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**HOMOPHOBIA AND NATIONALISM IN POLAND**

**The reactions to the march against homophobia in Cracow  
2004**

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**Homophobia and Nationalism in Poland**  
**The reactions to the march against homophobia in Cracow 2004**

by

**Barbara Törnquist-Plewa and Agnes Malmgren**

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## Introduction

In the spring of 2004, i.e., the same year that Poland joined the European Union, the organisation ‘Campaign against Homophobia’ organised a cultural festival entitled ‘Culture for tolerance’ in the Polish town of Cracow. The aim was to strengthen the position of gays and lesbians in the public sphere; to give them right to exist outside gay clubs and private homes. The culmination of the festival was a march for tolerating homosexuals.<sup>1</sup> This march caused a tumultuous debate in the Polish press and it ended in riots as counter-demonstrators prevented the participants from reaching the castle of Wawel where the march was supposed to end.

About 300 people participated in the counter-demonstration. Among them were a number of football supporters from two rival teams who on this day united against an even greater enemy. Others belonged to the ultra-nationalistic, far right-wing party *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (‘League of Polish Families’)<sup>2</sup> and its youth organisation All-Polish Youth<sup>3</sup>, self-proclaimed ideological heirs to the inter-war associations with the same names, closely connected to the nationalistic *Endecja* party and its leader Roman Dmowski<sup>4</sup>. They formed a wall at the foot of the Wawel Hill and prevented the march from advancing. They shouted: ‘You won’t get Wawel. Deviants! Murderers!’; ‘Gays for the gas chambers’ and ‘Do away with the disease’. Stones and bottles were thrown, forcing the representatives of the Campaign to disperse. Some of the counter-demonstrators later headed for Cracow’s Main Square, where they further pursued the demonstrators and attacked a number of policemen. About twenty people were arrested in conjunction with the counter-demonstration and the violence in the Square.

In the history of the Polish gay and lesbian movement this festival and the march have generally gone down as ‘the Cracow events’. These ‘Cracow events’ can be seen as the first big open confrontation between advocates of and opponents to the right of gays and lesbians to a place in the public sphere in Poland. ‘The Cracow events’ to a large extent also became a starting point for the ongoing (and recently also intensified) debate on the attitudes to gays and lesbians in Polish society. Therefore we would like to analyse the reactions to the march

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<sup>1</sup> A. Gruszczyńska ”Wściekłość i wrzask”. (”The Cry and the Fury”) in Sypniewski, Z, Warkocki, B (red), *Homofobia po polsku*. (Homophobia Polish-style) (Warszawa:Wyd.Sic! 2004), pp. 139-149; See also <http://tolerancja.gej.net/2004/>

<sup>2</sup> *Liga Polskich Rodzin* (‘League of Polish Families’), further abbreviated LPR.

<sup>3</sup> See the website for *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-Polish Youth) [www.wszechpolacy.pl](http://www.wszechpolacy.pl)

<sup>4</sup> For more about Dmowski’s and *Endecja*’s ideology see B. Porter, *When Nationalism Began to Hate: Imagining Modern Politics in Nineteenth-Century Poland*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

in Cracow in 2004. In our view the debate on the place of homosexuals in society can be seen as a sign of the ongoing social and cultural changes in Poland. Homosexuality, and human sexuality generally, are certainly not marginal issues, since the organisation of sexual difference and biological and cultural reproduction are central in every culture. They are connected to core existential issues like life and death, but also to the organisation of the society; therefore the debate surrounding the march can be used to show the tensions in the changing Polish society. In our analysis we will argue that the march raised questions concerning Polish identity: Who gets a place in the national community and who is excluded? Which are the basic national and cultural values and who will have the power to define them? The debate can be interpreted as an expression of the conflict taking place today about the reformulation of Polish identity. This process occurs in the interplay between Polish traditional cultural values, reasserted after the end of forty years of communist rule, and the influence of liberal ideas from the West, leading to a conflict between advocates of and opponents to the modernisation of Polish culture with EU liberal democracies as models.

This analysis of the debate is based on a corpus of articles in newspapers and periodicals published between 2 April 2004, when the debate on the march started, and 16 May, when it petered out after the march itself on 7 May. We are of course perfectly aware that the press is not a pure reflection of public opinion. However, in a country like Poland where the freedom of the press is constitutionally guaranteed, the press is both a forum for expression of different opinions and a channel used by political and intellectual elites to influence public opinion. Thus the debate in the press can be seen at first hand as representative of the views of the opinion-forming elites in Poland. Striving to cover as broad a spectrum of opinions as possible, we have chosen on one side major papers with various ideological sympathies such as *Gazeta Wyborcza* (social liberal)<sup>5</sup> *Rzeczpospolita* (liberal-conservative)<sup>6</sup> *Trybuna* (left-wing, the former Communist party paper),<sup>7</sup> *Nasz Dziennik*

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<sup>5</sup> The Polish daily with the largest circulation, with about 660 000 copies

(<http://serwis.gazeta.pl/gwreklama/1.54941.1112654.html>), according to their own information. The paper reported on the march in its Cracow supplement as good as daily, and several times in the national edition.

<sup>6</sup> Daily with a circulation of 240 000 according to its website

(<http://www.rzeczpospolita.pl/rzeczpospolita.html#rwl>). On economic matters the paper is liberal-oriented and on other issues more conservative as to values. However, the debating pages are open for people of different opinions; the paper has no supplement for Cracow and wrote much less on the march than *Gazeta Wyborcza*.

<sup>7</sup> Daily with no Cracow supplement. Its circulation is according to its website 76 000 copies on weekdays and 120 000 at weekends ([http://www.trybuna.com.pl/n\\_oglosz.php?id=inf\\_wyd](http://www.trybuna.com.pl/n_oglosz.php?id=inf_wyd)). It wrote relatively little on the march and was decidedly in favour of it.

(nationalist, Catholic-fundamentalist),<sup>8</sup> as well as three periodicals oriented towards specific circles: *Tygodnik Powszechny* (an established intellectual, liberal-Catholic weekly)<sup>9</sup> *Zadra* (the only feminist periodical)<sup>10</sup> and *Inna Strona* (a Cracow-based website for the gay community).

## **Catholicism, Nationalism, Communism and the views on homosexuality**

Before proceeding to analyse the debate around the march in Cracow we would like to present its cultural and historical context by briefly discussing those traditions, ideologies and historical developments that have influenced the attitudes to homosexuals in Poland.

Catholicism is obviously one such a factor to be mentioned. The Catholic Church's view on homosexuals is part of this institution's view on human sexuality in general. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church "human sexuality (...) is naturally ordered to the good of spouses and the generation and education of children".<sup>11</sup> Extra-marital sex is a sin. Furthermore the absolute goal of marriage as a holy and indissoluble union is to carry life further, i.e. procreation. For this reason, wilful childlessness is for example one of the few accepted reasons why the Catholic Church may annulate a marriage. In the view of the Church, sex in accordance to natural law is aimed at procreation. Preventing procreation through contraception or abortion is a sin. Thus, homosexual sex as never aiming at procreation is a sin. The Catechism of the Catholic Church bundles homosexual acts together with such sins as masturbation, fornication, pornography and prostitution. It states also that homosexual acts "are contrary to natural law. They close the sexual act to the gift of life. They do not proceed from genuine affective and sexual complementarity. Under no circumstances can they be approved."<sup>12</sup> At the same time the Catechism emphasises that homosexual

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<sup>8</sup> Daily, no information as to the circulation on its website, but according to its critics S. Kowalski & M. Tulli, *Zamiast procesu: Raport o mowie nienawiści*, (Warszawa: WAB, 2003), p. 33 it amounts to 180 000. It wrote quite extensively on the march and the festival.

<sup>9</sup> Circulation of 38 000 copies according to its website ([http://tygodnik.onet.pl/368\\_redakcja.html](http://tygodnik.onet.pl/368_redakcja.html)). The paper published only two articles on the march. However, after the march two of its reporters once 'borrowed' space in *Gazeta Wyborcza* in order to express their opinions there.

<sup>10</sup> Published five times a year with a circulation, according to one of its journalists (email communication from Sławomira Walczewska, 3 October 2005) of 2500 copies.

<sup>11</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church, See paragraph 2353, [www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P85HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P85HTM)

<sup>12</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church, See paragraph 2357, [www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P85HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P85HTM). See also two texts issued by the Polish Catholic Church on homosexuality - "Deklaracja o niektórych zagadnieniach etyki seksualnej" and "Uwagi dotyczące odpowiedzi na propozycje ustaw o niedyskryminacji osób homoseksualnych" both in *Dokumenty Kongregacji Nauki Wiary*, (Tarnów: Biblos, 1997).

persons “must be accepted with respect, compassion and sensitivity” and not discriminated against.<sup>13</sup> If they abstain from sex they are not sinners at all.

However, it should be pointed out that the attitude of the Christian Church towards the homosexuals varied through its history. According to John Boswell who studied Christianity and homosexuality in Medieval Europe,<sup>14</sup> moral theology until the thirteenth century did not oppose homosexual behaviour per se. It was most often silent on this issue. It was first in the High Middle Ages with the rising power of corporate states that hostility and special condemnation of the male homosexuality appeared in the legal and theological writings. Homosexuality was condemned as an act committed against the divine order and therefore against nature. This influenced the future teachings of the Church. Nevertheless, according to the historian George Mosse, until the end of the eighteenth century the perception of the gravity of the “homosexual sin” varied among the Churches. It could be sometimes comparable with other sins against “chastity”; the attitude of the Catholic Church towards various grades of homosexual ‘sin’ was more indulgent in comparison with the Protestant one.<sup>15</sup> Mosse claims that it was first in modern Europe, when religious ideas merged with modern nationalist ideologies, that the priestly condemnation of homosexuality acquired generally a new quality and homosexuals were pointed out as a group threatening public morality. While religion itself regarded the sin of homosexuals as a matter between God and the individual concerned, national ideology made it a sin against the community, against the nation. Churches and nationalist ideologists began to go hand in hand with their condemnation of homosexuality all over Europe.

Mosse has made an essential contribution to shedding light on the link between nationalism and the view on sexuality in modern European culture. With German and English examples he has demonstrated how the European middle class by the end of the eighteenth century created an ideal of respectability later used by nationalists. ‘Respectability’ here means ‘decent and correct manners and morals, as well as a proper attitude toward sexuality’.<sup>16</sup> Sex outside marriage, sexual acts ‘just for pleasure’, not aiming at procreation were loaded with guilt. Mosse stresses the part played by religion (particularly by pietism and Evangelicalism) in the emergence of this ideal, since religion shaped its main principles, viz.

