, were the words of Archbishop of Kraków Marek Jędraszewski during a homily he delivered in 2019 on the anniversary of the 1944 Warsaw Uprising, an important national commemoration. In this homily, he declared that "the red plague

[2] The appearance of these stickers was not limited to small, conservative cities, as a restaurant in Kraków –one of Poland's largest as well as more liberal cities- was criticized for placing one on its front door. The owner of the restaurant is closely aligned with the Polish Catholic Church.

no longer walks on our earth, but a new neo-Marxist one that wants to conquer our souls, hearts, and mind…it is not a red, but a *rainbow plague*" (Catholic World Report, 8/16/2019)[3]. Although Jędraszewski's words were harshly criticized by a number of prominent liberal politicians and public personalities, they also registered with a significant portion of the Polish population, as the Church remains one of the primary sources of legal and moral authority in the country (Zubrzycki 2006; Grzymała-Busse 2015). Thus, days later Jarosław Kaczyński, leader of the illiberal and currently in power Law and Justice party, voiced his support of Archbishop Jędraszewski's statement by claiming that Poles must "live in freedom, and not be subjected to all that is happening to the west of our borders…where freedom is being eliminated" (Catholic News Agency, 8/19/2019)[4]. In this context, freedom means a life unencumbered by ideas such as LGBT rights. Thus, while a number of organizations and politicians are actively fighting for LGBT rights and attempting to mitigate stigmatization of, and discrimination against, sexual minorities in the public sphere, there also exists a strong and dedicated resistance to this mission.

Such resistance is evident in the rhetoric of the Law and Justice party. Indeed, ever since their rise to political prominence in 2015, Law and Justice has emboldened purveyors of extremist ideologies and helped legitimize extreme views, while castigating and sanctioning those who voice any perspectives that deviate from traditional understandings of Polish national identity. These traditional understandings are premised on a mythology that frames Poland as an inherently Catholic nation of martyrs whose mission is to protect both Poland and Europe from any and all threats to conservative, Catholic sensibilities (Davies 1997; Zubrzycki 2011). At the

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[3] https://www.catholicworldreport.com/2019/08/16/krakows-archbishop-jedraszewski-under-fire-for-remarks-about-rainbow-plague/. Accessed 12 Apr. 2021.
[4] https://www.catholicnewsagency.com/news/42053/law-and-justice-party-leader-praises-polish-archbishop-for-lgbt-opposition. Accessed 12 Apr. 2021.

time of their election in 2015, this primary threat was refugees from the Middle East, who were framed as threats not only to public safety but to Polish culture and traditional ways of life[5]. More recently, Law and Justice and other groups on the Right and Far-Right have focused their efforts on a new "other"; the LGBT community and, more broadly, "LGBT ideology." While there has also been a concerted focus on the perceived threats of "gender ideology," since the introduction of the "LGBT charter" emphasis has moved even more towards the LGBT community and "LGBT ideology"[6].

The condemnation of all things "LGBT" was particularly salient as Law and Justice ran for re-election in the most recent parliamentary elections held in the Fall of 2019. The primary focal point of their campaign was the need to protect traditional Polish values and Polish national identity from "LGBT ideology." During a speech given at a conference organized by the Catholic organization "Catholic Action," Kaczyński claimed that "these ideologies, philosophies…all of this is imported…these are not internal Polish mechanisms. They are a threat to Polish identity, to our nation, to its existence and thus to the Polish state" (The Guardian, 10/25/2019)[7]. Further, president of Poland Andrzej Duda's recent campaign for re-election was also premised on the notion that Poland had a duty to fight "LGBT ideology" in order to protect traditional Polish values. His challenger, aforementioned liberal mayor of Warsaw Rafał Trzaskowski, ran a campaign based largely on progressive values including the

[5] Historically, Jews have served as an ultimate "other" in the Polish nationalist imagination (Michlic 2006; Zubrzycki 2006).
[6] Many on the Right refer simply to "LGBT" as opposed to more specific concepts such as the "LGBT community" or "LGBT ideology."
[7] https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/oct/25/anti-lgbt-rhetoric-stokes-tensions-in-eastern-europe. Accessed 12 Apr. 2021.

introduction of civil unions for same-sex couples[8]. The race was thus emblematic of the deeply rooted cultural struggle over national identity that is currently animating much of Polish politics, one in which the very idea and concept of "sexual minorities" and the "LGBT lobby" play a crucial role.

In the following section, I provide more context regarding the role that sexual minorities have played in recent struggles over national identity in Poland before turning to my research questions.

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: 55). In this struggle, the primary axis of disagreement centers on whether Poland should embrace the more liberal and progressive 'Western' values embodied by the European Union or remain tied to traditional, conservative and ethno-nationalist 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 European Union. This group opposes the E.U. 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

[8] Numerous critics have claimed that Trzaskowski and the Civic Platform party only appeal to these progressive issues for votes, and in practice do little to help struggling minorities. Duda won his re-election campaign against Trzaskowski by a narrow margin, receiving approximately 51% of the vote and Trzaskowski 49% with a nearly 70% turnout.

traditional family models (Gaisbauer 2007; Machaj and Białas-Zielińska 2014; Porter 2001). 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 center and left stands the pro-E.U., progressive and liberal faction which believes that Poland's national identity should be one of 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 this national mythology posit sexual minorities as one[9] of the primary threats to Polish national identity.

This is not to say, however, that sexual minorities and "Polishness" are framed as mutually exclusive at all times and in all contexts. As Lucas Szulc has pointed out (2011), it is not sexual minorities *in general* that are criticized but those who openly demonstrate and celebrate their diversity. The issue, therefore, is not with one's sexual orientation per se 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; 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 organization in Poland known as "Faith and Rainbow" (*Wiara i Tęcza*) that advocates on behalf of sexual minorities who also maintain strong religious faith and dedication to the Catholic Church[10]. The

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[9] Polish feminist activists, in addition to the more general notion of 'gender ideology,' are also often the targets of such debates.

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

intersection of (homo)sexuality, religion, and Polish national identity is therefore quite complex. However, the primary point I wish to underline here is that for the Church and the Polish Right and 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."

Questions and Theoretical Frameworks

Given the Polish Right's elevation of "LGBT" and "LGBT ideology" to the role national "other," and the fact that Poland is one of the most ethnically homogenous countries in the world (Zubrzycki 2006), Polish citizens who identify as non-heteronormative have been placed in a precarious position. *Despite being ethnically Polish*, sexual minorities are often portrayed in Right-wing discourse as being incompatible with, and often antithetical to, "true Polishness." As a consequence, Polish sexual minorities are being increasingly maligned in the public sphere and framed as external threats to the Polish nation despite their ethnic ties to it.

This contentious political and social context leads to important empirical and theoretical questions. While ample research has been conducted on the ways in which "ordinary" citizens understand, and the extent to which they relate to, their national identity, scant attention has been paid to the ways in which minority members of the ethno-national majority navigate their place in the national community. I thus ask: *How do Polish sexual minorities navigate the increasingly narrowing boundaries of national identity advocated by Far-Right groups? How do they reconcile their national and sexual identities, given that the latter is often portrayed as incompatible with the former? How are the symbolic boundaries of national identity understood and navigated by members of an ethnic majority who are increasingly framed as outsiders and threats to the nation?*

I refer to communities that are ethnically-included in, but symbolically-excluded from the national community as *ideological others*. By focusing on a particular case of this population – Polish sexual minorities- my dissertation contributes to literatures examining how nationhood and national identity are understood in everyday life (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008) as well as literature concerned with how members of vulnerable minority communities understand and navigate group boundaries (Moon 2010; Zubrzycki 2016; Lamont et.al 2017).

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 et.al 2004, Fox and 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 1983: Wimmer and Feinstein 2010). Thus, as Jon Fox and Cynthia Miller-Idriss (2008) have emphasized, nationhood must be understood as something that is practically accomplished in everyday interactions and situations in the lives of average national citizens in addition to being the result of macro-level, political dynamics. 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 endeavor for many scholars studying nationalism and national identity in recent years (Bonikowski 2016; Fenton 2007; Phillips and Smith 2000; Skey 2011; 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 et.al 2006). Through in-depth interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, they found that the nationalist 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 took a similar approach in her empirical work comparing levels of national identification among German vocational schoolteachers and their students (2006; 2009). 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: 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 and Chirot 1994) make it out to be. Overall, research on everyday nationhood has been helpful in elucidating the myriad ways in which 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 emphasized 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: 4) which categorized 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 centered on the creation of a politics of respectability and the formation of social norms concerning sexuality, and not on how sexual minorities themselves understood 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 by demonstrating the significant role that sexual and gendered norms have played in the formation of exclusionary forms of nationalism. An early take on the role between nationalism and sexuality came in a volume of case studies written by comparative literary scholars (Parker et. al 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 showed how national values –particularly how they relate to sexuality- are communicated through various modes of art and culture.

Similarly, a number of feminist scholars (McClintock 1995; Nagel 1998; Yuval-Davis 1993) 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 as deviant from and hazardous to the status quo of the nation. Building off of these studies, Sam Pryke (1998) argued for a more robust conceptualization 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 mining 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 both 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: 111), much like Mosse had shown to be the case in Nazi Germany. These discourses, Mole argues, serve to reinforce the idea that homosexuality is a foreign import — an unwelcome consequence of Europeanization— 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.[11]

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

In another insightful study, Adam Ostolski (2007) compared Right-Wing periodicals from the pre-War and contemporary eras, showing that the discourses of exclusion operated similarly against Jews in the 1930s as the do against sexual minorities today. His analysis demonstrated how both groups were characterized 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: 12). Such

[11] Such 'political homophobia' has therefore become a focal point of research in political science concerned with the impacts of 'Europeanization' on a number of recent E.U. member states, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe (O'Dwyer 2010; Ayoub 2016; Mole 2016).

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 described above, it tends to underline the idea that non-heteronormative sexualities are very often framed as foreign threats (be they internal or external) to the wellbeing of the nation. Yet in all of these studies, the analytic focus rests on the discursive construction of sexual qua national otherness, and not on how sexual minorities themselves construct and interpret their national identities and the relationship between their national and sexual identities.

A number of scholars, however, have also focused more directly on the experiences and actions of Polish sexual minorities. In a recent (2016) examination of the websites of several LGBTQ organizations in Poland and Turkey, Łukasz Szulc argued that by utilizing national symbols in conjunction with those of the LGBT community, these groups engaged in the practice of "domesticating the nation online." Borrowing Billg's concept of "banal nationalism," Szulc demonstrated that many of these organizations —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" (2016: 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 attention was on the organizational level, and not the firsthand, micro-level experiences of sexual minorities.

Some research has 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 analysis of Polish nationalist discourse in addition to interviews with Polish lesbians. However, her interviews were primarily focused on these women's relationship

to the Church and Catholicism, not how they navigate 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 one of the two primary foci of this dissertation.

In addition to focusing on the lived experiences of Polish sexual minorities my dissertation will address, through a detailed analysis of Polish LGBT activists' strategic uses of national and religious symbols, broader theoretical questions concerning the role of symbolic structures and material objects —such as national icons— in ushering in social change (Sewell 1992; Zubrzycki 2016): *Why have national symbols figured so prominently in LGBT Poles' responses to Far-Right criticisms and attacks? Can symbolic structures—such as national symbols and flags— help produce social change? If so, how and why can they do so?*

Aesthetic Revolt and the Power of Material Objects

Social scientists have long been concerned with examining how symbols work to encapsulate important aspects of communities' belief systems and forge a sense of solidarity among members of a collective (Durkheim 1912; Turner 1967). Recently, the material turn in social research has begun to focus more specifically on the roles that the very materiality of objects and symbols *themselves* play in social life and in bringing about social change (Alexander 2008; Keane 2005; McDonnell 2010; Mukerji 1997; Zubrzycki 2013). While scholarship focusing on the relationship between social actors and material objects takes many forms, most perspectives are informed by the notion that social research must take seriously the

myriad relationships that obtain between social actors and material objects. Further, this line of research often emphasizes the idea that material objects exert a form of agency, in that they can either call forth or inhibit responses and actions from social actors (Gell 1998; Gibson 1977; Latour 2005)[12]. Such objects can therefore be understood both as a means of expressing group solidarity through ritual (Durkheim 1912; Turner 1967), as well as being the basis for efforts to impact social change (Morgan 2005; Zubrzycki 2011).

With this material turn, sociologists examining a wide variety of empirical topics have begun focusing on the role of material objects in social life and on their material*ity* in particular. A key example is Jeffrey Alexander who, in his focus on "iconic consciousness," has claimed that "icons can be seen…as symbolic condensations that root social meanings in material form" (2010: 782). His theory argues against material*ism* — in seeing material objects simply as things— which he claims is rooted in the "relentless utilitarianism of everyday life, which insists on the concrete, on the practical, efficient and useful" (2010: 783). The antidote to such reductionism, Alexander argues, is an enthusiastic embrace of material*ity,* a perspective that seeks to understand how meaning can be manifested through material objects.

In a similar vein, Robin Wagner-Pacifici has argued for treating works of art as a focal point of social analysis, claiming that "art *models* social reality, rather than simply refracts it" (2010: 108). Artistic images, she claims, not only reflect but actually contain within them "the inchoate, sometimes violent, energy of actual social life" (2010: 110). In addition, Terence McDonnell's research on AIDS awareness campaigns in Africa has demonstrated the important role that the materiality of objects plays in successfully conveying their messages. Through his

[12] Much of these ideas are inspired by the pioneering work of ecological psychologist J.J. Gibson, whose concept of "affordance" stressed the importance of the relationship between perceiver and environment.

ethnographic analysis of AIDS media in Ghana, he showed that media —such as billboards and posters— can easily transform due to conditions such as the weather, ultimately hindering their ability to communicate their message effectively. An emphasis on material culture and materiality has thus proven a productive theoretical lens for scholarship examining a wide range of social phenomena.

Given its applicability across a range of research areas, the material turn has also found footing in scholarship examining nationalism and national identification. An early attempt to articulate the importance of social objects and actors' built environments in the national context was Chandra Mukerji's (1997) analysis of the gardens of Versailles and their role in fostering a collective understanding of French identity. Through her research, Mukerji demonstrated how and why objects — such as gardens— that appear to be simply aesthetic creations can be utilized to reach political ends in the name of the nation. More recently, Virag Molnar has argued that material culture is an important political resource that is not only engaged by elites, but by average citizens who are able to "normalize radical political ideas by turning them into everyday commodities" (2016: 207). She has empirically demonstrated this idea through an analysis of the ways in which radical right-wing, nationalist politics in Hungary have been largely fueled by an industry that produces "patriotic" commodities such as clothing, books, and rock music. Such studies have provided helpful insights into the ways that material objects work to solidify certain understandings of the nation. However, what they haven't shown is how material objects can be utilized to bring forth *new* understandings of the nation and national identity.

Given this lacuna, some scholars have started focusing specifically on the role that material objects play in bringing about new understandings of national identity. Geneviève

Zubrzycki, in her articulation of the concept of the national sensorium, argues that scholarship examining national identity and identification ought to look closely at how the nation is perceived and inculcated through images, sounds, and even smells. She argues that embodied practices such as "*wearing* a crown of thorns brooch; *carrying* a cross at a political demonstration; *singing* patriotic hymns at church" are all ways to make the abstract notions of national identity and belonging more concrete to national subjects (2010: 32). Importantly, she also discusses the ways in which activists and artists have subverted national symbols in order to critique the nation and certain framings of national identity. In the case of Poland, for example, Zubrzycki demonstrated how artists created controversial works utilizing important symbols of the nation — such as the Polish Pope as well as the Cross— to criticize Polish national mythology and advocate for renewed understandings of Polish national identity.

Further, in her study of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec, Zubrzycki demonstrated how both material objects and rituals can serve as vehicles for identity (trans)formation "as they not only express but propel political transformations" (2013: 464). Through her examination of what she terms "aesthetic revolt," Zubrzycki showed how changing the form and content of national icons —in her case, the icon of St. John the Baptist— can be an important resource for those advocating for new understandings of national identity. In the case of Quebec, left-wing nationalists consistently contested and reworked the physical form of the national icon of St. John the Baptist to better suit their vision of Quebecois national identity. In order to explain this process, she coined the term *aesthetic revolt,* which refers to the "dual process whereby social actors contest and rework iconic symbols in the public sphere; those symbols acquiring, through those material manipulations, significations that push forward the articulation of new identities and provide momentum for institutional reforms" (2013: 428). Ultimately, her analysis led her to

propose a framework for a cultural sociology of national identity that aims to "take into account the power exerted by material symbols" (2013: 467).

The concept of aesthetic revolt thus proves a valuable theoretical resource for researchers interested in examining and explaining how and why material objects, particularly salient national symbols, can be implicated in social change. However, given that Zubrzycki's study was based on a single empirical case, it is difficult to glean from her analysis whether, and the extent to which, aesthetic revolts can vary in the forms that they take. While in the case of the Quiet Revolution aesthetic revolt took the form of a complete disavowal of the Catholic model of Quebecois national identity and its attendant symbols (namely through the eventual "beheading" of St. John the Baptist), it is possible that activists could engage in aesthetic revolt without engaging in a full subversion and disavowal of national symbols. Thus, when attending to the actions of Polish LGBT activists and their engagement with national symbols, I pay particular attention to the ways in which they engage with these symbols in order to determine the extent to which their aesthetic revolt may differ from the one detailed by Zubrzycki in her analysis of the Quiet Revolution. Attending to these subtle but important distinctions will help extend the concept of aesthetic revolt in new directions.

In addition, while I agree with Zubrzycki that cultural objects such as national symbols can be powerful and help to usher in social change, I differ slightly on the question of precisely *how and why* this is possible. Primarily, I contend that while the concept of aesthetic revolt is useful in advancing our understandings of how material objects are both powerful and can serve as important catalysts for social change, it has done so without emphasizing the important role played by the internal, mental worlds of social actors as they engage with such symbols. In her articulation of the concept, Zubrzycki argues that material symbols "allow social actors…to

contest given representations and narratives and rearticulate new ones" (2013: 464). Yet this approach to examining the power of cultural objects —given that Zubrzycki was dealing with historic materials— focuses primarily on the role of the objects and less on the equally important aspects of human cognition that work to bring forth meanings and interpretations from these objects, thereby allowing social actors to engage with them in meaningful ways. Thus, I argue that for a more complete understanding of how cultural objects can be powerful and help to produce social change, scholars examining aesthetic revolt should pay equal attention to both processes[13]. The present study, through its inclusion of in-depth interviews, is an initial attempt to expand the concept of aesthetic revolt in this way.

The Symbolic Boundaries of National Identity

By examining the ways that sexual minorities navigate their national identity as well as LGBT activists' engagement in aesthetic revolt, this dissertation also addresses broader theoretical questions concerning the process of symbolic boundary work (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Specifically, it addresses the ways in which the symbolic boundaries of national identity can be extended and redefined within a single ethno-national community (Zubrzycki 2014).

The foundational work articulating the importance of attending to the boundaries formed between groups in research on ethnicity and nationalism is Frederik Barth's *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries* (1969). In this seminal text, Barth sought to shift analytical focus from the "cultural stuff" existing within group boundaries to the formation and maintenance of boundaries themselves (1969:15). Barth's explanation for the persistence of ethnic groups thus popularized

[13] Importantly, extending the concept of aesthetic revolt in this way does not require a radical departure Zubrzycki's original formulation. Rather, it simply means to draw greater attention to the important role that human interiority plays in the complex process of aesthetic revolt.

the idea that ethnic groups do not exist as inevitable things-in-the-world to which individuals naturally belong, but rather reflect the constant interactions between collectives that help to shape their identities. According to this perspective, belonging to an ethnic —or by extension national— group depends on active processes of inclusion and exclusion as groups are not constituted by "'objective' differences, but only those which the actors themselves regard as significant" (1969:14).

While Barth helped to introduce and popularize the concept of boundaries to the comparative study of ethnicities (Wimmer 2013), the concept began gaining traction in sociology due to the work of Michèle Lamont. In her classic work *Money, Morals, and Manners* (1992), Lamont distinguished between two types of boundaries that are often drawn in social life: social and symbolic. While social boundaries are objective manifestations of social differences that can promote inequality, Lamont defined symbolic boundaries as "conceptual distinctions used by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space" (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 168). These conceptual distinctions are formed by collectives as ways to think about complex concepts such as immigrants and immigration (Bail 2008), what constitutes "high" and "low" culture (Lamont 1992), or what criteria determine belonging in the national context (Theiss-Morse 2009; Zubrzycki 2016).

Given that nationalism is a phenomenon largely premised on the delineation between "insiders" and "outsiders," the concept of symbolic boundaries has proven fruitful in much research on the topic (Onasch 2017; Phillips 1996; Theiss-Morse 2009; Wimmer 2013)[14].

[14] It is worth noting that Brubaker and colleagues' (2006) study of nationalism in the Transylvanian town of Cluj, while not explicitly utilize the concept of symbolic boundaries, introduced an important challenge to traditional ways in which the concept of boundary is used in nationalism research. Instead of assuming the existence of boundaries, their methodological approach was designed to reveal whether or not, as well as when, such conceptual distinctions were invoked by people in their everyday lives. This general

However, due to their empirical foci, much of the existing literature has focused on examining the ways in which symbolic boundary work is conducted *between* groups. Given that Poland remains a nation where the vast majority of citizens belong to the same ethno-national community, my research, following Zubrzycki's, examines and contributes to scholarly understanding of "the process through which boundaries are redefined *within* one national community" (2016: 71). In her research, Zubrzycki outlines three overlapping processes related to such boundary work: softening, stretching, and reshaping and shows how non-Jewish Poles' interest in and mainstreaming of Judaism is part of a complex process of modifying the boundaries of Polish national identity.

While similar, my case differs in one important respect. Zubrzycki's examination of Polish "philosemitism" examined the ways in which Poles, but not Polish Jews *themselves*, worked to soften, stretch, and reshape the boundaries of national identity. As such, the empirical focus was primarily on actions taken in the realms of discourse (by contesting the dominant place of the Catholic Church in Polish society), social activism (by mainstreaming the idea that "Jewishness" is not foreign to "Polishness"), and memory work that aimed to show the deep roots of Jewish culture in Poland. While my research too focuses on activists' attempts to lessen the Church's grip on Polish society, it also examines how sexual minorities themselves navigate and possibly contest the narrow boundaries of national identity advocated by the Church, Right and Far-Right. Focusing on the intrapersonal navigation of boundaries in addition to boundary work through activism thus enables me to illustrate the relationship between symbolic boundary work as it occurs at the level of intrapersonal identifications and social and political activism. In

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approach to understanding nationalism and national identification has since become the hallmark of the "everyday nationhood" perspective (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008).

addition, through my analysis of openly gay politician Robert Biedroń and his political movement in the final chapter, I demonstrate how this boundary work has also entered the realm of official politics.

My dissertation therefore makes the following contributions: First, it contributes to the literature on everyday nationhood by addressing the empirical question of how Polish sexual minorities navigate their national and sexual identities in a time of ardent nationalism and anti-LGBT sentiment. Second, it adds to research examining the formation of symbolic boundaries and how such boundaries are navigated and negotiated within a single ethno-national community. Third, by examining how the Polish LGBT community has engaged with and modified prominent national symbols and by underscoring the relationship between the mental and material worlds, my dissertation extends the concept of aesthetic revolt in new directions.

Data, Methods, and Chapter Outlines

Following the literature on everyday nationhood (Brubaker et.al 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Skey 2010), I interviewed what is considered "ordinary" members of the national community, which the literature has defined as "those normally deemed to be on the receiving end of state, institutional and intellectual efforts to shape national identity, as compared to 'elites' or 'intellectuals'" (Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012: 151). More specifically, I conducted in-depth interviews with Polish citizens who identified as non-heteronormative, were 18 years or older, and came from a variety of social backgrounds. I interviewed a total of 60 individuals. Initial contacts for these interviews were made through an advertisement that the Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH), Poland's largest LGBT rights organization, helped me launch in the Summer of 2017. I met the first respondents through this advertisement, and the remainder through snowball sampling. Before returning to the field to conduct more interviews

in the Fall of 2019, I re-established contact with previous respondents in order to find more willing participants through snowball sampling. Respondents spanned a wide range of educational backgrounds and careers, and ages ranged from 18 to 64.

My interview questions were primarily designed to understand levels of national identification among my respondents. Some of the literature on everyday nationhood has discussed the pros and cons of direct solicitation of nation-talk through interviews (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Fox 2017). When aiming to discover *when* the nation matters to people, scholars have suggested that ethnographic observation is the best approach, as interviews seldom allow researchers to access the more situational aspects of national identification. However, when aiming to uncover *what* the nation means to individuals, scholars in the everyday nationhood tradition have claimed that direct-solicitation via interviews is the most useful way forward (Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012). In-depth interviews are therefore considered to be the best way to capture the wide range of *contents* of national identity, or what the nation and national identity mean to respondents. My approach therefore closely mirrored that of George Gaskell, who argues that "the real purpose of qualitative research is not counting opinions or people but rather exploring the range of opinions, and the different representations of the issue" (2000: 41).

I began each interview with a more general conversation in order to better get acquainted with my respondents before moving into the thematic questions. After my introductory questions, which on average took about fifteen minutes, I moved to the questions that were meant to tap into how respondents think about "Polishness" and their identification with their national identity. Such questions included prompts to define what it means to be Polish, what being Polish means to them personally, as well as the extent to which they identify with their

"Polishness" or with other identities, such as Cosmopolitanism, more regionally specific identities, or their vocations. Overall, my questions were designed to elicit what respondents think about Poland and "Polishness" more generally and their own Polish identity specifically, what they associate with Poland and "Polishness," how they view and articulate their personal sense of national belonging, and how they navigate and perhaps challenge the boundaries of national identity in Poland.

While the interview data is essential in helping me illustrate the ways in which sexual minorities navigate their national and sexual identities, it is necessary to situate them in a broader socio-historical context. My dissertation therefore also examines how sexual minorities have been framed in Right-wing discourse beginning when Poland began to consider acceding to the European Union in the early 2000s. In my data collection, I focused on three conservative periodicals: *Do Rzeczy* (To The Point) *Gość Niedzielny* (Sunday Guest) and *Nasz Dziennik* (Our Daily) in addition to the official newsletter of the Roman Catholic Church, *Biuletyn Katolickiej Agencji Informacyjnej (*Bulletin of the Catholic Information Agency, or Bulletin KAI for short)[15]. Both *Nasz Dziennik* and *Do Rzeczy* are considered "Far-Right" publications, the former being a daily publication and the latter a weekly, and will be useful in capturing the more extreme conservative arguments. I have chosen to focus on both in order to include both a weekly and a daily publication. *Gość Niedzielny* is a conservative weekly Catholic newspaper, which helps to capture conservative opinions that are not as extreme as those found in *Nasz Dziennik* and *Do Rzeczy*. Finally, *Biuletyn KAI* includes interviews, official statements, and letters written by Church hierarchy in Poland. Given the continued strength and salience of the Roman Catholic

[15] I will often refer to *eKAI*, Bulletin KAI's electronic newsletter, throughout the dissertation.

Church in Poland, it is important to consider the ways Church officials frame issues regarding sexual minorities in Poland.

Other primary source documents include images collected online as well as taken during my fieldwork, legal documents, flyers and posters from political rallies and LGBT pride events. These data further help to demonstrate the ways the Polish Right frame sexual minorities in their attacks on them, as well as how progressive political parties and LGBT Rights organizations have worked to counter these framings. Images of national icons, and the ways in which they have been modified by those advocating for LGBT rights, play a particularly important role in the chapter examining aesthetic revolt.

Additional data comes from fieldwork conducted in Poland between May 2017 and December 2019. During my fieldwork, I attended LGBT pride events in Warsaw, Kraków, Poznań, and Wrocław, as well as smaller, informal gatherings of LGBT NGO's in Poland such as the Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH) and Love Does Not Exclude (Miłość Nie Wyklucza). In addition, I attended demonstrations organized by the Catholic Church and Right wing political parties, including the annual "March for Life and Family" in both Warsaw and Kraków in the summer of 2019. Lastly, in the spring of 2019 I spent two weeks following progressive politician Robert Biedroń's campaign for E.U. parliament. During this time, I traveled with the campaign on their tour bus to several cities in southeastern Poland where I attended press conferences, campaign speeches and rallies, as well as informal meals and gatherings with the campaign staff.

Outline of Chapters

The first chapter consists of a broad overview of Polish national mythology, demonstrating the ways in which the traditional national myths have been integral to political

discourse in Poland throughout the last century. It also details the rise of the institutional Catholic Church in Poland, both providing crucial context for the primary focal point of this dissertation. Chapter two provides a more detailed account of the ways in which sexual minorities in Poland have been framed by the Church and Polish Right by focusing on how criticisms and attacks on the LGBT community have taken place in various spheres of public life.

Chapters three and four detail the ways in which sexual minorities navigate the political and social contexts outlined in the preceding chapters. Chapter three focuses exclusively on in-depth interviews, demonstrating the various ways in which Polish sexual minorities navigate national identity and belonging at a time of heightened hostility towards the LGBT community and "LGBT Ideology." Chapter four moves to examine the ways that LGBT activists and allies have attempted to challenge traditional understandings of national identity by engaging in aesthetic revolt. In the concluding chapter, I focus on the career of openly gay progressive activist and politician Robert Biedroń, including my time spent on the campaign trail with Biedroń and his political party Spring (Wiosna) in May of 2019. In this chapter I show how both his work as an LGBT activist and his political campaign —while not directly nor exclusively focused on LGBT rights— marked a significant attempt to delegitimize the role of the Catholic Church as the central moral force in Poland and thereby reshape the symbolic boundaries of Polish national identity.

Taken together, my chapters show how the symbolic boundaries of national identity are navigated and negotiated at the micro, meso, and macro levels, thereby demonstrating how such boundary work consists of a multitude of processes from the intrapersonal navigation of one's

own national identifications to their contestation at the levels of civic activism and official politics.

Chapter 1: "Catholic" Poland and the Rise of a New "Other"

Since the conclusion of the Second World War, Poland has been one of the most ethnically and religiously homogenous countries in the world (Casanova 1994; Zubrzycki 2006). Approximately 97% of the population is ethnically Polish, and since 1990, 90% to 97% of Poles claimed to be believers and Catholics, while those identifying as only partial or non-believers has ranged from only 3% to 8% (CBOS 2014)[16]. Poland also maintains a strong and vibrant national sensorium, and as Zubrzycki has shown the salience of religious symbols, icons and monuments dedicated to important Catholic figures in the public sphere help to inculcate the notion that Polish national identity is, and always has been, intimately tied to Catholicism (2006, 2011). In addition to the salience and strength of Catholic ideology, the institution of the Roman Catholic Church is one of the most powerful in Poland. Indeed, the Catholic Church of Poland is one of the largest non-governmental organizations in all of Europe and owns a substantial amount of property throughout the country (Zuba 2010: 117). Given the ubiquity of the institutional Catholic Church and the values and ideals it upholds, traditional Catholic values still play a central role in Poland's political, social, and educational realms[17] (Zielińska and Zwierdżyński 2013).

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[16] https://www.cbos.pl/EN/publications/reports/2012/049_12.pdf, Accessed 22, Mar 2020.

[17] Thus, it is well known in Poland that religious figures such as bishops often play a central role in political decision-making, often acting as an interest group promoting conservative, Catholic values (Zuba 2010). The Church also plays a significant role in the educational sector, and Article 53 of the Polish constitution specifically outlines that parents have "the right to religious and moral upbringing and teaching of their children in accordance with their convictions" (Zielińska and Zwierdżyński 2013). Although participation in religious education is optional, the Education System Act of 1991 mandated

However, it would be mistaken to assume that Poland has *always* been this way. Indeed, before the tragic demise of Polish Jewry and other minority populations during and after the Second World War, Poland was —for most of its history— home to a variety of ethnic, linguistic, and religious groups. Although Polish Catholics comprised approximately 96% of the population by the end of World War II, in 1931 only 65% of Poles declared themselves Catholic (Tomaszewski 1993). Yet if one were to listen to the speeches from many contemporary members of the Church hierarchy or those of conservative politicians, it would appear as if Poland has always been a predominately Catholic nation. This is largely because the myths of Poland's inherent Catholicism as well as that of its status as the martyrological "Christ of nations" are deeply woven into Polish national consciousness (Zubrzycki 2011).

In this chapter, I demonstrate how and why contemporary attacks on the LGBT community in Poland are rooted in a deeper cultural and political struggle driven by the desire to preserve the image of Poland's unassailable ties to Catholicism. Through an analysis of both primary and secondary source data, I illustrate that in both contemporary Poland and throughout the last century of Polish history, proponents of the idea that Poland is —and always has been— an immutably Catholic nation frame identities that do not conform to this standard as anti-national and threatening to the well being of the nation. Although numerous studies (O'Dwyer 2018; Ostolski 2007; Graff 2006; Shibata 2009) have examined the logics of the Polish Right's targeting of sexual minorities, the scope of these analyses has remained focused primarily on contemporary discourses from the E.U. accession period and onward. Some studies have taken a deeper historical arc when addressing such questions (O'Dwyer 2018; Ostolski 2007; Shibata

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that all state schools are obligated to organize religious education classes beginning in elementary education. This act was extended to Kindergartens in 1999.

2013), yet have not directly focused on the role that conceptions and pronouncements of national identity have played in the "othering" of Polish sexual minorities. My analysis therefore extends these works by demonstrating how appeals to preserving "traditional" understandings of national identity are intertwined in such arguments.

I begin with a brief genealogy of Polish national identity. My genealogy starts with a discussion of the legacy of Roman Dmowski, leader of the National Democratic Party (1893-1939) who is now largely understood as the godfather of extremist Right-Wing ideologies and contemporary Far-Right parties and groups in Poland (Pankowski 2010; Walicki 2000). I conclude this portion of the chapter by focusing on the post-World War II period, particularly the 1970s and 80s. In the following section, I detail how two major structural and cultural transformations —the fall of state socialism and Poland's accession to the European Union (E.U.)— brought about fears that Poland may lose touch with its intrinsic Catholicism, in addition to how sexual minorities began to fit into this picture. The chapter concludes with a detailed discussion of post-accession Poland and the ways in which this new political and social environment fostered room for the growth for LGBT organizations and activism, but also helped to bring about fierce criticism of what is now often referred to as "LGBT ideology." I demonstrate that throughout all of these periods, a central premise for the Right was the desire to preserve a conservative, Catholic notion of Polish national identity and frame those who deviated from it as existing outside of and against "true Polishness."[18]

[18] Importantly, this desire was not always tied to the denigration of "others." This is particularly the case during the state socialist period, when the Church represented a challenge to the socialist state. Yet this could also be explained by the fact that during this period, non-heteronormative sexualities were largely assumed not to exist, and thus remained largely underground and entirely apolitical.

Polish National Identity as Catholic, Oppositional, and Defensive

Poland, which lost independence when it was partitioned by Prussia, Russia, and Austria in the late 18th century, regained independence in 1918 and was once again able to exist as a sovereign nation with an independent state. However, as Zubrzycki (2006) has argued, one of the consequences of this long partition period was that Polish national identity began to be premised primarily on having a common language, culture, and faith, making the formation of a civic nationalism more difficult. Given the long and persistent periods of repression that came with partition, there grew a movement[19] whose aim was to firmly align Polish national identity with the tenets of Roman Catholicism while also castigating and denying any other interpretation of what it might mean to be Polish. Thus, as Rogers Brubaker has aptly put it, in this period Poland was increasingly seen as a state *of* and *for* ethnic Poles (1996). Such understandings of national identity were strongly advocated and firmly implanted by Roman Dmowski, leader of the National Democracy and "the main ideologist and undisputed leader of modern integral nationalism in Poland" (Walicki 2000).

