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THE EXCLUSIONARY NATIONALIST DISCOURSE OF RADICAL POPULIST RIGHT- WING PARTIES IN CONTEMPORARY POLAND

ABSTRACT: The objective of the paper is to analyse the nationalist political message of radical populist right-wing parties in Poland from 2015 to 2022. The authors apply a wide theoretical approach to the study of right-wing populism. The text exemplifies the category of ‘enemies’ of Poland and Polishness on the basis of three groups. The first analysed category is that of ‘the leftists’ and ‘cultural Marxists’, who are accused of undermining the ‘true’ roots of European civilisation. This part is followed by an analysis of a related but distinct category, namely atheists, who allegedly constitute a threat to the Catholic identity of Poles. The last group under analysis is refugees – especially Muslim refugees – who are presented in a racialised and even racist manner. The conclusions emphasise the undemocratic nature of the discourse of the Polish radical right.

Keywords: radical right populism, Poland, nationalism, cultural Marxism, refugees, atheism

INTRODUCTION

Public discourse is a platform for expressing social emotions and moods, as well as a space for shaping and developing a social model desirable for the majority of society. The content of such discourse and its mainstream are shaped by political and intellectual elites in addition to the mass media. The pluralistic space of discourse in a liberal democracy allows for the existence and exchange of different perceptions and visions of the state and society. Its contradiction is exclusionary discourse, characteristic of the parties that can be described as ‘radical populist right’, ‘extreme right’, ‘radical right’ or ‘right-wing populist’.¹

In our text, we take the language of the Polish right-wing as an example of exclusionary discourse, represented mainly by the Law and Justice party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* [PiS]), which has been in power in Poland since 2015. In our analysis, we aim to contribute to the international scientific discussion on nationalist and populist tendencies, viewed as threats to the Western concept of liberal democracy.

Since 2015, the Polish political system has been evolving. The manifestations of these changes include not only the problems associated with the weakening of the rule of law in the functioning of the state (the dispute with the EU), which have also been noticed and criticised by the international community, but also visible shifts in the social sphere. Here, the existing mental and ideological divisions have become further polarised in recent years. The mechanism deepening these divisions is the exclusionary discourse, which has evolved into a mainstream narrative for representatives of the authorities and the media dependent on them, losing its previous niche character. The keywords – nation, community, Catholicism, infidel, enemy, stranger and the other – describe its axiological and ideological core.

Therefore, in our text, we set ourselves the goal of presenting the characteristics and capturing the dynamics of creating the contemporary discourse of the Polish radical right. This is not a monographic description; the framework of a single scientific text is too narrow. Nevertheless, we want to provide the reader with an understanding of the specificity of the Polish (radical) right-wing narrative, and we attempt to exemplify it through a few selected examples of social groups whose distinguishing features are views or origin. They are: (1) ‘the leftists’/‘cultural Marxists’; (2) atheists; (3) refugees. These are not the only groups that are subject to exclusivist rhetoric. The discourse of the nationalist right excludes many groups from the category of ‘Polishness’, for example, feminists and LGBT+ communities (author forthcoming), Germans and Jews. In our paper, we focus on three groups. This allows us to characterise and define the logic of constructing such a message and describe the mechanism of discursive exclusion of groups outside the circle of the proper national community.

We conduct our characterisation in the following phases. First, we outline a broad theoretical background by distinguishing three main approaches: nationalism,

¹ C. Mudde, “Introduction to the Populist Radical Right,” in C. Mudde (ed.), *The Populist Radical Right: A Reader*, Abingdon–New York 2017.

populism and the ideational approach to populist radical right parties. In the next part, we present an original selection of examples of the intellectual construction of far-right discourse, along with their contextual explanation and falsification. In this section, we do not focus solely on the rhetoric of Law and Justice (PiS), but include other examples. These are intended to confirm the observation that a niche discourse, which has existed for decades, has become a space tolerated and utilised by Polish public authorities. The analysis will focus on the years 2015-2022 (from the election campaign that gave PiS the majority in the *Sejm* [parliament]), and close attention will be paid to statements made by PiS and its media allies, as this party is at the forefront of the ongoing cultural war.²

The starting point for our considerations is a statement by Jarosław Kaczyński from September 2019. The chairman of Law and Justice, the political party that has held power in Poland since 2015, said: *Every good Pole must know what the role of the Church is, must know that outside it there is – I repeat – nihilism.*³ In January 2021, during a mass on the eighth anniversary of his mother's death, broadcast by the nationwide public broadcaster *TVP Info*, he stated that: *today the rejection of evil is something extremely important, because this evil is attacking – it is attacking our country, our homeland, our nation; it is attacking the institution that is at the centre of our identity – it is attacking the Church, the Catholic Church.*⁴

We have to stress that the exclusionary vision of Polishness is ultra conservative. According to David McKnight, *While systematic ideologies appeal to the power of reason and logic, conservatism is often very powerful because it appeals to deep emotions in the human psyche. Behind its overt political and social outlooks are emotions, instincts, intuition and passion.*⁵

One might agree with Cas Mudde that the populist radical right constitutes the radicalisation of mainstream views.⁶ Right-wing radicalism accepts procedural democracy but challenges liberal democracy with its positive valuation of pluralism and constitutional limits on popular sovereignty. The core of radicalism is monism, the tendency to treat cleavages and ambiguities as illegitimate.⁷

² L. Szczegółka, *Droga do wojny kulturowej. Ideologia Dobrej Zmiany*, Warszawa 2020.

³ Cited in: P. Pacewicz, "Kaczyński: Jeden naród, jeden Kościół. «Demokracja skonstruowana prosto». «Każdy dobry Polak musi...»," *OKO.press*, 9 September 2019, at <https://oko.press/kaczynski-jeden-narod-jeden-kosciol-demokracja-skonstruowana-prosto-kazdy-dobry-polak-musi/>, 1 VI 2022.

⁴ Cited in: PAP/P. Polak, "Szef PiS podczas mszy w wigilię rocznicy śmierci Jadwigi Kaczyńskiej mówił o... Amber Gold," *Dziennik Gazeta Prawna*, 16 January 2021, at <https://wiadomosci.dziennik.pl/polityka/artykuly/8070345,jaroslaw-kaczynski-zlo-atak-nasz-narod-kraj.html>, 1 VI 2022.

⁵ See: D. McKnight, *Beyond Right and Left: New Politics and the Culture Wars*, Crows Nest 2005, p. 89.

⁶ C. Mudde, "The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy," *West European Politics*, vol. 33, no. 6 (2010), pp. 1168-1169.

⁷ *Ibid.*

To quote Benjamin de Cleen,⁸ both populism and nationalism revolve around the category of sovereignty of ‘the people’. This should not come as a surprise, as the nation-state remains the dominant context of political representation, and – therefore – populism tends to operate in a national context, even if the actual decision-making power of nation-states has significantly weakened. Nationalism is a discourse structured around the nodal point of a nation, understood as a limited and sovereign community that exists in time and occupies a specific space, being constructed through the in/out (member/non-member) opposition between a nation and other groups. Nationalism, like racism and sexism, divides the human species into exclusive groups. The structure of the nationalist discourse can be understood in spatial terms, which helps to distinguish it from populism. The nationalist discourse is structured around an ‘in/out’ relationship in which the ‘in’ consists of the members of a nation, while the ‘out’ consists of various kinds of non-members. Nationalism structures ‘in’ and ‘out’ in a particular way. It is worth mentioning the concept of a nation as an ‘imagined community’ at this point,⁹ which will help to understand the nationalist discourse.

Populism is a discourse centred around the nodal points of ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’, in which the meanings of ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ are constructed around a down/up antagonism between ‘the people’ as a large but powerless group and ‘the elite’ as a small but illegitimately powerful group.¹⁰ Populists claim to represent ‘the people’ against (a part of) the illegitimate ‘elite’, formulating their political demands as the will of ‘the people’.

