Looking at Pictures of Gay Men: Political Uses of Homophobia in Contemporary Poland

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During the recent period of right-wing rule, sometimes referred to as the Fourth Republic (2005–7), Poland developed a reputation for homophobia, prejudice against sexual minorities becoming its mark of difference in Europe. In January and June 2006, and again in April 2007, the European Parliament (EP) passed resolutions against homophobia, either alluding to Poland or mentioning it directly as a culprit in this area. The charge was not unearned: several lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) demonstrations had been banned; participants of gay pride parades (known in Poland as "equality marches") were regularly victimized by members of neo-Nazi groups; police had used violence against gay activists; and openly homophobic statements had been made by politicians.[1] These developments add up to an exciting and chilling story, but my purpose is neither to revisit the events themselves nor to assess the level of hostility toward sexual minorities in Poland as compared to other European societies. Instead, I aim to examine the dynamic of what I call the politicization of homophobia, that is, to look at the interplay between revived nationalist sentiment in Poland's public sphere following the country's May 2004 European Union (EU) accession and the trend of gay bashing, which was indulged in or at least condoned by state authorities. I argue that the exchanges concerning limits of sexual freedom fulfilled an important political function in the early stage of

1. For a chronological account of these developments, see Agnieszka Graff, "We Are (Not All) Homophobes: A Report from Poland," *Feminist Studies* 32 (2006): 434–49. On the legal aspects of the LGBT community's struggle for the right to freedom of assembly, see Adam Bodnar, "Shaping the Freedom of Assembly: Counter-productive Effects of the Polish Road towards Illiberal Democracy," in *Free to Protest: Constituent Power and Street Demonstration*, ed. Andra Sajo (Utrecht: Eleven International, 2009), 165–87.

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Poland's membership in the EU: the question of sexuality became a boundary marker, a reference point for political self-definition and national pride.

Despite the widespread public enthusiasm in Poland for EU membership, responses from the Polish media and politicians to the EP's calls for tolerance were a mixture of collective anger and pride, their hostility and defensiveness increasing with each resolution passed. This discourse of angry disavowal, I argue, should not be viewed in terms of the cultural conservatism somehow typical of Poland or as irrational resistance to the rational persuasion flowing from Europe.[2] My claim, rather, is that the homophobic discourse of this period was political and largely reactive, fueled by the EP's anti-homophobia resolutions. In short, the conflict was more about cultural identity and national pride than about sexual orientation or public morality.

In this period, public discussions concerning sexual minorities often revolved around the question of freedom of assembly and took a form that was predictable to the point of ritualization. Right-wing politicians and representatives of Catholic clergy would argue against allowing equality marches, calling them a "threat to public morality" and an effort to "promote homosexuality," almost inevitably referring to the obscenity seen in the Berlin Love Parades. Their arguments are best summed up in a statement made by Lech Kaczyński, Poland's president at the time: "Gay people may protest as citizens but not as homosexuals."[3] LGBT activists and left-wing commentators would invariably respond in the discourse of universal human rights and Europeanization, pointing out that freedom of assembly is a right most needed by minorities and that Poland ought not to lag behind the EU in matters concerning equality. Finally, "ordinary people" featured by the media would express their "instinctive" hostility to "perversion" or—in the moderate version of the ritual—claim that they had nothing against gay people as long as they did not have to see them in public.

What is striking about such exchanges—and I speak as participant as well as observer—is the extent to which sexual boundaries were assumed to coincide with national ones. Neither side envisioned a uniquely Polish version of cultural liberalism or a specifically Polish version of sexual otherness. Sexual progressives repeatedly referred to "European standards," while conservatives spoke of "European permissiveness." Conversely, lack of acceptance for sexual minorities (or

2. For a study performed in terms of influence, pressure, and persuasion, see Conor O'Dwyer, "From Conditionality to Persuasion? Europeanization and the Rights of Sexual Minorities in Post-accession Poland," *Journal of European Integration* 32 (2010): 229–47.

3. Statement from interview, April 20, 2007, quoted in Bodnar, "Shaping the Freedom of Assembly," 169.

"deviants" and "promoters of homosexuality," as conservatives refer to them) was construed as Poland's distinctive national feature in Europe — to be cherished or eradicated, depending on the speaker's standpoint. Although the link was rarely as clear as the neo-Nazis' signs proclaiming "Europa=Sodoma," homosexuality became closely linked to Europe in public discourse. The parallel between gays and Jews as well as between homophobia and anti-Semitism also played an important and complex role in this national/sexual mapping.

Overlap between discourses concerning national identity and gender/sexuality could be detected in Polish public debates well before the homophobic campaign of the Fourth Republic and the anti-homophobic EU resolutions made the link explicit and visible to all. As I argue elsewhere, in the years 2002–5 the Polish media were overflowing with *gender talk*: a nostalgic and anxiety-ridden, but ultimately optimistic, discourse that linked national culture to traditional gender roles while associating Europeanization with a crisis of masculinity as well as with sexual excess and perversion. Gender talk intensified around the time of accession (May 2004) and can be linked with Poland's joining the EU. This momentous political event was, of course, about much more than cultural identity issues: there were legitimate worries about Poland's political independence, relations with Russia, the fate of people employed in now "obsolete" branches of agriculture and industry, massive unemployment, and the prospect of adopting a new currency. Unable or unwilling to address these issues, and wary of a true nationalist revival that would endanger accession, the mainstream media were focusing on the evils of European moral and sexual decay (mainly abortion and homosexuality). Europe was vilified as perverse and ridiculed as effeminate, but this derision was followed by reassurance: surely, given our healthy commitment to tradition, Poland would resist pressure to conform. Thus collective fears concerning EU accession were projected onto, and neatly resolved within, an ultraconservative but only half-serious discourse on gender and sexuality.[4] However, in the period following accession, with right-wing forces and populists dominating parliament, the same narrative — European perversion versus Polish healthy traditionalism — took on a more vivid and confrontational form, reminiscent of the gendered nationalism rampant in former Yugoslavia of the early 1990s.[5]

4. I develop this argument in Agnieszka Graff, "The Land of Real Men and Real Women: Gender and EU Accession in Three Polish Weeklies," in *Global Empowerment of Women: Responses to Globalization and Politicized Religions*, ed. Carolyn M. Elliott (New York: Routledge, 2008), 191–212.

