

No longer red, but a rainbow-coloured
plague: the influence of ontological
insecurities on the anti-gender discourse
in Poland

by

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Abstract

In recent years anti-genderism has increased in popularity, as the populist parties, illiberal governments and conservative groups have begun to implement the discourse into their politics. The discourse can function as a symbolic glue, political tool as well as part of the religious narrative. Anti-genderism can emerge in different parts of the world, however, in the post-Socialist states of Central and Eastern Europe, gender is perceived as a totalitarian ideology, comparable even to communism. To study the influence of the historical ontological insecurities on the construction of the anti-gender discourse, this thesis analyses the case of the so-called LGBT-free zones in Poland. Through analysis of the resolutions produced by the local governments combined with statements of the religious actors, the thesis argues that the current anti-gender discourse is influenced by the insecurities of the Polish Catholic Church. To conduct such a study, this thesis has adhered to ontological security, gendered nationalism, chosen traumas and glories, which together with Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory guided the research. The thesis' findings revealed that there are two anti-gender discourses that operate currently in Poland, which may share the same interests, but ultimately, they work for different actors.

Keywords: anti-genderism; chosen trauma; discourse; gender ideology; gendered nationalism; ontological security;

Words:19762

List of abbreviations

LGCOFR - Local Government Charter of Family Rights

Ordo Iuris - Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture

PEC – Polish Episcopate Conference (Konferencja Episkopatu Polski)

PiS – Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość)

PO – Civic Platform (Platforma Obywatelska)

TFP – Tradition, Family, Prosperity

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1. Introduction

In recent years a variety of studies have been published that focus on the issue of anti-genderism, which to be defined needs to be discussed within its particular context. However, the range of issues that anti-gender movements oppose include same-sex marriage, sex education, gender studies, the existence of gender, and general anti-feminist attitudes (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018: 8-10; Bracke and Paternotte, 2016: 148). Even though the exact focus of the anti-gender discourse depends on the specific national context, the anti-gender movements are connected transnationally, as they tend to share the same strategies (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017). Moreover, the emergence of anti-gender groups can be triggered by the same events, which bounds the movements further. In the European context, one of the triggering issues has been the ratification of the Istanbul Convention, while the hostility tends to be directed toward the European Union (Peto, 2015: 132).

Anti-gender discourse is present in several European countries, such as Slovakia and Croatia (Tekstas and Ozgur Keyson, 2021), Bulgaria (Darakchi, 2019), Lithuania (Buschmann, 2017), Hungary (Fodor, 2022) or Russia (Edenborg, 2021). The movements are also active in Latin American countries such as Brazil, Ecuador and Mexico (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018). What can be remarked here, is that while the discourse may be present in all the cases, it affects them unevenly. In the case of Hungary, Russia and Poland, the anti-gender rhetoric is stronger and more successful, because it has been implemented in the rhetoric of the ruling governments, thus, it became a part of the official politics (Edenborg, 2021; Kovats and Peto, 2017; Žuk and Žuk, 2020). Despite the effectiveness of the movements, they seem to persist in many countries.

One explanation behind the prevalence of anti-genderism bounds it to religion, however, scholars argue that while the idea originated in the Vatican, it has become a more political issue, rather than just religious one (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022). The anti-gender movements are not linked to particular regions, but cultural and

historical contexts influence the movements' form and focus (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022: 6). They work primarily on the national scale, but even then, they can be conceptualised as a part of a broader global movement. Considering the enormous amount of money that had been donated to religious extremists in Europe to promote anti-genderism (Datta, 2021), it can be argued that anti-gender discourse became embedded with a political dimension. Between 2009 and 2018, European foundations, Russian oligarchs and the US Christian Right donated at least USD707.2 million to non-governmental organisations, foundations, but also political parties (ibid). Thus, anti-genderism can be analysed as a global political issue.

1.1. Case, aim and research questions

The conceptualisation of anti-genderism as a political issue requires to discuss it within its political context to explore what political purposes it can potentially serve. Similarly, Bosia argues that while the problem of state homophobia is indeed a global issue, its local forms are driven by the specific problems a particular state faces (2014). Following this line of argumentation, I focused on one country in the analysis to consider the impact of the national specificity. Poland was chosen due to the successfulness of the anti-gender discourse and the variety of actors that are involved in spreading it.

In Central and Eastern Europe, anti-gender discourse is strongly connected to their historical past. The anti-gender movements portray gender as a new totalitarian ideology, dangerous to culture and tradition, which could be even more dangerous than communism (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018: 9; Buschmann, 2017; Graff and Korolczuk, 2017). Furthermore, gender ideology is often framed as a new form of cultural colonisation, conducted by the European Union on the Eastern European states (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2018: 9; Marchlewska et al, 2019; Korolczuk and Graff, 2018; Grzebalska, 2015). The lack of a proper translation or equivalent of the word "gender" in the native languages, allows anti-gender activists to manipulate their audience further by associating the word exclusively

with the West and Western culture (Darakchi, 2019). Thus, the fight against gender can be framed as a broader resistance against both globalisation and the West.

Polish anti-gender rhetoric represents this conceptualisation. Although anti-genderism has not emerged until 2012-2013, it has been growing strongly since then (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017). The emergence was triggered by three factors: the Istanbul Convention, the paedophilia scandal within the Church and WHO's guidance on sex education (Grzebalska, 2015: 83). The effectiveness of the discourse can be linked to the strong position of the Catholic Church, its good relations with the government, but also to the support of religious lobbies and NGOs and even public television (Żuk and Żuk, 2020). The Church and the government promote a specific national identity that relies firmly on Christianity (ibid: 572). Thus, the fight against gender is not fought in the background by the radicals, instead, it became a national issue. As result, gender ideology became framed as a threat to identity. This led to the creation of so-called "LGBT ideology-free zones", which have been referred to as "LGBT-free zones".

In February 2019 the Mayor of Warsaw signed an LGBT declaration that would introduce the "LGBT Charter" into the structures of the city (Ramsden, 2019). The actual capabilities of this document were overestimated by the anti-gender activists, who argued that the introduction of the charter would favour queer community (ibid). In reality, the charter promised to re-open an emergency hostel for LGBT people, creation of a mechanism for reporting homophobic crimes, psychological and legal help, and sex education based on the WHO's guidelines (LGBT+ Declaration, 2019). This document promised to introduce a system of "Lightkeepers" (*Latarnicy*), which would rely on having a group of teachers that would monitor the situation of queer students and offer help when it is needed (ibid). There were few other points in the charter linked to inclusion, tolerance and anti-discrimination at work (ibid). Yet, the idea of Lightkeepers and reformed sex education was found to be the most controversial.

The adoption of the charter led to a heated discussion and received an official response from the Polish Catholic Church, which was presented during the Polish

Episcopate Conference (*Konferencja Episkopatu Polski*) in March. 13 days later the first resolution against “LGBT ideology” was adopted and within few days other regions followed their lead. In 2020 a third of Poland declared itself to be an “LGBT ideology-free zone” (Ciobanu, 2020). The case of Poland then exemplifies a strong and successful anti-gender discourse. Thus, by focusing on the case of so-called “LGBT-free zones”, I explore in more depth the Polish anti-gender rhetoric. The following research question guides the research:

RQ1: How are ontological insecurities instrumentalised by the Church through anti-gender discourse in Poland?

With this question, I aim to explore the connection between ontological insecurities and anti-genderism. By referring to the Church in the question, I seek to analyse the role of the Church in the situation. Hence, this thesis explores to what extent the Church is involved in the construction and spreading of the discourse. The second question asks:

RQ2: How is the Polish queer community constructed to be the symbol of insecurities by the political and religious actors in Poland?

This question identifies that queer community has become a symbol of insecurities, but it seeks to expose how this particular construction was made. As the regions declared themselves to be “LGBT ideology-free”, it can be assumed that the discourse is currently focused on LGBT people, rather than on other issues.

Several regions have repealed their resolutions due to losing funds from the EU (Reuters, 2021a), however, it does not mean that anti-gender activists stopped their actions. In October 2021 the parliament agreed to keep working on the citizens’ project that could ban pride parades or any demonstrations that promote marriage equality (dw.com, 2021). Therefore, the case is still actual and can be used to analyse how anti-gender discourse continues to hold influence in Poland.

The rest of the thesis has the following structure: the next chapter focuses on the origins of the anti-gender thought and its connection to the Vatican, then it analyses anti-genderism as a part of populism and explores the idea of anti-genderism as a

political tool. The chapter ends with literature concerned with the Polish case. The theoretical framework presents gendered nationalism, ontological security and chosen traumas and glories. The methodological chapter expands on Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory and chosen concepts as well as presents empirical material and reflects on ethical issues. With the use of theoretical concepts and methodological tools, the analysis conducts discourse analysis to explore the topic of anti-genderism. The last chapter presents conclusions from the case.

2. Literature review

2.1. The birth of anti-gender discourse

The emergence of anti-genderism has been associated with the Vatican due to the role of the Catholic Church in shaping and promoting the discourse (Korolczuk, 2016; Bracke and Paternotte, 2016). The theoretical foundations behind the discourse were established in the second half of the XX century (Korolczuk, 2016; Case, 2016; Garbagnoli, 2016) and are tied to the teaching of three popes - Pius XII, John Paul II and Benedict XVI (Case, 2016). They popularised the theory of complementarity, which assumes men and women to be different while being essentially complementary to each other (ibid). However, this conceptualisation is a relatively new development. According to Case's research, this idea did not emerge until the mid-XX century, before that relations between sexes were described more in terms of subordination, rather than complementarity (ibid).

For Garbagnoli, the origins of anti-genderism can be located in the mid-90s, when it emerged as a reaction to discussion of reproductive rights, gender equality, and empowerment during the UN Conference in Cairo and the World Conference on Women in Beijing (2016: 189). As well as Case, Garbagnoli refers to the theory of complementarity, but she argues that the conferences triggered its implementation, and this is when it became to be used to delegitimise and denaturalise gender and gender studies (ibid: 191). Thus, since then gender became to be conceptualised as non-scientific and was dismissed further to be an ideology (ibid). Therefore, the Vatican frames its own perception as the scientific one, which

is promoted by the anti-gender researchers, who work both globally and locally (Case, 2016; Korolczuk, 2016).

Vatican's anti-genderism aspires to connect religious and scientific dimensions, which could be the way for the Catholic Church to make its stand more attractive to a variety of groups. Yet, there is another element of the Vatican's narrative, which can be discussed – framing gender as a threat to culture or even civilisation (Vaggione, 2016). This conceptualisation of gender was advocated by the pope John Paul II, who placed gender at the same level as Islamic fundamentalism and ISIS (Bracke and Paternotte, 2016: 148). This comparison suggests that the threat can be absorbed from the current affairs, whether they are security threats or changes in the law. Thus, the discourse has a reactionary character, but it is also flexible as it can adjust to the current circumstances. Furthermore, this comparison reveals that anti-gender discourse can be constructed through interaction with other discourses. In this case, John Paul II adhered to the use of racialised, xenophobic discourse to associate gender with a cultural threat to the European civilisation. Thus, this comparison reveals the Eurocentric nature of anti-genderism, which considering its roots in the Vatican is not surprising.

However, anti-gender movements can emerge in other parts of the world and do not have to be tied to the Catholic Church (Korolczuk, 2016). Thus, the contextualisation of the discourse is necessary to establish the causes and drivers behind it, especially considering that even the Vatican re-shapes its own position to adjust to new circumstances. Currently, gender is framed as ideological colonisation (Vaggione, 2016). This frame was popularised by the pope Francis, who introduced a postcolonial discourse to the Vatican (Bracke and Paternotte, 2016). As result, gender can be compared to colonisation, while in the post-communist states it can be framed in totalitarian terms (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017). Anti-gender discourse is then not only reactionary, and flexible, but it is also emotional, which makes the discourse even more appealing as it allegedly tries to protect the world's order and the well-being of people.