The aggressive, even violent, nature of the analysed discourse must be emphasised. Let us look at one hallmark example. An activist of the Confederation (*Konfederacja*) party and a student of the prestigious University of Warsaw (UW), during the ‘UW Free From Marxism’ demonstration in April 2019, referred to leftists, saying: *We have to kick them out of universities, we have to chase away their lecturing staff*, and chanted with the crowd the slogan ‘Death to the Enemies of the Homeland’, of which, as he later explained, ‘he will be proud’ throughout his life.¹¹

⁸ B. de Cleen, “Populism and Nationalism,” in C.R. Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P.O. Espejo, P. Ostiguy (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford 2017, pp. 342-362.

⁹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London–New York 2006.

¹⁰ B. de Cleen, “Populism...,” p. 348.

¹¹ See: R. Ziemkiewicz, “Działacz Konfederacji zawieszony na UW. Winnicki do Gowina: Położy się Pan Rejtanem jak ws. LGBT?,” *Do Rzeczy*, 4 February 2020, at <https://ziemkiewicz.dorzeczy.pl/kraj/128437/dzialacz-konfederacji-zawieszony-na-uw-winnicki-do-gowina-polozy-sie-pan-rejtanem-jak-ws-lgbt.html>, 1 VI 2022.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

1. Main approaches to nationalism

According to Eric Hobsbawm, the modern sense of the concept of nation was formed no earlier than the 18th century, so surely nations are not as old as history.¹² The historian is convinced that the vagueness and lack of programme content of nationalism potentially gives it widespread support in its own community.¹³ In 'The Mass Production of Tradition: Europe, 1870-1914', Hobsbawm focuses on the state as an agent of the 'nationalisation' of the population. The state increasingly defined and registered the daily existence of individuals as members of society (*état civil*). Even if it was not the only scene, its existence and the limits of its increasingly uninterrupted and profound influence on the lives of citizens were ultimately decisive. The result of the unification of the state's administration and the laws within it, especially state education, was that people became citizens of a particular state.¹⁴

Hobsbawm puts it bluntly: *nationalism requires too much belief in things that are clearly not true*.¹⁵ The British historian stresses that history is the raw material for nationalist, ethnic or fundamentalist ideologies, just as the poppy is the raw material for heroin addiction. In these ideologies, the past is an essential (if not the most important) element. If there is no adequate past, one can always invent one.¹⁶

On the other hand, Ernest Gellner, in the view of John Breuilly, argues that nations and nationalism are not natural phenomena because they are not a fixed feature of the human condition, but rather emerged only with the transition to the industrial age. Nor are they something arbitrary in the sense of being accidental or something to be avoided; they share a close, almost inevitable relationship with industrialism. Indeed, it is precisely because they appear to members of industrial society as something natural that this 'naturalness' gives nationalism its power.¹⁷

Industrial society, Gellner writes: *...is based and dependent on cognitive and economic growth which in the end both outstrips and discourages further dramatic population growth. Various factors in it – universal literacy, mobility and hence individualism, political centralisation, the need for a costly educational infrastructure – impel it into a situation in which political and cultural boundaries are on the whole congruent. The state is, above*

¹² E. Hobsbawm, *Narody i nacjonalizm po 1780 roku. Program, mit, rzeczywistość*, transl. by J. Maciejczyk, M. Starnawski, Warszawa 2010, p. 11.

¹³ Ibid., p. 185.

¹⁴ E. Hobsbawm, "Masowa produkcja tradycji: Europa, lata 1870-1914," in E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (eds), *Tradycja wynaleziona*, transl. by M. Godyń, F. Godyń, Kraków 2008, pp. 276-277.

¹⁵ E. Hobsbawm, *Narody i nacjonalizm...*, p. 21.

¹⁶ E. Hobsbawm, *O nacjonalizmie*, transl. by A. Wojtasik, Warszawa 2022, p. 38.

¹⁷ J. Breuilly, "Wstęp," in E. Gellner (ed.), *Narody i nacjonalizm*, transl. by T. Hołówka, Warszawa 2009, p. 26.

*all, the protector – not of a faith, but of a culture, and the maintainer of the inescapably homogeneous and standardising educational system.*¹⁸

Benedict Anderson acknowledges nations as ‘imagined communities’. In his opinion, nationality (national belonging), like nationalism, is a specific cultural artefact of a particular kind. The emergence of these artefacts at the end of the 18th century was the result of a spontaneous combination of various historical factors, which were independent of each other. Once the artefacts had come into being, they became autonomous, later ‘transplanted’ with varying degrees of self-knowledge into various social spheres and could be coupled with the most diverse political and ideological concepts.¹⁹ Explaining nationalism, according to Anderson, should not involve juxtaposing it with political ideologies, but rather with the broader cultural systems that preceded it and from which it sometimes emerged.²⁰

Anthony D. Smith remarks that the significance of nationalism is not limited to the political world; it also extends to cultural and intellectual structures, as the ‘world of nations’ organises global symbolic systems. The widespread existence of nationalism and the impact it has today on millions of people on all continents demonstrate its ability to stimulate and influence ‘nations’ in a way that only religions previously did. We need to take a closer look at the role that symbolic elements play in the language and ideology of nationalism, and to pay attention to the moral, ritual and emotional aspects of national discourse and the way the nation operates.²¹ Crucial for the formation of nations and nationalisms is collective identity, which is particularly strong when it is based primarily on cultural elements. While other types of collective identity, such as class identification or identification with a particular region, function as interest groups and easily disintegrate once they have achieved their purpose, cultural collectivities are much more stable. This stability arises because the main cultural elements on which they are based – memories, values, symbols, myths and traditions – tend to be more durable and binding; they are enduring elements that testify to the continuity of a group and its distinctiveness.²²

Omnipresence of the thinking in a national framework is crucial for Michael’s Billig concept of ‘banal nationalism’. Billig aims to stress the significance of the strong emotional commitment that ‘normal’ people have to their nations. He noted almost thirty years ago: *In our age, it seems as if an aura attends the very idea of nationhood. [...] The aura attached to sovereign nationhood is not, however, absolute, as if all similar incidents produce a similar response.*²³

¹⁸ E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Oxford 1983, p. 110.

¹⁹ B. Anderson, *Wspólnoty wyobrażone. Rozważania o źródłach i rozprzestrzenieniu się nacjonalizmu*, transl. by S. Amsterdamski, Kraków–Warszawa 1997, p. 18.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²¹ A.D. Smith, *Nacjonalizm. Teoria, ideologia, historia*, transl. by E. Chomicka, Warszawa 2007, pp. 12–13.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 33.

²³ M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism*, London 1995, p. 4.

Nowadays, the category of nationalism is often combined with the term ‘populism’ – especially in the case of right-wing populism (i.e., the kind of populism prevalent in Central and Eastern Europe). Both terms are more or less related but not identical concepts,²⁴ as the next chapter will show.

2. Main approaches to populism

The topic of populism, Nadia Urbinati observes, is becoming increasingly prominent and important in contemporary political experience, although it is difficult to address in the field of political theory. Populism is not something new; it emerged with the process of democratisation in the 19th century, and since then, its character and forms have reflected the modes of democracy it has challenged. What is new today is the intensity and simultaneity of its manifestations in almost all countries governed by constitutional democracy.²⁵

Jan-Werner Müller writes that any populist will try to unite their people by maintaining a confrontation with those they do not consider part of the ‘real America’, the ‘real Turkey’ and so on. Polarisation is not a problem for populists; it is a means to retain power. Hence, it is supremely naïve to think that sooner or later a populist politician will ‘reach out to the other side’. Conflict is definitely good for the populists, as long as they can use it (especially the continuing culture war) to continually show what the ‘real nation’ is and how powerful it is.²⁶ They see populism as a problem that needs to be solved. They urge that politicians should be encouraged to talk to populists, but not to talk like populists. To look at potential collaborators on the conservative side and try to dissuade them from interacting with populists – of course, if those individuals cease to be populists (i.e., opponents of pluralism), it is perfectly legitimate to collaborate with them in a democracy.²⁷

Ernest Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have developed a highly influential theory in the study of populism over the years.²⁸ According to Laclau and Mouffe, the current international wave of populism in various parts of the world is due to the crisis of neoliberalism, which has politically and ideologically prevailed since the last decades of the 20th century. These authors make a distinction between right-wing populism (which

²⁴ K. Deegan-Krause, “Populism, Democracy, and Nationalism in Slovakia,” in C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser (eds), *Populism in Europe and Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?*, New York 2012, p. 182.

