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**Discursive Strategies of Polish Nationalists in the  
Construction of the Other. The Case of Muslims and  
Homosexuals**

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**Abstract**

The paper explores the discursive strategies used by participants of Polish nationalist (radical right) organizations when they speak about others: Muslims and homosexuals. The article is based on the critical discourse analysis of 30 biographical narrative interviews with the members of three main Polish nationalist organizations: the National Radical Camp (ONR), the National Rebirth of Poland (NOP), and the All-Polish Youth (MW). Following the reconstruction of more general ways in which various categories of others are discursively constructed by narrators, the body of the paper focuses on two categories, Muslims and homosexuals, which appear most often in the narratives collected.

The nationalists present themselves as the concerned defenders of both the European civilization as well as the Polish identity based on components such as religion (seen as the source of morality), tradition and history. Others are presented as a threat because of their otherness, claims and aspirations for power and dominance attributed to them. While Muslims constitute the embodiment of a cultural enemy who threatens the European (Christian) civilization, homosexuals are identified with liberalism seen as the danger destroying Polish identity and the traditional family.

*Keywords:* Nationalist Movement; Discourse; Strategies of Justification; Others.

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## *1. Introduction*

In recent years, there has been an increase in the presence and activity of nationalist, populist and right-wing ideas in the public space across Europe. We can observe the rise and spread of both right-wing political parties as well as extra-parliamentary organizations, which have become even more noticeable since the so-called 'refugee crisis'. The recent inflow of refugees from Syria and other countries to Europe has contributed to the strengthening of anti-immigrant and anti-Muslim discourse and protests in different countries, including relatively ethnically homogeneous Poland. Taking into consideration the fact that the nationalist discourse has recently become more influential it seems to be especially important to deepen our knowledge about it by exploring its linguistic characteristics.

The article explores the discursive strategies used by the nationalists when they speak about others: Muslims and homosexuals. It is based on the analysis of biographical-narrative interviews with the members of three Polish nationalist organizations. I focus on firstly: the ways of constructing the other and secondly: explaining/justifying such categorization. While homosexuals represent others against which the nationalist mobilized in the 2000s quite well (personifying one of the threats attributed to the values of West European liberalism and left-wing), the anti-Muslim slogans became increasingly present in the organizations' discourse only in the 2010s. Although there are more enemies mentioned by the nationalists (e.g. the political establishment, European Union representatives, the liberal media, left-wing activists), the paper focuses on these two cases in order to get better insight into the linguistic ways in which others are constructed.

The paper revolves around three questions: (1) how are Muslims and homosexuals described by the nationalists, (2) what traits are Muslims and homosexuals ascribed to, (3) how is the exclusion of Muslims and homosexuals justified (Wodak and Reisigl, 2003: 385)? The language narrators use to describe others reflects as well as creates their perception of them. That is why it is important to understand not only who is perceived as the other and what characteristics are assigned to him/her but also the arguments which are used to support such statements. Therefore, we are able to see how the nationalists construct both the image of others as well as their own. The discursive strategies used here serve as the justification for the individuals' involvement and group activity. It lets us learn how nationalists defend their views and persuade other people of their rightness. The denial of racist and homophobic attitudes is interpreted both in terms of avoiding social stigma (Goffman, 1963) and, in accordance to the concept of new racism, post-racism (Lentin and Titley, 2011; van Dijk, 1992), in terms of the replacement of racist categories by cultural ones, such as the concept of the clash of civilizations.

In the first part, I present a short description of the socio-political context of the present activity of the nationalist movement in Poland. Secondly, I draw the methodology on which the article is based, including the assumptions of critical discourse analysis and biographical-narrative interviews. Thirdly, I describe the main enemies presented in the nationalist discourse which is followed by the focusing on two specific groups: homosexuals and Muslims. I analyze the main discursive

strategies which narrators use to name and characterize the mentioned others as well as justify their own views and opinions.

## *2. The Polish socio-political context*

As many scholars state (van Dijk, 2008; Abell and Myers, 2011; Fairclough and Wodak, 1997) the context plays a crucial role in discourse analysis. Hence, it is important to discuss the socio-political situation in Poland (and also in Europe) which provides the context for nationalist movement activity and discourse. As Daniel Płatek and Piotr Płucienniczak show (2017: 288), that in response to political and discursive challenges, between 1989 and 2013 the nationalist movement went through three phases of mobilization (marginalization: 1989-1999; institutionalization: 2000-2005 and radicalization: 2006-2013). While the former refers to the broader political context which influences 'the opportunities and constraints offered by the political-institutional settings in which collective action takes place' (Koopmans and Olzak, 2004: 201), the latter is understood as 'the aspects of the public discourse that determine a message's chance of diffusion in the public sphere' (ibidem: 202). According to Płatek and Płucienniczak, marginalization results from weak discursive and narrow political opportunities, institutionalization from strong discursive and open political opportunities and radicalization from strong discursive and narrow political opportunities (2017: 293-294). Recently, political context has been changing which can be interpreted in terms of a gradual (and probably not yet completed and decisive) shift from the radicalization to the institutionalization phase. The presidential and parliamentary elections in 2015 show that there is a general new wave of right-wing attitudes in Polish society. The right-wing, conservative party, Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) won the parliamentary elections and gained enough votes to form a one-party government. There is no left-wing party in the new parliament. Moreover, some of the members of the National Movement nominated by the third most supported organization, Kukiz 15', have become members of the parliament as well.<sup>1</sup>

