Bodies and Borders: Gendered Nationalism in Contemporary Poland

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ABSTRACT

The 11th of November 2018, marked the 100th year anniversary of Poland regaining independence in 1918, following nearly 123 years of partition. To commemorate this centennial anniversary, museums and cultural institutions around the country hosted exhibitions presenting national identity and narratives. In this thesis, I compare two such exhibitions in Warsaw, one hosted by the Warsaw National Museum and the other housed in the Warsaw Modern Art Museum. In my third chapter, I explain that many of the artworks on display in the Krzycząc: Polska! Niepodległa 1918 (Shouting: Poland! Independence 1918) exhibition of the Warsaw National Museum employ feminine figures as allegorical representations of the nation as to reflect national fears and anxieties of the era of partitions, foster national unity under a mythological “mother of the nation," and inspire sacrifice in her defense. The (re)presentation of these works in this state funded exhibition, leads the visitor to draw parallels between the national crisis out of which these artworks were produced and Poland’s current national identity crisis. I argue that this exhibition serves as an illustrative example of how women have historically, and continue to be, made physical and symbolic bearers of Polish national identity. The policies, propaganda, and rhetoric of the ruling Law and Justice party have exploited the long-held associations between women’s bodies and the nation, in order to present themselves as the “patriarchal protectors” of a nation in crisis. In my fourth chapter, I argue that the expression of national identity through a singular and homogenized female allegorical figure has not only confined Polish women to a strictly symbolic role within the nation, but has also painted over the heterogenous subjectivities that have made up the Polish nation for centuries. I argue that the Niepodległe (Independent Women) exhibition, housed in the Warsaw Modern Art Museum, presents an alternative and more inclusive means of national identity formation by acknowledging the heterogenous roles and identities taken up by the actual women of the nation.
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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The 11th of November 2018, marked the 100th year anniversary of Poland regaining independence in 1918, following nearly 123 years of partition. To commemorate this centennial anniversary, museums and cultural institutions around the country hosted exhibitions presenting national identity and narratives. In this thesis, I compare two such exhibitions in Warsaw, one hosted by the Warsaw National Museum and the other housed in the Warsaw Modern Art Museum. I argue that the employment of feminine figures as allegorical representations of the nation within the *Krzycząc: Polska! Niepodległa 1918* (Shouting: Poland! Independence 1918), exhibition of the Warsaw National Museum, serves as an illustrative example of how women have historically, and continue to be, made physical and symbolic bearers of an exclusivist version of Polish national identity. The *Niepodległe* (Independent Women) exhibition housed in the Warsaw Modern Art Museum, on the other hand, presents an alternative, and more inclusive, means of national identity formation through acknowledging the heterogeneous roles and identities taken up by the actual women of the nation.
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Chapter One: Introduction

In November of 2018, Poland’s Ministry of Culture and National Heritage sponsored various events and exhibitions around the country in commemoration of the nation’s centennial anniversary of regaining independence in 1918. This initiative is best understood in light of the ruling Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, or Law and Justice, party’s recent usurpation of the nation’s institutions of education and culture in order to assert its preferred version of national identity.¹ According to the party’s de facto leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, Polish national identity has been endangered by the nation’s falling birth rates, alongside increasing pressures from the European Union to implement policies promoting gender equality and the acceptance of asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa.² As the form of “Polishness” advanced by the Law and Justice Party is understood to be inextricably linked to Catholicism and conservative family values, the acceptance of refugees of the Muslim faith is feared to undermine the nation’s Catholic majority, while policies which aim to prevent gender and sexual-orientation-based discrimination are feared as threatening traditional family-values.³ These sentiments are captured by Kaczyński’s description of contemporary Europe, “There is a very deep crisis in Europe…it is a serious crisis of European consciousness, a crisis of identity, which is coupled with the collapse of values and basic social institutions.”⁴

Preceding the 2015 parliamentary elections, the Law and Justice party successfully mobilized political support by presenting itself as the defender of the nation’s unique national

¹ I use the English translation of Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice) and its Polish acronym (PiS) interchangeably throughout this thesis.
heritage and culture. Speaking on behalf of the Law and Justice party in a 2015 parliamentary debate, Kaczyński identified the “renewal and consolidation of the national community” as the paramount challenge facing contemporary Poland. Since 2015, the party has taken control of the Constitutional Tribunal and the Supreme Court through judiciary reforms enacted by president Andrzej Duda. These reforms have granted the party de-facto control over the country’s judiciary, effectively allowing them to work outside the rule of the constitution. Today, PiS retains a majority in both houses of the Polish parliament. The continued support enjoyed by the party, despite its authoritarian-like tendencies, can in part be attributed to its employment of the long-held associations between women’s bodies and the nation in order to present themselves as the “patriarchal protectors” of a nation in crisis. The party has demonstrated its commitment to national preservation through the proposal and implementation of social policies aimed to reinstate traditional gender norms as well as through turning away E.U.-allocated asylum seekers from the Middle East and North Africa. While the latter is presented as necessary for protecting the rights and well-being of the nation’s women from supposedly misogynistic and sexually promiscuous male migrants, the former is understood as preventing the “death” of the nation that would inevitably occur if women were to abandon their role as mothers of the nation.

In the following thesis, I build off the work of Polish feminist scholars and the body of literature on the intersections of gender and nationalism, in order to investigate how the contemporary far-right nationalist movement in Poland, as led by the Law and Justice party, might be exploiting symbolic linkages between women and the nation in order to provide an anchorage for national identity by ensuring the maintenance and regulation of the boundaries of female bodies, and thus by extension, the boundaries of the nation. This aforementioned

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6 Bornman, “Struggles of identity in the age of globalisation.”
literature has already well elucidated why women came to be regarded as physical and symbolic bearers of national identity, given their reproductive facilities and their association with that which is primordial, natural, and unchanging. Moreover, the work of Polish feminists has revealed how the metaphorical association between women’s bodies and the nation has prompted Polish politicians, since the country’s democratic transition, to signal their legitimacy, morality, and commitment to the nation, by supporting policies that “protect” women and restrict their reproductive rights. For example, Ewa Majewska contends that today, PiS is mobilizing the long-held association between women’s bodies and the nation, to “legitimate its illiberal transformation of the country’s democracy.” Similarly, Agnieszka Graff has argued that the conservative social and immigration policies presented by PiS are best understood as part of a “well-planned and funded public relations effort” to legitimize the party as the patriarchal protectors of the vulnerable Polish nation. While the aforementioned body of literature has revealed why women are “relegated to minor, often symbolic, roles in nationalist movements and conflicts.” I inquire as to how women have been confined to a strictly symbolic national role in contemporary Poland.

I look at the situation in contemporary Poland as a case study of a broader phenomenon throughout contemporary Europe. We can observe the similar employment of a feminine figure, as both an embodiment of national identity and a reflection of national anxieties, in the propaganda and rhetoric of far-right nationalist parties throughout Europe. The image of a


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woman (typically white and adorned in traditional national costume) has been made the cover
 girl, so to speak, in many of these parties’ anti-EU and anti-immigration campaigns.\(^\text{11}\) The
 adornment of these figures in traditional national costume is meant to counter EU values of
gender equality and cultural diversity, which have come to be understood as an assault on
national heritage and culture by many nationalist parties.\(^\text{12}\) The vulnerability of these figures
reflects and further advances the paranoia that newly arriving immigrants from the Middle East
and North Africa pose a threat to the safety of European women. For instance, the cover art of a
2016 issue of a far-right Polish magazine, *wSieci*, depicts a distressed white woman wearing a
loosely draped EU flag, while the hands of three dark-complexioned men grab at the flag.\(^\text{13}\) The
issue, published in February 2016, is headlined, “The Islamic Rape of Europe;” and features an
article titled: “Does Europe want to commit suicide?” in which the author equates the arrival of
Muslim immigrants with the demise of European civilization.

The campaign posters of Germany’s Alternative für Deutschland (Alternative for
Germany) display similar xenophobic themes. One shows a German woman crying with the
message, “More security for our women and daughters!”\(^\text{14}\) Another depicts three women in
traditional German costumes and reads “Colorful variety? We’ve already got it.” Similarly, in a
campaign poster used by the Freiheitliche Partei Österreichs (Freedom Party of Austria), a
blonde woman is shown dressed in a dirndl next to the message: “Too beautiful for a veil” and

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\(^\text{11}\) Erel, Umut. 2018. “Saving and Reproducing the Nation: Struggles around Right-Wing Politics of Social

\(^\text{12}\) Korolczuk, Elzbieta, and Agnieszka Graff. 2018. “Gender as ‘Ebola from Brussels’: The Anticolonial Frame and
the Rise of Illiberal Populism.” *Signs*, no. 4: 797.