At the time of his rise to political significance in late 19th century Poland, Dmowski represented a new type of nationalism that was critical of elite heritages and nobility. Himself coming from a humble background as the son of a stonecutter, Dmowski came to epitomize what Walicki refers to as a "plebian nationalism" (2000: 3). His general outlook was highly influenced by Social Darwinism (Millard 1995), as he emphasized the harsh realities of survival in the world that necessitated ethnic rivalry in addition to an intolerance for ethnic diversity. Another

[19] Although the National Democratic Party was officially formed in 1893, the serious institutionalization of its ideas came in the period following the first World War (Pytka 2013). See Pytka 2013 for a fascinating and in-depth analysis of the various logics of exclusion occurring in Poland in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

important tool in Dmowski's ideological arsenal that helped to legitimize such notions was positivism, which promoted the idea that the nation is best understood as a social organism that was subject to the laws of nature[20] (Porter 2000; Pytka 2013). By understanding the Polish nation in this way, and as positing Poles as "sharing 'objective', concrete characteristics such as language, faith, and history" (Zubrzycki 2006: 53), Poland began to see a nationalism that was no longer driven by Romanticism[21], but by a logic of inclusion and exclusion (Porter 2000). As the rest of this chapter will demonstrate, such ideas are still fertile in the rhetoric of the Polish Right and Far-Right today.

The intolerant and discriminatory attitudes held by Dmowski and the National Democracy were far-reaching and included nearly anyone that was not deemed "properly" Polish. One of the primary scapegoats in this period were Jews, who Dmowski often condemned as a community that wished to undermine and take control of Poland[22]. Such paranoia was also directed towards Germans, who Dmowski believed were collaborating with Jews in order to once again divide and dismember Poland (Mendelsohn 1983: 38). A passage from one of his novels titled *Heritage* clearly expresses these sentiments: "A Jewish woman will always be a Jew, a Jewish man, a Jew. They have another skin, they smell differently, they carry the evil among the nations" (quoted in Kossert 2011). At the core of Dmowski's beliefs, then, was the fear that Polish culture was under siege by a threatening non-Catholic "other" and therefore in need of

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[20] This notion of positivism became popular after the failed Uprising of 1864, as a direct contradiction of Romantic visions of the nation (Davies 1982). Although this was before Dmowski's time, the positivist movement certainly helped to influence his views.

[21] Romanticism in Poland was an intellectual and literary period largely driven by reflections on Poland's status under the partitions and the desire to see Poland become a free country. Romantic poets and authors would therefore often write on topics regarding freedom and sovereignty.

[22] Such sentiments were expressed clearly in his 1925 polemical essay, "Żydzi wobec wojny" (Jews in the War), among other places.

protection. Although he never advocated for physical violence (Walicki 2000), he fully advocated measures such as boycotting businesses owned by Jews (and various other ethnic minority groups), which helped to further solidify the "oppositional" and fundamentally Catholic conception of Polish national identity that began forming in the late 19th century (Zubrzycki 2006).

In addition to its ethnically driven prejudices, Dmowski's nationalism was also bolstered by misogyny. Indeed, after the partition period Dmowski bemoaned a situation in which "wives now ruled their husbands" (quoted in Pytka 2013: 233). He believed that if women had any power, they would then have a say in Poland's moral development, thereby making it a weaker and more effeminate nation. Such worries extended to the realm of education, as Dmowski believed that any teachings of Romanticism were "effeminate" and resulted in a "feminization" of pedagogy in Poland. He described Romantic approaches to nationalism —those that did not entail a defensive devotion to the protection of a strictly "Polish Poland"— as "moral gangrene" (quoted in Pytka 2013: 234). Thus, according to the Social Darwinian logic that prevailed in Dmowski's mind, a nation that dabbled in such "feminine education" was destined to falter and fail.

After World War I the effort —largely led by Dmowski— to further cement the notion that Poland was a Catholic nation and that a Polish national identity ought to be rooted in Catholicism, continued through tangible policies and actions. As Pytka argues, this was a period when Polish nationalism "crossed the threshold from defensive posturing to offensive pursuit of governmental policy" (2013: 309). Such policies, however, were not simply advocating for the Church and its teachings, but also entailed the systematic exclusion and stigmatization of ethnic minorities. Thus, this era saw official boycotts of Jewish businesses as well as a quota system

that limited the number of Jews that could be admitted to universities (Zubrzycki 2006: 58). Throughout the interwar period, the National Democracy continued to publish articles and essays whose purpose was to inculcate the inseparability of the concepts "Polish" and "Catholic." A key example is a brochure Dmowski published in his later years titled *Church, Nation, and State* in which he claimed:

> Catholicism is not an appendage to Polishness, coloring it in some way; it is, rather, inherent to its being, in large measure it constitutes its very essence. To attempt to dissociate Catholicism from Polishness, and to separate the nation from its religion and Church, is to destroy the very essence of the nation.

The ideas proposed in *Church, Nation, and State* are far from controversial in contemporary Poland. Indeed, Dmowski still enjoys praise as one of the fathers of independent Poland who helped establish new schools of political thought in the tumultuous years of the early 20th century. As a tribute, a statue of him stands at a prominent intersection near one of Warsaw's major city parks, and a major traffic roundabout in the center of Warsaw also bears his name. In addition to these physical memorials, in 1999 the Polish Sejm voted to adopt a resolution paying tribute to Dmowski that passed with little controversy, which some scholars have argued is a testament to just how far Right Polish politics had moved by that time (Walicki 2000). Although the Sejm lauded many aspects of Dmowski's career, according to them his greatest contribution was "underlining the tight association of Catholicism with Polishness for the survival of the Nation" (Zubrzycki 2006).

State Socialism and the Further Reification of a "Catholic Poland"

After the Second World War, Poland's demographic make-up changed dramatically. Even though approximately 65 percent of the population was ethnically Polish and denominationally Catholic during the interwar period (Tomaszewski 1993), the rise of Nazism

brought well-known devastation to Poland's Jewish community. By the war's end, the population was approximately 95 percent ethnically Polish and 96.6 percent Catholic (Casanova 1994). Given this profound demographic shift, hardly any minority groups now existed to help shape the historical narrative of Poland's national identity (Zubrzycki 2006). Therefore, by the late 1970s, the prominent understanding of Polish identity increasingly became the notion of the "Polak-Katolik," or Catholic Pole. As one scholar has aptly noted, this period marked a time when "confronted with two powerful authoritarian Creeds —Catholicism and Marxism— the society opted for its Church" (Walaszek 1986: 131).

Before its rise to prominence, the Catholic Church was largely overshadowed by the socialist state in the latter's quest for legitimacy. However, such legitimacy hardly took root. By 1980 polls showed that nearly 92 percent of Poles disapproved of the state socialist regime and wanted to see the involvement of more non-party affiliated in positions of power, and that approximately 80 percent desired a more active role of the Church in public life (Walaszek 1986: 129). One of the first shifts in this direction came when the primate of Poland, Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, came to occupy a more active and political role in society. Wyszyński would deliver sermons that often focused on the problems of anti-religious sentiment under the current regime, and during his tenure he was increasingly seen as Poland's spiritual father and leader. Crucially, Wyszyński continued to refer to the Polish nation as a living organism that was in need of protection, while also further advocating for and thus helping solidify the idea that Poland was an inherently Catholic nation (Lewandowski 1989; Zubrzycki 2006). The important role of Wyszyński, in addition to Karol Wojtyła being elected as the first ever Polish Pope in 1978, helped further fuel the idea —dormant for some time under state socialism— that Catholicism and Poland were and always have been two sides of the same coin.

The strength and salience of the Church and of the Polish-Catholic identity became even more pronounced with the rise of the Solidarity movement in the 1980s. Although Solidarity initially formed as a secular response to widespread dissatisfaction with the party state, it soon affiliated itself with the Church. At this time, the Church was increasingly seen as the primary bastion against the increasingly illegitimate system of state socialism. Working together, Solidarity and the Church delivered a powerful narrative of Poland's suffering under the totalitarianism of the party state. On one side there was the oppressive state, commensurate to previous regimes that subjugated Poland during the partitions and the Second World War, while on the other stood the Church and the Polish people. In addition to the perpetuation of this powerful narrative, churches also became important meeting places for the movement, which helped to further imbricate religion and politics. Once Solidarity and the Church joined forces, there was little the party state could do to exert its authority, as the primary source of legitimacy and main vector for Polish identity had now become the Church[23]. Thus, by the end of the 1980s, 87% percent of Poles stated they trusted the Church, while 68% believed the government to be trustworthy (Ramet 2006: 121).

Poland's Sexual Minorities: Emerging from the Fringe

During the era of Solidarity, there was little concern regarding sexual minorities and homosexuality in Poland. As one scholar has stated, the period of state socialism was one where "the communist political system discriminated against everybody and everything considered to be a social and/or cultural 'deviation'," and therefore sexual minorities did not stand out (Mucha

[23] For more detailed analyses of the fusion of Solidarity and the Church, see Walaszek 1986, Zubrzycki 2006 (esp 67-75). For an excellent analysis of the Church's political strategy after the fall of state socialism, see Zuba 2010.

1997). However, it was still common for authorities to close down meeting places such as bars, baths, and clubs once they were discovered to be meeting places for members of the gay community (Szulc 2011). Sexual minorities in this era therefore kept a low profile, as it was still considered taboo and improper to discuss issues such as sexuality in the public sphere. At the time, it was common for sexual minorities to resort to secretive measures such as devising surreptitious signals in order to identify each other in public spaces (Giza 1963). There was therefore a tacit agreement in Polish society at this time that as long as one's sexuality was kept private, it would not be subject to interrogation, criticism, or punishment. For this reason, very few if any formal organizations for sexual minorities existed at the time (Mucha 1997; Szulc 2011).

Life for sexual minorities in Poland took a drastic turn in November of 1985, however, when police raided all known gay establishments as well as the apartments of known members of the gay community (Mucha 1997). Similar raids continued until 1987, and by then over 11,000 documents had been compiled containing the personal data of sexual minorities throughout Poland. Scholars believe that this raid, known as operation Hyacinth, was driven by fears around HIV/AIDS, unsubstantiated claims that gay men committed a disproportionate amount of crimes, in addition to concerns around a growing political movement among Poland's gay community (Szulc 2011). The raids did not have the intended effect, however, as it is precisely after Operation Hyacinth that Poland's gay community began to organize. Thus, by 1987 a number of regional gay activist groups held a conference in Warsaw, and in 1988 a group of Warsaw gays formally applied to register their organization with the Warsaw regional court (Mucha 1997)[24].

[24] For an in-depth discussion of the various gay magazines and journals at this time in Poland, see Szulc 2017.

Their application was accepted two years later, and by this time Poland had become a democratic country. However, as the following sections will detail, problems for Poland's sexual minorities were only just beginning.

Protecting the Catholic Nation

The Early Years of Polish Democracy: 1990-2003

The fall of state socialism in Poland was a monumental structural and cultural transition after which the Polish nation and state again became —for the first time since before World War II— congruent (Gellner 1983; Zubrzycki 2006). Poland was now a democratic state and was once again a nation *of* and *for* Poles (Brubaker 1996). With this profound change came opportunities for new groups and organizations to form. On the one hand, this new plurality was an optimistic development, as interests and causes —such as gay rights groups— that would have struggled to find a place during the last several decades could now effectively organize (Graff 2006; Gruszczyńska 2009). On the other hand, this newly formed space for civil society created competition and legitimacy issues for the Church. Although the Church proved to be an essential force in the Solidarity-era struggles against the socialist party state, its status as societal savior could not simply be assumed in the newly democratic Poland. The post-transition period was therefore one in which the discursive field of what should constitute "Polishness" was once again open for negotiation (Zubrzycki 2001).

Indeed, during the early period of Poland's transition, the Church struggled to maintain legitimacy. As Irena Borowik (2002) has noted, at this time a large number of organizations began to form in direct opposition to what was seen as the Church's overreach into certain institutions such as education, in addition to their complete intolerance for abortion Thus, by 1993, public support for the Church had fallen to 30% when it had been at 90% only four years

earlier (Zubrzycki 2006: 78). Another obstacle for the Church was Poland's newfound "Westward" re-orientation of foreign policy, which many thought would give rise to secular norms and values. Faced with an uphill battle, the Church attempted to gain more influence in the newly pluralized post-transition Poland through various means. As Krzysztof Zuba (2010) has shown, during this period the Church strived to retain its grasp on Polish society by directly supporting Catholic nationalist parties, continuing to promote religious teachings in schools, as well as by acting as an interest group working to attain concrete, material benefits. The following quotation from Bishop Adam Lepa paints a clear picture of the Church's views at the time:

> The task for believers is to introduce Christ into public life without any enclaves or exceptions, including the sphere of politics…*If the Church does not deal with politics, then politicians will deal with the Church* (quoted in Zuba 2010, emphasis added)

Thus, according to church officials like Lepa, there is no situation where Poland can be detached from the Church. Indeed, according to this statement, the Church ought to involve itself in all spheres of Polish life, whether people liked it or not.

Meanwhile, as the Church and its political allies struggled to maintain their power and relevance, Polish civil society was expanding and LGBT organizations began forming. In the 1990s, however, such organizations were still uncommon and those that existed were not politically driven. Rather, the primary focus of early LGBT organizations in the 1990s was to help build a sense of community amongst Polish sexual minorities as well as focus on the HIV/AIDS crisis (O'Dwyer 2018; Szulc 2011). As Helena Flam has described it, the situation of sexual minorities in Poland at the time was one of "institutionalization without mobilization" (2001: 13). Further, while these organizations were legally allowed to form, they struggled to find consistent sources of funding and office space, as landlords would often be reluctant to

"pollute their property" by renting to gays (Mucha 1997: 307). Although Poland's sexual minorities now had the ability to formally organize, the overt social stigma that still existed regarding homosexuality kept them at a marginal position in society and, perhaps most importantly, continued to portray them as simply another eccentric and morally deficient group (Szulc 2011). Thus, by the end of the century, there was only one formally registered LGBT organization in Poland (O'Dwyer 2018).

The tide began turning, however, once it appeared almost certain that Poland would accede to the European Union. At this crucial moment, there were many questions circulating among the Church hierarchy[25] concerning what Poland's future as an E.U. member would look like. Most vocally against Poland's integration was a faction of the Church that has become known as "Rydzyk's circle," a highly conservative collection of Church officials led by Tadeusz Rydzyk, founder of the popular and extremely conservative radio station Radio Maria. Critics of Poland's integration focused primarily on issues of culture and bemoaned "Western" traditions that would impose unfavorable changes on traditional patterns in Polish life (Szumigalska 2015). In addition to installing deleterious cultural changes, some Church officials worried that E.U. accession would also promote secularization, and thus numerous appeals were made for the need to preserve the "Polish Soul" if Poland did accede to the E.U. (Czaja 1999).

After much deliberation, and also due in large part to Polish Pope John Paul II's enthusiasm for Poland's accession (Hall 2015), Poland officially joined the E.U. in May of 2004. Although a number of Church officials remained concerned about the continued strength and

[25] There is a well known schism in the Polish Catholic Church between conservative and more liberal outlooks on social issues. The conservative perspective finds its voice in newspapers such as Gość Niedzielny (Sunday Guest) while the more liberal perspective is often articulated in the pages of Tygodnik Powszechny (The Catholic Weekly).

salience of the "Polish-Catholic" myth after Poland's accession, many of them believed that a strongly religious Poland could once again serve as the soul of Europe.

The Emergence of the "LGBT Threat" in Pre-Accession Poland

The pre-accession period brought renewed focus to Poland's sexual minorities. Although criticisms of the LGBT community truly gained fervor after Poland joined the E.U., it is important to note that such sentiments were already brewing prior to Poland's official accession in 2004. According to Dorota Hall, certain events occurring in the year 2000 proved crucial for the solidification of the stark opposition between homosexuality and the traditional values heralded by the Church (2015). A key example can be found in the ways in which numerous Polish periodicals framed the World Pride event that took place in Rome in 2000. Although only the most conservative publications were directly critical of the event, Hall shows how all sources framed the Pride as composed of "the Other that opposed not only the Church, but also the Polish nation and the values pertaining to its Christian heritage" (2015: 80). Thus, during this crucial period, sexual minorities began to be transformed in public discourse —by the Church and nationalist political parties and groups— from a deplorable yet harmless community of eccentrics into a political and ideological force that was incompatible with and hostile to "true Polishness."[26] Crucially, this new framing adhered strongly to the tenets of national identity championed by Dmowski and his followers who sought to instill the notion that Poland was an

[26] The most detailed and comprehensive account of this transition to date can be found in chapter 3 of Conor O'Dwyer's (2018) excellent book, *Coming Out of Communism: The Emergence of LGBT Activism in Eastern Europe.*

inherently Catholic nation of martyrs that was in constant need of protection from harmful foreign forces.

The Formation of Poland's Politically Oriented LGBT Rights Organizations

Now that Poland was going to be a part of the larger European project, it would be held accountable to certain standards whose purpose was to protect vulnerable minority communities. Given these optimistic new circumstances, there was renewed enthusiasm and growth for Polish LGBT activism[27] in the years preceding Poland's official accession. This period saw the formation of organizations that were clearly politically motivated and made issues such as same-sex marriage and anti-LGBT discrimination measures their priorities. The hopes of numerous activists and progressively minded citizens at the time can be understood as an inversion of the ideals maintained by the Church and conservative politicians; instead of seeing Poland as the Catholic savior of a troubled Europe, Europe could help rescue Poland from antiquated mythologies whose perpetuation continued to harm various minorities in the region. Such aspirations, however, would prove increasingly difficult to realize.

In this period, LGBT organizations in Poland began to frame their demands politically and "according to the logics of difference" (Hall 2015: 82). While a number of LGBT organizations were forming, arguably the most significant were the Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH) and Lambda Warsaw, as they were the only organizations at the time to adopt a formal and professional structure (O'Dwyer 2018: 116). Among these two groups, KPH

[27] The primary reference for my discussion of the growth of Poland's LGBT movement is O'Dwyer's 2018 book, chapters 4-6.

was particularly active in the political sphere. Founded by Robert Biedroń[28], KPH formed in Warsaw in 2001 and was immediately focused on tangible political gains for Polish sexual minorities such as promoting marriage equality and anti-discrimination legislation. Even the name "Campaign Against Homophobia" was meant to be testament to this political mission. Rather than focusing on a benign, non-threatening name, KPH's founders wanted to emphasize that there was indeed a serious problem with societal homophobia in Poland that needed to be addressed head-on (Krzemiński et.al 2006). Overall, KPH was the first LGBT rights organization in Poland that emphasized the importance of hybridizing aspirations for political rights while also helping to foster a stronger sense of group identity amongst Polish sexual minorities (O'Dwyer 2018).

A primary example of this mission can be found in one of KPH's first campaigns, "Let Them See Us" (*Niech Nas Zobaczą*), which many scholars consider one of the primary catalyzing moments for the LGBT movement in Poland (Graff 2006; Shibata 2009; Szulc 2011). The purpose of this campaign was to counter the increasingly vitriolic rhetoric, coming from both Far-Right organizations and political parties and the conservative faction of the Church, claiming that homosexuality posed a serious threat to Polish values and culture (O'Dwyer 2018: 119). It also aimed to discredit arguments framing sexual minorities as eccentric perverts whose primary goal was to corrupt youth and destroy traditional models of the nuclear family (Hall 2015; Mizielińska and Stasińska 2017). To achieve these goals, the campaign posted photos of gay and lesbian couples holding hands on billboards throughout Poland[29]. These couples were not holding rainbow posters or fulfilling any other common stereotypes regarding sexual

[28] Biedroń, who was the first openly gay member of parliament in Polish history, is now one of the most famous politicians in Poland and was a candidate for President in the 2020 election.
[29] The images were also shown in some small art galleries (Graff 2006).

minorities popular among the Right and Far-Right, but rather were depicted as average, everyday Poles. The only difference, of course, was that these average everyday Poles happened to be holding hands with partners of the same sex.

Figure 1.1: Poster of the "Let Them See Us" Campaign. Taken from: https://karolinabregula.com/portfolio/let_them_see_us/, Accessed 12 Apr 2021.

Despite, or perhaps because of, the fact that the "Let Them See Us" campaign simply showed images of gay and lesbian couples holding hands, KPH faced many hurdles in its realization. Many local governments chose not to authorize the campaign and organizers struggled to find spaces where they could rent billboards in multiple locations (O'Dwyer 2018). However, the campaign still managed to find some spaces to display their images and, although the majority of the billboards were destroyed or defaced within a few days, "Let Them See Us" sparked a heated debate concerning the place of sexual minorities in Poland's public sphere (Graff 2006; Warkocki 2004). I discuss the Right-Wing backlash to this event, as well as the growth and visibility of Poland's LGBT movement, in the following section.

Figure 1.2: Defaced poster of the "Let Them See Us" Campaign. Taken from: http://www.interalia.org.pl/en/artykuly/the_manchester_seminar/05_extremes_meet_anglopolish_perspective_on_sexual_politics.htm, Accessed Apr 12 2021.

In addition to campaigns such as "Let Them See Us," the pre-accession period saw the first attempts at organized pride demonstrations. While the earliest Polish Pride events saw few participants and faced fierce criticisms and sometimes violent counter-demonstrations, they too marked an important transition to a politics of visibility for the Polish LGBT movement (Ayoub 2016).

The League of Polish Families, Law and Justice and the Return of "Protective" Nationalism

While shifting to a predominately political framing was a crucial milestone for the growth of Poland's LGBT movement, its mobilization faced severe backlash. Such backlash was largely driven by the rhetoric and actions of two particularly significant political groups at this time; The League of Polish Families[30] and Law and Justice. Crucially, it is essential to remember

[30] I will occasionally refer to the League of Polish Families as the "League."

that in order to denigrate the LGBT population, these groups —following Dmowski's protective nationalism— often framed sexual minorities as un-Polish threats to the status quo of a conservative, immutably Catholic Poland. In doing so, they adhered to the traditional myths that Poland is an inherently Catholic, martyr nation constantly under siege by anti-Catholic, and hence anti-Polish, forces.

In the period following Poland's transition from state socialism, the primary political divide was between groups on the "Left" that supported liberal social policies and secularism, and those on the "Right" that were staunchly focused on the "de-Communization" of Polish society, maintaining conservative social values, and promoting an active role for the Church in political and social life (de Lange and Guerra 2009; Szczerbiak 2001). However, given the high levels of fragmentation among the Polish Right, they often struggled with electoral successes (de Lange and Guerra 2009: 535). Indeed, until Law and Justice swept the elections of 2015, the most successful political parties were often either socially democratic or centrist[31]. Table 1 describes the platforms of salient parties up until 2005 and Table 2 illustrates the breakdown of seats held in the Polish parliament from 1993 to 2005 [32]. It was not until Poland's accession to the European Union became a near certainty that the political field began to open for the nationalist Far-Right and the League of Polish Families was able to win seats —albeit a small proportion— in parliament (Markowski and Tucker 2005).

[31] Law and Justice did win a majority in the 2005 elections, but was soon ousted in 2007 due to scandals and the centrist Civic Platform party remained in power until 2015.
[32] A number of the parties listed were either renamed versions of earlier parties, or coalitions.

Party	Platform
Democratic Left Alliance (SLD)	Early progressive, social-democratic party that had recently joined with other progressive groups to form the "Left" (Lewica) coalition.
Polish Peasant's Party (PSL)	Agrarian, Christian-democratic party that entered into coalition with the Civic Platform after the 2007 election cycle.
Democratic Union (UD), Freedom Union (UW), Civic Platform (PO).	UD: A liberal Christian-Democratic party that merged with other unsuccessful liberal parties after the 1993 elections in order to form UW. After the 1997 elections, both the UD and UW morphed to become PO, which remains as one of the two major political parties in Poland.
Labor Union (UP)	Small progressive and social-democratic party that merged with the Democratic Left Alliance in 2001.
Self-Defense of the Republic of Poland (SRP)	Agrarian, populist party with left-wing economic views and religious, conservative social views. Eurosceptic.
Solidarity Electoral Action (AWSP)	Large coalition party fusing liberal, conservative and Christian-Democratic perspectives.
Law and Justice (PiS)	Conservative, nationalist party that is currently the dominant political force in Poland.
League of Polish Families (LPR)	Far-Right, anti- E.U., nationalist party that traces its roots to Roman Dmowski's National Democracy party.

Table 1.1: List and description of Political Parties in Poland, 1993-2005

Year/Ranking by % seats won	1	2	3	4	5	6
1993	Democratic Left Alliance (20.4%)	Polish Peasant's Party (15.4%)	Democratic Union (10.6%)	Labor Union (7.3%)		
1997	Solidarity Electoral Action (33.8%)	Democratic Left Alliance (27.1%)	Freedom Union (13.4%)	Polish Peasant's Party (7.3%)		

2001	Democratic Left Alliance-Labor Union Coalition (41%)	Civic Platform (12.7%)	Self-Defense of Republic of Poland (10.2%)	Law and Justice (9.5%)	Polish Peasant's Party (9%)	League of Polish Families (7.9%)
2005	Law and Justice (27%)	Civic Platform (24.1%)	Self-Defense of Republic of Poland (11.4%)	Democratic Left Alliance (11.3%)	League of Polish Families (8%)	Polish Peasant's Party (7%)

Table 1.2: Parties elected to Polish Sejm and Percentage of Votes, 1993-2005. From 2007-2015, the Civic Platform held a majority in parliament as well as the presidency, and was the prominent political voice in Poland. Since then, Law and Justice has held a strong majority. Spaces left blank mark spots held by parties that disbanded and did not merge with other parties. Highlights demarcate parties with similar views or those that eventually morphed into other parties (i.e. Democratic Union and Freedom Union both became part of the Civic Platform).

As Table 1.2 shows, the majority of parties that held power from 1993 until 2001 were generally social-democratic in nature. While some of them emphasized "Christianity," such as the Polish People's Party and the Democratic Union, their embrace of Christianity was not related to extremism as it was with the League of Polish Families. Indeed, extremist and/or Far-Right groups (highlighted in red) only started to make it onto the political map in 2001. However, as the table shows, in 2001 the majority of seats (41%) were still held by the coalition of the Democratic Left Alliance and the Labor Union parties, followed by the centrist Civic Platform party which held 12.7% of seats. Together, these two parties controlled over 50% of the seats in parliament. What is striking here is to see how significantly matters changed between 2001 and 2005. In a matter of a few years, not only did the Democratic Left Alliance (no longer in coalition with the Labor Union party) manage to descend from 41% to approximately 11% of seats, Law and Justice propelled upward from holding just below 10% up to nearly 30% of seats. Table 1.2 therefore clearly shows how quickly Polish politics began shifting from Center-Left to Right during Poland's pre-accession period.

The League of Polish Families, although they are no longer part of Poland's political landscape, was a significant political and social force in pre-accession Poland and into Poland's first few years as an E.U. member[33]. While similar groups existed on the political fringe in the early years of Poland's democratic statehood, it was not until the early 21st century that they were able to gain any meaningful traction in the political and public spheres with representatives in the parliament, government and various state agencies (Płatek and Płucinniczak 2017). While the League of Polish Families was not the only Far-Right group to emerge at this time, it was the largest and most organized due to its early support by one of Poland's most conservative priests —and founder of the conservative Catholic radio station Radio Maria— Tadeusz Rydzyk (Pankowski 2010). The League considered itself a continuation of Dmowski's National Democrats, and one of its founding members —Roman Giertych— had direct familial roots to members of Dmowski's party.

Ideologically, the League of Polish Families represented a strain of "protective nationalism" (de Lange and Guerra 2009) that was motivated primarily by strict adherence to conservative Catholicism and fierce criticism of Poland's accession to the E.U. Relatedly, their outlook was colored by a severe distrust of anything related to "parties," given the still fresh connotation to "communist" party rule (Szczerbiak 2016: 116). Armed with these two motivations, the League was able to forcefully blend the myth of Poland's inherent Catholicism with the myth of messianic martyrdom into a coherent political ideology which proclaimed that traditional, Catholic Polish values were under siege by corrupt "Western" (i.e. Western

[33] It is important to bear in mind, however, that although the League of Polish Families was able to pass the threshold to make it into parliament, they only occupied 7.87% of the seats. Yet despite their small official representation, they proved to be a very vocal coalition during their tenure in the Sejm, further abetting anti-LGBT sentiment in public discourse.

European, American, or simply not Polish) forces that wanted to subjugate and control Poland[34]. What was needed, according to the organization, was strict adherence to Catholicism, the nation, and patriotism (de Lange and Guerra 2009).

While such ideas may have been on the political fringe only a decade earlier, the extreme perspectives of the League of Polish Families were able to take root at this time due to the favorable political and discursive opportunity structure available during the pre-accession period (de Lange and Guerra 2009; Płatek and Płucienniczak 2017). Specifically, anxieties concerning the consequences of Poland's accession to the E.U. were still felt at the time, with 26% of the population claiming they would vote against accession in a poll conducted in 2000 (CBOS 2000). Thus, while the majority of Poles still favored accession, there was still a significant contingent of the population that was hostile to the idea or simply undecided. The League's focus on keeping Poland "Polish" and rooting out harmful influences to traditional Polish culture resonated among some of Poland's "Euroskeptic" population, giving them 7.87% of votes in the 2001 elections (de Lange and Guerra 2009).

Once in the political limelight, members of the League of Polish Families expressed their ideological concerns in numerous ways. In addition to working through formal political channels, members —often joined by the radical extremist group the All Polish Youth— would engage in street demonstrations such as E.U. flag burnings, disruption of pro-E.U. meetings, and physical attacks on sexual and religious minorities (Pankowski 2010: 114), thereby blending political lobbying with tactics of intimidation and violence all in the name of protecting and preserving the Catholic, Polish nation.

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[34] Their platform was also driven by a desire to halt any foreign investment into Poland, which was also seen as a way in which external, foreign forces could further control and subjugate the Polish nation.

The League had a wide range of targets. While they focused on traditional scapegoats such as Jews, they also began turning their attention towards the newly forming LGBT movement, which was largely seen as a corrupt import and consequence of E.U. accession. The following quotation from popular[35] Far-Right daily *Nasz Dziennik* (Our Daily) in 2004 aptly summarizes their attitudes towards sexual minorities[36]:

> We are dealing with a radical movement, a wide-ranging network of organizations, pressure groups, radical intellectuals and activists, who not only seek to protect their interests but also to change our laws, our customs, our morality, and even our Catholic religion…. This is not about the purported struggle for gay rights: it is about the destruction of traditional society based on the primacy of the family…Their main goal is the destruction of society (quoted in Ostolski 2007: 165).

The above quotation is both striking and telling. From the outset, the author makes clear that what "true Poles" are struggling against is something "radical," something exerting great pressure on Polish culture and society. The author makes clear that the purported movement for gay rights is simply an illusion, one to take away from its true mission of societal destruction. In addition, it is important to note the order in which the author discusses the goals of the LGBT movement. According to him, not only does the LGBT movement want to change "our" laws and "our" customs —this usage of the term "our" clearly indicating an "us versus them" logic that frames the LGBT community as non-Polish— but "*even* our Catholic religion." Such ordering —in addition to the use of the term "even"— implies that from the perspective of this author, of all the aspects of Polish culture and tradition that the LGBT movement is striving to

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[35] *Nasz Dziennik* (est 1998) is owned by controversial conservative Priest Tadeusz Rydzyk, who became famous for his right-wing Catholic radio station, Radio Maryja. It is released daily, except Sundays, and has a circulation of roughly 100,000 (https://www.eurotopics.net/en/148726/nasz-dziennik).

[36] While this was not written by a member of League, O'Dwyer (2018: 66-70) shows how this statement is nearly identical to ones made by League parliamentarian Wojciech Wierzejski.

change, the most troubling is their purported attack on Catholicism. Such language therefore demonstrates not only how closely Catholicism and Polish national identity are intertwined in the minds of many on the Right and Far-Right in Poland, but how easily this connection can be mobilized to justify and support a logic of exclusion.

Such rhetoric was becoming more commonplace among the Polish Far-Right at this time. Adam Ostolski's (2005) comparison of inter-war newspapers with those of the pre-accession period demonstrated that the rhetoric used to criticize Jews in the 1930s was strikingly similar to the League of Polish Families' rhetoric targeting sexual minorities. Following his lead, a number of scholars (Shibata 2009, Graff 2010) have pointed out how in this period gays were becoming Poland's "new Jews," meaning that sexual minorities were starting to take the place of Jews as the new threatening "Others" in the minds of Poland's nationalist groups[37]. In the most detailed analysis of League of Polish Families' rhetoric to date, Yasuko Shibata showed how much of their rhetoric made sexual minorities out to be a community of depraved pedophiles and symbolic murderers of the Polish nation (2009: 267-268). The goal of the League, then, was to protect traditional, Catholic Poland from the threats brought by this group[38]. It was therefore common at this time for Far-Right MPs to refer to the "homosexual lobby" when discussing the actions of LGBT NGOs or sexual minorities in general.

The League's hateful rhetoric was not only visible in Far-Right periodicals, however. Since the party held roughly 8% of the seats in the Polish Sejm between 2001 and 2007, such comments became more commonplace in political discourse which, in turn, trickled out to the

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[37] As Shibata has argued, a major reason for this shift was due to the fact that anti-Semitism was no longer "politically correct."

[38] It is important to re-emphasize that sexual minorities were not the *only* target of the LPR at this time, but that they were a particularly important one especially once it became clear that Poland was going to join the E.U.

rest of Polish society. Perhaps the most controversial situation occurred when League of Polish Families leader, Roman Giertych, was elected as Minister of Education in 2005[39]. During this period, the League seemed obsessed with eradicating anything remotely related to "homosexual content" from Polish schools. Specific actions taken included barring the Campaign Against Homophobia from accessing any educational funds from the E.U., initiating an internet filter for Polish schools that blocked access to any websites that even mentioned homosexuality, among other policies (O'Dwyer 2018: 67-69). Perhaps most disturbing, though, was the attempt to pass legislation that would prevent sexual minorities from becoming teachers (Czarnecki 2006: 31). At one point, Giertych fired the head of the national teacher training center for encouraging teachers to arrange meetings with LGBT groups and NGOs (O'Dwyer 2018: 65-66).

[39] Giertych's election was met with widespread protests, mostly by University students, which he denounced as being led by "left-wing and homosexual organizations" (Czarnecki 2006: 27).

Figure 1.3: Homophobic Banner at Polish Soccer Match. The banner reads "Warsaw Free of Faggotry" with "LGBT" visibly crossed out. Taken from: https://noizz.pl/lgbt/warszawa-wolna-od-pedalstwa-homofobiczny-transparent-na-legii/bhz03n8, Accessed 12 Apr 2021.

Figure 1.4: Right-Wing Activists Holding Anti-LGBT poste. It reads "Family yes! Depravity No!" with an image common to Right-Wing rallies. Taken from: https://www.dw.com/en/intolerance-rife-in-polands-lgbt-free-communities/av-53471430, Accessed 12 Apr 2021.

The opportunities for Poland's LGBT community to thrive in this political and social climate were bleak. Although the League was unable to retain its seats in the Polish Sejm after 2007, and was ultimately unable to formally institutionalize any of their anti-LGBT policies, their visibility and fervor posed numerous hurdles for the newly burgeoning LGBT movement to contend with. First, they helped to increase and promote the viability of anti-LGBT rhetoric in the public sphere. Second, they set a precedent for the introduction of discriminatory legislation meant to further curtail sexual minority rights in Poland. Lastly, and most crucial to the story being told here, they forcefully and consistently emphasized the idea that Poland was an inherently and immutably Catholic nation and that Catholic Poland had a new existential threat: sexual minorities.

The League of Polish Families, however, were not alone in their mission to protect Poland from the looming threat of "Europeanized" homosexuality (O'Dwyer 2018). During their time in the Sejm, the League often allied itself with the conservative, Catholic Law and Justice party. While the latter was staunchly opposed to the proliferation of the LGBT movement and to what they now refer to as "LGBT Ideology," Law and Justice was not as extreme as the League of Polish Families. However, the de-facto leader of Law and Justice, Jaroslaw Kaczyński, often defended Roman Giertych's assertions that homosexuality had no place in Polish schools and, as the following statement makes clear, decried homosexuality as something that was merely a passing fashion:

> I assure you that if a man from [Law and Justice] were Minister of Education, he would take the same direction as Giertych…I want to say it clearly, I am also against the promotion of homosexuality in school…I don't see any reason to support the *fashion* for promoting homosexuality (quoted in Pankowski 2010: 182. Emphasis added.)

In addition, members of Law and Justice often criticized what they saw as the deceiving nature of the LGBT movement, which they believed was simply interested in pursuing an ideological agenda that would like to see Poland's traditions destroyed. Not only did they frame sexual minorities and homosexuality as a threat to Catholic Poland, they often took the position as victim, claiming that tyrannical "Western" overreach was beginning to oppress "true Poles." Thus, as Kaczyński once said, "In Western Europe they want to ban the Christmas tree and they have *criminalized people who criticize homosexuality*. In a moment they will go after the churches…it is a question of facts, not opinions" (quoted in Pankowski 2010: 158, emphasis added). Law and Justice therefore also helped perpetuate the "Polak-Katolik" myth at this time as well as the idea that Poland's Catholic roots were under siege.