Both discursive and political opportunities now seem to be favourable for nationalist mobilization. Firstly, we observe a more general radicalization of the public discourse, including the spread of hate speech.<sup>2</sup> While the rejection of otherness is

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<sup>1</sup> When in September 2015, the previous Polish government agreed to accept around 7 thousand refugees, the decision was strongly criticized by some right-wing and nationalist parties and organizations. It was described as a betrayal of both Polish society and other Visegrad states. Interestingly, anti-immigrant (mostly anti-Arab, anti-Muslim) statements were presented not only during the marches organized by radical nationalist organizations, but they were also formulated by some politicians, publicists and other public figures. On March 2016, after the terrorist attack in Brussels, the new Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, declared that Poland would not take any refugees for now. As she stated, the procedures are not prepared enough to provide security. During the parliamentary electoral campaign, the leader of the Law and Justice party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość), Jarosław Kaczyński, openly warned people against the immigrants who can be the source of the outbreak of an epidemic.

<sup>2</sup> See more in the report *Hate speech. Contempt speech. Report about the research on verbal violence towards minorities* carried out by the Centre for Research on Prejudice in collaboration with the Stefan Batory Foundation (2017). According to the research examining Poland in 2016, gays and refugees were most often the targets of hate speech.

nothing new, circumstances favour such rhetoric to attract more supporters or at least address a larger audience. The refugees or more precisely, Muslims have become one of the ‘unwanted others,’ common enemy who constitutes a crucial (negative) actor in the nationalists’ discourse. Despite the former attempts to make the image of the nationalist movement more positive and avoid racist slogans in the past, recently the Polish nationalists present negative attitudes towards ‘others’ more openly.

Secondly, the new government seems to support or ignore the nationalists’ activity. When they organized the Independence Day March in 2015 under the slogan ‘Poland for Poles. Poles for Poland’<sup>3</sup> the Polish president, Andrzej Duda, sent them an official letter in which he thanked them for ‘contributing to building of identity and friendly ties connecting the whole Polish community’.<sup>4</sup> Another example of greater permissiveness towards hate speech and crimes, as important elements of far right discourse, is the dissolution by the Prime Minister, Beata Szydło, of the Council for Counteracting Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, a governmental body which has existed since 2013.<sup>5</sup>

While the aforementioned changes are of central importance for understanding contemporary nationalist discourse and practices, it is relevant to stress once again that the empirical research presented in the article took place in the period when the relationship between the nationalist movement and state authorities were more steeped in conflict and nationalism was depicted much more negatively in the public sphere. This, in turn, has some implications for the research design and the course of the study described in the next section.

### *3. Methodology*

The article draws on the critical discourse analysis of the narrative-biographical interviews. Focusing on the identity of the participants of the contemporary nationalist movement in Poland, 30 interviews were carried out with members of the nationalist organizations: the All-Polish Youth (Młodzież Wszechpolska, MW), the National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR) and the National Rebirth of Poland (Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski, NOP)<sup>6</sup> between 2012 and 2015. Some interviews were conducted by me and some by my students who participated in the field work research training ‘Activists and supporters of the national movement’. Theoretical sampling (Glaser and Strauss, 2009: 41) was used to select organizations and their members for the study. I started from the interviews with the representatives of the All-Polish Youth as it was the most visible nationalist organization. Next, in order to saturate the emerging analytical categories, I was trying to get access to the

<sup>3</sup> The Independence Day March is a demonstration organized by nationalist organizations every year on November 11 (the Polish Independence Day).

<sup>4</sup> The letter was published on the All-Polish Youth website: <https://marszniepodleglosci.pl/list-prezydenta-andrzej-dudy-do-organizatorow-i-uczestnikow-marszu-niepodleglosci/>

<sup>5</sup> See the report by the Lambda association for other examples of dismantling anti-hate crime policies, available at: <http://lambdawarszawa.org/lambdawarszawa/poland-is-dismantling-the-hate-crime-policy-warn-civil-society-groups/>

<sup>6</sup> MW, ONR and NOP are three main and the most visible nationalist organizations in Poland. All of them refer to the Polish interwar nationalist movement and were established with the idea of continuing their ideological work. While MW and ONR are associations, NOP is registered as a political party.

members of other organizations as well as people who have different positions (e.g. members, local leaders) within them. Although the sampling procedure chosen does not make the sample representative (in any statistical sense), the material collected did give us some insight into how the discourse about the other is (re)constructed and expressed by individuals who are involved in the most important nationalist organizations in Poland. The structure of the interviews was the same as in the Fritz Schütze's method (see: Schütze, 1992), which included an uninterrupted presentation of the whole life story in the first part of the interview, followed by specific biographical questions in the second part and problem-driven questions in the third part. It is crucial to note that otherness did not constitute a topic of the interview, but it was raised by some interlocutors with reference to various issues.

The analysis of discourse constitutes an important part of research on social movements (Lindekilde, 2014), in this case, the nationalist movement. It is through the use of language that the participants of social movements shape their identity, draw boundaries between we-ness and others, present their worldview and goals. Studies that explore how the notion of 'otherness' is created in the radical right/nationalist discourse are usually based on the analysis of official organizational statements, blogs or media content (Blee, 2007: 120-121). The paper contributes to previous findings by using the internalist perspective (Goodwin, 2006) and hence, analysing the interviews with the participants of the Polish nationalist movement. It gives us a deeper insight into the nationalists' discourse and allows us to understand individual attitudes in the context of face-to-face talk.