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<sup>13</sup> The Catechism of the Catholic Church, See paragraph 2358. [www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/\\_P85HTM](http://www.vatican.va/archive/ENG0015/_P85HTM)

<sup>14</sup> J. Boswell *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality. Gay People in Western Europe from the Beginning of the Christian Era to the Fourteenth Century*, Chicago and London: Chicago University Press 1980.

<sup>15</sup> See G. L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe*, (Wisconsin – London: Wisconsin University Press, 1985). See p.5 and pp.26-27. He quotes among others books for father confessors that discern between different kinds and grades of “homosexual sin”.

<sup>16</sup> Mosse 1985, p.1.

‘moderation and control over passions’. With the help of ‘the ideal of respectability’ the middle-class justified its newly acquired social position and delimited itself from other social classes (mainly the aristocracy and the working class) by stressing its ‘correct’, moral and sound way of living. Modern nationalism, which developed on a large scale in the nineteenth century, adopted the middle-class ideal of respectability. National ideologists called upon all social classes to adhere to this ideal since it was a warrant for the health, strength and survival of the nation. Priests were no longer the sole guardians of morality, since politicians and scientists (especially in the field of medical science) were set to watch over the physical and moral health of the nation. Many found the ideal of respectability appealing since it provided guidelines in ‘the chaos of the modern age’ and cohesion in societies which were in the midst of modernisation processes<sup>17</sup>.

The alliance between nationalism and the ideal of respectability fortified them both and the moral code associated with this ideal dominated until the second half of the twentieth century. It was first the so-called ‘sexual revolution’ that took place in the West during the 1960s and 1970s that effectively challenged the old ideal of respectability and led to its dismissal among the broad strata of society. A new view on sexuality together with the strengthening of the discourse on human and citizen rights in the 1970s and 1980s slowly and gradually made the struggle for the rights of gays and lesbians possible. However, one should be aware of the fact that large parts of the world remained untouched by the Western sexual revolution. It made only a marginal impact in Poland, then a Communist country behind the Iron Curtain, with both the Catholic Church and the Communist state acting as watchdogs. Thus the old ideal of respectability has had a hold on Polish society until today.

When discussing the connection between nationalism and the ideal of respectability, Mosse does not mention Poland, but a large part of his statements might, with some modification, be applied to Polish culture. The role played by the middle-class in Western Europe in the shaping of the ideal of respectability fell in the Polish context on the petty gentry, which in the eighteenth and partly the nineteenth centuries were the social stratum that created national cultural patterns.<sup>18</sup> This group adopted from the seventeenth-century ‘Sarmatian’ culture of the gentry<sup>19</sup> the concept of the Pole-and-Catholic, developed it during

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<sup>17</sup> Mosse 1985, p.180

<sup>18</sup> See A. Walicki, *Trzy Patriotyzmy* (‘Three Patriotisms’), (Warszawa: Res Publica, 1991).

<sup>19</sup> Sarmatism consisted of a particular ideology, customs and a life style which developed and remained popular among the gentry in the Polish-Lithuanian state during the seventeenth century. It was characterised, among other things, by a strong devotion to Catholicism. For an analysis of its long-lasting influence on Polish culture see for example Tazbir, J. *Kultura szlachecka w Polsce*, (Poznań: Wyd. Poznańskie. 1998).

the nineteenth century and transferred it to other social classes.<sup>20</sup> During this process there occurred a symbiosis between the original religious symbols and the modern national ones<sup>21</sup>. The Sarmatian nobility culture was xenophobic and intolerant towards non-Catholics, and Sarmatism also fortified an already budding idea of Poland as *Antemurale Christianitatis* – the rampart of Christendom, with Poland as a particularly moral country to which God had confined the mission of defending Christianity and Christian values. This idea established itself firmly in Polish culture in spite of continuous criticism by its opponents. The Sarmatian concept of Poland's mission in Europe returned during Romanticism in the nineteenth century in a new form, as the philosophy of Messianism, whose advocates preached that Poland was the Christ of nations. The Poles, bereft of their own state, which since 1795 was divided among their three neighbours, were to struggle both for their own freedom and for Christian and ethical values in politics.<sup>22</sup> The cultural heritage of Polish Romanticism is contradictory, just as the one left by Republic of the Nobility (*Rzeczpospolita Szlachecka*) and Sarmatism. On the one hand both traditions praised such expressions of individualism as untamed imagination, strong will and great heroic deeds; on the other they stressed the duty of the individual to sacrifice his private life in the service of the sacred nation. Thus the subjectivity, privacy and freedom of an individual have largely been neglected in Polish culture and can be seen as one of sources for the Polish opposition to gay and lesbian rights.<sup>23</sup> An individual should subordinate her or his needs to the group, i.e. nation and family. This collectivistic trait of Polish culture was strengthened by a modern, integrist, nationalist ideology formulated at the end of the nineteenth century by the political party called 'Endecja' (National Democracy) and its leader Roman Dmowski. *Endecja* proclaimed the need of national egoism and 'the right of the strongest' in politics. It rejected the Romantic definition of the Polish nation as a multi-ethnic community based on historic tradition. It claimed that in order to survive as a nation the Poles needed to integrate as a community of language, origin and religion, i.e. become a homogenous ethno-nation. The party came up with the slogan 'A Pole is a Catholic' that had great appeal, especially among Polish peasants. This was a concept of nation based on very clear distinctions between Poles and 'the others' and excluded several groups which

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<sup>20</sup> B. Cywiński, *Rodowody niepokornych*, (The Genealogy of the Irrepressible), (Warszawa: Krag, 1984).

<sup>21</sup> An example of this symbiosis is the cult of the Virgin of Czestochowa who is viewed both as the Mother of God and the mother of the Polish nation – i.e.; the queen of Poland. See B. Törnquist-Plewa, *The Wheel of Polish Fortune. Myths in Polish Collective Consciousness during the First Years of Solidarity*, (Lund: Lund Slavonic Monographs, 1992).

<sup>22</sup> A. Walicki, *Philosophy and Romantic Nationalism. The Case of Poland*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

<sup>23</sup> See P. Leszkowicz, and T. Kitliński, *Miłość i demokracja*, (Kraków: Aureus, 2005), pp. 63-64.

earlier had been viewed as part of the national community.<sup>24</sup> *Endecja's* ethno-nationalist ideas won considerable support in Polish society in the course of the twentieth century and it may be argued that it reduced tolerance for cultural diversity. Ethno-nationalist ideologies politicise culture, turning it into a store of national delimiting markers and symbols. Those groups and individuals who do not share the culture of the majority end up outside the national community and become undesirable minorities whom the dominant group tends to regard with suspicion.<sup>25</sup> In his book *Nationalism reframed* Rogers Brubaker shows, among other things, that the Polish state that emerged after World War I was dominated by ethno-nationalist politics.<sup>26</sup> Applying his own theoretical model he described Poland as a 'nationalizing state' involved in a tense 'triadic relation' with its 'national minorities' and 'external homelands' (i.e. the minorities' homelands). It should be stressed, however, that Polish ethno-nationalists of the interwar period concentrated their struggle on elements alien to Polish culture, on national and ethnic minorities, leaving sexual minorities outside their focus. This explains why it was possible for more liberal Polish politicians to carry through a decriminalisation of homosexual acts in Polish law already in 1932, which was earlier than in many Western countries. However, ignorance of homosexuals did not mean tolerance. Violence and discrimination against them occurred<sup>27</sup> and there was no room for them within the 'ideal of respectability' created in Poland by combined nationalism and Catholicism. The ideal of 'Pole and Catholic' dictated how a Pole should lead his life.

Nation and family were primary values. The cult of family in Polish national culture has its roots in the nobility culture of pre-modern Poland<sup>28</sup> and in Catholic tradition. The Catholic religion particularly sanctioned the family and so did modern Polish nationalism. In the world view of the 'Pole and Catholic', 'family' became a core value of Polish culture, seen as a precondition for the biological and cultural survival of the nation. Because of the perceived threat to the Polish nation, which in the nineteenth century lived under foreign rulers, the importance of the family for the cultural and biological reproduction of the nation was particularly emphasised, but it was not a totally unique phenomenon. As both Nira Yuval-

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<sup>24</sup> See Porter, 2000.

<sup>25</sup> For more about ethnonationalism in Eastern Europe, its sources and its difference from civic nationalism see B. Törnquist-Plewa, "Nationalism and Minority Questions in Central and Eastern Europe in the Context of EU Enlargement", *CFE Working Paper*, no.12, (Lund: CFE, Lund University, 2001).

<sup>26</sup> R. Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the national question in the New Europe*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 84-106.

<sup>27</sup> Leszkowicz & Kitliński, 2005, pp 50-51.

<sup>28</sup> See Tazbir, 1998.

Davies (2002) and Georg Mosse (1985) have pointed out<sup>29</sup> all nationalist ideologies have praised the family as the fundament of the nation. To quote Mosse:

‘Any threat to its survival endangered the nation’s future. Such fears about the family and therefore the nation, were closely involved [...] in the concern over population growth’. By the end of the nineteenth century; birth rates were decreasing in a number of European countries, and nationalists were alarmed that their nations would be weakened and even disappear. Darwinist thought was applied to nations, with its ‘struggle for survival’ and fear of degeneration. A conviction emerged that ‘natural selection, which Darwin had seen at work among animals, would reward a healthy national organism; free of hereditary disease and moral weakness’<sup>30</sup>.

The consequence of such reasoning was that homosexuals were pointed out as already degenerate; they did not fulfil their duty to the nation and ‘were accused of depriving the nation of its future soldiers and workers’.<sup>31</sup>

Mosse describes how medical science put itself in the service of the nation and discussed whether homosexuality could be prevented. Many argued that homosexuality was at least to some degree due to a weak character, lack of self-control and acquired bad habits. Thus, the spread of homosexuality could be prevented by a correct upbringing. Yet viewed as an ‘acquired’ and not a ‘congenital’ feature homosexuality constituted an even greater danger to the nation, in the form of a disease threatening the healthy part of the nation. One can presume that there is only one short step from this kind of thinking to the idea of eugenics. Yet although in Polish medical discourse homosexuality was throughout the whole of twentieth century treated as a kind of disease,<sup>32</sup> gays and lesbians never became an object for eugenic practices in Poland. What more, eugenics as such never gained the support it had in Western Europe. The eugenic ideas propagated by some Polish nationalists were effectively countered by the Polish Catholic church that opposed them firmly by stating that ‘science could not determine the value of a human being’.<sup>33</sup>

According to Mosse homosexuality was not only seen as a demographic threat to the nation; it was even claimed that.

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<sup>29</sup> Mosse 1985 and N. Yuval-Davis, 2002, *Gender and Nation*, (London: Sage Publications, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Mosse 1985, p.33.

<sup>31</sup> Mosse 1985, p.140.

