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Agents of change? (Hi)stories, perspectives, and everyday practices of Polish border guards

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Chapter 2: Article I - Political meanings of national belonging: tracing the evolution of ‘Polishness’ in the Third Republic of Poland¹

2.1. Introduction

The global shift towards securitization, visible especially after the events of September 11th 2001, has strongly linked itself to the discourse of borders as the ultimate scene where the sorting of people takes place, separating those who belong from those who don't (De Genova, 2018; Woude, 2020). Under the perceived threat of potential downfall --be it political, economic, cultural, or religious -- the securitization of border crossing is presented as the necessary part of providing safety to the people ‘legitimately’ belonging to the group demarcated by the border (Aas, 2014; Bigo, 2002). Validating the need for increasingly more restrictive border control, the discourse of national borders is often linked to the symbolic value of protection of national identity, the elusive perception of mutual belonging to a group of shared history, language, values, and cultural traditions (Anderson, 2010; Anderson, Gibney and Paoletti, 2011; Fenton, 2011). The process of bordering, physical as well as symbolic, consistently separates ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ and exacerbates the othering of some specific groups, affiliations, or identities (Aas, 2014; Franko, 2017; Van Houtum, 2002). In fact, ‘othering’ has been instrumental in the recent rise to power of right wing and populist parties around the world, which put forward the need to strengthen national security (and secure national identity) by focusing on criminalizing large groups of ‘others’ - now frequently synonymous with threat-posing migrants (Bigo, 2002; De Giorgi, 2010; Postelnicescu, 2016). The physical borders of the nation-state's territory serve the same fundamental function of demarcating belonging as the socio-cultural and symbolic boundaries do in the context of national identity.

Nationalistic anti-migrant rhetoric has become more salient in today's political debates, and contemporary Poland well illustrates these trends (Goździak and Marton, 2018; Klaus, 2017). The current government, led by the conservative Law and Justice party (PiS), often mobilizes the concepts of the nation and national belonging to undermine more liberal trends of multiculturalism or ‘Europeanization’ (Fox & Vermeersch 2010; Vermeersch 2013). In the recent years, which have seen a drastic increase in migration into Europe, Poland has become one of EU's most notorious anti- immigration countries (Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018; Legut and Pedziwiatr, 2017). Since the PiS party's rise to power in 2015, nationalist and anti-EU trends have intensified both in politics and among the public. The government and media routinely speak out against the threat of migration, advocate ‘closed’ borders and position liberal pro-European and multicultural sentiments as anti- Polish (Harper, 2010; Mikulska, 2010).

Despite this rhetoric, Poland itself has been a source of large numbers of refugees and economic migrants. Historically, more people emigrate from Poland than immigrate to it (Babakova,

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2018; Goździak, 2014). The country is the source of a diaspora of over 21 million people of Polish origin residing all around the world (Wspolnota Polska, n.d.). The combination of a long history of emigration and a volatile geo-political position has traditionally fostered pro-immigration sentiments in Poland (Bachman 2016). In fact, up until 2014 it usually placed quite high in polls evaluating societal tolerance and acceptance of refugees and other migrants ([European Social Survey](#)). However, recent socio-political shifts undermined a national sentiment of solidarity with those in need, with the state now opposing the influx of foreigners into the country in the name of protecting Polishness (Fomina and Kucharczyk, 2018; Klaus, 2019). This concept of shared Polish identity is frequently invoked in context of the legal framework for migration by politicians seeking to close borders. (Vermeersch, 2019). The instrumentalization of the notion of Polishness poses several questions: to what extent and how has the idea of national identity been used in the political debates on border control in the Poland? Further, how have the uses of national identity changed over time?

This paper analyzes the way in which the symbolic boundaries of national belonging are reflected in the political discussions about the legal framework of border protection in modern Poland. I use qualitative text analysis to examine the transcriptions of parliamentary debates on laws regulating border crossing in the Third Republic of Poland from 1989 to 2018, using critical discourse analysis to locate and map out different markers of Polishness. The paper begins by providing additional context concerning Polish history and national identity, followed by a brief discussion of the methodology, describing the data set and the analytical process. The results section shows examples of how the notion of Polishness is used in the political debates and how it has evolved/changed over time. The article concludes with reflections on the role of memory politics in modern Poland (Vermeersch, 2019) as well as the instrumentalization of the Polish diaspora (Lesinska, 2019; Nowak and Nowosielski, 2018) in political debates about national Polish borders.

2.2. Borders of Poland: historical legacies and the markers of ‘Polishness’

National identity and Polishness

Identity itself stems from the idea of exclusion and boundaries, “becom[ing] meaningful only through the contrast with others” (Triandafyllidou, 1998). Identity and exclusion are thus necessary to the creation of any common in-group mythology (Barth, 1969; Brubaker, 2015; Fenton, 2011). Thus, exclusion is inherent in the very concept of a border, physical as much as symbolic, a choice of awarding entrance, or access, to some individuals but not to others (Aas, 2014; Anderson, 2010; Anderson et al., 2011). National identity encompasses the values, symbols, characteristics and rituals that together facilitate the construction and re-construction of a common national in-group mythology.