Taking into consideration the variety of approaches to discourse analysis and the extensive literature on this topic, it would be impossible to present a detailed elaboration of all theoretical and methodological issues here. Therefore, I will only present crucial points concerning my own analysis. According to the Critical Discourse Analysis approach, discourse is understood as a social practice. It 'implies a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it. A dialectical relationship is a two-way relationship: the discursive event is shaped by situations, institutions and social structures, but it also shapes them' (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997: 55). Critical discourse analysis is a type of discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance and inequality are enacted, reproduced and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts (van Dijk, 2008: 85).

What seems to be crucial in the analysis of the interviews with the participants of such a controversial movement as the nationalist one, is the set of extra-linguistic social variables and institutional settings of the specific situation of the statement (Abell and Myers, 2011: 233). It is important to understand that this level of context refers to the awareness of atmosphere and the relationship between the researcher and the informant. The frames of mutual expectations and notions as well as emotions play an important role during the biographical-narrative interviews when people are asked to share their life stories (Fontana and Frey, 2009). The interview situations can create such obstacles as the narrators' carefulness and hence, avoidance of radical statements. On the grounds that the nationalists express their awareness of their negative image and hence, feel stigmatized or even marginalized, the interview can constitute an opportunity to modify that unfavourable notion. Some of my

interviewees appeared to censor their own opinions not only due to the possible notion about my views, but also due to the presence of a tape recorder. More than once I have had the impression that they focus mostly on positive dimensions of their activity and organization such as charity actions, meetings with veterans or commemoration of historical events/figures. As the destigmatization of the nationalists' image is an important process of identity construction, they tell destigmatizing stories about their initial fear concerning their involvement in a nationalist organization which disappeared just after the first meetings with its members.

What is highlighted by the informants is that there are mostly students and well-educated (doctors, academics, lawyers) people in their ranks. Almost all narrators (28) who participated in the research are students or university graduates as well: history (11), European studies (3), political science (2), law (2) and singular cases of students/graduates in pedagogy, Polish philology, national security, international relations, environmental protection, medical sciences, mathematics, computer science and mechanics and machine design. Two other informants who are/were not involved in studies were a technical college student planning to study; and a graduate of vocational college. Generally we can observe a changed character of the nationalist movement. Bearing in mind the limitations of the sample, it still seems that while during the 1990s there were mostly skinheads, now the students constitute a relevant group within the movement. It connects with the educational aims of the organizations that would like to train new, patriotic elites. When we look at social class background (based on the parents' professions), it can be said that most of the narrators come from the middle class – their parents are office workers and teachers. However, a better grounding of such observation would be needed in a representative sample research project taking into account other factors, such as income or education level (Janicka, Słomczyński, 2014: 62).

During the analysis of the interviews, I was inspired by the analytical approach proposed by Ruth Wodak and Martin Reisigl whose analytical schema consists of three dimensions: thematic contents, discursive strategies and forms of realizations (2003: 385). As regards the contents, I distinguished the discursive construction of the other as a main topic. It relates to such thematic areas as: the linguistic construction of differences (between us and them); the linguistic construction of Muslims and the linguistic construction of sexual minorities. In most cases I did not ask directly about their perception of others. Those themes occurred as the answers to such questions as: what do you like/do not like in your nation or what annoys you in the contemporary world? While analysing discursive strategies of others' constructing I followed the relations of textual realizations: (1) How are others named and referred to linguistically? (2) What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to others? (3) By means of which arguments and argumentation schemes do nationalists try to justify and legitimize the exclusion of others? (ibidem: 385).

#### *4. The picture of the nationalists' enemies*

Discussing the issue of the revival of nationalism in the time of globalization, Manuel Castells states that it concerns the reconstruction of identity based on nationality and against otherness (1997: 360). However, the concept of otherness does not have to be connected with ethnicity and nationality. Anybody, be they migrant, homosexual, feminist, post-communist politician and left-wing activist can be perceived as the other by nationalists. It is a consequence of the simple distinction between 'us' and 'them' which constitutes an important element of the collective identity construction (Taylor and Whittier, 1992). Before I present the specific discursive strategies of the otherness construction I would like to draw a general picture of different opponents who are visible in the nationalists' discourse.

The analysis of the collected narratives, as well as observation of the current activity of the nationalist movement, suggest that the nationalists' identity is based on the one hand on dissatisfaction and rebelliousness against the present and on the other - on being proud of the Polish history, tradition and heritage. The disappointment concerns both political-economic circumstances and social/cultural changes. The present situation is usually explained with reference to history where the chosen periods of the past are presented as the time of great ideals and authorities. Historical attachment involves a similar interpretation of some historical events, anti-communist attitudes, strong criticism and disappointment with regard to the Polish transformation after 1989, the need to remember specific historical figures (e.g. Cursed Soldiers - *Żołnierze Wyklęci*). What is crucial here is the fact that some of the narrators do not see communism as a closed chapter of history, but rather as a living enemy and a real opponent. Left-wing politicians and organizations are perceived as the carriers of this communist threat (Lipiński, 2009: 218). The nationalists have made the anti-communist rhetoric a crucial component of their identity. They use it as their symbolic resource and consider themselves as more anti-communist' than other right-wing organizations. It involves criticizing the way of Polish transformation and perception of today's politicians as post-communist elites. The narrators do not agree with liberal consensus which occurred after 1989 and appearance of such watchwords as freedom of choice, equal rights, minority rights, and tolerance in the public sphere. They criticize politicians which are presented as disgraced, deprived of ideals, hypocritical, focused on their own interests and dependent on European Union elites. Hence, according to the interlocutors, they are guided by 'foreign', not national interest.