2.2. Anti-gender discourse and populism

When it comes to anti-genderism, it tends to be discussed together with populism (Bellè and Poggio, 2018; Kováts, 2018). It has been argued that populism cannot function properly alone in politics due to its “thinness” (della Porta & Wagemann, 2012). Instead, it works well attached to other ideologies, as it equips them with necessary strategic tools for mobilisation (Moffitt, 2020: 15; Miller-Idriss, 2019: 18). The rising popularity of anti-genderism can be then contributed to its implementation in the rhetoric of right and far-right populist parties, as some of them have utilised anti-genderism in their programmes (Kováts, 2018). Although anti-genderism is not exclusively bound to the populist parties, it works well with the populist frame (ibid). Both adhere to the use of the same tactics, such as the creation of antagonistic division between elite and people, but also both are generally critical of globalisation (Miller-Idriss, 2019). Therefore, scholars tend to approach the topic of anti-genderism by analysing emotions, their use in the construction of collective identity and their use in the mobilisation of the individuals (Kalm and Meeuwisse, 2020).

However, it has been argued that while the anti-gender movements focus on gender in their narrative, their dissatisfaction is rooted in the current neoliberal order and institutions that represent it, such as the European Union (Grzebalska et al, 2017). Thus, the fight against gender is not really about gender, gender constitutes only a symbol of greater crisis (Kováts, 2018). This crisis can be defined as dissatisfaction with the current order, but more specifically, it is experienced by people who do not feel that the system benefits them. Rather, they perceive the neoliberal order as focused on the elites, their needs and their well-being, while the rest of society is criticised for being “backwards” when they share their negative opinion (Grzebalska et al, 2017). In a way, gender became a “symbolic glue”, because it unities different groups of people, who while may not share the same values or background, are linked through the same shared enemy (Kováts and Pöim, 2015).

2.3. Anti-gender discourse as a political tool

While anti-gender discourse positions itself against globalisation, anti-gender movements benefit in many ways from it. Mostly it relates to mobilisation, cooperation and transnationality of the discourse. To expand on this, anti-gender discourse can be defined as transnational because it is not bounded to one specific region, rather it can adjust and fit in several national settings (Garbagnoli, 2016). Furthermore, the discourse is transnational because anti-gender groups share strategies for mobilisation, but also tactics of how to approach their desired issues (Paternotte and Kuhar, 2017). Moreover, they communicate with each other through ultra-conservative networks, such as Tradition, Family and Property (TFP), as well as organise special forums such as the World Congress of Families where they meet (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022). While they are located in different regions, they remain in contact, thus, through this constant interaction, they support each other in cooperation and mobilisation.

The other aspect of the globality of European anti-genderism was revealed in 2021 when the European Parliament Forum for Sexual and Reproductive Rights published a report, which in detail discussed funding of anti-gender campaigns and their financial ties to the USA, Russia and European foundations (Datta, 2021). According to the report's findings, the highest amount of money comes from Europe, namely, from foundations founded by the elites, aristocrats or clerics, which constitute conservative networks (ibid). The second place belongs to the Russian oligarchs and the last to the US Christian Right (ibid). Even though the established amount of money is already high, the actual number is probably way higher due to the lack of the same transparency norms that both Russian and US donors have to follow (ibid: 30). Hence, it can be assumed that anti-gender campaigns receive even more funds than it was reported.

This report was presented to the Polish Parliamentary Group for Population, Health and Development in April 2022. During the presentation, one of the invited scholars reflected on the importance of anti-genderism in political propaganda, especially now when it has been used as one of the Russian reasons to justify the

war in Ukraine (Sejm, 2022). This argument refers to the words of Patriarch Kirill I, who implied that Donbas was in danger due to the rejection of Western, liberal values such as the organisation of pride parades (di Giovanni, 2022). While this is not the main point of the Russian narrative, it provides another dimension of discourse, which is utilised to demonise the West and deepen further the differences between them.

Furthermore, Korolczuk argues that for many organisations that receive funds from Russia, the country remains a role model and a moral authority due to protecting the traditional values (Sejm, 2022). However, in comparison to other anti-gender discourses in Europe, Russian discourse does not function as a symbolic glue, nor does it have roots in the Vatican (Edenborg, 2021). Russian anti-genderism is influenced by the Orthodox traditions, as well as by the ideas of Slavophilism and Russian Messianism, which had emerged in the XIX century (ibid: 3). Therefore, it can be argued that even in the European context, there is a plurality of anti-gender discourses, which may advocate for the same issues, but for different purposes. Thus, Russian anti-genderism has two major roles, which are played domestically and abroad.

Ordo Iuris Institute for Legal Culture (Ordo Iuris) was discussed during the presentation. Ordo Iuris is a conservative legal institute based in Poland, created by the Father Piotr Skarga Association for Christian Culture, which was established by the TFP in the first place (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022: 44). The Polish Catholic Church declines any affiliation with the institute (Curanović, 2021). TFP has been engaged in spreading anti-gender discourse in Eastern Europe and Ordo Iuris follows this tactic, as it led to the creation of a similar organisation in Croatia (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022: 44). Furthermore, Ordo Iuris recently monitored elections in Hungary (Ordo Iuris, 2022). Thus, it can be argued that the ambitions of Ordo Iuris are not limited to Poland, which makes the organisation different from the rest of the conservative anti-gender groups in Poland.

The institute was created in 2013, during the beginning stages of Polish anti-genderism. Since then, Ordo Iuris has been advocating for anti-gender initiatives,

such as restriction of abortion, and sex education but also contributed to the emergence of LGBT-free zones (Datta, 2021: 37). The institute functions also as an echo chamber, hence, it contributes to spreading the propaganda of the government (ibid). During the presentation of the report, the institute was discussed due to its role in spreading anti-genderism, but also in relation to Russia (Sejm, 2022). As one guest argued, the Russian financial investment in Ordo Iuris aimed to divide Polish society, to create religious-based conflicts, which would weaken the country (Sejm, 2022). Hence, while Russian anti-genderism aims at strengthening its own country from within, it seeks the opposite in the neighbouring countries. Thus, anti-genderism can be framed as a new political tool that can either unite or divide societies. Anti-gender campaigns then should not be associated only with the radical populist movements but should be recognised as a powerful ideological and political tool of the governments.

2.4. Church, Poland and anti-genderism

After the end of World War II Central and Eastern European states lost their sovereignty to the communist regime, which secularised their systems and limited the role of religion and the churches. As result, the role and position of the religious institutions depended on the ruling powers, yet, to a certain extent these intuitions managed to co-exist together (Žuk and Žuk, 2019: 192-193). The fall of communism opened the space for change, but also disrupted the system they had managed to create. Hence, the struggle to prevail began for the religious institutions; in certain countries, such as Poland (Mishtal, 2015; Žuk and Žuk, 2019), Russia (Žuk and Žuk, 2019), Croatia and Slovenia (Kuhar, 2015), they managed to re-enter and re-establish their position.

However, scholars argue that the successful return of religious institutions was bounded by the historical differences between Eastern and Western Europe, which made it easier for religious actors to re-establish their position (Žuk and Žuk, 2019). As Žuk and Žuk argue, Eastern European countries had been separated from the West even before communism, and as result, the Western processes of modernisation and secularisation were missed in the East (ibid: 191-192). In the

case of Poland, the country lost independence during the period of enlightenment, as result, the Polish Catholic Church did not have to face reformation or revolution (Ayoub, 2014: 342). Ayoub argues further that the Church took the role of the political organisation during the partitions, provided people with faith and reassurance, but also gave them the will to fight against the enemy (2014: 342). It became part of national identity during the time of struggle and resistance (ibid). Then again, during communism, the Church was part of national resistance and suffered from the internment of priests (ibid). The Church took an active role then and by emphasising it, the Polish Church can frame itself as a protector of freedom and independence of the Polish nation (Żuk and Żuk, 2019: 1993-194).

Nevertheless, the fall of communism began the period of change, during which the Church managed to re-enter the stage. However, the Church's ambitions were not limited to bringing religion back but expanded to the re-traditionalization of society (Kuhar, 2015). This could be also framed as the de-communisation of the society, as it revolved around the reversion of secular changes that the regime introduced, such as free and accessible abortion (Mishtal, 2015). Although, while the case of abortion went relatively successful and resulted in the so-called "abortion's compromise", the Church sought to go further. Yet, the Church's attempts to influence the political sphere were not as effective as they wished to be in the beginning.

One of the first platforms established by the Church was the Polish Episcopate Conference (PEC), which expresses official views of the institution (Żuk and Żuk, 2019). Through the PEC, the Church attempted to influence the political beliefs of the people, however, its beginnings were not successful (ibid). This could be connected to the relatively weak position of the Church after communism, but also due to a lack of knowledge of how to operate in the new system. With time, the Church was able to gradually secure its own position and learnt how to effectively influence the election (ibid). The bottom-up approach proved to be more successful, which relied on the local parishes using their platform to praise specific candidates (ibid). According to Żuk and Żuk, this approach contributed to Law and Justice's

(PiS) winning in the parliamentary elections of 2015 (2019). These elections were the first ones in post-communist Poland in which one party managed to secure a majority in the parliament (Szczerbiak, 2017). Thus, this alliance contributed to a political change.

Another factor that contributed to the PiS's winning was the general dissatisfaction with the Civic Platform (PO), which was perceived as elitist, indecisive and disconnected from the needs of the majority of voters (ibid). All of this has led to the emergence of anti-establishment feelings which PiS used during the campaign (ibid). This strategy was successful and allowed the party to dominate in all elections, starting with local, presidential and parliamentary ones.

Since the PiS's winning, both the Church and PiS have been supporting each other. The Church would stand by PiS's decisions and defend the government when needed (Żuk and Żuk, 2019: 199). Other religious platforms, such as Radio Maryja, Television Trwam and Journal Nasz Dziennik, all owned by Father Rydzyk, continue to promote PiS as well (ibid). In exchange, politicians with ties to Rydzyk would lobby for his causes in the parliament and ensure new privileges (ibid). As result, both PiS and the Church tie national identity to Christianity, thus, they seek to make Polishness and Christianity inseparable (ibid).

2.4.1. The emergence of anti-genderism in Poland

Polish anti-gender discourse revolves around such issues as reproductive rights, which include access to abortion, in-vitro, and contraception, as well as the discourse targets rights of LGBT people and opposes sex education (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017). The emergence of anti-genderism can be linked to three issues: WHO's guidelines on sex education, Istanbul Convention and the paedophilia scandal within the Church (Grzebalska, 2015: 83). The last issue is linked directly to the Church, which received backlash after the scandal. The carefully re-established position was threatened as well as the Church's moral authority. Since then, the Church had to face the allegations. The closeness between the scandal and the emergence of anti-genderism raises the question of to what extent the formed

discourse is a form of counterattack to deflect the negative attention (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017: 179).

Generally, Żuk and Żuk argue that feminism and homosexuality tend to be distinguished as threats to identity in the ex-Eastern Bloc, but the Polish case differs from the rest due to the extent to which the government embrace these views (2020: 571). This became more evident during the presidential elections of 2020 during which Duda referred to the queer community as an ideology and said:

“This is not why my parents' generation for 40 years struggled to expel communist ideology from schools, so that it could not be foisted on children, could not brainwash and indoctrinate them. (...) They did not fight so that we would now accept that another ideology, even more destructive to man, would come along, an ideology which under the clichés of respect and tolerance hides deep intolerance” (BBC, 2020)

This quote was not an isolated case, but an example of a broader anti-gender discourse in Poland. The quote illustrates in a brief way how LGBT people are depicted – as a dangerous ideology that needs to be fought off. This conceptualisation dehumanises the Polish queer community and has a reflection on the statistics. According to the European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, Poland has scored 13 % in the ranking, which rates European countries on their actions and commitment to LGBTQ+ issues and equality (Rainbow Europe, 2022). Such a low percentage placed Poland almost at the very end of the ranking, leaving behind only Belarus, Monaco, Russia, Armenia, Turkey and Azerbaijan (ibid). In comparison to other member states of the European Union, the situation of the Polish queer community is the worst (ibid). No prospects for marriage equality and even less chance for adoption.

Furthermore, the restriction of abortion in 2020 had led to tragic consequences, causing the death of at least one woman (Westfall, 2021). LGBT activists were prosecuted for offending religious feelings due to the creation and spreading of the image of the “Rainbow Virgin Mary (Tilles, 2021). An activist from the group “Abortion Dream Time” faces charges for giving an abortion pill to another woman (Abortion Support Network, 2022). Anti-genderism became part of the politics of

Poland and it continues to affect negatively the lives of Polish people. Thus, the case of Poland presents a relevant study of a successful anti-gender discourse. Therefore, I will proceed with theoretical concepts that will enhance the discussion further.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. Gendered nationalism

According to Agius et al (2020), the current far-right populist narrative is not only xenophobic and racist but also is often guided by a gendered logic. They argue that the need to protect the state from the threats has a gendered dimension to it, which is based on the conceptualisation of a nation as a “motherland” (ibid). This frame of nation exhibits female characteristics, thus, it requires protection (ibid). The same logic frames resistance and protection as a masculine reaction (ibid). The examples discussed by Agius et al refer to covid, climate change and Brexit, which are not threats in typical, physical understanding, but have more abstract forms. Hence, this conceptualisation offers a broader spectrum of potential dangers for the states, which can include individuals, groups, but also ideas and ideologies.