5. See, for instance, Julie Mostov, "Sexing the Nation/Desexing the Body: Politics of National Identity in the Former Yugoslavia," in *Gender Ironies of Nationalism: Sexing the Nation*, ed. Tamar Mayer (London: Routledge, 2000), 89–112.

The developments of 2005–8 discussed here can also be viewed as part of a broader pattern linking gender and sexuality with cultural, ethnic, and religious identity in contemporary Europe. As Éric Fassin and Judith Butler argue, both homophobia and the charge of homophobia have come to function in the EU as instruments of boundary drawing, tools for exclusion and inclusion. The clash between Poland's traditionalism driven by the Catholic Church's teachings and the EU's efforts to bring Poland into sexual modernity could then be usefully compared to exchanges on sexual tolerance featuring a different set of protagonists: Muslim immigrants and Western European governments. The problem is not just that Muslims resist sexual modernity but that the resistance to their efforts to settle on the Continent is legitimized in terms of sexual modernity: officially, it is not Muslims but Muslim homophobia that is rejected. As Fassin puts it, "Sexual democracy is indeed the language of national identity, not just in France, but throughout Europe—in a common context of anti-immigration backlash 'gender equality and sexual liberation' provide a litmus test for the selection and integration of immigrants, in particular from the Muslim World."[6] Butler draws on Fassin's work to examine the ways that liberal Europe—France and the Netherlands in particular—has instrumentalized the idea of sexual freedom in the service of Islamophobia.[7] An idea of secular morality that includes gender equality and tolerance toward sexual minorities has become a privileged value system and the hard currency of Europe's claim to modernity. Fassin and Butler are both proponents of sexual rights, but they are troubled by the new positioning of these values within a politics of exclusion: in the anti-Muslim atmosphere of the post-9/11 period, "sexual freedom" has been used by states as a rationalization for restrictive immigration policies and coercive practices against ethnic and religious others. Butler notes the absurd position in which this puts a gay citizen of an EU country: "Is this a liberal defense of my freedom . . . or is my freedom being used as an instrument of coercion, one that seeks to keep Europe white, pure, and 'secular' in ways that do not interrogate the violence that underwrites the very project?"[8]

As a feminist and longtime supporter of equal rights for sexual minorities, I watched the pattern of politicized homophobia in my country with morbid fascination and a sense of foreboding. Within a relatively short period, the question of

6. Éric Fassin, "Our Heterosexual Culture and Their Homophobic Cultures: Two Versions of European Sexual Democracy" (paper presented at the American Anthropological Association annual meeting, Washington, D.C., November 28–December 2, 2007).

7. Judith Butler, "Sexual Politics, Torture, and Secular Time," *British Journal of Sociology* 59 (2008): 1–23.

8. Butler, "Sexual Politics," 5.

Clockwise from top left:

Figures 1 and 2 Participants in the Equality March, Warsaw, June 2007. Photograph by Agnieszka Graff

Figure 3 Right-wing counterdemonstration to the Equality March, with banners saying "NO to EU" and "Europe=Sodomy," Warsaw, June 2007. Photograph by Agnieszka Graff

Figure 4 Members of All Polish Youth nationalist group protesting against the Equality March. The main banner says "We hope you will get well soon," implying that homosexuality is a disease. Warsaw, June 2007. Photograph by Agnieszka Graff

sexuality became a burning issue at the center of political debate, tightly linked to questions of national pride, cultural belonging, and resistance to the "foreign." Was visibility on such terms to be desired? Was the LGBT community right to invite and welcome the protective and somewhat patronizing language of the EP's resolutions? This essay examines the politicization of sexuality in four moves. First, I look at selected responses to the three resolutions against homophobia. Next, I comment on the relevance of the gay/Jew analogy to Poland's debates on sexual tolerance. I then examine a widely discussed incident of March 2008, when Poland's president used images from a gay wedding in a televised speech meant to account for his skepticism about the EU. Finally, drawing on Butler's and Fassin's work, I link these developments to a wider context of instrumentalization of sexual freedom in contemporary Europe.

"Poland Unfairly Accused"—the Logic of Politicized Homophobia

A paradox of the politicization of sexuality is that initiatives undertaken by various sides—the antigay right-wing politicians and political groups, the EP, the pro-tolerance nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—often brought unintended effects. For one thing, political moves designed to mobilize right-wing support by means of homophobia helped recruit supporters for LGBT activism among people who would otherwise have remained indifferent. The best-known example of this dynamic is the June 2005 ban of the Warsaw equality march, which contributed to the event's great popular success—the banned parade attracted far larger crowds and more media interest than any of the legal ones had. Next, when the police resorted to violence to disband another banned march (in Poznań, November 2005), massive protests engaging, among others, well-known members of pre-1989 democratic opposition followed. Thanks to right-wing gay bashing, the LGBT community won the sympathy of people who would never have supported sexual rights. Their concern was for human rights and the state of democracy. However, sexuality was now at the center of these issues.