<sup>32</sup> See quotations from Polish medical books and lexicons in Leszkowicz & Kitliński, 2005, pp.96-100.

<sup>33</sup> M. Gawin, *Rasa i nowoczesność. Historia polskiego ruchu eugenicznego*, (Warszawa: Neriton, 2003), pp.240-244.

‘the secrecy that accompanied deviant sexuality resembled a conspiracy sowing hatred against the state; men and women who practised such vices lacked either moral sense or civic responsibility, and their souls were incapable of spirituality as their bodies were slack and without tone’.<sup>34</sup>

The guardians of the nation were also of the opinion that homosexuality weakened family and society by blurring the difference between male and female. Men would become effeminate and no longer able to defend the nation, and women would stop bearing children for the good of the nation. Nationalism strengthened stereotypical representations of male and female by propagating distinct male and female ideals: Specific codes and regulations were developed defining who/what is ‘a proper man’ and a ‘proper woman’ which became central to the identities of the members of the nation.<sup>35</sup> ‘The orderly division of labor and with it a settled family life were thought to be vital in view of the rapid changes that occurred’.<sup>36</sup>

In Poland, national ideologists strengthened the already established gender contract<sup>37</sup> sanctioned by the Catholic Church. Catholic catechism preaches the idea of the complementarity of genders: men and women have different but equally important roles and they are to complete each other emotionally. Thus, the Polish nineteenth-century ideologists created models for how Polish men and women could best serve the nation. The male ideal was, as in many other European countries, designed according to the chivalrous ideal<sup>38</sup>, yet in Poland the ideal man should preferably be both a knight and a poet. He was to fight for the freedom of his country with arms but also be able to carry national values further by means of the ‘word’. The female ideal had Virgin Mary as its model, and both maternity and virginity were its central features. Women, as in many other nations, were required in Yuval Davies’ words ‘to carry the burden of representation’<sup>39</sup>, i.e. to be the symbolic bearers of the nation’s identity, to represent ‘moral purity’ and honour and to be the guardians of morals and family life. The Polish Romantics created a female ideal which is summed up by the concept, still in use, of *matka Polka* – ‘the Polish mother’, which defined women’s participation in the national community. On the one hand, male patriots called on women to participate as citizens in the struggle for the country’s freedom; on the other, this struggle was – with a few

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<sup>34</sup> Mosse, 1985, p.29.

<sup>35</sup> Yuval Davies 2002, p.67

<sup>36</sup> Mosse 1985, p.24.

<sup>37</sup> Concepts like ‘gender contract’, ‘gender regime’ or ‘gender system’ are used by researchers into gender issues to describe ‘hegemonic discourses and practices in different societies and in different locations within these societies which relate to the organisation of sexual difference and biological reproduction and establish forms of representation around these’. See Yuval-Davies 2002, p.8.

<sup>38</sup> Mosse 1985, p. 23.

<sup>39</sup> Yuval-Davies 2002. p.45.

exceptions of soldier women in service of the nation – connected mostly with their role as mothers.<sup>40</sup> ‘*Matka Polka*’ was to bear the children of the nation, preferably sons, and raise them in fidelity to the nation and the Catholic faith. She was to be self-effacing and prepared to see her children die for the nation; mentally strong and prepared to stand in for her husband when he was out fighting for the fatherland, yet just as ready to return to her old role when he came back. In such a cultural context, women who never married and did not fulfil the ideal of motherhood became stigmatised as failed ‘old maids’.<sup>41</sup>

A number of researches into gender issues<sup>42</sup> consider that gender roles in twentieth-century Polish culture remained largely unchanged. Communism declared equality between men and women, advocated professional activity for all and had quotas for women in Parliament. However, in practice, this meant that large numbers of women, who still held the main responsibility for home and children, had a double occupation. Since, according to Communist propaganda, discrimination and inequality could only occur in capitalist countries, this state of things was never turned into an issue, and all possibilities of a real debate on equality were stifled during the Communist era.<sup>43</sup> The Communist regimes borrowed several ideas on family policy from nationalism. The birth rate was to be raised, and therefore abortion was illegal in Poland during the Stalinist era (1948-56) and intermittently there was a special tax for unmarried and childless adult men.

The family as an important value has maintained its strong position in Poland. The preaching and authority of the Catholic Church has played an important part here, but there were also certain features in the Communist system which strengthened family ties, such as the scarcity of goods which made people dependent on one another for solving everyday economic problems. Because of the pressure from the omnipresent state there was also a need to create franchise zones outside the public sphere, and the family became a source of security, a private ‘we’ against the ‘them’ of the State. People tried to protect their homes and families from the omnipresent regime’s regulations and interventions, and women tended to see the almighty state, not the husband, as an oppressive force. Thus, when Western feminists came with their message that the private sphere was a political one and that they should

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<sup>40</sup> S. Walczewska *Damy, rycerze i feministki* (Ladies, knights and feminists), (Kraków: eFka, 2000), pp. 53-54.

<sup>41</sup> Walczewska 2000, pp. 126-130, 139-144.

<sup>42</sup> See for instance Walczewska 2000, J. Mizielńska, ‘The rest is silence... Polish Nationalism and the Question of Lesbian Existence’, in *The European Journal of Women’s Studies*, Vol. 8 (3), (2001), pp.281-297; J.

Mizielńska ‘Nasze życia, nasze ciała, nasze wartości, czyli jak walczyć z moralną paniką w ponowoczesnych czasach’ in Z. Sypniewski, & B. Warkocki (red.) *Homofobia po polsku* (Warszawa: Sic!, 2004)pp. 113-138; S.

Gal, & G. Klingman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: a comparative historical essay*, (Princeton: Princeton university press, 2000).

<sup>43</sup> Walczewska 2000, pp. 94-95, 65-68, 112-114; Gal and Klingman 2000, p. 5.

liberate themselves from their husbands, Polish women were sceptical. They preferred escaping from the omnipresent political dimension in their lives rather than making their private sphere even more political.<sup>44</sup>

Family, marriage and motherhood still rank high on the Polish value scale and are still viewed by the majority as the most important goals in life.<sup>45</sup> According to Mizielińska, a Polish researcher into gender issues, in order to feel fully included in the national community Polish women still have to accept the role which the nation and the Catholic Church – whose influence in society remains strong – ascribe them. And since it is as mothers and wives that women should fulfil themselves it is difficult to find any ‘alternative visions of womanhood’ in Polish official discourse. Women who renounce motherhood, unmarried women and lesbians do not live up to the ideal of church and nation and are therefore marginalised in society, risking to become its ‘others’.<sup>46</sup> As family and marriage maintain their importance, Polish men, too, are pressed to enter into matrimony.<sup>47</sup> This pressure is, however, less forceful because the male ideal is not primarily defined on the basis of fatherhood. This does not prevent the fact that homosexual men, together with lesbian women, belong to the ‘others’ of the nation. By refraining from begetting children, a homosexual man does not fulfil his duty to the nation; moreover, the stereotypical image of a homosexual man as effeminate runs counter to the Polish male ideal.

Thus, it transpires that the period of the Communist rule did not change attitudes towards homosexuals in Poland. Instead, it rather solidified the already existing gender contract and views on sexuality. In fact, the Communist system paradoxically contributed to the preservation of the old ideal of respectability. Its nationalist constituent was upheld by the Communist state that (despite lip-service to so-called internationalism) used excluding ethno-nationalistic ideas to mobilise Polish society (early on against the Germans and, in 1968, against the Jews). The Communist regime implemented several ideas of the *Endecja* while publicly condemning the latter's ideology as right-wing. It carried through an old dream of *Endecja*, namely the ethnic and cultural homogenisation of Polish society, diminishing the space for ‘otherness’ and difference. The Catholic constituent of the ‘ideal of respectability’ was also kept intact because the Communist attacks on Catholic Church mobilised the Poles

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<sup>44</sup> Gal and Klingman 2000, pp. 47-52, 99-101.

<sup>45</sup> This is confirmed by opinion surveys and analyses of the dominating discourse in Polish media, see B. Laciak, *Obyczajowość polska czasu transformacji*, (Polish mores in times of transformation), (Warszawa: Trio, 2005), pp. 46-104.

<sup>46</sup> Mizielińska 2001, pp. 284-287.

<sup>47</sup> One example thereof are the spiteful comments on the bachelor status of the Jarosław Kaczyński, Polish prime minister in the years 2005-2007.

to the defence of Catholic values. Moreover, during the Communist period the collectivistic ideas in Polish culture were strengthened. Individualism and liberalism, which in the West constituted the base for the rights of homosexuals, were not promoted and, as already mentioned, Poland remained largely uninfluenced by the Western 1970s sexual revolution. Thus with the old Polish-Catholic ideal of respectability still alive gays and lesbians could only remain outcasts.

The Polish Communist regime, too, displayed a negative attitude towards homosexuals.<sup>48</sup> However, it should be pointed out that after their coming to power the Communists did not change the law from 1932 which had decriminalised homosexuality.<sup>49</sup> Thus Poland was in this respect rather unique in the Communist bloc. Karl Marx viewed homosexuals as deviants, a product of a sick bourgeois society<sup>50</sup> and Lenin largely shared this view although he tolerated the liberal stance on homosexuality represented by many Bolsheviks during the first decade after the October revolution.<sup>51</sup> Early revolutionary Russia decriminalised homosexual acts; yet in 1934 Stalin recriminalised them by issuing the so-called antisodomy decree. Negative attitudes towards homosexuals got the upper hand in the Soviet Communist party. This policy influenced the Communists in the vassal countries. Homosexuality was considered a cosmopolitan and suspect phenomenon.<sup>52</sup> There was not to be any homosexuality in a socialist society, and this may be the reason why homosexuality was largely taboo in communist media. The communists' homophobia originated primarily in their need for total control of society. The Party feared any deviance from the norms of the community and was suspicious of the secrecy which, in their opinion, surrounded homosexual acts. Gays and lesbians were treated as potentially 'socially dangerous elements'. It was claimed that homosexuality and criminality were connected and there was police surveillance of groups of homosexuals.<sup>53</sup> Blackmail against homosexuals occurred; in order not to have their orientation revealed, they were forced to collaborate with the security police. In one of the extremely few works touching on gay history in Poland, the anthology *Homofobia po polsku* ('Homophobia the Polish way') from 2004,<sup>54</sup> Leszkowicz stresses that male

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<sup>48</sup> The police, for example, felt free to harass homosexuals. See J.D. Stanley, *Homosexuality in Early Polish History*, [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/poland](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/poland), consulted 05.08.2007.

<sup>49</sup> P. Leszkowicz, "Przełamując hetero-matrix. Wojna seksualna w Polsce i kryzys praw człowieka". Z. Sypniewski, & B. Warkocki (red.) *Homofobia po polsku*, (Warszawa: Sic!, 2004), p.101.