²⁵ N. Urbinati, “Political Theory of Populism,” *Annual Review of Political Science*, vol. 22 (2019), p. 112.

²⁶ J-W. Müller, *Co to jest populizm?*, transl. by M. Sutowski, Warszawa 2017, p. 9.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

²⁸ E. Laclau, C. Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London 2001; E. Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, London 2005; E. Laclau, “Populism: What’s in a Name?” in F. Panizza (ed.), *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, London 2005, pp. 32-49; E. Laclau, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory: Capitalism, Fascism, Populism*, London 2011; C. Mouffe, *W obronie lewicowego populizmu*, transl. by B. Szelewa, Warszawa 2020.

they zealously oppose) and left-wing populism (which they see as an opportunity to renew democracy). Mouffe argues that by creating political divisions anew, the 'populist moment' points to a 'return of the political' after years of so-called 'post-politics'. This return may open the door to authoritarian solutions by regimes that weaken the institutions of liberal democracy, but it may also lead to the strengthening and expansion of democratic values. It will all depend on which political forces succeed in establishing the hegemony of current democratic demands and which type of populism emerges victorious from the 'battle against post-politics'.²⁹

Right-wing populism, according to Mouffe, claims to restore the sovereignty of the people and democracy, but sovereignty is understood in a 'national' sense and is reserved for those deemed to be true members of the 'people'. Right-wing populists are not concerned with the demand for equality and construct 'the people' in a way that excludes many categories of individuals, usually immigrants, who are seen as a threat to the identity and well-being of the nation. The left populist strategy is to concentrate democratic demands in the form of a collective will to construct a 'we': 'the people' confronting a common opponent – the oligarchy. This requires the establishment of a chain of equivalences between the demands of workers, immigrants and the precarious middle class, as well as other democratic demands, for example from the LGBT community. The aim of such a chain is to establish a new hegemony to radicalise democracy.³⁰

Populism, according to the ideational approach, is a set of ideas that adopt a Manichean vision of politics in which the people, embodying democratic virtue, struggle against corrupt elites. Populist ideas may influence an organisation or policy, but it is only these ideas – their existence or non-existence – that allow us to speak legitimately of populism.³¹ According to Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser,³² populism is a form of moral politics because the distinction between 'the elite' and 'the people' is primarily of a moral nature (what is pure versus what is corrupt), rather than situational (a position with respect to those in power), socio-cultural (ethnic or religious issues) or socio-economic (social classes). The terms elite and people are 'empty signifiers'. Populism is a thin-centred ideology made up of three key concepts – the people, the elite and the general will – and a direct opposition between elitism and pluralism. In other words, populism is an ideology that sees society as ultimately divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups: 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', arguing that politics should be an expression of the popular will (*volonté générale*) of the people.

²⁹ C. Mouffe, *W obronie...*, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

³¹ K.A. Hawkins, C.R. Kaltwasser, I. Andreadis, "The Activate of Populist Attitudes," *Government & Opposition*, vol. 55, no. 2 (2020), p. 2.

³² C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser, "Populism and (Liberal) Democracy: A Framework for Analysis," in C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser (eds), *Populism in Europe and Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?*, New York 2012, pp. 8-9.

This definition includes four key concepts that are central and constitutive of populist ideology: ideology, the people, the elite and the general will.³³

The above ideational approach highlights the need to study populism not in isolation, but in combination with various ideologies that are crucial in developing programme profiles which may be more or less attractive to large parts of the population in a given society at a given point in time.³⁴ The ideational approach helps us to better understand the ambivalent relationship between populism and democracy. Populists assume that no one has the right to undermine the will of the people. They are sceptical of liberal democracy, particularly regarding minority rights, the rule of law and the division of powers, including the independence of the judiciary and the media. The ideational approach enables us to analyse the conditions under which populist forces have a positive or negative impact on real democracies, as well as the different phases of (de)democratisation.³⁵

The authors assume that it is the ideational perspective that is most fertile in the study of Polish right-wing populism, as it draws attention to the supply side of this phenomenon. Noteworthy, what is important in the Polish context is that populism is an ideology that considers societies to be essentially divided into two antagonistic and homogeneous groups – the ‘pure people’ and the ‘corrupt elite’ – and demands that politics reflect the general will of the people.³⁶

3. An ideational approach to the populist radical right parties

Empirical research should be conducted on both the supply and demand sides of populism. This paper focuses on the supply side. We consciously omit the demand side of the problem of Polish populism. Our aim is to emphasise the mechanisms and narrative contents that trigger the layers of xenophobic, authoritarian and racist attitudes dormant in Polish society. However, their presence and vitality have been confirmed by social research carried out in Poland in recent years.³⁷

³³ C. Mudde, “Populism: An Ideational Approach,” in C.R. Kaltwasser et al., *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford 2017, p. 30.

³⁴ C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser, “Studying Populism in Comparative Perspective: Reflections on the Contemporary and Future Research Agenda,” *Comparative Political Studies*, vol. 51, no. 13 (2018), p. 1670.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1670-1671.

³⁶ C. Mudde, “Fighting the System? Populist Radical Right Parties and Party System Change,” *Party Politics*, vol. 20, no. 2 (2014), p. 218.

³⁷ J. Czapiński, T. Panek (eds), *Diagnoza społeczna 2015. Warunki i jakość życia Polaków. Raport*, Warszawa 2015, pp. 334-336, at http://www.diagnoza.com/pliki/raporty/Diagnoza_raport_2015.pdf, 1 VI 2022; see also: CBOS, *Między patriotyzmem a nacjonalizmem*, Komunikat z badań nr 151, Warszawa 2016, at https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_151_16.PDF, 1 VI 2022.

We assume at least three characteristics of the populist radical right: nativism, authoritarianism and populism.³⁸ Individual actors may add further important ideological features such as anti-Semitism or welfare chauvinism. Different groups express their ideology in various ways, defining their 'own people' differently and attacking different 'enemies' based on diverse motivations and prejudices.

Three distinct ideological features are often linked together in party propaganda. All the populist right parties focus on crimes committed by 'aliens', the Romani in the East or immigrants in the West. Nativism comes down to the belief that states should be inhabited by members of a particular native group ('the nation'), while non-native elements – people and ideas – threaten the homogeneity of the nation-state.³⁹ This does not mean that populism and nativism are identical. The nativist distinction occurs between (good) 'natives' and (bad) 'aliens', while the populist distinction between the (good) 'people' and the (bad) 'elite' occurs within a national group.⁴⁰

Mudde claims that 'authoritarianism', the belief in a strictly ordered society in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely, is not exclusive to the core of populist radical right ideology.⁴¹ Most notably, 'love and respect for authority', a euphemistic description of authoritarianism, is considered to be a core staple of conservatism.

EXCLUDED CATEGORIES OF POLISH POPULIST RADICAL RIGHT PARTIES

1. The leftists/'cultural Marxists'

Anti-leftism, or more precisely anti-communism, has been the essence of the right-wing political narrative since the beginning of Poland's systemic transformation. The Polish road to democracy involved a rejection of its communist past in terms of economy and politics, but above all, ideology. Anti-communism was at the heart of the political milieu created by Kaczyński. In the early 1990s, his first party *Porozumienie Centrum*⁴² sought to remove people associated with the former system from public life. Kaczyński emphasised the destructive influence of the post-communist political and financial elite on the quality of public life in Poland.