\(^\text{13}\) “wSieci: Islamski gwałt na Europie.” wsieci prawdy. https://www.wsieciprawdy.pl/wsieci-islamski-gwalt-na-

\(^\text{14}\) Robins-Early, Nick. “Germany’s New Far-Right Campaign Poster Is Unsubtly Racist.” *Huffington Post*,
November 10, 2018. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/afd-poster-islam-free-
schools_n_5b96a0f7e4b0cf7b00425ab7?guccounter=1
“Against the Islamization of Europe.”¹⁵ This imagery is often accompanied by rhetoric that further presents immigration from the Middle East and North Africa as a threat to European women. For example, Kaczyński has been quoted as saying that if the country were to accept refugees, Poland “Would have to use some repression” to prevent a “wave of aggression, especially toward women” on the part of asylum seekers.¹⁶ Similarly, Marie Le Pen, leader of France’s Rassemblement National (National Rally) has been quoted as saying, “I am scared that the migrant crisis signals the beginning of the end of women’s rights.”¹⁷

This phenomenon may not be just a matter of artistic expression or campaign marketing. Alongside the popular use of women’s bodies as allegorical representations of the nation, we can observe increasing attempts to police women’s bodies through the restriction of reproductive rights. These restrictions are sometimes justified as an attempt to control and secure national boundaries. Since nationalism has long regarded women not as individuals, but rather as “bearers of the collective” and “biological reproducers of the nation,” their purity is regarded as essential for the preservation of national identity. For instance, Cas Mudde observes the common stance among the European radical right that women should be protected in their stereotypical role of housewife and mother, as offspring are vital for the survival of the nation.¹⁸ Further, Sara Farris contends that many of the social policies promoted and enacted by nationalist parties in

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France and Italy are designed to encourage motherhood for the nation’s women, as to ensure the preservation of the nation’s ethnic identity in its future generations.19

I argue that far-right nationalist movements across Europe have employed the image of a vulnerable woman in order to fuel and feed off national fears and anxieties prompted by the amalgamation of several crises, namely the financial crisis of 2008, the subsequent Eurozone crisis, and the Refugee Crisis of 2015. In the face of these national crises, far right nationalist parties have sought legitimacy and support by presenting themselves as the patriarchal protectors of embattled nations. If we approach “crisis” as a discursive condition rather than an objectively knowable, measurable reality, we may begin to unveil how the discourse of crisis is being employed by the far right to redefine and reinforce the boundaries between the nation’s inside and outside, provoking fears of internal and external enemy “others” in the process.20 It may be a perceived sense of crisis that has prompted the rise of far-right nationalist movements in many European countries.21 While the financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent Eurozone crisis left many unemployed and impoverished and the refugee crisis constitutes an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, the majority of Europe continues to enjoy what are by global standards remarkable levels of affluence and security22.

Take Poland for instance, its economy has been the most consistently successful in Europe over the past quarter-century.23 Even after the global financial collapse in 2008, the country saw no significant recession.24 Further, the country remains largely unaffected by the

24Applebaum, Anne. “A warning from Europe: The worst is yet to come.”
increase in migration to Europe; according to the World Bank, only .03% of the Polish population are refugees, making it one of the countries with the lowest refugee population in Europe.\(^\text{25}\) However, despite the country’s relative stability, the ruling Law and Justice party has risen to power by exploiting long-held associations between women’s bodies and the nation in order to create a discursive condition of crisis. In no other European Union member state, except Hungary, does a far-right nationalist party hold more political power, than in Poland. Additionally, by positioning themselves as the “patriarchal protectors” of an endangered nation, the Law and Justice party has sought legitimacy for the expansion of its powers and increasingly authoritarian tendencies. It is imperative that political scientists pay attention to what is happening in contemporary Poland. The situation demonstrates how discourses of emergency or crisis, articulated through the medium of the woman’s body, may serve to vindicate the authoritarian transformation of democracy, putting the rights and liberties of not only women and minorities at stake, but of all Polish citizens. In what remains of this introduction I will provide a brief overview of how I will study this phenomenon in the subsequent chapters, explaining why I have chosen two museum exhibitions as my site of analysis. I will then proceed with a review of the literature of feminist approaches to nationalism, to which this study is deeply indebted.

As museums and other cultural institutions have become key sites of national identity formation and contestation in Poland, I look at the *Krzycząc: Polska! Niepodległa 1918* (Shouting: Poland! Independence 1918) exhibition, housed in the National Museum in Warsaw and sponsored by the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage’s initiative, as a window into how women have historically, and continue to be, made physical and symbolic bearers of Polish

Museum scholars have identified exhibitions as key sites of national identity formation and solidification. Timothy Luke, in his work *Museum Politics: Power Plays at the Exhibition*, emphasizes the importance of museums as “sites of public instruction and collective imagination,” and goes on to detail their pedagogical role in teaching members of the nation about themselves, their culture, and history. Luke notes, “Museums help to forge reality, and then they organize the collective rites of this unstable reality’s reception that will write authoritative accounts of the past, present, and future in their displays.” In teaching the viewer about their national history and identity, museums play a crucial role in this process of pedagogy and thus can be understood as a key site of national identity formation and solidification. Luke explains that museum exhibitions often become the battleground of cultural struggles as sites of “highly politicized polemics and ritualized reflection.” In Poland, the museum has become a battleground in the struggle over national memory as the Law and Justice party attempts to co-opt historical memory in order to advance their particular version of national identity and narratives. As Piotr Gliński, Poland’s Minister of Heritage and Culture, recently remarked in an interview with the *New York Times*, PiS has “been building new kinds of institutions” through which Poland might, “regain our memory — as a free nation, and as a community.”

In their article “Polish Cultural Diplomacy and Historical Memory: the Case of the Museum of the Second World War in Gdańsk,” David Clarke and Pawel Duber argue that the

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29 Luke, Timothy W.

Law and Justice party has mobilized cultural memory in order to “to re-shape not only its own
domestic public’s perception of the country’s relationship to Europe and the integration process,
but also its EU’s partners’ perceptions of Poland’s place within European history and,
consequently, of its proper place in Europe’s future”. To further explore the role of the museum
in the contestation of national memory, Clarke and Duber analyze two museums of WWII
history in Poland which narrate contesting versions of Polish history, one in Warsaw and the
other in Gdansk. While the Warsaw Rising Museum focuses primarily on the suffering and
martyrdom of Poles in the unsuccessful, although courageous, resistance to the Nazi invasion of
the city in 1944. The Museum of the Second World War in Gdansk, on the other hand,
emphasizes the suffering of the Polish people during the Great War, but in relation, rather than in
opposition, to the suffering of others, thus challenging Poland’s exclusive victim status. The
latter museum has been the subject of much criticism, for not “paying enough attention to the
tragic experience of Polish nation during the Second World War”; and consequently is currently
facing the risk of being defunded. Another example of the mobilization of historical memory is
the recent amendment to the Law on the Institute of National Remembrance, “prohibiting public
claims that the Polish state or the Polish nation as a whole bore any responsibility for carrying
out the Holocaust.” The representation of Poland as a martyr, the outcome of a long quest for
independence against foreign domination, reflects the national myth of Poland as “Chrystusem
narodow” (the Christ of nations), destined to suffer for the sanctification of the rest of Europe,
and serves to assert a privileged position of Poland in the EU as autonomous but also a truly

34 Ibid
European Nation. The struggle over the authority of national history demonstrated in Clarke and Duber’s study, as well as this thesis, point to the recent efforts of the PiS party to mobilize historical memory in order to legitimize itself domestically, as well as internationally.

In my third chapter, I look at how national memory is being presented and mobilized in the National Museum’s *Krzycząc: Polska!* exhibition. I argue that this exhibition serves as an illustrative example of how the Law and Justice Party has employed physical and symbolic femininity in order to create a discursive condition of crisis, positioning themselves as the “patriarchal protectors” of a nation “under siege” by both the infringement of the EU and the “invasion” of immigrants. The use of feminine figures as allegorical representations of the nation in many of the artworks presented in this exhibition, reflect long-held association between women’s bodies and the nation. During the national crisis out of which these works were produced, the feminine depiction of the nation served to reflect national fears and anxieties, foster national unity under a mythological “mother of the nation,” and inspire self-sacrificial action on behalf of the nation. As the stated purpose of the museum is to serve as a “bridge” between the national past and present, the (re)presentation of these works serves to liken the national crisis of the early 20th century with the perceived national crisis of the contemporary moment. In both cases, the anxieties of vulnerable national borders are articulated through the medium of the national woman’s body. In both cases, we see the emergence of a masculine “national superhero” to provide patriarchal protection for the nation in crisis. Further, in both cases, the defense of the nation is understood to authorize the right to define the nation, resulting in the exclusion of racialized and feminized “others.”

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36 Clarke, D. & Duber, P. Int J
In my analysis, I sought to reveal the specific purpose these allegorical figures serve, or served, for both nationalist movements of the 20th century and today. I found that these figures take one of two forms: that of Polonia and the Polish-ized Madonna. The figure of the Virgin Mary in Polish dress and fair complexion serves as both the exalted “mother of the nation” as well as the embodiment of national honor and divinity. Mary represents both of these virtues without complication in that she is fertile but also chaste. Polonia, on the other hand, serves as an embodiment of feminized national territory. As the representation of the land’s fecundity as well as its vulnerabilities Polonia is both the object of desire for the male nationalist as well as the source of his greatest anxieties. I also note how this exhibition can be understood as a microcosmic example of how actual women are made to bear the task of symbolically representing the nation. We can observe how the actual women of the nation are expected to embody Polonia in contemporary national narratives which employ the image of a vulnerable woman to express anxieties of vulnerable national borders. Additionally, we can observe how women are being made to embody the Virgin Mary through patriarchal social policies that police women’s sexuality, limit their reproductive rights, and incentivize motherhood.