By the time Law and Justice rose to political prominence in 2005 by gaining a majority (27%) of seats in parliament as well the presidency, debates and controversies surrounding the LGBT community had become so salient that traditional focal points of the Far-Right, such as abortion and religious education, had faded into the background (Millard 2006). Not surprisingly, one of the first moves Law and Justice made once in power was to abolish the Government Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Men and Women, the only government organization whose official mandates included protecting the LGBT community (Czarnecki 2006). Together, between 2001 and 2007, the League of Polish Families and Law and Justice helped to make the LGBT community the primary scapegoat for nearly all the problems that Catholic Poland was facing since joining the European Union.

Pride and Prejudice: The Kraków, Poznań, and Warsaw Marches for Equality

This section demonstrates how and why the equality marches in Kraków (2004), Poznań (2005), and Warsaw (2004 and 2005) were crucial for Poland's LGBT community. These events marked some of the earliest confrontations between Far-Right groups such as the League of Polish Families and the LGBT community, and will be instructive in further illustrating the extent and logic of anti-LGBT sentiment in post-accession Poland. Further, this discussion will also demonstrate the ways in which the newly burgeoning LGBT movement began to fight back and draw more national and international attention.

The Kraków[40] march for equality in 2004 is an important place to begin because it occurred only one week after Poland officially joined the E.U. on May 1st. Plans for the march had been in the works since 2003 through the local branch of KPH, which was part of a larger

[40] My retelling of this event is based on the in-depth analysis provided by Grażyna Kubia (2006).

event called the Festival of Culture and Tolerance. The festival was sponsored by the Plenipotentiary for Equal Status of Women and Men and the Jagiellonian University's sociology department, but was met with general disapproval from the University Rector, who happened to be a Catholic Archbishop (Kubica 2006). Despite some disapproval from the University, however, the events of the festival —which included a film screening, an art exhibition and open air concert— went on as scheduled and were left undisturbed.

Problems arose, however, with the march that was scheduled to be the concluding event for the festival. Unfortunately for the event's coordinators, the original date for the march for equality overlapped with the Feast of St Stanisław, an important religious procession that takes place annually in Kraków. Saint Stanislaw was the first Polish saint to be canonized, and served as the Patron Saint of Poland until his murder by King Boleslaus II. He was soon after declared a martyr, and to this day represents the victory of religion over secularity. Although this oversight was allegedly more of an error of the municipality than of the event organizers, and despite the fact that the march was then moved back two days, it provided an impetus for anger and protest among the the more conservative, religious and Far-Right communities. Poland's most popular daily newspaper, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, qualified the event as a simple misunderstanding, yet in the story also included an image showing two processions: one with believers holding a cross and another with activists holding a rainbow flag[41]. This image would soon symbolize one of the most significant political and cultural battles in contemporary Polish history.

Given the controversy leading up to the march for equality, it is not surprising that once the event took place, it was met with overt hostility. What was meant to be a small event quickly

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[41] On the social importance of processions and potential political salience of parades, see Zubrzycki 2016. Chapter 4 will focus exclusively on the important of the symbolic aspects of Polish religious and national symbols and the rainbow.

evolved into, from the perspective of the Polish Right and Far-Right, a national crisis. Thus, once the march started, members of the League and the neo-fascist group All Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*) as well as other disapproving citizens lined the streets jeering at participants in the march. Some threw eggs and even sometimes glass bottles. While many of those protesting the march simply yelled profanities, they also brandished banners with statements such as "The Wawel Dragon[42] was straight" and "Stop Homosexuality." Opponents also distributed a leaflet to passersby titled "Say No to homosexual promotion in Kraków," which juxtaposed an image of the Wawel castle with an image of two drag queens. As Kubica points out in her analysis of the events, this image was meant to depict the primary motivation of the League and other radical groups present that day; to draw a stark contrast between what ought to be considered the formidable bulwark of Poland —the Wawel castle— and the newest threat to Polish national identity; sexual minorities.

While the events in Kraków illustrate how the Far-Right in Poland began framing the terms of the debate as "true Poles" versus "deviant and threatening homosexuals," the 2005 March for Equality in Poznań is a clear example of how LGBT organizing in Poland became more strategic. Like in Kraków, Poznań's march was part of a larger event called the "Days of Equality and Tolerance," which consisted of several events. However, the march in Poznań became controversial not because of overlapping with a religious holiday or procession, but because Mayor of Poznań Ryszard Grobelny decided to refuse a permit for the march four days before its scheduled occurrence. His decision was met with the approval of various other local politicians who were concerned with the promotion of homosexual behavior in public as well as for more tangible concerns such as possible property damage (Gruszczyńska 2009; Kowalczyk

[42] The Wawel dragon is a part of traditional Polish folklore, a story told to practically all Polish children.

2006). Further, one week before the scheduled march, a Poznań archbishop received a standing ovation after stating the following at a large ceremonial mass, showing how some Church officials often helped fuel the sentiments of the more active Right and Far-Right:

> …agreeing to organize this event- which in its essence is violating the most fundamental divine rights- is an insult to the memory of John Paul II…Freedom to assemble cannot be used as a smoke screen for offending public morality and promoting homosexual behavior (Quoted in Gruszczyńska 2009)

However, after a few days of legal struggles, it was ruled that the attempt to ban the parade violated the right to freedom of assembly under the Polish constitution, and the event was set to continue. While the event did not draw as large a crowd of counter-protestors as the march in Kraków, it remains a controversial event in Polish LGBT history because of the actions of local police once the march ended. The following account by an event organizer succinctly summarizes the controversial events that day:

> This is the moment that the police run up to the people putting together a pacifist symbol and arrest them. People are scared (the police are brutal and do not seem to care that somebody might be hurt) and sit down on the ground, some fall over…people are dragged out in a brutal way, they are pulled and beaten. First they take out Marta, who is sitting on the ground, and they brutally pull our Agata, then Gaja and Asia (quoted in Gruszczynka 2009)

According to personal correspondence with scholar and activist Adam Ostolski, the accounts of police brutality in Poznań helped to launch the event into the national spotlight:

> There was an image of a girl who was dragged by her hair by a policeman over her statements. So people started to identify with it. They started to think about their freedom as well. So in 2005, thanks to the brutal actions on the part of the government, there was a shift in the public support for gay rights.

While concerning, the events in Poznań also served as a catalyst for more public acknowledgment and support of sexual minorities in Poland. Further, the march in Poznań was

important because it relied upon a framing that likened the struggle for LGBT rights as similar to the struggles faced by the Solidarity movement two decades earlier (Gruszczyńska 2009). Activists speaking at the event that day therefore recalled either their or their parents' experiences with Solidarity, and claimed that they faced similar struggles with LGBT rights today (Gruszczyńska 2009: 322). Framing the event in this way allowed LGBT activists in Poland to now frame their demands and grievances in a way that resonated with Polish citizens who were not part of the LGBT community, but nonetheless understood and sympathized with the idea of combating state-sponsored oppression. Further, as O'Dwyer has aptly pointed out, the virulent backlash from the Far-Right helped the LGBT movement gain legitimacy and resonance in framing their struggles as overtly political (2018: 141), thereby helping it gain more allies outside of the Polish LGBT community.

The movement found an international audience when then mayor of Warsaw and Law and Justice member Lech Kaczyński attempted to ban Warsaw's equality marches in both 2004 and 2005. The decision to ban the 2004 march came only a few months after Poland's E.U. accession, which allowed Law and Justice to cement its reputation as staunch protector of Catholic Poland and opponent of the perceived decadence of E.U (O'Dwyer 2018: 145). Although Kaczyński appealed to a number of practical concerns such as increased traffic and the possible threat of violence (still a common tactic today among politicians attempting to block or ban Prides), his ideological concerns were also evident. Thus, regarding his decision to ban the march, he said "I will prohibit the parade regardless of what I find in the organizers' application. I can't see a reason for propagating gay culture" (Quoted in Kosc 2005). Yet activists had learned valuable lessons from both the Kraków and Poznań marches, and actively resisted Kaczyński's actions in both years by appealing to the narrative of fundamental rights guaranteed

under E.U. laws as well as free speech provisions provided in Poland's constitution. They managed to push back against Kaczyński's bans and still held marches, albeit with truncated routes and aggressive resistance from members of the League of Polish Families and All Polish Youth.

However, international human rights organizations such as Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International soon began to take notice of the events unraveling in Warsaw and published official reports condemning Poland's "official homophobia" (Amnesty International 2006). While they specifically condemned Kaczyński's actions in attempting to ban pride marches, they also criticized several of the official actions of the League discussed above. Poland's LGBT movement had now found an international audience. Within a few years, the movement continued to burgeon and frame their mission as one focused on tangible political gains. Although the struggles at the Kraków, Poznań, and Warsaw prides were arduous, they proved to be catalysts for the formation of a formidable and politically viable LGBT movement. Yet as the following sections will illustrate, despite the growing visibility of the LGBT movement and its increasing transnational connections, resistance to their mission remained strong and found renewed strength with the re-election of Law and Justice in 2015.

A Changing Tide? The LGBT movement and Poland's Centrist Civic Platform Party

Although 2001-2007 were challenging years for the Polish LGBT movement and community due to the virulent attacks from the League of Polish Families and Law and Justice, the struggles faced in these years allowed the movement to forge its overtly political framing. Then, in 2007, Law and Justice no longer held a majority in the Sejm and the League of Polish Families was unable to retain any seats. The centrist and Euro-enthusiast Civic Platform (PO) party was now in the majority, and LGBT activists were hopeful that this change would help

them realize some of their demands. However, while the Civic Platform was not overtly hostile to the LGBT community as was the Far-Right, they did little to address their concerns and mostly left LGBT organizations to their own devices. While they condemned anti-gay politics and rhetoric, they still did nothing to tangibly help sexual minorities[43] (O'Dwyer 2018: 156).

The most concrete changes came in 2009 when a Polish millionaire, Janusz Palikot, decided to form his own political movement known as Palikot's Movement (*Ruch Palikota*). The Palikot Movement formed due to widespread frustrations with PO, namely their political centrism and ties to the Church, as well as to stand up to the Catholic nationalism of Law and Justice. Although the Palikot movement was not formed around LGBT rights, it was sympathetic to them. As an example of this solidarity, in 2007 Palikot (himself a heterosexual) appeared on a television program wearing a t-shirt that read "I am gay." It was during this television appearance that he stated his dissatisfaction with PO and their inaction on issues such as minority rights protections. This appearance helped lay the seeds for the movement he would start soon after, a movement that would prioritize progressive causes such as LGBT rights[44].

The Palikot movement was finally able to enter the political spotlight in 2011 after two years of organizing and campaigning. The party's program emphasized, among other progressive measures, increased tolerance for homosexuality as well as advocacy of same sex-partnerships and adoptions. However, the most impactful gain for the LGBT community and movement came with the historic election of Robert Biedroń and Anna Grodzka, the first openly gay man and transgender woman to be elected to parliament. Their election showed that sexual minorities

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[43] Thus, it is possible to argue that PO was more detrimental to the LGBT movement than the League and Law and Justice because of their inaction.
[44] This appearance was part of a campaign for inclusivity for various minority groups, including Jews (Zubrzycki 2015).

were no longer only activists, but politicians. Although the Palikot Movement did not last long in the Polish Sejm, it was instrumental in both legitimizing official debates over same sex marriage legislation and solidifying LGBT rights as being part of a larger struggle for the maintenance of democratic norms and values. Importantly, and as will be elaborated in chapter 5, the Palikot movement also took a strongly anti-clerical stance.

Yet despite these gains, the appeal of Law and Justice and their populist, nationalistic message became too loud to ignore, and in 2015 they won a decisive victory. Not only did Law and Justice achieve an overall majority in parliament as well as the presidency, but they did so without working alongside a coalition partner, meaning that they would now have total legislative control without the need to appease another party. With this dramatic shift, the staunchly Catholic Law and Justice party now had the power to pursue their agenda with little formal resistance.

The Rise of "LGBT Ideology"

Law and Justice's sweeping victory in the 2015 parliamentary elections was a sign that the struggle for LGBT rights in Poland would only become more challenging and contested[45]. Law and Justice gained 85 parliamentary seats in the 2015 election, putting them at a total of 242 while the Civic Platform retained only 133, giving Law and Justice an absolute majority. While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to reflect on the various reasons for Law and Justice's overwhelming victory in 2015, part of their strategy during the campaign season was to focus on the migrant crisis. Indeed, de-facto leader of Law and Justice Jarosław Kaczysnki made numerous speeches in which he claimed that Muslims coming into Poland would attempt to

[45] However, as Conor O'Dwyer (2018) has argued, increased backlash to the LGBT movement by conservative and Far-Right groups may actually help bolster its growth and support in society.

impose Sharia law. He also claimed that refugees carried a variety of diseases and parasites foreign to Poland that would almost certainly be a health hazard if they were allowed into Poland, thus appealing to the fears and uncertainties held by many Poles (Deloy 2015). Importantly, the numerous speeches and appeals made by Kaczyński and other Law and Justice party members emphasized the importance of protecting Poland's Catholic roots and of keeping Poland "Polish."

Thus, as Fomina and Kucharczyk (2016) argue, Law and Justice's rise can largely be understood as a reaction to liberal cultural trends. It is therefore not surprising that soon after their 2015 victory Law and Justice, as well as other Right-wing parties and conservative factions of the Polish Church, began to target sexual minorities and the LGBT movement. One of the primary ways in which they pursued this agenda was by consistently attacking what they framed as "LGBT Ideology." In this perspective, "LGBT" has the same ontological status as "communism" or "authoritarianism," and as such it is framed as an oppressive force impinging upon the nation as opposed to a community of people ethnically tied to the nation advocating for their rights.

Given the virulent attacks on "LGBT Ideology" that began gaining momentum at this time, an opinion poll[46] published by OKO press —an independent investigative journalism and fact-checking website— in 2019 showed that a majority of younger men as well as older Poles found "LGBT Ideology," as well as "gender ideology," to be the greatest threat to Poland in the 21st century. According to the same survey, while the majority of respondents (38%) agreed that climate change proved to be the greatest existential threat to Poland, the second largest threat

[46] The poll, conducted by IPSOS, was conducted by phone on a nationally representative sample of 1006 people.

was seen to be "LGBT" and "gender" ideologies among all who participated. When the sample was stratified to consider only Law and Justice voters, only 12% cited climate change, while 54% cited "LGBT" and "gender" ideology. When focused on individuals who voted for the Civic Platform, the survey found that only 2% cited "LGBT" and "gender" ideology as a threat to Poland. Such findings thus indicate that the rhetoric of Law and Justice party members, as well as that of other Right-wing parties and members of the clergy, has had a strong impact on the ways everyday Poles perceive sexual minorities and their relationship to Poland.

Yet despite their ardent attacks on sexual minorities since 2015, Law and Justice has been framed as "weak" on this issue by the Far-Right party named Confederation Liberty and Independence (Konfederacja Wolność i Niepodległość), or Confederation for short. According to members of the Confederation, Law and Justice has been inefficient in fighting against "LGBT Ideology," and part of their platform in the 2019 elections was to fight against it more aggressively. Such sentiments are evident in the following statement made by Confederation politician Witold Tumanowicz:

> We are going to fight for the separation of LGBT and the state. We are going to pass an anti-LGBT law…to make sure that public spaces are free from provocative symbols and behaviors (Do Rzeczy, 9/29/2019)[47].

Comments like this are the norm for members of this Far-Right party, who claim that their strongly Catholic and anti-LGBT platform is the best thing for Poland. While the Confederation only managed to secure 7% percent of the vote in the most recent parliamentary elections, their

[47] Taken from: https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/115550/konfederacja-rozdzielimy-lgbt-od-panstwa-wprowadzimy-ustawe-anty-lgbt.html. Accessed 12 Apr 2021.

words strongly echo those of the League of Polish Families from nearly two decades ago[48]. Thus, despite the substantial gains made by Polish LGBT rights organizations since the beginning of the 21st century, the resistance to these gains —in the name of protecting "Catholic Poland" from foreign threats— by the Church and political Right has been consistent and formidable.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed how and why sexual minorities and "LGBT Ideology" have become the primary scapegoat for the Polish Right and Far-Right in recent years. The rise of "LGBT-Free Zones" as well as the frequency of attacks by prominent conservative politicians and religious figures in public discourse indicate how salient sexual minorities have become in contemporary Poland. Yet, as I have shown, the current attacks on sexual minorities have deep roots in Polish history. These roots begin in early 20th century Poland with the protective nationalism of Roman Dmowski, who promoted exclusionary and nationalist discourse and policies intended to solidify Polish national identity as being premised on conservative, Catholic values. Although such sentiments underwent a period of abeyance during Poland's period of state socialism (a socio-political reality that, as I discussed above, helped to reinstate the Catholic Church as a primary moral force in Poland), it returned with full force after the fall of the party state. However, the rise of the Polish Right and Far-Right did not come until Poland's accession to the European Union. Ever since Poland's accession, sexual minorities have become a prism through which larger debates over the direction of Polish national identity are fought.

[48] One of the leaders of the Confederation and their most recent candidate for Polish President, Krzysztof Bosak, got his political start working with the League of Polish Families and All Polish Youth.

This chapter has also detailed how Poland's LGBT movement evolved into a significant social movement with political goals. Yet despite the positive gains of the LGBT movement and community in Poland, consistent and virulent backlash from the Far-Right and conservative factions of the Church has remained formidable. As this chapter has demonstrated, such backlash is fueled by rhetoric referring to the depth and immutability of Poland's Catholic identity as well as the need to protect it from foreign, anti-Catholic threats. Despite their ethnic ties to the nation, sexual minorities are now often framed as one of these dangerous foreign threats.

As a result, although the LGBT movement in Poland has done much in order to increase visibility of Poland's sexual minorities (Ayoub 2017), few legislative[49] goals have been realized. Thus, there is still no formal hate crime legislation in Poland regarding sexual minorities, as gender and sexual identities are not recognized as protected under the Polish criminal code (Godisz et.al 2018). As a result, no data exists on gender or sexuality based hate crimes in Poland, making it impossible to compile statistics and write formal policy proposals based on hard data. The lack of these protections is particularly troubling because approximately one third of Polish municipalities have now declared themselves "LGBT Free Zones." The political climate in Poland is thus rife with division, and sexual minorities lie at the center of this divisive socio-political context.

[49] Rafał Trzaskowski's LGBT+ Declaration of 2019 notwithstanding.

Chapter 2: Framing the Other: Sexual Minorities in the Polish Nationalist Imagination

In this chapter, I move to examine particular instances of how the Polish Right and Far-Right have characterized sexual minorities in different spheres of life in Poland in the last decade, showing how commonplace these attacks have become over the past 15 years. I first examine Right-Wing responses to and framings of sexual minorities in Polish media and the public sphere. I then examine conservative backlash to initiatives designed to lessen anti-LGBT stigma in Polish schools, as well as how conservative groups have initiated marches aimed to criticize LGBT pride events. I conclude by scrutinizing the most recent manifestation of virulent anti-LGBT sentiment: the formation of "LGBT-Free Zones." In all of these instances, I demonstrate how appeals to the need to protect traditional Catholic and conservative notions of Polish national identity are central to the criticisms promoted by both Right-wing politicians and members of the clergy, and how sexual minorities —despite their ethnic ties to the nation— are often framed as existing outside of and against the Polish nation.

Sexual Minorities in the Public Sphere

Prior to the mid-2000s, sexual minorities were seldom featured in Poland's public media. If they were, sources would often portray them as members of a small fringe community largely detached from the mainstream of Polish society (Oliwa 2012). However, in the first decade of

the new millennium, there was an increased presence of sexual minorities and topics relating to the LGBT community in the public sphere and at this time, sexual minorities were becoming increasingly visible not only as a strange and troubled subculture, but as ordinary Polish citizens. Yet despite the increase of visibility for the LGBT community in this period, they still faced formidable challenges in the public sphere. Thus, numerous public controversies arose concerning the increasingly public face of sexual minorities in media, often initiating critical voices in Far-Right publications as well as publications of the more conservative factions of the Catholic Church. Public media thus proved to be an important early battleground for the promotion of, and resistance to, LGBT rights in Poland.

A prime example is a controversy that arose in 2014 over the Campaign Against Homophobia's (KPH) attempt to broadcast a commercial advocating support for same-sex marriage on Telewizja Polska (TVP)[50], the state-run news agency. The commercial was a central part of a social campaign organized by KPH called "I Support Unions" which attempted to promote support for same-sex marriages among the population as well as to de-stigmatize domestic partnerships among same-sex couples. The ad was thirty seconds in length and was meant to be broadcast on five TVP channels for a period of two weeks. The commercial featured a day in the life of a young woman and her partner. In it, the voice of a narrator says:

> I wake up in front of a stranger…laugh with a stranger. With a stranger I celebrate another anniversary of our relationship. Why with a stranger? Because according to Polish law, people living in partnerships are completely alien to each other (KPH, 10/30/2014, my translation)[51].

[50] This public network has, since the time of Law and Justice's (PiS) election in 2014, often been referred to critically by liberal critics as "TVPiS."
[51] Taken From: https://kph.org.pl/popieram-zwiazki-informacja-prasowa/, Accessed 12 Apr 2021.

According to KPH, the message was meant to do two things. First and foremost, it was meant to normalize the fact that people of the same sex could choose to live together, countering the belief that a same-sex relationship was scandalous or immoral. In so doing, the creators of the ad hoped they would gain solidarity among more Poles who were not against LGBT rights, but simply unfamiliar with the issues that sexual minorities in Poland were facing. In order to exemplify the fact that sexual minorities were indeed a normal part of Polish society, in one of its segments the ad strategically featured the couple praying at church. Prior to the initial airing of the commercial, a spokesman for TVP stated that "Telewizja Polska is focused on promoting openness and tolerance, and the spot is an example of a well-executed campaign, both visually and substantively, that highlights the problems of society" (Queer.PL, 10/22/2014)[52].

However, even before the airing of the first commercial, Right-wing criticism of the campaign abounded. The official online newsletter of the Church, *eKAI*, in an article titled "TVP will join the promotion of homo unions" published an opinion lamenting the choice of Polish Television to "join in the promotion of homosexuality" (eKAI, 10/22/2014)[53]. After detailing the contents of the commercial, the article stated:

> The social campaign "I support unions" was launched in April. Its aim is to embed in the minds of Poles the belief that there is an alleged discrimination against homosexuals in Poland and to convince society for the need for changes in the law, e.g. by introducing the institution of partnerships in Poland.

The overall tone in the *eKAI* opinion article is relatively neutral, especially when compared to the fiery rhetoric discussed by Far-Right politicians in chapter one. However, its appeals to the need to protect Poles and traditional, conservative understandings of "Polishness" are evident. By

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[52] https://queer.pl/news/195141/zwiazki-partnerskie-tvp-telewizja-geje-lesbijki, Accessed 12 April 2021
[53] https://www.ekai.pl/tvp-wlaczy-sie-w-promocje-homozwiazkow/, Accessed 12 April 2021

claiming that the campaign wants to "embed" certain beliefs into the minds of Poles, the authors use language conveying the idea that the goal of the ad, and the campaign more generally, is to manipulate Polish citizens. The decision to focus on "Poles" here and not "people" more generally is also deserving of further scrutiny. According to this quote, not only is the goal of the campaign to manipulate, but its goal is to manipulate *Poles* into believing that same-sex unions ought to be supported. Behind this claim is the idea that, while other people in other places may be fine with supporting same-sex unions, doing so is simply not a Polish thing to do. Thus, by using the term "Poles" in this context, the criticism of the campaign reifies the concept of "Poles" by making it seem that all Polish citizens are similarly conservative and who do not want to be exposed to campaigns of the LGBT community.

This subtle and seemingly innocuous statement is brought into sharper focus when considered in light of comments made by Marcin Przeciszewski, a member of the TVP board, who was quoted in the same article in e*KAI*. When speaking of the planned campaign ad, he proclaimed:

> The promotion of homosexual relationships on public television is contrary to its mission, as it is obliged under the Broadcasting Act to strengthen the family. Meanwhile, promoting civil partnerships as a legal alternative to the family, based on the marriage of a woman and a man, means weakening its special status in society.

In his statement, Przeciszewski clarifies that public television in Poland does have a mission and that airing the KPH ad would be a clear violation of it. Indeed, the Polish Broadcasting Act of 1993 states that a "social broadcaster shall mean a broadcaster who…propagates learning and educational activities, promotes charitable deeds, *respects the Christian system of values*, being guided by the universal principles of ethics, *and strives to preserve national identity*," and also that "programmes or other broadcasts shall respect the religious beliefs of viewers/listeners,

particularly the Christian system of values." (Polish Broadcasting Act 1993, my emphasis). The arguments put forth by Przeciszewski and the e*KAI* article more generally are therefore not only hollow complaints, but have grounding in laws designed to protect a conservative, Catholic notion of national identity. According to this act, while broadcasters are meant to respect religious beliefs, the "Christian system of values" is delineated as the priority.

The criticism of the KPH advertisement, as well as the language of the Polish Broadcasting Act on which it is based, thus illustrate two things. First, they most clearly demonstrate how closely aligned major institutions, such as TVP, are with the missions of the Church and with the promotion of a conservative, Catholic model of Polish national identity. However, more important for our purposes is that it shows how "Poles" and thereby "Polishness" are often reified as a monolithic collection of conservative Catholics, and that any ideas or concepts that go against these conservative, Catholic values are framed as un-Polish and a threat to Polish national identity. From this perspective, the LGBT community and organizations like KPH —despite their ethnic ties to the Polish nation— are therefore reminiscent of earlier infidel groups that have attempted to conquer Poland (cf. Zubrzycki 2011).

This sentiment was reaffirmed only two days later in another article, printed in *eKAI,* that summarized the sentiments of Bishop Henryk Tomasik on the topic:

> …Bishop Tomasik recalled that the Constitution of the Republic of Poland and the laws on the functioning of public media speak of promoting family values as well as maintaining moral order. - So we have a conflict with the legislation. This is a clear clash with a healthy feeling, with the normal concept of the family as a relationship between a man and a woman - Bishop Tomasik told Radio Plus Radom (eKAI, 10/24/14)[54].

[54] Taken from: https://www.ekai.pl/bp-tomasik-spot-tvp-koliduje-z-prawem/, Accessed 12 April 2021.

In this statement, both *KAI* and Bishop Tomasik endorse the perspective that KPH's advertisement presents a clear legal challenge given the language of the Broadcasting Act. By questioning the legality of the KPH ad spot, both *KAI* and the Bishop were underscoring the idea that Poland and "Polishness" are immutably Catholic, and in order to support their arguments they point directly to the Polish constitution and other Polish legislation. They support their reasoning by referring to both the Polish constitution and alluding to the 1993 Media and Broadcast Act. This point is an important one, as it demonstrates how such presuppositions of the nature of Poland's Catholic identity are written into the country's foundational legal documents[55]. Also striking in this statement is what Tomasik argues is at stake if the laws discussed here are not followed; a loss of moral order and a clash with "healthy feelings." These statements therefore further work to solidify the idea that advertisements such as the one promoted by KPH will have a damaging effect on "good" Polish society, and as such they stand outside the constitutional bounds of what is properly Polish. The same article then went on to state:

> The "Strangers" spot is part of the social campaign "I Support the Unions," prepared by the Campaign Against Homophobia. KPH is a nationwide public benefit organization that aims to counteract the alleged discrimination against lesbians, gays, bisexuals and trans people (LGBT)... on Monday, October 27 at 15.00 The Right of the Republic of Poland organizes a demonstration in defense of TV Trwam and "against deviation on TVP" in connection with the announcement of the broadcast of the spot.

The importance of this statement lies primarily in the final sentence, where the author mentions the demonstration that will be held in order to protest the KPH advertisement and support *TV*

[55] For an analysis of debates over Christian references in the Polish constitution's preamble, see Zubrzycki 2002.

TRWAM, a channel operated by the Church and closely affiliated with conservative radio station Radio Maria. The demonstration, instead of being focused on the specific content of the ad, is more generally focused on combating *deviation,* specifically on state funded television. Thus, non-heteronormative sexualities are not only framed as a deviation from *sexual* norms, a common way to frame sexual minorities, but from *Polish* norms. Further, this final statement also underlines the important and common claim that sexual minorities are responding to *alleged* discrimination, thereby attempting to undercut the seriousness of their claims. Although this controversy only lasted a matter of days, a close analysis of this one conflict demonstrates the subtle ways in which the Polish Right attempt to both undermine the struggles of Polish sexual minorities and frame their grievances and demands as attacks on Poland and Polish national identity.

Given the strained relationship the Polish LGBT community has had with much of the Polish Catholic Church, in 2016 KPH launched a campaign, called "Let Us Offer a Sign of Peace" (*Przekażmy sobie znak pokoju*), with the more liberal faction of Poland's Catholic Church. The campaign was initiated in order to show that religious values and support for LGBT rights were not antithetical to one another, but compatible. The non-profit organization Faith and Rainbow (*Wiara i Tęcza*), a group composed of LGBT members of the Catholic Church, was also involved with the initiative. In addition to displaying billboards and posters throughout various cities, the campaign involved in-depth interviews with LGBT Catholics which KPH shared on their website. The ultimate goal of the "Let Us Offer a Sign of Peace" campaign was not to achieve a specific policy goal or legal end, but to catalyze a conversation in society over the perceived frictions between having religious faith and being a member of the LGBT community.

Figure 2.1: Poster for the "Let Us Offer a Sign of Peace" Campaign. Taken from: https://kph.org.pl/katolicy-i-lgbt-zapraszaja-do-znaku-pokoju-wystartowala-nowa-kampania-spoleczna/, Accessed 11 Feb 2021.

However, the campaign was met with disapproval by many other members of the Church hierarchy, as some claimed it was a deceptive attempt to push for same-sex marriage and the legalization of adoption by same-sex partners. These deceptions, they argued, were also framed as being unjust discrimination against the Church. An article in the conservative periodical *Gość Niedzielny* thus stated that "the real purpose of the campaign is not only to promote respect, but to fully accept…legalization of homosexual relationships and so-called homo-adoption" (9/29/2016)[56]. Thus, the concern amongst conservative and pious Poles that a growing "LGBT lobby" was attempting to displace traditional, Catholic values continued despite a campaign meant to portray the opposite.

Numerous important Bishops criticized the campaign in the weeks after its launch. Another article featured in *Gość Niedzielny* quoted three points made by Archbishop and chairman of the Polish Bishops Conference Stanisław Gądecki regarding the initiative:

[56] https://gdansk.gosc.pl/doc/3471588.Znak-pokoju-bez-ideologii, Accessed 11 Feb 2021.

> The very liturgical sign of peace - to which the organizers of the campaign refer - expresses the readiness to reconcile with others and to accept them in a holy community of sinners. After all, we are all sinful, which is also expressed in the act of penance at the very beginning of each liturgy. Thus, a hand extended to another signifies acceptance of a person, never - approval of his sin, no matter what his nature is. It should also be emphasized that the members of the community assembled at the liturgy have a constant obligation to convert, that is, to conform to the requirements of the Gospel and to turn away from their own sinful tastes. There is a fear that the action "Let us give each other the sign of peace," extracting the gesture of the extended hand from the liturgical context, gives it a meaning that is incompatible with the teaching of Christ and the Church (Gość Niedzielny 9/14/2016)[57].

In this first point, the bishop begins by recognizing the standard Catholic belief that there is sin inherent in every person, regardless of their sexual orientation. He then quickly moves to his criticism of the campaign, which centers on what he understands as its desire to have the Church recognize and accept members of the LGBT community. Such acceptance, according to the Bishop, is impossible unless they renounce "their own sinful tastes." The Bishop is therefore critical of a campaign that, in his view, tries to accept and tolerate both the person *and* their "sinful sexuality" instead of trying to accept the person and rid them of this perceived sin.

While he does not directly state that such "sinful sexuality" makes it impossible for one to be a "good Pole," this message is implied when considering the quote in light of the fact that the Church and Catholicism remain central sources of identification in Poland and that the myth of the Polak-Katolik remains pervasive and powerful. The Bishop claims that as members of the Catholic community, all people must strive to rid themselves of their sins, as all people are sinful. Thus, in order to be fully accepted into the Church, one would have to renounce their "sinful sexuality" just as they would any other sin. Failure to renounce one's sins —such as non-

[57] https://www.gosc.pl/doc/3446398.Archidiecezja-warszawska-krytykuje-kampanie-LGBT, Accessed 11 Feb 2021.

heteronormative sexuality— would therefore put one at odds with the Church and the tenets of Catholicism. However, as was detailed in chapter one, "Catholicism" and "Polishness" are closely imbricated. Given the fusion of "Polish" and "Catholic" identities, the Bishop's claim implies that if one does not renounce their "sinful sexuality," they would be contrary to the Church and by extension, "Polishness." For him, then, one cannot be accepted into the Church and be, or become, a good Pole unless they denounce their non-heteronormative sexuality. He then goes on to say:

> LGBT groups often accuse the Church of depriving them of the dignity of homosexual, bisexual or transgender people by proclaiming the Gospel. Therefore, it must be said with full force that the Church is the only institution which has been tirelessly proclaiming the dignity of every human person without exception for two thousand years. This unchanging teaching does not change with regard to these persons either.

The importance of this quotation comes from the Bishop's defensive claim that LGBT groups are often unfair to the Church (as opposed to the other way around) in accusing it of being discriminatory against them. Accordingly, it is not the Church that has done anything wrong, but the LGBT groups, as they simply choose to ignore that they are engaging in sinful behavior. Paired with the first point, the Bishop is saying that so long as LGBT people renounce part of their identity (framed by him as simply a sinful behavior one can willingly discard), they can be accepted as part of the Church. But, since the campaign does not require individuals to renounce their sexual orientation, he sees it as problematic. This leads him to his third, and most strongly worded, point:

> Respect for the dignity of every person is incompatible with respect for homosexual acts themselves. They are objectively morally wrong and as such can never be accepted by the Church. The situation is similar with the postulates of equating homosexual and heterosexual relationships in the law. Such postulates - always, especially in times of deep family crisis - are

> harmful to societies and individuals… Evil is evil not because it has been forbidden by someone, but because - as contrary to God's plan - it harms man. Hence the Church - like a good mother - must clearly call them by name. An attitude of tolerance towards evil would, in fact, be indifference to sinning sisters and brothers. So it would have nothing to do with mercy or with Christian love.

The first sentence of this statement concisely captures the essence of what I have discussed above; the overall attitude of "love the sinner, hate the sin" as it relates to the LGBT community in Poland. Yet the remainder of this statement goes much further, as in it the Bishop declares homosexual acts and homosexual relationships as both "objectively, morally wrong" as well as "evil." It is thus the role of the Church to help excise this evil from people so that it does not negatively impact the rest of society. This statement therefore not only further stigmatizes sexual minorities by claiming that their sexuality is merely a sinful behavior, but also adds that the primary entity capable of helping rid them of their sin in the Church.

Again, considering the strength and salience of the "Polak-Katolik" myth that was detailed in chapter one, it is not hard to follow the implicit logic leading to the idea that sexual minorities, at least those who choose not to denounce their "sinful behaviors," cannot be understood as being "true Poles." If, as the myth has is, part of being Polish means adhering to the tenets of the Catholic Church, and the Church cannot accept non-heteronormative sexuality, then from the perspective of this Bishop (as well as many other members of the Church and the Polish Right and Far-Right) sexual minorities cannot be "true Poles" unless they renounce their non-heteronormative sexual identities[58]. If they do not, they are framed as enemies of and threats to the nation.