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<sup>7</sup> It was a set of Polish resistance organizations and movements formed during the 40s. The term refers to various anti-communist milieus which fought against the Stalinist power after the World War II. The most of them ceased to exist in early 1950s as result of heavy persecution by communist authorities and Soviet forces. Their stories were silenced throughout the state socialism. It was only after the system change that various organizations, including nationalist ones, started to reveal the history of their struggle and demanded commemoration. Since 2011, March 1<sup>st</sup> became the National Day of Memory of Cursed Soldiers in Poland. The assessment of the role of the cursed soldiers in the post-World War II anti-communist opposition remains the subject of political and historical debates in which the arguments stressing their heroism and patriotism clash with the criticism of the civilian casualties of their fight, in particular among ethnic minorities in the post-war Poland accused of cooperation with Soviets.

Left-wing and liberal activists are criticized because of their involvement in struggles over the rights of minorities instead of supporting the economically disadvantaged groups. Moreover, they are presented as aggressive as well as supported (also financially) by the media and the elites. While the nationalists present themselves as defenders of the Polish identity, carriers of historical knowledge and concerned about the continuity of the Polish culture, the opponents seem to be naïve, unthinking, self-interested or mendacious. What is crucial, is that both Muslims and sexual minorities are presented in different ways – not as naïve, but rather as active and focused on their own (dangerous) interests.

### *5. Us and them: others*

The narratives about others are usually followed by more general criticism of multiculturalism, the European Union is presented as yet another communist project and liberalization is understood as breaking up the traditional order. As I already mentioned, Muslims have recently become a broadly discussed group in the nationalists' discourse and to be more specific, the most dangerous enemy. However, their theme is present in interviews which had been conducted long before 'the refugee crisis'.

Taking into consideration the fact that Muslims constitute only a small percentage of the Polish population<sup>8</sup> and to date only a few Syrian refugee families came to Poland, it is quite interesting that they are present to such an extent in the nationalist discourse. When writing about world risk society after 9/11 Ulrich Beck states that 'terrorist enemy images are deterritorialised, de-nationalised and flexible state constructions that legitimise the global intervention of military powers as 'self-defence' (Beck, 2002: 44). Similarly, it seems that they constitute the symbolic and transnational embodiment of the cultural other and imagined enemy constructed by the activists of nationalist movements. As Lentin and Titley state, 'Muslim transnational disloyalty, arising from their inability to transcend the language and tradition of their "countries of origin", or stoked by overriding transnational affiliations, mirrors fears about Jews' lack of allegiance in the pre-war period. The traditional anti-Semitic view sees Jews as a nation apart whose true allegiance is always kept for their co-religionists' (2011: 55). While anti-Semitism which used to be one of the core themes in nationalist discourse for a long time now is barely present,<sup>9</sup> the Muslims are presented as the most dangerous group and threat to the Polish or even European identity.

The homosexual minority seems to have been one of the main opponents of the nationalists (Wrzosek, 2010) for a long time. While Muslims constitute the embodiment of a cultural enemy who threatens European civilization, homosexuals

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<sup>8</sup> The population of Muslims in Poland is estimated at about 25-35 thousand which represents 0.07-0.09 per cent of the total population of Poland. About one-fifth of them are 'the descendants of the Tatars who were already settled in the country by the 13<sup>th</sup>/14<sup>th</sup> century' (Pędziwiatr, 2011: 170; 172).

<sup>9</sup> Despite the fact that the narrators deny being anti-Semites and present such attitudes as the reaction to 'inter-war circumstances', there are some single (usually hidden) anti-Semitic statements in the interviews – they mostly refer to the past: Jews are presented as a greedy and ungrateful group whose aim is to deprive the Polish nation of its identity.

are identified with the danger of destroying the Polish identity which is defined through reference to family and pro-life Catholic values. Homosexuals constitute an opponent who is the embodiment of such phenomena as liberalism, relativism and postmodernism. As Agnieszka Graff states, ‘the word “homosexuality” functions in Polish nationalist context as a synonym of liberal project of united Europe’ (2008: 138). Homosexuality is associated by some of the informants with abortion, euthanasia and paedophilia – by creating a ‘package’ of different phenomena and presenting it as one, they draw a picture of unavoidable changes. According to that view, consent to gay marriages would be followed by liberalization of abortion law or paedophiles’ attempts to organize themselves. The nationalists’ aversion to sexual minorities involves anti-homosexual manifestations, blockades of Equality Parades and campaigns aiming at the promotion and defence of the traditional family.

Both Muslims and homosexuals are presented as homogenous groups which formulate various, unjustified demands towards the state. What is quite interesting is that they are always presented as a community – not as individuals. The individuals are mentioned rather as the examples of positive exceptions: stories about people who the narrators personally know and who assimilate and do not manifest their otherness. Additionally, there are no names referring to others’ appearance, physiognomy, but rather to their behaviour and demands.