Following this conceptualisation, anti-gender discourse operates through a similar gendered logic. Through opposition against “gender ideology”, the movement put itself in a position of the protector of children – born and unborn ones. Children are perceived as essentially weaker, more easily influenced group. Therefore, they require protection. However, I would argue that anti-gender activists seek to protect not only children but also the established system. As I discussed in the literature review, the anti-gender movements are reactionary, because they emerge as a response to changes. Therefore, while they frame children as their main focus and concern, the analysis must dig deeper to uncover what triggered the reaction.

Gendered nationalism can be utilised to discuss how relations between members of a nation and non-native members are constructed. According to Yuval-Davis, the other can be defined by having a different nationality, race or ethnicity (1997: 47).

The other due to his own otherness, while may seek to assimilate, is not able to (ibid: 48). The use of the pronoun “he” is crucial, as she argues the other tends to be associated with masculine traits to construct him as the threat (ibid). Together with other factors, such as race and ethnicity, the stranger becomes even more dangerous and becomes a threat to women’s safety (ibid: 51). The connection of the masculine traits with racialised discourse influence how the other is perceived. Thus, this gendered and racialised logic demands protection of the weaker group, which tends to be constituted by women.

To differentiate between members and non-members of the group, Yuval-Davis proposes the idea of “symbolic border guards”, which serve as indicators for identification of one’s membership (ibid: 23). Those indicators are utilised to exclude and include individuals, based on such factors as behaviour, language, religion or even clothes (ibid). Hence, certain elements can reveal who belongs to the nation and who does not. Those symbolic border guards can be connected to the idea of “nativism”, which refers to a belief that membership in a particular group is exclusive and thus limited to only native members of this group (Agius et al, 2020: 434).

While this frame refers to exclusion of migrants and refugees, I would argue that it could be expanded to another context. In the Polish anti-gender discourse, anyone who supports gender ideology could be framed as the other, whether they are feminists, LGBT people or non-Catholics. Hence, in this case, the other does not come from the outside but emerges from within the state. The otherness is then defined by political and religious beliefs, but also sexuality. According to Kuhar, citizenship is both gendered and sexualised concept, because it is based on a heterosexual man (2015: 85). Therefore, the designated norm is heteronormative and anyone who does not fit into it can be constructed as an outsider.

3.2. Ontological security

3.2.1. Globalisation and insecurity

Globalisation has positively contributed to ensuring security in the world, by increasing awareness, but also by the availability of new technologies that tackle threats (Scholte, 2005). However, at the same time globalisation has exacerbated the insecurities of individuals, sometimes even through the very same processes that seek to ensure safety. For instance, Scholte referred to an increased level of ecological awareness as a positive issue (ibid: 280), but it may have negative consequences for certain groups, such as workers who could lose their source of income. Therefore, for some groups globalisation may be perceived as a negative process, because due to uneven realities, it may exacerbate inequalities between groups.

Due to different experiences of globalisation, scholars varied in their assessment of whether it would lead to hybridisation or homogenisation of societies. According to Yuval-Davis globalisation would lead to the hybridisation of societies, rather than their homogenisation (1997: 64). Scholte shares similar views, as he argued that globalisation opens space and provides more contacts with other people, which can contribute to the pluralisation of identities (2005). As result, certain aspects such as sexuality are brought forward (ibid: 305). This is connected to the greater availability of social media, which raised awareness of other people that share similar struggles. As result, individuals began to embrace their other forms of identities (ibid). However, at the same time, all these processes led to an increase in insecurity of individuals, as identities based on religion and nation have lost their value (ibid). On contrary to that, I disagree with Scholte's assessment of national identity. The state remains the major actor that constructs identities and can legitimise them, for example through citizenship. Hence, the value of national identity and the state's role cannot be dismissed.

Yet, insecurity is a subjective feeling, how it is defined and what triggers it depends on the social context of individuals (Scholte, 2005: 281). Therefore, how individuals perceive their reality may differ from the actual reality. For instance,

generally in the nationalist narrative migrants tends to be conceptualised as people who would take away jobs and thus income from the rest of society. However, this is hardly an accurate depiction of reality, as migrants tend to be employed in low-paid and not wanted positions. Similarly, anti-gender activists frame gender as a threat, even though the idea of gender does not pose a threat to anyone. Hence, the perspective on reality is subjective, it depends on the interpretation of events. As result, the feeling of anxiety could be exacerbated for political purposes.

Furthermore, Scholte argues that the problem does not lie in globalisation as a process, but in the specific policies, initiatives or decisions adopted due to it (ibid: 281). Hence, insecurity is a reactionary feeling that may occur when something triggers an established and stable situation. As both ontological insecurity and anti-genderism are both triggered by something or someone, the chosen theory of ontological security is suitable to discuss the case.

3.2.2. Ontological security

When it comes to security, it has been associated with state and physical threats. In opposition to that, ontological security moves beyond the conceptualisation of security in strictly physical ways, instead, the approach proposes the concept of “security as being” (Krahmann, 2018: 358). Hence, the focus has shifted from the state-centric perspective to include people and their experiences. To feel secure, individuals must feel content with themselves and feel accepted by the rest of society (Zarakol, 2010: 6). The theory does not reject the state’s perspective, the same applies to it as well. According to Steele, ontological security is necessary for states and their self-esteem, because to feel secure, their own perception about who they are must be reflected by other states (2008). Thus, ontological insecurity may be experienced on different levels and by different groups.

This approach to security includes the role of emotions, such as shame and insecurity, which can explain why certain actions were taken by either individuals or states (Steele, 2008; Zarakol, 2010). Thus, this theory assumes that there is a connection between emotions and actions that is strong enough that it can explain why those actions were taken. According to Zarakol, ontological insecurities can

influence states' actions to the extent that they would not acknowledge crimes from the past (2010). To acknowledge past crimes the states' narrative would have to change, and as result, the sense of who they are would be disrupted (Zarakol, 2010). Furthermore, according to Steele, ontological security has such significant value that it is even placed higher than physical security (2008: 2). Therefore, it could be argued that if this form is indeed more valuable, then the states may be willing to take actions that would jeopardise their other form of security. This approach proposes a theoretical framework that may explain why states or political actors pursue actions that seem irrational.

To apply this to the Polish case, this approach could explain why the ruling government did not intervene in the case of so-called LGBT-free zones, as well as why the government did not detach from the Church during the paedophilia scandal. Support of the zones had its consequences and led to losing funds from the EU (Frater and Kolirin, 2020). Those funds are necessary as they contribute to the renovation of the state in several ways. Hence, while this may be interpreted as an economical reason, funds ensure security and provide stability. Yet, while local governments had continued with resolutions, the government did not react. The actions of the government could be connected to its ties with the Church, as both promote the same model of national identity and according to scholars, these two share an alliance (Żuk and Żuk, 2019). The leader of PiS has even stated that there is no Poland without the Catholic Church (Żuk and Żuk, 2020: 572). Both present a united front, which emphasises the impact of religion on the state and its necessity.

Such conceptualisation ties religion to the nation, which could be conducted to underline the persistence of a nation (Andrews et al, 2015; Kinnvall, 2002). Globalisation or even political actors can foster the feeling of insecurity and when this feeling occurs individuals are likely to turn to collective identity, which provides them with the needed stability and security (Kinnvall, 2004). Therefore, religion and nationality can serve as master signifiers, because they are stable and persistent throughout time (Andrews et al, 2015: 143). However, when these master signifiers are disrupted, then, the feeling of insecurity emerges (ibid). In that

occurrence, religion and nation can be embraced to sustain a feeling of security. Therefore, to apply ontological security there is a need of establishing what could cause the emergence of insecurities.

Steele proposes three concepts that provide the necessary guidance, beginning with critical situations (2008). “Critical situation” refers to a threat that comes unpredictably and disrupts the established self-perception of the state (ibid). “Shame” is the consequence of the critical situation and is experienced by the state or individual who is touched by the threat (ibid). “Biographical narrative” is a story created that utilises memories from the past to sustain a sense of self (ibid). Crucial for the analysis is the identification of a threat that caused actions. In the case of the Polish anti-gender discourse, scholars emphasise three events that triggered the emergence of the movement: ratification of the Istanbul Convention, WHO’s guidelines on sex education and the paedophilia scandal at the Church (Grzebalska, 2015: 83). While the first two undermine the Church’s teachings, the last one is the most problematic for the Church as it caused the loss of trust and credibility and as result, it threatened its position of moral superiority.

As the Church was the institution that was threatened directly, it should be addressed to what extent the Church’s insecurities influence the anti-gender discourse as there is a correlation between the allegations and the emergence of the discourse. This correlation could be expanded on with the concept of “existential insecurity”. Existential insecurity may be experienced by the political actor, whose insecurities are related to staying in power (Akkoyunlu and Öktem, 2016). Political actors are in a position to foster their own insecurities into their audiences, thus, by equating their own safety and stability with the safety and stability of the whole nation, they are able to frame themselves as the only protectors of stability (ibid). This construction will come valuable to the analysis of the position of the Church, as the institution frames itself in a similar manner.

3.3. Chosen trauma and chosen glories

Chosen traumas and chosen glories are concepts that can be utilised with ontological security. Both serve different aims, but what connects them is relying

on collective memories from the past, which is intertwined with religion and nation (Kinnvall, 2004: 756). These memories are crucial in the construction of a narrative of the state. The first concept brings past traumatic experiences of aggression, injustice or subordination, which for the colonised states was colonisation (ibid), while for Poland, this can refer to communism, World War II or even partitions. These memories are recollected with a purpose, through them current events can be interpreted (Kinnvall, 2002: 86). Thus, they can be used to antagonise specific groups and even lead to hostile behaviour (Kinnvall, 2004). Those past memories can also intensify a sense of victimhood and even a sense of martyrdom. According to Prizel's assessment of Central and Eastern Europe, these states have developed a strong "fascination with the past", due to their history of subordination, as well as they experience the recurring feeling of injustice (1998: 24). Therefore, this fascination may be connected to the appeal of chosen trauma and chosen glories in the Polish case.

However, chosen glories serve a different purpose. They represent memories that are full of glory, success and fame, therefore, they become part of the narrative to boost self-esteem (Kinnvall, 2002: 87). In the Polish context, chosen glories may be based on crucial won battles, such as the Battle of Vienna or Warsaw. Both tend to be implemented in the nationalist, anti-migrant narratives as they both are utilised to present Poland as a historical protector of Europe, firstly from the Ottomans, and secondly from the Bolsheviks (Baranowska, 2020). Another chosen glory that can be identified relates to the Polish political achievement, which was the Constitution of 3 May 1791, the first such constitution in Europe and the second in the world. Around these events, the narrative is created, which presents Poland as a great nation that fought and protect others and influenced the development of others (ibid). All of this construct a sense of national pride.

Chosen glories together with chosen traumas can be part of the same narrative as both contribute to shaping a particular image of the group, as well as can influence relations with others. It could be argued that they complement each other, constructing a full and coherent story of a nation, which determines the state's role

and position in the world. In the case of Eastern Europe, Żuk and Żuk discusses the prevalence of the Messianic narrative, which assures those states in feeling morally superior to other European nations due to the preservation of the Christian legacy in Europe (2020: 574). This narrative is applied due to uneven development and the economical situation of Eastern Europe (ibid). This narrative exhibits what Prizel referred to as a recurring feeling of injustice and fascination with the past (1998). In this case, it is bounded to the uneven situation between Western and Eastern Europe, which may trigger their ontological insecurities. Thus, this narrative reassures them of their status and position.