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[58] Importantly, in all of this the Church is continually framed not as a wrongdoer, but indeed the only true moral force protecting from evil. In the concluding chapter of this dissertation, I will discuss how Robert

Anti-LGBT sentiment took on a more symbolic form in 2015 when a massive rainbow art installation —displayed in one of Warsaw's prominent central squares since 2012— was permanently removed after being repeatedly burnt and rebuilt over a number of years. The art installation was destroyed by radical nationalist groups six times before the Adam Mickiewicz institute, the cultural organization that owns the sculpture, made the decision to remove it. The sculptor, Julia Wójcik, explained that the rainbow was meant to represent many things, primarily hope and openness to social change, and that it was not intended to solely represent the Polish LGBT community. However, as I have shown, in the minds of many on the Far-Right in Poland, both the E.U. and sexual minorities are understood as threats to conservative conceptions of Polish national identity. This sentiment is clear in the following statement made by a representative of the National Radical Camp (ONR), one of contemporary Poland's most radically nationalist and xenophobic organizations;

> In recent years in Poland, the marginal community of [homosexual] perverts has intensified its war on tradition, symbolism, history and national unity. The rainbow is the best example of this…It's a shame the decision to take it down took so long. This kind of installation belongs in the garbage (Times, 08/19/2015)[59].

Biedroń's political party Wiosna (Spring) attempted to attack the Church's claims at moral superiority by consistently pointing to their involvement in pedophilia scandals.

[59] https://time.com/3988534/warsaw-rainbow-statue-gay-rights/, Accessed 12 Feb 2021.

Figure 2.2: Burning of the Rainbow Sculpture in Warsaw. Image taken from: https://visegradinsight.eu/the-rainbow-on-fire/, Accessed 12 Feb 2021.

Thus, to the Far-Right Poland's LGBT community and its associated "ideology" continue to represent a serious threat to traditional Polish myths and conceptions of national identity. If Polish mythology is premised on the myths of Poland being "the bulwark of Christendom defending Europe against the infidel (however defined)" (Zubrzycki 2011), sexual minorities have become the most targeted infidel in the Polish nationalistic imagination.

Sexual Minorities and Polish Public Education

Similar struggles for sexual minorities pervade the realm of public education in Poland[60], as the Church and political Right are often vocal critics of any proposed progressive changes in school curriculums and programs. While I focused on some of these criticisms in chapter one through my brief discussion of Roman Dmowski's attacks on sexual education, in this section I

[60] As some have noted (Casanova 1994; Zielińska and Zwierżdzyński 2013), the rules and regulations regarding religious education in schools were made hastily after the fall of communism, and the emerging framework was largely shaped by the interests of the Roman Catholic Church without consulting the broader society.

delve deeper into three events in order to demonstrate how sexual minorities and their efforts to introduce progressive changes into the public school system are framed by the Polish Right as threats to Polish national identity.

In 2013, controversy arose regarding a report, titled "School of Silence," in which a number of educators argued for an update to school curricula to include topics related to sexual minorities, as virtually all materials only considered heterosexual relationships to be "normal." Further, instead of offering comprehensive sexual education programs, many schools opted to teach a course focused on preparing for family life called "Education for Family Life." A passage from the textbook *Wandering Towards Adulthood: Education for Family Life High School Students,* a common choice at the time among educators teaching about the role of the family and family life, states:

> The most important strength for a homosexual to confront his inclinations cannot, however, be found in psychoanalysis or in a therapist's advice. It is necessary to appeal to the 'ultimate source of strength', which is the experience of faith in God and conscience…superficial homosexual inclinations may reverse quite quickly if they are not accompanied by an active homosexual lifestyle (Król, 2009)

It is worth repeating that texts such as this are not only common in private, religious academies, but are a standard feature of public education in Poland. Such texts are part of a core curriculum decided by the Ministry of Education[61], and demonstrate how closely entwined the public education system in Poland is with the Church.

Given the outdated and scientifically inaccurate takes on human sexuality presented by popular texts, the authors of the "School of Silence" report argued that such information and the

[61] Such texts remained a standard part of the curriculum even when the Civic Platform party was in power from 2007 until 2015.

lack of positive representation of sexual minorities not only led to ignorance, but to bullying and discrimination against young students who did not identify as heteronormative. In order to make their case, the authors[62] analyzed 51 commonly used texts that public school educators used to teach the Education for Family Life course. They found that nearly all textbooks utilized outdated science to discuss concepts of gender and sexuality, and ignored or discounted the outlooks of influential groups such as the American Psychiatric Association and American Psychological Association. Their report also concluded that all texts analyzed either included explicit homophobia or claimed that the problem of homophobia was a myth, and therefore often engaged in victim blaming. Yet while the textbooks relegated the phenomenon of homophobia and anti-gay prejudice to the realm of mythology, the texts *did* address other forms of prejudice and discrimination such as anti-Semitism, xenophobia, and racism. I will return to this important point below.

The authors concluded that the curriculum for courses focused on Family Life needed to be updated in order to better reflect scientific research on the topic, as well as to prevent the rise in prejudice against those with non-heteronormative sexualities. They worried that the curriculums would be fodder for increased societal homophobia and anti-LGBT sentiment if gone unchecked. When reflecting on the results of the analysis, a spokesperson for an LGBT equality center in the town of Toruń, thus stated:

> The worst thing is when the textbook is homophobic…and according to the experts, it is a feature of most of the WDJR textbooks. They are great tools for raising the next generation of homophobes: convinced that homosexuality is "against nature," that it is a "disorder," "anomaly," a dangerous ailment that must and can be cured or it will spread. Such nonsense is conducive to

[62] All of the authors involved in the report were trained researchers. The research team consisted of dr hab. Jacek Kochanowski (sociologist), Dr Krzysztof Wąż (educator), and Dr. Robert Kowalczyk (psychologist).

> appealing to beliefs instead of facts, to religion instead of science. In the "School of Silence," it is pointed out several times that even the bibliography of textbooks is ideological, and not scientific (Kobiety-Kobietom, 02/08/2013)[63].

This important statement succinctly identifies what was at stake with these textbooks. Not only are the riddled with factual inaccuracies, but those inaccuracies can end up promoting the homophobic attitudes that the texts themselves claim do not exist. This reality is compounded by the fact that, according to the authors of the report, the textbooks analyzed discuss various forms of prejudice and discrimination yet claim that homophobia is not a real societal issue. In claiming that only *some* forms of prejudice actually exist —such as anti-Semitism, racism, and xenophobia— these texts invalidate the claims of sexual minorities who have been victims of prejudice and discrimination. Instead of dismissing all prejudice and discrimination as fiction, they create a distorted image of reality that protects some but places sexual minorities outside the umbra of not only legal but more general societal protection. As a result, by reading the messages in these books, many students could internalize the idea that sexual minorities not only go against nature, but pose a threat to social stability and by extension, the stability of the nation and national identity.

Not surprisingly, the view that sexual minorities were threatening to Poland was clearly articulated in a number of criticisms of the School of Silence report. Father Józef Augustyn, for example, released a statement published in *eKAI* in which he argued, among other things, that

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[63] https://kobiety-kobietom.com/portal/art.php?art=8810&nadtytul=Wiadomo%B6ci,%20news&t=Raport%20%22Szko%B3a%20milczenia%22%20-%20szkolne%20podr%EAczniki%20krytykowane%20za%20powielanie%20homofobicznych%20uprzedze%F1, Accessed 12, Feb 2021.

LGBT organizations premise their arguments on fraudulent scientific evidence that claim that one's sexuality is not a biological fact:

> For years, gay circles have tried to influence school education in Poland. Now they are having their first successes…this is true. They have tried and are still trying different methods. The first, primitive, was tossing gay leaflets to schools, anonymously or officially, during classes organized for young people under some pretext, for example, fighting AIDS… But smuggling leaflets into schools is an ad hoc action, not very effective, and when caught - compromising. After the times of guerrilla warfare, a real battle with the Ministry of National Education began to change the content of the textbooks on Family Life Education, introducing a parallel between the so-called "Gay marriage" and heterosexual… The real terrorism of homosexual communities is already visible in many countries, it is enough to mention Canada and recently also France. The French took to the streets to protest against legislation equating homosexual relationships with actual marriages. The question is whether they are too late (eKAI, 3/29/2013)[64].

In this lengthy and highly significant excerpt, Father Augustyn not only ardently defends the positions of the textbooks that have been criticized in the report, but positions sexual minorities (or as he refers to them, "gay circles") as a threatening force. He refers to their various efforts as being tactical in nature, as if there were indeed a war being waged on traditional Polish norms and values. Significantly, Father Augustyn concludes by discussing the ways in which the "terrorism of homosexual communities" has been visible in countries such as Canada and France, where devout defenders of Catholic norms protested legislation that intended to introduce legitimate scientific research questioning outdated views regarding homosexuality into school curriculums. In drawing these comparisons, Augustyn explicitly instills fear in the reader by using terms such as "guerilla warfare" and suggesting that if Poles don't stand up and fight, they will be victimized much like the Canadians and French. His statement also explicitly frames

[64] https://www.ekai.pl/bierna-batalia-o-podreczniki/, Accessed 12 Feb 2021.

sexual minorities as a threat to Poland and "Polishness," despite the fact that they too are ethnic Polish citizens.

In another critique published in KAI, conservative doctor and co-author of the textbook *Wandering Towards Adulthood: Education for Family Life High School Students* Teresa Król, argued that updates to traditional understandings of the family would "lead to a new exclusion…this time people accepting the Judeo-Christian foundation of Western civilization" (eKAI, 2/12/2013)[65]. She added, in reference to the LGBT community, that "the purpose of their lustration is to undermine the value of marriage and the family and to ridicule and label these concepts as Catholic, i.e. intolerant, homophobia, unscientific, and simply bad. *This is a step to exclusion*" (eKAI, 2/12/2013, emphasis added). Thus, much like the traditional myths would have it, the responses to to the School of Silence report discussed here portray the sentiment that conservative Catholic Poland and good Polish citizens were under siege from a foreign threat and needed to employ measures to protect themselves[66].

Conservative backlash was also palpable during the 2019 installment of KPH's annual "Rainbow Friday" event, which the organization has referred to as a "pro-LGBT event in Polish schools" (KPH.org, 10/16/2019)[67]. The point of the campaign was to begin normalizing discussions surrounding the LGBT community in Polish schools, including ways to combat prejudice and discrimination as well as suicides among Polish LGBT youth. In addition, students were encouraged to don colorful apparel and decorate their schools with rainbow items in order

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[65] https://www.ekai.pl/zamach-na-podreczniki/, Accessed 12 Feb 2021.
[66] Although some changes were introduced since the publication of the School of Silence report, few significantly altered the implicit message in school curriculums that sexual minorities were still somehow deficient. Thus, Jacek Kochanowski –one of the researchers and authors involved in producing the report- claimed in 2015 that much of the report's suggestions for modifying curriculums were still current.
[67] https://kph.org.pl/the-rainbow-friday-a-pro-lgbt-event-in-polish-schools/, Accessed 14 Feb 2021.

to show support for and solidarity with their LGBT peers. Although "Rainbow Friday" began a few years earlier, the number of participating schools in 2019 was triple that of the previous year (211 from 70). This growth occurred despite vociferous criticisms for the event from the Polish Right in 2018, which KPH addressed in the following press release:

> The Rainbow Friday event initiated by KPH may be the only day of school year when thousands of LGBT teenagers feel safe at schools. Despite its noble goal, the event encountered numerous attacks a year ago. This year it's already being tracked by the right-wing homophobic organizations that threaten schools with courts, the school superintendent called it "a depravation of students," and the representatives of the ruling party put pressure on schools to cancel the event. The Campaign Against Homophobia published a tear-jerking spot on the Internet which promotes the event planned for the 25th of October. It also serves to protect teenagers planning to take part in the event from homophobic and transphobic attack (KPH, 10/16/2019).

However, many schools throughout Poland began to face pressures regarding whether or not to participate in the events associated with Rainbow Friday, as Law and Justice party member and minister of education Anna Zalewska told media that the event was in violation of education laws. As a result, teachers throughout Poland faced threats of punishment if they decided to partake in Rainbow Friday events. In order to prevent schools from participating, school superintendents held unannounced inspections at numerous schools throughout the country intent on punishing those schools and teachers who allowed the events occur. In a statement of support for these actions, and against the "Rainbow Friday" initiative, Law and Justice party member and member of parliament Kazimierz Smoliński shared the following sentiments on Twitter:

> Tomorrow in Polish schools the 'Rainbow Friday' is to be held, which, as part of the harmful #LGBT ideology, aims to *infect* children with the demands of this dangerous environment. Please report all cases of inappropriate treatment

> of children to the board of trustees. Let's defend the children!" (Do Rzeczy, 10/25/2019, my emphasis)[68].

The language of Smoliński's tweet is striking. He refers to an attempt, on behalf of the LGBT community, to "infect" children with harmful ideology. The choice of this specific term is important for two related reasons. First, it functions to dehumanize sexual minorities and turn them into an object of fear and/or disgust by likening them to something that can spread disease or infection. Second, and most important to the argument being made in this chapter, is that this dehumanization serves as another means by which the Right can frame sexual minorities as existing outside of and in opposition to Poland and "Polishness." Thus, in the minds of many on the Polish Right, to be gay or lesbian or transgender goes against the natural order intended by God, and is therefore treated as being nothing more than a harmful ideology. The Right's framing of "Rainbow Friday" therefore remained unchanged from previous years, as they continued to portray it as an encroachment of harmful ideology on innocent *Polish* children.

Rainbow Friday was not the only controversial event regarding the LGBT community and Polish public education in 2019, however, as the conservative government soon decided to introduce a bill aiming to outlaw the teaching of sexual education in schools. Amnesty International, in issuing a report on the proposed bill, referred to it as "recklessly retrogressive."[69] The proposed legislation, termed the "Stop Pedophilia" bill, claimed that sex education is in reality a perverse attempt on the behalf of sexual minorities and activists to further its political

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[68] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/118437/teczowy-piatek-w-szkolach-bronmy-dzieci.html, Accessed 14 Feb 2021.

[69] According to the report, "This recklessly retrogressive law would encourage fear and ignorance, putting young people at risk. Its impact would be felt well beyond the classroom, creating a chilling effect on teachers, activists and even on parents who want to talk to their children about sex." (Amnesty International, 10/16/2019) https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/10/poland-law-criminalizing-sexuality-education-recklessly-retrogressive/ Accessed 14 Feb 2021).

goals, and sought to label those who chose to teach sexual education to those under 18 as pedophiles. Further, the promotion of sexual education in schools to people under the age of 18 would be punishable with up to three years in prison. In a document written to parliament, the proponents[70] of the bill claimed:

> Children are sexually awakened and familiarized with homosexuality by the LGBT lobby in order to achieve radical political goals. The organizations and activists most involved in the promotion of sexual 'education' in our country are the LGBT lobby. In Western Europe, members of these movements involved in implementing sex education in schools were convicted of pedophilia (Reuters, 4/15/2020)[71].

The controversial bill, spearheaded by the "pro-life" and strongly anti-LGBT group Fundacja Pro (Pro-Foundation) collected over 250,000 signatures. According to the organization's webpage, the bill "assumes, inter alia, that promoting sexual intercourse or other sexual activity in educational institutions will be punishable by up to three years of imprisonment. The aim of the project is to protect children from "sexualization," and at the same time to complete the legal protection of society against pedophilia" (Strona Życia, 10/15/2019)[72]. Further, the organization's website features a frequently asked questions section, with the third question being specifically about why the LGBT movement is considered "pedophile." The response reads:

> There were many pedophiles in the ranks of LGBT activists - their cases were reported by the world media. These can be found in articles in the "pedophiles

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[70] Ironically, but not surprisingly, Law and Justice has mostly remained silent on issues surrounding pedophilia scandals in the Church, which has become an important topic since the release of a film titled "Just Don't Tell Anyone (Tylko nie mów nikomu) in 2019. In the conclusion I will discuss how a focus on Church pedophilia scandals was a central focus of progressive politician Robert Biedroń's political movement.

[71] https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-lgbt-education-trfn/poland-mulls-law-denouncing-sex-educators-as-paedophiles-and-gay-activists-idUSKCN21X2ZA, Accessed 14 Feb 2021.

[72] https://stronazycia.pl/stop-pedofilii/inicjatywa-2019/, Accessed 14 Feb 2021.

> and their victims" category." Drag queens belonging to the LGBT movement, i.e. men disguising themselves as women and often performing in gay clubs, are also convicted of pedophilia. Currently they run, among others an action of reading fairy tales about "diversity" to preschoolers. The drag queen community also uses children in another way - as the so-called children's drag queen. They are often even several-year-old boys who appear disguised as girls, mainly in-front of homosexuals (Strona Życia, 10/15/2019).

As this statement shows, the organization implicates not only some individuals but the entire "LGBT movement" in the promotion of pedophilia. Thus, by promoting this bill, Law and Justice and the other politicians supporting it continue to send a clear message to Poles; members of the LGBT community are a threat to Poland, as they and their movement desire to hurt young Polish children. Consequently, relying on the traditional model of Polish national identity premised on conservative, Catholic values is the best line of defense against this harmful force[73]. This idea was evident in the words of the Ordo Iuris, a highly conservative and powerful interest organization closely aligned with the Church, in their analysis and summary of the proposed bill:

> The purpose of the "Stop Pedophilia" Bill postulated by the Applicants is fully in compliance with the Polish constitutional axiology. In accordance with Article 72 of the Polish Constitution: "The Republic of Poland shall ensure protection of the rights of the child. Everyone shall have the right to demand of organs of public authority that they defend children against violence, cruelty, exploitation and actions which undermine their moral sense." (Ordo Iuris, 4/15/2020)[74]

While the Ordo Iuris' words here convey much of the same content as the other statements above, what is important to note is their direct appeals to the Polish constitution. By referring to the foundational document of the nation, the organization is indicating that the actions taken by

[73] Although the bill has not yet passed, as members of parliament voted to delay a decision largely because of the need to focus on issues related to the COVID-19 pandemic, it has not yet been defeated.
[74] https://en.ordoiuris.pl/education/civic-project-stop-pedophilia-will-help-protect-children, Accessed 15 Feb 2021.

the proponents of the "Stop Pedophilia" bill are squarely in line with the national interest. As a result, the LGBT community in Poland is framed as incompatible with "Polishness" and an enemy of the nation.

Image 2.1: Anti-LGBT Poster found in Wrocław, May 2019. Photo by author.

The passionate fight against the perceived threats of the LGBT movement were palpably felt at the annual "March for Life and Family" (Marsz dla Życia i Rodzina) in both Kraków and Warsaw in the summer of 2019. I attended both of these demonstrations while conducting fieldwork in Poland the same summer. These marches, generally planned within days of LGBT pride marches in order to counter the messages from those events, have been organized in Poland since 2012. The following statement is taken directly from the organization's webpage, and is titled the "Declaration for Life and Family":

> Poland needs a change! A change that will make our and future generations grow in an environment that allows unfettered development, self-esteem and the use of the fruits of their work. We believe that the foundations of the New Deal should be based on respect for human life and recognition of the family as the central institution of social order. We also recognize there is a need for consistent and intensive work to promote these values. *The importance of a strong family for a shaping a healthy cultural, social, and economic order must be noticed and appreciated*. That is why we express our willingness to cooperate in the implementation of projects aimed at such shaping of the social and legal order that will guarantee full protection of human life and respect for the family (Marsz.org, my emphasis, Accessed 15 Feb 2021).

While this declaration does not contain any direct criticisms of sexual minorities, the LGBT movement, or LGBT ideology as have been found in the words of the conservative politicians and clergymen above, underneath the formal prose lies the same message; traditional Polish norms and values are in need of protection for the sake of societal stability. This sentiment is clearly indicated in the italicized portion of the text, which states that Polish culture, society, and even the economy are at stake in this battle. Further, the organization's webpage is covered with photos of happy families marching hand in hand, waving Polish flags, and conveying the image that they are indeed the true protectors of Poland.

Yet these images belie the atmosphere I experienced when observing these events in both Warsaw and Kraków. At both events, I found participants more strongly emphasizing their disdain for "LGBT" and "Gender" Ideology than positively affirming the role of the family in Polish life. If there were slogans and banners affirming the role of the family, they strictly underlined the importance of that family being composed of a man and a woman, striking a defensive posture. Thus, two common slogans that participants chanted at both manifestations were "husband and wife, family united!" and "sex education is depravity!"

Image 2.2: March for Family and Life in Kraków, June 2019. Three signs are visible. The most clearly visible says "Stop Homo-Propaganda," followed by "A Right to Birth for All Children," and finally "Defend the Family." Photo by author.

Images 2.3 and 2.4: March for Family and Life in Warsaw, June 2019. On the left, the banner reads "Catholic Poland is not secular!" and on the right "stop sexualization." Photos by author.

The images above demonstrate both the desire to maintain a strictly Catholic Poland, as well as vehement anti-LGBT sentiment. Most striking, however, is the poster featuring the words "Stop Sexualization" on the image of an infant with a rainbow pacifier whose pupils have also been painted with rainbow colors. This image indicates both the criticism of sex education efforts, as well as the idea that the LGBT community is a dangerous threat to Polish children. Thus, despite the efforts of the Polish LGBT movement to combat such sentiments in both the

public sphere and the realm of education, the militant anti-LGBT sentiment espoused by the Polish Right remains a powerful influence for many citizens.

LGBT Pride, "LGBT Ideology," and LGBT-Free Zones

Another major source of backlash for the Polish Right has been the growing number of LGBT pride parades, which as of 2018 were being held in 20 cities throughout Poland (compared to almost none in 2004, the year when Lech Kaczyński banned the pride parade in Warsaw). Prides were also seeing an increase in attendance, and at most demonstrations the amount of pride participants easily outnumbered that of counter protestors. The 2018 Warsaw pride, for example, brought activists from around Europe and it was estimated that approximately 50,000 people attended the event. Further, the 2018 Warsaw pride marked the first year that a Polish mayor — Rafał Trzaskowski— took part in a pride event. Other major Polish cities, such as Kraków and Poznań, also held large pride parades that faced little to no backlash from Far-Right groups.

Most surprising and controversial, however, was that smaller and more conservative cities and towns also began holding pride parades. The first major controversy surrounding these events arose in the Southeastern and highly conservative town of Lublin, when the city's mayor, citing security concerns, decided to ban the gathering (the same reason given by Lech Kaczyński in Warsaw in 2004). It was reported that the regional governor, Przemysław Czarnek, wrote to the mayor of Lublin imploring him to cancel the event on the grounds that the parade would promote unnatural, immoral acts such as pedophilia. However, the Polish Court of Appeals soon overturned the decision to ban Lublin's pride, and the event was held with approximately 1,500 participants. An estimated 200 Far-Right protestors arrived as well and harassed the parade by screaming and throwing bottles and small firecrackers at those partaking in the march, reminiscent of the first pride held in Kraków in 2004 discussed in chapter one.

The events in Lublin paled in comparison, however, to those that took place in Białystok in the summer of 2019. Białystok, one of Poland's most conservative cities in one of its most conservative regions, is also a Law and Justice stronghold and home to many Right-wing extremist groups. Thus, although the pride parade was an officially sanctioned event, 32 demonstrations were registered in opposition of it. In addition, prior to the event, Archbishop Tadeusz Wojda issued a proclamation that was to be read in all churches in Białystok, as well as all churches in the region, condemning prides as blasphemous and devised "by a foreign initiative in Podlaskie land and community, an area which is deeply rooted in Christianity and concerned about the good of its own society, especially children" (quoted in Rogowska 2019). In this statement, Wojda explicitly frames the march as a "foreign initiative." Later in his proclamation, Wojda alluded to a famous protest speech made by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in 1953 in which Wyszyński spoke out against the communist regime, thereby suggesting that pride parades were helping to usher in a new era of authoritarian rule. Consequently, the role of the Church and of "good Poles" was to resist "LGBT ideology" at all costs. The tensions in Białystok were therefore high in the days preceding the city's first pride event.

The day of the parade brought violence and mayhem. Unlike Lublin, where approximately 200 Far-Right protestors appeared, thousands of Far-Right protestors were present in Białystok. Some sources estimate that there were roughly 1,000 Pride participants and 4,000 Far-Right protestors present in Białystok that day (Rogowska 2019). Given the number of people protesting the Pride, it was difficult for the local police to adequately protect those involved with the parade from attacks, and numerous participants were injured. As a result, Amnesty International published an official report condemning the events in Białystok, citing what they believed to be an inadequate police response to the Far-Right protestors. Thus, although more

cities in Poland began holding prides, Białystok served as a difficult reminder that in some regions of Poland, particularly those where Law and Justice held strong influence, homophobia and violent opposition to Pride parades remains rampant.

Indeed, Białystok (as well as Lublin) is one of the many cities in Poland that had declared itself an "LGBT Free Zone" in early 2019. Following Rafał Trzaskowki's signing of the "LGBT Charter" in Warsaw, many cities swiftly protested his action by declaring themselves as areas that would not only avoid similar provisions, but actively oppose them. By February 2020, 100 municipalities (approximately one-third of Poland) had symbolically declared themselves free of "LGBT ideology," while 30 signed charters known as the "Local Government Charter of the Rights of the Family" (Ciobanu 2020). The charters called for all local policies, initiatives and funding to focus first and foremost on protecting and advocating for the traditional family (i.e. a union between a man and woman). One of the charters, from the Rycki county in Eastern Poland, reads:

> The resolution aims to defend children, youth, families, and Polish schools from sexual depravity and indoctrination, which lead to many pathologies existing in Western countries, such as accepting pornography, abortion, sexual criminality, the crisis of the family and many others (Ciobanu 2020).

The language of this charter clearly demonstrates that there is a fear among Polish conservatives that Polish society will deteriorate largely due to "pressures exercised by homopropaganda… [and the] imposition by LGBT activists of programmes and an ideology leading to the depravation of children." While not all municipalities signed this specific charter, other initiatives such as the "anti-LGBT ideology resolution" and "declaration against LGBT subculture" have been approved in other cities (Świder 2020). While they all differ in details, what all of these charters and resolutions have in common is their denunciation of "LGBT

ideology" as a threat to "the Polish nation and its age-old Christian values" (Ciobanu 2020). Due to the rapid increase of these "LGBT Free Zones," activists soon constructed an online map of Poland (known as the Atlas of Hate) which delineated which areas of the country had declared themselves as an "LGBT Free-Zone."

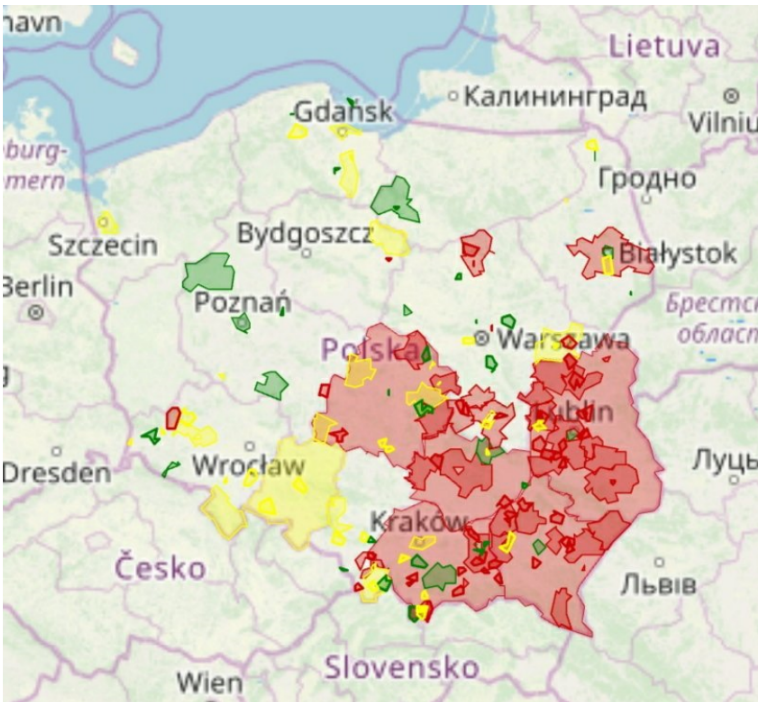

Figure 2.3: "Atlas of Hate" Depicting Regions Declared "LGBT Free-Zones". Red zones indicate regions where legislation has been enacted, yellow where it is pending, and green where it has been rejected. Image taken from: Atlasnienawisci.pl, Accessed 18 Feb 2021.

The constitutionality of the "LGBT-Free Zones" is still being debated. However, their sudden and rapid rise demonstrates both the power and resonance behind the Polish Right's anti-LGBT rhetoric.

The specter of "LGBT ideology" was also one of the central pillars of Andrzej Duda's platform for re-election to the presidency of Poland in the summer of 2020. During his campaign, he claimed that LGBT ideology was more dangerous than communism and emphasized the importance of shielding the traditional family model from such threats. He even went as far as stating that he would attempt to block any teaching of subjects related to LGBT

issues in schools. Such ideas were broadly supported by Law and Justice party members. Law and Justice MP Przemysław Czarnek claimed people should "stop listening to the idiocy about some human rights or equality. These people are not equal to normal people" (Świder 2020). Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki stated:

> We do not want to fund cultural revolutions. Such revolutions are dreamed of by our opponents, and this is an attack on our identity, on Polish culture. I think that Polish parents do not want their six-year-old children to be taught how to stimulate sexually, or nine-year-olds to be encouraged to find homosexual tendencies and show them off (Świder 2020).

Again, the recurring theme promulgated in these statements is that the LGBT community and the ideology it maintains prove a dangerous threat to Polish national identity, one that is premised on conservative, Catholic values.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have shown how attacks on the LGBT community in Poland have been swift and forceful in various sphere of public life within the last decade. My analysis demonstrates how, at a time when Poland's sexual minorities began organizing to affirm their status as legitimate Polish citizens as opposed to a small and dangerous subculture, conservative voices from the Church and political sphere were quick to retaliate and challenge this new framing. Such retaliation consisted of claims that the LGBT community were both threats to the nation and national identity and that sexual minorities, because of their deviation from conservative understandings of national identity were both outside of and against "true Polishness" and in some cases depicted as not "true Poles." The proliferation of the term "LGBT Ideology" thus served to reify sexual minorities as an oppressive force rather than a group of ethnically Polish citizens advocating for their rights and interests.

My analysis of conservative responses to LGBT rights initiatives has also shed light on how attacks on the LGBT community are deeply rooted in the desire to preserve a conception of Polish national identity that is premised on conservative, Catholic values. Thus, critics of the LGBT movement and their initiatives would often adhere to the enduring myths of Poland's inherent, immutable Catholicism as well as the notion that Poland is a nation constantly under siege by foreign threats. Coupled with the context provided in chapter one, the analysis presented in this chapter serves to add a deeper historical arc to the large body of discursive analyses examining how the Polish Right has framed sexual minorities and LGBT rights since the time of Poland's accession to the European Union. Having now presented this important historical context, the remainder of this dissertation focuses on the ideas and actions of Polish sexual minorities.

Chapter 3: Ideological Others and National Identification(s)

In recent years, research on nationhood and national identification 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 ordinary individuals understand and interpret the nation and national identity (Bonikowski 2016; Fox and Miller Idriss 2008; Hearn 2007; Kiely et.al 2006). Such studies have been helpful in showing the extent to which national identities are evoked in everyday interactions in addition to demonstrating when, whether and why such identities matter (Brubaker et.al 2006; Fenton 2007; McCrone and 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*; 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. 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. Thus, as the previous chapters demonstrated, ideological others who do not fit the narrow model of "Polishness" advocated for by the Right and Far-Right are therefore de-nationalized because of their "otherness."

As I reviewed in the introduction, there is a long tradition of research that has examined the intersection of nationalism and sexuality (Bunzl 2001; Graff 2010; Mosse 1985; Parker et.al 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 examining how sexual minorities themselves understand and navigate their relationship to national identity given such exclusion. The primary objective of this chapter is thus to extend research on everyday nationhood and national identification by focusing on the experiences of sexual minorities.[75] Focusing research in this way will add to our knowledge of how symbolic boundary work is conducted within an ethno-national community (Zubrzycki 2014) by showing how such boundary work is done at the intrapersonal level.

Before continuing, however, it is important to specify my claims. 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 chapter is to demonstrate the processes of national identification among members of a stigmatized community that is also part of the ethnic majority and how for some, such identification leads to a mental reframing of the symbolic boundaries of national identity.

I will first detail the various ways in which my respondents depict the current context surrounding LGBT issues in Poland, as well as how they characterized the role of the Church in Polish society. Doing so allows us to see the extent to which the elite level discourses criticizing

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[75] Thus, as Michael Skey has claimed; 'a further issue that requires greater scrutiny is the notion of the ethnic majority' (2010: 731).

sexual minorities and advancing a constricted, Catholic model of "Polishness" enter into the lives and minds of those interviewed, and how respondents interpret the current debates over all things "LGBT" in Poland today.

Everyday Life

In my conversations with respondents about the current atmosphere surrounding LGBT issues in Poland, I noticed a nearly unanimous concern over the ways in which conservative politicians and Church officials spoke about "LGBT ideology." Darek, a 29-year-old PhD student in Philology at Kraków's Jagiellonian University, spoke at length about how he believes the environment for sexual minorities in Poland has become less secure in the last few years since Law and Justice has been in power. When I asked him why he believed "LGBT ideology" has become such a salient issue, he told me that he believes the ardent focus on "LGBT" is primarily an electoral strategy:

> First thing, I think it's a government strategy…in Polish mythology there is some norm that we have to protect the Polish family. And so they think that gay people are the…biggest enemy of the Polish family. So, four years ago the public enemy was immigrants, and probably every four years the Right will need some [new] enemies (Interview conducted in English).

According to Darek, the LGBT community is currently serving as a new scapegoat that the Right can use to mobilize voters. However, even though Darek notes that there is a trend for the Far-Right to use minority populations as scapegoats, he does not believe these trends are innocuous. This reality became clear to him as he was working on a project that involved interviewing gay men and women in Kraków:

> Four years ago, I started a project conducting interviews with gay people in Kraków from the 1950s and 60s…because I wanted to document the history of gay Kraków. And four years ago when I started there was a better atmosphere

> for it. And now some people don't want to meet me in public spaces because they feel they could have some problems when someone hears that they're gay. And that is a problem. You can't talk about things that are normal in public places.

Darek's comments here are striking, as they demonstrate how the Far-Right's trenchant attacks on the LGBT community are making it more difficult for some gay Poles to feel comfortable discussing their sexuality with him, which as he notes was not as difficult four years ago. Importantly, the discomfort he notes is not related to taking part in pride manifestations or walking on the street holding the hand of a same-sex partner, but more simply discussing one's sexuality in a private conversation. Thus, for some, public spaces are becoming less secure venues for open conversation. Darek later told me that one of the reasons he chose the café he did for our conversation was because he knew the staff and environment well, and could feel comfortable speaking there.

Max, a 21-year-old transgender student studying sociology at the same university in Kraków, spoke of the ways in which conservative discourse targeting sexual minorities has caused a number of problems for the LGBT community:

> What really disappoints me, and what's really hard for me to understand about Polish people, is that they don't really react. I mean, they don't really see how bad it turns out for all LGBTQ people…because we are treated by the politicians as some kind of issue or problem…not only a problem but something that destroys the community. Especially since we live among them and we don't really blend in. *We just live*…and it's really hard for me to understand why someone would say we are plague (Interview conducted in English, emphasis added).

Max raised numerous important points in this brief statement. He begins by noting the general apathy of the Polish population to the pressures and stresses that sexual minorities in Poland now must face. What is essential in his statement is the claim that most people, due to the ways in which "LGBT ideology" is discussed in the public sphere by conservative politicians, tend to not

see LGBT people as individuals, but as part of a broad ideological threat. As Max said, in the words of the Right-Wing politicians, sexual minorities are not referred to as people, but rather as a force or a problem that serve the function of destroying the Polish community despite their desire to simply live. Max then told me that given the increasingly difficult atmosphere for sexual minorities in Poland, many are choosing to leave:

> It's really hard to live here generally…and I think most young people that are LGBTQ, if they are not activists and they do not have enough energy…they will just move somewhere else.

Indeed, the idea of leaving Poland for a country that is more tolerant came up in many conversations. Marcin, a 27-year-old computer programmer living in Warsaw, who has never lived abroad, told me during our conversation how he often thinks about leaving Poland due to the ways in which Law and Justice treat minorities. This topic came up unprompted as we were discussing Law and Justice and the actions of the Far-Right in Poland.

> They're doing things really fast, and they're very effective in what they do. So, basically, everything now is more connected with being Polish, with being Catholic, and they don't care about other groups. I mean, that's the general feeling. I'm happy that we're in the European Union because I can travel without really much bureaucracy or whatever, and I don't know…. it's still in the back of my head just to move away from Poland someday and live a normal life in a country that would appreciate me for who I am (Interview conducted in English).