Unforeseen effects were also brought about by political moves aimed to curb Poland's homophobia, namely, the EP's resolutions. Intended as part of an ongoing effort to "Europeanize" Poland as the EU's new member state, they provoked an increase in publicly expressed homophobia, as well as anti-European sentiment. The first of the three resolutions (January 2006) urged member states "firmly to condemn homophobic hate speech or incitement to hatred and violence, and to ensure that freedom of demonstration—guaranteed by all human rights

treaties — is respected in practice."[9] The text does not name Poland, but the main culprit's identity was not hard to guess from this reference: "A series of worrying events has recently taken place in a number of Member States, as widely reported by the press and NGOs." The other two resolutions (June 2006 and April 2007) name Poland repeatedly as a country where the problem of homophobia is especially acute, emphasizing the European Parliament's "solidarity with, and support for, fundamental rights activists and defenders of equal rights for members of the LGBT community."[10] Good intentions notwithstanding, the language of the resolutions is disturbingly self-righteous, filled with pathos and a thinly veiled sense of the EU's moral superiority vis-à-vis those new "Member States" that fail to live up to EU standards. Whether we view these admonitions as patronizing is perhaps a matter of rhetorical taste. What matters is that they were received as such by Polish commentators, from right to left. The response was remarkably unanimous: wounded pride and outrage led the admonitions to be read as examples of Western arrogance and presumptuousness. Many recalled President Jacques Chirac's regret — voiced in February 2003, when Poland, Hungary, and the Czech Republic joined the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) forces in Iraq — that Eastern European states had "missed a great opportunity to keep quiet."[11]

Not surprisingly, Catholic clergy members were also highly critical. What does give pause, however, is that their criticism was phrased in terms of national singularity under threat, rather than in universalist terms of "God's will" or "natural law." Representatives of the church seemed to agree that this squabble was about Poland — about national pride and not religious sentiment. For instance, Bishop Józef Życiński said: "It is with great concern that we receive efforts of the

9. "European Parliament Resolution on Homophobia in Europe," January 18, 2006, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2006-0018+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN. The other two resolutions are "European Parliament Resolution on the Increase in Racist and Homophobic Violence in Europe," June 15, 2006, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2006-0273+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN; and "European Parliament Resolution of 26 April 2007 on Homophobia in Europe," April 26, 2007, www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2007-0167+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN. See also "Poland: Official Homophobia Threatens Human Rights," Human Rights Watch letter to Polish president Lech Kaczyński, February 14, 2006, hrw.org/en/news/2006/02/14/poland-official-homophobia-threatens-human-rights.

10. "European Parliament Resolution of 26 April 2007."

11. Chirac said, "Je crois qu'ils ont manqué une bonne occasion de se taire." Jacques Chirac, press conference, February 17, 2003, transcript, www.monde-diplomatique.fr/cahier/europe/conf-chirac. The statement has been endlessly quoted, often out of context, as evidence of Western paternalism.

European Parliament to interfere with the state of Polish consciences. These are our personal values, and one cannot accept a situation where moral beliefs are bureaucratically imposed on us. . . . We have one Poland, our common fatherland, and it is our task to protect the values that can be associated with positive Polish experience."[12]

In June 2006, when the second resolution was passed, the mainstream media reacted with headlines such as "Poland Unfairly Accused of Homophobia?" The article thus titled cites Wojciech Roszkowski, a conservative professor and member of the EP, who views the resolution as an act of ideological manipulation: "Homophobia means fear of homosexuals, while those who protest are not afraid of them, but simply believe their orientation to be a departure from the norm. Those who call them homophobes are manipulating words and turning the whole situation upside down."[13] Not only were gays and lesbians being stigmatized in the name of patriotism, but national sentiment was now regularly expressed through the exclusion of the sexual (rather than the ethnic or cultural) other. Thus it is not just that homophobia was becoming politicized, or that politicized homophobia was displacing other existing forms of gay bashing (discourses of aversion, religious outrage, or the slippery-slope argument), but that homophobia was becoming the new discourse of patriotism. To name just one characteristic example, on June 17, 2006, the front page of the tabloid *Fakt* featured photographs of the nine Polish members of the EP who had voted for the resolution, the headline screaming: "They Have Betrayed Poland." Two days later *Fakt* was focusing on a female "traitor," who, to make matters worse, happens to have a foreign-sounding name. Lidia Geringer de Oedenberg was singled out with a large photograph captioned: "The Corruptible Parliamentarian: I will do anything for money."[14]

When the third resolution was passed in April 2007, even *Gazeta Wyborcza*, the liberal daily known for its positive coverage of LGBT activism, reacted some-

12. "Biskupi skrytykowali rezolucję europarlamentu nt. homofobii" ("Bishops Critiqued Resolution of Euro-Parliament against Homophobia"), E-KAI [Catholic Information Agency Internet service], January 31, 2006, ekai.pl/wydarzenia/x10560/biskupi-skrytykowali-rezolucje-europarlamentu-nt-homofobii/. All translations from Polish to English are mine.

13. "Niesprawiedliwe oskarżenia Polski o homofobię?" ("Poland Unfairly Accused of Homophobia?"), June 16, 2006, wiadomosci.wp.pl/wiadomosc.html?kat=1342&wid=8353619&rfbawp=1150459157.000&ticaid=1761.

14. For more details on this incident and other symptoms of political homophobia, see Robert Biedroń, "How Has Discrimination against Gays and Lesbians Become a Political Issue?" in *Situation of Bisexual and Homosexual Persons in Poland: 2005 and 2006 Report*, ed. Marta Abramowicz (Warsaw: Campaign Against Homophobia and Lambda, 2007), 37–44, kph.org.pl/images/stories/raporty/raport_homofobia_2007_EN_screen.pdf.

what defensively. Calls for tolerance and critical self-examination were mixed in the newspaper's editorial with skepticism about Europe's goodwill and predictions of its counterproductive effects: "The document leaves one with the impression that homophobia exists only in Poland. This is certainly not the case. One can easily foresee the comments: how can Poland be so maligned, with such paternalism, such prejudice?"[15] There is plenty of evidence that these predictions proved true. One of my personal favorites is an article published a few days later in the ultra-right-wing newspaper *Nasz Dziennik* (*Our Daily*), which compares European efforts to root out homophobia to terrorism and jihad. The piece, titled "Let Us Put a Stop to the Anti-Polish Campaign," also brings news of a petition to the EP titled "Homosexual Hands off Poland" circulated by a U.S.-based religious Right organization.[16]

It can be (and has been) suggested that the EP resolutions helped bring new visibility and legitimacy to the issue of sexual rights in Poland. Yet the framing of this visibility as a question of national pride was hardly conducive to progressive change. No one was discussing the actual issues at stake: the legal status of same-sex couples, inheritance, hospital visitation rights, or the possibility of some form of legal union. Little was said about homophobia itself, about social attitudes toward gays and lesbians. Instead, the right to be a "homophobe" became a question of Poland's sovereignty, the term always in quotation marks, now ironically appropriated as an identity by proud "patriots."[17] In short, refusing to be "educated" by the EP, Poland reacted with a wave of resurgent hostility toward nonheterosexuals, its motivation nationalistic rather than (as had previously been the case) religious or moralistic.