In my fourth chapter, I argue that alternative means of national identity formation are possible, and already existent in Poland. I look to the Niepodlegle (Independent Women) exhibition of the Warsaw Modern Art Museum as an example of a more inclusive form of nationalism that does not rely on the formation of binaries through which to secure a privileged sense of self. As the museum’s curator, Magda Lipska explains, the intention of this exhibition is to deconstruct the “patriarchal order on which national narratives are built.” Through revealing its exclusions and contradictions, this exhibition sets out to deconstruct patriarchal national narratives and purposely leaves the articulation of the nation as an open project as to resist
further exclusions. By acknowledging the racial and religious heterogeneities of the nation, as well as the agency of women as more than just physical and symbolic reproducers of the nation, the exhibition opens up the possibility for more inclusive national narratives, that are better disposed to celebrate, rather than admonish, differences.

To conclude, I argue that the deconstructive and open-ended form of national identity and narrative formation illustrated by the latter exhibition, serves a model by which we may come to conceive of a more inclusive form of nationalism; namely one that does not rely on the essentialization of difference or the exclusion and “protection” of women. However, through its illiberal transformation of Poland’s democracy, the Law and Justice party has made it increasingly difficult for alternative articulations of national identity to emerge. The contribution I hope to have made with this thesis is to not only uncover how contemporary nationalist movements (have) and continue to confine women to symbolic roles as the bearers of national identity in the production and propagation of exclusionary national narratives, but to also consider the larger implications of this phenomena for the rights of all members of the nation.
Chapter Two: Review of Literature on Gender and Nationalism

In the following, I will provide an overview of the body of literature that has recently emerged in attempt to explicate the archaic gender views of contemporary European far-right nationalist parties. While this literature has undoubtedly served to advance our understanding of the ideology and success of these parties. I argue that the majority of this scholarship has overlooked the true roots of their misogyny: namely a long tradition of European nations anchoring their identity through the process of gendered and racialized othering. Within this process, women’s bodies have come to be understood as the allegorical sites upon which national identity is contested and confirmed. To better understand how the significance of gender and race in the identity formation of early European nation-states continues to shape national identity today, I argue that we must turn toward the insights of feminist theorists of nationalism. This scholarship, which emerged in the early 1990s, has already well elucidated the significance of gender in nationhood, highlighting the manner in which this process marginalizes women and ethnic minorities.

More recent works which attempt to explain the widespread backlash to gender ideology, or any line of thought that aims at transforming unequal gender relations, can be summed up in two recent works, Korolczuk and Graff’s “Gender as ‘Ebola from Brussels’” and Grzebalska, Kováts, and Pető’s “Gender as Symbolic Glue”.37 In the former work, Korolczuk and Graff argue that for many populist radical right parties, EU policies promoting gender and sexual orientation equality have come to be understood as “ideological colonization” led by feminists and elites in Brussels; yet another means by which the European Union is infringing upon their national sovereignty. Similarly, scholars who study this phenomenon specifically in the Eastern-

37 As explained by Paternotte and Kuhar (2018) the phrase “gender ideology” may refer to reforms promoting LGBT rights, reproductive rights, sex and gender education, and even the critical study of gender in academia
European context observe that in many post-socialist European countries, gender equality is vehemently opposed as it is reminiscent to Marxist social policies.\textsuperscript{38} In “Gender as Symbolic Glue”, Grzebalska, Kováts, and Pető argue that the vague notion of “gender ideology” or “gender theory” has become a unifying issue for diverse conservative movements who are fed up with the false promises of neoliberalism, while populism has offered a springboard allowing the anti-gender cause to appeal to a much wider audience. By diverse conservative movements, they refer to far-right parties, but also Catholic groups, and those who equate gender ideology with the false promises of the neoliberal world order.

While these works have advanced our understanding of this phenomena, I argue that they might be supplemented by drawing from the insights of feminist approaches to nationalism. Sara Farris’s work, \textit{In the Name of Women’s Rights}, offers groundbreaking insights into this phenomena by doing just that. Farris investigates the tendency of nationalist parties to frame Islam as a quintessentially misogynistic religion and culture, all the while ignoring the gender inequalities within their own national and cultural borders.\textsuperscript{39} Farris argues that these paradoxical objectives might best be understood as indicative of both racialized sexism and sexualized racism. While the former refers to the manner in which non-western cultures are portrayed as patriarchal and misogynistic in contrast to more progressive European nations, the latter refers to the depiction of non-western “others” as sexually deviant/promiscuous in contrast to the moral European subject. Racialized sexism and sexualized racism coalesce in the portrayal of migrant males as first, potentially disrespectful of women’s rights and secondly, more likely to sexually assault women. Farris explains that this second point is the primary impetus for these parties’

\textsuperscript{38} see Cestnik 2013, Alzamora Revoredo 2005 & Peeters 2013
Islamophobia, while the first is simply instrumentalized to recruit feminist allies.\textsuperscript{40} The “othering” of the non-European male migrant by contemporary European nationalist movements appears reminiscent of the manner in which early European nation-states of the 19th century established their national identities through the construction of antithetical and subordinate others. Today we can observe a similar strategy being employed as an attempt to anchor national identity amidst the tides of globalization.

The extensive body of literature on the intersections of gender and nationalism explains how the self-identification of European nation-states as rational, powerful, strong, resilient, or in other words – masculine – depends on a gender hierarchy within the nation, namely the exclusion of the feminine from the public sphere.\textsuperscript{41} Feminist scholars have criticized the lack of attention popular theorists such as Benedict Anderson or Ernest Gellner give to the gendered and racialized aspects of nationalism. Zillah Eisenstein, in particular, critiques Anderson’s failure to recognize the exclusion of women from the “deep, horizontal, comradeship” of the imagined community.\textsuperscript{42} As Eisenstein states, “He does not recognize that nationalism is an instance of phallocentric construction, with brotherhood rather than sisterhood at its core. Nor does he recognize racism as part of the historical articulation of the nation.”\textsuperscript{43} Seen as unfit for political participation given their supposed incapacity for reason, women in the early European nation-state were tasked with maintaining the domestic sphere, reproducing and socializing the next

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Farris, Sara R. 2017. \textit{In the Name of Women’s Rights : The Rise of Femonationalism}.
\item \textsuperscript{41} Grant, Rebecca. 1991. \textit{Gender and international relations}. Bloomington u.a: Indiana Univ. Press.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Ranchod-Nilsson and Tetreault. 2003. \textit{Women, States and Nationalism: At Home in the Nation}?
\end{itemize}
generation. While men were to lead and defend the nation, women came to be understood as the symbolic bearers of national identity and culture.\textsuperscript{44}

Nationalism began as a highly gendered project in which women, as “mothers of the nation,” enabled the myth of the nation as an extended family, united by a common ethnic heritage. The imagination of the nation as an “extended family,” with a clear gender and age order, allowed early nationalist projects to identify themselves as civilized and respectable in line with the bourgeois values of the late 18th and early 19th centuries.\textsuperscript{45} Ann Stoler, in \textit{Race and the Education of Desire}, explains that a division of labor between the sexes was believed to be a key characteristic of civilized nations, and thus served to distinguish the European nation as “racially superior” to their supposedly impure and immoral colonial subjects.\textsuperscript{46} Thus early European nationalist movements asserted their identity as respectable and civilized by solidifying gender roles, which took form through the separation of national duties for men and women in both the public and private spheres.\textsuperscript{47}

At the same time, the exclusion of women from the public or political sphere legitimized the nation in accordance with the masculine values idealized by western political thought, allowing the nation to assert its privileged identity through both racial and gender binaries.\textsuperscript{48} Gayatri Spivak explains that the early European nation-state formed its identity through a process of intersectional “othering” by positioning itself in contrast to feminized and racialized

“others.” Carole Pateman argues that the separation of national duties along gendered lines not only elevated the nation’s external image and legitimacy; it was also crucial in ensuring internal legitimacy. In Pateman’s view, the consolidation of power from monarchical rule to the nation-state was facilitated through what she terms the “sexual contract” in which man received the right to rule over his wife and family in the domestic sphere but agreed on a contract of social order and equality among other men within the political sphere.

The desire of early European nationalist movements to identify with traits understood as masculine rather than those associated with femininity can be traced back to long-established ontological linkages between women and nature. In her work, *Manhood and Politics*, Wendy Brown explains that western politics has historically valued traits associated with masculinity such as rationality, strength, and virility, while seeking to transcend the more natural or animal-like characteristics of humanity associated with femininity such as irrationality, emotionality, and other vulnerabilities seen as preventing man from achieving his greatest potential. Thus the division between men and women, and the subjugation of women in the nation served to distinguish the nation as highly cultured and civilized.