The point Max makes about emigration and the statement of Marcin's speak to an important point about LGBT migration, and as scholarship has shown (Binnie and Klesse 2013), a number of Poles have chosen to flee Poland due to feeling oppressed for their sexuality[76]. Although all of

[76] In addition, many Poles have emigrated to countries such as the UK for economic reasons. The outflow began to increase after Poland's accession to the E.U. in 2004 and has continued steadily since.

my respondents lived in Poland during the time of our interview, a number of them had lived abroad for either school or work at some point in their lives. Those who had lived abroad were able to offer a perspective into what living as an openly gay person was like in Poland compared to in another, often more socially liberal, country. An illuminating example comes from Marek, a 35-year-old microbiologist who now lives in Kraków after completing his PhD in Ireland. Marek spent 6 years living in Ireland for his studies. When I asked him to describe the major distinctions between living as a gay man in Poland and Ireland, he quickly illustrated the differences:

> Everything in Poland is more homophobic and more heterosexual. Everyone in Ireland was more politically correct when speaking, even when joking and messing around. But here…very derogatory speech is normal. This is what I see (Interview conducted in English).

Marek then went on to detail what these differences meant to him now that he was living in Poland full time once again:

> It's really strange because I had the freedom back in Ireland where I could say; okay I went with my boyfriend for a nice dinner last night or we went to a movie, etcetera. And here *I cannot say anything like that*, and I'm all the time biting my tongue not to say too much or to give out too much information, because then I can see that it could influence my future career promotion-wise [...] Something like that, you know… simple things that could make your life harder than easier. So I don't lie, but I cut off the information where I could say something more about my life (emphasis added).

This statement shows the extent to which Marek was more comfortable being fully open regarding his sexuality while living abroad in Ireland. What is most striking, however, is how his statement seems to take for granted the idea that a gay person cannot be as open about their sexuality in Poland as they could in another country such as Ireland. This is most clearly illustrated when he states that in Poland, he *cannot* say anything regarding a date night with his

boyfriend. Of course, Marek is capable of making such statements in Poland, but as he states it would not only be received poorly and lead to uncomfortable situations, but he feels it could also negatively impact his career prospects. Rather than test the waters, Marek claims that he must continually bite his tongue in order to avoid letting certain aspects of his identity be known, giving up a sense of freedom and openness he knew for years while living in Ireland.

Krzysztof, a 33-year-old art curator in Kraków who also lives part time in Milan with his Italian partner, noted similar experiences. At first, he was up front with me about thinking that he would not be a good case for my research, given that he was intimately involved in the art world in Kraków, which he characterized as a safe space for those identifying as non-heteronormative in any way. However, only moments later he noted some distinct differences between living as an openly gay man in Poland versus Italy or London:

> I don't know if I'm a good person to interview actually, because my life is quite different. I live and work in an art environment and I live in Kraków and abroad in Italy…But here in Kraków where I'm working…the request is to maybe not speak too much about your personal life…yeah. So, basically now I understand your point that Poland is an interesting case now…*when I'm in London or in Milan and other European cities, I feel totally free (*Interview conducted in English, emphasis added).

Given his extensive travels for his work and the fact that he works in the art world, Krzysztof is able to disconnect himself from some of the major issues facing gay Poles in his daily life. As he states, his life is different and as such he is generally able to live more freely than other non-heteronormative Poles, such as Marek. Yet as he continues, he admits that even in his line of work in Kraków there are requests for him to be less open about his personal life. Krzysztof is therefore, after only some brief reflection, able to come to the conclusion that in Poland he is not able to live "totally free" as he is in cities such as Milan or London.

Sylwia, a 24-year-old working in tourism in Kraków, never lived abroad but discussed how she often thinks about other countries when considering the situation of sexual minorities in Poland. She expressed frustration at the fact that there has been progress regarding increased rights and protections for sexual minorities abroad, but that in Poland such progress has not happened:

> It's not good at all. I mean, it's difficult for all of us because you know… you see that everywhere in the world things are improving and there is marriage equality and everything, and in Poland it's uh… it's not moving. It's maybe even going backwards a little because there is so much hate in politics from the highest politicians…I think it's quite trendy to be against gay people (Interview conducted in English).

The "hate" from elite politicians Sylwia mentions often trickles down to the local level, making local officials uncomfortable dealing with representatives of LGBT organizations. Mateusz, a 40-year-old corporate lawyer who spends his spare time volunteering for a small LGBT non-profit in Kraków, described to me some of the awkward interactions he has had with public officials when arriving to represent the organization in a legal capacity. Up to this point, our conversation had been about the process of his coming out, but then quickly shifted to his experiences dealing with local officials.

> Well, I do a sort of coming out almost every day actually. For example, when meeting with the deputies of the local council, you just show up and you say 'hello, I am from LGBT organization' and this is like a sort of coming out. The funny thing is, though, if you look at their faces (laughs) after you say you are from an LGBT organization they expect, you know, that you will have glitter everywhere, rainbows everywhere, or wearing a dress or some sort of leather. And suddenly a guy in jeans and a shirt who looks like anybody on the street shows up and they think, are you for real? (Interview conducted in English)

Although this interaction is not something that personally harmed Mateusz, and indeed is something that he found humorous, it provides a useful window into how elite level political

discourse concerning LGBT ideology can impact the biases of local officials whose role is to help facilitate important resources such as permits and licenses for events and access to public spaces. In this case, Mateusz constantly sees and experiences the biases and stereotypes of such officials when trying to do his job.

The impacts of anti-LGBT political discourse were also felt by 19-year-old Arthur, a student and volunteer for the same organization as Mateusz. According to his narrative, coming out to his parents was particularly difficult given the recent focus on LGBT ideology amongst conservative politicians.

> The hardest part was coming out to my mom and dad, because it's hard to talk about the reaction in the media and what's going on in the media in Poland regarding LGBT. For example, politicians and what they say in the media. So I had a problem with coming out and I wasn't sure how to get ready for it. So, I had been thinking for probably more than one year how to come out (Interview conducted in Polish, my translation).

Fortunately for Arthur, his parents accepted him after he came out to them. However, his statement demonstrates that the increasingly hostile discourses surrounding the LGBT community in Poland made him think that he had to choose between embracing his sexuality or maintaining a relationship with his parents. This psychological dilemma was aptly captured in my conversation with Krzysztof, the art curator in Kraków.

> I remember when this government started…I felt like some things were changing and the feeling of security was breaking. But for me it's not about the things happening, it's more about your personal psychology. You start to question yourself…is what I am doing ok or not?

The respondents in this section show that the conservative, elite-level discourses targeting the LGBT community are readily felt on the ground by many non-heteronormative Polish citizens. In addition, a number of respondents discussed the role of the Church in Polish politics and

society. While I did not specifically ask respondents about the role of the Church, a number of them mentioned, often eagerly, what they understood as the problematic and deleterious relationship between the Church and the state in Poland today.

Klaudia, a 27-year-old journalist living in Kraków, mentioned precisely this issue with no hesitation when I asked her what she thought was the most important change to positively impact LGBT rights in Poland.

> I want to separate the church and state…things are really, really bad because the Catholic Church in Poland is in an incredibly high position and it's, oh my God it is unbelievable…so it's important right now but I don't know how it is even possible. But right now it's all connected with the Church and its really bad because they impose their way of thinking onto all Polish people, and it's very sad (Interview conducted in English).

Klaudia's comments provide a concise summary of the sentiments shared by a number of respondents regarding the role of the Church in Polish politics and society; frustration coupled with a sense of uncertainty on how to move forward. Anna, a 22-year-old University student living in Poznań, provided some insight into why she believed the Church still has such a strong grip on Polish society.

> I think they want us to think there isn't a relationship [between the Church and state], but there is, especially with the current government. I think they help each other a lot in different matters. I think it is also connected with our history and traditions. Christianity and Catholicism brought us together throughout the years, so I think that's the whole reason why we are so afraid to leave it. *They are afraid Poland will fall apart without it. It's the main thing that is keeping us together, I guess (*Interview conducted in English, emphasis added).

Anna's point here is important because it refers precisely to the kind of rhetoric used by Far-Right politicians and the conservative wing of the Church, which frames any criticism or perceived criticism of Catholicism as an attack on Poland and an attempt to destroy the Polish nation. Thus, according to Anna, the idea that separating Poland from Catholicism will be the

downfall of Polish civilization is one that gets stuck in the minds of many Poles, making the idea of any future without a strong Catholic Church not only unfavorable, but dangerous. Romek, a 37-year-old lawyer living in Kraków, told me how he believed the strength and reach of the Church had made it more difficult for people to express any kind of sexual diversity.

> People are still very much, I would say, afraid of speaking about sexual diversity; afraid or maybe ashamed. It is changing, progressive media and influential media are promoting, I would say, a good picture of sexual diversity and LGBT people, you know…But still, you know, I you have to remember… I'm always underlining when meeting with foreigners that the Church is still a huge power here (Interview conducted in Polish, my translation).

Even though Romek believes there have been some positive developments for sexual minorities through progressive media, he stopped this discussion to remind me again just how powerful the Church is in Poland. These comments suggest that even though he believes there is some momentum for sexual minorities, the power of the Church and their resistance to this progress is not something that can be taken for granted. He further illustrated this point as our discussion continued.

> If you look at polls, you can still see that around 45% of Poles go to church every Sunday. So you can imagine how influential the institution of the church is when approximately 20 million Poles go to the church every Sunday, and they are listening to the often anti-progressive ideology. So, this is one of the main obstacles in overcoming this prejudices or openness in terms of sexual diversity in Poland.

Bartek, a young activist and employee of the Campaign Against Homophobia (KPH), was able to offer a clear view into the relationship between the Church and conservative parties as he told me why politicians fear going against the church.

> The stubbornness I would say, is kind-of related to Poland being a conservative country. I mean, politicians imagine it to be very conservative, and also the church – the institutionalized church, not the parishes – has a very strong sense

> on the issues like family and how the family should be regulated…so the church is very strong, and even if the church as an institution doesn't do much, there are many politicians who feel that mission to be kind of church representatives unofficially in politics. They act according to what the Church would think about the issue.

According to Bartek, even though the institutional Church does not take certain actions in the political sphere, many conservative politicians act on behalf of the Church when debating and implementing policies. Importantly, he notes that Poland is not necessarily a conservative country, but rather it is politicians and the Church who believe Poland is and should remain so. He then spoke about his first serious interactions with the Church as KPH was facing criticisms for their campaign (discussed in the previous chapter) titled "Let Us Offer a Sign of Peace":

> That was the first time, I think, that the church reacted so strongly about something that we did. We had strong alliances and partnerships in that project with the Catholic community. Three of the biggest Catholic magazines gave patronage to the campaign, and a number of really well known Polish theologians and Catholics were very involved in supporting the campaign. So, it made the church angry and they feared that we might be getting the support also from places that were not expected at all. That showed us that even though there is not much room for dialogue with the church as an institution, we still have access to those people that matter, who have influence in the community (Interview conducted in English).

Bartek's reflection on this campaign are important as they illustrate that not all Catholic Poles adhere to the dictates of the predominately conservative institution of the Church. While the overall institution is still very powerful, Bartek's comments show that for some Polish Catholics, even those in important positions in society, the LGBT community is not seen as a threat to Poland and Polish national identity. These reflections serve as an important reminder that one's adherence to Catholicism does not necessarily make them critical of advancing rights for sexual minorities, and that the true struggles are primarily due to the institutionalized Catholic Church's anti-progressive narratives which still have a far reach in both Polish politics and society.

In the following section, I demonstrate the various ways in which respondents understood and identified with their 'Polishness'.

National Identification(s) Amongst Polish Sexual Minorities

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 thirty-eight-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 twenties 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 (Interview conducted in English).

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 must consciously work to separate herself from. Yet even several years later her immediate response is 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 such attraction may be 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 gay. 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?
>
> B: Right now -- right now, I do feel Polish. The fact is that I criticize 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 are telling. Although she claims to feel Polish *right now,* the implication 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 significant 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 a souvenir. Beata therefore noted a sense of shame that

accompanied any utilization of traditional Polish symbols that are often accompanied by feelings of patriotism and national pride. Yet for her, any involvement with national symbols —be it carrying a flag or wearing a 'patriotic' article of clothing— given their association with Far-Right nationalism, may be understood as an assault on her sexual identity, one that is at odds with prevailing articulations of Polish national identity.

Waldek, a 30-year old artist living in Kraków, 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 (Interview conducted in English).

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 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 Kraków, 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 (Interview conducted in English).

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 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 marginalized 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 marginalized. As the cases of Beata, Waldek, and Karol demonstrate, such dis-identification may be more circumstantial, or tied to more general liberal leanings.

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

> 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,* 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. (Emphasis added)

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 therefore felt patriotic. Although not ardently focused on nationality, he could claim his Polish national identity with pride and 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 symbolized 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.* (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.

A few respondents voiced their frustrations with the current state of Poland in similar ways to Marcin and the other respondents above, but found it much easier to denounce their 'Polishness'. Jakub, a 40-year-old actor living in Kraków, also spoke of the hostile environment in Poland and how he has distanced himself from identifying with his Polish identity.

> I: What does it mean to you to be Polish?
>
> R: Frankly, I cannot tell you now. I'm so un-Polish at this point, I cannot tell you. Certainly this is an anti-Semitic country. And certainly, it is very – it's not okay to be gay. You know, it isn't. And, I mean, most generally speaking, any difference is looked down upon. I had this conversation here with a guy – I think he was Australian, but he lives here and he teaches and he speaks perfect Polish. But, he made an interesting observation that different people in Poland are grouped here only because they're different. I mean, the mentality

> is so us and them that people who really don't have much in common other than being different from the norm are grouped together (Interview conducted in Polish, my translation).

Unlike Beata and Marcin, Jakub is quick to denounce his 'Polishness' even to the point of considering himself "un-Polish." While he does not directly link his lack of identification with his sexual identity, it is important to note how adamantly Jakub distanced himself from being Polish at the outset of his response before describing how he understood Poland. Further, immediately after he states that he is "un-Polish," he goes on to discuss the exclusionary aspects of Polish society, suggesting that it is due to such hostility to "otherness" that he not only has issues with his Polish identity, but considers himself "un-Polish." Indeed, given that the Right has deemed him an ideological other, adopting this "un-Polish" mindset may help Jakub find a more stable sense of identity and allow him to live more comfortably within Poland's borders.

Darek, the 29-year-old PhD student in philology at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków, also discussed his rejection of not only his Polish identity, but the idea of identification in general. Early in our conversation, he told me how he generally tries to avoid lumping himself into any category or identify with anything too strongly. Therefore, when I asked him what it meant to be Polish, he responded;

> Like I said, I'm trying to refuse all kinds of identity…for me, what is most important is a focus on knowledge and science and understanding what is important for others. I think this is what is important in my life, not some kind of identity.

Darek did, however, acknowledge that this was a position he had come to after much careful thought and deliberation, as his family was religious and he spent a lot of time going to Church as a child.

> It was a process. I went to Catholic school and it was…it had very strict rules. And I started thinking more about myself…. I never was patriotic. I was more religious. But when I started to think about religion, about Christianity, about Catholicism, and I read the bible etcetera, I found many points I did not agree with. And then year after year everything in my brain started changing, and soon I stopped with Church and started to read more and more books. And for me that was…well then I didn't need any religion.

The points Darek make here are important, because even though he is not talking about Polish identity directly, he is discussing how he distanced himself from what is considered by many to be a pillar of Polishness; Catholicism. His statement is also important because it illustrates how important intellectual curiosity was in helping him move away from conservative modes of thought that would force him to be critical of his non-heteronormative identity. This point became even more clear when he told me how important reading and research, particularly in gender studies, were for him as he came to terms with his sexuality.

> For me the crucial thing was that I had an interest in gender studies. And gender studies helped me to realize my own personality…so for me my research and my studies were very helpful in letting me know more about myself and help me say that I am normal. Because in my childhood…my times with peers in high school…I didn't know why I chose this way of living that was known as unusual. That's why when I was in Lublin…I got depression and tried suicide once…and I tried, you know, psychotherapy, but nothing helped me like my studies and that's why I'm…myself. And I am trying to help other people like me.

In this powerful statement, Darek shares that it is because of his research and work in fields such as gender studies that he is able to feel more comfort and security living as a sexual minority in Poland. In his early life, while he was still involved with the Church and did not have contact with academic fields such as gender studies, it was very difficult for him to accept himself due to how negatively non-heteronormative sexualities were framed. However, once he discovered gender studies and other intellectual traditions, Darek was able to break out of a cycle of self-loathing and depression and accept, as he states, himself, without any labels or the need to

identify with something. As is evident from his statements, finding such self acceptance would not have been possible had he remained actively involved with the Church. Indeed, according to Darek, the exact opposite was true, as his research and studies helped him in battling depression and suicidal impulses more than anything else.

While the respondents just discussed either struggled with identifying with their Polish identity or openly eschewed it, such sentiments were not unanimously felt among respondents. In the following section, I will discuss reframing as a strategy some used in order to broaden the symbolic boundaries of national identity and therefore make their relationship to Polish national identity easier to navigate.

Reframing "Polishness"

Some respondents 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 the boundaries of 'Polishness' as 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 college Freshman and activist living in Poznań, 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? (Interview conducted in English)

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 frameworks that, having grown up in Poland, are impossible to avoid. Therefore, in some ways, he is 'without question' Polish. However, despite these deeply ingrained 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 renounce 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 neighborhood, 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):

> 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 (Interview conducted in English, 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, the 37-year old lawyer living in Kraków- 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 Wrocław;

> I: Would you say that you feel Polish?
>
> R: Yes. I think… I think yes. I feel Polish, but my Polish-ness 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 Polish-ness is like the everyday life… so this is the way I would like to understand Polish-ness. 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 (Interview conducted in English).

While Kuba does not identify as cosmopolitan, he has found a way to associate comfortably with 'Polishness' by reframing what being Polish means to him. Given this reframing, he is able to easily and quickly say that he feels Polish when asked. As his statement demonstrates, being Polish does not require displays of patriotism or national pride. Rather, for Kuba, it is enough to be a good neighbor and everyday citizen, traits that he believes are 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 (Interview conducted in English).

As Kuba and Ewa emphasize, 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 mythologized ideal, and emphasizes the crucial place of everyday actions happening in the present; actions nearly anyone can engage in. Reframing the symbolic boundaries 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.

Conclusion

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 and Miller-Idriss 2008, Miller-Idriss and Rothenberg 2012), it has not focused explicitly on how more vulnerable and stigmatized members of the ethnic majority —what I have termed *ideological others*— navigate their relationship with national identity. As a result, the everyday nationhood literature has often reified the notion of "ordinary" citizens as well as the concept of the "ethnic majority." 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 by underlining that there is wide variation among those "ordinary" citizens who compose a given nation's "ethnic majority."

My interviews demonstrated that some respondents struggled to identify with their national identity, but that such struggles are not necessarily determined by their sexual orientation. These respondents tended to cite a concern that Polish national identity was being increasingly associated with Far-Right extremism, making it nearly impossible for them to feel connected to their Polishness. 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 in their national identity and belonging to their national community despite a political climate that marks them as enemies of

the nation and thus outside the symbolic boundaries of national belonging[77]. In addition to reframing, other respondents were able to more easily and comfortably identify with their "Polishness" because they also embraced a cosmopolitan identity.

In the following chapter, I explore how such efforts at reframing the boundaries of national identity in Poland has involved the strategic use of national symbols through aesthetic revolt.

[77] 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: 31). While this argument is well taken, such research has yet to focus on ideological others.

Chapter 4: Reclaiming "Polishness" Through Aesthetic Revolt

This chapter examines how the recent actions of Polish LGBT activists constitute an aesthetic revolt that is contesting the boundaries of "Polishness" by fundamentally reimagining some of the primary pillars of a conservative, Catholic model of Polish national identity. In order to explore activists' efforts to reclaim and reframe Polish national identity, I begin by discussing and analyzing Poland's pervasive national sensorium (Zubrzycki 2011) and the ways in which sexual minorities have been engaging with salient national symbols in order to advocate for both the inclusion of sexual and other minority groups as well as a renewed conception of Polish national identity. They achieve these ends through what Zubrzycki has called an "aesthetic revolt," the process by which social actors strategically rework core national symbols and icons by materially manipulating them, potentially transforming national identity in the process (2013: 428). I extend Zubrzycki's concept by showing how aesthetic revolts can take different forms as well as by underlining the importance of focusing on actors' perceptions when examining the complex process of aesthetic revolt.

By emphasizing the importance of both the intrapersonal and the material in aesthetic revolt, my approach is similar to William Sewell Jr's (1992) program to overcome the duality of structure and agency by detailing the interdependence of both. In Sewell's formulation, social actors are not merely passive receptors of social structure, but have the capacity for creative social action which can then lead to social change. In order for social change to come about, there must be an interaction between intrapersonal cultural schemas and material resources, the

latter of which he argues are the physical embodiment of the former (1992: 19). Consequently, Sewell argues that structures are best conceived of as being constituted by mutually reinforcing schemas and sets of resources and that the meaning of a given resource "is largely a consequence of the schemas that inform their use" (1992: 11). Thus, for Sewell, structural change is the result of the complex interplay between both aspects of human cognition (schemas) and external, material objects (resources).

Following Sewell, my analysis of aesthetic revolt in Poland considers the mutually constitutive relationship between material objects and human minds, thereby heeding the claim that "the semantic potential of cultural symbols depends on the meaning construction potential embodied in persons" (Lizardo 2016: 202, cf. Shore 1996)[78]. Such a perspective therefore would insist that it is not the properties of material objects *themselves* that make changes in signification possible (cf. Zubrzycki 2014: 446), but that a change in signification —and by extension broader social change— is made possible when an array of material objects (or a single material object) is reinterpreted "in terms of cultural schemas other than those that initially constituted the array" (Sewell 1992; 19).

I first discuss the concept of the national sensorium and demonstrate the importance of particular national symbols and icons in Poland as well as their pervasiveness in the Polish public sphere. I also provide essential background information on the aspects of Poland's constitution that prohibit defaming or criticizing national symbols as well as insulting religious sentiments. I then focus on three controversial events in which national symbols were targeted by LGBT activists and their allies. The first concerns the attempt to prosecute two activists who

[78] From this, it would follow that any analysis of the power of material objects must take into account that the meaning and subsequent power of these objects is the result of "motivated mappings between external form and cognitive meaning" (Lizardo 2016: 200).

reinterpreted Poland's coat of arms —by replacing its traditionally red background with a rainbow background— on a banner they carried at an equality march in the summer of 2018. I then analyze the controversy surrounding the arrest of Elżbieta Podleśna, a psychotherapist and LGBT activist, for creating posters featuring Our Lady of Częstochowa —Poland's most sacred and venerated icon— with a rainbow colored halo. Finally, I conclude the chapter with an examination of the actions of a recent movement known as Stop Bzdurom (Stop Nonsense), whose members have faced arrests and criminal charges for hanging rainbow flags on famous Polish statues and icons. I argue that in all of these instances, activists are engaging in a particular form of aesthetic revolt focused on reframing and reclaiming the symbolic boundaries of Polish national identity.

Historical Background of Poland's National Symbols and Sensorium

For Zubrzycki, the national sensorium is driven by "historically constructed, contingent, and contested systems of myths" and composed of a nation's mythology "crystallized in material culture and embodied in various practices and performances" (2011: 22). To pay attention to a nation's sensorium means to take seriously the impacts that images, sounds and other sensory modalities have on socializing individuals and collectives to feel as if they are part of an abstract, imagined community known as a nation (Anderson 1983). Through consistent exposure to sensory stimuli related to the nation —reciting and hearing the national anthem in school, seeing national flags hanging on buildings, consuming products that feature vestiges of the nation— people come to know themselves as being part of a national community. This is not to say, however, that consistent exposure to national symbols, songs, and other features of the national sensorium always lead to ardent nationalism. Rather, the concept of the national sensorium is meant to emphasize the important role that symbols and materiality play in forging national

identities. Further, as Zubrzycki notes, "the extent to which they can shape national identity, frame the understanding of the present, or mobilize towards nationalist action depends on the specific historical contexts in which they are deployed" (2011: 22). This chapter will therefore emphasize the broader historical context in which sexual minorities are mobilizing national and religious symbols to reframe and reclaim Polish national identity.

While the national sensorium can inspire ardent nationalism or simply a more pacified sense of national belonging, it is also a means by which activists can criticize and subvert existing understandings of national identity through aesthetic revolt (Zubrzycki 2013). Although the Polish national sensorium consists of many objects, sights and sounds, in this chapter I will focus specifically on national symbols and their role in political protest.

Though all nations have their symbols, they may have a greater semiotic force in some nations than in others. Such is the case in Poland because of the country's political history[79]. Due to a 123-year period of partitions between Austria, Hungary, Prussia, and Russia that began in 1772, Poland did not exist as a sovereign state until the end of the First World War. As Zubrzycki (2011) has argued, due to the lack of a centralized state and tangible borders demarcating Poland from other countries during the nineteenth century, symbols served as tangible representations of the nation and became an increasingly important means by which Poles could retain a sense of national identity and belonging. These symbols were used in rites and rituals and "facilitated affective attachment to, and support for, the idea of Poland" (2011: 33). By wearing a cross on a necklace or hanging religious iconography in one's bedroom,

[79] This is not to say, of course, that other nations do not take their national symbols and icons seriously nor that they do not utilize them as a way to signify allegiance to and support of the nation. What I am underlining here is the idea that because of Poland's specific and unique history, symbols for some time were the primary means of identification with the nation and with national identity.

individuals could understand themselves as belonging to a broader national community even though one did not exist geopolitically. Thus, in the Polish case, national symbols played an exceptionally essential role in "rendering abstract ideas concrete, and creating affective bonds among subjects, as well as between subjects and the stateless nation" (2011: 34).

Before proceeding to my analysis, however, it is important to discuss the relationship between national and religious symbols in Poland, as some of the most important symbols in Poland are also religious in nature. The confluence of the religious and the national is due to Poland's centuries old mythology that locates the birth of the first Polish state in the 10th century as occurring when Prince Mieszko I converted to Christianity. Mieszko's conversion —along with other salient historical events that will be discussed below— thus provided the fuel for the eventual myth of Poland's inherent Catholicism. Given the tight associations between Polish national identity and Catholicism, traditionally religious symbols such as the cross are understood by many as symbols representing the nation and Polish national identity. The nearly seamless association between the religious and the national is evidenced in the following quotation taken from a televised transmission of the state funeral for Polish composer, pianist, and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski in 1992:

> Today's celebration has a special religious and national meaning. These two elements are so intertwined in Polish history that it is not possible to distinguish of separate them. It is remarkable that there are no national symbols that would not also be religious at the same time (quoted in Mizielińska 2001).

As this statement demonstrates, it is difficult to distinguish between the religious and the national in Poland. Further, it shows that the influence of the Church and Catholicism lies not only in the realm of political discourse —as exhibited in Chapters 1 and 2— but also in the realm of symbols. While this chapter is focused on examining the role and use of national symbols in

political protest, it is essential to note the close associations between nation and religion in Poland when it comes to constituting what is considered a national symbol. Thus, in what follows I will consistently be referring to "national" symbols when discussing icons like the cross or Our Lady of Częstochowa[80] although such symbols can also be interpreted as simply being religious. While for an American or Italian such symbols may belong solely to the realm of religion, in Poland they are also understood as reflections of national identity.

Due to the important role that symbols played in affectively bonding members of the stateless nation, national symbols continued to serve a crucial role in both political and social realms once Poland regained nationhood in 1918. A key example is the usage of religio-national symbols in protests against the totalitarian socialist state following the Second World War. Jan Kubik (1994) has shown how symbols and ceremonies played a crucial role in the Solidarity movement in the 1980s, and that they were an important element in the construction of political power in the years preceding the fall of the Soviet Union. In a similar but different vein, Zubrzycki's (2006) examination of Poland's "war of the crosses" showed that religious symbols —specifically that of the cross— and culture played a central role in heated debates over Polish national identity in the years following the collapse of state socialism in Poland.

Given the historical and contemporary importance of the connection between Catholicism and the nation in Poland, numerous scholars have written about the evolution and fusion of religious and national symbols in Poland and the important role they've played in demarcating the boundaries of national identity. In a recent genealogy of the symbol of the cross in Polish political consciousness, Magdalena Waligórska (2019) demonstrated how this pervasive symbol has been important for centuries and has taken on different meanings throughout its historical

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[80] I detail the significance of this particular symbol in the following section.

usages. She argues that while in the middle 19th century the cross represented progressive and egalitarian values, after the First World War it became more strongly seen as a territorial marker meant to demarcate Poles from non-Poles. In her study of Polish lesbians, Joanna Mizielińska (2001) claimed that important aspects of Polish nationalism can be gleaned by examining national symbols and images. Through her analysis, she critically argued that the use of national symbols has "helped to create a Polish identity in opposition to the Others presented in textbooks and the dominant nationalistic discourse/canon" (2001: 284), thereby claiming that national symbols in Poland often serve as a potent means for oppression and exclusion.

The tight association between religious —and specifically *Catholic*— symbols and the nation is therefore not universally accepted but hotly contested. Geneviève Zubrzycki (2006) demonstrated the polarizing nature of these symbols in her analysis of a controversial event in which groups of Polish nationalists erected and displayed hundreds of crosses outside the Auschwitz concentration camp. According to those responsible for the display, the purpose of the spectacle was to mark the site as one that represented the martyrdom of Poles killed during the Second World War, and thereby claim that Poland is an intrinsically Catholic nation. As competing factions fought intensely over the placement of these crosses, Poles were forced to actively rethink what Polish national identity and its associated symbols such as the cross meant to them. The cross has also been a point of contention in contemporary Polish politics, as the symbol has hung over a rostrum in the main hall of this parliamentary building since 1997. Although various politicians have called for its removal on the grounds that the Polish state ought to remain secular, the symbol has not been removed and remains a testament to the strong influence of Catholicism in Polish politics and public life. In addition, it shows the important place that national symbols play in professions of Polish national identity.

Given the elevated status of national symbols in Poland as well the important role of Catholicism, the Polish constitution contains an article specifically addressing the defamation of national symbols as well one concerning insulting religious feeling. These articles, respectively articles 137 and 196 of the criminal/penal code, read:

> Whoever publicly insults, destroys, damages or removes the emblem, banner, flag or other state mark, shall be subject to a fine, the penalty of restriction of liberty or the penalty of deprivation of liberty for up to one year.
>
> Whoever offends the religious feelings of other persons by publicly insulting an object of religious worship, or a place designated for public religious ceremonies, is liable to pay a fine, have his or her liberty limited, or be deprived of his or her liberty for a period of up to two years.

While some of the language surrounding what actually constitutes an "insult" in these laws remains vague, what is clear is the desire to protect Polish national identity —specifically a traditional and religious conception of it— through the threat of formal legal sanctions. Commonly known as the "insult laws," they are frequently utilized and are often controversial. Many critics of the insult laws have claimed that they violate individual citizens' freedom of expression, and as such they have been subject to numerous debates and controversies. Critics claim that although numerous countries across Europe have similar laws for defamation and insult, Poland is unique because its legal system consistently enforces them (Moran 2018). Some have gone so far as to claim that since these laws still exist, contemporary Poland has yet to shed some of the most troubling totalitarian aspects that were present during the years of state socialism[81] (Yanchukova 2003, Griffin 2015). Indeed, in a 2015 review of Poland's legal system, the Helsinki Human Rights Foundation cautioned against these insult and defamation

[81] Restrictions on speech were severe during Poland's state socialist period. Freedom of expression was severely restricted, and it was possible to receive a prison sentence of up to seven years for defaming Soviet authorities (see Yanchukova 2003 for more details).

laws, claiming that they would discourage people from addressing sensitive subjects due to the fear of fines or jail time and thereby produce a chilling effect on society. However, despite drawing international scrutiny and criticism, Poland's insult and defamation laws remain strongly enforced.

Perhaps one of the most controversial aspects of these laws is that they appear to apply most strictly when criticism is directed towards powerful political officials (Moran 2018). Specifically insulting the president, for example, is a separate offense that can carry a punishment of up to 3 years in prison. Thus, in 2018 an elderly man was criminally charged for placing a t-shirt which said "Constitution" (a reference to the movement opposing the Law and Justice party) on a statue of late Polish President Lech Kaczyński. In 2006 police actively pursued a homeless man who had claimed, in a drunken state, that Lech Kaczyński was a thief. Although during his court hearing the man claimed he did not recall the statement due to his inebriated state, he still faced criminal charges. Most recently, during a peaceful protest in the small town of Łowicz, a man was apprehended for brandishing a banner that read "We have an idiot for president."

Numerous citizens have also been arrested for the crimes of defaming national symbols and/or religious sentiment. A particularly significant case of the latter occurred when famous Polish pop star Doda claimed in an interview that she was "more likely to believe in dinosaurs than in the bible…because it is hard to believe in something that was written by someone wasted from drinking wine and smoking weed" (National Post, 1/19/2012)[82]. Following these statements and a trial, Doda had to pay a fine of 5,000 Polish zloty (approximately 1,300 USD). Numerous cases such as the one against Doda have also been brought against Nergal, the front-man of

[82] https://nationalpost.com/holy-post/polish-pop-singer-fined-for-insulting-bible, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.

Polish black metal band Behemoth. In a particularly controversial case, Nergal was formally charged for destroying a bible while performing a concert in the Polish town of Gdynia, during which he also claimed that the Roman Catholic Church is the most murderous cult on the planet. More recently, young poet and writer for progressive magazine Political Criticism (*Krytyka Polityczna)* Jaś Kapela was arrested for a poem he wrote which altered the Polish national anthem. In his poem, which was meant to criticize Poland's decision not to accept refugees, Kapela wrote that given Poland's wealth, it should not hesitate to accept refugees. Nowhere in his poem was he directly critical of Poland or the nation's anthem. However, a court ruled that his poem defamed the national anthem —considered a national symbol— and he was forced to pay a significant fine.

Figure 4.1: Behemoth concert poster. Lead singer Nergal was charged with the crime of desecrating a national symbol for featuring a rendition of the Polish Eagle with an inverted cross. There is also no crown on the eagle, and the title of the poster reads "Poland Unfaithful," a direct contradiction of the nation's motto, Polonia semper fidelis (Poland always faithful). Image taken from:

https://www.behance.net/gallery/43404981/BEHEMOTH-Rzeczpospolita-Niewierna, Accessed 15 Oct 2020

Thus, while national symbols hold an important place in the hearts and minds of many Poles, it remains difficult to voice any criticism of Poland and traditional understandings of Polish national identity through the use of national symbols because of the strength and consistent enforcement of the insult and defamation laws. These laws therefore help to reify the notion that Polish national identity not only should be, but always has been premised on conservative, Catholic values. Defying the insult laws is therefore often framed as an attack on Poland and Polish national identity. In what follows, I provide a detailed account and analysis of recent attempts by Poland's LGBT community to utilize national symbols in an aesthetic revolt in order to reframe and reclaim the symbolic boundaries of Polish national identity.

Polish Sexual Minorities and Aesthetic Revolt

The Rainbow Eagle and Flag: Expanding "Polishness" through Symbolic Manipulation

The summer of 2018 was an important time for Poland's LGBT movement and community. LGBT Equality marches, generally only held in the largest and more progressive cities, were beginning to be organized in smaller cities and towns, some of which are highly conservative. While in the summer of 2017 seven Equality marches were held in primarily major cities, in 2018 fifteen marches were held throughout Poland[83]. Importantly, some of these marches were organized in small, conservative towns that either had few resources for sexual minorities or were outright hostile to the idea of advancing gay rights. In these towns, common criticisms were that the LGBT community was not truly representative of Polish sexual

[83] In 2019, there were 25, and it is likely that the number would have increased in 2020 if it were not for the Covid-19 pandemic.

minorities, but rather an interest group forcing a progressive, liberal agenda that conservative Poles did not want. Thus, in the weeks leading up to some of the marches, conservative politicians were vocal in criticizing what they saw as threats to public morality through the promotion of same-sex relationships. The mayor of the small and conservative town of Lublin, for example, initially attempted to prevent the city's march from occurring by citing concerns over security[84]. However, despite the varied controversies leading up to them, all of the marches planned for the summer of 2018 were held, though not without incident.