Table 1. Discursive strategies of construction of Muslims’ image

Names (How are they linguistically named?)	Muslims, immigrants, Islam, minorities, Arabs, guests, strange culture
Characteristics (What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is no debate with them</li> <li>• Coming to Europe, sitting all days in the coffee places, not working and living on welfare benefits</li> <li>• Not wanting to assimilate</li> <li>• Being expansive</li> <li>• Not understanding European values, democracy and basic human rights</li> <li>• Having different system of values</li> <li>• Not acknowledging the host state institutions</li> <li>• Becoming a majority in Western Europe in 20-30 years</li> </ul>

Source: the author’s own research

Muslims are described with reference to the differences between their culture and the European civilization and values. There are no offensive names in the narratives, but the nationalists provide different (more subtle than in the homosexuals’ case) arguments in order to explain and justify their resistance to the Muslims’ presence in Poland or even Europe. They will be presented in more detail in the next part of the article. The analysis of the interviews shows that the language and the arguments presented by the narrators are much less radicalized and different from what we could expect and what was recently said/written by the nationalist

representatives during manifestations, on official websites and in the media. The narrators present Muslims as people with a completely different system of values, who follow their own rules and are settling *en masse* in Europe.

Table 2. Discursive strategies of constructing homosexuals' image

Names (How are they linguistically named?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Homosexuals, deviants, queers, sick people, homosexual lobby</li> </ul>
Characteristics (What traits, characteristics, qualities and features are attributed to them?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Referring to sexual habits: abnormal behaviour, not natural, immoral, degeneration, deviation, illness, disgusting</li> <li>• Referring to their public action: demanding rights in order to dominate over the law and over others, promoting and manifesting sexual deviation</li> <li>• Jostling and achieving their goals one by one</li> <li>• Defining themselves with the reference to sex orientation (self-humiliation)</li> <li>• Being a threat</li> <li>• Having money and influences (having impact on the World Health Organization)</li> </ul>

Source: the author's own research

When speaking about homosexuals, narrators rarely use openly offensive epithets. The most common name is 'homosexual'. After using the word 'queer' one of the narrators corrected himself quite fast, pointed out the tape recorder, smiled and mentioned political correctness. Such a situation should be analyzed and described as an important part of the extra-linguistic context of the statement. Even if he uses offensive terms in everyday life, the situation of being interviewed makes him change the language and somehow adapt to the particular context. As I have mentioned before, there are not so many offensive names in the narratives, but, on the other hand, 'deviation' is the most common category which appears when the narrators describe the characteristics of sexual minorities. The narrators put stress on abnormal and immoral nature of homosexuality, but first of all, on their powerful and dangerous influences.

## 6. Strategies of justification

Nationalists present different arguments for the justification of the exclusion of others. It is crucial to find out what discursive strategies are used by them as it helps us to better understand how they want to not only justify their views, but also persuade more general public of their rightness.

The first of such strategies is *emphasizing the possible discontinuity of civilization and tradition*. According to the nationalists, civilizations are assigned to a

specific geographical location and involve a specific culture. Multiculturalism is presented here as a possible risk of losing cultural uniqueness as well as the old, traditional order. More often, the narrators refer here to other cultures rather than the Polish one. What is quite interesting is that they focus mostly on food and travel experiences in their argumentations:

Eryk<sup>10</sup> (ONR): By all means I support diversity of cultures, but each of them embedded in its own reality, right... that a satisfaction it is to go for example for... I don't know, a romantic weekend... to Bruges and eat pizza or go to Venice and... eat Chinese soup, right...[...] For instance, I would not like to go to some European country and meet there... Arab, Islam, Turkish culture... it is not an attraction... we can learn about cultures, but... each of them in its own place, because only then it is complete, within the context, not bastardized and so on. [...]

Andrzej (ONR): *I am not a racist, but* I don't know... I think that not without a reason we have different colours of skin and the world looks like in this way... there are spaces where people with the same colour of skin live... and this colour is followed by specific culture... mixing that is not just a loss for... in fact all people lose because some individual, cool cultures die... I would like to go to Africa and see something like that... and McDonalds will soon be in Africa as well... the same with incoming people... today Europe... here [in Poland] it is still so-so, but in the West these Europeans are not able to say who they are... Europe means nothing for them other than the European Union.

The geographical mobility of others and their settlement 'outside their cultural context' is perceived as a risk for different cultures and identities. Similarly, homosexuality (first of all its presence in the public space) is presented as a turn against history and a threat to the traditional order. There is a strong opposition between normal, traditional families and abnormal, deviant homosexuals who destroy the long-established order based on Polish and Catholic values. What is relevant is that Catholicism is also seen as the most important source of morality – therefore, any phenomena which are incoherent with the religious norms, are seen as immoral.

Wiktoria (MW): What gets my goat...of course [the direction] in which Poland has been striving, that homosexuality will become something socially normal. I think that soon, in 15 years, if the national movement fails, [we will have a situation] that abortion will be completely possible, not as today – just in those three cases.