Prizel's study was released in 1998, before Poland became part of the EU and before PiS came to power. Therefore, it can be argued that these attitudes were already there, which can explain their appeal, as well as the power they hold. Zarakol argues that historical imperialism and the effects it had on the other states tend to be omitted in the analysis of non-Western European states (2010: 19). Hence, such analysis does not include the source of insecurities, which still continues to influence how these states perceive themselves and others. However, as both studies, Żuk and Żuk (2020) and Prizel (1998), come from different points of time, it can be argued that history remains an influential factor in the construction of Polish national identity. Therefore, it can be assumed that the impact of historical subordination does not disappear over time, but it may prevail and influence current relations.

As this chapter has referred to several concepts that can be applied together with ontological security, each of them was not used to the same extent. Therefore, to conclude this chapter, I will briefly summarise the theoretical framework. The first introduced concept was gendered nationalism, which became a valuable tool in analysing the exact focus of the anti-gender narrative. Together with nativism and methodological tools, it allowed for a discussion of how LGBT people are constructed as the others. Applying existential insecurity to the Church, expanded the discussion of the potential reasons behind the Church's engagement, as well as, it became a valuable tool to discuss how these insecurities influence the rest of the

state. Steele's concepts provided clear instructions to locate the beginning moment of discourse as well as the process which comes after. Overall, ontological security expands the analysis, through the localisation of a threat and insecurities and provides a framework to understand how discourse operates.

4. Methodology

As was presented in the previous chapters, Poland was chosen due to the successfulness of the anti-gender discourse, but also due to its continuing appeal. Therefore, the case of Poland presents a discourse that is still relevant. As previous research indicated, national context influences the form and focus of anti-gender discourse. Thus, to analyse a global problem of anti-genderism, I focused on one case to further contextualise the issue. The next sections elaborate on the chosen method, which is discourse analysis.

4.1. Discourse analysis

Discourse can be understood as a way of thinking or representing the world, or any particular phenomena in it, in a certain way (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 143). Discourse can be conceptualised as lenses through which individuals can interpret the surrounding world. However, there is no such thing as one discourse; there are multiple discourses shaped by the knowledge, identity, social and historical background of the individuals (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). Thus, this conceptualisation opens the space for a struggle over fixation on meaning (ibid).

Discourse analysis brings attention to the linguistic forms of communication by approaching them through an interpretative position (Lamont, 2015: 91). This method focuses on language and analyses how meanings are constructed. Depending on the type of discourse, its aims and focus may differ, and as result, they can adhere to a variety of analytical tools. Nevertheless, they share certain aspects, which are being "action-oriented", "situated", "constructed" and "constructive" (Potter, 2011). Being action-oriented implies that discourse *does* something, thus, it directs interests to actions and practices (ibid). However, discourse is also situated, which means that it depends on the context (ibid). Hence,

the inclusion of the context is necessary to explore the relational aspect of meanings' construction. Meanings are not created in isolation then but through social interactions. The last aspect is concerned with discourse being constructed and constructive, which refers to discourse's focus on linguistics, but also to the ability to constitute a particular meaning as the dominant one (Lamont, 2015: 91). Thus, the discourse analysis seeks to understand how a particular understanding became a dominant one and why specific actors may utilise this discourse (ibid). Discourse analysis then is not only interested in the identification of a discourse, but also in establishing what purposes it serves, and who benefits from it, thus, it includes the aspect of power and power relations.

4.2. Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory

Laclau and Mouffe's discourse theory is rooted in both traditions of Marxism and structuralism, which places their discourse in poststructuralism (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 25). This influences their way of thinking about the social world, as they argue that meanings are never finished, instead, they are relational (ibid). Thus, meanings are constructed by being different and similar to each other (ibid). As result, signs have to be positioned in relation to other signs to gain meanings, but as there are no fixed meanings, there is a constant struggle over the fixation of meanings (ibid: 24). Thus, by the articulation of differences and similarities, elements become part of the discourse (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001: 105). However, crucial for Laclau and Mouffe's approach to discourse is understanding that there are several discourses in the social world (2001). Hence, there are several understandings of what a particular phenomenon might mean, which raises the question, of how a specific understanding had become a dominant one.

As Laclau and Mouffe grounded their study in Marxism, their main unit of analysis are classes, constituted by their antagonistic relationship with each other (2001: 50). Those classes have assigned roles, but when the dominant class fails to fulfil its own role, the other will have a chance to replace it (ibid). To apply this to the discourse – the dominant class represents the hegemonic discourse that prevails as the dominant one. The dominant class wields the power to assign meanings.

However, this is not a permanent structure, as the failure of the dominant class opens space for the other class to replace it with its own discourse. Therefore, as discourse is not a permanent structure, the same applies to the meanings. Thus, meanings and discourse reflect power relations and hegemony.

When it comes to defining the end of the discourse, for Laclau and Mouffe everything is part of discourse, as result, signs hold no meaning without relation to the discourse (2001: 112). As this understanding of the social world is quite abstract, they provide a variety of concepts to further expand on it, such as nodal points, floating signifiers, signs, elements, moments and many others (ibid). Nodal points are stable signs around which other signs are defined (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002). According to Laclau and Mouffe, even though meanings cannot be fully fixed, there have to be certain signs, whose meanings are partially fixed (2001: 112). Those signs are essential to define the meaning of the rest (ibid). Jorgensen and Phillips exemplify this with “democracy” being a nodal point in political discourse, thus, by having a common understanding of what democracy entails, one can assess what actions can violate it (2002: 26). With the use of nodal points, the meaning of floating signifiers can be defined. Floating signifiers refer to concepts or signs whose meanings are not fixed (ibid: 27-28). Thus, different groups can compete to assign their own meaning to it and engage in a struggle over establishing the right meaning (Farkas and Schou, 2018).

It has been argued that Laclau and Mouffe’s ideas about discourse propose more of a theoretical framework, rather than a method (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 24). However, their ideas have been applied as methodological tools, with the use of specific concepts they had developed. In scholarship dedicated to anti-genderism, scholars have adhered to the conceptualisation of gender ideology as an empty signifier, to discuss its transnationality (Garbagnoli, 2016), suitability with right-wing populism Mayer and Sauer (2017), but also how this signifier can represent struggle over one group against the other (Gunnarsson Payne and Tornhill, 2021). Therefore, I followed a similar strategy by focusing on specific concepts that would serve as analytical tools. These tools included floating signifiers, nodal points, chain

of difference and equivalence and antagonism. While the mentioned scholars focused on “gender ideology”, I defined the word “gender” as a floating signifier instead. From the social science perspective, gender is understood as a social construct, rather than biological sex. However, anti-gender discourse rejects this conceptualisation of gender for alleged lack of scientific support (Garbagnoli, 2016). Furthermore, in the Polish context, the word “gender” is attributed with a pejorative meaning (Graff, 2016: 269). Together with the word “ideology” its negative meaning is exacerbated by the activists.

Based on the empirical material, I defined two major nodal points in the Polish anti-gender discourse, which are “freedom” and “tolerance”. Both are utilised in the anti-gender narrative to construct LGBT and gender as an ideology, which violates both concepts. Thus, in accordance with both of these points, LGBT and gender are attributed with specific negative traits that position them in an antagonistic relationship to the Polish Catholic society. Based on the empirical material, I constructed a chain of difference and a chain of equivalence that illustrate both groups:

Figure 1: chains

Chain of difference

Queer – modern – Western – marginal - perverse – corrupted - predator

Chain of equivalence

Heterosexual – traditional – Polish – majority – sacred - pure – protector

While these chains are discussed in the next chapter of the thesis, I will briefly explain in general how such chains are constructed. As mentioned earlier, meanings are relational, they are constructed by being similar and different to each other. Therefore, to assign meaning these relations must be defined. However, as these

chains represent both groups with different identities, then the matter of antagonism becomes relevant. Laclau and Mouffe discussed the implications of the existence of antagonism as follows:

“Insofar as there is antagonism, I cannot be a full presence for myself. But nor is the force that antagonizes me such a presence: its objective being is a symbol of my non-being and, in this way, it is overflowed by a plurality of meanings which prevent its being fixed as full positivity.” (2001: 125)

Antagonism does not only reveal the existence of several groups with different discourses, but it also prevents the stabilisation of the situation, because of the impossibility of establishing one universal discourse. Thus, as long as there are competing discourses, there is a struggle for discourse and identities. However, power is manifested through securing discourse, thus, as long as the dominant group wields the power over meaning, it can preserve its own domination (Jorgensen and Phillips, 2002: 32).

To return to the studied case, the existence of antagonism and struggle can be applied to the Polish case; the Church engages in this struggle over the meaning of gender because it is incompatible with the institution’s teachings. As a result, the idea of gender is part of another discourse that could overthrow the Church’s teachings and position, which constitute religious discourse. Therefore, by utilising available tools and platforms the Church attempts to secure its own dominance.

4.3. Sampling and empirical material

Sampling’s strategy was guided by the aim of collecting material that refers to the emergence of so-called “LGBT-free zones” in Poland. Therefore, the first stage of sampling was related to the collection of declarations from the local governments that had issued them. All documents are collected by a group of activists, who created an online database called “Atlas of hate” (*Atlas nienawiści*¹). This database provides a variety of information, which include documents, written protocols, recordings of transmissions, and names of council members. Having all data in one

¹ <https://atlasnienawisci.pl/>

place made the sampling process easier, especially considering that the overall number of still valid declarations is 86. As of April 2022, 19 governments have repealed their anti-gender declarations due to losing funds from the EU (Pająk and Gawron, 2022a).

Due to the high number of documents, the sampling had to be narrowed down further. Documents that were discussed by the councils but were rejected in the voting process were excluded from the sampling. The same applied to resolutions that were repealed. This decision was motivated by the aim of prioritising the ones that are still valid. Atlas of hate categories resolutions in fourth types. One of them is “Resolutions against LGBT-ideology” (*uchwały przeciwko ideologii LGBT*), their current number is the highest – there are 49 of them. Overall, they are relatively short, most of them being around one page long. They tend to share similar structures and wording, although, some use stronger language than others. They oppose LGBT ideology, refer to ideological war and political correctness, the documents refer to “centuries-old traditions” and the Baptism of Poland (Pająk and Gawron, 2022b). Generally, they follow a similar pattern, some of the councils adopted resolutions that had been written and adopted by a different council.

The second type is “Local Government Charter of Family Rights” (*Samorządowa Karta Praw Rodzin*), which was created and lobbied by Ordo Iuris. Other conservative groups cooperated with Ordo Iuris on this document, however, Ordo Iuris remains the driving force behind it. This is the second most adopted document with the current number of valid ones being 31. This one has a different form and has the least emotional language in comparison to the rest of the documents. As Ordo Iuris is a legal institute, this form utilises legal language, as result, councils adopt this document without adding their own modifications and they do not really engage in discussion during sessions (Pająk and Gawron, 2022b). Therefore, I included only one of them, as they all have the exact same structure.

The third type includes more specific documents, which claim to support or defend the “constitutional model of family”, “protection of marriage and family” while other resolutions are against “attacks on Church” or “against the attacks on

the Archbishop Jędraszewski”. Their current number is 6. The last category defined by Atlas of hate includes appeals for the prohibition of Pride Marches, although none of them was adopted (Pająk and Gawron, 2022b)

Due to still significant number of valid resolutions, the sampling included overall 14 resolutions and 1 Charter. While this number may seem small, discourse analysis does not demand as much material as content analysis (Lamont, 2015: 91). Rather, it selects the most significant material that can provide the most information about discourse (ibid). However, to expand the sampling and include social dynamics, which constitute discourse, material from the councils’ sessions was included. Here, it was conducted through reviewing written protocols and when there were available, recorded transmissions of the sessions, during which the resolutions were discussed and adopted. This approach allowed for observation of the dynamics, social interaction, but also attitudes towards the issue.

Furthermore, to contextualise the emergence of the zones, the sampling was expanded to two other materials that influenced the resolutions and were also mentioned in them. The first one refers to the statement made by the Polish Episcopate Conference, which took place between 12-14.03.2019. This timing places the conference between the adoption of LGBT+ Charter in Warsaw in February 2019 and the first declaration against LGBT ideology. Therefore, it can be argued that all of them are connected and triggered the emergence of each other. During the conference, clerics have addressed such issues as paedophilia, their stand on the LGBT Charter and the protection of human life (the PEC, 2019a). However, I focused on the statement regarding the Charter, which is available on the official website of the PEC.