This production of a shared meaning is always linked to various specific markers (such as people, places, or events), used to delineate the borders between ‘us’ and ‘them’. In certain Central and Easter European states, especially the so-called post-Soviet ones, the notion of ethnicity as “common descent, common culture, attachment to a certain territory, a shared language, the collective will to be a group, mutual recognition of group membership, common history, common religion, group symbols, economic ties and existential threat” [Ehala, (2015),

p.177] is strongly connected to national identity. This is also the case with Polishness, or Polish national identity, “a mental representation shared by the members of a group” who consider themselves ‘ethnic’ Poles [Ehala, (2015), p.174]. Such ethnonational identities tend to be closed to outsiders, difficult to permeate, and resistant to any cultural ‘infiltration’ (Jaskolkowski, 2019).

‘Polishness’ can be broadly defined as “a set of qualities characteristic to Poles, their cultural tradition, [and] values” (Wielki Słownik Języka Polskiego, n.d.). However, a comprehensive list of specific qualities appears beyond any straight-forward summary, as the substance of Polishness has been shown to be both fluid and heterogeneous throughout the Polish population, both historically and geographically (Erdmans, 2007; Pasięka, 2013). A vast pool of academic work has engaged the topic of Polishness, specifically the complex process of its construction, showcasing the narratives and negotiations surrounding perception of Polish national identity at different places and times (Mucha, 2000). Ongoing cultural internationalization and Europeanization have affected and complicated the process of negotiating national identity for many Poles, who find themselves torn between more conservative, traditional national values and those more liberal ideologies of the ‘West.’ This is even more true for Poles who live outside of Poland and face these differences as daily cultural clashes (Galbraith, 2014; Pasięka, 2013).

An overview of the relevant literature reveals two formative forces in the construction of Polishness: a volatile territorial history resulting in politically forced, unstable borders, and the Polish diaspora (*Polonia*); and the role of religion (Catholicism) as common proxy for Polish national belonging (Fialkowska, 2019; Sekardej and Pasięka, 2013). These two themes can be better understood through the lens of the mythologized origin story of Poland and its cultural legacies. The next section showcases the elements of Polish history that constitute some of the major national identity markers, also commonly present in modern political debates.

God, honor, and Fatherland – the mythologies of Polish history

The Baptism of Poland in 966 is often imagined as “the first step in the formation of the single most important element in modern Polish culture” [Davies, (2001), p.255] – religion. Although the Baptism was a political decision, modern nationalistic Polish discourse constructs it as the first step towards the religious homogenization of Poland, connecting Catholicism to national belonging (Erdmans, 2007; Fialkowska, 2019). Standing against several ‘invasions’ from the East, Poland historically saw itself in a role of an Eastern outpost of Christianity, showcasing its military wins as the ultimate triumph of good (Christians) over evil (non-Christians). (Erdmans, 2007). While Poland experienced moments of glory and territorial enhancement, the national borders proved severely unstable over the coming centuries. In 1795 the country had effectively disappeared off the world maps, its territory split between Russia, Prussia, and Austria in three acts of ‘partitions’ (Kamiński and Korcuć, 2016; Markiewicz, 2004). Some historians point to the partitions as *the* defining moment for Polish national identity, as they took place during the newly evolving romantic notions of nationalism and the idea of a modern nation-state. National poets such as Adam Mickiewicz and Juliusz Słowacki, or musicians like Fryderyk Chopin, are some among the artistic historical figures strongly associated with the era of Polish romanticism and the specific Polishness and melancholy of

that time period (Davies, 2001). The fact that Poland had just ceased to exist as a free country added a distinctive level to self-identification through fighting off the oppressive political and cultural forces that forbid the expression of ‘real’ national identity of the Polish people [Davies, (2001), p.236-237]. It was not until November 11th 1918, commemorated to this day as the national Day of Independence, when Polish troops under the leadership of general Jozef Pilsudski managed to fight off the political aggressors and Poland once again negotiated becoming an independent state (Kamiński and Korkuć, 2016). Events such as Battle of Warsaw in 1920, or general Pilsudski himself, are still among some of the most prominent and powerful symbols of Polishness today (Davies, 2013; Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2019).

On the topic of formation of Polish national identity Davies (2013) also points to the Polish historical ‘legacy of betrayal’ which is heavily popularized by modern histories. After the partitions, Poland only briefly enjoyed the status of an independent country, as it fell victim to Nazi Germany’s aggression in 1939. The comprehensive devastation of war was followed by the ‘betrayal’ of the Western states during the Tehran, Yalta, and Potsdam Conferences that threw Poland under USSR protectorate (Davies, 2013). These centuries of volatile national Polish history resulted in waves of mass emigration of ‘ethnic Poles’, due to political, ideological, religious, and economic reasons. Over hundreds of years of revolts, oppression, uprisings, and shifting political allegiances, Poland has produced a large diaspora. Millions of people were forced to flee their homes and found it impossible to return, thus creating enclaves of Polishness in their new countries of residence. As shown in research on various Polish migrations, *Polonia* plays a prominent role in discussions about Polishness and national belonging (Erdmans, 2007; Kristina, 2018).