Increasingly, Poland's gays and lesbians were being marked as foreigners in their own country. In the context of a nationalist revival, such stigmatization can mean only one thing — a resurgence of patterns of Poland's most engrained discourse of exclusion, namely, anti-Semitism. That gays have replaced — though not entirely displaced — Jews in the Polish nationalist imagination has become all but a truism by now.

15. Piotr Pacewicz, "Parlament Europejski: Polska oazą homofobii" ("European Parliament Views Poland as Oasis of Homophobia"), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, April 27, 2007.

16. Krzysztof Jasiński, "Powstrzymać antypolską ofensywę," *Nasz Dziennik*, May 5, 2007. The petition "Homosexual Hands off Poland" was prepared by the U.S.-based Catholic Family and Human Rights Institute. The text of the petition can be found at www.prawica.net/node/6969 (accessed February 1, 2009).

17. For more on the ironic appropriation of *homophobe* as an identity on the right, see Graff, "We Are (Not) All Homophobes," 447.

The Gay and the Jew, or Does the "Homosexual Lobby" Have an Ethnic Identity?

Anti-Semitism remains a central if shadowy element of Polish national identity. The ethnographer Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, the author of a recent monumental study of Polish blood libel myths — tales of child kidnapping, bleeding hosts, torture and sacrilege, still alive in the folk imagination — states that research on anti-Semitism in many ways resembles the work of a psychoanalyst. Anti-Semitism in Poland is "a theme that is both old and 'cold,' which means that it is deeply rooted but less and less accessible. . . . We are dealing with 'structural anti-Semitism,' which works through allusion and ambiguous signals, words and deeds that . . . take advantage of the symbolic excess hidden in language."[18] The word *Jew* functions as a slur and slander in everyday speech, used by children fighting over toys, by soccer fans cursing the rival team in graffiti. "Jewish" (*żydowski*, *po żydowsku*) means suspect, devious, sinister, unpleasant, or badly done; it can also mean inside out, or upside down. "Jew" — often spoken in a hushed voice — is a remnant of a repressed history fossilized in language. Commonly replaced by code words such as "the Masons," "Sanhedrins," or "Zionists," "Jew" remains a central category of a discourse on Poland's innocence, moral uprightness, wounded pride, and the status of a country betrayed and cheated by Europe. Another replacement word is the compound *żydokomuna* (Jew-Communists), which signals the speaker's belief that Jews were responsible for the atrocities of Stalinism. To be labeled "Jew" in Polish politics is to become unelectable.

The key point here is that Polish anti-Semitism is not a discourse of exclusion aimed at an existing ethnic or religious group; rather, it is a logic of hatred, suspicion, and fear, a deep structure of irrational sentiment largely independent of historical and demographic reality. This explains why Polish anti-Semitism functions so well without actual Jews. For instance, one need not be ethnically Jewish, or even have Jewish roots, to be listed as a Jew on one of the "Jew lists" on the Internet.[19] Jewishness as understood by anti-Semites is not an ethnicity

18. Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, *Legendy krwi: Antropologia przesądu* (*Legends of Blood: Anthropology of a Superstition*) (Warsaw: WAB, 2008), 51.

19. The most developed Polish Jew list on the Web, regularly updated with new discoveries, illustrated with racist caricatures, is "Lista Żydów w zniewalanej Polsce" ("List of Jews in Enslaved Poland"), www.polonica.net/Lista_zydow_w_zniewalanej_Polsce.htm (accessed February 14, 2009). Brief, specialized lists appear on various forums, with the intention of warning readers against "Jewish conspirators" whose real names are revealed (e.g., the Kaczyński brothers are revealed to be really the Kalkstein brothers). See "List of Jewish Conspirators," www.grupy.egospodarka.pl/Lista-zakonspirowanych-Zydow,p,701320,9.html (accessed February 14, 2009).

but rather a position in the national imaginary: that of threatening other, demonized antagonist, villain. Within this framework the Jew is imagined as scheming, dishonest, and demonic, while Jews as a group are a powerful, omnipresent threat. Polish patriotism as constructed within this scenario is an endless struggle to keep the Jews at bay, unmask their plots and machinations, and warn others of danger. Since Jews are forever concealing their identity, attacking whoever is "discovered" to be a "Jew" is by definition a form of self-defense. What, then, are the dangers and possible advantages of taking the place of the stigmatized other within such an obsessive pattern of hatred? What does the gay-Jew analogy mean to the LGBT community in Poland?

Activists and writers associated with the Polish gay and lesbian movement began drawing the parallel as early as 2004. Initially, the link was made between anti-Semitism of the 1930s and present-day homophobia. Comparisons were drawn, for instance, between violent attacks by neo-Nazi groups against gay/lesbian demonstrators in Krakow and prewar pogroms, an analogy that includes evidence of astonishing indifference of passersby. The function of such a parallel is persuasive rather than descriptive: it is meant to shock the public into rethinking its attitudes.[20] The more general claim has also been made that — in the absence of ethnic minorities — homosexuals are becoming Poland's "new Jews."[21] By 2008 the parallel was a familiar trope in the public sphere, one that functioned simultaneously in several forms and contexts, with strikingly diverse intentions: in some cases, it is meant to educate and ennoble, and in others to threaten and offend.