<sup>50</sup> Mosse 1985, p.185.

<sup>51</sup> D. Healey, "Homosexual Existence and Existing Socialism. New Light on the Repression of Male Homosexuality in Stalin's Russia", *GLQ. A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, v.8, no.3, (2002), pp.353-4.

<sup>52</sup> For example they were accused of spying, see Healey 2002, p.362.

<sup>53</sup> See for example Leszkowicz & Kitliński, 2005, p.52.

<sup>54</sup> Beside this work we would like to mention writings by Leszkowicz and Kitliński, Miezielińska and Umińska. See the bibliography at the end of this article.

homosexuals were openly discriminated against and arrested, while lesbian women were totally invisible in official discourse.<sup>55</sup> One reason could be the visibility of the male homosexual subculture connected with public places that functioned as clandestine sexual marketplaces. The Communist authorities found this subculture particularly challenging and disturbing.<sup>56</sup> In 1985 in Poland, in connection with a police action called 'Hyacinth', thousands of homosexuals were arrested and forced to sign a 'confession' of their orientation. Leszkowicz, researcher and gay activist, explains this action by the fact that a 'homosexual underground movement' acting for human rights and against the regime began to take shape in the 1980s. The homosexuals' orientation and alleged criminality was used as a pretext for combating their political activity. Moreover, the regime wanted to blackmail arrested homosexuals into delivering information on underground resistance activities.<sup>57</sup>

After the fall of the Communist system in the early 1990s the support organisation *Lambda* was founded by and for homosexuals. In large cities, bars, clubs and other meeting places were opened; however, the freedom these places gave did not imply freedom from discrimination. In the draft constitution of 1995 there were a number of grounds, including homosexuality, on which discrimination was forbidden. However, these various grounds had been eliminated from the constitution adopted in April 1997. It is claimed that this was the work of the Catholic Church and certain right-wing parties which were openly against adding 'homosexual orientation' to the article on discrimination.<sup>58</sup> The Catholic Church was also behind paragraph 18 of the Constitution stating that marriage can only be a union of woman and man. In this way those who elaborated the text of the Constitution wanted to block the Western European tendency to accept same sex-marriage. During the preparatory stage of its EU membership Poland was pressed into adopting laws against all kinds of discrimination, including on the grounds of sexual orientation. A result thereof was the law in 2002 banning discrimination on the labour market due to sexual orientation, the first Polish law forbidding discrimination for this reason. Gay activists emphasise that all Polish laws and legal and organisational initiatives aimed at strengthening the rights of homosexuals in Poland are undertaken exclusively with support and/or pressure from the EU.<sup>59</sup> In 2001 the non-governmental organisation 'Campaign against Homophobia' was founded rather as a political organisation than as a support group. It has organised numerous actions, first and foremost

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<sup>55</sup> Leszkowicz 2004, pp. 101-102.

<sup>56</sup> Healey 2002, p.361-2, p.366.

<sup>57</sup> Leszkowicz 2004, pp.101-102.

<sup>58</sup> Leszkowicz 2004, pp. 103-105.

<sup>59</sup> Leszkowicz and Kitliński 2005, p. 61.

distributing flyers in order to promote the tolerance of homosexuals in society. The organisation has also carried out large information campaigns with the slogan 'I'm gay, I'm lesbian' at universities<sup>60</sup> and a photographic campaign 'Let them see us' in the streets of Polish main cities<sup>61</sup> It was the 'Campaign against Homophobia' which organised the festival and the march for tolerance in Cracow 2004, the very march that resulted in violence and fuelled the debate.

## The opposition to the march

### *A provocation against the faithful?*

The debate in the press set off as it became known that gays and lesbians were to march on the same day that the believers in Cracow held their procession in honour of Saint Stanislaus, one of the most important Polish saints and a national symbol. As Bishop of Cracow in the eleventh century he condemned the immoral ways of king Boleslaus the Bold, an act he paid for with his life.<sup>62</sup> Every year thousands of Cracovians march to Skalka<sup>63</sup> in memory of the martyr. Therefore, the opposition to the march originally concerned the timing and the place, the fact that the homosexuals were to go to the same sacred plot on the same sacred day as the believers held their procession. The first paper to inform on the simultaneous date for both manifestations was *Gazeta Wyborcza*. It wrote:

[...] many of them [the believers] will after Mass receive flyers calling them to support homosexuals and their equal rights in society [...]<sup>64</sup>

Why, *Gazeta Wyborcza* wondered, had the festival organisers chosen that very day for their march? In the same article, Franciszek Ziejka, Chancellor of Cracow's Jagellonian University, was quoted to say that '[...] holding it [the march] on the same day as the procession to Skalka, is a deliberate provocation'. In *Rzeczpospolita* the journalist (former dissident and liberal, now centre-right activist) Bronisław Wildstein called the march a party. Under the heading 'Sad Pride' he wrote an article on how the 'party' [...] is characterised by

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<sup>60</sup> See [www.homoseksualizm.pl](http://www.homoseksualizm.pl)

<sup>61</sup> Leszkowicz and Kitliński 2005, p.12

<sup>62</sup> According to medieval *Annales* by Jan Długosz, Boleslaw the Bold was accused of sodomy. See Stanley J.D. *Homosexuality in Early Polish History*, [www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/poland](http://www.glbtc.com/social-sciences/poland). Yet it is striking that no one mentioned that in the debate, either because of ignorance or through political and/or moral discomfort.

<sup>63</sup> Skalka – a monastery with a statue of Saint Stanislaus; it is also the burial place for Poles who have done extraordinary deeds for the nation.

<sup>64</sup> M. Kula "Rendez-vous na Wawelu" ('Appointment at Wawel Castle') *Gazeta Wyborcza* 20/4 2004.

something typical for events of this kind, i.e. a provocation directed against traditional symbols and cultural values'.<sup>65</sup> The organisers of the march argued that they had only picked the date the town authorities had suggested. Although it later transpired that the events were scheduled at different times and thus could not clash, the Campaign changed the date for its march, and also its itinerary. Instead of the town centre they marched through the park surrounding the Old Town, yet these compromises did not silence the media's accusations of provocation.

In an article entitled 'Cracovians do not want a vulgar parade' the member of the ultra-nationalistic far-right party LPR ('League of Polish Families') Maciej Twaróg, called for a reaction against the march:

Let us defend the normal, traditional face of Cracow. If this march takes place, it will be an offence against public morality, which is the main point the Mayor should defend, instead of letting himself be led by a group wanting to demonstrate their perversity [...]<sup>66</sup>

The fact that there was such a thing as public morality based on Catholic and national norms which were 'ours', and that the march was a threat against these norms, against 'us', was a recurrent theme in the opponents' arguments.

Cracow's politicians discussed whether this march, as the 'threat against public morality' it was, could be allowed. In the local assembly 22 out of 26 members voted against it, yet the Mayor gave it the go-ahead, referring to the constitutional right to demonstrate.

While the debate was in full swing *Gazeta Wyborcza* asked the Archbishop of Cracow, Cardinal Franciszek Macharski, about the views on homosexuality held by the Catholic church. The Archbishop explained that homosexuality 'ran contrary to laws of nature as stated in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, according to which only spouses – women and men – are allowed sex with one another'. Therefore, homosexual acts are viewed as unnatural and the church sees, he continued, a moral disorder in homosexuality. He pointed out, however, that people 'afflicted by homosexuality should be shown due respect.' Only homosexuality which was *acted out* was sinful.<sup>67</sup>

However, representatives of an organisation called Catholic Action of the Cracow Archdiocese (Akcja Katolicka Archidiecezji Krakowskiej) did not share the view of their

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<sup>65</sup> B. Wildstein "Żalosa Duma" *Rzeczpospolita* 21/4-2004

<sup>66</sup> Quoted in R. Motola "Krakowianie nie chcą wulgarnej parady" (Cracovians do not want a vulgar parade) *Nasz Dziennik* 6/5-2004.

<sup>67</sup> "Oświadczenie Metropolity Krakowskiego" (Declaration by the Cracow Archbishop) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 23/4-2004.

Church leader, a view based on the official teaching of the church. They wrote in *Nasz Dziennik* that ‘tolerance, i.e. to patiently stand people’s bad acts [...] must have its limits’. Homosexual acts were wilful and therefore should not be tolerated, since they could be controlled. The intentions of the organisers of the march were described in the following manner:

In this way the [organisers] want, in the name of so-called progressive thought, to accomplish a fatal degeneration of culture and return to the mores of Sodom and Gomorra or the decaying Roman Empire.<sup>68</sup>

In this manner the opponents to the march were able to position their negative attitude within something on a much grander scale, namely biblical representations of homosexual sin and not only their personal distaste for homosexuals. Naturally, the Campaign’s march was *not* a manifestation in favour of homosexual abstinence, and thus its participants, being sinners, defied the religious procession. And if their sin had caused the downfall of the entire Roman Empire, then allowing it would of course constitute a danger for Cracow and Poland in 2004. For this reason, the organisers’ reassurance that ‘they were not seeking to provoke the feelings of Catholics’<sup>69</sup> did not mean much in that context. Likewise, it did not matter that the Campaign changed the date for its march. After the march Cardinal Stanisław Nagy said in a sermon that it was ‘a shameful provocation, degrading the city of a hundred churches [...]’.<sup>70</sup>

### ***Homosexuals as a threat to the nation***

The opponents presented the march not only as a provocation against Catholic believers but also against the Polish nation. In their view Polishness was tightly intertwined with Catholicism and the Polish nation was a defender of Christian values. Thus challenging these values, homosexuals challenged the nation. They were identified not only as ‘the Other’ but also as the Other that constituted the threat to the nation. They represented sexuality that was not life-giving and that could be spread and lead to the moral and physical weakness of the nation, and in the longer perspective, even its death. Several newspapers pointed out that the

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<sup>68</sup> Father Jakubiec Majerczak, ”Przeciwko ludzkiej godności” (‘Against human dignity’) *Nasz Dziennik* 23/4-2004.

<sup>69</sup> M. Szypuła, T. Śmietana ”List otwarty do prezydenta Krakowa Jacka Majchrowskiego i rektora UJ Franciszka Ziejki” (Open letter to the Mayor of Cracow Jacek Majchrowski and to the Chancellor of Jagellonian University Franciszek Ziejka *Gazeta Wyborcza* 21/4-2004.