The last empirical material refers to a homily made by Archbishop Marek Jędraszewski on the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising. He has been mentioned in the declarations due to the homily, which received negative comments in Poland and abroad. At the same time, he received declarations of support from the local governments, politicians of the ruling party and even from the foreign religious actors (Davis and Holroyd, 2019). As result, the analysis presents two levels – local

and national and discusses how they are connected. Hence, the analysis begins with the articulation of anti-gender discourse at the national level and follows its implementation at the local level.

4.4. Limitations

When it comes to relying on documents in the analysis, there are two potential problems, which were discussed by Lamont (2015). Firstly, the research must consider their availability, as in some cases documents may be located in the archives with limited public access (2015: 82). In this case, this was not the issue, as resolutions were already collected and available on a special database. The second issue relates to the analysis of just the document, which according to Lamont focuses only on the final product, and as result, it dismisses the impact of social interactions on its formation (*ibid*). Therefore, as I stated in the previous section, the sampling was expanded to the written protocols and recorded transmissions of councils' discussions. The same approach could not be applied to the PEC and homily, nevertheless, it was applied to the majority of the empirical material and had exposed issues that were not visible in the resolutions. For instance, recorded transmissions had revealed a limited understanding of what the term LGBT means. Furthermore, it presented interactions between council members, although in most cases, their interactions were limited, which also could be argued that it relies on limited knowledge of the issue.

Another issue discussed by Lamont refers to the problem of fully understanding local nuances and whether the analysed document fits within a broader narrative of the studied group (2015: 82-83). Hence, this limitation refers to the possibility of selection bias during sampling. He underlines the need of selecting information from the "authoritative" members of the group, which are in a position to represent their voice (*ibid*: 91-92). The empirical material for this case fulfils his requirements; resolutions were written by the local councils, which are elected bodies that represent their local communities. The PEC is the official voice of the Church, while Jędraszewski holds the high position of Archbishop in Cracow. Hence, all of them are in a position to represent their groups.

4.4. Ethical considerations

When it comes to the analysis of documents or any type of data that does not involve any direct interaction with people, it may seem that the question of ethics is easier to answer. However, even in this case, it should be addressed since the empirical material exhibits elements of hate speech. Thus, my ethical considerations were focused on how to approach this kind of material without promoting it. A similar dilemma was discussed by Blee in regard to her study of the American racist activists (1998). Although her issue was more complicated due to the choice of interviews as a method of data collection. While this method allows for generating new data from direct, authentic sources, at the same time it can cause other problems. Firstly, interviewing people with such opposing views may disrupt the process, as the researcher can have problems remaining neutral (ibid). Secondly, interviews may be used by the activists to promote their views, thus, they may try to steer away from the focus of the conversation (ibid). To avoid these problems, I decided to focus on the already produced material, hence, the collection of material did not include interaction with the anti-gender activists.

However, this approach is not without issues. In the past, Spivak asked “Can the Subaltern speak?” (1988), here the question can be rephrased to “Can the Queer speak?”. In her study, Spivak referred to the construction of the colonial subject as the other as epistemic violence (1988: 280-281). This exposes two fundamental problems. Firstly, the practice of othering. The other is not perceived as an independent entity, but it is always constructed in relation to the West, which is essentially the subject and the source of normative reality (ibid). As result, the other and the other’s experience and knowledge hold less value, which leads to the second issue – the lack of representation in the research. The voice of the other is not represented, because the other has no voice. In this case, queer community functions only as the other in the heteronormative narrative of the anti-gender discourse. Thus, the discourse is already limiting their voice and agency. Hence, the lack of inclusion can in a way perpetuate this practice.

Yet would the inclusion of the queer voice solve this problem, or could it lead to other issues? Stacey reflected on similar issues in relation to the inclusion of women's voices in the research process (1988). In her study, she questioned whether feminist inquiry could escape ethical problems, as involving people is bounded to the exploitative manner of the research process (ibid). Firstly, the exploitative manner relates to the practice of generating knowledge, which is conducted through asking sometimes difficult questions, which may trigger interviewed individuals (ibid). Secondly, using this knowledge for my own research, if even provides the representation, the person who benefits the most will remain the researcher.

For this study, involving the direct queer voice would have to rely on asking the questions related to the anti-gender discourse, which would explore their negative and emotional experience. Therefore, the research would exploit their experience, by increasing their vulnerability for the sake of heightening the value of the study. Hence, while interviews would enhance my thesis, they would serve me more than the interviewed group.

Considering all ethical problems that are connected to the inclusion of participants in the research, I decided to not include this method in the research. Not all problems can be escaped, but as an author, I am aware of the issues. All material used in the analysis comes from official sources and is referenced correctly. The used quotes from the resolutions, sessions and homily are my translations.

5. Analysis

After the presentation and discussion of the theoretical framework and methodology, this chapter proceeds with their application in the analysis. This chapter seeks to answer research questions, which ask:

RQ1: How are ontological insecurities instrumentalised by the Church through anti-gender discourse in Poland?

RQ2: How is the Polish queer community constructed to be the symbol of insecurities by the political and religious actors in Poland?

To answer them, I begin this chapter with a brief recollection of what the Polish Episcopate Conference's (PEC) statement entails, as this was the first material chronologically, hence, the arguments from the resolutions reflect a certain extent what was written in the statement. Resolutions do not have a separate section, they were used to discuss identity construction, roles, gender ideology and ontological insecurity. A separate section was created for the homily and the state's position on the issue. The last section is concerned with Ordo Iuris' "Local Government Charter of Family Rights" in which I argue that this is another anti-gender discourse that operates in Poland.

5.1. The Polish Episcopate Conference

The conference took place after the Warsaw LGBT Charter was adopted. The PEC's statement presents the Polish Catholic Church's official position on the matter of the document, which according to the PEC is:

- Incompatible with the Constitution, thus, the ideas within are legally and ethically questionable
- Incompatible with the Christian vision of a human
- Is based on ideological claims, thus, it is not scientific nor natural (2019b)

Therefore, with the use of all three arguments, the PEC attempts to dismiss the validity of the Charter. Overall, the document fits within the current religious anti-gender narrative. While religious beliefs remain as a ground for morality, it cannot be dismissed that the discourse became embedded with secular claims. These claims are rooted in the Constitution and specific articles that refer to the protection of children (art. 72, section 1), the impartiality of public authorities (art. 25), no discrimination (art. 32), freedom of consciousness and religion (art. 53) (the PEC, 2019b). Adhering to the Constitution is perhaps the most valuable argument because it provides a legal foundation for the Church's claims.

Even though the LGBT+ Charter does not break any constitutional rule, the PEC's interpretation claims the opposite. Therefore, to discuss this specific interpretation I adhere to the nodal points – freedom and tolerance. As I explained in the methodological chapter, nodal points have partially fixed meanings, on which we agree as a society. In this case, the Church does not reject their meaning, instead, it favours certain aspects of them. For instance, freedom relates to a variety of things, which could be summarised as the ability to do something by the individual. However, the PEC emphasises freedom as the ability to *not* do something. Both interpretations are correct, as both constitute a coherent definition of freedom. Yet, the PEC underlines the other part to frame gender and the Charter as incompatible with the Constitution. The same interpretation was expressed in the resolutions, which provided more specific examples of this aspect. The resolutions exemplified this with teachers, who would be forced to teach something incompatible with their beliefs, which would lead to violations of their freedom of consciousness (Stary Zamość Commune Council, 2019). The same situation applies to parents, whose children would be exposed to beliefs that are incompatible with their parents' religion (Białystok County Council, 2019). On this basis, the Charter's legality is dismissed by the PEC and resolutions.

Other constitutional articles refer to the issues of impartiality, discrimination and children's protection which I approach with the second nodal point – tolerance. Similarly, their meaning is understandable without clarification, however, specific interpretation is pushed by the PEC. According to the PEC and resolutions, tolerance has boundaries, which gender seeks to break by favouring certain beliefs and groups (Świdnik County Council, 2019b). Then, according to this conceptualisation, tolerance is concerned with keeping balance in society, which pushed too much in one direction, it becomes disturbed. As result, the constitutional values are framed to be affected by it. Such interpretation relies on religious morality, which influences the perception of the issue. Even though the Church secularised its claims, religious morality prevails to be the dominating factor in the interpretation of the document. Therefore, I would argue that by prioritising own beliefs and morality, the PEC and resolutions fail to objectively approach the

Charter and even the Constitution. Thus, while the PEC intended to rationalise its claims, it was not conducted in that matter.

To return to the general arguments of PEC, the remaining two are part of the original narrative constructed by the Vatican. The second reason for incompatibility relies on the idea of complementarity, which assumes the nature of men and women to be complementary to each other (Case, 2016). This is the original argument, which was formulated in the XX century in the Vatican and since then it became a theoretical foundation of anti-genderism (ibid). Therefore, this is not unusual that this particular argument to be here. The last one became part of the anti-gender discourse after the mid-90s Conferences when the Vatican has begun to attack gender for lack of scientific evidence (Garbagnoli, 2016). In the same manner, the PEC discredits gender ideology for a lack of scientific support (the PEC, 2019b). All three together constitute the broad foundation for the arguments since they cover legal, religious and scientific aspects, even though, the last one itself lacks scientific sources.

While the idea of complementarity is part of the argumentation, the statement is framed in such way to prioritise the Constitution, since this is the legally superior document. As I argued earlier, this approach was compromised by the biased interpretation of the Constitution. Nevertheless, such an approach was taken with the purpose to strengthen and rationalise the Church's argumentation with a legal dimension. In a way, it allowed the PEC to secularise their position to a certain extent, while their moral integrity was preserved. Such a tactic could be interpreted as a way of reaching broader audiences, hence, not only the most faithful Catholics but some of the more moderate as well.

All three points mentioned at the beginning of the section are further supported by justification and possible consequences of what will happen if the Charter's ideas are to be implemented. I categorised them based on four social unities they are to affect: children, parents and other adults, state/society and Europe (the PEC, 2019b). The order of units is crucial, as the alleged threat of gender begins its conquer with children. Children are discussed as a group who would suffer from

sexualisation, which would cause them emotional disruption, and moral anxiety and eventually could lead to their demoralisation (ibid). All of this refers specifically to WHO's guidelines for sex education in schools, which according to the PEC, are built around gender ideology (ibid).

Then, the next unit is constituted mainly of parents, but it also refers to other adults. This group is endangered due to their disapproval of gender ideology, thus, they could be discriminated against, and parents' rights could be limited (ibid). A similar threat applies to teachers, but freedom's aspect is more emphasised. As I discussed earlier, freedom is understood as the ability to say no and express disapproval. Therefore, when all of this is fulfilled, the whole society and the state would be affected in terms of social justice, limitation of freedom and eventually all of this would culminate and affect democracy (ibid). Finally, when all is corrupted, gender ideology is supposed to pose a civilisational threat to the whole European continent (ibid).

These units represent the stages of the alleged threat, which is supposed to attack gradually and systematically, by beginning with the weakest group before it moves further. This narrative is crucial because it motivates the need to take action as soon as possible, before it proceeds, especially as the level and intensity of a threat grow with each unit. However, the Church's role is limited to offering moral guidelines, the actual actions have to come from below. Thus, the statement is directed to citizens, whose response took the form of the resolutions.

5.2. Identities, roles and gender ideology

The extent to which the Church engages in anti-gender discourse is broad and has many dimensions, one of them relates to the rejection of the term "LGBT". According to the PEC's statement, the Church will not use this term, because it questions the Christian vision of a human (PEC, 2019b). Instead, the institution refers to them as gender or LGBT ideology (ibid). This has its reflection in both resolutions and in the discussion that took place during sessions of the local councils. Documents utilise a variety of terms such as "gender ideology", "LGBT ideology", "gender and LGBT ideology", "homosexual lifestyle", but also

“homosexual tendencies” and “homosexual behaviour”. Nevertheless, LGBT ideology is the most commonly used term, which I would argue reveal what is commonly associated with the idea of gender as well as presents the current focus of the Polish anti-gender discourse.

The dominant perception of the queer community depicts them as an ideology, rather than people. Yet, there are other issues with the use of abbreviation. In some cases, the material from the recorded sessions of councils revealed that there is a limited understanding of what particular letters in LGBT mean. This problem was observed in more than one case. For instance, in one case the council member, which advocated for the adoption of the resolution, was asked by the other member to explain what the letters mean and while he could define the first two easily, the B letter was more challenging - “bio something” was his answer (Kraśnik County Council, 2019). The actual definition was presented to him by another member of the council who stood up and showed him the definition on the laptop (ibid). This leads to an assumption that he had to google it, which even further reveals the lack of knowledge about LGBT people.