The right-wing aversion to leftists has evolved over recent years. The place of the much-hated post-communists has been taken by 'leftists', representatives of 'neo-Marxism' and 'cultural Marxism'. In Polish nationalist discourse, the terms 'leftist' and 'leftism' are used to describe a politically and ideologically alien element. Left-wing as well as centre-right groups are referred to as 'leftists'. Leftists include domestic political

³⁸ C. Mudde, "Introduction...", p. 23.

³⁹ C. Mudde, *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*, Cambridge 2007, p. 19.

⁴⁰ C. Mudde, "Introduction...", p. 24.

⁴¹ C. Mudde, *On Extremism and Democracy in Europe*, Abingdon–New York 2016, p. 7.

⁴² J. Kaczyński, *Porozumienie przeciw monowładzy. Z dziejów PC*, Poznań 2016.

opponents and groups from outside Poland that are critical of PiS and Confederation or present an ideological perspective different from those of the two parties. A manifestation of leftism is the tolerance of LGBT communities in Western countries and the departure from the traditional family model. Gender 'non-binarity' is also perceived as leftism. The insinuating, extremely nativist character of the terms 'leftist' and 'leftism' serves only to stigmatise the enemy and excludes the possibility of discussion and conciliation. In this understanding, a leftist is seen as extremely alien to Polish tradition and identity and is even viewed as a threat to freedom. According to Jarosław Kaczyński: *the Polish tradition of freedom may collapse because of leftism*.⁴³

Representatives of the *Razem* party are exemplary leftists stigmatised for supporting and representing the interests of minority groups, advocating *the terror of the minority, promoting deviation and perversion under the guise of tolerance*.⁴⁴ The denunciatory nature of this narrative is also revealed in the implications of connections between this formation and its 'twin' party in Israel; these are based on not only the system of visual identification of both formations, but also the suspected affinity between their leaders.⁴⁵ These kinds of messages manage to actualise stereotypical links between communism and Jews. The content of such opinions is anti-Semitic, although not explicitly so.

Hostility towards Marxism, particularly so-called 'cultural Marxism', 'neo-Marxism' or 'the leftists', is a characteristic feature of the extreme populist right in other parts of the world, including the United States and Europe. The category of cultural Marxism is extremely extensive and constitutes the embodiment of everything that the hard right fights against. It is worth noting that the Norwegian white supremacist Anders Behring Breivik, who killed 77 people on 22 July 2011, stated that he had done so in order to disseminate his 1,500-page manifesto entitled '2083: A European Declaration of Independence'. He called on white people to carry out armed attacks against 'cultural Marxists', whom he regarded as the 'enemy of Western civilisation'. From the hard right's perspective, *the No. 1 goal of that cultural Marxism, since its creation, has been the destruction of Western culture and the Christian religion*.⁴⁶

PiS members of the European Parliament submitted an official request for information to the European Commission and the Council of the European Union regarding the participation of European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker in the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx. In their request, they wrote: *The ideology created by Karl Marx resulted in the death of over 100 million people*

⁴³ See: SJ, KF, "Prezes PiS: To nie lewica, to lewactwo. Może zawalić się tradycja wolnościowa," *TVP Info*, 3 October 2019, at <https://www.tvp.info/44670811/prezes-pis-to-nie-lewica-to-lewactwo-moze-zawalic-sie-tradycja-wolnosciowa>, 1 VI 2022.

⁴⁴ L. Pietrzak, "TYLKO U NAS! Obyczajowi terroryści," *Warszawska Gazeta*, 27 November 2018, at <https://warszawskagazeta.pl/kraj/item/6055-tylko-u-nas-obyczajowi-terrorysci>, 1 VI 2022.

⁴⁵ S. Balcerac, "TYLKO U NAS! Jedno nazwisko, jedna barwa, jeden program – czy izraelska partia stoi za nową młodą polską lewicą?," *Warszawska Gazeta*, 11 May 2018, at <https://warszawskagazeta.pl/polityka/item/5619-tylko-u-nas-jedno-nazwisko-jedna-barwa->, 1 VI 2022.

⁴⁶ See: W.S. Lind, *Cultural Marxism: Who Stole Our Culture?*, at http://www.silentnomorepublications.com/Money/files/Cultural_Marxism.pdf, 1 VI 2022.

*in the territory of many countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Communism caused the devastation of the economies and developmental backwardness in at least 10 of the present Member States of the European Union, which they have been overcoming with great effort for over 20 years, also thanks to funds from the budget of the European Union.*⁴⁷

Jarosław Kaczyński argues that freedom can ‘collapse’ due to left-wing extremists, who cannot be identified with the old, ‘good’ left. The PiS leader referenced Józef Piłsudski’s Revolutionary Faction of the Polish Socialist Party, which fought for Poland’s independence. According to Kaczyński, this tradition cannot be identified with the contemporary movements that call themselves leftist: *This is not the left, this is leftist extremists. Well, but our rivals must have put their bet on such leftist extremists.*⁴⁸

According to Michał Głowiński, a discourse analyst, the category of ‘leftist extremists’ is characteristic of the language of PiS.⁴⁹ This word first appeared in one of Lenin’s brochures condemning leftist deviations among some communists. In Poland, this label serves to emphasise the division between us – namely, PiS advocates, Catholics, patriots and good, true Poles – and them – the rabble, bad leftists. Głowiński claims that such a dichotomy is of a non-democratic character. As an absurd example of using the term ‘leftist extremists’, he refers to a situation in which a certain PiS Member of Parliament, criticised for embarrassing grammatical errors, asserted that her manner of speaking was correct and that she was only attacked by ‘leftist extremists’.

For PiS, everyone, even (or perhaps especially) other – less radical – rightist parties, could become labelled as ‘leftist’ or even ‘Marxist’. In a rather disturbing manner, in 2016, Polish Foreign Minister Witold Waszczykowski told the German tabloid *Bild am Sonntag*: *The previous government carried out a leftist programme there (in the public media). It was as if the world was according to a Marxist model which has to automatically develop in one direction only – a new mixture of cultures and races, a world made up of cyclists and vegetarians who only use renewable energy and fight all forms of religion.*⁵⁰ Marxism is perceived as a threat to social cohesion, including the ideological rule of the Catholic Church, whose priests and bishops are more or less publicly among the strong supporters of the far-right government.

The above statement appears to be an attempt to transplant the conspiracy theory of ‘cultural Marxism’ from America to Poland in a way that resembles its adaptation in Australia.⁵¹ Traditionalism and the fear of contamination bear a distant resemblance to the accusations of ‘cultural Bolshevism’ levelled against aesthetic modernists

⁴⁷ BM, MNIE, “Europosłowie PiS pytają o udział szefa KE w rocznicy urodzin Marksa,” *TVP Info*, 8 May 2018, at <https://www.tvp.info/37114146/europoslowie-pis-pytaja-o-udzial-szefa-ke-w-rocznicy-urodzin-marksa>, 1 VI 2022.

⁴⁸ Cited in: SJ, KF, “Prezes PiS: To nie lewica, to lewactwo...”

⁴⁹ M. Głowiński, “Pisomowa, czyli o wolnoamerykance językowej,” *Niezbędnik Inteligenta, Polityka*, vol. 50 (2006), pp. 14–18.

⁵⁰ See: A. Easton, “Poland’s Ruling Conservatives Clash with EU over Media Control,” *BBC News*, 4 January, at <https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-eu-35220316>, 1 VI 2022.