While the Equality march in Lublin provoked controversy both before and after its occurrence, the most significant and consequential Equality march held in 2018 (and arguably throughout Poland's history of Equality marches) was held in the city of Częstochowa. Located in the southern region of Poland, Częstochowa has a population of approximately 220,000 and is the thirteenth largest city in Poland. What makes it unique, however, is that it is home to the Jasna Góra monastery, a sacred site not only for Polish Catholics but for Roman Catholics around the globe. The monastery, established in 1382, draws thousands in pilgrimage every year. As such, Częstochowa and the sacred site of Jasna Góra within it have been important symbolic markers of the Polish nation's imbrication with Catholicism for centuries and for many continue to signify the essence of Polish national identity[85].

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[84] Critics of this decision claimed that this excuse was the same as the one given by former Polish president Lech Kaczyński in his attempt to prevent the 2004 and 2005 marches from occurring in Warsaw. In addition, they claimed that the decision was made only because Lublin's mayor was coerced to do so by Przemysław Czarnek, the regional governor (a controversial member of the Law and Justice party who often shares his homophobic views on social media).

[85] Among many other reasons, the site of Jasna Góra is important because of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński's "Pledge of Jasna Góra, which he wrote in 1956 during a three-year prison sentence for being seen as a threat to the stability of Poland's state socialist regime. The pledge focused on his gratitude to Our Lady of Częstochowa as well as for his hope for a free Poland, and became a cornerstone of Catholic devotion in Poland. It also contained profound yet subtle political themes, as during World War II and Poland's period of state socialism, pilgrimages to the shrine were banned and strict penalties were imposed for

Given the sacredness of Jasna Góra and Częstochowa to Catholic Poles, the idea of an LGBT Equality march there was highly controversial and generated heated criticism from the beginning. For many conservative politicians, commentators and members of the clergy, the decision to hold an Equality march in the holy city was deemed a direct provocation. Thus, when speaking of the march, the archbishop of Częstochowa said the following:

> [We are witnessing] the confrontation of those who have rejected God and a Christian civilization…we will not accept the desecration, the mockery against God, we will not accept the social hatred that those who are not only the enemies of the Church but also the enemies of Poland want to sow[86].

As this quotation shows, any criticism of the Church is perceived as also being a criticism of Poland. In the words of this archbishop, and in the sentiments of the Polish Right and Far-Right more generally, one who rejects God and is not a devout Catholic is by definition not a legitimate Pole. Such statements therefore promote the logic of "good, real Poles" versus the "bad, false Poles" on the basis of one's adherence to conservative, Catholic values. Further, the archbishop's use of the terms "desecration," "mockery" and "social hatred" are important, as by using them he is sending the message to his followers that the LGBT community's actions and presence in Częstochowa can be understood as nothing but a harmful act driven by anger and contempt. However, while the LGBT community may be attempting to criticize the Church, they are not doing so simply because they are driven by "social hatred." Rather, contrary to the words of the Archbishop, their criticism is focused precisely on combating hatred and exclusion. While the LGBT movement is indeed critical of the Church, its goal is not to rid Poland of Catholicism but

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attempting to access it. Jasna Góra is therefore a site that holds tremendous religious and political significance for many Poles.

[86] https://visegradpost.com/en/2019/07/01/the-international-lgbt-offensive-in-catholic-poland/, Accessed 16 Oct 2020.

to expand the boundaries of Polish identity so that being a "good Catholic" and a "good Pole" need not exist in opposition to the idea of LGBT rights and equality.

Additionally, numerous conservative periodicals and magazines spoke critically of what many referred to as the "LGBT offensive," claiming that their efforts were not only attacking and undermining traditional Polish values, but also causing deep rifts in Polish society between progressives and conservatives. Conservative magazine *Do Rzeczy*, for example, published an article whose title read "Equality March in Częstochowa: Homopropaganda will not arrive at Jasna Góra." Throughout the text the term "equality" is consistently placed in parentheses, implying a common line of attack the Polish Right often levies against the LGBT community; although they claim to advocate for equality, justice, and rights, their true mission is the destruction of traditional Polish values and the destruction of normalcy.

Although the idea of a LGBT Equality march in the holy city of Częstochowa was controversial enough, the planned route made it even more so[87]. The march was originally designed to conclude in a park near the entrance to the Jasna Góra monastery, where activists were hoping to hold a celebration as well as meet with Pauline monks. Thus, while the march was able to proceed without issue at the outset —the jeers and taunts of small groups of counter protestors notwithstanding— demonstrators were faced with formidable opposition once they approached the park near Jasna Góra. Some opponents to the Equality march laid down in the middle of the road leading up to the park in order to prevent it from advancing. They were eventually removed by police. However, citing a need to protect public safety given the number

[87] To make matters worse, the Equality March was held on the same day as a large conservative Catholic event known as the "Radio Maria Family Pilgrimage."

of counter-protestors blocking entry to the park, the police ultimately decided to prevent the Equality march from ending in its chosen location.

Although the the decision to prevent the march from reaching the base of Jasna Góra was allegedly in the interest of public safety, it was nevertheless an important symbolic gesture. While —after some debate— the city was willing to let the march occur through its streets, it would still not allow its participants to enter a sacred Polish site, showing a desire to maintain a strict boundary between the LGBT community and an important national symbol. Further, this boundary was made tangible via the presence of Far-Right protestors blocking the march from accessing the park. Blocking the participants from entering the park near Jasna Góra thus signaled that once the LGBT community started coming into contact with important Polish symbols, there would be absolutely no tolerance for them.[88]

The decision to prevent the march from reaching the base of Jasna Góra was praised by the Church and political Right and decried by progressive politicians and activists. *Do Rzeczy*, for example, published an article claiming that the decision to keep the march from reaching its desired endpoint was an important move in order to protect the sacred symbol of Jasna Góra[89]:

> Many commentators saw the choice of this place for this type of event as a provocation…this march is a form of violence against a symbol that is important to Polish traditions. The organizers chose this place on purpose to cause a scandal and provoke, otherwise they would have chosen a different part of the city. In 1956…the Jasna Góra Vows of the Polish Nation took place, where Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński was held in isolation, great religious

[88] It is of course possible to argue that many on the Right have no tolerance for the LGBT community in any case. However, as the rest of the chapter will make clear, these sentiments become most pronounced when it comes to important national symbols.

[89] In another article published two days prior to the march, editor-in-chief of Do Rzeczy criticized the march as "a form of rape on a symbol important for Poland."

> ceremonies were held. This is a special place, a zone that must not be violated (Do Rzeczy 7/8/2018).[90]

This excerpt is instructive for numerous reasons. First, the author frames participants in the Equality march as provocateurs, claiming that the sole reason they chose to end their march at the base of Jasna Góra was to cause a scandal and provoke the Church. Relatedly, the author refers to the march as a "type" of event that is in and of itself meant to be a provocation. In both statements, the implication is that Polish sexual minorities are by definition *outside of* and *against* anything that can be considered traditionally Polish. In order to emphasize the place of sexual minorities as outside agitators who care nothing for the good of Poland, but rather wish to see it destroyed, the author alludes to famous moments in Poland's history that underscore the importance of the Jasna Góra monastery, and assumes that the Equality march is meant to be nothing more than an affront to this important history and by extension Polish national identity. As is usual in conservative accounts of the LGBT community, the march is framed as a Trojan horse; one that feigns to be about equality but in reality is an attempt to bring about the destruction of Catholic Poland and traditional Polish culture.

This brings up an important point. On the one hand, the critics of the equality march are correct, as the ultimate goal of the march is to criticize the traditional models of Polish national identity that are premised on conservative Catholicism. However, what this interpretation misses is that the desire to reframe Polish national identity is not driven by a distaste for or lack of respect for Catholicism *in general,* but rather a disavowal of the ideologies of exclusion that have

[90] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/69879/marsz-rownosci-w-czestochowie-homopropaganda-nie-dotrze-na-jasna-gore.html, Accessed 16 Oct 2020.

been promulgated by the Church and conservative politicians in Poland for decades.[91] The ultimate goal, then, is not to completely disavow and dispel religion from Polish life, but rather to emphasize that being Catholic is not the primary indicator of "Polishness."

Critics on the Polish Left also weighed in on the events in Częstochowa, echoing these sentiments. In a scathing critique of conservative criticisms of the Equality march, Jan Hartman, a philosopher and journalist writing for the center-left magazine Polityka, wrote that "the equality march in Częstochowa serves not only to defend the rights of LGBT people, but also to demonstrate that Catholicism is not beyond the reach of criticism and protest" (*Poliytka*, 7/8/2019).[92] Thus, while the Equality march was not an attempt to destroy traditional understandings of Polish national identity, it *was a* means by which ideological others such as Polish sexual minorities could attempt to criticize those traditional aspects of "Polishness" that would deem them as incompatible with traditional understandings of Polish national identity. Further, Hartman's analysis denounces the hypocritical nature of the Church and conservative politician's decisions to label only those actors and actions that go against their agenda as insulting to Polish identity. He therefore goes on to criticize the hypocrisy of the Church and its priests for condemning the LGBT community and its march while accepting the sale of cheap religious kitsch and paraphernalia (such as t-shirts and buttons featuring the Polish Eagle and other important icons) near the gates of the monastery, nor the marches of nationalists carrying torches at Jasna Góra on Poland's Independence Day.

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[91] There are numerous LGBT rights organizations in Poland that have religious affiliations and advocate for the place of sexual minorities in the Catholic Church. See Mikulak 2019 for a discussion of these groups.

[92] https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/mojemiasto/1755580,1,pierwszy-marsz-rownosci-w-czestochowie-a-kosciol-judzi-dalej.read, Accessed 16 Oct 2020.

Even though the controversy over the path and endpoint of the march was palpable, what drew even greater national attention was the sighting of a gay couple marching with a Polish flag with the red portion replaced with the LGBT rainbow (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Activists with Rainbow Eagle Flag. Holding the banner would soon catapult them into a national controversy. Image taken from: https://www.pinknews.co.uk/2018/07/09/prosecute-lgbt-poland-national-symbol-white-eagle/, Accessed 16 Oct 2020.

The Polish Eagle —the national coat of arms— is an important and pervasive symbol in Poland and its history goes back to the nation's founding. According to national legend, the mythical founder of Poland, Lech, came across a majestic white eagle when traversing through the terrain that is now known as Greater Poland. Once he encountered the eagle, legend has it that the bird expanded its massive wings as the sun was setting, creating the famous image of the grand eagle among a red background. After this encounter, Lech was so inspired by what he saw that he decided to establish the first Polish city at the site where he saw it spread its wings. Ever

since, the eagle has been a symbol standing for courage, strength, and nobility. During the partitions, for example, the eagle served as an important reminder for Poles to seek independence. Once Polish independence was regained in 1918, the white eagle became the nation's official coat of arms. The story of the eagle remains an important part of Polish mythology, and both its origin story and what it has come to symbolize are well known to all Poles.

Figure 4.3: Traditional Polish Eagle.

Given the importance of the eagle in the Polish national imagination, its appearance among a rainbow background at Częstochowa's first Equality march was controversial. Several images were taken of the banner that day, which prompted Law and Justice member of parliament Joachim Brudziński to condemn its appearances in a Twitter post. His post contained several images of the banner and the activists carrying it, and read that those carrying the banner must be prosecuted for profaning a national symbol. In addition to his post, hundreds of others

took to Twitter to condemn that actions of the two activists and praise Brudziński for calling for their arrest. In addition to Brudzińksi's letter to the prosecutor's office in Częstochowa, six individuals —two anonymous— filed a complaint regarding the use of the "rainbow eagle."

Shortly after Brudziński's announcement that the activists holding the rainbow eagle banner would be prosecuted, there was also an outpouring of support for the activists online and outrage at Brudziński's actions. Within a few days, thousands of people had adopted new images on their social media accounts featuring the words "Rainbow Does Not Offend" (Tęcza Nie Obraża), which soon became an important slogan for Poland's LGBT movement. Further, within a few days of the march in Częstochowa, an organization called Democracy Action (*Akcja Demokracja*) took up a petition to send to MP Brudziński in which they ardently argued that the rainbow is not a sign of offense but of inclusion. Over 10,000 Poles signed the petition, which read:

> We, the undersigned, inform that we publicly wear t-shirts with an eagle on a rainbow background and we flaunt this sign on badges, stickers, and posters. Both the rainbow- a symbol of love, freedom, equality, and tolerance, and the emblem of the Polish state of which we are citizens, are important symbols for us, the combination of which represents the 2 million in the Polish LGBT+ community. We consider it absurd to conduct [legal] proceedings against participants in the Equality march in Częstochowa who were carrying the flag with this beautiful symbol. In a gesture of solidarity with them, we know about the possibility of publicly committing the crime of 'insulting the state emblem', knowing at the same time that we have not insulted it, because the RAINBOW DOES NOT OFFEND![93]

[93] https://teczowyorzel.pl/historia-teczowego-orla, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.

Figure 4.4: Activists Supporting the Rainbow Flag and Eagle. The large banner in the center reads: "Rainbow Does Not Offend…10,000 Signatures." In the corner is a sign that reads "God is Gay." Taken from: https://teczowyorzel.pl/historia-teczowego-orla, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.

In the end, the case against the two activists in Częstochowa was dropped, but the political life of the rainbow eagle was just beginning. Since its initial appearance in Częstochowa, the rainbow eagle has become a symbol of resistance and pride for the Polish LGBT community as well as an important target for the Polish Right.

Importantly, some conservative commentators have used the rainbow eagle as foil for the traditional red and white eagle. In the most recent presidential elections, incumbent and Law and Justice member Andrzej Duda was challenged by a number of candidates, the most formidable being Mayor of Warsaw Rafał Trzaskowski who had become a controversial figure for many on the Polish Right because of his support for Poland's LGBT community as well as other liberal and progressive reforms. Duda, on other hand, ran on a platform dedicated to combating "LGBT Ideology" and preserving the idea of the "Polak-katolik." Thus, when discussing the election, Law and Justice party member Bogdan Rzońca stated:

> In these elections, a *real, Polish* White Eagle and a tiny rainbow bird stood against each other. Behind President Andrzej Duda stands his program, Polish and conservative traditions and values. Rafał Trzaskowski presents only the anti-signature. Therefore, he will lose the elections miserably[94] (Do Rzeczy 7/9/2020, emphasis added)[95].

For many on the Polish Right, the rainbow eagle therefore has come to symbolize an "anti-signature," a blatant attack on traditional Polish norms and values represented by the "real Polish" white eagle. What is most important in this statement, however, is Rzonca's claim that there is a difference between "real" Poles who support the traditional white eagle, and by implication "not real" Poles who support the "rainbow eagle," bringing further attention to the idea that there is a sharp distinction between those who can and should be considered "truly" Polish. The rainbow eagle has therefore become a new, crucial focal point in the continued struggle over Polish national identity.

On the other hand, rather than retreat due to the threats and critiques from conservative politicians like Brudziński and Rzońca, LGBT activists and their allies have continued to march with the rainbow eagle icon at Equality marches throughout Poland, continuing the effort to reframe and reclaim the boundaries of Polish national identity. The icon has since become an important feature at many LGBT rights manifestations within Polish borders. Importantly, the image has also made appearances outside of Poland. In September of 2020, the image of the rainbow eagle was projected onto the façade of the European Commission building in Brussels as a sign of protest against Poland's "LGBT Free Zones." The projection, which was organized by two prominent Polish LGBT rights organizations, also included text that read "We are not an

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[94] It is worth noting that Duda won the presidential election by a very narrow margin (51/49), thus exhibiting the deep divide in Polish politics and society.

[95] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/146417/w-tych-wyborach-walcza-wspanialy-orzel-bialy-i-malenki-teczowy-ptaszek.html, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.

Ideology. We are Citizens of Poland." The motivation for this banner was to contest the claims from the Right and Far-Right that "LGBT" was nothing more than an ideology or cultural trend. Given this reality, a movement on social media began in which members of the LGBT community posted the hashtag #We are people, not and ideology (Jesteśmy ludźmi, nie ideologia).

While the action in Brussels was roundly criticized by Law and Justice party members as yet another instance of the LGBT community profaning national symbols, a spokesperson for the Campaign Against Homophobia (one of the organizations responsible for the projection) claimed that "placing a rainbow on the façade of the European Commission building was not a profanation of national symbols…national symbols are also national symbols of the LGBT community" (Polishnews, 9/24/2020)[96].

Figure 4.5: Image of Rainbow Eagle on E.U. Commission Building in Brussels. The text reading "We are not and Ideology, we are citizens of Poland." Taken from: https://www.polishnews.co.uk/brussels-polish-flag-with-rainbow-colors-on-the-building-of-the-european-commission-the-reaction-of-pis-meps/, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.

[96] https://www.polishnews.co.uk/brussels-polish-flag-with-rainbow-colors-on-the-building-of-the-european-commission-the-reaction-of-pis-meps/, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.

This statement is an important one, and demonstrates how and why the utilization of the rainbow eagle is an example of *aesthetic revolt*, or "the dual process by which social actors contest and rework iconic symbols in the public sphere; those symbols acquiring, through those material manipulations, significations that push forward the articulation of new identities and provide momentum for institutional reforms" (Zubrzycki 2011: 428). In the instances described above, LGBT activists took an important national symbol of Poland and reworked it so that it would stand for something that includes not only those Poles who adhere to the tenets of a conservative, Catholic Polish identity but ideological others such as Polish sexual minorities. Through their material manipulations of the Polish flag and eagle, a traditional national symbol has been modified and is able to take on new meaning. Two different interpretations of the eagle therefore now exist in the Polish public sphere, each standing for distinctive visions of Polish national identity.

Further, and most important for the argument being advanced here, the aesthetic revolt involving the Polish flag and eagle is different in form than that detailed by Zubrzycki in her study of the Quiet Revolution. In this case, all of the activists involved have not been calling for a complete disavowal of Polish symbols and advocating for a completely new model of "Polishness," but rather are working with and modifying the existing model to better fit their progressive values. By modifying the symbols in this way, the activists are showing that while the symbols are still meaningful and important to them, their traditional form has become too imbricated with the exclusionary and nationalist cultural schemas promulgated by the Right and Far-Right. Thus, in order to reclaim Polish national identity for ideological others like Polish sexual minorities, they are engaging in a form of aesthetic revolt emphasizing the reframing of salient national symbols instead of their outright rejection.

The Intrapersonal Aspects of Aesthetic Revolt

The reworking and utilization of national symbols —namely the Polish flag and eagle— was something that numerous respondents discussed during our interviews. The statements from these respondents show the importance of attending to actors' perceptions and understandings of the material objects utilized in aesthetic revolts in addition to the objects' own materiality and the material manipulations of the symbols themselves. Irma and Maria, two lesbian activists who I met after the 2018 Pride in Kraków, clearly articulated the significance of modifying such symbols and how doing so is an important means by which sexual minorities can reframe the boundaries of Polish national identity both in their own minds and in society more generally. In our conversation, Irma and Maria 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 minority communities. However, as Irma's statement shows, engaging with national symbols in this way was not always easy for her:

> 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 [Polish] flag (Interview conducted in English, emphasis added).

In this important statement, Irma claims that she 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 renewed meaning in the flag which allowed her to more easily identify with and utilize it in public demonstrations. This mental reframing of a formerly oppressive symbol therefore encouraged her to approach both the Polish flag and what it means to be Polish differently. Importantly, in this case, there was no need for material manipulation or any form of

subversion of the symbol itself. Rather, the only change that occurred was within Irma's own mind, as the symbol she could now wave with pride was the same one —with no material alterations— that she previously hid in the closet. Irma's statement therefore demonstrates the important role that internal, mental struggles can play in the initial realization of aesthetic revolt, as in order to understand the flag as something she could utilize and eventually manipulate, Irma had to —using Sewell's language— reinterpret the flag in terms of a new cultural schema.

While it was not clear from our conversation which cultural schema now informed her interpretation of the flag[97], what is clear from her statement is that the meaning evoked by the symbol was no longer negative and associated with exclusion, but positive. Thus, as she states, for some time she could only imagine the Right waving the flag and the flag representing exclusionary nationalism. However, this connection soon changed for her, allowing her to embrace the flag with renewed enthusiasm and reframed meaning. The mental reframing of a polysemic symbol can therefore be seen as an important initial step in one's engagement in aesthetic revolt, as before one engages with and manipulates a symbol they must see it as something that they *can* engage with and manipulate.

However, while these intrapersonal changes can be an important precursor to one's decision to engage in aesthetic revolt, in order to catalyze broader societal changes, the material manipulation of such symbols becomes more important (Zubrzycki 2011). Thus, Irma and Maria then informed me that they had taken their mobilization of the Polish flag further by stitching it to a rainbow flag, which they now display at parades and pride marches. By manipulating national symbols in this way, and thereby engaging in aesthetic revolt, Irma and Maria are also

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[97] Although, given her statement, one could infer that the cultural schema that now informs her interpretation of the flag is one of openness and inclusion.

attempting to reframe Polish national identity and reclaim it as being inclusive of sexual minorities and other minority communities. Therefore, in addition to finding ways to reframe what it means to be 'Polish' in their own minds much like those discussed in the previous chapter, activists like Irma and Maria are working to reframe the symbolic boundaries of Polish national identity through aesthetic revolt. As they say:

> 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 with and manipulating salient national symbols in a critical way, 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 been 'hijacked' by the Far-Right (Bourdieu 1991; Verdery 1993)[98]. For activists like Irma and Maria, such acts of aesthetic revolt 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. Further, what Irma and Maria discuss here is not an act of *rejecting* a dominant symbol. Rather, they emphasize that they are *mainstreaming* their modified symbol and by extension advocating for a renewed and more inclusive vision of Polish identity. This subtle but important distinction shows that engaging in aesthetic revolt does not necessitate the outright rejection of national symbols, but can be done

[98] In addition, by using the term "citizens" in this statement, they are embracing a civic notion of "Polishness" as opposed to the ethnic one advocated by the Right and Far-Right.

by tweaking and modifying them. As such, activists like Irma and Maria —as well as the activists in Częstochowa— are not focused at all on exclusion, but entirely on inclusion.

Figure 4.6: Rainbow Eagle/Rainbow Polish Flag Among Polish Flag. Image taken from: https://notesfrompoland.com/2020/05/20/elections-are-a-choice-between-white-and-red-poland-and-rainbow-poland-says-ruling-party-official/, Accessed 18 Oct 2020.

My conversation with Franek —a 40-year-old German teacher living in Kraków— further demonstrated just how malleable the meaning of cultural objects like national flags can be.

> I: How do you feel about Polish symbols?
>
> F: I don't feel much about it, but – it's so strange. When PiS came to power and we started to go to demonstrations and so on, it was the first time I was thinking of the flag and the Polish national anthem as something that I

> identified with. Before, liberal people or leftists didn't care about national symbols…they are not nationalists. Nationalists are singing [the] national anthem all the time and they were carrying flags, and I was – *it was my association with patriotism, like Right, conservative, aggressive people.* So, the symbols were, for me, the symbols of oppression. But, when I started to demonstrate, I thought, okay, okay, it's *–then, I feel something for the symbols*. *So, it changed with PiS coming to power*. Strange, isn't it? And I even bought a flag for demonstrations. And, I wasn't ashamed of singing national anthems during these manifestations (Interview conducted in English, Emphasis added).

Much like Irma, Franek saw the Polish flag as a sign of oppression for much of his life, and therefore did not associate himself with it nor could he take any pride in displaying it. As he states, brandishing national symbols and chanting national anthems were the actions of aggressive, Right-Wing nationalists, not those who maintained liberal ideals. However, as his statement demonstrates, once one has interpreted such symbols in terms of a new cultural schema, the valence of these symbols can change. Thus Franek, much like Irma and Maria, now saw the flag as something he could wave in order to reclaim "Polishness" from the dictates of the Right and Far-Right.

Other respondents also echoed what activists like Irma and Maria stated about reclaiming national symbols. Jan, a 30-year-old graduate student told me that while he did not have much feeling for symbols, he felt that it was important to try to reclaim them from being associated solely with the Far-Right and particular segments of Polish society.

> I'm not big on symbols, especially national symbols. I feel attached to Poland and I respect our flag, but I'm not the kind of person who would wave a flag…I would never wave a Polish flag, *never other than at Pride*. But right now…pretty much all the symbols are associated with the Right. So you cannot wave a flag, a Polish flag, because Polish symbols have been hijacked by the extreme Right. But I also want to wave a Polish flag at Pride and actually last year in Warsaw we did…yeah, so I want to reclaim the symbols, Polish symbols….so they do not belong only to one group of people. You know, to a section of Polish society and not to everyone (Interview conducted in English, emphasis added).

In addition to articulating his desire to reclaim national symbols from the Right, Jan makes the important point that he would only march with a Polish flag if at a Pride manifestation. Doing so demonstrates his desire to subvert exclusionary conceptions of Polish identity by showing the compatibility of the Polish flag and the LGBT community. In the context of Pride, he can wave a Polish flag and advocate for the interpretation of "Polishness" in terms of a new cultural schema; one driven by the acceptance and inclusion of a Pride gathering and not one driven by ethno-nationalism and exclusion. However, outside of the context of Pride the national flag is still bolstered too strongly by the exclusionary schema of "Polishness" advocated by the Right, which precludes him from wanting to wave it anywhere else.

Marcin, the young computer programmer from Warsaw, made similar comments regarding the need to reclaim national symbols from the Far-Right:

> You see now, the whole 20th century has been a real struggle for Poland, and I think it increased the need to identify as Polish significantly…and with the nation and all the symbols. So there is this strong patriotic thing going on with the current government. They're very focused on the past…and I think it is really important that we also recognize the symbols and that we identify with them as well so that they cannot steal them from us. So they cannot make them theirs.

While Marcin's comments are similar to those of Irma, Maria, Jan, and Marek, he adds the important point that given Poland's struggles throughout the 20th century, there might be an increased desire amongst Poles to identify with their 'Polishness'. However, as both he and Jan state, at this time the the symbols that are meant to signify that national identity are increasingly being hijacked and reserved for a small portion of Polish society; those that adhere to strictly conservative, Catholic values. Therefore, by engaging in aesthetic revolt and reframing the boundaries of national identity in the process, activists like Irma and Maria and concerned citizens like Jan and Marcin are working towards envisioning a Polish identity that is inclusive of

LGBT identities as well as other identities that don't fit the model of the "Polak-katolik" that has been the bastion of 'Polishness' for over a century.

Aesthetic Revolt and the Rainbow Madonna

While the advent and utilization of the rainbow eagle and rainbow-infused Polish flag has been an important aspect of aesthetic revolt on the behalf of Polish sexual minorities, their revolt was pushed even further in the summer of 2019 when activist and psychoanalyst Elżbieta Podleśna chose to manipulate one of Poland's most sacred icons; Our Lady of Częstochowa, also known as the Madonna. Although Our Lady of Częstochowa is a religious icon, because of Poland's intimate ties to the Catholic Church and the specific history of the icon, it is considered by all Poles as an important national symbol. Veneration of the symbol is thus deeply rooted in Polish history and culture, and it is estimated that seven hundred shrines exist throughout the country devoted to it (de Busser and Niedzwiedz 2009).

Although the image of the Madonna can be traced back to the 1st century AD, it becomes particularly significant in Polish history and culture beginning in the middle of the 17th century. According to Polish mythology, during the Battle of Jasna Góra in 1655, Mary's divine assistance helped the Polish army vanquish the invading Swedish army. This event has since been interpreted as a major turning point in the war with Sweden, and ever since then the image of the Madonna has been associated with strength and the defense of Poland. The symbol became increasingly important during Poland's partition period. Importantly, during this time the symbol of the Madonna came to be a representation of "Polish Catholic identity *vis-à-vis* the non-Catholic nature of the most oppressive foreign powers…Protestant Prussia and Orthodox Russia" (de Busser and Niedzwiedz 2009). The image therefore became an essential symbol of Poland's ardently Catholic national identity. Further, due to her miraculous role in vanquishing

Poland's non-Catholic enemies in Polish mythology, Our Lady of Częstochowa was recognized by Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński in 1966 as the Queen of the Poles as well as the commander-in-chief of Poland's armed forces (Porter 2005; Zubrzycki 2006). Because of Poland's long history of invasion and exploitation by surrounding territories, the image came to represent hope and the promise of salvation in the face of injustice and thus remains an essential element of Polish culture (Jakubowska 1990).

Figure 4.7: Traditional image of Our Lady of Częstochowa.

The image of Our Lady of Częstochowa, given its important and sacred nature to Poland and conservative understandings of Polish identity, would therefore appear to many as a symbol that is off limits for any form of subversion or even alteration. Yet Elżbieta Podleśna's actions in late April of 2019 challenged these assumptions. Podleśna, who lives in the small Polish town of Płock, originally came up with her rendition of the image as a form of protest against a local

church in her community that had featured an Easter display mentioning "LGBT" and "Gender" as sins. As a response to these images placed in front of the Płock church, she placed an image of her newly created rainbow Madonna around the city as well as directly on the church's property.

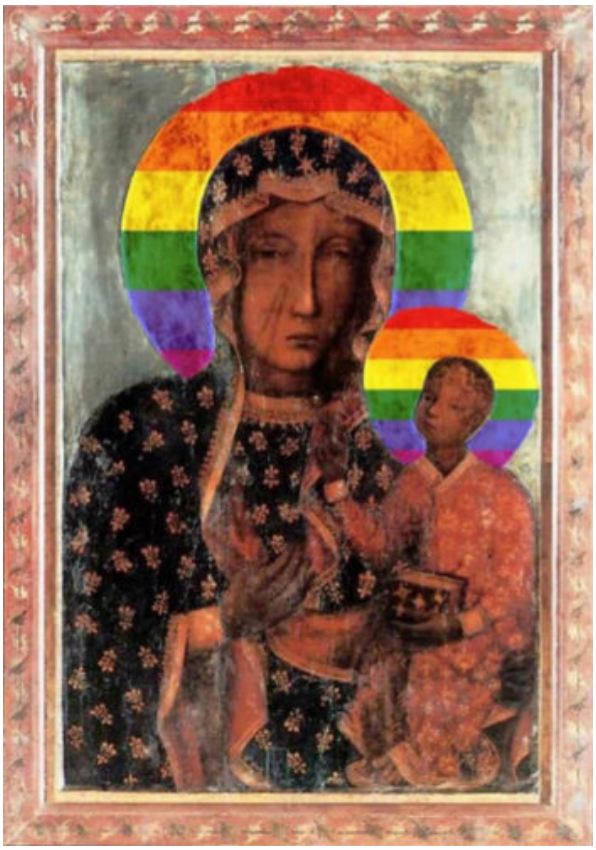

Figure 4.8: Image of the Rainbow Madonna. taken from: https://qspirit.net/polish-rainbow-virgin-mary/, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.

Podleśna's message was not well received by the Church nor the Polish Right, and calls for her arrest on the basis of insulting religious feeling were immediate. One Prior, who was quoted in conservative periodical Do Rzeczy, stated:

> Today, even honest believers are indignant at the blasphemy against the mother of Jesus. The godless have exceeded the limits of decency…to mock Mary, who is worshipped by several hundred million people around the world, who appears to the faithful and speaks, showing the way to conversion and penance, is evidence of some kind of obnubilation. It is interesting that all of

> these blasphemers think that this is their freedom to do as they please (Do Rzeczy, 5/2/2019)[99].

The Prior's statement is directly in line with the conservative critiques of the LGBT community detailed in the first two chapters of this dissertation. That is, he makes a clear delineation between the "godless" and the good Poles who devoutly covet the image of the Madonna. Further, the image of the rainbow Madonna is characterized as an attempt at mockery when, as I will discuss below, its meaning and significance is far greater.

In another critical assessment of the rainbow Madonna discussed in *Do Rzeczy*, the image was decried as simply another instance of "Christianophobia" that have been mounting in Poland over the years. The article, citing a letter from the Ordo Iuris Center for Religious Freedom, stated:

> There is no doubt that the profanation of the image of the Black Madonna is a crime offending religious feelings. It is therefore the duty of the prosecution to conduct proceedings in these cases. It is all the more important as we are currently witnessing a growing "Christianophobia" in Poland, which must be strongly opposed (Do Rzeczy, 5/14/2019)[100].

The calls for Podleśna's arrest were resounding, and after a few weeks Podleśna was detained after authorities raided her home and found numerous copies of posters containing the image of the rainbow Madonna[101]. Yet her arrest, while pleasing critics on the Right, instigated massive protests across the country and also drew international attention. Amnesty International and

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[99] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/102542/bezboznicy-przekroczyli-granice-mocny-wpis-ojca-knabita.html, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.
[100] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/102684/ordo-iuris-profanacja-wizerunku-matki-bozej-to-przestepstwo.html, Accessed 17 Oct 2020.
[101] Two other women, Anna Prus and Joanna Gzyra, were also arrested for helping Podleśna hang posters of the rainbow Madonna. They were all three acquitted on March 2, 2021.

Human Rights Watch, for example, both issued statements condemning the Polish government for Podleśna's arrest.

Yet while the Polish Right saw Podleśna's actions as an attempt to mock the sacred image of the Madonna, and thereby insult the feelings of religious Poles, the story from the other side was quite different. When later asked about her actions and motivations, Podleśna stated:

> Nobody should be excluded from society. Sexual orientation is not a sin or a crime and the Holy Mother would protect such people from the Church and from priests who think it is okay to condemn others…I refuse to be told to shut up because there is a chance you will provoke someone else. Wake up, defenders of human rights. Leave your offices, go out and say it is not fair (BBC, 5/14/2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48257706, Accessed 18 Oct 2020).

What stands out as particularly important in this statement is that Podleśna is in no way criticizing the Madonna, her legacy or what she stands for. Indeed, she claims that she sees the Madonna as a helpful figure that would protect all of those communities that are condemned as dangerous to Poland by the Right and Far-Right. Her statement is thus an affirmation of the legacy of the Madonna; an icon that is meant to be a protector of *all* Polish people, not just those who adhere to a highly conservative, Catholic national identity. What she is condemning is the narrow ways in which the legacy and meaning of the symbol of Our Lady of Częstochowa have been interpreted and mobilized by the conservative sects of the Catholic Church and the Polish Right for centuries. In this way, Podleśna has catalyzed a modified symbol to be utilized in Polish sexual minorities' aesthetic revolt that is attempting to chip away at exclusionary ethno-nationalist conceptions of Polish national identity. Importantly, much like the activists utilizing the rainbow eagle and rainbow-infused Polish flag, such actions constitute a form of aesthetic revolt that does not rely on the wholesale rejection of a national icon and the national identity it

upholds, but instead focuses on modifying and reframing a symbol in order to reclaim Polish national identity for sexual and other ideological minorities.

Symbolic Re-workings and New Sacralities

Despite Podleśna's arrest and attempts by the Polish Right to censor the image of the rainbow Madonna, the image only became more popular amongst progressive Poles. Soon after the news broke about her possible arrest, citizens took to the streets in protest and began sharing the reinterpreted icon on social media accounts and across the internet more broadly. Some activists began to refer to the new rendition of the Madonna as "Our Lady of Equality," explaining that the image was never meant to be an insult to the Church, but was rather a stand against the discrimination and stigmatization of Polish sexual minorities by the Church, Right, and Far-Right. A member of the organization called Warsaw Freedom Activists thus said the following regarding the actions taken against Podleśna in Płock:

> We do not agree with indoctrinating towards hatred and segregation. The way in which Catholic priests present and explain the world is not an internal matter of the Church, as it concerns and affects not only its followers. What happened in the Płock church is not internal…because it is happening all over Poland (NaTemat, 4/30/2019)[102].

From the perspective of the Warsaw Freedom Activists, the primary point of Podleśna's image was to show that the Catholic church did not hold a monopoly on the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa or on explaining how the world should operate. In this powerful statement, they underscore the fact that discrimination against sexual minorities in Poland is ubiquitous, and that the Church has been complicit in its perpetuation. The image of the rainbow Madonna therefore

[102] https://natemat.pl/271483,teczowa-maryja-aktywistki-tlumacza-o-co-chodzi-z-matka-boska-rownosciowa#, Accessed 18 Oct 2020.

quickly became an important symbol for those who wanted to imagine a new national identity for Poland, one that was not overtly critical of the Church but one that could openly criticize institutions that continued to maintain positions advocating for the exclusion and stigmatization of certain groups and identities. This sentiment was succinctly captured by American author and minister Kittredge Cherry —a lesbian who began a website that advocates for sexual minorities in the Catholic Church— in a letter directed to Poland's Minister of Interior showing support for Podleśna after her arrest:

> Dear Minister of Interior,
>
> Stop legal action against Elżbieta Podleśna for "offending religious sentiments" with the rainbow Madonna of Częstochowa. This arrest offends MY religious sentiments as a queer Christian minister…sexual orientation is not a sin and the Holy Mother would protect LGBT people and other outcasts from discrimination.
>
> …I pray for you with the words of the Rainbow Christ prayer, which is honored by LGBT people of faith and our allies worldwide:
>
> Rainbow Christ, you embody all the colors of the world. Rainbows serve as bridges between different realms: heaven and earth, east and west, queer and non-queer. Inspire us to remember the values expressed in the rainbow flag of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer community. Rainbow Christ, you light up the world. You make rainbows to promise to support all life on earth. In the rainbow space, we can see all the hidden connections between sexualities, genders, and races. Like the rainbow, may we embody all the colors of the world! (QSpirit.net, May 16 2019)[103].