While women were often shunned from the public sphere, this did not mean that they were not given a role to play in making and preserving the nation. Nagel contends that women occupy a distinct, symbolic role in nationalist culture, discourse, and collective action, a role that reflects a masculinist definition of femininity and woman’s proper place in the nation. women

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have thus been made instruments of patriarchal nationalist movements, as biological reproducers of the nation, preservers of national culture, maintainers of national boundaries, and signifiers of ethnic/national differences.\textsuperscript{53} The image of a woman as “mother” of the nation helped to invoke sentiments of familial national belonging and unity, as well as solidify national myths of a common national bloodline or ancestral heritage. Given this myth of a common national bloodline or a homogeneous ethnic community, the exalted mother of the nation is often depicted in line with racialized aesthetic ideals.\textsuperscript{54}

In addition to evoking national unity, the image of a moral and modest motherly figure as a symbol of the nation served to demonstrate its virtuous aims.\textsuperscript{55} In their association with morality and innocence, women are seen to represent national honor and virtue. Woman as a national symbol, Mosse writes, is “the guardian of the continuity and immutability of the nation, the embodiment of its respectability.”\textsuperscript{56} Spike Peterson explains that women-as-nation signifies the boundaries of group identity, marking its difference from alien “others.” As Yuval-Davis explains, “Women in their proper behavior and clothing embody the line which signifies the collectivity’s boundaries.”\textsuperscript{57} According to Mayer, nationalist movements often hold the belief that only pure and modest women can reproduce the pure nation; without purity in biological reproduction the nation clearly cannot survive.\textsuperscript{58} Enloe explains that in this sense, women serve as symbols of “the nation reproducing itself, the nation at its purest.”\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{56} Mosse. \textit{Nationalism and sexuality: middle-class morality and sexual norms in modern Europe}.
\textsuperscript{59} Enloe, Cynthia H. 1990. \textit{Bananas, Beaches and Bases : Making Feminist Sense of International Politics}.
Given this reliance on women as symbolic and physical reproducers of the nation, the maintenance of gender roles has come to be understood as crucial for the preservation of the nation’s unique ethnic and cultural identity. As bearers of the collectivity’s identity and insurers of its continuity, the violation of the nation’s women is often conceived as a violation of the nation as a whole. Zillah Eisenstein explains that the feminization of national territory reflects notions of the land’s fecundity, upon which the people depend, and the subsequent need to protect and defend the body/nation’s boundaries against invasion and violation.

Nationalist movements have historically evoked gendered national imaginings in which the state is figured as masculine and the nation as feminine to express anxieties of vulnerable national borders and precarious state sovereignty. Brown explains that since the classical period, western politics has coded vulnerability and penetrability as feminine, while sovereign supremacy and powers of containment and protection are almost universally coded as masculine. Long-held association of women’s bodies with nature also serve to naturalize national territorial boundaries. “It makes these boundaries,” Verderey explains, “like the skin of the female body, fixed yet violable, in need of armed defense by inevitably masculine militaries.” Peterson explains that at the same time “that they are glorified as producers and symbols of the nation,” women’s bodies come to serve as national boundaries, and, as a result, often become battlegrounds in nationalist conflicts. Enloe explains that women serve as

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60 Blom, Ida, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall. 2000. Gendered nations: nationalisms and gender order in the long nineteenth century
“symbols of the nation violated and the nation suffering.”65 This feminization of space and territory thus serves to signal its vulnerability to national invasion and the necessity of its defense by the nation’s men. Women have come to be conflated with the raw materials, or territory, of the nation, which must be defended from the defilement of national outsiders. Charles and Hintjens argue that defining and controlling women is thus central to demarcating ethnic and national boundaries.66

More recent scholarship on gendered nationalisms has explicated how women’s symbolic national role has led nationalist movements to assert control over women’s bodies as a means by which to maintain national identity, morality, and tradition. For instance, Angela Martin argues that it was this symbolic linkage between women’s bodies and the nation that resulted in the policing of Irish women’s bodies, through the restriction of reproductive rights in the 1990s, as an attempt to control and secure national boundaries in the face of EU accession.67 Similarly, Blom et al. explain that anxieties about the national health, the nation’s demographic future, its global competitiveness, or the stabilities of the social fabric, have invariably authorized a politics directed to and against women, whether through systems of mother and child welfare, rhetoric of family values or policy offensives around reproductive health, regulation of sexuality, or direct control over women’s bodies.68

In this literature review I have attempted to demonstrate, first, how the conservative gender views have been explained by thus far by scholars, and secondly, how these views might be better understood in light of the insights offered by feminist approaches to nationalism. My

contribution to the literature will be to analyze this phenomena specifically in the Polish context, suggesting that both the islamophobia and conservative gender views of the ruling Law and Justice party, might be reflective of a revived process of othering as a means of anchoring Polish national identity.
Chapter Three: Feminine Allegories of Nation at the National Museum in Warsaw

The National Museum in Warsaw is housed in a modernistic and authority evoking edifice in the heart of downtown Warsaw. Upon entering, the visitor’s eye is almost immediately drawn to the title of the featured exhibition, *Krzycząc: Polska!* (Shouting: Poland!) portrayed in large white letters over the museum’s main doors. On either side of this title and the museum’s entrance are two large banners depicting scenes from the far-right led independence day march held on the 11th of November of 2017. The men in the photographs are presumably *shouting* Poland while wielding red flare guns. This march was organized by several parties of Poland’s radical right in response to what they perceive to be a “national crisis,” namely the refugee crisis and the supposed infringement of national sovereignty on behalf of the EU. Among the slogans chanted during the march were “Clear blood, sober mind,” “No to Islam,” and “White Europe of Brotherly Nations.” While the museum houses several other permanent exhibitions, the eye catching and somewhat shocking images portrayed by the aforementioned banners lead the visitor to begin their tour of the museum with the *Krzycząc: Polska!* exhibition. During my own visit to the museum I was taken aback and surprised by the presentation of scenes from this march in such large banners. Despite the controversy surrounding the blatantly xenophobic sentiments expressed by participants in the march, the unapologetic display of these images suggests that the form of Polishness asserted by the march’s organizers is not far off from that presented by this exhibition.

According to the museum’s description, this exhibition is a “historical narrative" recounting the developments immediately preceding and following Poland’s regaining of independence in 1918, following nearly 123 years of partition between Russia, Austria, and Prussia. The museum’s curator, Piotr Rypson, describes the exhibition as a sort of “bridge”
between the nation’s past and present. As Rypson noted in an interview with OKO.press, “The exhibition concerns what happened a hundred years ago, before and after regaining independence. But because we are dealing with the same country, similar culture, society and views, there is a lot of analogy.”

In my analysis of the exhibition I argue that it does more than simply bridge national narratives, it presents the national crisis, out of which the artworks in this exhibition were produced, in adjacency with the perceived national crisis that prompted the 2017 nationalist march. While this is most blatantly demonstrated through the inclusion of images from the march, there are several other cultural allusions throughout the exhibition that serve to connect these two moments of “crises” in the national narrative. Further, the depiction of the nation as a vulnerable female figure in many of the works displayed in the exhibition serve to conjure up nationalist sentiments in the visitor, perhaps leading them to connect the anxieties experienced by the nation today, in adjacency with those experienced by Poland during this well-known period of the nation’s history. As Rypson notes “Our exhibition is about experience, feelings and thoughts, rather than a simple history class.”

The power of this exhibition is thus found in the emotions it is able to evoke from the viewer, achieved through this repeated usage of feminine figures as allegorical representations of the nation. Additionally, the ceremonious presentation of these works in large ornate frames as centerpieces of the exhibition, serves to imbue their particular representations of national identity and narratives with an air of authenticity and authority.

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69 Sitnicka, Dominika “Wokół radykałów wszyscy w Polsce chodzą jak wokół zgniłego jaja i nie wiedzą, co z nim zrobić.” OKO.press, 15 December, 2018 (translated by google)

The first artwork the visitor encounters in the exhibition is Jacek Malczewski work, The Polish Hamlet, which depicts polish aristocrat Aleksander Wielopolski contemplating the future of Poland. To each side of Wielopolski stands a differing vision of Poland, both anthropomorphized as female figures. While the young, unshackled, and expressive young woman on the left represents Polish national liberation, the elderly, somber, and shackled woman on the right signifies a national future remaining under the tyranny of foreign occupation. Thus, upon entering the exhibition the visitor is immediately presented with a portrayal of an embattled Poland manifested through the medium of the female form. The tattered clothing and expressions of desperation and remorse worn by these allegorical figures unsettles the viewer and evokes feelings of uneasiness and distress. According to Rypson, this work demonstrates the difficulties of imagining Poland’s future during this time; whether Poland was to be or not to be was indeterminate. Wielopolski is portrayed playing a petal-picking counting game with a small daisy, perhaps contemplating whether Poland was to be, or not to be. The metaphorical female figures in the work, look towards the literal historical figure, Wielopolski, in desperation and despair, as to suggest that their future is in his hands. On Wielopolski’s bandolier we see tubes of paint rather than bullets. This could be to say that in fighting for Poland’s independence,

72 Wszechnica FWW. “Wprowadzenie do wystawy "Krzycząc: Polska! Niepodległa 1918”/MNW”.
Wielopolski is essentially fighting for the freedom to paint her identity.