For one thing, the gay-Jew analogy is habitually used by progressive journalists, commentators, and public intellectuals who aim — as did the EP in its resolutions — to shame Poles into sexual tolerance. One vivid instance of this rhetorical strategy is a statement made by the progressive sociologist and commentator Ireneusz Krzemiński in response to a homophobic statement made by Kaczyński (to be discussed in the next section). Krzemiński was cited by a daily newspaper as saying: "The prewar Jew has been replaced by the gay and the lesbian. Poland is becoming provincial. Ignorance and hatred are shown as a moral victory for Poles. This makes me deeply outraged."[22] The analogy is used here with the unspoken

20. Błażej Warkocki, "Biedni Polacy patrzą na homoseksualistów" ("Poor Poles Look at Homosexuals"), in *Homofobia po polsku* (*Homophobia in Polish*), ed. Zbyszek Sypniewski and Błażej Warkocki (Warsaw: Sic! 2004), 151–70.

21. Bożena Umińska, "Wojna z lesbijkami i gejami" ("War against Lesbians and Gays"), *Przegląd*, June 13, 2004.

22. Quoted in *Dziennik*, March 28, 2008.

assumption that anti-Semitism is a shameful remnant of the past and the hope that homophobia will soon become taboo if successfully associated with this history. If the two forms of prejudice are seen as one, "Europeanization" will be achieved, and Poland will at last become modern. Implicit here is a single and linear narrative of European modernity as secularization. As Butler points out, "The ways in which debates within sexual politics are framed are already imbued with the problem of time, of progress in particular, and in certain notions of what it means to unfold a future of freedom in time."[23]

Some right-wing commentators have suggested that the gay-Jew analogy is a form of moral blackmail, since it unfairly casts sexual conservatives as anti-Semites. Jewishness, it is argued, as an ethnic and religious identity is ethically neutral, while homosexuality, as a sin, can and should be judged in moral terms. The analogy, however, does not include the claim that homophobes are necessarily anti-Semites (or, for that matter, that gays are like Jews). The argument is rather that the (largely unconscious) structures of prejudice are similar. In both cases, for instance, there is a deep ambivalence about the visibility of the stigmatized other, resulting in contradictory demands typically addressed to members of the scapegoated minority: they should reveal their identity (stop hiding) while ceasing to be so ostentatiously visible (stop offending the majority with their presence). Subjected to a hermeneutics of suspicion, the gay, like the Jew, is paradoxically always both too visible and too secretive. Another striking parallel pertains to the power, secrecy, and scheming attributed to the gay/Jewish villain.

In a more complex form—as disavowal, allusion, innuendo—the analogy has also been embraced by the Right. Another example of its homophobic employment is a text titled "The Homosexual Lobby," by Roszkowski, a member of the EP already cited here with claims that the concept of homophobia is a form of manipulation. Published immediately after the January 2005 EP resolution in *Rzeczpospolita* (a mainstream daily), the article argues that the resolution is a "violent attack of the homosexual lobby against the foundations of social life in Europe."[24] The "lobby," as he depicts it, is well organized, arrogant, and guilty of introducing chaos into the world of values under the guise of tolerance and diversity. Homosexuals are pressuring Europe into confusing the moral, aesthetic, and political orders; their aim is to undermine the family according to a carefully prepared plan, one step at a time. All this reminds the author of communist

23. Butler, "Sexual Politics," 1.

24. Wojciech Roszkowski, "Lobby homoseksualne" ("The Homosexual Lobby"), *Rzeczpospolita*, January 19, 2005.

strategies from the Stalinist era. Roszkowski clearly feels cornered by the "lobby" whose machinations he has unmasked; his report from the EP is suffused with words signaling fear, entrapment, and danger. The word *Jew* is nowhere to be seen in the text, but all the elements fall neatly into place when one recalls the key elements of the image of the Jew in Polish anti-Semitism: deviousness, the desire to undermine civilization, the tendency to bring chaos, the inevitable link with communism. Finally, the word *lobby* is a familiar element of anti-Semitic discourse; synonymous with *plot* and *scheme*, it is routinely linked with the notion of a Jewish conspiracy aiming to rule the world.

The link is not always as subtle as that. In the homophobic/anti-Semitic hate speech of Poland's extreme Right — neo-Nazi groups such as Młodzież Wszechpolska (All Polish Youth) — the analogy is both explicit and omnipresent and often slips from comparison into the confusion of identities. Perhaps the secretive scheming Jews and the secretive scheming gays are really the same people after all? Spray-painted signs equating Jewishness and homosexuality are not a rare sight in Poland's cities; anonymous posts on the Internet make seemingly illogical references to "pushy Jews telling hetero Poles how to live our lives."[25] Threats shouted at participants of equality marches are also noteworthy in this context: "We will do with you what Hitler did with the Jews" and "Lesbians to the gas." The gay and the Jew have merged here into a single figure of repulsive pariah who also somehow represents the EU. Foreign perversion is now living in our midst; it must be unmasked, marked as foreign, expunged. The aim is to protect what is left of wholesome Polishness against decadence.

The analogy has also found its academic niche and metadiscourse. The sociologist Adam Ostolski views its presence in public discourse as a symptom of the "Judaization of the object of hatred," a common rhetorical pattern in Polish public debates. Ostolski analyzes the parallels between the present-day rhetoric of homophobia in the right-wing daily *Nasz Dziennik* and the language of anti-Semitism as it appeared in *Mały Dziennik* (*Little Daily*), an analogous publication of the 1930s. The temporal gap is a significant aspect of his methodology: the point is to compare the two discourses of hatred, capturing each at a time when it is legitimate, linguistically alive, self assured, and explicit. The similarities, operative on several levels of language — from narrative structure to lexical echoes — are listed under three basic categories: conspirators, corruptors, and

25. Quoted in Igor Stokfiszewski, "Klemm jest Żydem" ("Klemm Is a Jew"), *Krytyka Polityczna*, February 5, 2009, www.krytykapolityczna.pl/Igor-Stokfiszewski/Klemm-jest-Zydem/menu-id-194.html.

pariahs.[26] Ostolski's analysis thus reveals a whole structure or pattern of similarities (he calls it a "matrix of exclusion") between gays and Jews as imagined by Polish nationalists.