Andrzej (ONR): I think that it is a moral decay...in a nutshell, the world has been going to the dogs. And it will be such situation that even in that our supposedly Catholic state...we will have...and I am passing over queer marriages, homosexuality in general, the same with lesbians...but that there will

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<sup>10</sup> The narrators' real names were anonymized.

be such strange situations with abortion, euthanasia, children's adoptions, bringing them up, influencing their education. I think it is sick that the state is supposed to influence the education in that way...I do not know if you have heard that today it is deleted...there is a project of European history textbook in which painful facts will be deleted and there is no more place for history, objective science [...] we cannot live in falsehood, at some point someone will find out that past and it will affected [us] or we will destroy everything.

It can be argued that that nationalists shape their identities around 'a set of fixed commitments, which act as a filter through which numerous different social environments are reacted to or interpreted' (Giddens, 1991: 90). Giddens calls such people 'the rigid traditionalists, in a compulsive sense' (ibidem: 190).

The other discursive strategy is *emphasizing the difference between us and them*. It follows the previous strategy and refers to civilization, cultural differences and to different systems of values. It is a strategy mostly used in the discourse about Muslims and it involves forecasting the clash of civilizations. By linking the general crisis of the European values and attachment to Christianity with the influx of religious Muslims, the nationalists try to convince their potential supporters that without any anti-immigrant politics, Europe will be overtaken by Islam and will lose its fundaments.

Tadeusz, a member of the All-Polish Youth, says that the emptiness left by Christianity (caused by the Cultural Revolution of the 1960s and the dominance of left-wing and liberal groups which had overtaken the media) has been filled by Islam, which 'does not understand European values, democracy and basic human rights'.<sup>11</sup> What is pretty interesting is the ambivalent attitude towards Europe - on the one hand, it is a positive point of reference as the civilization based on Christian values; on the other hand - contemporary, Western Europe (presented sometimes as a synonym of the European Union) is seen as the liberal political project breaking up with a traditional (good) order and a source of dangerous anti-values. While Tadeusz presents the vision of possible Islamization of Europe, he points to the distance between Poland and Western Europe:

Tadeusz (MW): Well, within 20-30 years Muslims will be the majority in Western Europe and the question is what Western Europe will do with that... will it let itself be dominated or will it take some radical steps, I do not know what will happen, I do not know what will happen there... the army will be on the streets...I do not know...there will be a dictatorship, the Fourth Reich in Germany...I do not know, there are different variants, right...we can border on caliphates, right, or on some emirates...instead of the United Arab Emirates we would have Berlin Emirate or Caliphate Dresden.

Wojciech (MW): [...] it is impossible that two different groups coming from different cultures, I mean civilizations live in the framework of one society, one state. It is what Professor Koneczny proposed before the World War II...that

<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, in the mentioned quotation the narrator presents democracy in positive way which is pretty incoherent with the nationalists' criticism of that system.

point concerning civilizations...in which he stated that if there are two different civilizations, they will always fight each other. And today we have confirmation of that...when we look at things which are going on in Great Britain for example...where suddenly it has turned out that there is a huge group of immigrants, Muslims and they have problems with them. It is because those people [immigrants, Muslims] function in the framework of completely different value systems and so on. Different religion as well, right? And they start to fight each other.

In such a context, Poland is presented as a state which still has the chance to avoid the mistakes made by Western Europe which promoted the policies of multiculturalism. The real and, more often, imagined problems of Muslims' integration in Europe are presented as the core case against these policies. Similarly to Inari Sakki and Katarina Pettersson's findings, 'members of Islamic culture are portrayed as culturally ideologically incompatible with Christianity' (2015). What is quite interesting is that Muslims are presented with reference to abstract, collective categories (religion, civilization) rather than as individuals bearing specific, personal characteristics.

Another and related strategy of justification is connected with the emphasis on *presenting the 'facts' about the experiences of other countries*. The narrators present the differences between homogenous and relatively (still) safe Poland described by some as 'the last bastion of Christian civilization' and multicultural Western Europe which is not able to deal with immigrants and has lost its identity. The facts are presented as 'objective truths' and the role of the informants' values and ideologies in selecting and interpreting them is to a large extent veiled:

Wojciech (MW): Recently, right, a few days ago... there were huge riots in Sweden... on the Swedish outskirts. With Swedes. Muslims did it *because they just have different system of values...* because they say that their religion should dominate... that they do not want to submit to the jurisdiction of courts, police and any other organs. For example, the Muslim community does not recognise the British courts and the British police in Great Britain. [...] The same in France... a few years ago... a few thousand cars were set on fire, there were regular fights with the police... Generally, Western Europe has been heading for war, civil war... religious and civilizational. [...]

Wojciech, similarly to the other informants, presents the riots and fights with the police as provoked by Muslims and explains them by 'just a different system of values'. What is more, the narrator presents it as a source of the predicted future war. Some nationalists mention that Europe will soon turn into a caliphate. By reference to the experiences of other countries and presenting them rather as a set of facts than as an interpretation, the narrators are able to present Muslims as dangerous and expansive strangers who follow a completely different normative system and do not respect European law. Similarly, some narrators refer to other countries in order to show the possible negative consequences of granting more rights to homosexual couples. One of the nationalists mentions the Netherlands and Germany as the

countries in which just after legalising gay marriages, zoophiles and paedophiles started to campaign for their rights. As he comments, as long as we [Poles] do not let the homosexuals have any new rights, we can avoid such situations. The mentioned 'facts' are not always true – they are just presented as empirical credibility of the arguments. For example, gay marriages were legalized by the German Parliament only in June 2017.