<sup>70</sup> M. Skowrońska ”Mocni w trudnych czasach” (‘The strong ones in difficult times’), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 10/5-2004.

family, ‘the source of life, the supreme value of every nation’<sup>71</sup>, was under homosexual threat. In the same spirit Wildstein declared in *Rzeczpospolita* that marriage enjoyed social privileges, since children were born into it and raised inside it; the family, and, by extension, the nation, might be in danger if gays and lesbians were given free reins in the public sphere. The consequence of a permissive attitude towards the march would lead to gays and lesbians demanding further rights, such as the right to marry:

The idea of homosexual marriage fundamentally changes this concept [i.e. of the family] and leads therefore to the destruction of this very basic social institution.<sup>72</sup>

From his viewpoint of the ‘basic’ function of the family for society Wildstein argued further that allowing the march, which implied a permissive attitude towards homosexuality in the public sphere, might constitute a threat to democracy as a whole:

A precondition for democracy is the existence of its subjects, i.e.; a democratic community, a nation in the political sense. [...] Therefore the State and the law must assess acts in the public sphere and assume (within reason) the role of educator.<sup>73</sup>

Wildstein touched here upon the question of a possible conflict between the interests of the state and the nation on the one hand, and the importance of adhering to principles of democracy on the other. However, Wildstein escaped this dilemma by equating democracy and nation. By doing it he tried to present himself as a defender of democracy while at the same time he denied homosexuals access to the public sphere. Other opponents to the march seldom used the word democracy; yet it turned out that their views on democracy were not far from Wildstein’s. The interest of the nation was above democracy.

Homosexuals viewed as enemies of Polish values and thus of the nation were in the eyes of the opponents unworthy to use national symbols. For instance, local politicians used the town of Cracow as a symbol of Poland and declared in the press:

We consider the march of gays and lesbians [...] improper and directed against [...] Cracow, the historic and cultural capital of Poland. It is a conservative town, its inhabitants living according to Christian values and therefore such a march is not proper here.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> R. Motuła ”W trosce o rodzinę”(‘Concern about the family’) *Nasz Dziennik* 28/4-2004.

<sup>72</sup> B. Wildstein ”Wolność potrzebuje fundamentu”(Freedom needs a solid ground) *Rzeczpospolita* 28/5-2004.

<sup>73</sup> *ibid.*

The opponents were also outraged that the Campaign against Homophobia wanted to organize a scientific conference at the Jagellonian University, seen as an ancient national institution. In an open letter to the Mayor of Cracow and to the University Chancellor, the representative for LPR ('League of Polish Families') explained why they wanted it cancelled. The University was in their opinion '[...] an institution which thousands of Poles hold in awe and which has formed generations of the great sons of our country [...]'.<sup>75</sup> By sanctioning the conference the University sent out what they considered false signals to society and undermined its own authority. The LPR created such a negative atmosphere around the conference that the Chancellor of Jagellonian University moved it from the city centre to the university buildings at the outskirts of Cracow motivating it by the risk that teaching activities might be disturbed.

Nor could the opponents accept the fact that the march against homophobia was to head for Wawel Castle, a national shrine holding the graves of several Polish kings, national bards and national heroes. A priest, Father Bielański, expressed his feelings about this in the following words:

I suffer, my heart bleeds, when I'm here at Wawel – next to Saint Stanislaus, Saint Hedwig, next to kings and poets, who have been such defenders of Poland and the Polish language – at the thought of somebody wanting to dishonour human dignity in this manner.<sup>76</sup>

At the foot of the castle hill there is a statue of a dragon. According to the legend, long ago this dragon terrorised Cracow by living off its maidens and sheep. The evil dragon of the story gave heterosexuality a face as the opponents wrote on their streamers: 'The Wawel dragon was heterosexual'.<sup>77</sup> Even if the opponents had a twinkle in their eye as they adopted the dragon as their symbol, they nevertheless established a firm connection between their town and heterosexuality.

Flyers and posters published in connection with the march may serve as examples of the struggle for the right to use national symbols. On the front of the flyer sent to 280 000 Cracovian households by the Piotr Skarga Association for Christian Culture there was a montage of pictures, one representing Wawel and the other a few participants in a Pride

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<sup>74</sup> Z. Fijak, "Oświadczenie" (Declaration), *Gazeta Wyborcza* 4/5-2004.

<sup>75</sup> M. Kula "Machina Protestów" (The mechanism of Protests) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 21/4-2004.

<sup>76</sup> Father Bielański "Przeciwko ludzkiej godności" (Against human dignity) *Nasz Dziennik* 23/4-2004.

<sup>77</sup> J. Sadecki, "Orientacja seksualna smoka wawelskiego" (The sexual orientation of the Wawel Dragon) *Rzeczpospolita* 8/5-2004.

parade and, in between, the words ‘Say no to the marketing of homosexuality’<sup>78</sup>. Thus Wawel was put in opposition to gays and lesbians. The montage may be compared to the Campaign’s poster for the festival representing Wawel ‘drowned’ in rainbow colours. No clearer illustration is needed of the difference between the views of the Campaign and its opponents: while the former thought it was possible to dress the castle in the colours of the rainbow, the latter considered that Wawel – that symbol of Polishness – and homosexuality were totally in opposition and would never meet, or should never be allowed to.

### ***Homosexuality – the disease from the West***

It is important to mention that the picture of the Pride Parade featured on the flyer described above had been taken abroad, since no such parade had been held in Poland. Thus the picture can be interpreted as a warning finger at those who believed a Polish homosexual march would be different from a Western Gay Pride-parade. The picture was intended to awake a fear that the world from which it originated, the West and Europe, would penetrate the Polish universe. In due course those pride parades would make their way into Poland. This idea was also expressed by Bronisław Wildstein in *Rzeczpospolita*. The writer opposed the march on the grounds that ‘there is nothing more apolitical than sexuality’. He stressed that gays and lesbians must have the right to private life. However, he found their demands to openly demonstrate their sexual disposition exaggerated. He stated ironically:

Homosexuals used to request that no outsiders peek into their beds; now they all demand that their frolics in the bedchamber be approved by one and all.<sup>79</sup>

Wildstein seemed or pretended to not understand what the gay and lesbian movement is about, that their demands to ‘openly demonstrate their sexual disposition’ are really about the demands to the right to be accepted in the public sphere without being ridiculed and discriminated.

Many opponents expressed a conviction that the Polish nation was threatened by Western European immoral ways of life. Referring to the march, Cardinal Stanislaw Nagy said in a sermon that ‘the enemy is well armed and exceptionally sly’. He added:

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<sup>78</sup> M. Kula ”Protest plus oferta” (‘A protest and an offer’) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 23/4-2004.

<sup>79</sup> B. Wildstein “Żaloszna Duma” (Sad Pride) in *Rzeczpospolita* 21/4 and 28/4- 2004.

The spiritual climate in Europe [...] worries us. We fear a criminal attitude to life, characterised by free abortion and euthanasia.<sup>80</sup>

Thus the Cardinal mentioned those phenomena which the Polish Catholic-nationalist rhetoric describes as signs of the so-called ‘civilisation of death’ in the West<sup>81</sup>, and homosexuality is considered part thereof, since it does not generate life.<sup>82</sup>

The paper *Nasz Dziennik* is known in Poland for its appeals to stop the advance of the ‘civilisation of death’. Thus it made itself the organ of the opponents to the march. It only published negative articles about the festival and never interviewed any organisers or advocates. The writers attacked the Campaign against Homophobia and claimed that homosexuals were ‘the propagandists of perversity’. In their view homosexuality could be marketed, and so would spread like a disease. For that reason it was a threat against family and nation and its advance in the public sphere had to be prevented.

*Nasz Dziennik* also reported of a conference – ‘The legalisation of homosexual relations – a threat to society’ – held in Cracow Town Hall a few days prior to the march-<sup>83</sup> This conference may largely be seen as a counter-reaction to the scientific conference held by the Campaign in connection with the festival. Thus both sides used science as an authority for substantiating their views. *Nasz Dziennik* particularly emphasised the paper of the psychiatrist Wanda Póltowska on the possibility of ‘curing’ homosexuality.<sup>84</sup>

In view of the opponents’ presentation of homosexuality as something that was marketed by the West and the EU it is not surprising that the aggressive counter-demonstrators shouted ‘eurogays’, and ‘the Union is gay’ after the homosexuals participating in the march.<sup>85</sup>

Just a few days before the march Poland had become a member of the European Union. Poland’s EU membership strengthened the opponents’ conviction that ‘something must be done’. If the march was not prevented now, it was only a question of time before gay marriages and adoptions were legalised and the ‘civilisation of death’ got its hold on Poland.

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<sup>80</sup> M. Austyn ”Stawić czoła Europie bez Boga (To face the godless Europe) *Nasz Dziennik* 10/5-2004.

<sup>81</sup> See M. Jurek, *Reakcja jest objawem życia. Kroniki radiowe 1999-2000* (A reaction is a sign of life-The Radio Chronicles 1999-2000), (Poznań: Akvilon, 2000).

<sup>82</sup> R. Motola ”Sprzeciw wobec demoralizacji” (Opposition to democracy) *Nasz Dziennik* 26/4 2004.

<sup>83</sup> The conference was not organised by the town of Cracow, though the local authorities lent their premises to it. Since a number of festival activities had to be cancelled on the grounds of politicians’ opposing their being organised on public premises, the fact that this conference was allowed in a public building upset the Campaign against Homophobia and its adherents.

<sup>84</sup> M. Pabis ”Zorganizowana kampania przeciwko rodzinie”(An organised campaign against the family) *Nasz Dziennik* 6/5 -2004.

<sup>85</sup> J. Sadecki ”Orientacja seksualna Smoka Wawelskiego”(The sexual orientation of the Wavel Dragon’) *Rzeczpospolita* 8/5 -2004, ”Krakowska Tolerancja” (‘Tolerance Cracow-style’) *Trybuna* 8/5-2004.

Were then the opponents to the march opponents to the EU in general? It was not as simple as that. There were opponents to the march also among those in favour of the EU, which is illustrated by this declaration by the MEP Bogdan Klich (Platforma Obywatelska-PO, 'Civic Platform')<sup>86</sup>:

The organisers of the march have a right to express their opinions. Yet they should not do this at a point in time when Cracow goes on with its life and concentrates on patriotic and religious events, namely Poland's accession to the European Union and the traditional procession in honour of Saint Stanislaus.<sup>87</sup>

Klich's voice can be seen as representative of that part of the Polish centre-right politicians that supported Poland's accession to the EU but claimed at the same time that Poland's special mission in the EU was to defend Christian values, to 'Christianise politics'. They even wanted to annex a special declaration on values to the Polish accession treaty. The well-known Polish cartoonist Andrzej Mleczko summed up their ideas ironically in a cartoon representing two politicians shaking hands and exchanging Polish and EU flags. One of them says: 'So we have a deal. We give you morality and you give us cash.'<sup>88</sup>

Yet, generally in the debate Euroscepticism and homophobia were connected. The view on homosexuals as deviant and outcasts went hand in hand with the fear of what was to happen when Poland was becoming part of the world from where all the "anomalies", such as gay rights, same-sex marriages, etc., seemed to have originated.