⁵¹ R. Busbridge, B. Moffitt, J. Thorburn, “Cultural Marxism: Far-Right Conspiracy Theory in Australia’s Culture Wars,” *Social Identities*, vol. 26, no. 6 (2020), pp. 722–738.

by conservatives during the Weimar Republic.⁵² The cultural Marxism theory is reminiscent of some still influential anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, including the theory of 'Judeo-Bolshevism',⁵³ according to which the Bolshevik revolution was a conspiracy of Jewish bankers, an aftermath of The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion – a forged document that claimed Jews and Masons were involved in a conspiracy to enslave Christian civilisation through a new world order and a new global elite.⁵⁴

Culture wars against the leftists originated in the USA. According to Tanner Mirreles: *For almost three decades, everyone from paleo-conservatives to neo-Nazis has used the phrase 'cultural Marxism' as a shorthand for an anti-American bogeyman, a symbol for every liberal or left-leaning group the right defined itself against, and an epithet for progressive identities, values, ideas and practices that reactionaries believe have made America worse than before.*⁵⁵ This American tendency has been transplanted into the Polish context. We evidence this by the statement of Dariusz Matecki, a PiS councillor from Szczecin, who demanded that a Civic Coalition councillor be dismissed from the post of Chairperson of the Commission for Cultural Affairs, accusing her of cultural Marxism. In his opinion, *The main ideas motivating cultural Marxists are abortion on demand, the legalisation of homosexual partnerships or the destruction of the Catholic Church. Unfortunately, we can see these and other actions in the programme of the Civic Coalition. Nowadays, culture is a Marxists' battleground.*⁵⁶

One source of the radical right's hostility to the leftists is their atheism, another enemy of populists in Poland.

2. Atheists

Bearing in mind Kaczyński's statement quoted at the beginning of the paper, it seems logical that agnostics and atheists are, as it were, by definition qualified as 'aliens'. Indeed, given the right-wing populist logic of exclusion in Poland, the alien character of people with no religion has an almost civilisational dimension. For the sake of clarity, this is nothing new.

⁵² See: M. Tuters, "Cultural Marxism," *Krisis: Journal for Contemporary Philosophy*, vol. 32, no. 2 (2018), pp. 32-33; D. Arieli-Horowitz, "The Jew as 'Destroyer of Culture' in National Socialist Ideology," *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 32 (1998), pp. 51-67.

⁵³ G.D. Michalopoulos, "The Judeo-Bolshevik Conspiracy and the Persecution of Jews in Interwar Salonica," *Studia Krytyczne/Critical Studies*, no. 1 (2015), 1, pp. 47-63.

⁵⁴ J. Braune, "Who's Afraid of the Frankfurt School? 'Cultural Marxism' as an Antisemitic Conspiracy Theory," *Journal of Social Justice*, vol. 9 (2019), p. 3.

⁵⁵ See: T. Mirreles, "The Alt-Right's Discourse of 'Cultural Marxism': A Political Instrument of Intersectional Hate," *Atlantis Journal*, vol. 39 (2018), p. 69.

⁵⁶ O. Masternak, "Radny Dariusz Matecki ostrzega przed marksizmem kulturowym w radzie," *Głos Szczeciński*, 20 May 2019, at <https://gs24.pl/radny-dariusz-matecki-ostrzega-przed-marksizmem-kulturowym-w-radzie-wideo/ar/c1-14145125>, 1 VI 2022.

In discussions about Polish identity, as Brian Porter noted, Catholicism is considered a matter of national identity.⁵⁷ At the beginning of the 20th century, the radical Polish right-wing was already using the slogans of militant Catholicism in its political struggle.⁵⁸ Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński (Primate of Poland from 1948 to 1981) once remarked: *nowhere else is the Church and nation as strong as in Poland*.⁵⁹ As Geneviève Zubrzycki points out, every nation has a myth of foundation that combines themes of growth and development, crisis and resistance, victory and re-birth.⁶⁰ These myths change over time, but they endure. According to Geneviève Zubrzycki, the most significant Polish myth is the inseparability of Poland and Catholicism: *Polonia semper fidelis* (Poland always faithful); the bulwark of Christendom defending Europe against the infidels; the Christ of nations, crucified for the sins of the world and resurrected to save it; a nation whose identity is guarded by its protector, the Roman Catholic Church, by its Queen, the miraculous Black Madonna, Our Lady of Częstochowa; a nation that gave the world a Pope and freed the Western world from communism.

During the Partitions period (1795-1918), *the symbiosis between Catholicism and Polishness, and between church and civil society, was achieved through a long process in which national identity was Catholicised and Catholicism was nationalised*.⁶¹ The equation of Polishness with Catholicism is an example of 'the invention of tradition'.⁶²

The case of Jarosław Kaczyński also shows the opportunistic nature of the discourse against non-believers. The diagnosis that, like most political actors, populists seek as much electoral support as possible⁶³ is confirmed here, although the promotion of Catholic fundamentalism in social and political life is not a side issue but a key one for the Polish radical right. It should be remembered that populism is a certain entrepreneurial political strategy.⁶⁴

Although Jarosław Kaczyński places atheists within the realm of pejorative nihilism in the narrative layer, one of the vice-presidents of PiS, Mariusz Kamiński, who has been the Minister of the Interior since 2019, has publicly declared his lack of religious

⁵⁷ B. Porter, "The Catholic Nation: Religion, Identity, and the Narratives of Polish History," *The Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 45 (2001), p. 289.

⁵⁸ B. Porter, "Marking the Boundaries of the Faith: Catholic Modernism and the Radical Right in Early Twentieth-Century Poland," in E.M. Grossman (ed.), *Studies in Language, Literature and Cultural Mythology in Poland: Investigating "the Other"*, Lewiston–New York 2002, pp. 261-286.

⁵⁹ Cited in: B. Porter, "The Catholic Nation...", p. 289.

⁶⁰ G. Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland*, Chicago–London, 2006, p. 34.

⁶¹ Cited in: *ibid.*, p. 49.

⁶² E. Hobsbawm, T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge–New York 2012.

⁶³ C. Mudde, C.R. Kaltwasser, "Vox populi or vox masculini? Populism and Gender in Northern Europe and South America," *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 49, no. 1-2 (2015), pp. 16-36.

⁶⁴ B. Stanley, "Populism in Central and Eastern Europe," in C.R. Kaltwasser et al. (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford 2017.

beliefs.⁶⁵ An interesting example of Catholic radicalism among lower-ranking PiS members was the idea of compulsory deportation of people who would not agree to ‘respect the Polish Constitution and values considered important in Poland’, which was a paraphrase of Catholic values. In this concept, the requirement to respect Polish (i.e., Catholic) values was to be supported by a written declaration to be signed by atheists, as well as by Orthodox Christians and Muslims.⁶⁶

The discrepancy between the declared ardent Catholicism of the discursive and media dimensions and the political practice is also noticeable in the statements of Confederation politicians. Furthermore, an ambiguous approach to the role of the Roman Catholic religion in public life can be observed at the party leadership level. On the one hand, there are opinions among the leaders that *religion in schools distances Poles from God*,⁶⁷ while on the other hand, some representatives present their ostentatious attachment to Catholicism, starting every public speech with the greeting ‘God bless you’ – the most famous example of which is one of the leaders of Confederation, Grzegorz Braun.

One of the most prominent atheists in Polish public life is Jan Hartman. He is a professor of philosophy, a publicist and a political activist in the liberal Freedom Union (*Unia Wolności*) party and the Palikot Movement (*Ruch Palikota* – a one-issue party with a leftist profile). Hartman was a candidate for local councillor representing the *Razem* party in the 2018 local government elections. In his case, he cannot be regarded merely as a victim of the exclusionary discourse of the Polish right wing, as he is simultaneously its critic and adversary. He speaks openly about his Jewish origins and atheism. In his radical journalism, he focuses on criticising the role of the Catholic Church, the style of governance and the rhetoric of the right-wing governing party in Poland, as well as manifestations of anti-Semitism in the country. In all three areas of his journalistic interests, he tries – as he notes in his internet blog – to highlight and denounce ‘hypocrisy, boorishness, arrogance and ignorance’. His activity has often met with equally emotional reactions. His journalism has been described on right-wing internet portals

⁶⁵ Ł. Grzegorzczuk, “Kaczyński zaatakował jedną z najważniejszych osób w PiS? To ateista w rządzie Morawieckiego,” *naTemat*, 9 September 2019, at <https://natemat.pl/283917,mariusz-kaminski-jest-ateista-kaczynski-zarzuca-mu-nihilizm>, 1 VI 2022.