In what follows, I examine how this exhibition’s employment of feminine allegorical figures as representations of national identity, as well as relays of national narrative, serves to advance a particular version of Polishness, as championed by the Law and Justice party. Through the deliberately chosen artworks featured in this exhibit, a particular version of national identity and narrative is fused with authority and then taught to the museum-goer. Further the vulnerability of these feminine figures serves to evoke national fears and anxieties. These works depict the Polish nation as an allegorical white feminine figure fulfilling her duty as the symbolic bearer of national identity and/or in need of protection against a racialized “other.” While the first half of the exhibition employs symbolic womanhood to depict the imperiled Polish nation during the era of partitions, the final section of the exhibition displays photographs and busts of

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the masculine national “superheroes,” who saved the nation from its effeminization by foreign invasion. The museum presents these “fathers of Polish independence”: Jozef Pilsudski, Ignacy Paderewski, and Roman Dmowski, as the patriarchal protectors of a vulnerable nation. The Law and Justice party has similarly presented themselves as the patriarchal protectors of contemporary Poland, which they perceive to again be “under siege,” by foreign influence. I argue that use of feminine figures as allegorical representations of the nation in many of the exhibition’s artworks are indicative of how women have historically, and continue to be, made physical and symbolic bearers of an exclusivist version of Polish national identity.

As previously mentioned, there are a number of cultural and historical allusions throughout the exhibition that appeal to the visitor’s national memory and serve to draw parallels between the era of partitions and the supposed national crisis of the contemporary moment. One such allusion is the exhibition’s title Shouting: Poland!” In a lecture given at the museum, Rypson explains that this title is taken from a famous monologue in Juliusz Słowacki’s drama Kordian, a work critiquing the passivity of romanticism. In the protagonist’s famous monologue, Kordian shouts a call to arms to his Polish compatriots, “Poland, the Winkelried of nations! Sacrifice yourself, come fall as before! as often!” Słowacki’s use of the term “Winkelried of nations” is an allusion to the Swiss national hero, Arnold Winkelried, whose name became associated with an ideal of heroism and sacrifice for a higher cause. The allusion to Winkelried serves a double purpose for Słowacki’s narrative. First, it is a nod to the long-held national myth of Poland as the Christ of Nations, sacrificing itself for the preservation of European Christendom. Today this national myth is being revived as PiS presents Poland as a perpetual

victim, always in danger from external as well as internal “others” and always in need of protection by a paternalistic state. Second, in likening Poland to this self-sacrificial heroic figure, Kordian is stirring up nationalist fervor by challenging the men of the nation to follow heed and risk their lives for the national cause.\textsuperscript{76} In the present national crisis, PiS has presented itself as the hero of the nation, whose increasingly illiberal policies are accepted, and even welcomed, as necessary for national preservation.

Slowacki’s \textit{Kordian} departed slightly from the established Polish messianic perspective of his romantic predecessors, which passively accepted Poland’s role as a martyr as its God-given fate, by advocating for an active involvement in the resistance movements against the partitioning powers and repeatedly called for military opposition.\textsuperscript{77} Slowacki’s critique of romanticism’s passivity foretell the popular abandonment of the romantic ideal of a multiethnic and multireligious Polish nation in favor of a more exclusivist, ethnic and religious-based form of nationalism.\textsuperscript{78} By the late 19th century, following several unsuccessful attempts to regain sovereignty, the Polish nationalist movement became increasingly disillusioned by the continual and fruitless struggle for independence.\textsuperscript{79} Roman Dmowski, founder of the National Democracy Party, as well as key figure in the founding of an ethnic and religious definition of Polish national identity argued that Poland’s past failures were precisely the result of its religious tolerance, ethnic equality, and humanist tradition.\textsuperscript{80} Although Dmowski was openly anti-Semitic, he still hailed by many as the “father of Polish nationalism.” Up to this point, Poland “undeniably, stood proudly as one of the most tolerant nations of Europe, where people of

\textsuperscript{76} Berezhnaya, Liliya, and Heidi Hein-Kircher. 2019.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid
\textsuperscript{79} Porter, Brian. 2002.
\textsuperscript{80} Porter, Brian. 2002.
disparate ethnic origins and religious faiths could find not only a home but a safe haven.”

However, as the continual struggle for national independence remained unsuccessful, a strand of nationalism in Poland began to actively engage in a process of “othering,” first on the basis of religion and later race, as a means by which to anchor national identity. According to Dmowski and his fellow National Democrats, known as Endeks for short, independence would only be achieved through strengthening Polish identity in opposition not only to the nation’s foreign occupiers but also to internal “others.” For Dmowski, to be Polish was to be “Polish-born, Polish-speaking and Roman Catholic.” All those who did not fit this exceedingly narrow definition of “Polishness” were outcasted and blamed for the nation’s failures. Not only were the nation’s Protestant and Orthodox occupiers othered as the antithesis of “Polishness,” the nation’s internal Jewish population was also othered and blamed for Poland’s nationalist struggles. The formation of Polish national identity, and its holy self-image, was thus facilitated through the differentiation from an outside “other.”

In both Kordian and the rhetoric of the contemporary nationalist movement, the preservation of national identity is understood to rest on a clear demarcation between the inside and outside of the nation. Additionally, in both narratives, the only hope for the nation is the protection by a masculine hero. In its repeated usage of allegorical feminine figures as representations of the nation, this exhibition illustrates how women’s bodies are employed by national narratives and rhetoric to depict the nation as an exclusive ethnic community whose

83 Porter, Brian. 2002.
heritage and culture is under siege by menacing national outsiders. Through this perceived condition of national crisis, PiS legitimizes its increasingly authoritarian tendencies as necessary for national preservation. However, as a consequence of this patriarchal form of (ethnic) nationalism, women are reduced to mothers, while minorities are feared as potentially subversive “others.”

In many of this exhibition’s works, we can observe the Polish nation being defined as a homogenized white and Catholic national body through the medium of feminine allegorical figures. The illustrated vulnerability of these figures portrays the nation as the innocent victim of foreign intervention, thus vindicating its exclusion of religious “others” in the name of both national defense, as well as the defense of European Christendom. The artworks displayed in the exhibit illustrate how women’s bodies are made aesthetic signifiers of collective boundaries when nationalism is defined in racial or ethnic terms. Since the preservation of a nation that conceives itself as descendants of a common blood-line relies upon the continuation of that lineage in succeeding generations, women, given their reproductive facilities, become crucial players in ensuring the nation’s future. As 19th century Polish nationalists became increasingly exclusivist, emphasizing the importance of racial and religious purity for the success of the Polish national struggle, we may observe these national anxieties being expressed as anxieties over women’s bodies and behavior.

Allegorical Figures of Poland: Polonia and the Virgin Mary

The repeated use of female figures as mediums for representing national identity in this exhibit can be attributed to the deep and visceral nationalist sentiment that a woman's body evokes from the viewer, a response that other national symbols cannot quite achieve. In describing the feminine embodiment of the nation as a “national allegory,” I understand allegory
as a symbolic representation as well as a vehicle for relaying an underlying meaning. In my analysis of these allegorical figures, I pay particular attention to not only the national narratives, identities, and myths these figures embody, but also the emotions they evoke. Given the association of femininity with vulnerability, these allegorical figures are able to evoke sentiments of fear and anxiety, both in the context of the era of partitions out of which these works were produced as well as that of the current “national crisis” unfolding outside the museum’s walls.

To further explain how the image of the vulnerable woman’s body elicits such a visceral response, I will borrow from Laura Mulvey’s theorization of the “male gaze.” In her work *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*, Mulvey explains that in film, the female form is employed to evoke “strong visual and erotic impacts.”85 The female character herself, Mulvey argues, “Has not the slightest importance...what counts is what the heroine provokes, or rather what she represents.”86 Mulvey explains that while the male characters of a film serve to advance the action of the plot, the visual presence of the woman tends to “freeze the flow of action in moments of erotic contemplation.”87 In other words, the female character “bears meaning” while the male character “makes meaning.”88 The allegorical figures presented in the works of this exhibition serve to *represent* the nation as the object of desire of the male national subject. Further, these figures serve to *evoke* anxieties of vulnerable national borders and instill nationalist fervor in defense of the nation.89 Katherine Verdery argues that in gendering the nation as feminine, national territory is feminized as the container or backdrop of masculine

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87 Ibid
88 Ibid
action and occupation. As Verdery explains, “The homeland becomes the inactive female object of sentiment, while the male subject is a historically acting subject.”\(^{90}\)

However, at the same time, these figures also serve as the embodiments of the nation’s virtue and morality as well as the symbolic “mother of the nation,” under which the nation is united as an extended family. As I will further explicate below, these national allegorical figures take one of two forms: that of Polonia or the Polish-ized Madonna. While both allegorical figures serve as an embodiment of a homogenized national identity and relay national narratives, the differentiation between the two is the consequence of nationalism’s paradoxical employment of femininity, as both an indicator of morality and virtue as well as the object of sexual desire. The figure of the Virgin Mary in Polish dress and fair complexion serves as both the exalted “mother of the nation” as well as the embodiment of national honor and divinity. Mary represents both of these virtues without complication in that she is fertile but also chaste. Polonia, on the other hand, serves as an embodiment of feminized national territory. As the representation of the land’s fecundity as well as its vulnerabilities, Polonia is both the object of desire for the male nationalist as well as the source of his greatest anxieties.