Cherry's words clearly articulate the intended message of the rainbow Madonna, and also highlight why the physical image of the rainbow is so important to the LGBT community. Not only is a rainbow a collection of multiple colors, suggesting diversity and inclusivity, but rainbows as physical phenomena span great distances and appear to serve as bridges. This

[103] https://qspirit.net/polish-rainbow-virgin-mary/, Accessed 18 Oct 2020.

metaphor is a powerful one, and it means that by infusing these traditional national symbols with rainbows, the ultimate goal is to bring Polish citizens together, rather than divide them through narrow definitions of "Polishness."

Figure 4.9: Activists Supporting Podleśna and the Rainbow Madonna. The words read "Free Ela," in reference to Podleśna's arrest. Image taken from: https://www.dw.com/en/poland-furor-over-rainbow-madonna-lgbt-activist-arrest/a-48694526, Accessed 18 Oct 2020.

Figure 4.10: Activists Supporting Podleśna and the Rainbow Madonna. The words "Rainbow does not offend." The image was taken during the covid-19 pandemic, well over a year after the initial controversy over the Madonna. Image taken from: https://apnews.com/article/trials-e1d82221344dc1e211aabc2e8d9e3c33, Accessed 18 Oct 2020.

Since Podleśna's arrest, the image of the Rainbow Madonna has become pervasive at Equality marches throughout Poland, albeit to the continued dismay of conservative politicians and members of the clergy. Thus, when the town of Płock held its first Equality march only months after the controversy with the rainbow Madonna, a local conservative Catholic group wrote a letter to the city's president condemning him for allowing the march. In the letter, among other things, they make clear that the rainbow is not seen by them as a symbol of inclusion, but one that tramples on Polish traditions:

> With disbelief and sadness, we received the information that you decided to take the honorary patronage of the Equality March organized by the LGBT community. Our amazement and indignation are all the greater that you made this decision after a series of profanations and scandalous events that took place during the parades in other Polish cities. They offended thousands of Christians and scandalized hundreds of children… [such acts] not only insult the symbols and objects of religious worship protected by law, but are also a slap in the face of all those who respect Polish culture and tradition (Do Rzeczy 8/7/2019)[104].

However, despite the resistance from conservative groups, the image of the rainbow Madonna has persevered and remains and important symbol, garnering support from many Poles. Much like the case of the Polish eagle, the enthusiastic embrace of the rainbow Madonna shows how aesthetic revolt need not entail a complete rejection and disavowal of a given national symbol and the national identity it upholds. Indeed, in this case, Podleśna and fellow activists still recognize and respect the icon of Our Lady of Częstochowa, but in a modified form.

The modification of the Madonna also suggests that some Poles, following Podleśna's lead, are beginning to carve out a new sacred register of Polish national identity. In her discussion of the national sensorium, Zubrzycki (2011) posits two ideal typical modes in which individuals and groups can apprehend national mythology; sacred and profane. Those approaching through the sacred mode hold national mythology closely and could not imagine altering or criticizing it, as doing so would feel immoral. Contrarily, the profane mode allows for some critical distance as mythology is interpreted as "an oft-commodified *thing* to be used playfully or even ironically by national actors" (2011: 52). However, the case here shows that while national actors might apprehend a national symbol through the profane mode, apprehending it in this way may be an attempt to create a new sacred register rather than simply

[104] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/110324/marsz-rownosci-w-plocku-pod-patronatem-wladz-opozycjonisci-z-okresu-prl-protestuja.html, Accessed 18 Oct 2020.

criticize or profane the mythology. Thus, although Podleśna saw the icon of the Madonna with enough of a critical distance to modify it, she was not engaging in mockery or desecration (despite the accusations from the Right and Far-Right). Rather, her manipulation demonstrated a desire to reimagine and recreate certain symbols that have become associated with the narrow and exclusionary model of Polish national identity promulgated by Law and Justice and other conservative, Catholic parties and organizations. The same point applies to the activists in Częstochowa. By manipulating symbols in this way, these activists are not disengaging from and criticizing "Polishness" wholesale, but are instead reimagining them so that the symbols can once again exist as something that they feel close to and perhaps once again see as sacred. The process of aesthetic revolt can therefore be a means by which social actors transform national symbols in order to feel a closeness to their national identity once again.

Accelerating the Aesthetic Revolt

In the summer of 2020, LGBT activists in Poland associated with a small queer collective known as Stop Bzdurom (Stop Nonsense) came onto the scene with full force. The collective, which was initially formed in 2019, is primarily focused on campaigns that help young members of the Polish LGBT community who are struggling due to the Polish Right's continued attacks on "LGBT ideology." Their primary objective has been to combat misinformation regarding sexual minorities that may prevent young members of the LGBT community from coming out and accepting their sexuality. The name "Stop Nonsense" was derived from a criticism of a campaign launched by a Far-Right organization called "Stop Pedophilia," in which the organization claimed that the LGBT community were pedophiles intent on converting young children to homosexuality.

The Far-Right organization, known as the "Pro Foundation" (Fundacja Pro) because of their strong "pro-life" viewpoints, is well known throughout Poland for small vans it charters to drive around Polish cities displaying anti-LGBT slogans. Such vans are particularly common sights at Equality marches, as are their information tents where they hand out homophobic literature. The organization's website is one of the primary sources of misinformation that the Stop Bzdurom movement seeks to address[105]. Although a number of LGBT organizations in Poland have tried to stop the vans, their efforts have largely failed due to the fact that in Poland, laws concerning hate speech do not include sexual minorities.

Figure 4.11: Anti-LGBT Bus of the "Pro" Foundation. It reads: "The LGBT wants to teach children: At 4 years, masturbation. At 6 years, consenting to sex. At 9 years, first sexual experiences and orgasm." Image taken from: https://ilga-europe.org/sites/default/files/Poland-Anti-LGBT-Timeline.pdf, Accessed 20 Oct 2020.

[105] One of the primary ways StopBzdurom does this on their webpage is by exposing outdated and/or debunked research that groups like Fundacja Pro utilize in their arguments, such as that of University of Texas sociologist Mark Regnerus. In addition, Stop Bzdurom claimed a domain name that is very close to the domain name of Fundacja Pro in order to reroute internet traffic to their webpage.

Prior to the summer of 2020, those involved with the Stop Bzdurom collective engaged in some actions but none that drew much attention. Controversy began in July, when activists associated with the collective tied a rainbow flag to a statue of Jesus Christ that stands in front of the Church of the Holy Cross on Warsaw's most important avenue. This particular statue holds an important place in Polish social and political history. Created in 1858, the sculpture was an important early assertion of Poland's fealty to Catholicism. It became famous, however, during World War II when the Nazi's decimated nearly 90% of Warsaw. Despite the widespread destruction brought by the Nazis, the statue of Christ remained mostly intact, and a now famous photo depicts the statue lying among rubble. The statue has since come to symbolize both Poland and Polish Catholicism's ability to withstand even the most oppressive and aggressive attacks.

Figure 4.12: Statue of Christ Among Ruins after World War II Bombings. Image taken from: https://rmx.news/article/article/lgbt-activists-vandalize-statute-of-jesus-christ-in-warsaw-polish-pm-morawiecki-condemns-bigotry, Accessed 20 Oct 2020.

Figure 4.13: Stop Bzdurom Activists Placing Rainbow Flag on Statue of Christ. Image taken from: https://www.reuters.com/article/us-poland-lgbt-rights-trfn-idUSKCN2522YV, Accessed 20 Oct 2020.

The outcry from the Church and Polish Right was immediate and was composed of both sadness and anger. Conservative magazines such as *Do Rzeczy*, *Nasz Dziennik*, and *Bulletin KAI* published opinions speaking to the pain that this action caused parishioners and members of the clergy, appealing to the need to prosecute those responsible with offending religious sentiments. Additionally, the religious organization Center of Life and Family began a petition that demanded Mayor of Warsaw Rafał Trzaskowski to withdraw his support for the LGBT protections bill he had recently signed. *Bulletin KAI* endorsed their petition in a brief article where the authors also called for Trzaskowski to withdraw support for the protections bill:

> … Is Warsaw a city where LGBT activists can act with impunity? Yes, because they have the official support of President Rafał Trzaskowski, who signed the "LGBT + Declaration" over a year ago. With such a declaration supporting them, homoactivists have consent to aggression, acts of vandalism and profanation (eKAI, 7/31/2020)[106].

[106] https://www.ekai.pl/profanacja-figury-chrystusa-napelnila-bolem-parafian-i-mieszkancow-stolicy/, Accessed 20 Oct 2020.

Other reactions went as far as to call the LGBT community and those who participated in hanging the rainbow flag as primitives and barbarians. An article published in *Do Rzeczy* the following day read:

> There are boundaries, the crossing of which excludes any conversation. The primitives that "embellished" the figure of Jesus crossed that boundary…the offensive of leftism continues. Today it is all the more symbolic as the target of the attack, on the eve of the anniversary of the outbreak of the Warsaw Uprising was the statue of Christ…this is an assault! The rainbow…is an attack! (Do Rzeczy, 7/30/2020)[107].

In a similar vain, when giving a statement regarding the events, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki referred to the actions of activists who hung the rainbow as "barbaric" and intolerant, a statement that some on the Left interpreted as an allusion to the actions of the Nazis when they destroyed Warsaw decades earlier:

> The basic condition of any civilized debate about tolerance is to define the limits of this tolerance. Can you justify any, even the most iconoclastic behavior, by fighting for your vision of the world? Does the end justify the means? Definitely NO…In Poland, we will not make the mistakes of the West. We all see what tolerance of such barbarism leads to (TVP, 7/29/2020)[108].

In a response to Morawiecki's statement, one activist involved with Stop Bzdurom wrote:

> *The rainbow flag is part of the city's identity. We decided to show that we are here*. When I saw Morawiecki's post, I was shocked. This is the level of absurdity that that surprises me…*these monuments and figures are important to us because we are Polish.* The action was a provocation. It wasn't meant to offend anyone (Oko Press, 9/30/2020, emphasis added)[109].

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[107] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/148768/aktywisci-lgbt-sprofanowali-figure-chrystusa-powstala-petycja-do-trzaskowskiego.html, Accessed 21 Oct 2020.
[108] https://www.tvp.info/49182753/premier-morawiecki-komentuje-w-nocna-akcje-anarchistek-w-warszawie-dotyczaca-pomnikow-wieszwiecej?fbclid=IwAR1EEk0XDL_q-TSxPNWB--4dn2cfwcB-7kV3B9_yAo5y5LU3sVmV6OP2Seo, Accessed 21 Oct 2020.
[109] https://oko.press/morawiecki-to-barbarzynstwo-aktywistki-to-szturm-na-homofobie-prawnik-to-nie-byla-profanacja/, Accessed 21 Oct 2020.

The comments made by Morawiecki and the conservative columnist for *Do Rzeczy* show an attempt by the Polish Right to frame protestors as radical and anti-Polish. As the latter argues, he sees the actions of the Stop Bzdurom activists as an assault and attack on Polish identity, as if the activists involved are not themselves citizens of Poland. However, the sentiments shared by the activist involved with the collective demonstrate that they are not trying to insult these icons but rather reframe and reclaim them. By hanging a rainbow flag on such an important national icon, the activists are not rejecting it but rather are stating that Polish sexual minorities are still Polish despite their sexuality and the narrow vision of "Polishness" espoused by the Right and Far-Right. Through engaging in aesthetic revolt and reworking the physical forms of these icons, the Stop Bzdurom activists are attempting to reframe the symbolic boundaries of Polish national identity and what "Polishness" can mean.

Within days of the event at the Warsaw church, a number of progressive and even centrist politicians came to defend the action. Sylwia Spurek, a progressive politician and activist who was elected to represent Poland in the European Union in 2019, spoke of the importance of the rainbow as a symbol of acceptance and respect. She echoed the activists' sentiments that by hanging a rainbow on this icon, protestors were advocating for themselves as Polish citizens who have been repeatedly attacked by Law and Justice and the more conservative factions of the Polish clergy. Former Prime Minister Donald Tusk, a centrist member of the Civic Platform party, also refused to condemn the actions of the collective, stating that "as the head of the European Christian democrats, I would like to remind you that Jesus has always been on the side of the weaker and the harmed, never on the side of the oppressive power" (Do Rzeczy,

7/30/2020)[110]. Thus, as opposed to seeing the rainbow as an affront and an insult to 'Polishness', advocates on the Left characterize it as a symbol that is part and parcel of what Polish identity should be about; inclusivity and the desire to protect the most vulnerable.

Despite the controversies that the actions of the Stop Bzdurom movement incited, they did not stop with the symbol of Jesus, and rainbow flags were soon hung on other significant statues throughout Warsaw. Some of the icons targeted by protestors included a statue of Copernicus, a monument dedicated to a commander of the 1794 Warsaw uprising Jan Kiliński, as well as on the Warsaw mermaid, an official symbol of the city of Warsaw that is featured on its coat of arms.

Figure 4.14: Copernicus Statue with Rainbow Flag. Image taken from: https://time.com/5878424/poland-lgbt-protests-police-brutality/, Accessed 22 Oct 2020.

[110] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/148804/tusk-o-prowokacji-srodowisk-lgbt-jako-szef-europejskich-chrzescijanskich-demokratow.html, Accessed 21 Oct 2020.

Figure 4.15: Warsaw Mermaid Statue with Rainbow Flag. Image taken from: https://www.hrw.org/news/2020/08/07/poland-crackdown-lgbt-activists, Accessed 22 Oct 2020.

In addition to adorning these icons with a rainbow flag, activists attached a note to each figure they had targeted, which read:

> This is an assault! The rainbow…is an attack! We decided to act. As long as I'm afraid to hold your hand. Until the last homophobic van disappears from our streets. This rainbow is a manifestation of our difference. As long as the flag will scandalize someone and will be "inappropriate," we promise to provoke…after all, no one will say that the Polish flag is inappropriate and offensive…this city is all of us.

The opening words of this statement were meant to mock the criticisms of the initial actions on the figure of Jesus Christ. The remainder of this powerful statement, however, illustrate the goals of Stop Bzdurom's aesthetic revolt; to not rest until the image of the rainbow is no longer presented by the Catholic Right as a threat to Poland, or as the symbol of a minority that is somehow not "truly Polish," but as something entirely and obviously Polish. These words and the placement of rainbow flags on statues throughout Warsaw stake the claim that while not all

Poles are sexual minorities, all Polish sexual minorities are fully Polish and must be recognized as such. The rainbow, an essential aspect of Polish sexual minorities' aesthetic revolt, therefore is the material manifestation of the cultural schema of "Polishness" that is premised on inclusion and the acceptance of diversity. By hanging it on important national symbols throughout Warsaw, the activists are striving to reclaim this identity for themselves and other marginalized groups. Further, and most important for the argument being put forth in this chapter, the actions taken by Stop Bzdurom —just like the actions taken by the activists in Częstochowa and by Elżbieta Podleśna— did not require a wholesale rejection of Polish symbols and the creation of an entirely new Polish identity. Rather, their aesthetic revolt was one centered on modifying and reframing these symbols in order to reclaim Polish national identity.

Conclusion

This chapter has detailed the important role that aesthetic revolt has played in recent actions taken by Polish sexual minorities to reframe the boundaries of "Polishness." The concept of aesthetic revolt is important because it details the subtle ways in which the strategic manipulation of national symbols can lead to renewed understandings of national identity (Zubrzycki 2013). Through my analysis of three significant events, I elaborated the ways in which Polish LGBT rights activists have engaged with salient religio-national symbols in order to reclaim Polish national identity from the dictates of the Right and Far-Right and reframe what "Polishness" can mean. Contrary to the efforts of those whose political strategies involve circumscribing the symbolic boundaries of national identity, the actions taken by the activists detailed in this chapter are premised on a fundamental logic of inclusion. Thus, while they advocate for a dismantling of the exclusionary notions of national identity premised on

conservative, Catholic values, in so doing they are not advocating for a completely *new* national identity, but a *renewed or reframed* one.

For this reason, my case differs from the model of aesthetic revolt Zubrzycki outlines in her analysis of the Quiet Revolution in Quebec. In her case, critics of the Catholic French Canadian identity did not seek to modify Catholic symbols, but to replace them altogether. Yet in all of the cases discussed in this chapter, activists were not outright rejecting the symbols of the Polish national sensorium, but instead modifying them to show that coexistence was indeed possible. There are, of course, also activists who would like to see Poland become an entirely secular and therefore completely eschew all religio-national symbols. However, the data collected for this chapter show a desire among many to not completely abolish and replace, but to reframe, the boundaries Polish national identity. Thus, Our Lady of Częstochowa was not dismembered but rather given a modified halo.

This effort to promote coexistence was also evident in the interviews with activists and citizens who did not long for a completely new Poland, but a renewed one where they could embrace the symbols they used to admire in order to feel connected to both the symbols and their national identity again. Engaging in this manner of aesthetic revolt did not require a complete rejection of national symbols, but rather a reclaiming and reframing of them. Further, this chapter has helped to extend the concept of aesthetic revolt by emphasizing the important role that human interiority plays in the process. Given these findings, it will be instructive for future research on aesthetic revolt to consider these subtle distinctions when considering how activists engage with national symbols in order to effect social change.

Chapter 5: Robert Biedroń and the Expansion of "Polishness" Through Politics

In this chapter, I discuss and analyze the political career of Robert Biedroń, Poland's first openly gay member of parliament and recent candidate for President of Poland. Although Biedroń's status as an openly gay politician is highly significant, the primary purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the ways that Biedroń and his social and political movement have engaged and challenged the boundaries of Polish national identity. They have done this, I argue, by attempting to fundamentally redraw the symbolic boundaries of "Polishness" by criticizing the strong place the Church has in politics and society. Thus, while chapter 3 showed how individual Poles were reframing Polish identity in their own minds and chapter 4 examined how this reframing has taken form through aesthetic revolt, this concluding chapter illustrates how such boundary work has also occurred in the realm of official politics. Through all of the sections in this chapter, I demonstrate how Biedroń and his movement have consistently advocated for a more inclusive vision of Polish identity, one that breaks away from the dominant model of the "Polak-Katolik" that has been elaborated in earlier chapters.

Expanding "Polishness" through Political Activism

During his time as a university student in the 1990s in the city of Olsztyn, Biedroń worked with the center-left Democratic Left Alliance (SLD), a political party that formed soon

after Poland's democratic transition in 1991[111]. In and early interview, Biedroń claimed that one of the primary reasons he chose to get involved in politics was to help improve the status of sexual minorities in Polish society:

> As a teenage boy I came across a barrier in society that was impenetrable for me. Everyone expected me to have a girlfriend, not to walk with a boy holding hands. And I thought, there's nothing wrong, I am not hurting anyone. And that probably somehow determined my path. That is why in 1998 I joined SLD…there, no one required me to hide my homosexuality (Życie Warszawy, 9/12/2002)[112].

This important statement shows that from an early age, Biedroń was acutely aware of the restrictive symbolic boundaries in Polish society that worked to marginalize sexual minorities. As he states, he was aware of this "barrier" since he was a teenager, and decided to join SLD because it was the one party where he could be himself. His work with SLD therefore marked the beginning of his mission to expand the restrictive boundaries of national identity by advocating for the place of sexual minorities in Polish society.

The article that published this interview was titled "A Brave Gay in SLD" (Odważny Gay z SLD). While the article was not critical of Biedroń's decision to be open about his sexuality, it did remark upon the uphill battle he would face given Poland's overwhelming social conservatism. He remained an activist for SLD for many years, despite unsuccessful attempts to represent the party in Warsaw's city council in 2002 and as part of the Polish legislature in 2005. In addition to working with SLD during his college years, he worked with the local Olsztyn chapter of the Lambda Association, which at the time was the only major LGBT organization

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[111] SLD has now fused with Biedroń's former party Wiosna and another progressive party called Razem (Together).
[112] http://www.zw.com.pl/artykul/149033.html?print=tak, Accessed 8 Mar 2021.

operating in Poland. When Poland held its first LGBT Pride event in Warsaw in 2001—a small gathering of about 300 people— Biedroń was one of only two politically affiliated individuals to attend the march, demonstrating his early commitment to challenging Poland's social and political norms.

Biedroń's political mission truly started to gain traction, however, in the newly burgeoning world of NGOs that had been steadily growing since Poland's transition from state socialism. In September of 2001 Biedroń co-founded KPH and served as the organization's president until February 2009. According to a document released by KPH in 2008, the primary goals of the organization throughout those initial years were to help foster tolerant attitudes towards sexual minorities in Poland, fight discrimination and bullying, and abolish instances of anti-LGBT prejudices in various institutions including but not limited to schools and the Polish legal system through legislation. Although many of these early efforts were not successful, they showed that KPH and Biedroń were eager to make LGBT issues —which up to this point were primarily framed apolitically— political issues. By doing so, they were bringing the struggle to realize rights for sexual minorities, and thereby expand the boundaries of Polish national identity, out of the realm of charity and into the realm of official policy[113].

Thus, one of KPH's founding statements said that the organization's mission was highly political and specifically mentioned legalizing same-sex partnerships:

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[113] Additionally, the organization ran several awareness campaigns, including the 2008 Festival for Rainbow Families, which was organized in Warsaw in order to show everyday Poles that families with same-sex parents existed and were similar to those that adhered to the heteronormative nuclear family model. It also helped organize the formation of a Queer studies course that featured prominent Polish academics who wrote on the topics of gender and sexuality. The course, which was run by KPH and the Equality Foundation, was motivated by the dearth of university level programs focusing on queer and/or gender studies in Poland.

> Public discussion on gay and lesbian issues and increased social representation for all sexual minorities, as well as, most importantly, political lobbying that would lead to introducing the concept of same-sex partnerships (quoted in O'Dwyer 2018).

Embracing the political challenge of introducing same-sex partnerships legislation demonstrated an early attempt on behalf of KPH to challenge the legitimacy of the Church and its place in steering Polish norms and laws that have worked to constrict the boundaries of Polish identity. Given that Biedroń already had some experience working with the center-left political party SLD, during his time with KPH he made sure that the organization took political lobbying and policy work seriously. According to early interviews with members of KPH conducted by Ireneusz Krzemiński and team of researchers in 2006, many of those involved with the organization credited Biedroń with its politically motivated goals (Krzemiński et.al 2006, cf. O'Dwyer 2018). However, realizing these goals in the early years of KPH proved difficult because of the lack of adequate funding for such organizations. Like many NGOs that existed in post-communist Europe, the internal organization was informal and funding scarce. Much of the labor in the earliest years of the organization's existence was provided by volunteers, and given the blatantly political goals of KPH (unlike the goals of groups such as Lambda Warsaw that focused more on charitable works) it was unable to attain funding from government institutions.

Despite these difficulties, KPH managed to remain successful largely due to transnational ties, especially with E.U. institutions, particularly the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) of Europe. KPH soon became more active politically by introducing anti-discrimination measures in parliament and attempting to have the Sejm consider legislation recognizing same-sex partnerships. Although Poland still does not collect data on hate crimes against sexual minorities, nor officially recognize same-sex partnerships, the politically motivated actions of KPH during Biedroń's time as the organization's president were some of the earliest attempts to

fundamentally reshape the boundaries of national identity through the advocacy of rights for sexual minorities.

However, as was detailed in chapter 1, KPH and its various initiatives were met with hostility by the Church, the Right and Far-Right, and conservative segments of Polish society. Thus, a lengthy article titled "Gays and Lesbians in Poland- a minority on the attack" published in eKAI in 2004, criticized the activities of KPH and Biedroń for trying to force society to accept homosexuality as normal. The article discussed and criticized many positions of LGBT rights organizations, characterizing them as a dangerous and threatening minority:

> The discussion on the postulates of gays and lesbians, the problem of tolerance towards minorities and their borders, or the rights and privileges of people with a homosexual orientation is becoming more and more popular in Poland…The conflict between this minority and the rest of society results from the fact that, using the rights that society has given them, it does not accept the norms in force and tries to change these norms with various methods, which in turn will lead to changes in civilization (eKAI, 6/15/2004)[114].

Resistance to the mission of KPH was therefore palpable as soon as it was clear the organization had politically motivated, legislative goals. These goals were seen as a threat to Poland. Importantly, this article directly refers to "borders" or "boundaries" when discussing sexual minorities ("granic" in Polish), implying a separation between them and the rest of Polish society. Yet despite the rampant backlash from the Polish Right, Biedroń continued his political mission to expand the boundaries of Polish identity until his retirement from the organization in 2009.

Soon after stepping down as president of KPH and cutting his political ties with SLD, Biedroń affiliated himself with the progressive Palikot movement. The Palikot movement proved

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[114] https://ekai.pl/geje-i-lesbijki-w-polsce-mniejszosc-w-natarciu/, Accessed 10 Mar 2020.

to be Biedroń's major vehicle to recognition in not only Poland but around the world, as he made history by becoming the first openly gay member of parliament in Polish history. This development was not only news in Poland, as numerous other countries published articles commemorating this important milestone in Polish history[115]. Once elected, Biedroń served as a representative of the Palikot movement —which later evolved into the party known as Your Movement (Twój Ruch)— until the end of 2014.

Once a member of parliament, Biedroń expanded his progressive efforts by focusing not only on issues pertaining to the LGBT community, but also increased equality for women, making human rights issues in general more salient, and introducing protections for animals. Most important for our purposes, however, the Palikot movement and Biedroń along with it expressed a strong anti-clerical stance and believed that the role of the Church in Polish society should be diminished. Indeed, Biedroń is a known atheist and has been forthright with this perspective throughout his political career. Thus, in 2013, Biedroń alongside seven of his colleagues in the Palikot Movement filed a lawsuit in order to have the Sejm remove the cross that hangs above the main exit of the legislative chamber[116]. When asked about his decision to join in on the lawsuit, Biedroń stated that while he believes everyone has the right to practice their own religion, he did not find the chambers of a government that is supposed to serve a secular state to be an appropriate place to hang a cross. This perspective mirrored his sentiments on the topic when asked about the Sejm's cross in 2012:

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[115] The Palikot movement was also a vehicle for the election of Anna Grodzka, the first transgender MP in Poland and Europe.

[116] Part of the controversy regarding the cross is that is was placed in the legislative chamber surreptitiously overnight in 1997 by members of the now defunct political party Solidarity Electoral Action. It has been controversial ever since, and although the cross still hangs in the Sejm, progressive political parties still call for its removal.

> I think that the president should avoid flaunting religion in public. This is a private matter. Of course, privately, each of us has and should have the right to practice our religion…[but] I believe the parliament should be a place where we respect our diversity. If in this parliament we serve the secular state, we follow the Constitution, then this cross should disappear (Wprost, 7/9/2012)[117].

Not surprisingly, Biedroń and the anti-clerical, socially progressive agenda of the Palikot movement were seen as highly controversial to the Polish Right and Catholic Church, and publications such as *eKAI* and *Gość Niedzielny* published numerous articles at the time condemning their agenda and initiatives. Biedroń's increased notoriety as a progressive and openly gay member of parliament also frustrated conservative members of the populace, as the following letter to the editor of *Gość Niedzielny* demonstrates. The author of this letter expresses frustration that instead of showing footage of a pilgrimage to the city of Piekary Śląskie, the main program of TVP news instead focused on Biedroń and a pro-family policy he and Palikot were pursuing:

> What happened to the media, what happened to journalists? How far will we go in this sick […] political correctness? How long will we witness the creation of a reality that is sick, distorted and without God? How long with our silence will we allow the creation of an artificial caricature that is not the real face of our country? Beautiful pictures could be seen on the Silesian roads on Sunday! Parish pilgrimages that stretch for kilometers, thousands of cyclists, hundreds of coaches. And in Piekary itself… comforting words encouraging us to defend our roots, our traditions and our culture. To protect our children from homopropaganda and harmful attempts by the rulers.
>
> Unfortunately, in [the news] on the material about pro-family policy, none other than the declared homosexual MP - Robert Biedroń. Oh yes! This one knows how to raise children and the difficulties associated with it, like no one else!
>
> In the next pilgrimage to Piekary Śląskie, we have to wear rainbow scarves and dresses (Gość Niedzielny, 5/27/2013)[118].

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[117] https://www.wprost.pl/332710/biedron-krzyz-w-sejmie-to-paranoja.html, Accessed 10 Mar 2021.
[118] https://www.gosc.pl/doc/1572133.W-TV-zamiast-Piekar-Biedron, Accessed 11 Mar 2021.

This letter depicts the frustration felt by religious and conservative Poles that events such as pilgrimages, that to them represent an essential and important aspect of Polish identity, are not only being sidelined but replaced by a focus on "homopropaganda." Further, as this letter shows, the primary figure in the center of this unwelcome transition is Robert Biedroń. Thus, at a time when Biedroń and the Palikot movement were attempting to redefine the boundaries of Polish national identity by introducing progressive legislation, advocating for the support of sexual and other minority groups in the public sphere, and criticizing the strong role of the Church in society, the resistance to this mission continued.

After the dissolution of the Palikot movement due to their parliamentary losses, Biedroń was elected mayor, in 2014, of the small northwestern town of Słupsk. Given that he was now in charge of overseeing the functioning of a city, his efforts at this time became mostly focused on, inter alia, issues such as solving the city's budget issues. During his time as mayor, Biedroń was known for engaging earnestly with residents of Słupsk, and garnered attention for frequently holding meetings with constituents in public areas on a red couch. Although he did not seek re-election once his term was up in 2018, citing a desire to return to the national stage, polls at the time put him at over 60% approval by the time he left office.

While Biedroń's tenure in Ślupsk was not centered on engaging with and expanding the boundaries of Polish identity as his time in the Sejm had been, it is still highly significant for the story being told here. Biedroń's status as the first openly gay Polish mayor —as well as his status as having been the first openly gay member of parliament— was a consistent repudiation of the idea that those with non-heteronormative sexualities were harmful to both Poland and Polish identity and that all of Polish society was homophobic. Biedroń's rise to political prominence at this time therefore showed many Poles that sexual minorities were not only obviously part of

Polish society, but that they could effectively work in positions of leadership for the betterment of the country. Thus, although Law and Justice still enjoyed support among a large segment of the Polish population at this time, Biedroń had —beginning with his time in the Sejm and continuing with his role as mayor of Słupsk— helped initiate a progressive movement focused on delegitimizing the restrictive visions of Polish identity maintained by much of the Church and the Polish Right.

In order to continue carrying this message forward after his time spent in Słupsk, Biedroń began an initiative called "Brainstorming with Biedroń" that consisted of large meetings with Poles in different regions of the country. In these meetings, Biedroń and participants would sit together and think about ways that they could help realize a more progressive and open Poland. "Brainstorming with Biedroń" events became extremely popular and sometimes saw attendance in the thousands, and Biedroń referred to the gatherings as the start of a pro-democratic political movement (Alternative UK, 9/10/2018). Within a few short months, Biedroń and his allies announced the formation of the political party Spring (Wiosna) which would serve as the vehicle to help realize the goals of this inchoate movement.

Criticizing the Catholic Nation

While the news of Biedroń's new political party was not a complete surprise, as he had been discussing the possibility during his "Brainstorming with Biedroń" events, its official announcement brought excitement and optimism from progressives and liberals alike. Political scientist Aleks Szczerbiak, writing in his Polish politics blog, saw some hope that Spring would help to reinvigorate the Polish left which had practically disappeared from the electoral map after 2005 (Szczerbiak 2019). Szczerbiak further noted that Biedroń had done much to try and distance himself from the standard political dichotomy of Left and Right, instead calling himself

a progressive who desires to start a grassroots movement and party. However, at the same time he noted that while Biedroń's economically progressive agenda might be appealing to some traditionally conservative voters, his social liberalism would almost certainly be a non-starter for them. Thus, while excitement abounded with Spring's initial launch, there was legitimate concern from the outset that the enthusiasm would soon die down and the party would collapse much like the Palikot movement had only a few years earlier[119].

Despite the concerns from scholars and political pundits, Biedroń pushed ahead with a program which he claimed would bring about a new Poland. In addition to attacking Law and Justice, Biedroń focused his criticisms on members of the center-right Civic Platform who he argued were only committed to returning to the status quo that existed before Law and Justice came to power in 2015. While Spring's platform deviated from that of the Civic Platform in many ways, the most significant and controversial aspect of it was the strongly anti-clerical stance which sought to undo the tightly knit and deeply rooted ties between Church and state in Poland. Such a move was at once practical, in that it sought to bring an end to state funding for the Church in order to redirect the funds elsewhere. Yet it was also an attempt to fundamentally redraw the boundaries of Polish national identity by attempting to undermine the legitimacy of the Polak-Katolik myth which helped to perpetuate narrow conceptions of "Polishness" that excluded ideological others such as Polish sexual minorities.

Given Spring's strongly anti-clerical stance, it was not long before the platform and Biedroń drew vehement criticism from the Church and Polish Right. Thus, within days of the

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[119] Numerous commentators, including Szczerbiak, noted that they were wary of a new party organized around a single individual, citing instances where such efforts in the past had seen little success. Further, there was much concern on the Polish Left at this time regarding Wiosna and it taking votes away from the primary opposition to Law and Justice, the Civic Platform.

party's official launch, the Ordo Iuris published a series of objections to the platform, claiming that much of it was unconstitutional. In its criticism, the Ordo Iuris objected to four aspects of the platform on constitutional grounds: the push for less restrictive abortion laws, the liquidation of the "conscience clause" which allows doctors to deny performing health services to those inconsistent with their conscience (which many have argued leads to discrimination against sexual minorities), the introduction of same-sex marriage, and the separation of church and state (largely by removing religious education from schools). An article published in *Do Rzeczy* only days after the launch of Spring summarized the views of the Ordo Iuris regarding this final point:

> The postulate to oust religion lessons from public schools is directly inconsistent with the binding Constitution and the Concordat. Pursuant to the Basic Law, the religion of a church or other religious association with a regulated legal situation may be taught at school. At the same time, the right to use religious education within the public education system is related to the parents' right to religious and moral education of their children and the child's right to education (Do Rzeczy, 2/6/2019)[120].

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyze the legal arguments offered by the Ordo Iuris, they are nonetheless important because they demonstrate precisely how entwined Church and State are in Poland. What is ironic is that the institute, and those supporting their arguments, appear oblivious to the fact that Biedroń and Spring are criticizing precisely that these ideas are grounded in the nation's founding document in the first place. It is highly unlikely that the strategists for Spring were completely unaware of the fact that these aspects of their platform went against certain facets of Poland's constitution. Indeed, this was largely the point: to show that certain ideas that have been enshrined in Poland's constitution were harmful to

[120] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/92585/powazne-zastrzezenia-ws-partii-biedronia-jej-program-narusza-konstytucje.html, Accessed 12 Mar 2021.

vulnerable minority communities and therefore needed to be altered at a fundamental level. In this way, Biedroń and Spring were attempting to not only stretch and soften the boundaries of "Polishness," but redraw them around a fundamentally new conception of what being Polish can, and should, mean.