In some cases, the abbreviation had been defined incorrectly regarding the letter T, but while in the previous example it seemed like a lack of knowledge, in those cases the used word was offensive. Thus, it could be purposefully used due to the insensitivity or lack of knowledge. Regardless of the problem which poses the abbreviation, the character of gender ideology is described in several ways, such as: “homosexual promotion”, “homo propaganda” or even “homo terror”. The example of this rhetoric claims that:

“To protect children, youth, families and Polish schools from sexual depravation and indoctrination, which led to many pathologies in the Western countries, such as acceptance of pornography, abortion, sexual crimes, family crisis and many others, we declare our stand and our determination to stop homo terror and sexualisation of social life. We will not allow marginal minority communities to impose imported from the West gender and LGBT ideology, foreign to our centuries-old traditions, values and

Christian morality grounded in the Decalogue and respect for human dignity” (Ryki County Council, 2019a)²

This quote illustrates the anti-gender rhetoric with the use of specific consequences of gender ideology, in a more graphic way than the PEC did. It also indicates the source of the problem, which is located in Western European countries. Thus, the West is perceived negatively, as the source of the problem, but also due to its inability to deal with it. The West then is weak and incapable of taking action. The matter of religious morality is incorporated into it as well as dignity. This conceptualisation of both, gender and the West, which constitutes a threat and visualisation of consequences, demands a response:

“Pursuant to the ideological war caused by certain politicians, the Council of Świdnik County adopts a resolution: “Świdnik County is free from the LGBT ideology”. Radicals are striving to start a cultural revolution in Poland. They attack freedom of speech, the innocence of children, the authority of family and school, and entrepreneurial freedom. Therefore, we will protect our local community!” (Świdnik County Council, 2019a).

Similar and identical sentences can be found in several resolutions, often constituting the first paragraph of them. There are few things to unpack here: the emergence of conflict, antagonistic relationships, cultural differences and cultural revolution, but also particular issues derived from the gender ideology. The dramatic tone of the resolutions, which compare the Polish socio-political situation to an ideological war, reveals the scale and importance of the issue. Overall, the quote indicates a conflict between two groups in Poland, as well as the role of politicians in it, which adds another layer to the conflict. While it is initiated by the politicians, the consequences are faced by the rest of society. This conceptualisation influences how the councils’ members perceive their role in the issue. They see themselves as the protectors of the children and families, but also as protectors of culture and tradition. While at the state level politicians continue to argue, they do

² All quotes from the resolutions and homily were translated by the author

not want to take part in it, rather, they prefer to make a statement that if they have to, they will take action.

5.2.1. Gendered nationalism

The focus of children can be approached from the concept of gendered nationalism. During the session of one council, it was stated that children and adults differ from each other because adults' minds are fully developed, whereas children's minds are "whiteboards" (Ryki County Council, 2019b). Thus, they can be easily shaped and reshaped by influential actors and ideologies. Children are then incapable of thinking for themselves and as result, they need to be protected, hence, it can be argued that children are constructed with traits of femininity.

Gendered nationalism is grounded in stereotypical beliefs about the nature of genders. This is not only reflected in social norms but it is rooted deeper, in the perception of a nation. If a nation, is indeed characterised by femininity, thus, its, protection is grounded in masculinity (Agius et al, 2020). However, as was stated at the beginning of this chapter, the very first unit that is affected by gender is not a nation, but children. The failure to protect them would negatively affect the structures of the state, as children constitute the future of a nation. Thus, targeting children has the most forward implications.

What can be discussed further is the aspect of sexualisation. In the nationalist narratives, the other tends to be constructed as *he*, which allows for the sexualised conceptualisation of a threat he allegedly carries (Yuval-Davis, 1997). The sexualised and gendered construction of a threat is present in this discourse as well but in a reshaped way. The threat is no longer associated with the male other, but with anyone who supports or promotes gender ideology. The threat is directed toward children, who are to suffer from sexualisation. Even though the threat affects mainly their minds, souls and morality, rather than their bodies, it employs similar sexualised rhetoric.

Gendered logic is then the most pronounced in the aspect of children's protection, which is grounded in the Constitution's article that claims that children

should be protected from any “(...) actions which undermine their moral sense.” (Constitution of the Republic of Poland, 1997, article 72, section 1). The morality aspect is part of this article, however, the document does not imply any religious morality here. Yet, resolutions state that Polish morality relies on the decalogue and Christian values, while the Church or specific religious actors remain the moral guards of it.

Resolutions define marriage between a woman and a man as the unit that constructs a family. Such conceptualisation of family is not a new phenomenon and throughout the time it has been the designated form. In the Polish case, while the anti-gender politics became more popular during the Law and Justice’s rule, the situation before PiS could be described more as stable, rather than progressive. According to Graff (2021), gender has been a non-existing topic after 1989 in the political debate in Poland. She discussed the connection between communism, resistance and masculinity. As she argued, communism was perceived as a period of emasculation, during which taking part in resistance was a chance of regaining lost masculinity (ibid). After 1989 masculinity was regained and the “normal” system was re-established, now, gender ideology is portrayed as a threat to the established order (ibid). Hence, it could be argued that to a certain extent, in the past and present, the fight against gender is connected to the gendered ideas of masculinity.

The sudden turn in politics has been noticed by other scholars as well, as they argue that re-traditionalisation of society has been pushed by religious actors after communism (Mishtal, 2015; Kuhar, 2015). Both conceptualisations do not dismiss each other, as they refer to the same issues connected to communism, such as public and free abortion, and also secularisation of the state. Therefore, re-traditionalisation, de-communisation and gender are connected and through this connection, gender is constructed as a threat.

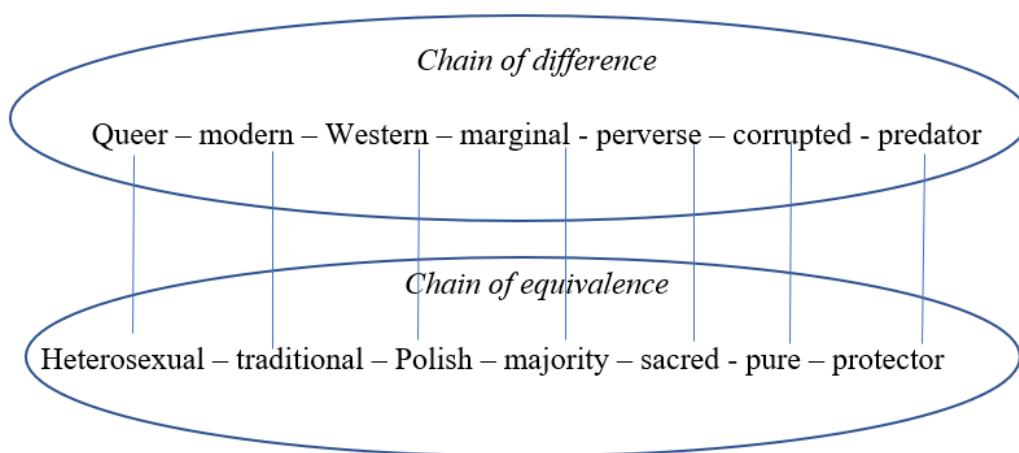
5.2.2. Discursive chains and construction of identities

As discussed above with examples, both LGBT and Western Europe are associated with pejorative traits, and they are essentially placed in the same category. In a way,

both are understood as similar, or even in the same manner. Anti-gender discourse locates the source of LGBT ideology in the West and the same applies to gender. Therefore, the discursive chains can apply to either Poland and Western Europe, but also the Polish queer community and the rest of society. As meanings are created relationally, they have to be similar as well as be different to each other. This is conducted in relation to nodal points, which in this case are freedom and tolerance. Both influence construction of identities and relations between them.

As was discussed earlier, freedom and tolerance were utilised in the anti-gender rhetoric to present LGBT people as a group who do not understand these terms and seek to abuse them. Thus, instead of acting in accordance with these values, their actions aim to discriminate the rest of society. In relation to both, the construction of the chains can be further elaborated. This construction can be illustrated with Laclau and Mouffe's chains, which based on the empirical material can be illustrated as:

Figure 2: chains and identities



As the figures indicate, there are two groups, their features, while different to each other, constitute each coherent circle of characteristics. The first three sets of characteristics represent their association to the designated sexuality, their affiliation to the particular culture, but also geographical spatiality. While they do not reveal any negative characteristics at this point, they indicate clear division,

which allows for the construction of LGBT people or gender ideology, as the other. As Yuval-Davis argues, native members of society can become the other, but in order to do that, they have to acquire typical traits of the stranger (1997). Thus, this specific construction relies on the purposeful othering of LGBT people. The implication that gender is a foreign, Western ideology becomes the key argument in that process. Framing them as modern, rather than traditional, while may seem as not that significant, is indeed crucial to the construction, although for a different reason. Being modern implies a rejection of culture, traditions and religion, all elements that construct traditional national identity. Thus, being modern means being disloyal.

Marginal – majority distinction is used to dismiss any claims from LGBT people, due to their low number. Perverse – predator – corrupted refer to the nature of gender ideology, which LGBT people represent. All three are strong words, with negative emotional dimensions. The word “predator” further implies the aggressive nature of the gender ideology, which is essentially “perverse”, because as councils argue – it is distasteful to the Christians (Wilkołaz Commune Council, 2019). “Corrupted” refers to their state of mind, which is lost and conquered by the ideology. On contrary to that, Polish Christian society is “sacred” due to the prevalence of culture and traditions. Their attachment to the culture positions them as “protectors” of culture and traditions, but also children and families. Thus, their role is influenced by their superior sense of morality, which has its cost – due to their role they are prone to be discriminated against by the supporters of gender ideology.

5.3. Ontological security

As ontological insecurities are the focus of the research questions and thus the research itself, I will proceed to them now. Ontological insecurities that are presented in the empirical material are rooted in history. They refer to lost freedom, sovereignty and democracy, thus, to the period of time when the state’s and people’s ability to make their own decisions was limited by foreign powers. The source of historical insecurities relies on the geo-location of Poland, which positions Poland

between both Russia and Germany, to which the country lost independence in the past. The period of independence did not last long, as Poland lost it twice; firstly, due to the partitions in the XVIII century and again with World War II. As result, the period of freedom lasted only 21 years. Independence was regained once again with the fall of communism. Thus, anxiety is related to safe existence as a sovereign state and this feeling can influence perception, as people who lived through communism are still alive. Those collective memories hold a value. Ontological insecurities relate to the geographic location of Poland, which put the state through a constant struggle with other powers.

As I argued in the theoretical section, these insecurities are always lingering in the background. However, they can be used by the political actors, because when such insecurities arise, individuals tend to seek stability in the state and religion. Hence, insecurities may push individuals in direction of nationalist movements, but also into religious groups. Yet, the question is why and how such insecurities arise now, are those insecurities of individuals or is there someone else who fosters them into people? According to the analysis of Akkoyunlu and Öktem, political actors are in a position to foster their own fears and anxiety in their audiences (2016). Thus, both the actor and the people experience the same insecurities, which source is rooted in the existential insecurity of said actor (*ibid*). Following this conceptualisation, I would argue that Polish society may experience such existential insecurities, which source is located in the anxiety of the Church.

5.3.1. Critical situation

A critical situation, as described by Steele, is an unexpected moment, which catches one off guard and disrupts the established situation (2008). The paedophilia scandal in the Polish Catholic Church can be defined as such a moment. The news came out in 2013, thus, the scandal overlapped in time with the beginning stages of anti-genderism in Poland (Graff and Korolczuk, 2017: 179). While there were other issues such as ratification of the Istanbul Convention and the matter of sex education, the scandal brought attention directly to the Church. Hence, redirecting this attention by finding another focus could explain the Church's involvement, as

the scandal caused damage to the image of the institution. Thus, it can be argued that the scandal has disturbed the ontological security of the institution because it negated the narrative of what the Church is and what values it represents.