## **Defending the march and the festival**

Besides the gay website *Inna Strona* and the feminist periodical *Zadra* it was first and foremost *Gazeta Wyborcza* which, apart from its first article on the issue, took a stand in favour of the march. On its premises there was a list in support of the march open for signatures. Most often, the defenders published their opinions in various articles in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, as well as in *Trybuna*, *Rzeczpospolita* and *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Let us look at their arguments.

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<sup>86</sup> Civic Platform (PO) A liberal-conservative parliamentary party; liberal in its views on economics, conservative on other issues.

<sup>87</sup> M. Kula, "Rozterki Platformy"(The dilemmas of the Platform), *Gazeta Wyborcza* 7/5-2004.

<sup>88</sup> Quoted after J. Mizielnińska *Pleć, ciało, seksualność*, (Kraków: Universitas, 2006), p.165.

### *The march as a democratic right*

It is important to point out that among the defenders of the march there were representatives of different political and ideological positions – the leftists, the liberals and even the moderate conservatives and Catholics. What united them was the view that forbidding the march was a threat to democracy. The idea of democracy as a most important value was their common denominator. The right to manifest one's opinions had to be respected. Ewa Siedlicka, a journalist, expressed it in the following way:

Nobody has the duty to like homosexuals. You may dislike them, not tolerate them and tell the whole world so. If there is such a group that wishes to do so, they have a holy democratic right to it.

Whereupon she wondered why homosexuals were not granted the same 'holy, democratic right', since democracy was a tool for homosexuals to try to gain acceptance in society. Within the framework of democracy they could fight for the right to marriage and adoption. Still, it was another question whether they would succeed, as they had in other European countries.<sup>89</sup>

Marcin Śmietana and Tomasz Szypuła from the Campaign against Homophobia preferred to view democracy as something more than a tool: they wanted to see a democratic Poland permeated by tolerance. They saw gays and lesbians in Poland as a minority deprived of its rights. In an open letter to the Mayor of Cracow and the Chancellor of Jagellonian University they wrote that 'the touchstone of every democracy is the attitude of the majority towards the minority'.<sup>90</sup>

In another article Senator Maria Szyszkowska<sup>91</sup> from the post-communist social-democratic party SLD, suggested that pluralism and tolerance were the basic conditions for democracy. The controversy surrounding the march led her to the conclusion that Poland had failed the acid test of democracy. She stated:

[...] Let us state frankly that Poland is a country of one dominant outlook on life. At least that will justify the attacks against the advocates of tolerance.<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> E. Siedlicka, "Ograniczona Tolerancja"(Limited tolerance), *Gazeta Wyborcza* 6/5-2004.

<sup>90</sup> M. Szypuła, T. Śmietana, "List otwarty do prezydenta Jacka Majchrowskiego i rektora UJ Franciszka Ziejki" (Open letter to the Mayor of Cracow Jacek Majchrowski and to the Chancellor of Cracow University Franciszek Ziejka) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 22/4-2004.

<sup>91</sup> In 2003 Szyszkowska presented a Bill to the Senate (higher house in Polish parliament) on registered civic partnership for same sex-couples. The Senate accepted it and after some amendments submitted it to the Sejm (lower house in Polish parliament). However, no legislative procedure in the Sejm has hitherto been initiated.

<sup>92</sup> M. Szyszkowska "Powszechna Klerykalizacja"(A general clericalisation) *Trybuna* 2/5-2004.

In *Zadra*, Beata Kozak proclaimed in ironic tones the failure of Polish democracy:

This may sound radical – since nothing awful has happened, correct? No one has abolished the right to vote of priests. No one has forbidden the invalids to show themselves on the streets [...] There is no ‘Polish Defence of Racists, Antisemitists and Terrorists’ with ten million members – so that is not bad. It is just the old usual familiar discrimination of a few gays, so why is there so much shouting and protest?

Kozak ironises the selectivity of democracy: if other groups than homosexuals had been prevented from demonstrating, Polish society would have been up in arms.<sup>93</sup>

Still, the fact remains that there were quite large numbers upset by the discrimination ‘of a few gays’. The Nobel Prize winners Czesław Miłosz and Wisława Szymborska, together with several other prominent Polish intellectuals, signed an open letter supporting the march. The letter highlighted the danger of denying someone access to the public sphere: ‘To obstruct such a right is to pave the way for a totalitarian society’. ‘The opponents to the march’, the letter continues, ‘tried to take over the public sphere with an outlook on life which negates all other outlooks.’<sup>94</sup>

Local politicians from Civic Platform were, as had been said earlier, against the march since Cracow was ‘a conservative town’. However, their opposition was severely criticised, both by their fellow party members and by other defenders of the march. This shows that the Civic Platform was expected to live up to democratic ideals, while other parties further to the right ‘escaped’ such criticism.

Bogusław Sonik, a politician representing Civic Platform did consider the Campaign ‘provocative’ with its march, but also wrote that the opponents used a ‘hateful language’. Most importantly, he stressed that ‘a manifestation cannot be forbidden in a democratic country [...]’.<sup>95</sup> Marta Kundelska, also from Civic Platform, pointed out in turn that her party was a ‘conservative-liberal party which considered that the state should not be influenced by any ideologies’. She wondered:

How come that farmers and miners have the right to demonstrate, while those that want to protest against homophobia in society are denied that right?<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> B. Kozak “Epoka kamienia rzuconego”(The era of lapidation) *Zadra* no. 2/2004.

<sup>94</sup> “List otwarty do mieszkańców oraz władz miasta Krakowa” (An open letter to the inhabitants and authorities of Cracow), *Gazeta Wyborcza* 5/5-2004.

<sup>95</sup> M. Kula “Rozterki Platformy” (The dilemmas of the Platform) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 7/5-2004.

<sup>96</sup> M. Kula “PO a geje” (the Civic Platform and the gay issue) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 5/5-2004.

Representatives of the liberal party Unia Wolności ('Freedom Union') and its youth organisation Young Centre objected to Cracow being labelled 'conservative':

Neither Cracow nor any other Polish town is conservative. Nor are they socialist (even if the Communist regime had wanted them to be) or liberal. They are towns in free Poland, where their inhabitants have the right to live according to their own convictions [...].<sup>97</sup>

Communism was here used as an example, well established in Polish history, of another time when people were unable to express their views. The Communist past emerged in yet another way in the arguments of the defenders, namely in the shape of the dissident. *Gazeta Wyborcza* pointed out that the chairman of Civic Platform in Cracow, Zbigniew Fijak, who had taken the side of the counter-demonstrators, had once been 'a laudable dissident' who had now betrayed his ideals.<sup>98</sup>

The treacherous dissident re-emerged on the pages of *Rzeczpospolita* in an article by the well-known leftist-liberal sociologist Irenusz Krzemiński, who wondered how it was that the former 'freedom fighter' Wildstein had turned his back on democracy during the discussions about the march. Krzemiński considered that those that had themselves been deprived of their freedom could reasonably empathise with how others felt oppression and discrimination.<sup>99</sup>

It is interesting to note the presence of the dissident in the argumentation of the defenders of the march. It shows that some of them found it important to live up to an ideal harking back to the time of the Solidarity movement, and even further back, to earlier times of oppression and the Polish Romantic cult of the struggle for freedom.

### ***The march as a matter of tolerance***

*Trybuna* published an article with the title 'Tolerance, you stupid'.<sup>100</sup> This title rather adequately sums up the view of many defenders of the march. Tolerance was viewed as a precondition for pluralism, which in turn is the precondition for democracy. Besides, the name of the festival was 'A Festival for tolerance' and during the march people shouted 'freedom, equality, tolerance'. In this slogan 'tolerance' had more or less the same meaning as the 'fraternity' it had here replaced: it signified the possibility for people to live together in spite of their differences. Therefore, the stones against the march of the Campaign were

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<sup>97</sup> P. Kuśnia, J. Lityński "W obronie otwartego państwa" (Defending the open State) *Rzeczpospolita* 7/5-2004.

<sup>98</sup> S. Mancewicz "Nieobecny pan Zbyszek" (The absent Zbyszek) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 11/5-2004.

<sup>99</sup> I. Krzemiński "Prawa człowieka, prawa geja" (Human rights, gay rights) *Rzeczpospolita* 28/4-2004.

<sup>100</sup> J. Karpiński, J. Złotorowicz "Tolerancja, Głupcze" *Trybuna* 6/5-2004.

‘stones against tolerance’, while the significant support for the march was described as ‘victory for tolerance’.<sup>101</sup> Yet even among the defenders there were some that considered that the Campaign had failed in tolerance vis-à-vis pious Catholics in its choice of the date for the march. Magdalena Kula expressed her doubts as to the Campaign’s reassurance that ‘they did not mean to provoke’. ‘There has to be tolerance on both sides’, she wrote.<sup>102</sup> Two writers in *Gazeta Wyborcza* considered that it was too early for tolerance of homosexuals and their marches:

The idea to hold days of homosexual culture in Cracow was definitely controversial and could not get public support. For a long time it will still be shameful to be gay or lesbian.<sup>103</sup>

Yet after the march and the violent counter-demonstration the issue of tolerance for homosexuals was no longer the most interesting one. The two writers considered that Poland now needed to talk about ‘the limits for the tolerance of the use of violence and lawlessness’. In *Zadra* Beata Kozak poked fun at the wide-spread use of the concept of tolerance:

To participate in the march became a matter of honour for people who in this way clearly wanted to line up on the side of democracy and accept... sorry, I mean tolerance.<sup>104</sup>

It was striking that it was the concept of tolerance, i.e. the respect for the (different) view or behaviour of others even if one does not like it, and not the concept of acceptance, which permeated the defence of the march.

### ***The Polish snout and the Polish face***

The defenders of the march directed towards the opponents a broad range of accusations, from double moral standards to fascism. They defined the opponents as aggressive, dangerous and primitive. Besides, some pointed that it was opportunism and not moral convictions that were considered to be at the bottom both of the opposition to the march and the passivity of politicians to the violent counterdemonstration.

In order to illustrate the double moral standards of the opponents, the defenders reached for a character from literature, ‘Mrs. Dulska’. This *Pani Dulska*, the main character in a play

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<sup>101</sup> M. Kula, W. Pelowski ”Bitwa o Kraków” (The battle for Cracow) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 8/5-2004.

<sup>102</sup> M. Kula ”Są. Mają prawo być. I tyle.” (They have the right to be. That is all’) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 24/4-2004.

<sup>103</sup> M. Szostkiewicz, A. Brzeziecki ”Granice tolerancji dla przemocy” (The limits for tolerance of violence’, *Gazeta Wyborcza* 12/5-2004.