The legacy of betrayal feeds into another historical narrative of Polish national identity: resistance. Even under the partitions, when Poland lacked a defined territory or legal status, Polishness was defined via fighting off Germany, Russia, or Austria. Multiple uprisings and revolutions marked Polish history with persistent episodes of ‘the people’ fighting off the oppressive state in power in order to regain sovereignty (Davies, 2001). This tradition of popular resistance was continued in the outbreak of national strikes in the 1980s against the USSR-controlled Polish polity, with a prominent role played by Lech Wałęsa-led labor union Solidarity (*NSZZ Solidarność*). These strikes, alongside the seminal Round Table Deliberations, facilitated systemic changes which allowed Poland to negotiate its independence, and in 1989 Poland again became a sovereign, democratic state as the Third Republic of Poland (Lukowski and Zawadzki, 2019). Additionally, the political role of the Polish pope John Paul II in stimulating and facilitating the creation of Solidarity and following systemic changes has made him a crucial symbolic marker of Polishness, and a figure celebrated across partisan lines in the contemporary construction of Polish national belonging. His fame and accomplishments are a matter of great pride to most Poles, further infusing aspects of Polish national identity with religiousness.

Modern Poland: socio-political characteristics

The new democratic Third Republic of Poland became a member of NATO and the EU in 1999 and 2004, respectively. Modern Polish political parties, to a large extent, defy the division of left-right. The major parties competing against each other today, PO (*Platforma Obywatelska*,

or Civic Platform) and PiS, both originated from ‘Solidarity’; a party impossible to theoretically identify either as right due to its fundamental belief in establishment of state support, or left due to its core self-asserting ideology, which is anti-establishment, anti-socialist and anti-communist, supporting far-reaching privatization (Vermeersch, 2005). In Poland the ‘right-left’ division represents a more socio-cultural divide than socio-economic one, and ideologically overlaps with the dichotomy of ‘conservative’ v. ‘liberal.’ However, Polish politics presents a uniform front when it comes to support of state-funded services and institutions (Harper, 2010; Tyrała, 2013).

Despite the undeniable trend of secularization in the modern world (Kurth, 2009), places such as Poland appear to experience a trend of solidification in religiousness, and an intensification of politicized deployment of religious values linked to national identity (Brubaker, 2015). Since religion has historically held a prominent role in creating boundaries that demarcate Polish national identity, the role of Catholicism and religious symbols in the process of construction of Polish national identity cannot be stressed enough (Erdman, 2007; Fialkowska, 2019; Sekardej and Pasięka, 2013; also see Rosary to the Borders, n.d.).

Popular historical and religious symbols continue to be typically included in the commonly shared “collective identity” of Polishness “as constructed in the public discourse: history textbooks, political speeches, the press, linguistic landscapes etc.” [Ehala, (2015), p.174]. Many presidential addresses to the nation mobilize the notion of ethnonational identity by consistently referring the historical and religious identity markers, such as the baptism of Poland in 996, partitions, regaining independence in 1918, World War II and Yalta conference, 1989 and beginning of a new democratic Poland, ‘Solidarity’, Chopin, Mickiewicz, Piłsudski, or John Paul II (Oficjalna strona Prezydenta Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, n.d., www.prezydent.pl).

2.3. Methodology

This paper uses a discursive analytical approach in locating and examining uses of the notion of national belonging in the process of producing the legislature that has governed border protection in Poland since 1989 until 2018.

Data set: Sejm Deliberations on border-related laws and policies 1989-2018

For this article a set of political deliberations pertaining to border control was chosen from the plenary Sejm (lower House of Polish Parliament) debates. The analyzed data spans the years 1989-2018, and all of the texts were acquired from the Archives of Polish Sejm (Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej <http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm9.nsf/page.xsp/archiwum>). An initial thematic selection chose all addresses and debates on the topic of the Polish borders and issues of migration. This created a collection of data including over 100 different assemblies and debates. The collection included all Sejm plenary sessions discussing: Border Act of 1991; Act for Border Guards of 1991; Alien Acts of 1997, 2003, and 2013 & related legislation; anti-terrorist legislation; treaties and agreements with individual neighbor countries; laws regulating the status of refugees, and laws regulating the status of EU citizens in Poland (for a full list see appendix 1).

All the original sources are in Polish and were translated to English for the purpose of this article by the paper's author, who worked as a professional translator for a variety of medical, legal, and entertainment services such as Sfera Studios, Netflix, ZOO Digital, as well as Polish academic journals and additional individual clients. A quality check for the translations was provided independently by a third party, a Polish academic whose publications are written in English as well as in Polish.

The data set provides a window in to the legislature and internal political debates on the topics relating to border controlⁱ. It also exposes nuances in the positions of specific political parties and the interest groups they represent. Data selection was limited to discussions on laws directly and explicitly related to border control in the lower House of the Polish Parliament. This data set is for the basis for the in- depth critical discourse analysis of the political use of the concept of Polishness in creating laws and discussing regulations, as pertaining to border control in Poland. A critical analysis of this data will outline the processes of 'claiming' certain narratives and symbols by various political stakeholders in debates where legal issues of border protection and emotional narratives of national belonging are frequently intertwined.