Structural kinship between homophobia and anti-Semitism and the presence of a parallel between gays and Jews in public discourse are hardly unique to contemporary Poland. In *Nationalism and Sexuality* the cultural historian George Mosse offers a thorough analysis of overlapping stereotypes in late-nineteenth-century German nationalist discourse. The two groups were supposed to share a whole set of traits: nervousness, effeminacy, excessive sensuality, and a tendency to give in to "vibrations of modernity"—in short, both were outsiders, accused of unmanly decadence.[27] What makes the Polish case somewhat special is the immediate relevance of Mosse's historical data—most of which are, after all, more than a century old—to contemporary political reality and public discourse. My point is, however, not that Poland's homophobes are somehow "stuck in the past," lagging behind Europe on some abstract chronology of progress, but rather that the echoes of the past are activated in an all too modern scenario.

"The Gays from Kaczyński's Speech"—Politicized Homophobia Meets Discourse of Gay Assimilation

On March 17, 2008, Lech Kaczyński delivered a televised address to the nation concerning the impasse in ratification of the Lisbon treaty, explaining his recent decision not to sign it. The speech was more than a political statement—it was a performance designed to evoke patriotic emotions and a sense of danger. The special effects meant to achieve this aim included images of Polish landscapes and nostalgic music in the background (the theme tune from the popular 1970s TV series about wartime experiences called, appropriately enough, *Polskie drogi* [*Polish Paths*]). The president announced that "it is worthwhile to be decisive in defense of Polish interest" and that "not everything in Europe is good for Poland."[28] He concluded with a dramatic plea for unity: "There are moments in a

26. Adam Ostolski, "Spiskowcy i gorszyciele: Judaizowanie gejów w polskim dyskursie prawicowym" ("Conspirators, Corruptors, Pariahs: The Judaization of Gay People in Polish Right-Wing Discourse"), in *Jak siê dzielimy i co nas łâczy* (*How We Are Divided and What Keeps Us Together*), ed. Ewa Nowicka and Małgorzata Głowacka-Grajper (Krakow: NOMOS, 2007), 156–78. An English translation is available from the author upon request: adam.ostolski@krytykapolityczna.pl.

27. George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York: Howard Fertig, 1985), 133–52.

28. "Telewizyjne orędzie prezydenta" ("The President's Television Address"), *Gazeta Wyborcza*, March 18, 2008, wyborcza.pl/1,76842,5032947.html.

nation's life when party lines and interests must be forgotten, and one must think of only one thing: Poland." The central message was that the EU seeks to violate the integrity of Poland's traditional culture and that this must be resisted. Specifically, the dangers are inherent in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Woven into the speech were pictures from the wedding of a gay couple, the "perverse" union serving to sexualize the opposition between Poland and Europe, us and them. To put it briefly: *we* are heterosexual, traditional, and we cherish boundaries; *they* are demoralized, homosexual, and intent on pushing things too far. Thus viewers received a sexual response to a question that was in fact political: how far should Poland go in the process of EU integration? As viewers examined the wedding photographs and marriage license, the president was saying: "Yet another regulation of the Charter, in absence of a clear definition of marriage as a union of man and woman, might endanger the moral order generally accepted in Poland, forcing our country to introduce institutions that are at odds with the moral convictions of the majority of the population." Thus the boundary between the right and the wrong amount of EU integration was marked by the image of a gay wedding presented as a travesty of a "real" one. What the image of gay marriage on our TV screens was meant to provoke was less homophobia per se than homophobia in the service of national cohesion.

Attentive viewers of the president's address might have noticed the word "Toronto" on the marriage license that flashed briefly on the screen — a detail that should have spelled trouble for the Kaczyński public relations team. The men who were to embody the evils of Europe were, as it turned out, New Yorkers: a certain Brendan Fay and his partner Tom Moulton, both Catholics, one Irish by birth, married in Canada in 2003.[29] Not surprisingly, they felt offended by Kaczyński's use of images from their marriage ceremony. They filed a formal complaint to the Consul General of the Republic of Poland in New York City, and, soon afterward, they addressed a letter to Kaczyński, asking him for a meeting. This missive — widely circulated via e-mail — was written in a tone of politeness and offended respectability; to the astonishment and amusement of Polish readers, it emphasized the couple's commitment to tradition, family values, and the Catholic Church. It began as follows: "While my spouse Tom and I celebrated the feast of St. Patrick, our Irish heritage and culture, in parades, community gatherings, and in prayer, you were addressing the people of Poland on national

29. For the factual details of the case, see Andy Humm, "Polish Prez Targets NY Gay Couple," *Gay City*, March 27, 2008, gaycitynews.com/articles/2008/03/27/gay_city_news_archives/top%20news%20stories/19429390.txt.

television. . . . we were surprised to hear . . . that you had used images from our wedding, without our consent."[30]

The president failed to respond, but Fay and Moulton—who are both members of Dignity, a Catholic LGBT group—were not discouraged. They soon arrived in Warsaw as guests of TVN, a commercial television station, which interviewed them in a popular evening talk show. Right-wing commentators did all in their power to define the couple as radical impostors, representatives of "the homosexual lobby," whose aim was to undermine the very foundations of civilization. Several commentators insisted that they were not Catholics, since by choosing a gay lifestyle they had "excommunicated themselves." However, Fay and Moulton maintained their cool and continued speaking of their commitment to the Church, family values, community, and toleration. Again and again, they told the story of how they had met and instantly fallen in love in a church. Live on TV, Moulton claimed that the president's use of their wedding photographs had in fact done much good by provoking discussion. "Look, couples and families are a gift for society. It's good! It's a gift."[31] The trip, they announced, was motivated by "hopes of opening a dialogue . . . and that this dialogue will make Poland an even better place."[32]