The artists of these works enlisted these figures as allegorical representations of the nation because of the aforementioned sentiments they are able to evoke from the viewer. Today, the re-presentation of these feminine allegorical figures in this government-funded exhibition, as well as in the propaganda and rhetoric of PiS, serves a similar purpose: to evoke nationalist fervor in a state of national crisis, real or perceived, and to present the leaders of the nationalist movement as the masculine heroes of a nation in distress. Below I will analyze specific works that feature the Polish-ized Madonna, or Polonia, to further reveal the purpose they serve(d) for

nationalist movements of the 19th century and today. I will also investigate how the metaphorical association between women and the nation, which these works did not devise but arguably serve to cement, has shaped women’s role in the nation throughout Polish history.

In Jacek Malczewski 1910 work, *Adoration of the Madonna*, we can observe the archetypal image of Mary with child—but Mary is a blonde woman in traditional Polish dress. The image of the polish Madonna as national allegory serves to advance a national narrative in which Poland is the bastion of European Christendom. In her embodiment of the collective unity, sacredness, and moral tradition of the Polish nation, the Virgin Mary upholds the task of physically bearing their identities and culture. The deep ties between Polish national identity and Catholicism, as manifested in its self-proclamation as the “Christ of nations," can be traced back to the role of the church in the construction of national identity. During the era of partitions, the church and the home were the only spheres of life unregulated by foreign powers. The family and the church consequently became the locus of self-expression for Poles, as well as space in which they could differentiate themselves from the ruling “other.”

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Mary is a symbol of national perseverance for Poland, as well as an anchor of its unique culture and heritage, throughout its long history of foreign occupation. Paintings that feature a Polish-ized Madonna served to signal Poland’s Catholic identity and distinguish it from its foreign occupiers and internal religious others. The sacredness of Mary, her perfect innocence and morality, serves as a symbol of the sacredness and morality of the nation. The formation of Polish national identity, and its holy self-image, was thus facilitated through the differentiation from an outside “other.” In her embodiment of the collective unity, sacredness, and moral

Fig. 2 Adoration of the Virgin, Jacek Malczewski
1910

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tradition of the Polish nation, the Virgin Mary upholds the task of physically bearing their identities and culture.

According to the national myth of Poland as the bulwark of Christianity, Mary is believed to have assisted the nation in defending, its own borders, as well as those of European Christendom as a whole, from the Islamic Ottomans to the East. While there are several origin stories of this myth, the most well remembered today is the divine assistance Mary was believed to provide the European Holy League in the decisive Battle of Lepanto in 1571. The Holy League was an alliance of the major maritime powers, brought together by Pope Pius V to regain control over the Mediterranean Sea from the Ottoman Empire. Outnumbered by the Ottoman forces, Pope Pius V called upon all the churches of Rome to pray the rosary so the Virgin Mary might intercede on the Holy League’s behalf. The Holy League’s eventual victory was attributed to the Virgin Mary and in recognition of her divine assistance, the Pope designated October 7th the Feast of Our Lady of the Rosary in the Roman Liturgical Calendar.

Although Poland did not have a hand in the Battle of Lepanto, the event still holds significance in the Polish national consciousness, as the nation prides itself as ensuring the continued protection of Europe from the Ottoman Empire. For instance the 1683 Battle of Vienna, in which the Polish king, Jan Sobieski was said to have led the Holy League to victory in the defense of Vienna from the invading Ottoman Empire, remains a proud moment of Polish history. As in the Battle of Lepanto, amidst the panic of the Ottoman siege of Vienna, the Pope again ordered the people to recite a rosary prayer in solicitation for the Virgin Mary’s intercession. Further, according to myth, King Sobieski is said to have begun his journey to Vienna at the Jasna Gora Monastery, home of the revered icon of the Virgin Mary, Our Lady of

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Czestochowa, known as the “Queen of Poland.” In the Polish national memory, the Battle of Vienna is an attestation of the nation serving as the bulwark of Christianity, with the aid of the Madonna.

On October 7, 2017, nearly a million Poles lined the borders of the country and prayed to the Virgin Mary for Poland’s future, and the future of Christianity as a whole. The “Rosary at the Borders” event, was sponsored by several state-owned companies in commemoration of the 1571 Battle of Lepanto. Many of the participants in the event expressed concern over the supposed threat of Islam undermining Poland’s Catholic heritage and identity. As one man told the Associated Press, “In the past, there were raids by sultans and Turks and people of other faiths against us Christians. Today, Islam is flooding us, and we are afraid of this, too. We are afraid of terrorist threats and we are afraid of people departing from the faith.” The “Rosary at the Borders” illustrates the continued saliency of the national myth of Poland as the Bulwark of Christianity, as well as the ongoing conception of Mary as the symbolic bearer of Polish national identity.

In addition to serving as the signifier of Poland’s unique Catholic identity, the Virgin Mary also served as the symbolic “mother of the nation.” In her identity as both mother of the son of God, as well as a motherly figure for Catholics in their personal religious lives, the Virgin Mary appealed to all social classes and thus became a unifying symbol to link different groups within the nation; serving to foster a sense of national “familial” unity and solidify national

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94 Our Lady of Czestochowa was first crowned in 1717 through a papal coronation, and then officially recognized by the Polish parliament as the Queen of Poland in 1746, and again in 2017 to mark the 300th year of her reign.
96 Specia, Megan and Berendt, Joanna “Polish Catholics Gather at Border for Vast Rosary Prayer Event.”
myths of a common national bloodline or ancestral heritage. Additionally, Mary’s suffering for the loss of her son was understood to reflect the suffering of Polish mothers in the sacrifice of their sons to the “higher cause” of national sovereignty. According to national myth, Poland, was destined for the messianic mission of suffering for the salvation of the rest of Europe. In sum, the image of the Polish Madonna as national allegory serves to advance a national narrative in which Poland is the bastion of European Christendom. Thus, in her embodiment of the collective unity, sacredness, and moral tradition of the Polish nation, the Virgin Mary upholds the task of physically bearing their identities and culture.

In Jacek Mierzejewski’s 1915 work, *Polonia*, we may observe an allegorical figure that differs from the motif of the Madonna. During the era of partition, the nation was often represented as the innocent and vulnerable allegorical female figure, “Polonia,” to invoke nationalist feelings as well as inspire sacrifice on behalf of the nation. In Mierzejewski’s work we see Polonia on her deathbed, or tombstone, symbolizing the death of the nation. The allegorical national figure, Polonia, is featured in many of these works as a weeping woman, often in chains (representing a loss of freedom) and dressed in white, (an indication of innocence). At times, she is depicted in the background of the work while men fighting for her liberation occupy the foreground. Like the Virgin Mary, Polonia represented the innocence and victimhood of the Polish nation. However, unlike the Madonna, who serves as the embodiment of the nation’s

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97 Porter, Brian. "Hetmanka and Mother: Representing the Virgin Mary in Modern Poland."
sanctity and morality, Polonia is often sexualized, portrayed as the object of desire of the male national subject.99

Fig. 3 *Polonia*, Jacek Mierzejewski, 1915

In other exhibits in commemoration of the country’s independence, we can see similar depictions of the nation as Polonia on display. For instance, in November 2018, the Wroclaw National Museum proudly displayed Jan Styka’s 1891 work, Polonia, in its foyer. In this work, Styka narrates a romantic version of the Polish national struggle. In the foreground, we see Polish national heroes such as Tadeusz Kościuszko and Adam Mickiewicz. In the background, we see Polonia, in chains, tied to the rocks. In Styka’s work, Polonia is the passive object of desire for this motley crew of Polish national heroes. In her embodied vulnerability, suffering, as well as grace and innocence, Polonia serves to advance the myth of Poland as the perpetual, defenseless victim of its powerful enemies. Given the association of femininity with vulnerability, the female allegorical figure also serves to vindicate violent national exclusions.

presenting the nation as the innocent victim of foreign occupation whose violence (internal or external) was simply a mechanism of self-preservation.

Fig. 4 Polonia, Jan Styka 1891

The Fathers of Polish Independence

Towards the end of the exhibition, the visitor comes across a room full of portraits and busts of Polish heroes. The museum identifies these figures, namely Jozef Pilsudski, Ignacy Paderewski, and Roman Dmowski as the “fathers of independence.” If women are required to carry the burden of representing Poland’s supposedly timeless and unchanging identity, men are positioned as defenders of women who fulfill this role. While the works leading up to this final section of the museum depict a vulnerable Polonia waiting for the rescue of her countrymen, in this final section we meet the men who rose to the task. A change in color scheme brings a sense of relief and hope in the visitor. While the preceding rooms of the exhibition are painted dark

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100 Malczewski, Jacek, Polonia, oil on canvas, 1891, The National Museum in Wroclaw, Wroclaw, Poland.

hues of red, purple, and green, as to reflect this dark era of the nation’s visitor, this last room is painted a bright white as to reflect the nation’s newfound independence. A majority of the works in the exhibition’s final room depict the de facto leader of the Second Polish Republic, Jozef Pilsudski, and his signature walrus mustache. These photographs and busts of these historical figures, all notably male, celebrate the national superheroes who saved Poland from a long period of foreign occupation. In Jacek Malczewski’s 1918 work, *Polonia II*, pictures a free Poland through the allegorical Polonia; she is draped in the coat of a soldier, which perhaps suggests her rescue by brave soldiers.