Discourse Analysis

This article looks at linguistic manifestations of the markers that identify symbolic demarcation lines of national identity, as they are used in the context of political discussions about the national border. These boundaries define 'us' vs. 'them' and will be traced within and across the bodies of text to expose changes and trends, and to contextualize them within the changing socio-political discourse in modern Poland. Given the specific limitations stemming from the textual nature of the data and theoretical/methodological compatibility, this article uses a combination of critical discourse analysis approaches (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Wodak and de Cillia, 2006). Software ATLAS.ti was used to facilitate initial stages of text analysis. Separate coding lists were created for topics of: international relations; threat; history; and 'othering', allowing to localize and define all textual passages relating to these concepts as linked to national identity and borders, and provided a base for more in-depth analysis. In following stage of the analysis, the relevant quotes were grouped thematically and studied against theoretical concepts of bordering/boundary making and national identity, in the specific Polish historical and socio-political context. This closer look at the use of language in Sejm deliberations on border-related laws revealed ways in which national identity and its markers are used for political framing in these discussions. Focusing on the discourse of Polishness, the analysis aims to reveal some of the underlying trends and instrumentalizations of the notion of national belonging.

2.4. Developing the legal boundaries of Polishness

The following section illustrates how various concepts linked to Polishness have been used in political discussions about laws regulating border security in the years 1989-2018. Following quotes are direct citations from Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1.

The early years of the Third Republic: different threats and open borders as a symbol of freedom

In 1989 and the early 1990s the biggest concerns commonly expressed were demilitarization of the borders. Additionally, the desire for an assurance of sovereignty and the territoriality of the newly constructed Third Republic being respected by its Eastern and Western neighbors were at the forefront of discussions. In 1990 Minister of Foreign Affairs Krzysztof Skubiszewski reflected on the dilemma: Poland between USSR and Germany. Relations with the USSR remain the main focus of our national strategy. These relations, as with all other nations, must be based on the respect of our independence and all its implications, adding that Polish the government will shortly begin negotiating demilitarization of the Eastern Polish border (Krzysztof Skubiszewski, 1990.04.26, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1). The territorial and political insecurities also appeared in the context of unification of Germany, already expressed by the minister in the previous year:

With the Germany united by Otto van Bismarck and its follower, III Reich, the Polish nation had the worst experiences. There should be then no surprise that our memory in regards to this German unity is not good, and affects contemporary discussions (Krzysztof Skubiszewski, 07.12.1989, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

Still, in these early years of the Third Republic the goals of a democratic Poland were linked to ‘open borders’ and free movement, which functioned ideologically as symbols of freedom, solidarity, and a strong European community: “We support the idea of a united Europe and achieving it through cooperation and integration of European nations”, and “the Polish-German reconciliation is of high significance for both nations as well as for Europe. It is significant especially as a moral victory” (Krzysztof Skubiszewski, 1989.12.07, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1). Additionally some political voices created an intersection between ‘European freedom’ and Polishness, crediting Poland with overthrowing of the totalitarian regime of USSR in the 1980s and in effect establishing the new European order:

It was Poland, because of the ‘Solidarity’, that initiated the movement to abolish totalitarian rule in our region, and brought attention of the West, giving us hope of the European unity in freedom and democracy (Krzysztof Skubiszewski, 1990.04.26, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

In the early 2000s, the idea of a border-free reality through joining the Schengen Agreement was still discussed not only in purely political or economic terms, but in the ideological and symbolic sense of “including Poland in the process of building a common area of freedom, safety, and justice” (Andrzej Brachmanski, 25.09.2002, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

Still, the theme of threat and safety was an ever-present one in the political border debates, frequently emerging as the leading concept in the analyzed discussions. However, what or who was perceived as the main threat to the Polish border continued to change. Various economic, political, or safety concerns appeared in the political deliberations, each addressed to different

geo-political aspects of Poland. For example in the early 1990s it was said that “border region communities, as much as the entire Poland, experience the unequal treatment in crossing border with Germany”, causing “permeating feelings of economic or criminal threat, as well as helplessness against penetration of our national territory” (Jozef Zych, 12.09.1990, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1). In 1993 Marian Pilka spoke at lengths about economic and socio-political threat on the Eastern border, created by “100 thousand of Russians, Ukrainians and Belarussians [who] steal jobs of our countrymen”, warning against “a flood of migrants from the East [...] becoming a plague, weighing down Polish economy” (Marian Pilka, 09.01.1993, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

European Union as a new threat

The discussions of EU accession begun in the mid and late 1990s, intensifying in early 2000s, bringing forth a new threat: ‘Europeanization’. For many political groups, the notion of the new legislature being designed to fit European standards was perceived as highly problematic. For some, any imposition of another country’s expectations on Poland’s management of its own borders was unacceptable:

In essence this is a debate about the Polish sovereignty, whether we are allowed to defend our own interests or not, whether we must yield our interests to various ideas of open borders, or defend public safety (Marian Pilka 09.01.1993, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

Framing the process of Europeanization of the legal framework as loss of national sovereignty, many voices in the Sejm expressed concerns with what becoming a member of the EU would mean for various aspects of Polishness and Polish national interest. Especially pronounced was “the context of a ‘bumper’, which we will become upon integration with the EU”, with politicians also warning against mass migration that would undoubtedly flood Poland after its “enslavement into the EU [...] with the shift of our Eastern borders into the external borders of European Union” (Stanisław Gudowski 20.05.2003, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1). After the accession, Polish sovereignty was often questioned by the representatives of the conservative parties, who criticized president Aleksander Kwaśniewski for apparently misleading of the nation:

We were promised that Poland would not lose its sovereignty, and the bureaucrats from Brussels will not dictate our laws. And what is happening today? [...] Are we a sovereign nation within the EU? (Witold Balazak, 23.05.2006, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

In 2013 Edward Siarka warned Poland again against mass illegal migration, framing the problem as a result of Poland belonging to the EU and Schengen (23.07.2013, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1). In the later years, the burden of becoming an ‘external border of EU’ became even more prominent in the deliberations, linking certain political obligations such as redistribution of refugees in 2015/2016 to the topics of national responsibility:

It is our opinion that Poland should bear no responsibility for illogical and inconsistent, bad decisions of Western European countries, especially Germany, guilty of causing the current European crisis. Refugee quotas and relocation are nothing else but an attempt to shed the responsibility for their own stupidity onto other countries (Bartosz Jozwiak 12.04.2016, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

‘Us’ and ‘the other’

In many discussions about the borders and their protection politicians deployed strong notions of ‘others’ in relation to ‘us’, using the outsider groups to strengthen notions of cohesion and belonging among Poles. In 1993 Janusz Korwin-Mikke discussed at length the need for Poles to distinguish themselves from the ‘East’ “with its corruption, bribes, and bureaucracy. This is the culture of the East [...] and we must throw away this Eastern ballast”. In his opinion this national isolation and separation were necessary in the process of creating a Polish nation under the rule of law (01.09.1993, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1). Despite of conveyed Polishness “being known for hospitality” (Jerzy Dziewulski, 24.11.1995, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1), in 1995 politicians still saw the need to focus on public safety and national security as a priority above the friendly welcome to foreigners, even when reflecting on Poland’s own past of migration and seeking asylum. In 2004, one politician noted that even in personal relations people should refrain from ‘intermixing’ and marrying foreigners:

We believe it is wrong to mix different nationalities. We see the effect of mixing in other European countries, like France or Germany [...] and so we believe Poland should make its own independent policy in context of [migrants] (Stanislaw Zadora, 21.10.2004, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

Similar words were heard in 2013, “Trying to be married to people often very different culturally, as definitely are people from Iran or Pakistan [...] causes many problems” (Edward Siarka, 06.11.2013, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1). Over time the perception of inherent incompatibility of the Polish values in contrast with the ‘other’ only exacerbated. According to Marek Matuszewski from the PiS party, in 2015 Poland was at risk of being “flooded by the refugees from the places of faith which is foreign to us”, furthermore pointing to the economic and cultural threat in which the Muslim refugees became synonymous with much feared Islamic terrorists (Marek Matuszewski, 11.06.2015, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

The Poles outside of Poland

Interestingly, the discussions of undesirable ‘others’ was often conceptually linked to the theme of Polish diaspora, ‘ethnic Poles’, or *Polonia*. In the deliberations about laws regulating migration, referring to demographics or refugee acceptance, this specific group was often posed as the antithesis of the imposed Islamic refugees; the alternate, desirable migrants. The group was typically presented as victims of various political and socio-economic circumstances. In early 1990s Poles in the East became a hot topic in deliberations about visa requirements:

It is a questions of morality. These Poles, who for 50 or some even 70 years were discriminated for Polishness, gave their lives to protect it, and kept the link, the national identity, and now, after we regained independence, they will need to ask for visas? (Jadwiga Rudnicka, 14.04.1993, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

The issue of *Polonia* became even more salient in early 2000s, in the years and discussions leading up to EU accession, with politicians reflecting on Polish migratory history:

It is said around 65 million Poles live around the globe, not quite 40 of which are in Poland, and the rest all over the world. Some left home looking for work and bread, for freedom [...], others against their will, in chains and wagons [...]. Sometimes they were welcomed by people and governments, but more frequently were met with harsh, hostile reception (Wiesław Woda, 20.05.2003, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

The topic rose to prominence once again in 2010s when discussing demographic labor needs of Poland in context of immigration:

Immigration is not a fix for the demographic problems Poland is having today. We believe there are better ways of dealing with the demographic crisis, by [...] facilitating repatriation of Poles back to Poland (Jacek Sasin, 06.11.2013, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

This idea was utilized again in 2015 and 2016 in context of refugee quotas and their redistribution within EU. Doubting effectiveness of helping refugees, politicians shifted attention to *Polonia* and the need to repatriate ‘ethnic Poles’ back to Poland instead of helping foreigners:

Will we change the dramatic situation and extinguish conflicts? Not likely [...] What we need to discuss is the problem of bringing our countrymen, spread all over the world as results of repressions and forced repatriations, back to Poland (Mirosław Pawlak, 11.06.2015, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

History and religion as markers of boundary production

Throughout the analyzed time period topics of religion and history were persistently used as markers of belonging, often touching back on the history of political aggression towards Poland:

The Polish-German border has been a source of conflicts, wars, and has flown with blood. Luckily for 65 years now our border has been established and recognized, even though on the German side there are many people and organizations, who question it (Wiesław Woda, 10.09.2009, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