While the scandal broke almost a decade ago, there is a potential correlation between the scandal and the current anti-gender discourse. During the Polish Episcopate Conference, the very same that published the statement regarding LGBT Charter, the PEC published its own report about paedophilia in the Polish Church (PEC, 2019c). As the report had to be conducted after the allegations, it also brought attention once again to the issue. As result, the critical situation, while initially happened in the past, it still affects the actions and image of the institution. The First LGBT-free resolution was adopted 12 days later and during the session of this local government, the attention was focused on the issue of paedophilia (Świdnik County Council, 2019b). The council's members argued among themselves about the localisation of the source of the problem, is it in the Church or in the West (ibid). Furthermore, two months after the publication of the PEC's report and two weeks before the European Parliamentary elections, a documentary was released on the issue of sexual abuse of children in the Polish Catholic Church (Ciobanu, 2019). Therefore, the discussion over paedophilia overlaps with the emergence of the zones, but also with the elections, thus, it can be argued that there is a connection between the Church and its involvement in the anti-gender discourse.

5.3.2. Biographical narrative

To respond to a critical situation, one can adhere to the use of a biographical narrative that would sustain the sense of the self (Steele, 2008). In the case of the Polish Church, it resolves around constituting Christianity as an essential part of national identity, thus, making Polishness and Christianity inseparable. It has been argued that to construct a nation as a symbol of long and persistent stability, it is conducted through the use of religion (Kinnvall, 2002). The Polish Church follows this logic, by bounding Christianity and Poland to a specific point of time, which is the Baptism of Poland. The Baptism took place in 966 and has been mentioned in several resolutions, by associating this event with the birth of the Polish nation.

Thus, by emphasising this event the Church is able to frame itself as something that has always been part of Poland and if this event symbolises the birth of the Polish nation, then the institution becomes essential to its existence.

However, Baptism holds significance in the discourse due to two other implications. Firstly, Baptism initiated the transition from paganism to Christianity. Secondly, the Christianisation “introduced” Poland to Western Europe, since Christianity was the religion of Western Europe. As result, this moment indicated the change and transformation. The choice of religious moment ties the existence of Poland to religion, however, at the same time this frame associates being European with being Christian. This conceptualisation constitutes a base of the Church’s argument about the existence of a civilisational threat to the whole European continent. As the institution bounds its own existence and well-being to the existence and well-being of Europe, the Church is able to foster its own existential insecurities into its audiences. Thus, through this narrative, the Church operates the discourse.

This argumentation is present in the Polish anti-gender discourse, as was discussed earlier, the PEC had issued such concerns as well as resolutions. Both resolutions and councils’ sessions revealed that there are several discourses about what being European means. For the councils, being European is essentially tied to being Christian. Thus, as the West fails to protect itself from gender ideology, Western Europe is losing its ties to its European roots. The perception of who knows and what it means to be European has shifted since there are several competing discourses at play. As Laclau and Mouffe argued, the failure of one group in fulfilling their role opens the space for the other to replace it (2001). Therefore, if the EU or Western Europe is allegedly failing to protect its own heritage, then, the other group has a chance to take the role. This line of thinking grounds the councils in the need to take action. The antagonistic conceptualisation of the West through its failure becomes crucial for the articulation of the Polish anti-gender discourse. Hence, Western failure strengthens the validity of the councils’ anti-gender discourse.

The moral greatness of Poland is then bounded to the failure of the West. Such construction is conducted through the repetitive mentioning of the West, but only in a negative light. Whether it is conducted through framing the West as the source of pathologies (Ryki County Council, 2019a), its inability to protect Christians (Wilkołaz Commune Council, 2019), or accusing the EU of financial support for gender ideology (Ryki County Council, 2019b; Kraśnik County Council, 2019), it all serves the same purpose – to present Poland as a total opposite. As result, the West is essentially weak and corrupted, thus, it is not able to take action or make any moral judgement. Hence, Poland can become the moral authority instead. To assert own superiority, chosen glories and traumas are intertwined in the anti-gender narrative.

The idea of chosen glories can be discussed in relation to the special focus on the Constitution resolutions and the PEC's statement exhibit. The Constitution is a symbol of sovereignty, freedom and independence, which are the capabilities taken from Poland several times. The first constitution was adopted in 1791, four years before Poland would lose independence in the third partition. While The Constitution of 3 May was not able to implement any reforms, it became a symbol instead, or even a chosen glory. The ratification of this historical document remains a part of national pride, its anniversary is a national holiday, celebrated every year. Thus, the Constitution became a chosen glory. It symbolises a moment of great glory and even superiority to other nations since this constitution was the first such document in Europe. Thus, the notion of being first allowed for the construction of Poland as a role model or even as a precursor of democratic thought in Europe. Yet, all of this was taken from Poland by other powers. Then, the situation was repeated, after regaining independence in 1918, it was lost again and finally regained in 1989. Therefore, chosen glories and chosen traumas are connected, as both relate to the same issues of freedom, independence and sovereignty. Both are intervened in the narrative because to regain independence, one has to lose it first. Together they construct one coherent narrative, which became part of the anti-gender discourse.

During a session of one of the councils, the historical constitution was mentioned and some fragments of the preamble were quoted. Those quotes referred to Roman Catholicism being the national religion of Poland, but also to the importance of the Constitution on the lives of Poles (Wilkołaz Commune Council, 2019). By referring to these particular parts, the importance and persistence of religion are emphasised, as well as the significance of the Constitution. Inscribing religion into this document, legitimised its validity. Hence, even though these parts belong to the historical Constitution, they are utilised to assert the historical continuity of the religion in Poland and thus, its impact on the national identity. All of these references were mentioned with a purpose. As the elections were coming, a warning was issued that stated:

“Be aware of rainbow, red, green and liberal traitors who report to Europe. Choose in agreement with your consciousness for the wellbeing of our fatherland. Show the whole Europe what it should strive to be” (Wilkołaz Commune Council, 2019)

All of these sentences were further elaborated by comparison to France, where it was argued that Christianity was being discriminated against (ibid). Through antagonistic othering, the West is further demonised, while Poland is presented as a role model. Superiority is expressed in the last sentence, which claims that Europe should strive to be just like Poland. However, this specific construction has a political dimension as well. Since the matter of the coming election was brought up, it can be argued that this construction was conducted purposefully to influence elections. Anti-genderism became then a political tool, which is utilised to assert its own superiority, while at the same it dismisses its opponents. As the quote indicates, opponents can be defined as anyone who supports gender ideology (*rainbow*), is part of a left-wing party (*red*), is an environmentalist (*green*) or can be identified as a liberal. All of them are portrayed to be traitors because they allegedly report to the EU, thus, instead of supporting Poland and fighting in its best interest, they stand against their nation.

Throughout the resolutions three events are often mentioned. These events refer to Baptism, regaining independence in 1918 and regaining self-governance in 1989.

All can be conceptualised as chosen glories because they are utilised to affirm the validity of the councils' actions. These events indicate values that local governments seek to embrace, which are Christianity, independence and self-governance. Thus, these councils can claim to be faithful to the traditions and values of the state, since they strive to ensure their continuity.

5.3.3. Homily

During the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, Archbishop Jędraszewski delivered a homily, which resembled a parable in the style. His homily was constructed through references to Mosses, Promised Land, the World War II and the Warsaw Uprising, with the reference to the current dangers of gender ideology (Jędraszewski, 2019). His homily on its own represents how the chosen traumas are applied to interpret current events (Kinnvall, 2002). He combined biblical references with historical ones to enhance anti-gender discourse and frame gender as a threat to the Polish nation. During his homily, he said:

“And today we know that the red plague is no longer on our land. But this does not mean that there is not a new one, which seeks to conquer our souls, hearts, and minds. Not Marxist, not Bolshevik, but born from the same spirit – Neo-Marxism. Not red, but rainbow” (Jędraszewski, 2019)³.

From the red plague to the rainbow – with this comparison, Jędraszewski associated gender with communism and argued further that both share the same roots in Marxist thought. Therefore, gender is evil and corrupted and must be stopped before it will be too late. This comparison is grounded in the collective ontological insecurities bound to the historical experience of war, uprising and communism. The comparison is even more influential since it was spoken during the anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, which took place in 1944, right before the war ended and the communist regime was enforced. The value of these words was then further enhanced by the time and place of the homily.

³ Translated by the author

The biblical references are utilised to construct the Polish nation as Chosen people, who had to suffer to reach the Promised Land – the house of freedom (ibid). However, as the Israeli journey was not without obstacles, Polish freedom was stopped by the outbreak of War World II and communism. Throughout the homily, Jędraszewski emphasises the role of remembrance of memories on dignity and honour, he argues that remembrance obliges people to cherish these values and memories, but it also commits them to protect the nation (ibid).

Gender as gender ideology is portrayed to resemble communism in the homily. The way the story is narrated allows for connecting this narrative with the anti-gender discourse presented in the resolutions. Resolutions have used such phrases as ideological war and cultural revolutions, caused by the politicians but fought by the rest of society. Furthermore, the emergence of gender leads to conflict, which seeks to conquer and enforce a totalitarian ideology. A totalitarian regime is then enforced as the outcome of the war. While in the past Poland was not able to protect itself from communism, the narrative frames gender as a new totalitarian regime that seeks to repeat the situation. Thus, in the face of new conflict caused by the gender ideology, actions are necessary, as soon as possible before it begins its conquer.

Chosen traumas of war and communism are applied to interpret the dangers of gender. The traumas are used purposefully to demonise gender and LGBT people. Nodal points, such as freedom and tolerance, are utilised in the narrative to construct gender and LGBT as a group that abuses tolerance and promotes artificial freedom. To protect the nation and its freedom, religion is necessary as it ensures stability and safety. Thus, if the nation fails in being faithful to God and rejects religion and remembrance, honour, dignity and freedom would suffer. By using examples of disrespect to religious symbols and historical memories, Jędraszewski further antagonises LGBT people.

Historical ontological insecurities are instrumentalised by the Church through the anti-gender discourse to reaffirm its own position and validity. To do that, it became crucial to dehumanise and demonise LGBT people, who became the

equivalent of a totalitarian ideology, similar to communism. The queer community became a symbol of those insecurities, as they are constructed in the same way as communism – as a foreign ideology that seeks to enforce a totalitarian regime that seeks to destroy all values and traditions, which constitute the Polish nation.

This construction positions queer community as the ultimate threat and since there is a threat, the Church is ready to take the role of the protector. As a moral authority, the institution offers moral guides and issues warnings about the coming dangers. While it could be argued that the Church is in no position to interfere in any way, the Polish Catholic Church acts as a political actor. Therefore, the Church is able to foster its own existential insecurity in its audiences. Since the Church frames itself as a necessity for stability and safety, the prevalence of the institution becomes inseparable from the existence of the state. Thus, the attack on the Church, clerics and religious symbols become an attack on the Polish nation.

5.4. The state's position on the issue

At the peak of LGBT-free zones, they constituted a third of Poland, covering more space than Hungary is on the map (Ciobanu, 2020). The zones were located in the South-Eastern regions of Poland, which traditionally have constituted the greatest supporters of PiS (Szczerbiak, 2017: 415). Furthermore, based on the political affiliation of the councils' members who voted for the adoption of resolutions, the data shows that almost 60 % of them belong to the PiS party (Ciobanu, 2020). The emergence of the zones fits into the anti-gender narrative that PiS had implemented in elections campaigns of that period (ibid). The narrative presented in the discussed empirical material is identical to the anti-gender discourse of the ruling government. To present an example, the leader of PiS, Kaczyński said in the relation to the LGBT that:

“Obviously, this is connected to a certain ideology, philosophy, which emerged earlier in the West. All of this is imported into Poland. These are not internal Polish mechanisms, but they really threaten today our identity. They threaten our nation, its continuation and the Polish state.” (Ciobanu, 2019)

Polish anti-genderism defines LGBT people as a Western ideology that is not native to the Polish nation and incompatible with the Polish traditions. Thus, it threatens the whole state. The Polish anti-gender discourse became part of the politics on the local and national level, with the Church being a firm supporter. Thus, as there is a correlation, I will proceed now with a discussion of the state's position on the LGBT-free zones.

The so-called LGBT free zones brought the attention of the EU to Poland, which warned that this kind of behaviour is unacceptable and will have financial consequences if it continues (Reuters, 2021). As the warning did not bring the desirable reaction, the EU decided to block funds to the Polish municipalities, which declared themselves to be LGBT-free (Frater and Kolirin, 2020). This decision was taken due to disrespect for fundamental rights (ibid). Polish response was presented by Minister of Justice Ziobro, who declared that the Justice Fund would cover the lost funds (Wakefield, 2020). As result, the local governments would still receive financial support.