![Polonia II, Jacek Mierzejewski 1918](image)

The presentation of nations salvation by “national superheroes” is further advanced

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102 Malczewski, Jacek, *Polonia II*, oil on canvas, 1918, The National Museum in Warsaw, Warsaw, Poland.
by the few contemporary pieces included in this exhibit: those of the well-known Polish comic artist, Przemek “Trust” Truscinski. Truscinski’s works feature Polish historical figures as national “superheroes.” This comic book style helps spark the interest of young viewers. However these artworks do much more than just pique the curiosity of the young, they teach a certain view of Polish history in which national actors are always male superheroes. In an interview with Ośrodek Kontroli Obywatelskiej (OKO press), Rypson explains that the dream of a knight, commander, or fairy-tale king that would lead Poland to victory, or to independence, is quite ancient.

In the present national crisis, the emasculation provoked by the perceived loss of sovereignty from increasing EU integration, globalization, and the breakdown of national borders by transnational migration, has prompted the desire for a masculine “national hero” to relieve the nation of its feminized vulnerabilities. The image of Polonia is being employed today in the rhetoric and propaganda of the PiS party to create a perceived condition of national crisis in which the nation’s Catholic identity is understood to be under siege by the arrival of Muslim immigrants, on one hand, and the progressive social policies forced upon the country by the EU, on the other. In the face of this national crisis, PiS has presented itself as the “national hero” in the image of the aforementioned heroes who regained Poland’s independence. One might argue that Kaczyński, the de-facto leader of PiS, is just this figure. In the midst of the nation’s current identity crises, Polish nationalists are again looking toward the Virgin Mary to provide an anchor of national identity. Although it is not Mary who will bear the burden of this task. It is rather actual women of the nation who, in being made to align themselves with the national ideal of

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femininity as modeled by Mary, come to take up her role as symbolic bearers of the nation. The manner in which national identity and narratives are presented through the bodies of women in this exhibit can be understood as a microcosmic example of how actual women are made to bear the task of symbolically representing the nation. While these works are intended as an articulation of national identity and narratives, they also serve as a model of feminine ideals to which the women of the nation are expected to conform as part of their national duty.

A History of (Real) Women as Physical and Symbolic Reproducers of the Nation

The feminine ideals embodied in these national allegories are the same norms to which Polish women have been expected to adhere for the past several centuries. Women’s symbolic performance of national identity and physical reproduction of the nation has served as an anchor for Polish heritage and culture through the political turmoil endured by the country for almost the entirety of its existence. Thus it is not surprising that in the contemporary moment we are again seeing expectations placed on women to continue their role as anchors of national duty through the current perceived national crisis. Awiukiewicz-Tomczak explains that national allegories not only “portray historical, political, and cultural events of the nation,” but also serve to construct women’s roles within society in particular ways, always in service to the nation.106 The remainder of this chapter will address the manner in which real Polish women, outside of the museum’s walls, have similarly been made to bear the task of physically and symbolically reproducing the nation and how the association of the nation with women’s bodies has directed policies for and against women as a means by which to preserve and secure national boundaries throughout Polish history. George Mosse contends that while some might interpret these

feminine allegorical figures as somewhat empowering for women, these images served to idealize women while at the same time “put [woman] firmly into her place.”107 Similarly, Blom et. al explain the inverse relationship in the prominence of female figures in the allegorizations of the nation and the degree of access granted to women by the political apparatus of the state.108 As Mosse explains, “Those who did not live up to the ideal were perceived as a menace to society and the nation, threatening the established order they were intended to uphold.”109

During the era of partitions in Poland, women as mothers were tasked with preserving national culture, language, and tradition in the home, since the expression of Polish national identity was strictly forbidden in the public sphere. Mothers were seen as generating cultural strength, “providing moral teachings to give the next generation a sense of urgency to unite against the oppressive power.”110 Katherine Verdery explains that procreation and the upbringing of children came to be understood as a patriotic act on behalf of the nation, “as the family was seen as the place to raise young patriots who would continue the struggle for independence in the future.”111 As further explained by Rogowska, “Polish women were granted the revered role of becoming transmitters of language and culture, serving as a patriotic moral compass for children.”112 Ostrowska & Mazierska explain that the combination of the national myth of the Madonna as Poland’s queen and protectress with the idea of the Polish woman as the symbolic bearer of national identity set an ideal of femininity with which actual Polish mothers were to

align themselves in service to the nation.\textsuperscript{113} Just as the Virgin Mary was tasked with defending and embodying Polish national heritage, the actual women of Poland were given a similar task, preserving the Polish language, tradition, and culture in the private sphere.

The Matka Polka (polish mother), as the patriotic, self-sacrificing, noble, brave, strong, but also humble, and devoted “mother of the nation,” thus became the model of femininity to be embodied by all Polish women.\textsuperscript{114} This is illustrated in a work written by one of Poland’s most beloved national poets, Adam Mickiewicz, entitled “Do Matki Polki” (To the Polish Mother). In this poem, Mickiewicz’s instructs Polish women to raise their sons as patriots, willing to sacrifice their life for the nation.\textsuperscript{115} Polish women were expected to embody the suffering of the Virgin in the sacrifice of their sons to the national cause. The suffering of the Polish mother mirrored the situation of the country and the uncertain fate of the nation; it reflected lost independence and a threat to language, culture, and heritage.\textsuperscript{116} Additionally, just as the Virgin Mary was tasked with defending and embodying Polish national heritage, the actual women of Poland were given a similar task, protecting the Polish language, tradition, and culture in the private sphere. The domestic sphere, in becoming the center of patriotic activity, arguably gave women a heightened sense of autonomy and power in their families as well as in broader society. However, such reverence was only reserved for women who actively fulfilled their national duty as keepers of the domestic sphere.\textsuperscript{117} As Awiukiewicz-Tomczak explains, “The role of Matka Polka was limited to maternal instincts, the nationalistic expectations of women were reduced to their


\textsuperscript{115} Adam Mickiewicz, ‘To the Polish Mother’ (‘Do Matki Polki’, 1830)(Mickiewicz, n.d.)


reproductive skills." Nowicka argues that “all of this made it very difficult for women to realize their ambitions outside of the family. Any attempt by a woman to liberate herself from family roles was treated as a betrayal of the nation and the Church.”

After 123 years of partition, the Polish nation would finally gain independence in 1918. This independence was short-lived, as Poland would be invaded by the Nazis in 1939, and then incorporated into the Soviet sphere of influence in 1945. Into the second World War, the Nazi occupation, and incorporation in the Soviet sphere of influence, Polish women continued to be regarded as the symbolic bearers of national identity. Although women in Poland gained equality of civil rights in 1918 and equal suffrage in 1919, these legal rights did not translate into practical reality, however, and the situation for women did not really change till after WW2.

Ostrowska, Rogowska, and Verdery note that the nationalist discourse of the 19th century and that of the communist both regarded women’s sexuality as in service to “higher values,” patriotic aims for the former, and proletarian for the latter. The sacrifice of the Matka Polka for her nation during the period of partitions was replaced with the sacrifice for the communist state. As Rogowska explains, “the heroic patriotic Polish mother willing to give birth to sons who would fight for the patria was transformed into a female communist worker giving birth to next generations of communist workers willing to build the socialist paradise in unison.”

Ostrowska explains that the communist elites attempted to appropriate the imagery of the Matka Polka, “equipping it with elements of the communist ideology,” to establish an illusion of continuity in

national life. Again we see how the use of the woman’s body, as a symbol of the nation, is employed to evoke a sense of naturalness and legitimacy to political rule. However, while the conditions of women may have appeared to improve during the Soviet era, as they were encouraged to enter the workforce and enjoyed liberal reproductive rights, women were double-burdened in that they were still expected to maintain their domestic duties. As Rogawski observes, “The communist propaganda created the image of the superwoman: the tractor driver, the crane operator, the bricklayer—able to work alongside men. The equality brought about by the work opportunities was only illusory, as it was not accompanied by changes in mentality.”

Following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1989, Poland finally achieved national independence. Given Poland’s tradition of cultivating national identity in the domestic sphere, the formation of Poland’s post-communist identity began with the enforcement of a strictly heteronormative and Catholic model of the family with the Polish woman-as-mother at its center. As many perceived the liberal abortion policies of the socialist state as bringing about the “death of the nation” by permitting birth rates to fall, the rebirth of the nation in the post-1989 transition was understood to depend first and foremost on ensuring that women return back to their “proper place” as symbolic bearers and physical reproducers of the nation. In 1989, the newly formed Polish state was quick to submit a proposal to the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish parliament) to restrict reproductive rights. In 1993, the Polish legislature ratified the Law on Family Planning, Legal Protection of the Foetus and the Conditions of the Permissibility of Abortion, which allowed abortion in only three cases: if there is a serious threat to the life or

123 Rogawska, Katarzyna. "The Perpetuation of the Myth of the Polish Mother In Polish Nationalist Discourse."
125 Rogawska, Katarzyna. "The Perpetuation of the Myth of the Polish Mother In Polish Nationalist Discourse."
health of the women, if pregnancy is the result of a crime, or if prenatal tests indicate the foetus to be severely and incurably damaged. In her analysis of the discourses and narratives surrounding the abortion debate in the 1990s, Kramer observes that those who opposed the proposed liberalization of the abortion law tend to equate abortion with the death of the Polish nation and subsequently characterize women who abort their pregnancies as refusing to accept their duty to reproduce the nation and blaming them for the extinction of the nation. Discourses which equate abortion with the death of the Polish nation often point to the liberal abortion policies of the communist era, suggesting that these laws were a Soviet tactic to undermine Polish national strength. Other such arguments liken abortion to a Holocaust, alluding to the mass murder of Polish Jews during the Nazi occupation during WWII. In both such discourses, liberal abortion policy is equated with foreign occupation and national destruction, while restrictive abortion policies are understood as safeguarding Polish identity and self-determination.