⁶⁶ B. Mateusiak-Pielucha, “Wydarzenia wokół ‘Wołynia’ utwierdzają mnie w przekonaniu, że nie uciekniemy od problemu współczesnej oceny ludobójstwa sprzed lat,” *wPolityce*, 15 November 2016, at <https://wpolityce.pl/historia/315441-wydarzenia-wokol-wolynia-utwierdzaja-mnie-w-przekonaniu-ze-nie-uciekniemy-od-problemu-wspolczesnej-oceny-ludobojstwa-sprzed-lat>, 1 VI 2022.

⁶⁷ J. Korwin-Mikke, “Religia w szkołach oddala Polaków od Boga,” *Rzeczpospolita*, 18 December 2019, at <https://www.rp.pl/Publicystyka/191219288-Janusz-Korwin-Mikke-Religia-w-szkolach-oddala-Polakow-od-Boga.html>, 1 VI 2022.

as ‘leftist howl’,⁶⁸ and he himself as an ‘atheist and former Jewish Freemason’⁶⁹, a ‘scoundrel’ who ‘persistently wants to destroy Poland’s reputation.’⁷⁰ The right wing criticises Hartman because he ‘spits’ at the Catholic Church and calls the religious person’s participation in religious practices ‘an embarrassment.’⁷¹

It must be stressed, however, that the ultra-Catholicism of the Polish nationalist right does not by any means imply unconditional support for the Catholic hierarchy. The Episcopate is criticised if it does not support the nationalist agenda. This occurred in 2017 when the Episcopate issued the document ‘The Christian Form of Patriotism.’ PiS senator and historian Jan Żaryn noted that *in the Polish ideological and political tradition, nationalism has nothing in common with hatred*, while the negative perception of nationalism was imposed by communists after World War II.⁷² Obviously, Żaryn’s statement contradicts the facts.⁷³ It suffices to mention that in interwar Poland, Jews were second-class citizens – the ‘internal other’. They were portrayed as dangerous chameleons and parasites on the body of Polish Catholicism.⁷⁴ Historically, Polish nationalists appropriated Catholicism, transforming it from a universal religion into a national religion. Roman Dmowski, the leader of Polish nationalists in the interwar period, observed in his pamphlet entitled *Church, Nation, and State* (1927) that: *Catholicism is not an appendage to Polishness, colouring 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 the Church is to destroy the very essence of the nation. [...] The Polish state is a Catholic state. It is not Catholic only be-*

⁶⁸ PS, “Kolejny skowyt lewactwa! Jan Hartman komentuje wyniki wyborów do Parlamentu Europejskiego: «Jeśli Biedroń zrobi to po raz drugi jesienią, będzie zdrajcą»,” *Najwyższy Czas!*, 27 May 2019, at <https://nczas.com/2019/05/27/kolejny-skowyt-lewactwa-jan-hartman-komentuje-wyniki-wyborow-do-parlamentu-europejskiego-jesli-biedron-zrobi-to-po-raz-drugi-jesienia-bedzie-zdrajca/>, 1 VI 2022.

⁶⁹ J. Bodakowski, “Ateista i były żydowski mason Jan Hartman: Żydzi zdradzili i zeszmacili się, bo bratają się z Rydzykiem. Izrael także,” *Najwyższy Czas!*, 28 November 2017, at <https://nczas.com/2017/11/28/ateista-i-byly-zydowski-mason-jan-hartman-zydzi-zdradzili-i-zeszmacili-sie-bo-brataja-sie-z-rydzykiem-izrael-takze/>, 1 VI 2022.

⁷⁰ M. Kokoszkiewicz, “Oto ferajna, który uparcie chce niszczyć opinię o Polsce,” *Warszawska Gazeta*, 22 August 2018, at <https://warszawskagazeta.pl/felietony/miroslaw-kokoszkiewicz/item/5819-oto-ferajna-ktory-uparcie-chce-niszczyc-opinie-o-polsce>, 1 VI 2022.

⁷¹ J. Bodakowski, “Ateista Jan Hartman piekli się z powodu katolicyzmu Cezarego Pazury i pluje na Kościół Katolicki. «Uczestnictwo człowieka wykształconego w aktach religijnych jest obciążeniem»,” *Wolność24*, 6 October 2017, at <https://wolnosc24.pl/2017/10/06/ateista-jan-hartman-pieklis-sie-z-powodu-katolicyzmu-cezarego-pazury-i-pluje-na-kosciol-katolicki-uczestnictwo-czlowieka-wykształconego-w-aktach-religijnych-jest-obciążeniem/>, 1 VI 2022.

⁷² J. Bodakowski, “Profesor Żaryn skrytykował dokument Episkopatu o nacjonalizmie. Lewicowiec Hartman jest dokumentem zachwycony. Gdzie jest problem?,” *Wolność24*, 2 May 2017, at <https://wolnosc24.pl/2017/05/02/profesor-zaryn-skrytykowal-dokument-episkopatu-o-nacjonalizmie-lewicowiec-hartman-jest-dokumentem-zachwycony-gdzie-jest-problem/>, 1 VI 2022.

⁷³ B. Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*, New York–Oxford 2000, p. 245.

⁷⁴ G. Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz...*, p. 57.

cause the great majority of its population is Catholic, and it is not Catholic in some or other percentile. From our perspective, it is Catholic in the full sense of that term because our state is a national state, and our nation is a Catholic nation.⁷⁵ The ideological fusion of Polishness with Catholicism was one of the sources of hostility from PiS and Confederation towards Poland's acceptance of refugees, particularly Arabs and Muslims.

3. Refugees

Refugees belong to groups that are particularly vulnerable to discriminatory practices. International human rights legislation devotes significant attention to ensuring that the fundamental rights and freedoms of these individuals are preserved.⁷⁶ International practice shows, however, that despite the functioning of laws and institutions at both the international and national levels – which are supposed to protect and support such people, regardless of geographical latitude – refugees are subject to discrimination in the spheres of both discourse and concrete political actions. PiS's and Confederation's opposition to the acceptance of refugees from Muslim countries was connected with the party's willingness to endorse anti-Islamic sentiments in society. According to Kasia Narkowicz: *In a 2011 European survey, almost half of Poles were of the opinion that there are 'too many Muslims' in their country. Despite an estimated Muslim population of only 35,000 in a country of 38 million people, less than 0.1% of the population, Polish citizens overestimated more than any other population in Europe the number of Muslims in their country, believing that Muslims make up 7% of their country's population.*⁷⁷

As Witold Klaus notes, Europe's 2015 refugee crisis coincided with the parliamentary elections in Poland.⁷⁸ During that period, for the first time in Poland, the rightist and populist parties introduced the issue of migration into their political agendas. For them, it was a matter of security – not only national and direct, but also cultural and symbolic. The discourse on refugees is based on the distinction between 'us' and 'them'. They are evil and dangerous Muslim terrorists. The PiS government restricted the rights of refugees (e.g., the so-called 'Anti-terrorist Act', according to which every foreigner can be kept under surveillance without any court supervision). Besides Hungary and Austria, Poland is one of the three EU countries that refused to relocate refugees to their territories.

For the PiS government, the refugee issue played a key role in ensuring national security. It should be stressed that the desire for security lies at the heart of Western

⁷⁵ See: *ibid.*

⁷⁶ UN General Assembly, *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees*, 28 July 1951, United Nations, Treaty Series, vol. 189, p. 137, at <https://www.refworld.org/docid/3be01b964.html>, 1 VI 2022.