Biedroń's desire to reshape the boundaries of "Polishness" was evident at a Spring campaign event in Poznań, a large city in northwestern Poland, that I attended in early May of 2019 at the height of campaigns for the European Parliament. Before being admitted to the large auditorium where Biedroń and the local Spring candidate for Poznań, Sylwia Spurek, were going to speak, I noticed several people wearing t-shirts with either the rainbow Polish eagle or a rainbow Polish flag. Further, while many of the volunteers for the event appeared to be young university students, there were also several seniors in the crowd. The event began with a long and enthusiastic speech from Biedroń, which focused almost entirely on how he believed it was time that the Church stop making all of the important social and political decisions for Poles. He used the term "pathology" numerous times in reference to the Church, and the idea that the Church was a harmful institution that was undermining the rights of many Poles —by restricting abortion access, criticizing sexual minorities and same-sex unions, and demanding an end to sexual education in public schools— was underscored intensely. Biedroń then spoke specifically about his desire to, following the arrest of Elżbieta Podleśna which occurred only 4 days prior to this event, abolish the article in the criminal code concerning the offending of religious sentiment. By doing so, Biedroń was showing his willingness to challenge and change some of the key laws that keep Polish society fused with the Church, which is exactly what the Ordo Iuris and his critics on the Polish right were afraid of.

In addition, Biedroń attacked the Church for the numerous pedophilia scandals that had recently been revealed involving Polish priests, an approach that I will further detail shortly. For now, however, it is worth noting that this criticism was passionately leveraged at this nationally broadcast campaign event, showing how eager Biedroń and Spring were to challenge traditional conceptions of "Polishness." Importantly, throughout the entire speech Biedroń continued to proclaim that Poles were going to need courage in order to see this platform through[121]. Following Biedroń, progressive lawyer and feminist activist Sylwia Spurek[122] spoke at length about how Spring was the right choice for those who wanted equality for Polish women. She consistently appealed to other countries in the European Union whose rights for minorities were far more progressive than Poland's, and the need for Poland to "catch up" with its peers in these realms. To close, a young high school student spoke about the state of sexual education in Poland, which she referred to as a "joke" due to the fact that the Church still has so much influence over the curriculum. Throughout the entire event, participants waved both Polish and E.U. flags and loudly cheering for the proposals to make Poland a more progressive, tolerant, and above all secular nation.

Similar enthusiasm was palpable during the days I spent traveling through southwestern Poland with Biedroń and other Spring candidates on their tour bus. I visited a total of 5 cities with the campaign, and in each city the bus was greeted with excited supporters of all ages who were eager to take a photo with Biedroń once he emerged. When addressing his supporters in the city of Legnica, Biedroń emphasized that he was visiting smaller cities in order to show that not

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[121] My field notes from this event note that the two most frequently used terms in this speech were "pathology" and "courage," both in reference to the fight against the Catholic Church's influence in Polish society.

[122] Spurek won her election for European Parliament and is still serving as an MP in Brussels although now with the Green party

only Warsaw mattered, and that all of Poland was important. After his initial address, Biedroń and the crowd of supporters walked to a nearby botanical garden. Poles of various ages were present at his address and joined in the walk, showing that Biedroń's message resonated among citizens of various ages as well as those who lived in smaller cities. The desire to see a more progressive Poland no longer tied to the Church was therefore not only a sentiment felt in large and liberal cities such as Warsaw, Kraków, and Poznań.

Yet while Biedroń's comments regarding the separation of Church and state were cheered and applauded by the attendants at his various rallies and press conferences, this aspect of the Spring platform drew ire from the Polish Right. In an interview on TVP in early February 2019, a member of parliament from the Right wing, nationalist party Kukiz'15[123] claimed that by advocating for increased abortion access and abolishing the conscience clause (which, as detailed above, allows medical practitioners to discriminate against patients on the basis of sexual orientation) Biedroń was ushering in a totalitarian regime:

> I hear that Robert Biedroń says, 'I will defend the constitution' and in the same breath says 'I want to introduce a mechanism for a totalitarian state, eliminating the conscience clause for doctors…[but] the thing that absolutely shocked me, Robert Biedroń wants to introduce the kidding of unborn children up to the 12th week of pregnancy (Do Rzeczy, 2/10/2019)[124].

Thus, much like member of the League of Polish Families, Law and Justice and other Right-wing groups in earlier years, the Kukiz'15 politician claims that the Church and conservative Poles are the ones under siege by the dictates of progressive politicians like Biedroń.

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[123] This party, which has only had moderate electoral successes, was formed by former punk rock singer Paweł Kukiz. It is known for being anti-establishment, nationalist and in favor of Christian democracy.
[124] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/93106/rzymkowski-biedron-chce-panstwa-totalitarnego.html, Accessed 12 Mar 2021.

Despite such criticism, Spring continued to focus on its anti-clerical message throughout the election campaign cycle. Biedroń soon began calling for specific actions against the Church, such as prohibiting the state's financing of the Church, higher tax rates for the Church and for priests, and continuing the call for removing religious education from public schools. On Easter of 2019 one of the candidates for E.U. parliament on the Spring ticket Krzysztof Śmiszek —who is also Biedroń's partner— posted a video on Facebook in which he stated that that instead of painting Easter Eggs, he was holding a meeting with the Spring youth group in order to discuss politics. The video features Śmiszek sitting on a beach with Biedroń and a group of young volunteers, and in it he says:

> Apparently, young people are not involved in politics and are not very interested in public affairs. See how many there are? This is Monday's Easter Meeting of Spring [Wiosna]. We talk about politics instead of sacred eggs (Do Rzeczy, 4/23/2019)[125].

This statement is significant because to a large number of Poles, Easter is still considered the most important religious holiday in Poland. However, in this brief statement Śmiszek shows that he, Biedroń, and a number of their young volunteers would rather sit and discuss political issues than engage in the traditional, religious Easter rituals.

The attacks on the Church became the most ardent, however, near the end of the campaign after the release of the controversial film *Tylko Nie Mów Niekomu (Just Don't Tell Anyone)* which documented several instances of sexual abuse in the Polish Catholic Church. One the film was released, the Spring campaign arranged multiple screenings, one of which I attended while following the campaign in the city Wrocław. The film focused on the lived experiences of

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[125] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/100588/gadamy-o-polityce-zamiast-swiecic-jajka-znamienna-wpadka-smiszka.html, Accessed 13 Mar 2021.

several Poles who had been sexually assaulted by priests, and in some instances documented the victims confronting the priests that had abused them. During the post-film discussion in Wrocław, numerous attendees pointed to the need to show the film to as many people as possible, and one older man stated that it was important that "Poland cannot be seen as needing the Church" (5/14/2019). In addition, numerous participants noted that one of the most important aspects of the film, in addition to sharing the stories of those who were victimized, was revealing how complicit the state had been in trying to cover up the abuse. The film proved to be an important tool for the Spring campaign in attempting to further delegitimize the place of the Church in Polish society.

Soon after the release of the film, Biedroń announced his desire to start a fund for all of the victims of the church. At a press conference, he stated that:

> *Just Don't Tell Anyone* shows what has been swept under the rug for many years. Politicians who we trusted would guard our safety, the safety of our children, and the safety of our youth…today is the time of doomsday. If the political class does not rise to the occasion and does not do everything in our power to clarify the matter, to judge the guilty, and to compensate the victims, then we will lose all credibility in society. We, as 'Spring', have the courage to call a spade a spade. We will not give up, we will not kneel in front of any bishop, we will not be scared (cited in Do Rzeczy, 5/12/2019)[126].

This important statement shows that despite the Church's status in Poland, Biedroń and Spring had no intent on relenting on their criticisms. Instead, given the gravity of the film and its revelations, Biedroń and Spring's struggle against the Church became much stronger. Indeed, during the time I spent following the campaign in May of 2019, nearly every press conference and speech I attended were focused on the Church and on the film *Just Don't Tell Anyone.* The

[126] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/102495/dzisiaj-przyszedl-czas-sadu-ostatecznego-biedron-chce-powolania-komisji-ds-ofiar-kosciola.html, Accessed 13 Mar 2021.

first press conference I attended, in the small town of Opole, was set in front of a large Cathedral on a rainy Sunday morning. Before the press conference began I spoke briefly with Krzysztof Śmiszek, who informed me that filming in front of a Cathedral on Sunday was very important symbolically for their campaign. Biedroń and Śmiszek, along with several supporters holding different Spring signs and banners, were the focal point of the press conference and both gave speeches regarding the need to both end funding for the Church and hold it responsible for decades of hidden sexual abuse. In front of them stood a banner which listed Spring's platform regarding the Church, and hanging on the banner were several pairs of children's shoes.

Image 5.1: Wiosna event in Opole, May 2019. In addition to posters featuring the names of Wiosna candidates, participants held posters that read “Finally Change” (Nareszcie Zmiana) and “Secular Society” (Świeckie Państwo). Image by author.

Image 5.2: Wiosna Event in Opole, May 2019. The poster in the center of this this photo enumerates Wiosna's platform regarding the Church, and the banner the young man in holding reads "Stop Financing of the Church." Hanging on the poster are a few pairs of children's shoes. Image by author.

Once the speeches ended, a reporter asked Biedroń whether he was concerned that he would likely be seen as attacking Poland for his views on the Church. He responded that he wasn't, as he was only attacking the Church. While Biedroń's response to this question is

obviously important, the question itself is also highly significant. The reporter's question demonstrated that although the Spring campaign is clearly leveraging its attack against the Church and not Poland more generally, many people still see the two as intimately related. Although the reporter did not necessarily share this viewpoint, his question made it clear that many Poles see an attack on the Church as an attack on Poland and Polish national identity. On the other hand, Biedroń responded by trying to quickly disentangle the two, as part of his mission and the mission of Spring has been to dislodge this implicit association in people's minds.

The various proposals regarding the Church and Biedroń's commentary regarding the pedophilia scandals were met with fierce backlash from the Polish Right as well as the Church. Law and Justice politician and member of the Constitutional Tribunal, Krystyna Pawłowicz, wrote on Twitter that Biedroń should "gallop on his knees, apologize for the blasphemy and convert…because the six colored rainbow will not save you" (cited in Do Rzeczy, 5/12/2019)[127]. In an opinion piece published in eKAI, Bishop Henryk Tomasik lambasted Spring's anti-clerical platform saying that it was an insult to believers. In the same text, Tomasik went further and claimed if Spring's platform were realized —particularly the aspects attempting to weaken the Church's influence— it would effectively erase the history of Poland:

> If someone is spreading the slogan of separating the Church from the state, it is about separating believers from state structures. It is depriving believers of the right to participate in public life by professing their faith. The slogan about separating the Church from the state is an insult to believers, it is an insult against so many lay people who participate in building the Polish society. To disconnect the Church from the state also means to exclude the Mother of God

[127] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/102511/pawlowicz-do-biedronia-galopem-na-kolana-przepraszaj-za-bluznierstwa.html, Accessed 13 Mar 2021.

> from our history and from literature all religious elements (eKAI, 2/18/2019)[128].

Despite their provocative campaign, Spring had only mild success once the election came to pass, electing only three people —Robert Biedroń, Sylwia Spurek, and sociologist Maciej Gdula— in E.U. parliament. Soon after the E.U. parliamentary elections, the party fused with SLD and another progressive party called Together (Razem) to form a coalition known as The Left (Lewica). Together, The Left managed to place nineteen people in the Polish parliament in the 2019 election. However, despite its modest electoral success in the E.U. parliamentary elections, the emergence of Spring and its strongly anti-clerical stance proved a highly important and controversial moment in Poland's recent political history.

In 2020, The Left made Biedroń their candidate for President of Poland, but his nomination was quickly overshadowed once Mayor of Warsaw Rafał Trzaskowsi of the Civic Platform party announced his candidacy. Biedroń continued to level criticisms at both Law and Justice and the Civic Platform, and in an interview with OKO press, criticized both Trzaskowski and the Civic Platform for not boldly standing up for minority rights:

> If we are in favor of a woman's right to decide about her body, also in terms of abortion, we must be aware that the Platform will not solve it. If we want equal rights for LGBT people, the Platform will not solve it. It does not want to because it is Right-wing. Of course, some of us fall for their rhetoric when they go to the podium and say 'we are open and tolerant'…then the elections pass and nothing is resolved. I have fought for the rights of LGBT people many times and would lose because of the votes of the Civic Platform (Oko Press, 6/19/2020)[129].

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[128] https://www.ekai.pl/bp-tomasik-oddzielanie-kosciola-od-panstwa-to-obrazanie-ludzi-wierzacych/, Accessed 14 Mar 2021.
[129] https://oko.press/biedron-duopol-po-pis-gniecie-prawa-osob-lgbt-i-kobiet-wywiad/, Accessed 14 Mar 2021.

In addition, Biedroń not only maintained his criticisms of the Church, but went a step further in an interview with Polsat news by directly implicating John Paul II in the Church's sexual abuse scandals. In the interview, he said:

> I would like us to talk more about the victims of the Church. It is the only institution that protects pedophiles in an organized manner. I would be glad if, for example, a square named after the victims of John Paul II was created, because it is the victims who deserve compensation (cited in Do Rzeczy, 11/14/2020)[130].

Thus, instead of scaling back his criticisms and visions for a different model of "Polishness," Biedroń has continued to reaffirm them, and criticizing John Paul II —Poland's first and only Pope and one of the most celebrated figures in Poland— shows the dedication to this challenging mission.

Conclusion

In this final chapter I have demonstrated how Robert Biedroń has been consistently challenging and attempting to reshape the boundaries of Polish national identity in the realms of activism and formal politics. His work with KPH began reshaping these boundaries by advocating for the rights of Polish sexual minorities, and his political work with both the Palikot movement and Spring worked to fortify this mission. This mission was taken further through efforts to not only question the role of the Church in Polish politics and society more broadly, but to fundamentally change the relationship between Church and state in Poland by greatly diminishing the role of the former. In doing so, Biedroń has criticized some of the most sacred ideas and figures in recent Polish history, making him and his movement a beacon of hope

[130] https://dorzeczy.pl/kraj/161259/biedron-cieszylbym-sie-gdyby-powstal-np-plac-imienia-ofiar-jana-pawla-ii.html, Accessed 17 Mar 2021.

amongst progressives and an agent of chaos to the Church and Right. Crucially, given his status as an openly gay man, Biedroń has shown that sexual minorities in Poland not only exist, but can become central figures in the struggle to reshape the boundaries of what being "Polish" means not only through activism but in the realm of official politics.

Conclusion

On the morning of October 3rd, 2016, approximately 250,000 Polish women and progressive male supporters took to the streets to protest a near total ban on abortion in Poland. The proposed ban, which was introduced via a citizens' initiative of pro-life activists and supported by the Catholic Church, sought to criminalize women who obtained abortions even in the case of rape or if the fetus was severely damaged (Narkowicz 2016). In what was referred to as the "Black Protest" (Czarny Protest), participants donned all black attire and flooded the streets of Polish cities to protest the proposed law. Soon after, images began surfacing online showing thousands of people gathered closely together in Warsaw's historic old town holding umbrellas, and open umbrellas soon became an important symbol of the Black Protest movement[131]. Given the magnitude and tenacity of the demonstration, and the overwhelming societal support for it, the Justice and Human Rights Committee of the Sejm soon announced it would throw out the proposed policy.

However, the success of the the Black Protest in October of 2016 was far from the end of the fight for pro-choice groups in Poland and the organizing movement "Women's Strike" (Strajk Kobiet) that helped to organize the Black Protest events. Thus, on the one-year anniversary of the protest, the organization "Save Women" (Ratujmy Kobiet) organized another

[131] At first, the umbrellas were utilized for practical reasons as the large protest in Warsaw occurred during an autumn rain. However, in order to show that they would not back down from their stance even after the initial ruling was thrown out, activists claimed that they "would not close their umbrellas," thereby making open umbrellas a significant symbol of the movement.

protest in Kraków in order to solidify the message of the Black Protest as well as challenge petitions that had been circulating in order to introduce another restrictive anti-abortion bill (Kraków Post, 10/3/2017)[132]. The issue remains contentious today, as in January of 2021 the government announced it would begin enforcing a new law that made abortion illegal in the case of severe defects and potentially lethal illness in the fetus, which account for the majority of abortion cases in Poland[133]. Large scale protests organized by "Women's Strike" and numerous other feminist organizations therefore continue to animate the streets of Poland and show that resistance to the ruling government's strictly conservative and Catholic agenda remains dedicated despite formidable opposition.

While the umbrella has remained an important symbol of these protests and Poland's feminist movement, another symbol commonly featured at such protests is the rainbow flag. Indeed, it has become common to see renditions of the primary symbol of the "Women's Strike" (a silhouette of a woman's head with a lightening bolt) with the lightening bolt decorated with rainbow colors. The struggle for women's rights and LGBT rights in Poland are therefore intimately connected, both because they stand for increased recognition and rights for minority and vulnerable populations, but also because they both stand adamantly against the traditional and conservative understandings of Polish identity that relegate women and sexual minorities to the status of second-class citizens. Both the LGBT and feminist movement in Poland are therefore two important beacons of democracy in a country that has been experiencing democratic backsliding since the election of Law and Justice in 2015.

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[132] http://www.krakowpost.com/18264/2017/10/abortion-ban-czarny-protest-anniversary, Accessed 19 Apr 2021.

[133] Enforcement of this law followed a ruling by Poland's constitutional tribunal in October of 2020 that ruled a 1993 law allowing for such abortions unconstitutional.

Figure 6.1: Women's Strike Poster. The text reads "Only United Are We Invincible." Image taken from: https://www.eska.pl/krakow/ogolnopolski-strajk-kobiet-30-10-2020-co-sie-bedzie-dzialo-w-krakowie-mapa-google-aa-mYj1-TryS-576D.html, Accessed 19 Apr 2021.

While Poland's democratic backsliding has most notably included Law and Justice's attempts to alter the judiciary, minority rights also factor greatly into the continued struggle to maintain Polish democracy. The Polish Right and Far-Right's vilification of sexual minorities and women's rights exhibit an ethno-populist impulse that has helped bolster the messages and ideas of extremist groups while delegitimizing and silencing the voices of the opposition as well those advocating for minority rights (Vachudova 2020). Such attempts were evident when Law and Justice politicians called for the arrests of Elżbieta Podleśna and other activists who, according to their interpretation of the criminal code, had profaned national symbols through their aesthetic revolt. Given the important roles that minority rights and representation play in the realization and maintenance of democracy (Benhabib et.al 1996), the rainbow flag has become a staple at pro-democracy demonstrations in Poland since Law and Justice first came to power in 2015.

Figure 6.2: Demonstration Opposing Law and Justice Featuring Rainbow Flags. Visible are several Polish and E.U. flags in addition to three rainbow flags. Image taken from: https://www.neweurope.eu/article/protests-grow-against-polands-new-government/, Accessed 19 Apr 2021.

The story of Poland's LGBT community and their attempts to expand the boundaries of national identity is therefore also one about the struggle for the maintenance of democracy in the context of encroaching authoritarianism. One need not look far from Poland to see how the gradual eradication of democratic norms, in countries such as Hungary, Russia and the United States, has emboldened censures and attacks on sexual minorities. Thus, following nearly a decade of democratic backsliding, Hungary's parliament voted to end the legal recognition of transgender and interersex people, choosing to define gender as determined solely by biology. In addition to the introduction of formal legislation, Hungary's ruling party recently forced a disclaimer onto a children's book written by a noted LGBT activist. The disclaimer stated that

the book went against "traditional" family values for discussing non-heteronormative relationships and labeled it as "homosexual propaganda." In Russia, federal law has prohibited the promotion of "homosexual propaganda" since June 11th, 2013[134]. Similar attacks are also currently occurring in the post-Trump United States as individual states attempt to pass anti-transgender legislation that impinge upon the rights of trans citizens. Therefore, at the broadest level, this dissertation serves to underline the idea that minority rights and the acceptance of diversity are important aspects of a well-functioning democracy, and that the erosion of the latter often entails the gradual eradication of the former.

Empirical and Theoretical Contributions

My research has sought to understand how Polish sexual minorities navigate and understand their national identities in the context of ardent nationalist sentiment that frames them as enemies of and threats to the nation. In addition, I have explored how and why the utilization of salient national symbols, by both sexual minorities and their allies, in protests constitutes an aesthetic revolt that seeks to redefine the boundaries of Polish national identity. I concluded by showing how the work of Robert Biedroń and his social and political movement has also been instrumental in expanding the boundaries of "Polishness" both by advocating for sexual minorities and strongly criticizing the role of the Church in Polish society.

Everyday Nationhood, Nationalism, and Sexuality:

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[134] This law, similar to the "stop pedophilia" bill recently introduced in Poland, punishesthe promotion of "nontraditional" sexual relations to minors, which critics often argue is a means to deprive children and young adults any information about LGBT people.

The everyday nationhood tradition began as a way to study how ordinary, "everyday" members of a national community identify with the nation and national identity. In so doing, scholars interested in everyday nationhood moved away from the macro-analytic perspectives that had been the traditional approach to questions of nationalism and national identity. This traditional approach tended to examine nationalism as either a political ideology, the contingent outcome of modernization, a cultural construct realized through discursive practices, or "as a site for the material and symbolic struggles over the definition of national inclusion and exclusion" (Fox and Miller Idriss 2008: 536). While providing ample insights into the ways in which nationalism came to be from *above,* such research tended to neglect how, and the extent to which, nationalist projects and ideas entered into and impacted the lives of ordinary citizens. Thus, although scholars tended to agree that nationalism was a mass phenomenon, much of the scholarship on the topic had neglected the masses themselves as a focal point for analysis (Whitmeyer 2002).

This point is an important one, as much scholarship on nationalism tended towards having a top-down bias that often took for granted the idea that national subjects simply attuned themselves to the national messaging coming from political entrepreneurs (Fox 2018). As a result, national subjects were treated as "nationalist dupes" (Fox 2017; cf. Garfinkel 1964) instead of active agents who, although they might be somewhat constrained by culture and history, had minds of their own and did not necessarily fall in line with the national status quo. This notion therefore brought Eric Hobsbawm to claim that although nationalism is "essentially constructed from above, [it] …cannot be understood unless also analyzed from below, that is in terms of the assumptions, hopes, needs, longings, and interests of ordinary people, which are not necessarily national and still less nationalist" (1991:10). Following this reasoning, scholars

examining the "everyday" aspects of nationhood have uncovered numerous ways in which national subjects identify with the nation as well as how important their "nationness" is to them.

One of the shortcomings of this literature, however, is that it has often taken the idea of the "ethnic majority" for granted. As such, studies in the everyday nationhood tradition have tended to focus their analyses on national identifications among those who are considered as part of a given ethnic majority. Yet the concept of an "ethnic majority" is an elusive one, as not all members of this majority enjoy the same status and privileges. By studying them as if they do, scholars of everyday nationhood are bound to overlook some important aspects of subjects' lived experiences and the ways in which they recreate, or do not recreate, nationhood. Some of the leading scholars in the everyday nationhood field have noted this trend. Thus, in the conclusion of his paper examining national identifications among the "ethnic majority" in England, Michael Skey claimed that "a further issue that requires greater scrutiny is the notion of the ethnic majority" (2010: 731). Further, in a recent reflection on the concept of everyday nationhood, Jon Fox noted that the tradition could certainly be criticized for "trading in crude binaries" (2018: 865).

My introduction of the term "ideological others" has therefore been an attempt to think through the muddled notion of the "ethnic majority" further. The case of Polish sexual minorities shows that although some groups are ethnically bound to the nation through citizenship and/or blood, they can still be framed as enemies of the nation and consequently "denationalized." What constitutes an "ethnic majority," then, is not always clearly demarcated through "objective" criteria such as one's citizenship, and can often be the result of discursive practices that label some as "insiders" and others as "outsiders." In its quest to examine the identifications of "ordinary" members of a given national community, the everyday nationhood literature has

reified the notion of the "ethnic majority" and overlooked the fact that not all members of this "majority" are created equal.

In the case presented here, I demonstrated how Polish sexual minorities have been consistently framed as threats to the well-being of Poland by Right-wing and Far-Right groups. In some cases, they are framed not only as threats to the Polish nation but as not truly Polish. My case therefore shows that in practice, powerful political groups can often dictate what terms such as the "ethnic majority" can mean through discourse, as well as who ought to be seen as belonging to the nation and who ought to be seen as external to it. While the rich literature examining the intersection of nationalism and sexuality has explored this topic in various contexts (Bunzl 2004; Graff 2010; Mosse 1985), its primary empirical focus has consistently been the construction of the nation through discourse and not how stigmatized members of an ethnic majority themselves navigate their relationship to the nation given their exclusion. By examining the process of ideological "othering" as well as how ideological others navigate their relationship(s) to their national identity, my dissertation has blended insights from the everyday nationhood and nationalism and sexuality traditions in order to examine national identifications among Polish sexual minorities.

My interviews demonstrated that while some respondents struggled to identify with their national identity because of its association with Far-Right nationalism, others found ways to reframe what being "Polish" meant to them. Some did so by claiming that while they still identified with aspects of Polish culture and identity, they also identified themselves as belonging to a broader, Cosmopolitan ideal. In a similar vein, other respondents were able to confidently identify with their "Polishness" because they reframed what being "Polish" meant in their own minds. For these respondents, being Polish was not necessarily tied to the

conservative, Catholic model espoused by Law and Justice and the Church, but rather was one driven by progressive ideals and values and thus open to interpretation and change. Further, the mental reframing of what the boundaries of "Polishness" could mean at an individual level can help to provide the fuel for respondent's engagement in aesthetic revolt.

Reframing "Polishness" Through Aesthetic Revolt

The concept of aesthetic revolt is a useful tool for cultural sociologists who want to understand and explain the role that cultural forms, such as national symbols and icons, play in social change. Zubrzycki, in her explication of the concept, argues that national identity can be "constructed and redefined…through popular rituals such as parades and protests where social actors manipulate and transform core symbols of the nation" (2013: 463). She adds that symbols are an important focal point of study because they "serve to focus, magnify, and exaggerate particular features of national identity, which allows social actors, in turn, to contest given representations and rearticulate new ones" (2013: 464). As such, social actors can use symbols to push forth normative claims about what the nation and national identity can and should mean.

I have argued that while Zubrzycki's concept is helpful in demonstrating why symbols can play an important role in social change efforts, its initial articulation overlooked the important role of the internal, mental worlds of those actors engaging in aesthetic revolt. This is so because Zubrzycki's study of the Quiet Revolution dealt with archival materials. Through in-depth interviews, my study showed how individual interpretations of cultural objects can change and how these intrapersonal changes factor into the complex process of aesthetic revolt. By borrowing Sewell's typology of the relationship between cultural schemas and material resources, I argued that before actors can engage with and manipulate a symbol in order to advocate for social change, they often must first be able to understand it as something that they

can utilize and manipulate. Thus, once some respondents were able to reinterpret the Polish flag in terms of a new cultural schema, they were more willing to utilize it in demonstrations as well as manipulate it in order to advocate for a reframed meaning of "Polishness."

In addition to demonstrating the role that the intrapersonal can play in helping to realize aesthetic revolt, my dissertation also shows that such revolts can take different forms. While in Zubrzycki's case protestors sought to completely renounce and redefine national identity through the beheading of St. John the Baptist and their criticism and reworking of other national symbols, the case presented here shows that aesthetic revolt need not necessitate the outright rejection of national symbols and their attendant national identity. Thus, in all of the cases discussed in chapter four, activists chose to reframe and reinterpret Polish symbols in order to show that Polish national identity can and ought to be one of openness and inclusion. This renewed understanding of what "Polishness" can mean is therefore represented through the rainbow eagle, Madonna, and the statues that had been modified by the Stop Bzdurom movement. Understanding aesthetic revolt in this way opens the door for many exciting new research questions, as future studies could explore why it is that certain forms of aesthetic revolt take place in certain times and places, as well as what factors help to enable or constrain the realization of particular forms of aesthetic revolt.

Finally, the findings from this chapter help shed new light on an important ideal-type Zubrzycki articulated in her discussion of the national sensorium between the sacred and profane modes of apprehending national mythology (2011). While in the sacred mode national mythology is experienced as a deeply emotional and often overpowering force, the profane allows for a certain amount of critical distance from the mythology and the objects that encapsulate it. The sacred mode would thus be represented by those who worship and covet a

particular symbol or icon and see it as something that cannot be criticized or altered, while those apprehending national mythology through the profane register could easily criticize, manipulate or appropriate a symbol such as the Polish flag.

Yet my data show that there is some gray area between these two registers, as a number of interview subjects, as well as those engaging in aesthetic revolt by reframing and reclaiming national symbols, fall somewhere in-between them. Given their actions and sentiments, many if not all of the activists and citizens discussed in chapter four feel enough emotional distance from national mythology that they can modify national symbols and not feel like they are doing something immoral. Yet on the other hand, many of them still *want* to feel a close emotional attachment to the nation, but struggle to do so given the ways in which the nation and national identity have been "hijacked" by the Right. As a result, they are not completely disengaging from the nation and national identity. Rather, by engaging in the less extreme form of aesthetic revolt discussed above, they are modifying the symbols so that they too can apprehend them as more sacred and feel a closeness to them again. Thus, what was once sacred to them but has been profaned because of its associations with the Far-Right, could become sacred again once it is modified to better adhere to their beliefs.

Reframing the Symbolic Boundaries of National Identity

While the concepts of everyday nationhood and aesthetic revolt are essential aspects of this dissertation, the unifying thread is the idea of symbolic boundaries. Symbolic boundaries are integral to the story being told here as they are the "tools by which individuals and groups struggle over and come to agree upon definitions of reality" (Lamont and Molnar 2002: 168). The delineation of, and agreement on, symbolic boundaries therefore determines how individuals and/or groups will frame, parse, and interpret information and come to conclusions about what

certain concepts, such as national identity, should mean. The struggle over symbolic boundaries is therefore a normative one that can have important social and political effects. In chapters one and two, I showed both how and why the Polish Right has sought to constrict the boundaries of Polish identity by adhering to the mythologized notion of the "Catholic Pole." I demonstrated how their attempts to maintain these narrow boundaries led to the denigration and stigmatization of Polish sexual minorities in various spheres of public life by framing them as threats to the nation and in some cases not truly Polish.

I then explored how sexual minorities themselves have engaged the boundaries of Polish identity. Through my examination of sexual minorities' national identifications, their aesthetic revolts, and Robert Biedroń's efforts to redefine "Polishness" both by advocating for sexual minorities and attacking the status of the Church in society, my dissertation focused on the question of how the symbolic boundaries of national identity can be challenged within a single ethno-national community. Zubrzycki's study of Polish "Philosemitism" (2016) began this task by examining the ways in which non-Jewish Poles engaged with the boundaries of Polish identity through their support of Poland's Jewish community. She showed how this was achieved through three overlapping processes (the softening, stretching and reshaping of symbolic boundaries) occurring at micro, meso, and macro levels. Following Zubrzycki, my study also adopted micro, meso and macro perspectives in its examination of symbolic boundary work by scrutinizing individual national identifications, civic protests, and efforts on behalf of Robert Biedroń to expand rights for sexual minorities and challenge the dominant role of the Church in Polish society.

The present study differed from Zubrzycki's, however, as hers did not examine how Polish Jews *themselves* navigated and worked with the symbolic boundaries of national identity.

My research therefore contributes to this new line of inquiry by emphasizing how such symbolic boundary work also occurs at the intrapersonal level and by illustrating the relationship between boundary work as it occurs at the levels of the intrapersonal identifications and social and political activism. This connection was evident in my interviews with activists who, once they managed to reframe what "Polishness" meant in their own minds, were more willing and able to engage with national symbols and use them in demonstrations and protests in order to expand the symbolic boundaries of "Polishness." The case under study here therefore shows that navigating and negotiating the boundaries of national identity is a complex process that often exists at the intersection of the psychological, sociological, and political. While the work here has provided a preliminary look at the connections among these various levels, further research will be needed to help better theorize the relationships between them.

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

While my interviews with Polish sexual minorities has contributed to research on everyday nationhood and the relationship between nationalism and sexuality (Bratcher 2020), comparative research is needed in order to explore whether national identifications among sexual and other minority groups differ from those who do not belong to vulnerable or stigmatized groups (i.e. those in the "ethnic" or "ideological" majority). Such research could then better deduce whether sexuality or other features of one's identity accounted for varying levels of national identification. 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, future studies might be able to tease out whether and why certain communities struggle more or less than others with their national identification(s).

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 stigmatization and discrimination. Michèle Lamont and colleagues (2016) have already made some very useful steps in this direction by examining responses to stigmatization 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 emphasizing a focus on the experiences of those who are stigmatized 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 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.

In addition, my research has only begun to scratch the surface on the relationship

between the intrapersonal and the material in aesthetic revolt. Thus, when possible, future research on the topic would do well to conduct in-depth interviews with activists and others who have engaged in aesthetic revolt, asking them questions about the symbols they are utilizing, what they mean to them and how these meanings have evolved over time. In-depth interviews would help researchers further understand the motivations behind actors' utilization of certain symbols in certain times and places. Relatedly, further research on aesthetic revolt would benefit from comparative analyses that would enable scholars to ask questions regarding why certain forms of aesthetic revolt either occurred or did not occur in particular contexts and historical junctures. Thus, what were the circumstances that led to French Canadians' outright rejection of a Catholic understanding of national identity? Why did they reject this vision of national identity outright, while those in the Polish case chose to work with and modify existing models of "Polishness"?

Theoretically, scholars examining the relationship between the intrapersonal and the material in aesthetic revolt could also benefit from engaging with the burgeoning literature examining the intersection of culture and cognition. Doing so could provide researchers with rich concepts and vocabulary to describe and explain the processes occurring as actors interpret and engage with cultural objects such as national flags and other significant symbols. While I have touched on one of these ideas by including Sewell's articulation of cultural schemas (1992) in my analysis of aesthetic revolt, research in the field of culture and cognition has greatly improved upon such concepts (Frye 2012; Lizardo 2017; Martin 2011; Strauss and Quinn 1997; Shore 1998). As an example, a recent study examining "neural binding" (Taylor et.al 2019) conducted by Terence McDonnell and his students takes insights from cognitive neuroscience and applies them to research on cultural objects. The application of neuroscientific concepts such

as “indexicalization” and “binding”, they argue, can help cultural sociologists “understand cultural objects as an ongoing accomplishment through processes of indexicaling and innovating” (Taylor et.al 2019: 11). Adopting concepts from fields such as cognitive neuroscience and the philosophy of mind could therefore assist those sociologists interested in the effects of cultural objects, and culture more generally, by providing them with concrete, neuroscientifically grounded ways to think about how meaning is generated, maintained, and transformed both within and outside the confines of the human mind.

However, this does not mean that sociologists should simply adopt the ideas and theories of these sciences uncritically, as doing so could result in the reification of neuroscientific knowledge. Thus, as Victoria Pitts-Taylor has aptly noted, the primary question is not *whether* social scientists should embrace the neurocognitive turn, but *how* they should approach the knowledge gained from research in the cognitive and neuro sciences (2014: 996). The truly exciting path forward would therefore be a two-way street in which sociologists and neuro-cognitive scientists both criticized and learned from the complexities and contradictions within each discipline. This is especially true for those interested in culture, which exists just as much in our minds as it does outside of and around us (Mohr et.al 2020). Thus, while the neurocognitive turn should be embraced, social scientists must ensure that instead of blindly accepting the concepts stemming from the cognitive and neuro sciences, that they “approach knowledge about the brain and cognition as complex, embedded, and situated….and are willing to admit the multiplicity and messiness of emerging knowledge about cognition” (Pitts-Taylor 2014: 999).

Final Reflection

In a recent debate article published in *Nations and Nationalism,* Jon Fox reflected on research in the everyday nationhood tradition and remarked that from the start, its primary objective had been to examine "nationhood as a practical accomplishment, where actors creatively and willfully invoke and manipulate nationhood for their own purposes" (2018: 864). Nationhood from this perspective is therefore something accomplished through people "doing things with nationalism" (2018: 864). My study has demonstrated how Polish sexual minorities have engaged the nation and national mythology in order to reinterpret what being Polish means to them, thereby manipulating nationhood for their own purposes. Personal reflection and engaging in acts of symbolic manipulation have helped many find new ways to identify with their "Polishness."

Yet what this also shows is that "Polishness" —at least for the majority of those interviewed— remains a highly significant object of identification. Thus, while the renewed visions of national identity discussed by my interview subjects and demonstrated by those involved in aesthetic revolt involved openness, progressiveness and tolerance, for most of them this new vision was still a *national* vision. Indeed, even those who spoke of Cosmopolitanism held onto aspects of their "Polishness." Although they liked the idea of being global citizens, they still struggled to disengage from the deeper, more viscerally felt aspects of their Polish identity. This dissertation therefore serves to remind us that although there may be attempts in the name of inclusivity to reframe and redefine what national identity can and should mean, the nation and the national frame of mind, for better or for worse, are still very much alive.

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