The Yalta conference was brought up frequently in 1989-1990, 1993, and in throughout 2000s, usually in the context of the old and faulty political system that needed to be transformed, or the need for Western Europe to make up for the bad decisions of the past. The role of religion

in political developments has also been prominent in the analyzed data, seen for example in crediting Polish bishops for “being the voice of the nation when the nation had no voice” and facilitating post WWII reconciliation between Poland and Germany (Krzysztof Skubiszewski, 26.04.1990, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1). At times the same historical and religious markers end up being utilized to different ends, for example with religion being the motivator behind attitude towards refugee acceptance in Poland at different points in time. In 2002, reflecting back on a homily of the pope John Paul II in 1998, Marek Jurek spoke of:

The greatest necessity of openness and helping [refugees]. The pope shows that kindness and solidarity towards migrants is not only an order of human dignity, but also a concrete duty of any state (Marek Jurek 17.12.2002, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

The approach changed dramatically after 2015, when religion became one of the dominant factors in turning away Islamic refugees:

Today, in the era of increasing terrorist threat, which brings to Europe progressively more tragic consequences, restriction on laws of entry about emigrants from Muslim countries should be seen as most necessary and justified (Bartosz Jozwiak, 12.04.2016, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1), focusing on images and discourse of “terrorism [as] a huge challenge of the 21st century, also for Europe. Today we are dealing with a flood of Muslim immigrants in Europe” (Maria Siarkowska, 19.05.2016, Sejm Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (n.d.) archives – see Appendix, Table A1).

The political deliberations about the protection of Polish borders, as illustrated above, showcase the fluidity in ideological and practical perception of what the border’s goals are perceived to be over time. It also exposes salient uses of the concepts linked to the notion of Polishness and national belonging in these discussions and in the construction of the legal framework governing border protection. Frequent uses of historical and religious symbols in putting forward often conflicting political agendas reveal a utilitarian and somewhat simplified yet strongly rooted in the perception of ethnic Polishness treatment of the notion of national belonging. Drawing on the analysis, the next section of the paper discusses some of the observed trends in context of memory politics in contemporary Poland (Vermeersch, 2019), observing a progressive process of ethnicization of national identity (Ehala, 2015), as well as instrumentalization of the Polish diaspora in the political discussions about immigration (Lesińska, 2019).

2.5. Discussion

Memory politics and the ethnicization of Polishness

According to the analysis, discussion about laws relating to border protection in the III Republic of Poland heavily relied on political uses of symbols rooted in religion and history in order to promote certain partisan decisions and ideologies. This political use of the concept of national identity allowed politicians to adjust the interpretations and definitions of the common

and powerful historical and religious symbols to their own current agenda, aiming to sway the support mostly by emotional triggers and implicit ultimatums of what a ‘true Pole’ should want and support. Events that held the same meaning and interpretation across party lines sometimes served to motivate opposing actions.. The results suggest that Polishness could actually be used here in order to differentiate ideologies and agendas on the arena of political party competition. This perfectly illustrates the role of memory politics in Poland in context of political developments after 1989, and the progressive claiming of discourse of ‘true Polishness’ by PiS and other conservative parties (Vermeersch, 2013; Vermeersch, 2019). Vermeersch points out the instrumentalization of the discourse of Europe and the EU in Poland, seeing the progressive anti-EU political position on the political stage as a discursive tactic of the PiS party in using memory politics and simultaneously “establish[ing] the (symbolic) borders of the nation” [Vermeersch, (2019), p.9]. PiS and ideologically aligned parties are continuing the already known narrative of geo-political threat, as well as that of Polishness under attack and in need of protection against invaders. “In this new narrative the EU is an ally of external others of the nation as well as of the institutional elites (not ‘the people’), accused of working in the interest of more powerful EU states” [Vermeersch, (2019), p.9]. The reach of the conservative Polish parties towards the narrative of defending the morality of ‘true Polishness’ against the invasive forces of powerful nations (Germany; the EU) can be observed in the examples from deliberations on refugee acceptance and discussions about the Polish sovereignty. In the deliberations, the notion of national identity serves as a tool to re-establish and strengthen ideological borders of belonging and exclusion. This projects incompatibility between the goals of Poland and its citizens, and those of the rest of the world’s, separating and juxtaposing well-being of ‘others’ as insignificant at best and detrimental to Poles at worst. Immigration and the dangerous ‘others’ are used to create a perception that national sovereignty is under attack. This is strongly linked with a trend of continuous ethnicization of the notion of Polishness in the analyzed political debates, as “ethnic national identities are highly saturated with the sovereignty idea, and are interwoven with other core values” [Ehala, (2015), p.180].