⁷⁷ See: K. Narkowicz, "Refugees Not Welcome Here: State, Church and Civil Society Responses to the Refugee Crisis in Poland," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 31 (2018), p. 360.

⁷⁸ W. Klaus, "Security First: New Right-Wing Government in Poland and Its Policy Towards Immigrants and Refugees," *Surveillance & Society*, vol. 15, no. 3/4 (2017), p. 523.

political philosophy and its concepts of sovereignty, political identity and statehood itself.⁷⁹ Thus, PiS referred to two of the three elements of the radically populist right-wing triad – immigration and security.⁸⁰

According to the Polish far right, Poles and only Poles have to decide who could (and who could not) live in Poland. The Law and Justice government rejected the previous commitment to relocate refugees on Polish soil, as demanded by the European Union. The authorities raised issues about their status, labelling them ‘economic migrants’, but more importantly, they refused to receive people from Muslim countries. Jarosław Kaczyński observed, *At the same time, if we look at the problem that has been raised here, we have to distinguish firmly between refugees, who are truly fleeing the war, and economic migrants. We must differentiate between them. And who created the whole magnet here, the magnet that induces all economic migrants? Germany did. And it is their problem. Orbán was right here; it is their problem, not ours.*⁸¹

The political response to the European refugee crisis was determined by the 2015 parliamentary elections, as a consequence of which the populist right came to power. Poland’s new Prime Minister Beata Szydło announced that Poland would not receive any immigrants. The government made this decision after the terrorist attacks in Brussels in 2016, justifying it with the potential threat from Muslims that Poland was supposed to receive. Many comments concerning refugees were of a racialised character.⁸² They proved the statement that *racism turns out to be a significant, important and ever-gaining popularity aspect of the social and cultural (as well as political, economic, etc.) life.*⁸³

We have to acknowledge that the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 triggered a wave of racism aimed at immigrants in many countries. Emmanuelo Toscano stresses that different types of racist attitudes and behaviours in Italy after 2001 can be divided into three different configurations.⁸⁴ The first is an institutional racism characteristic, in particular, of such political parties as Lega Nord, making use of anti-Islamic sentiments and including religious discourse in a wider criticism of migration. The second is criminal racism, comprising acts of criminal violence against immigrants. The third configuration is populist racism of the far right, although it is not limited to the far right. In view of the weakening forms of biological racism, populist racism focuses on cultural differences, social instability and the lack of security with respect to immigration issues.

⁷⁹ A. Burke, *Fear of Security: Australia’s Invasion Anxiety*, Cambridge–New York 2008, pp. 1-2.

⁸⁰ C. Mudde, “The Populist Radical Right...,” p. 1179.

⁸¹ Cited in: M. Krzyżanowski, “Discursive Shifts in Ethno-Nationalist Politics: On Politicization and Mediatization of the ‘Refugee Crisis’ in Poland,” *Journal of Immigrant and Refugee Studies*, vol. 16, no. 1-2 (2018), p. 87.

⁸² K. Narkowicz, “Refugees Not Welcome Here...,” pp. 365-366.

⁸³ See: M. Turowski, “Granice rasy. Między nowym rasizmem a płynną rasologią,” *Studia Krytyczne/Critical Studies*, no. 1 (2015), p. 124.

⁸⁴ E. Toscano, “The Rise of Italian Populism and ‘Fascism of the Third Millennium’ in the Age of Migration and Security,” in G. Lazaridis, K. Wadia (eds), *The Securitisation of Migration in the EU: Debates since 9/11*, Basingstoke–New York 2015, p. 171.

The situation in Poland is quite similar, but there are also examples of biological racism here. The Polish right worries that refugees carry *all kinds of parasites and protozoa which are not dangerous in these people's bodies, but can be dangerous here* (Jarosław Kaczyński).⁸⁵ It should be added that the use of the language of biology and medicine was the *differentia specifica* of Nazi propaganda. Jews were *the poisoners of the nations* (*Volksvergifter*), compared to bacteria (*Spaltfilz*).⁸⁶

The anti-migration rhetoric of the Polish authorities is a part of the broader phenomenon – the ‘Antemurale myth’ of the nations of Central Europe as a bastion defending Christian Europe against foreign invaders. Originating in Hungary, it spread throughout the region, for example, in Slovakia and the Czech Republic. According to this perspective, refugees and migrants are perceived as hostile armies whose advance across Europe, in the face of the inactivity of the corrupt elites of the West, must be stopped by Hungary and Poland.⁸⁷ Jarosław Kaczyński warned that: *If somebody says all of this is not true, then have a look around Europe, let's take Sweden. There are 45 zones there governed by Sharia law; there is no control of the state. [...] There are fears of hanging out the Swedish flag at schools, since there is a custom like that over there because there is a cross on the flag.*⁸⁸

It can be concluded that PiS's politics and rhetoric are anti-immigrant, Islamophobic and, sometimes, even racist.⁸⁹ Narkowicz puts it simply: *The Polish response to the so-called 'refugee crisis' should be analysed as a subtext to the broader political changes in the country, whereby the figure of the Muslim terrorist disguised as a refugee has allowed the government to advance its nationalistic agenda aiming to exclude all that is considered 'foreign'. The aftermath of the refugee crisis showed a rise in xenophobic attitudes, including Islamophobia and anti-Semitism.*⁹⁰

Just like the Jew symbolised, first of all, ‘bad and uncivilised’ Bolsheviks coming from somewhere in the East whom the Nazis had to fight to prevent ‘the Bolshevisation of the world’, nowadays Muslim immigrants are seen as constituting the agenda of ‘cultural Marxism’ and left-wing extremists who, for reasons known only to them, want to destroy Europe and its ‘traditional’ values. The terrorist attacks in France and Germany between 2015 and 2016 provided fodder for the radical right in Europe, including Poland. Shortly after PiS came to power in November 2015, one of the leading PiS politicians who was soon to become head of Polish diplomacy, Witold Waszczykowski, stated that the increase in terrorist threats at the time was an ‘attack on European

⁸⁵ See: J. Cienski, “Migrants Carry ‘Parasites and Protozoa’, Warns Polish Opposition Leader,” *Politico*, 14 October 2015, at <https://www.politico.eu/article/migrants-asylum-poland-kaczynski-election/>, 1 VI 2022.

⁸⁶ P. Kołtunowski, *Strategia propagandy hitlerowskiej w Generalnym Gubernatorstwie na podstawie „Kraukauer Zeitung” (1939-1945). Studium historyczno-filologiczne*, Lublin 1990, p. 128.

⁸⁷ W. Przybylski, “Explaining Eastern Europe: Can Poland's Backsliding Be Stopped?,” *Journal of Democracy*, vol. 29, no. 3 (2018), p. 61.

⁸⁸ Cited in: M. Krzyżanowski, “Discursive Shifts in Ethno-Nationalist Politics...,” p. 86.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁹⁰ K. Narkowicz, “Refugees Not Welcome Here...,” p. 357.

civilisation', while the readiness to accept refugees was a manifestation of 'left-wing political correctness'.⁹¹ Waszczykowski, like other European conservatives blamed Muslims for their plight, arguing that they do not want to integrate into the societies of the European countries in which they live.⁹²

It should be remembered that the refugee crisis that affected Europe in the years 2014-2016 aroused anti-immigrant and xenophobic sentiments in many countries.⁹³ Public fears of the consequences of their influx into Europe in many countries became 'fuel' for populist and national-conservative groups. The course of the crisis had different dynamics in Europe. It is possible to notice differences between its socio-political reworking in Western European (the 'Old Union') and Central and Eastern European (the 'New Union') countries.⁹⁴ Bearing in mind the scale of the refugee influx and its distribution among countries, it can be noted that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe experienced it basically only in the discourse layer, Poland being a case in point in this respect.