Justice Fund is the institution that was created to help victims of crimes, from providing psychological and legal help to financial ones. However, using this fund to help LGBT-free regions, reveals who the Minister of Justice perceives as the actual victims of the situation. Furthermore, if those regions are indeed victims, then the perpetrator of crime becomes the EU. Thus, through the issuing of punishment, the EU is further demonised by its affiliation to the gender ideology, while the councils who adopted resolutions are portrayed as both the victims and protectors of Polish values. Some of the councils have even received medals from the politicians (Noack, 2019). Therefore, the Polish side did not condemn the zones but supported them, with financial help and official recognition.

In the case of the homily, while the words of Archbishop Jędraszewski were met with many negative comments, the members of the ruling party had an opposing stand. Leader of PiS party, Kaczyński thanked the Archbishop for his words, while Minister of National Defence, Błaszczak said that "Poland is a country in which evil is called evil" (Davis and Holroyd, 2019). Even though the critical comments

were raised, they did not come from the government. Therefore, both acts of anti-gender discourse were supported by the ruling government, even though association with such rhetoric had consequences on the image of the state and its relations with the EU. Therefore, it has to be asked – why did the state stand by it.

The ruling government shares an alliance with the Church, as they are united by having similar views, as well as both, promote the same national identity (Żuk and Żuk, 2020). However, I would argue that there is another aspect that connects them, which is the aversion to communism and its legacies. Kaczyński has been arguing since the 90s that the state needs to be further de-communised (Davis, 2016; Bill, 2017). His assessment of this has not changed over time. Both seek to de-communise the state, however, they focus on different areas. While the Church's intentions are concerned with de-secularisation and re-traditionalisation of society, the government is interested in getting rid of the communist legacies within the courts (ibid). Even though they are concerned about different sectors, their interests are aligned. Thus, together they can antagonise groups and people who are against them, by associating them with communism. This specific frame made it possible to successfully antagonise gender and LGBT people, by conceptualising them to be a part of a totalitarian ideology, just like communism was.

Thus, both share interests, enemies and aims. As the alliance is firmly grounded, it can be argued that the insecurities of one can affect the other party. The paedophilia scandal affected the Church's image and position of the moral authority, as result it triggered its existential insecurity. While the attacks were directed at the institution of the Church, instead of religion, the Church, local councils and government treated it as an attack on the religion, hence, on the fundamental values of the nation. Thus, existential insecurity was fostered further into the Polish Catholics, by framing gender and LGBT people as a threat, leading to the emergence of the LGBT-free zones. The lack of a necessary intervention from the state caused a loss of financial support from the EU, but it also exacerbated the already tense relations with the union.

Yet, the state's reluctance to act can be discussed through ontological security. As Steele argued, to ensure their own ontological security, states may be willing to sacrifice other forms of security (2008). Hence, by associating gender and LGBT people with communism, the state was able to frame them as a threat, but at the same time, it prevented the government to act differently later. As Zarakol argued, admission to own faults can trigger ontological insecurity, because it disturbs the narrative of who the state is (2010). Therefore, the government's intervention would disturb the established sense of the self, because the party would have to reject the original narrative of the threat. Considering the fact that since the PiS came to power, the party has emphasised the significance of the state's sovereignty to dismiss any comments from the EU, giving up to the EU's warnings would affect ontological security and the political discourse PiS has been articulating.

5.5. More than one anti-gender discourse? Ordo Iuris and final discussion

5.5.1. Local Government Charter of Family Rights

Local Government Charter of Family Rights (LGCOFR) was written and lobbied by Ordo Iuris. This charter adheres to the same Constitutional articles as the rest of the resolutions, however, according to the activists, this document is the most dangerous because it proposes practical ideas that could be adopted by the governments (Pająk and Gawron, 2022b). Those ideas can be categorised into two groups, the first set addresses schools, while the second group is directed to the local government (LGCOFR, 2019). Overall, the document argues that both schools and governments should pursue "family mainstreaming", which is understood as the prioritisation of the rights and well-being of the family (ibid). To exemplify it, the document argues that all cooperation with any NGO should aim at strengthening family and marriage, and any project which undermines it should not receive any funds (ibid: 9).

In the case of schools, the charter proposes full transparency, which would aim at monitoring and having full control over any non-obligatory workshops or meetings that could be organised at the schools' premises (2019: 9). To ensure full control parents would have to present their agreement, individually and

collectively, and they would also be able to take an active role during those non-obligatory classes (ibid). Furthermore, all information, such as the name, full programme and profile of the organisation should be provided to parents before as well as all information should be available on the official website of the city (ibid). The document mentions also that local government should reward those schools, which would implement these ideas (ibid).

While these practices may not seem as problematic as the content of the resolutions, it should be noted that claims for transparency are used only to target any organisation that does not represent a traditional Christian way of thinking. This becomes evident, as the only subject mentioned in specific is sex education (ibid). The engagement of parents, while may appear as a family-friendly initiative, it strives to limit the schools' independence. Furthermore, the document proposes a creation of a new official function called "the Speaker for Family Rights", which would monitor whether families' rights are respected by local governments' institutions and schools (ibid: 8). The Speaker should be ready to intervene when the family's rights are not respected (ibid). The creation of a monitoring organ would limit the school's autonomy and target specific individuals further.

As the document claims to pursue "family mainstreaming", it only refers to traditional, heterosexual marriages with children. This construction excludes other forms of family, not only queer ones but also single parents. The charter in specific addresses the case of single parents, by arguing that marriages are legally discriminated by social funds, which prioritise single parents (ibid: 10). Even more problematic and dangerous are claims that the local government should focus on maintaining the integrity of the family and abstain from intervention (ibid). Thus, instead of investing in preventive measures against violence, alcoholism, and drug addiction, the local governments should pursue programmes for "procreational health promotion" and "the durability of marriages" (ibid).

5.5.2. Plurality of anti-gender discourses

While the Ordo Iuris' Charter does not use the same language as the resolutions nor does it adhere to the same narrative, it is still part of the anti-gender discourse.

Although, a different one. In the case of Polish anti-genderism, I identified two discourses that advocate for the same issues, even though they are not officially connected with each other. These discourses can be identified as the first and main one, which is led by the Church. As the Church cooperate with the government, this discourse is a dominant one. The second discourse is led by the Ordo Iuris, which is not affiliated with the Church, however, the institute functions as an echo chamber for the government (Datta, 2021). Hence, both receive attention and support from the government to some extent. However, the distinction between them is the most visible in the case of funding.

When it comes to the Church-led initiatives, Foundation Lux Veritatis, founded and led by father Rydzyk provides financial support for anti-gender initiatives (Datta, 2021). This foundation is one of the most influential in Europe, the report refers to it as the “Rydzyk empire” (ibid). According to the report, Rydzyk’s foundation donated USD83 million between 2009-2018 to support ultra-conservative religious activism (ibid: 33). Rydzyk’s empire operates on several levels, from TV, and radio to published press (ibid). Due to having such a broad and influential network, conservative politicians cooperate with Rydzyk to receive support for the elections (Żuk and Żuk, 2019). Therefore, it can be argued that this anti-gender discourse is the dominant one, as it is articulated by both the Church and the government.

Ordo Iuris presents a different case, while the institute claims that all funds come from donations, according to Datta’s research, members of the Ordo Iuris can be found at high positions in the state institutions responsible for the funding of civil society (ibid: 61). Through these institutions, Ordo Iuris secures funds for itself and other affiliated organisations (ibid). Furthermore, the institute receives funds from outside sources and has connections to the international ultra-conservative networks, such as TFP (Graff and Korolczuk, 2022). The logo of Citizen Go can be found on the official sheet of the Charter, which is an NGO funded by the Russian oligarchs (Datta, 2021). Thus, it can be argued that Ordo Iuris, while operating in Poland, it serves as a political tool for foreign actors.

The difference in funding reveals the existence of two anti-gender discourses, which share common anti-gender interests. The Church-led discourse utilises ontological insecurities to support its own claims and cooperate with the government. Even though they share an alliance, the Church is more independent, due to having its own funding and long history of working. Despite securing funds from the public institutions, Ordo Iuris does not share the same independence. Due to having ties to foreign investors, the institute will always have to balance between the state and investors. At the same time, the institute has to be more careful with its appearances and affiliations. As was discussed by Graff and Korolczuk (2022), there were no Polish representatives during The World Congress of Families Forum because attending the Russian-funded event, would cause the break of any cooperation with the Polish government (2022: 55). The Polish government is the only one that can formally legitimise the anti-gender claims, thus, as long as it cooperates with the Church, the Church-led anti-gender discourse will remain the dominant one.

6. Conclusion

Anti-genderism has become a transnational phenomenon that can operate as religious discourse or symbolic glue, but also as a political tool. Even though the idea originated in the Vatican, anti-genderism is no longer tied exclusively to the religion, instead, it can incorporate religious teachings with political goals. Due to own flexibility anti-genderism is not bounded to any specific geographic location. As the anti-gender discourse rises in popularity, it became implemented into the official politics of governments. Therefore, this thesis was focused on one case of a successful anti-gender movement. To discuss Polish anti-genderism, the thesis's interest was narrowed down to one specific area of LGBT issues. Hence, through analysis of so-called LGBT-free zones, I discussed the case of Polish anti-gender discourse.

Two formed research questions guided the research process to seek the source of ontological insecurities, their application in the discourse and to establish the

affiliation between the insecurities and queer community. As result, I argued that ontological insecurities are bounded to the historical experience of lost independence and sovereignty, especially in relation to World War II and communism which constitute chosen traumas. The analysis of the resolutions reveals that these traumas still affect Polish people and their implementation in the narrative can influence the perception of who and what constitutes a threat to the nation. Through gendered nationalism, I discussed how children became the main focus of the discourse. The threat of sexualisation and demoralisation motivates different groups to protect the weakest group before gender reaches other social units.

Throughout the empirical material, LGBT people and gender have been associated with Western Europe, pathology and communism. Thus, LGBT people are constructed in an antagonistic way to the Polish Catholics. Councils' discussion as well as the resolutions revealed the limited knowledge about the discussed issue. In most cases, the councils did not engage in any discussions. When the discussion occurred, it revolved around the meaning of the abbreviation, paedophilia in the Church and political fights, instead of the real issue of discrimination against LGBT people.

By focusing on the role of the Church in the discourse, I argued that the current wave of anti-genderism is influenced to a certain extent by the existential insecurity of the Church, which was triggered by the publication of the report. Redirection of the attention to a new threat allowed the institution to frame itself as a proctor of the Polish nation. Thus, the threat against the Church became the threat against the whole nation and even to the whole European civilisation. As the government promotes the same values as the Church, the government did not intervene to stop the zones. Both parties represent the same anti-gender discourse built around historical, biblical, secular and political dimensions. The case of *Ordo Iuris* exposed another anti-gender discourse that operates in Poland. While both discourses promote the same views, they can be distinguished from each other based on funding, relations with the government and the ideology they assert in the discourse.

However, they do not compete with each other over. Instead, the Church-led discourse antagonises the EU, by framing its own discourse as the true European discourse. Hence, by demonising the EU and gender, the Church protects its own position and fulfils its own ontological security. Gender functions as a floating signifier in the Polish anti-gender discourse. The concept is associated purely with the West. In relation to the nodal points of freedom and tolerance, the idea of gender is further demonised to be a new form of a totalitarian ideology. As result, gender is perceived as something that needs to be fought off and anyone who can be associated with it, becomes a threat to the established order and the Polish nation.

This research holds limitations, as it focused only on one case. Thus, generalisations are limited, but not impossible. Although, while this case may not be applicable for comparison with Western states, it could be used to discuss situations of other post-Socialist states. As they share similar experiences of communism, it could be discussed to what extent their anti-gender discourses are similar to each other. Considering Ordo Iuris ties and funding, further research could focus on the aspect of international networking. Since the institute seeks to engage in other states, such as Croatia and Hungary, attention could be brought to the actions of Ordo Iuris in these countries. Further research could include other issues that anti-genderism targets to expand the discussion. Considering that the Polish parliamentary elections will be held in 2023, future research could observe if the PiS continues to antagonise LGBT people, or will it politicise and securise another group. Nevertheless, this study's findings contribute to the broader discussion of anti-genderism with a specific focus to the Central and Eastern European variation of it.

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