It is associated with the other argument against the demands of homosexuals or other minorities. Some narrators suggest that the Polish law protects everyone equally so any new rights for a given group mean privilege. Homosexuals are criticized as people who demand equality of rights because of their otherness which is called 'an unimportant niche'. Many informants highlight the lack of grounds for their claims. According to them, it is rather an attempt to gain superiority over other people. The homosexuals are presented as people who want to be, or even already are, treated in a better way and use their sexual orientation to get into power. The important fact is that minorities are presented as active, not passive groups. Consequently, they are seen as being able to achieve their goals and become powerful. This strategy of presentation lets the nationalists justify the view that the minorities are problematic, take too much for granted and tend to have too much power in Poland, and therefore might destroy the Polish identity and heritage. At the same time, their own activism is seen as the needed reaction to others' initiatives, a kind of defence of public space on 'the majority norms and values' behalf.

### *7. Denial of racism and homophobia*

As I have mentioned above, the nationalists are aware of their negative media image and the still limited acceptance of their activity, and therefore they try to conduct a kind of destigmatization. These attempts involve focusing on the positive sides of organization activity, highlighting the change of people who are creating the movement (from skinheads to students) and stressing how the media lie about them. There is also a strong rejection of being labelled as fascists, Nazis and racists. Not only the need of destigmatization, which is manifested in distancing from other ('more radical') nationalists, but also the consciousness of binding norms and law concerning racism involves aversion to being identified with racializing practices (Billig 1988 in: van Dijk, 1992: 89). Despite the fact that most of the narrators openly criticize the meaning of tolerance, they are aware that their statements may be understood as 'breaking the social norm of tolerance or acceptance' (van Dijk, 1992: 89). As Teun van Dijk writes: 'Denials of racism have both an individual and a social dimension. Not only do most white speakers individually resent being perceived as racists also, and even more importantly, such strategies may at the same time aim at defending the intergroup as a whole: "We are not racists"' (1992: 89).

There can be different forms of denial: a negative attitude can be acceptable only when it concerns a specific feature of a given group, justification or mitigations, excuses, blaming the victim or reversal (ibidem: 90-91). To some extent all elaborated discursive strategies of justification could be seen as a denial of racism and homophobia. Referring to cultural differences and possible risks, nationalists draw a picture of others who are dangerous not because of their biology, but due to

behaviour and demands attributed to them. Similarly to other researchers' findings, there is a common expression in some interviews: 'I am not a racist, but...' and after that the narrators justify their negative attitudes towards others:

Wojciech (MW): [...] *we are not racists* because it always comes to mind when you say nationalists. It is not racism. With respect to biology, right? We are not against anyone because of their biology. It is stupid, you know? That we are against them because someone is black. Someone is Mongoloid, someone is... I do not know... Italian or anything, right? Idiocy, totally. We... nobody has such views. If we are against... for example immigrants in our country... it is *not because of their physiognomy, but because of their culture*.

Wojciech, one of the members of the All-Polish Youth, uses a traditional concept of racism and associates racism with aversion to people because of their skin colour. However, he does not see anything wrong with justification of negative attitudes with reference to their culture. Some researchers write about 'new racism' or 'post-racism' (Lentin and Titley, 2011) what implies that there is a new nature of racism: 'cultural norms, values, tradition and life styles of outsiders are now held to be problematic, rather than physiognomy.' In the so-called 'differentialist turn' it is 'racism, which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others, but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions' (Balibar, 2007: 84). To add, 'the more modern and subtle forms of ethnic or racial inequality and especially the 'racism', or rather 'ethnicism' based on constructions of cultural difference and incompatibility, is seldom characterized as 'racism', but at most as xenophobia, and more often than not, as legitimate cultural self-defence' (Baker, 1981; Dovidio and Gaertner 1986 in: van Dijk 1992). Since the narrators consider racism within the classical frames, exclusion of others due to their culture is not racist. Additionally, the narrators try to present themselves as not-racist or even as tolerant people by telling stories about their friendly or at least non-problematic relations with representatives of others. It seems that the main reason for that is to show that they are not against all immigrants/homosexuals, but rather that they are against those who manifest their otherness in a public space. It is an ostensible acceptance which depends on the degree of public invisibility of others:

Dominik (ONR): Once I met an Arab at the party... there were no conflicts, he has lived here [in Poland] since his childhood... he does not promote... he just does not force his own rules, he just knows that he is in Poland and there are some rules and he accepts them.

The same argumentation emerges out of the statements concerning homosexuals. Some narrators claim: 'I do not care what they do in their bedrooms, I just don't want to see them in public,' 'I just do not want a minority to attack the majority.' 'I just do not want my kids to look as this.' There is a strong distinction between the private sphere and the public sphere. While the former

seems to be out of the range of the nationalists' interest, the latter has to be reserved for Polish – and therefore Catholic – values.

Tadeusz (MW): [...] with MP Godson [Polish conservative politician of Nigerian origin] we can absolutely cooperate and build Poland because he is a *man brought up in a Christian culture...* and it is actually a great example... how the world is changing... that there is a man from Africa who comes to us and he teaches us what the sanctity of life means... what marriage is... that homosexual couples are not marriages and so on... and he defends it and he is not afraid... so such nationalism... such a nation... that anyone who feels Polish... who cultivates... who identifies with that.