The conservative response was business as usual: the visit was construed as an act of "aggression," and the couple's talk about Catholicism was portrayed as nothing but a "provocation." Jacek Kurski—the politician responsible for the shape of the president's address—delivered an extemporaneous speech in front of TV cameras, which included all the familiar elements of politicized homophobia:

> The activity of homosexuals right before the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and only a few days before the third anniversary of the death of John Paul II, shows how right the president is to be concerned. . . . All this will do us much good: it will heighten our awareness of what might happen if we fail to defend our own laws against the aggression of the world of liberalism, permissivism, moral relativism that is trying to impose this sort of behavior onto Poland—a country true to traditional family values.[33]

30. Brendan Fay and Thomas Moulton to Lech Kaczyński, March 25, 2008. A copy of the letter is available upon request from Fay: brendan@stpatsforall.com.

31. *Teraz My* (*Now It Is Us*) talk show on TVN, hosted by Andrzej Morozowski and Tomasz Sekielski, aired April 1, 2008. Video and program description (in Polish) posted at www.tvn24.pl/-1,1544344,wiadomosc.html (accessed February 1, 2009).

32. "NY Couple Visit Poland after Leader's Anti-Gay Speech," AP news release, March 31, 2008, www.cnn.com/.

33. Jacek Kurski for TVN24, April 1, 2008. Video posted at www.tvn24.pl/-1,1544344,wiadomosc.html.

Listening to this diatribe, one becomes acutely aware that Fay and Moulton were indeed foreigners to Poland, though not in the sense meant by Kaczyński. My point is that they spoke a truly alien language, markedly different from the EP's progressive moralism. The American language of gay assimilationism, focused as it is on the idea of dialogue, sounded peculiar in a context where attitudes toward homosexuality function as political division lines. It is odd and disconcerting in such a political landscape to hear arguments based on a sense of personal dignity, trust in human openness, and reliance on personal testimony. Especially foreign sounding was the claim of religious legitimacy for a gay relationship. Fay and Moulton were, after all, visitors in a country where to be openly gay is to place oneself outside the Church, outside the nation, and quite often also outside one's family and local community. The expected counterdiscourse to Polish Catholicism is a European discourse of sexual modernity, which implies a framework of secularism (as well as assumptions about secularization). Meanwhile, the American visitors were referring to their investment in gay rights and to their Catholicism in the same breath, as a matter of course. Theirs was a public religion intent on a vision of common humanity that includes the right to sexual freedom. Asked about the pope's views on homosexuality, they said, "Nobody's perfect."[34]

The Right did all in its power to reintroduce the tone of disgust and wounded pride that had won the day two years earlier, when the media were responding to EP anti-homophobia resolutions. However, this time the trick did not work. The nationalist revival of the Kaczyński era was already losing ground. When Fay and Moulton arrived in Poland, they were viewed as Kaczyński's American victims, not as patronizing European educators telling Poland how to behave. With their disarming, trusting smiles, their emotional talk of home, love, dialogue, and St. Patrick's Day parades, they became the popular media's darlings. Unearthed by the president as an embodiment of "the lobby," they simply failed to fit the job description. In my view, they were also never taken entirely seriously—but perhaps the unintended comic aspect of the story is what made "the gays from Kaczyński's address" so politically effective.

Learning to Look in Disgust—The Politics of Sexual (In)tolerance in the EU

Both Fassin and Butler recall an incident from another place in Europe, which is hauntingly similar to the use of Fay and Moulton's wedding photographs by Kaczyński. During a civic integration exam administered to newly arriving immi-

34. *Teraz My.*

grants in Holland, applicants view a film called *Coming to the Netherlands*, which includes — next to glimpses of the country's history, politics, and education — a long shot of a gay couple kissing in a field of flowers. An applicant's reaction to such images is to indicate his or her adaptability to "modern" society.[35] Interestingly, the test is applied only to outsiders already stigmatized: exempt are citizens of the EU (including Poles), the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the Vatican, as well as skilled workers able to earn at least €45,000.[36] The charge of homophobia thus becomes a rationale for exclusion from potential citizenship of individuals who are "undesirable" because of their religion, race, or economic status.

Consider the disturbing parallel between the two scenarios of public and political viewing of images of gay couples in contemporary Europe. Central to both is the political use of aversion, a public staging of disgust. In both cases, it is assumed that viewers will be repelled by images of homosexual love; a link is drawn between this disgust and authentic national belonging. Unlike the Dutch authorities, of course, the Polish president (or rather his public relations team) encouraged disgust, valorizing it as patriotic, a way to demonstrate Poland's continued sovereignty despite our membership in the EU. We may be cornered by the "homosexual lobby," but we continue our proud struggle. Clearly, Muslim immigrants to Holland are in no position to emphasize their identity in such a way: they must learn not to be repelled by pictures of homosexual love, because they wish to belong in Europe.

My argument is not that the EU's anti-homophobia resolutions and the Dutch video meant to educate Muslim immigrants are equivalent to the instrumentalization of sexual freedom by the Polish Right. In fact, it is important to pry these developments apart, to see how each provides a context for the other. There is a significant difference between the EU's pressure on Poland and its disciplining of immigrants. In one case the addressee is an EU member state, and in the other addressees are non-EU individuals. The EU resolutions are reactions against state-sanctioned discrimination, while the sensationalizing images in the Dutch video are intended to provoke a disgust that will then be used to disqualify viewers from their right to be in "Europe." Finally, the two uses of images of kissing gay couples are markedly different in that, while both are meant to provoke disgust, in one case the presumed "homophobe" already holds an EU passport, while in the other he or she merely aspires to hold one. In the Dutch case the

35. Fassin, "Our Heterosexual Culture."
36. Butler, "Sexual Politics," 4.

accusation of homophobia must be met with humiliation, apology, and disavowal; in the Polish scenario it can be met with defiance, and the "homophobe" can score political points by doing so. To put it crudely: the question is not are you a homophobe, but can you afford to be one? As I have argued above, politicized homophobia in Poland is a discourse of wounded pride characteristic of the post-accession period: the aim is to demonstrate that as an EU member state we can, indeed, afford to be homophobes. At stake are not the actual attitudes of Poland's citizens toward sexual freedom but the position of Poland as a state and a nation in Europe's economic, geopolitical, and racial hierarchy.