Instrumentalization of the Polish diaspora

The intersectionality of the political discourse on border protection and Polishness is well illustrated by the topic of *Polonia*. Discourse of *Polonia* is in many ways parallel to that of Poland and its volatile, unstable borders, as well as a mythologized illustration of its violent history of oppression, betrayal, and aggression experienced at hands of other countries. In these political debates, *Polonia* is used by certain political factions as a distraction topic in discussions about borders and migrations. *Polonia* represents those ‘left behind’, the homeless children eager to come back to their home (Poland), but set back due to antagonistic stance of other countries (later also lack of regard for them by more liberal Polish politicians). The group is frequently enhanced with appearance of upholding Polish roots and traditions, even though research shows varying degrees to which Polish migration enclaves are actually connected to Poland and its values (Erdmans, 2007; Pasieka, 2013). Still, *Polonia* and repatriation are embraced as go-to subjects when deflecting discussions about migration in Poland, or even when referring to its demographic needs, suggesting repatriation as a remedy for a large gap in the Polish labor market (Babakova, 2018; Lesińska, 2019; Nowak and Nowosielski, 2018; Central Statistical Office of Poland).

The discourse of the ‘Poles left behind’ is frequently present in deliberations on laws about border protection, Alien Acts, laws about counter-terrorism, and migration in general. Curiously, there is not many voices of people *de facto* representing *Polonia* present in these discussions, and the notion they feel deserted, abandoned, or neglected in incessant desire to come back ‘home’ is supported by little more than words of politicians making these assumptions. It becomes clear over time that, despite its framing, the topic is not a gateway to give voice to a disadvantaged group, but rather an argument not to give voices to any other groups that could be seen as silenced and under-represented in Poland – such as immigrants. This finding fits well with the research conducted on the Polish diaspora and its politicization, showing that the legal infrastructure is more concerned with economic benefits rather than providing repatriates with all the tools necessary to make the transition of moving back to Poland (Nowak and Nowosielski, 2018). Thus, the discourse of *Polonia* serves as a tool of ‘othering’, accompanying the trends of drop in acceptance of refugees and perception of migrants as a threat instead of mobilizing social understanding and solidarity due to Poles’ own violent history [Górny, Grzymała-Moszczyńska, Klaus, and Łodziński, (2017), p.73].

2.6. Conclusion: Polishness, an identity in constant (trans)formation

The paper analyzes the ways in which the idea of national identity has been used in the political debates on border control in the III Republic of Poland, and its evolution over time. Based on the analysis, I conclude that since 1989 debates on border and migration laws in Poland have drawn deeply on the concept of national identity, instrumentally referring to the notion of shared group belonging in a variety of changing and sometimes inconsistent way. Similarly, the most recent developments in the Polish border and migration policy also show a far-reaching intersectionality and politicization of concepts of border and national identity. In 2019 Polish government produced its new official migration policy (Polityka migracyjna Polski wersja ostateczna, 2019) a document glorifying religious, ethnic, and national divisions, exacerbating the concept of threat in promoting explicit ‘othering’ of groups deemed dangerous, and/or ‘incompatible’ with the politically accepted notion of Polishness (Klaus, 2019). The document sadly confirms the observed trend of fearism, demonization of migration and Islamophobia becoming more present and acceptable in the Polish society (Górny et al., 2017; Gozdziaik and Marton, 2018), and also serves as a fitting illustration of encouraging the ethicized ideal of national identity (Ehala, 2015). However, as shown in this paper, conceptually and in practice Polishness as used in political debates is a very fluid idea. As such it is highly problematic to use as a standard, or a reference point in legitimization for new policy developments. Its instrumentalization inherently leads to simplification of the political discourse of national belonging, promoting one ideal of national identity, an official version of ‘one truth’. One could reflect that such a development – a strong push towards a homogenized and restrictive notion of national belonging – is neither possible nor desirable in a democratic nation. As Adam Szostkiewicz, a Polish author, journalist, and a political activist in ‘Solidarity’ in the 1980s, wrote: “Polishness goes beyond Romanticism, Catholicism, war heroism, God, honor, and fatherland. It’s more than just a ritual”. Szostkiewicz envisions a more transformative approach to Polishness, a concept of identity as “a creation in constant motion, in a relentless and brave transformation, never finished, without a tunnel- vision – most important to the spiritual future of Poland” (Szostkiewicz, 2010).

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Appendix 1. List of the Sejm debates included in the analysis

Date	Assembly #	Topic (law/treaty/address)
1989.12.07	15	Debate about the unification of Germany
1990.04.26	28	Address from the Minister of Foreign Affairs
1990.06.07	32	Border Act
1990.06.21	33	Passport Act
1990.09.12	38	Act for Border Guards
1990.10.11	41	Border Act
1990.11.29	45	Passport Act
1991.06.07	62	Polish-German Treaty
1991.06.27	65	Address from the Minister of Foreign Affairs
1991.09.12	73	Polish-German Treaty
1991.09.19	74	Alien Act
1991.10.16	78	Polish-German Treaty
1992.07.29	22	Border Act
1992.09.04	23	Border Act
1993.01.08	34	Border Act
1993.01.09	34	Debate about the need for stricter migration control on the eastern border
1993.04.14	41	Debate about the need for stricter migration control on the eastern border
1994.01.20	10	Alien Act
1995.01.04	40	Alien Act
1995.11.24	65	Alien Act
1996.08.22	86	Act for Border Guards
1996.11.21	94	Treaty on visa-free movement between Poland and Russia
1997.02.19	101	Border Act
1997.06.04	108	Alien Act
1998.05.22	18	Treaty on friendly relations and cross-border cooperation between Poland and Lithuania
1999.04.08	47	Act on possession and use of weapons and ammunition
1999.04.21	48	Report on the car-terminal in Koroszczyn border crossing
1999.09.22	58	Alien Act in context of repatriation
1999.09.22	58	Refugee status in context of the Geneva Convention
2000.05.12	78	Alien Act
2000.07.12	82	Act for Border Guards