Right-wing politicians also made extremely controversial comparisons. Janusz Korwin-Mikke, one of the leaders of the Confederation, pointed out that refugee camps should not be built in Poland because they *will flee to Germany anyway*, and he suggested the possibility of placing them in the former death camp at Auschwitz *because it just happens not to be occupied*.⁹⁵

The intensity of anti-refugee and anti-immigrant content during the period under analysis correlated with the dynamics of the refugee influx into Europe. When the influx decreased, both the media and right-wing politicians spoke less frequently on the subject. One can also observe an opportunistic link between this issue and the rhythm of the Polish election campaigns. Indeed, the greatest amount of anti-immigrant discourse activity was recorded in 2015 (parliamentary elections) and 2018 (local government elections). The effectiveness of anti-immigrant discourse was demonstrated by the social research conducted at that time. The fears aroused in society accelerated the decline in social acceptance for refugees. From May 2015 to February 2016, this

⁹¹ rz, "Mocne słowa Waszczykowskiego po zamachach: Już słyszę dyskusję tego oszalałego lewactwa," *Niezależna*, 14 November 2015, at <https://niezalezna.pl/72909-mocne-slowa-waszczykowskiego-po-zamachach-juz-slysze-dyskusje-tego-oszalalego-lewactwa>, 1 VI 2022.

⁹² B. Parekh, "Europe, Liberalism and the 'Muslim Question,'" in T. Modood, A. Triandafyllidou, R. Zapata-Barrero (eds), *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship. A European Approach*, Abingdon-New York 2006, p. 179.

⁹³ J. Khrebtan-Hörhager, "Italia – la terra promessa? Lampedusa and the Immigrant Crisis of the European Union," *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, vol. 10 (2015), pp. 85-99.

⁹⁴ I. Lassen, "Resisting Dehumanization: Citizen Voices and Acts of Solidarity," *Critical Discourse Studies*, vol. 15, no. 5 (2018), pp. 427-443; see also: F. Windel, A. Balaram, K.M. Perkins, "Discourses of the Willkommenskultur (Welcoming Culture) in Germany," *Critical Discourse Studies*, vol. 19, no. 1 (2022), pp. 93-116.

⁹⁵ M. Nałęcz, "Janusz Korwin-Mikke ws. uchodźców. «Pod żadnym pozorem nie należy budować dla nich obozów»," *WP Wiadomości*, 12 April 2018, at <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/janusz-korwin-mikke-ws-uchodzcow-pod-zadnym-pozorem-nie-nalez-y-budowac-dla-nich-obozow-6240422577227905a>, 1 VI 2022.

acceptance dropped from 72% to 39%.⁹⁶ Two years later, although 29% of respondents accepted the presence of refugees in Poland, it was only until they could return to their countries. Only 5% of the respondents fully accepted the possibility of their free arrival and settlement.⁹⁷

The refugee issue proves that the populist radical right's foreign policy contributes to its popularity.⁹⁸ To be precise, the populist radical right feared that Poland would become a multicultural country when multiculturalism was in crisis due to the jihadist attacks in New York (9/11/2001), Madrid (14/3/2004) and London (7/7 and 21/7/2005). Linking the Islamic religion with terrorism and anti-Western values in the debate is by no means a Central European invention.⁹⁹

Anna Triandafyllidou emphasises that the othering of the immigrant and also the refugee is not the 'natural' order of things, but is linked to a specific socio-political order, namely that of nation-states.¹⁰⁰ It serves purposes that are combined not only with political and economic interests but, above all, national identity. The othering of the immigrant is a source of security for the ingroup and legitimises various forms of direct or indirect exploitation of non-natives.

CONCLUSIONS

The exclusionary vision of Polishness could resonate in a society that, facing an identity crisis, is divided by social classes (huge wage and wealth disproportions, large areas of poverty, including extreme poverty), geography (countryside versus big cities, east versus west) and fast-declining Catholic religious practices – especially among the younger generation (Pew Research Center 2018). One may argue that PiS's practices are not necessarily the main problem, but they remain rather unchallenged by other influential political and social forces. One year before the rightist populists took power in Poland, Agnieszka Graff accurately predicted that: *Poland is no exception, but it may be a key battleground in the transnational culture war because of the political and cultural*

⁹⁶ CBOS, *Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców*, Komunikat z badań nr 24, Warszawa 2016, at https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2016/K_024_16.PDF, 1 VI 2022.

⁹⁷ CBOS, *Stosunek Polaków i Czechów do przyjmowania uchodźców*, Komunikat z badań nr 87, Warszawa 2018, at https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2018/K_087_18.PDF, 1 VI 2022.

⁹⁸ Ch.S. Liang, "Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right," in Ch.S. Liang (ed.), *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right*, Aldershot–Burlington 2007, p. 2.

⁹⁹ A. Triandafyllidou, T. Modood, R. Zapata-Barrero, "European Challenges to Multicultural Citizenship. Muslims, Secularism and Beyond," in T. Modood, A. Triandafyllidou, R. Zapata-Barrero (eds), *Multiculturalism, Muslims and Citizenship. A European Approach*, Abingdon–New York 2006, pp. 1-22.

¹⁰⁰ A. Triandafyllidou, *Immigrants and National Identity in Europe*, London–New York 2001, p. IX.

*prominence of the Catholic Church and because of the general vulnerability of Eastern Europe to right-wing extremism.*¹⁰¹

The above discussion confirms Cas Mudde's statement that what is unique about the study of populist right-wing parties is that there are virtually no researchers who are openly sympathetic to them.¹⁰² Like other researchers, we consider the populist radical right a problem, if not an open threat to the system of liberal democracy. If Kevin Deegan-Krause, who wrote about Slovakia under Vladimir Mečiar in the 1990s, is correct in claiming that the damage done by that politician was less due to his populism *per se* and more due to his nationalism, then in the case of Poland, populism is so firmly merged with nationalism that it is impossible to adequately separate the two. In the layer of discourse, the people (sovereign) is equated with the nation.¹⁰³

Right-wing radicalism can be defined primarily through the ideological criteria of populist and romantic ultra-nationalism, the myth of a homogeneous nation that places the nation above the individual and their civil rights. Its opponent is liberal and pluralistic democracy, along with its values of freedom and equality, and the related categories of individualism and universalism.¹⁰⁴ This is true with regard to Poland. For the populist radical right, the nation is a key category, stretching between demos and ethnos. The nationalist myth is characterised by an effort to construct the idea of nation and national identity by radicalising ethnic, religious, linguistic and other cultural and political criteria of exclusion in order to fuse the state and the nation and to condense the idea of nation into an image of extreme collective homogeneity.¹⁰⁵ Contemporary radical-right populist parties in Poland – like other similar European populist parties – are often linked to romantic nationalism, emphasising the 'glorious past' (which is often mystified), as well as 'ethnic purity' and 'blood and belonging'.¹⁰⁶ Such a vision is highly toxic and dangerous.

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¹⁰¹ See: A. Graff, "Report from the Gender Trenches: War Against 'Genderism' in Poland," *European Journal of Women's Studies*, vol. 21, no. 4 (2014), p. 434.

¹⁰² C. Mudde, "Introduction...", p. 24.

¹⁰³ K. Deegan-Krause, "Populism...", p. 182.

¹⁰⁴ M. Minkenberg, "Between Tradition and Transition: The Central European Radical Right and the New European Order," in Ch.S. Liang (ed.), *Europe for the Europeans: The Foreign and Security Policy of the Populist Radical Right*, Aldershot–Burlington 2007, pp. 262-263.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 263.

¹⁰⁶ A. Triandafyllidou, S. Spencer, "Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe: A Multi-Faceted and Dynamic Reality," in S. Spencer, A. Triandafyllidou (eds), *Migrants with Irregular Status in Europe: Evolving Conceptual and Policy Challenges*, Cham 2020, pp. 1-9.

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