<sup>104</sup> B. Kozak, *Zadra*, no. 2-2004.

from 1906 by the Cracow authoress Gabriela Zapolska, personifies philistine, double moral standards as her whole life is devoted to keeping up appearances. According to Mrs Dulka, committing immoral acts is not wrong, but it is only wrong when they become known to the outside world.<sup>105</sup> Mrs Dulka's attitude has led to the coining in Polish of the expression *dulszczyzna*, which was frequently used by the defenders. In *Trybuna* we could read that 'intolerance, *dulszczyzna*, homophobia and narrow views' had at the occasion of the march 'converged at Wawel'.<sup>106</sup>

After the march, Robert Walenciak, a journalist and editor of the left-wing weekly *Przegląd*, wrote in *Gazeta Wyborcza*: 'Cracow the European town, the town of Miłosz and Szymborska lost against the Cracow of Mrs Dulka'.<sup>107</sup> In *Gazeta Wyborcza* the well known Cracow journalist, Stanisław Mancewicz accused the opponents, and the whole town of Cracow as well, of philistinism and double moral standards. These vices were particularly displayed by Cracow politicians and especially those from the Civic Platform. They represented the party that spoke about tolerance and liberalism, yet they were able to tolerate gays and lesbians only as long as these remained invisible and did not demand any rights. The fuss about the march was, according to Mancewicz, only one of many expressions of Cracovian intolerance:

Those who know but a little history of Cracow are well aware that being different has never been approved here.

In his words, Cracow was a 'provincial' town where differing had always been considered a provocation. For that reason it was easy for politicians to score on 'pederasts'.<sup>108</sup>

On the Internet site *Inna Strona* the gay activist Janusz Marchwiński expressed the view that many politicians played into the hands of the 'bald-headed bandits' by opposing a democratic march. He wrote that 'a Polish snout, distorted with hatred, stupid and primitive' had emerged during the festival. Faced with the 'snout', with 'fascist bullies', politicians were passive, an attitude 'not only damaging to gays and lesbians [...] but also to the state [...]'. Marchwiński contrasted 'the Polish snout' with 'the Polish face', tolerant and open to the

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<sup>105</sup> G. Zapolska, *Moralność Pani Dulskiej*. (Mrs Dulka's Morality), (Wrocław: Biblioteka Narodowa, 1978).

<sup>106</sup> J. Karpiński, J. Złotorowicz, "Tolerancja, głupcze" (Tolerance, you stupid) *Trybuna* 6/5-2004.

<sup>107</sup> R. Walenciak "Festiwal Ciemnoty" (Festival of ignorance) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 10/5-2004.

<sup>108</sup> S. Mancewicz "Po prostu wyleczyć" (Just cure it) *Gazeta Wyborcza* 7/5-2004.

outside world, and also present during the festival. The participants in the march, not afraid to show their feelings on sensitive issues, were an expression of this Polish face <sup>109</sup>.

### ***Catholic defenders of the march***

It is important to note that there were also Catholics who openly criticised the opposition to the march. A couple of writers in *Tygodnik Powszechny* protested against the way the opponents made use of the teachings of the church and national symbols. Krzysztof Brunetko described the opponents as follows:

We knew that football supporters are bandits. And it was just as obvious that the All-Polish Youth and its armed extensions, i.e. the skinheads, would distort the idea of patriotism, and that the League of Polish Families would misuse the notion of Christian values for its political aims <sup>110</sup>.

Brunetko then accused those politicians who had not condemned the counter-demonstrators of contributing to 'hatred and fanaticism' in society. Another writer, Józefa Hannelowa, in turn doubted that genuine moral indignation and religiosity were the causes of the opposition, considering instead that right-wing politicians used the conflict to present themselves in the public sphere as 'defenders of values' in order to 'easily score' on their opposition to homosexuals.<sup>111</sup>

The declarations by the writers in *Tygodnik Powszechny* showed that Catholic faith and homophobia do not necessarily go hand in hand, and even if these declarations did not lead to a discussion within the church, at least they sent out signals that Catholics' opinions might vary as to the view on homosexuals' place in society.

### ***Europe – the ally of the defenders***

A few days prior to the Cracow march Poland had become a member of the European Union, and the defenders of the march were in their majority pro-European. The open letter of the 'Nobel Prize winners' said:

One of the greatest advances of European culture is the respect for different opinions [...] The ground for this Europe which is now uniting is the coexistence of different intellectual, religious

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<sup>109</sup> J. Marchwiński "Polska twarz i polski ryj" (The Polish snout and the Polish face) *Inna Strona* 20/5 2004. Se: [http://innastrona.pl/samsw\\_rep\\_krk2004.phtml](http://innastrona.pl/samsw_rep_krk2004.phtml)

<sup>110</sup> K. Brunetko "Duża aura przyzwolenia" (A large aura of permissiveness) *Tygodnik Powszechny* 16/5-2005:

<sup>111</sup> J. Hannelowa "Moje trzy grosze" ('My two-pennies' worth') *Tygodnik Powszechny* 16/5-2004.

and social movements. Let us not, in the days preceding Poland's accession to the EU, allow our country to become a sad example of how the basic values of this continent may be misunderstood.<sup>112</sup>

Some representatives of the Campaign pointed out in their own open letter that the Poles' opposition to the march could not be that stubborn, since many of them had the previous year voted in favour of EU membership; and in that Union, in Europe, democracy was the rule:

When our festival will be held, Poland will already have become part of that family of nations for whom democracy is a superior value and the public sphere is not reserved for the advocates of one [...] ideology<sup>113</sup>

In the eyes of the defenders the EU was not solely the symbol of openness and democracy; it was also an ally and concrete support in the fight for the rights of homosexuals. The gay activist Szymon Niemiec even considered that 'the view on Poland in Europe' was influenced by the opposition to the march and that by discriminating against homosexuals the state would make financial losses in the form of reduced EU subsidies and grants.<sup>114</sup>

## **Conclusions: The 'Cracow Events' and Polish National Identity**

The first Cracow march for the rights of homosexuals led to a major conflict, which reflected and magnified already existing differences in Polish society. Although the heterosexual family is held as a very important value within the Polish culture Polish society includes many gays and lesbians, people who diverge from this ideal. As long as these people were obliged to accept a marginal position there had been no open conflicts; yet democracy and the 'Europeanisation' of Polish politics and culture brought support groups for gays and lesbians and finally a struggle for their rights. However, for many Poles their vision of Poland did not include such a deviation as homosexuality was considered to be. The difference between those that did live up to, and those that could not or did not want to live up to the ideals of the nation surfaced and led to conflict.

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<sup>112</sup> „List otwarty do mieszkańców oraz władz miasta Krakowa” *Gazeta Wyborcza* 5/5- 2004.

<sup>113</sup> *Gazeta Wyborcza* 21/4 – 2004.

<sup>114</sup> J. Karpiński, J. Złotorowicz ”Tolerancja, Głupcze” (*Tolerance, you stupid*) *Trybuna* 6/5-2004.

What is the picture of Polish society that emerges in connection with the debate and the conflict surrounding the march in Cracow in 2004?

The fact that there is strong entrenched fear and dislike of homosexuals which surfaced in the opposition to the march is hardly surprising. There is some aversion to homosexuals in most societies and research carried out in countries that joined the EU in 2004 shows that the level of intolerance of homosexuals was higher there than in the old EU countries.<sup>115</sup> Opinion polls in Poland also show that the majority of people can tolerate gays and lesbians only as long as they do not manifest their sexual orientation and about 40 per cent declare that they do not tolerate homosexuals at all.<sup>116</sup> One explanation is that Poland is a young democracy which only recently has seen homosexuality in the public sphere. What more, it is a country where not only homosexuality, but open discussions on many issues had been banned from the public sphere during the years of Communist rule. Poland is also, as we have clearly seen, a place where many people uphold a traditional way of life with church and family at its base. In a society cherishing marriage and motherhood and the idea of the complementarity of sexes, homosexuals cannot be seen as anything but deviant. Poland did not experience a sexual revolution of the kind that took place in the West and even in the West, equal legal rights for gays and lesbians date back only about ten years or so. It is not possible for something that took about thirty years in the West to happen in just a few years in Poland. Nor should the critical attitude of the Polish Catholic church to the march come as a surprise. According to the teachings of the church, homosexual acts are sinful, and therefore the church could only view the march as a call to tolerate sin.

*The occurrence* of opposition is thus not surprising, yet what may cause amazement are its strong expressions and vehemence. How could such a strong opposition against a march for tolerance which was not actually a 'gay parade' be mobilised, develop and thrive with the blessing of many politicians?

One explanation may be found in the stress Polish society is under because of the intensive ongoing changes. In times of deep social transformations people tend to adhere to whatever provides security and direction. Some researchers explain the distaste for homosexuals in terms of people's fears of the social changes that modernisation brings<sup>117</sup>. The

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<sup>115</sup> See ILGA' rapport *Meeting the challenge of accession. Surveys on sexual orientation discrimination in countries joining the EU*, ILGA-Europe policy paper, April 2004. See

[http://warszawa.lambda.org.pl/dokumenty/ILGA\\_raport\\_akcesja\\_2004\\_e.pdf](http://warszawa.lambda.org.pl/dokumenty/ILGA_raport_akcesja_2004_e.pdf); consulted 12.08 2007

<sup>116</sup> See CBOS's (Public Opinion Research Center) rapport *Akceptacja praw dla gejów i lesbijek i społeczny dystans wobec nich* ('Acceptance of gay and lesbian rights and social distance to them'). Warszawa, July 2005., p.1. See [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/K\\_127\\_05PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/K_127_05PDF), consulted 12.08.2007.

<sup>117</sup> Mosse, 1985, pp. 180-182, and Mizielińska 2004, pp. 115-124.

dogged opposition to the march may be interpreted as an indication of the Poles' fear of the new and the unknown. Since the march coincided with Poland's accession to the EU it might add to people's worries what that membership implied. Polish Euro-sceptics had presented the European Union as a 'degenerate' West, as a 'civilisation of death' threatening the Polish nation. This picture was recurrent in the rhetoric of the opponents to the march and seemed convincing to many, for why would the development in Poland regarding the views on gays and lesbians differ from that in other EU countries?