2001.02.14	101	Act for Border Guards
2001.03.02	102	Act for Border Guards
2001.03.14	104	Alien Act
2001.04.11	106	Act for Border Guards
2001.04.11	106	Alien Act
2002.03.20	17	Alien Act
2002.03.20	17	Treaty on the Polish-Lithuanian cross-border cooperation
2002.04.17	19	Alien Act
2002.06.20	24	Regulation of entry and stay in Poland of EU citizens and their families
2002.06.21	24	Alien Act in context of refugee acceptance and the Geneva Convention
2002.07.19	26	Report on the project of the cross-border cooperation treaty between Poland and Ukraine
2002.09.25	30	Report on the project of the cross-border cooperation treaty between Poland and Germany
2002.12.17	38	Report about human smuggling and trafficking
2003.01.09	39	Report on the project of the cross-border cooperation treaty between Poland and Slovakia
2003.05.20	49	Alien Act
2003.05.20	49	Alien Act and humanitarian protection
2003.05.22	49	Alien Act in context of refugee acceptance and the Geneva Convention
2003.06.12	50	Alien Act and humanitarian protection
2004.05.11	75	Border Act
2004.10.21	87	Visa-waivers in application for refugee status
2005.02.16	97	Alien act and humanitarian protection
2005.03.09	99	Act for Border Guards
2005.03.11	99	Act for Border Guards
2005.04.21	101	Act for Border Guards
2005.04.21	101	Alien Act and humanitarian protection
2005.05.17	103	Alien Act
2006.05.23	18	Regulation of entry and stay in Poland of EU citizens and their families
2006.10.25	27	Report on the project of the cross-border cooperation treaty between Poland and Lithuania
2006.10.25	27	Report on the project of the cross-border cooperation treaty between Poland and Czech Republic
2007.02.16	34	Alien Act

2007.02.16	34	Act for Border Guards
2007.03.07	36	Act for Border Guards
2007.03.15	37	Alien Act
2007.04.12	39	Act for Border Guards
2007.06.27	44	Act for Border Guards
2007.07.10	45	Polish participation in SIS
2007.08.22	46	Polish participation in SIS
2007.08.24	46	Polish participation in SIS
2008.09.03	21	Border Act
2008.09.18	22	Alien Act
2008.10.01	23	Border Act
2008.10.23	26	Alien Act
2009.09.10	49	Report on the project of the cross-border cooperation treaty between Poland and Germany
2010.01.06	58	Polish participation in SIS
2010.03.17	63	Alien Act
2010.06.09	68	Report on the project of the cross-border cooperation treaty between Poland and Ukraine
2011.02.23	85	Regulation of entry and stay in Poland of EU citizens and their families
2012.03.14	10	Cross-border traffic management between Poland and Russia
2013.07.23	46	Alien Act
2013.11.06	56	Alien Act
2013.12.11	56	Alien Act
2014.12.04	81	Cross-border cooperation treaty between Poland and Germany
2015.06.11	94	Humanitarian protection
2015.06.11	94	Act for Border Guards
2015.07.07	96	Act for Border Guards
2015.07.08	96	Humanitarian protection
2015.09.16	100	Report on the migration crisis in Europe and its consequences for Poland
2015.11.26	2	Report on the current situation of Poland
2015.12.02	3	Report on the current situation of Poland
2016.01.29	10	Address from the Minister of Foreign Affairs
2016.03.09	13	Report on the Polish immigration policy in context of EU
2016.03.09	13	Report on the Polish immigration policy
2016.03.31	15	Report on the current situation of Poland
2016.04.12	16	Humanitarian protection
2016.05.19	19	Act on Counter-terrorism
2016.05.20	19	Act on Counter-terrorism

2016.05.20	19	Report on the defense of Polish sovereignty and rights of Polish citizens
2016.05.20	19	Humanitarian protection
2016.06.10	20	Act on Counter-terrorism
2016.06.22	21	Questions
2016.09.14	25	Current reports
2016.09.22	26	Report on the cross-border cooperation in cases of natural disasters between Poland and Belarus
2016.10.05	27	Questions
2016.10.21	28	Refugee relocation to Poland and EU refugee quotas
2016.12.01	31	Refugee relocation to Poland and EU refugee quotas
2016.12.02	31	Refugee relocation to Poland and EU refugee quotas
2017.02.09	35	Address from the Minister of Foreign Affairs
2017.02.10	35	Report on Polish participation in EU developments
2017.03.23	38	European integration
2017.04.05	39	Readmission treaty between Poland and Kazakhstan
2017.07.19	46	Treaty between Poland and Frontex
2017.10.12	49	Alien Act

ⁱ The used data, including both Sejm deliberations and the Presidential addresses, as well as the code lists and quotes used in the analysis, are available via the DANS data repository at: <https://easy.dans.knaw.nl/ui/datasets/id/easy-dataset:163121>