Having noted all the significant differences, it is important to register the common structure of assumptions about history, politics, and the relationship between individual and group rights that drives both scenarios: the reliance on the binarism between modernity (secular) and tradition (religious). As the debate of Susan Moller Okin's famous essay "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" made evident more than a decade ago, it is precisely such a conceptualization that makes progressive politics seem out of reach.[37] It is important to understand the extent to which the idea of sexual freedom is instrumentalized in discourses that are, in fact, concerned with neither freedom nor sexuality—their real investments are national identity, state boundaries, money, and power. Butler and Fassin suggest that the proper response to this scenario on the part of those who wish to extend sexual freedom would involve resistance to the false alternative that makes the instrumentalization possible in the first place. What needs to be challenged is the easy binary that pits modernity against religious backwardness, the view that struggle against racism and struggle against homophobia are inevitably at odds with each other, the culturalist framework that views cultures as monolithic and static.

The idea of moving beyond binarisms is certainly laudable as a theoretical strategy, but it is hardly a blueprint for action. What exactly is an antiracist gay couple in the Netherlands to do when they learn of the forced anti-homophobia education imposed by their government? And how should a patriotic gay person living in Poland react to the constant pitting of homosexuality against Polishness? Also worth pausing over is the irrelevance of lesbians to this dialogue on sexual modernity, European identity, and belonging. As Mosse and others note, nationalism has always been a conversation among men and largely a conversa-

37. Susan Moller Okin, "Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women?" in *Is Multiculturalism Bad for Women? Susan Moller Okin with Respondents*, ed. Joshua Cohen, Matthew Howard, and Martha C. Nussbaum (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 9–24.

tion about "manliness." Finally, should we not consider a view from the side of the "barbarians" falsely accused of, and chided for, homophobia, that is, of someone who supports sexual freedom in a country routinely accused of homophobia by its wealthier European neighbors?

Homophobia is no more a static concept than is sexual modernity—both are culturally and historically constructed, relational, reactive, and vulnerable to political pressure. Homophobic attitudes in Poland obviously predate the scenario of European boundary drawing and anti-homophobia moralizing. Yet once part of the game of collective boundary drawing, attitudes toward sexual minorities are profoundly affected by its logic. What tended to be framed in moral or religious terms, or as a matter of spontaneous aversion toward "deviance," now became political, an urgent matter of collective identity. Though the LGBT community in Poland has mostly welcomed—to some extent even provoked—the EU resolutions against homophobia, perhaps this strategy needs to be reconsidered. The instrumentalization of the idea of sexual freedom in the EU and the politicization of homophobia in Poland are aspects of the same dynamic, one that is profoundly threatening to the progressive cause. As Butler puts it: "Certainly, I want to kiss in public, don't get me wrong. But do I want to require that everyone watch and approve before they acquire rights of citizenship? I think not."[38]

Perhaps I am engaging in wishful thinking, but the Polish adventure of Fay and Moulton, with their markedly American discourse of gay assimilation into "family values," appears to have opened the way to new developments and a new tone in Poland's discussion of sexual freedom. This new rhetoric works precisely because it is alien, that is, incongruous with the politics of nationalism and religious conservatism, but also distinct from (or rather oblivious to) the European discourse of sexual modernity, with its secularist moralism. The appeal is sentimental and commercial: gay love comes packaged as "romance" in popular culture genres.

In the summer of 2008 one of the TV stations aired a program featuring a gay couple in its documentary series about celebrity couples, called *Such Love Never Happens*.[39] The heroes were the popular film critic and former editor of the Polish edition of *Playboy* Tomasz Raczek and his partner of fifteen years, Mariusz Szczygielski. It is too early to say that the days of politicized homophobia are over

38. Butler, "Sexual Politics," 5.

39. *Taka miłość się nie zdarza: Tomasz Raczek* (*Such Love Never Happens: Tomasz Raczek*), TVN Style, aired August 10, 2008, posted at video.google.com/videoplay?docid=1645740715958537632.

in Poland, but clearly something has changed: former members of the "lobby" are featured walking side by side on a beach, their friends spinning a tale of their true love. In November 2008 the same two men were named "Beautiful Couple of the Year" by the glossy magazine *Gala*. Nobody was required to watch, but many did and were amused, or moved, or both.

Throughout this analysis, I have emphasized the significance of the European context for the politicization of homophobia in Poland. My aim has been to demonstrate that contemporary homophobia, with its attendant resonances with anti-Semitism, cannot be explained as a reversion to a presumptively Catholic "tradition" or as an inherent element of Polish "culture." Such reifications do little to help us understand recent developments. The "European" model of sexual modernity and the sexual conservatism of Poland must be understood as engaged in a dynamic relationship to each other. Such a reconceptualization has significant implications for how we think about LGBT politics: without giving up on our insistence on rights and freedoms, we must be aware of the ways that well-meant efforts to counteract homophobia might contribute to the illiberal backlash. The need to problematize assumptions about the opposition between sexual traditionalism and sexual modernity is, I believe, equally valid for the other locus of tension over gender/sexuality versus cultural/religious identity: that concerning the status of Muslim diasporas in Europe. In both contexts one must be careful to avoid the twin pitfalls of dogmatic secularism and simplistic universalism on the one hand and a retreat into doctrines of cultural relativism and multiculturalism on the other.