The Cracow march against homophobia in 2004 worried many Poles, yet it would not have led to such expressions of violence if it had not been used for political and ideological purposes. Nationalist politicians (primarily from the League of Polish Families but partly also belonging to the Civic Platform) viewed the march as an opportunity to invoke a threat against the Polish nation and present themselves as the sole defenders of Polishness. This open political and ideological use of homophobia marks Poland as different from other post-communist countries, where homophobia is also widely spread phenomenon. It seems that gays and lesbians in Poland play a role assigned in other post-communist countries to national minorities. Ethnic minorities in Poland are very small, constituting together at most about 3% of the population.<sup>118</sup> Thus gay activists may be correct in claiming that homosexuals are today the largest minority in Poland. In such a homogenous country, in the absence of other clear external or internal enemies homosexuals can be used by nationalists for ideological purposes. They can be turned into the internal 'others' of the nation.<sup>119</sup> The situation of gays and lesbians in Poland may in our view be analysed with the help of the model of the 'tradic nexus' presented by Rogers Brubaker with respect to national minorities, and described by us earlier in this article.<sup>120</sup> Polish nationalist politicians want Poland to be a 'nationalising state', gays and lesbians are the suppressed minority that demands rights and the European Union acts as a kind of their 'external homeland' that tries to put pressure on the Polish state to respect minority rights, including the rights of gays and lesbians. According to Brubaker the 'triadic nexus' creates a breeding-ground for confrontations and conflict, and this is also what happens today in the case of gays and lesbians in Poland.

The march against homophobia in Cracow in 2004 was used by the Polish nationalists to gain support, to present themselves as the carriers of 'true Polishness'. As antitypes, gays and lesbians would strengthen 'true Polishness', and the image of that Polishness may be

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<sup>118</sup> K. Cordell and A. Dobczyński, "Poland's Indigenous Ethnic Minorities and the Census of 2002", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 6:1, (2005), pp.83-87.

<sup>119</sup> See Mizielińska, 2001, pp. 282-284.

<sup>120</sup> See the subsection "Catholicism, Nationalism, Communism and their views on homosexuality".

observed in the opponents' arguments, which reflect older national discourses presenting a vision of a culturally homogenous Polish nation devoted to Catholic faith and such traditional values as family. This is an image of a morally superior nation with the task of adhering to Christian values and defending them both against internal (for instance homosexuals and liberals) and external enemies (immoral Western Europe). It implies an extremely collectivist concept of nation, in which the interests and rights of the individual, even democratic rights, are to be subservient to the interests of the nation. Gays and lesbians were placed in opposition to a nation thus defined. In a world view where Pole equals Catholic, homosexuals were represented as sinners not only against God but also against the nation. They stood for a sexuality contrary to norms and not generating life, and which the opponents considered could spread and lead to the moral and physical weakening of the nation, up to its very death. Thus they constituted a threat to family and nation.

When it became known that gays and lesbians were going to hold a scientific conference at Jagellonian University, to march through the streets of Cracow and 'take' Wawel Castle, these sites were depicted in nationalist media as fundamental national symbols. Thus, Polishness was under threat from homosexuals and had to be defended. 300 counter-demonstrators, prepared to throw stones, rose to the effective defence of the castle. The idea that every generation of Poles should be ready to fight for the nation has since Romanticism been a key scenario<sup>121</sup> in Polish nationalism. The march of the Campaign thus made it possible for a group of counter-demonstrators, mainly young people, to live up to that ideal. Under the influence of the nationalist rhetoric, members of All-Polish Youth could fancy themselves fighting for the nation, where the designated enemy was 'the gays'.

The illegal demonstration against the march was violent and some of its participants shouted 'gays for the gas chambers'. Were these cries representative of the opposition, i.e. were the views of the opponents permeated by fascism? Such a conclusion would be taking things too far. After all, the counter-demonstration consisted of a mere 300, mostly 'aggressive football hooligans'. On the other hand, the silence following the counter-demonstration, together with declarations of 'faults on both sides' shows compliance with the aggressive opposition. And if this silence is weighed against the vociferous opposition to the

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<sup>121</sup> A concept referring to symbolic models of action firmly entrenched in a particular culture. See Ortner, Sherry B. "On Key Symbols" *American Anthropologist*, no.75, (1973).

Campaign, we understand that a counter-demonstration with fascist undercurrents was viewed by some as a lesser evil than the march of gays and lesbians.<sup>122</sup>

The procession in honour of Saint Stanislaus took place as usual on 9 May 2004, two days after the march against homophobia. There was no illegal counter-demonstration to stop it and no bottles or stones were thrown at its participants. When the procession reached Skalka Cardinal Nagy condemned in his sermon the Campaign's march. Not a word did he say about the violent counterdemonstration. Thus a picture emerges of how the opponents' nationalistic version of Poland, their idea of a homogenous country with clearly drawn boundaries against 'the different Others' was there and then established in the public sphere.

However, many voices protested against such a vision of Poland. As the opponents to the march drew their horror picture of a Polish nation threatened by homosexuals, the support for the march grew. The defence of the march was thus to a considerable extent a reaction against the nationalist reaction to the march. This defence consisted of a large variety of people – from the gay activists themselves to journalists of the Catholic weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny*. Their common denominator was the idea of democracy as a fundamental value and the will not to let the opponents' definition of the Polish national identity gain priority and dominate in the public discourse. For the defenders, the most important Polish national values were the ideals of tolerance, democracy, freedom and fight against totalitarianism, also these established in earlier Polish national discourse. Some of these defenders discerned in the rhetoric of the opponents echoes of previous political regimes where people had been prevented from expressing their opinions. Communism, and sometimes Naziism, were used as their examples in their horror vision of what might happen should the opponents be allowed to prevail.

Some defenders nevertheless did have a problem with the idea of a gay march taking place on the same day as a religious procession; others were of quite the contrary opinion, that in a democratic country the two manifestations must be possible on the same day. They considered pluralism one of the preconditions for democracy, which implied that different groups had equal access to the public sphere. In spite of these differences among the defenders they were all united in favour of the vision of a 'more open' Poland and a more inclusive concept of the Polish nation. They considered that the Poles did not need to

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<sup>122</sup> Opinion polls conducted in 2005 also showed that 74 per cent of Poles were against public demonstrations organised by homosexuals. See CBOS's (Public Opinion Research Center) report *Akceptacja praw dla gejów i lesbijek i społeczny dystans wobec nich*. Warszawa, July 2005., p.1. See [http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/K\\_127\\_05PDF](http://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/K_127_05PDF), consulted 12.08.2007.

construct their national identity by pointing out gays and lesbians as ‘the others’. They clearly rebuked the opponents’ way of defining Poland and Polishness. Moreover, the Catholic defendants grouped around *Tygodnik Powszechny* protested against the way the opponents mixed religion and nationalism and used religion for their ideological and political goals.

If the defenders did not mince words describing the Poland of the opponents, then they had an all the more positive attitude towards Europe. For them Europe symbolised openness, democracy and pluralism. This positive image of Europe did not of course emerge in the context of the march, it was already firmly established in their view of Poland as a nation in need of modernisation according to a European model. In connection with the march, Poland was placed in opposition to Europe, constituting almost a dichotomy. Yet the defenders wished this difference to cease and ‘European’ values to prevail in Poland. Thus the conflict surrounding the march may serve as an example of how Poland today is involved in the process of cultural integration in Europe. Cultural integration is about changes of identities and reorganisation of societal order. It occurs as a result of encounters of the established, traditional cultural models and new ideas that are taken on and adapted.<sup>123</sup> In Polish contemporary culture traditional and liberal values, the latter seen as ‘European’, clash with each other. Identities, cultural models and values are undergoing change but they still bear a mark of continuity with the past.

It should be pointed out that the defenders of the march did not often address the issue of gay rights in their argumentation. The march was first and foremost a question of democratic rights. Some writers even pointed out that if the right to demonstrate was fundamental for democracy, this was not the case for the extended minority rights. Naturally, such a view may be discussed, but the fact is that democracy does not automatically imply gay rights. However, it does create a space for those that wish to fight for such rights. The defenders of the march first and foremost protested against the opponents’ attempts at denying gays and lesbians the right to act within this space.

It should also be pointed out that it was the notion of tolerance and not of acceptance which permeated the arguments of the defenders and which was chosen by the organisers as the name for the festival. What was the reason for this? The explanation may be sought in the fact that even for the defenders of the march, homosexuality in the public sphere in Poland in 2004 was an absolute novelty. Moreover, the defenders were not entirely free from the

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<sup>123</sup> Because of the limited scope of this article we do not enter into the ongoing theoretical discussion about the meaning and content of the cultural integration in Europe. For more about this subject see for example G. Delanty and C. Rumford, *Rethinking Europe: Social Theory and the Implications of Europeanization*, (London: Routledge, 2005).

influence of traditional Polish values as to relations between the sexes, sexuality and family patterns. Therefore, tolerance in the context of the march in Poland in 2004 was quite a radical demand, since tolerance presupposes the existence of different 'us' in a society which in spite of internal differences and conflicts can manage to live together. Acceptance may follow later on.

According to researcher and gay activist Paweł Leszkowicz<sup>124</sup> the status of and prevalent attitude towards homosexuality in Polish society have now entered a second phase. The first phase was characterized by silence and invisibility, while the second one, which to a considerable extent was triggered by the Cracow march, is marked by conflict. Leszkowicz views this phase as necessary. The problem with this conflict is, however, the absence of a wide range of opinions in the public debate. Only two antagonistic positions crystallized in the debate and the peremptory nature of the homophobic position is clearly not compatible with the idea of a liberal-democratic social order that Polish society is supposed to build. Democracy can not be maintained under conditions where one group refuses to accept the right of another group to exist (exception allowed only in cases when a group aims to destroy democracy itself.) This phase of an open conflict is nevertheless, according to Leszkowicz, a step in the right direction since it contains alternatives and makes people discuss the place of gays and lesbians in Polish society. A third phase, which Leszkowicz today considers utopian in Poland, will be when there are merely different ways of being 'in favour' of homosexuals: in favour of the right to adoption, gay partnerships and marriages, etc. Even during this phase there may be critical attitudes towards 'deviant' life-styles, but this does not mean their oppression and exclusion from the public sphere.

After the march and the counter-demonstration both camps called themselves the winners. The counter-demonstrators considered that they had succeeded in defending the Wawel castle. The advocates of the march were of the opinion that tolerance had prevailed. Both were correct, in their way. On the one hand, the counter-demonstrators had effectively succeeded in disrupting the march; nationalist politicians, together with the church, reaffirmed in their declarations the link between Polish nation, heterosexuality and Catholicism in the public sphere. On the other hand the defenders of the march succeeded by their very existence to question the opponents' image of Poland as a homogeneous country. In their defence of democracy, which is a precondition for human rights generally, they sowed the seeds for a future discussion on gay rights. The evidence of the defence of and the support for the march

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<sup>124</sup> Leszkowicz 2004, pp. 91-98.

prevents us from condemning Poland as a non-democratic backwater of Europe. Still, the expressions used by the opponents make it equally difficult to praise the young Polish democracy. The tension surrounding the march shows us that contemporary Poland is the scene of a sharp conflict between different views on what Polish nation is and should be. A fierce fight between them is going on. The future will show if the homosexuals one day reach Wawel.

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