The manifestation of readiness to cooperate or meet others is another and pretty interesting strategy of denying one's racism. On the one hand, they present themselves as people who do not have problems with otherness, but on the other hand, they always add special conditions under which it is possible.

Interestingly, despite the fact that homophobia is not avoided as much as racism, strategies similar to the denial of racism can be observed in nationalists' ways of talking about homosexuals. For instance, the National Rebirth of Poland member, Dariusz, says:

Dariusz (NOP): *I don't hate them, but* similarly to the case of an alcoholic, I perceive him as a sick person, I don't hate him, I do not want to shoot him or sterilise him and the same with homosexual – *I don't hate him, but I claim that he is sick* and one should, according to John Paul II and his words in *Memory and Identity*, one should treat them, show them love, I mean, respect.

It is a kind of denial of homophobia. Justifying his opinion through a specific reading of the words of Pope John Paul II, Dariusz frames homosexuality as an illness, declares compassion instead of hatred and emphasizes that homosexuals deserve compassion, respect and professional medical help. Similar statements focus on the powerfulness of homosexuals who according to some narrators were able to (financially) influence the World Health Organization in order to stop homosexuality being considered as a mental illness.

However, the denial of racism, which is one of the well explored discursive strategies of the far right activists (van Dijk, 1992; Billig, 1988), appears not only when the narrators talk about otherness, but also when they explain the various challenges they have to deal with. For example, some of those who control the recruitment process put stress on too radical views of some of the candidates who mention in their application their positive attitudes towards Hitler, readiness to beat black people or leftists.

What is more, drawing boundaries between racists (them) and non-racists (us) can be linked with internal conflicts within the nationalist movement. There is a very limited cooperation between the National Rebirth of Poland (NOP) and the two other organizations. One of the All-Polish Youth members explains why he does not see any opportunities to work together with the NOP:

‘Because they are a bit... extreme. We are not as extreme a milieu as we are depicted... we are normal people. But the NOP is a kind... You can actually find both racists and different other people there... it is not for me. [...]’

Such statements play an important role in creating the organizational collective identity and positive self-presentation.

## *8. Conclusions*

The aim of the paper was to present the main discursive strategies used by the participants of the Polish nationalist movement when they speak about others. The analysis focused on two specific categories of others: Muslims and homosexuals. Contributing to the debates on the changing nature of racists and homophobic attitudes among the activists of far right groups in various countries (Blee, 2007; Lentin and Titley, 2011; van Dijk, 1992), the analysis shows that the ‘otherness’ of both categories chosen is created with reference to differentialist terms (Balibar, 2007) connected with culture, civilization and tradition.

The main strategies of justification for the (desired) exclusion of others include: 1) emphasizing the possible discontinuity if civilization and tradition, (2) emphasizing the difference between us and them and (3) presenting the (imagined) ‘facts’ about the (negative) experiences of other countries in dealing with others. Therefore, others are presented by the narrators as a real threat both to the continuity of the European civilization based on Christianity and to the Polish identity having its foundations in the Catholic Church and the traditional family. According to the narrators, cultural differences (connected mostly with religion) constitute the main factor which makes the idea of multicultural societies impossible to succeed. Their attitudes reflect the core characteristics of ‘new racism’ and ‘post-racism’ (Lentin and Titley, 2011) which justifies the exclusion of others with the reference to the alleged incompatibility of cultural characteristics and life styles rather than merely phenotypical markers of those excluded (Balibar, 2007).

Referring to the Western countries’ experiences and predicting the clash of civilizations, the nationalists state that their criticism of others is well-justified and based on the need to defend the essence of the Polish nation rather than any racist attitudes or prejudices. Both Muslims and homosexuals are presented as groups which are actively influential and not ready to adapt to the extant traditional order. However, the nationalists’ language and arguments do not seem to be as radical as one could assume. Owing to the fact that they are aware of their negative image on the one hand, and the importance of political correctness and legal consequences on the other, they try to use subtle linguistic expressions and deny racism (understood by them in classical-biological terms) and homophobia. These discursive strategies make the Polish nationalists’ studied similar to the far-right activists studied in other countries (van Dijk, 1992; Billig, 1988).

In many cases, the nationalists whom I interviewed presented themselves as real patriots. As Aleksandra Kozłowska-Grzymała argues, ‘the statements which from the point of view of the multicultural discourse could be described as xenophobic and

racist, were presented in the ethno-nationalistic discourse as an act of courage, a testimony to true wisdom and patriotic duty' (2009: 73). Therefore, they seem to be, unlike the leftists and liberal politicians, rational, aware of threats and worried about the Polish nationality and uniqueness. They place themselves in the role of defenders of tradition, history and Polish values. At the same time they try to regain control over the public sphere and make it more homogenous.

Taking into consideration the fact that the social and political context has been changing (e.g. by the new right-wing parliament in Poland, the influx of refugees into Europe, Brexit) it will be worthwhile to observe the changes of the nationalist movement discourse and its mutual relations with the public discourse as well as with the discourses of individual participants. So far, we can observe increasing similarities between the nationalist organizations and the Polish government in the perception of refugees (as potential terrorists and a cultural danger) and homosexuals (as a threat to the traditional order). What is more, the nationalists have started to create Ukrainians as another (economic) threat. Therefore, it would be important to continue the analysis and see what strategies are used in the discourse about them.

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