Today, the association of Polish women as the physical and symbolic reproducers of the nation is being employed by PiS to bolster its legitimacy through policies to restrict reproductive rights and incentivize motherhood in a commitment to national continuity. In April 2016, a bill was presented to the Sejm that would ban abortion in all cases except to save a woman’s life. The bill would also require the approval of three physicians and subject women who illegally receive an abortion to jail time. This bill did not pass, but a new attempt to restrict abortion laws in Poland is underway in the “Stop Abortion” bill presented in early 2018. By associating

128 Kramer, Anne-Marie (2006a) ‘Media, Gender and Nation in the Polish Abortion Debate’,
women’s bodies with the assurance of national continuity, the bill was presented as “necessary” for the preservation of the Polish nation given falling fertility rates.\textsuperscript{130} This can be observed in the language used to justify the necessity of recent social policies enacted by PiS. In an interview with TVP1, former Prime Minister and PiS party member Beata Szydło commented that the demographic challenge was the “greatest” issue facing the state at the moment. Szydło then went on to contend that the Family 500 Plus program, which provides financial incentives to women with more than one child, would help address this problem through a focus on strengthening families by encouraging motherhood.\textsuperscript{131} Szydło also pinpointed the family as the source of national sovereignty. “When Poland was not on the maps of the world, families took on the burden of maintaining our identity, without which there would be no sovereignty.”\textsuperscript{132} Thus, in the midst of the nation’s current identity crises, Polish nationalists are again looking toward the Virgin Mary to provide an anchor of national identity.

Further, the image of Polonia is being employed today in the rhetoric and propaganda of the PiS party to create a perceived condition of national crisis in which the nation’s Catholic identity is perceived to be under siege by the arrival of Muslim immigrants on one hand and the progressive social policies forced upon the country by the EU, on the other. In the wake of the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis, far-right Polish nationalists have resisted pressures from the EU to take in asylum seekers from overburdened countries such as Greece and Italy due to the threat that “invading” male migrants supposedly pose to the safety and rights of Polish women. Thus,

\textsuperscript{132} “Rodzina staje w centrum zainteresowania.” (Accessed September 15, 2018).
just as Polonia was employed by nationalist artworks in the period of partition to reflect a condition of national crisis, today Polonia is being revived in the propaganda and rhetoric of PiS to depict the nation as under siege by foreign invaders. Amidst this purported national crisis, PiS has presented itself as the defender of Polish national identity by any means necessary. These xenophobic discourses described above, which posit male migrants as a danger to the nation’s women, have been accompanied by opposition to the so-called “gender ideology” of the European Union, namely policies which aim to prevent gender and sexual orientation-based discrimination in EU member states. These policies are feared as threatening traditional family-values, Catholic-inspired social-policies, and perhaps most importantly, the long-held role of Polish women as physical and symbolic bearers of national identity. The breakdown of gender binaries within the nation, particularly women’s abandonment of their national duty as bearers of national identity, is seen as undermining the nation’s reproductive futurity. According to a report published by Human Rights Watch, the PiS led government has repeatedly threatened to withdraw from the Istanbul Convention, a European Council treaty aimed at preventing and combating violence against women as well as domestic violence.\textsuperscript{133} Jadwiga Wiśniewska, a member of the European Parliament and PiS representative, argued that although prevention of domestic violence is a worthy cause, it does not warrant the supposed gender ideology and radical feminism to which the convention would subject Polish society.\textsuperscript{134}

The association of Polish women as the physical and symbolic reproducers of the nation is being employed by PiS today, as it attempts to assuage national anxieties through the policing


of women’s bodies to demonstrate its commitment to national defense and preservation. We can observe how the actual women of the nation are expected to embody Polonia in contemporary national narratives which employ the images of vulnerable women to express anxieties of vulnerable national borders. We can observe how women are being made to embody the Matka Polka through patriarchal social policies that police women’s sexuality, limit their reproductive rights, and incentivize motherhood for women understood to meet the national ideals of femininity.
Chapter Four: Deconstructing Patriarchal Nationalism at the Warsaw Modern Art Museum

We will now turn to another museum exhibition in Warsaw, which as I will argue demonstrates a more inclusive, pluralistic form of nationalism. While the Krzycząc: Polska! Niepodległa 1918 exhibition constitutes a carefully crafted presentation of national narratives and identity, the Warsaw Modern Art Museum’s temporary exhibit, Niepodległe (independent women), serves to deconstruct this presentation through revealing the heterogeneous narratives and identities that make up the actual nation. Like the previously examined exhibition, the Niepodległe exhibition was presented in commemoration of Poland’s centennial anniversary of regaining independence, although unlike the former exhibit, it did not receive funding from the Ministry of Culture and National Heritage’s initiative. In fact, the exhibit’s title Niepodległe, which translates to “independent women” (plural), has been described by the museum’s curator, Magda Lipska, as a critical counter to the traditional Polish epithet for independence, Niepodległa, a singular and feminine noun often represented through a feminized allegorical figure.135

According to the museum’s website, the exhibition “undermines the masculine gaze” and “postulates an urgent shift away from the considerations of symbolic womanhood manifested in allegorical representations of a nation.”136 The exhibition looks instead at “actual women who played a part in various national movements,” as well as what women’s “presence – or, too often, their absence – may say about the condition of a country, a nation or, more broadly,
contemporary culture in general.” As the previous chapter has hopefully made clear, the presence of women as symbols and the absence of actual women in the national narrative, is indicative of a form of nationalism which recognizes men as active participants of the nation while enframing women as symbolic representations of national identity. It is not only the subjectivity of women that has been left out of the national narrative, as the museum’s curator, Magda Lipska, reminds us in an interview with Krytyka Polityczna, “non-heteronormative, non-white, and working-class persons are similarly excluded.” Thus the works of the 29 artists in this exhibit serve to reveal the exclusions of women as well as that of non-heteronormative and non-white individuals from the national narrative, and in the case of some works, literally to put them back into the picture.

The Niepodległe exhibition was presented between October 26, 2018, and March 3, 2019, in the Warsaw Contemporary Art Museum’s exhibition space on the Vistula river. The exhibit’s architecture is worth noting, as it serves to convey the exhibits’ meaning as much as the works themselves. The Museum on the Vistula, as it has come to be known, houses one large exhibition space, as well as a small library and a cafe. In contrast to the National Museum’s exhibition, which sprawled out into several large rooms, the Niepodległe exhibition was all but completely confined to the four walls of this quite spacious, exhibition room. The inner walls of the exhibition are cut around the artworks, such that the works of the exhibition can be read as a text, allowing the visitor to extract common parts from isolated works.” Joanna Meyer-Grohbrügge, the exhibit’s architect, explains that her design was inspired by the experimental novel "Tree of

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137 “Niepodległe: Women, Independence and National Discourse.”
Codes," by Jonathan Safran Foer and the motif of palimpsest. In “Tree of Codes," Foer takes multiple manuscripts of a preexisting novel and carves out a new story by physically cutting out portions of the text. The presentation of the exhibit’s works as a palimpsest, “a collage of diverse images and stories,” reveals the heterogeneity of the nation as well as the missing links and blanks scattered throughout women's history, not just nationally, but globally.\(^{140}\)

While the architecture of the exhibition invites the visitor to view or read the works together as a sort of text, Lipska explains that the exhibition does not seek to rewrite the national narrative, but rather to open these narratives to be rewritten in such ways that acknowledge as many different subjectivities and identities as possible. When asked in an interview with Krytyka Polityczna how we might move forward from a masculinist national narrative, Lipska answered that the urgent first step is to acknowledge that the exclusivity of the dominant national narrative and to then reconsider national history “in the widest possible spectrum.”\(^{141}\) The intention, Lipska explains, is “not to replace one hegemony with another, but to open up a multitude of experiences, and not to close in one image of the world that stiffly defines who we are and where our place is.”\(^{142}\) Any single writing of history will inevitably cover up the stories and subjectivities of some members of the nation, and thus Lipska intentionally leaves the narration of nation open-ended. In her work, The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism, Ranjoo Seodu Herr, argues that different, non-essentialist, conceptualizations of nationalism are possible, but in order to remain inclusive, they must remain open-ended. Such a reconceptualization of the nation as an open-ended project requires first the deconstruction of narratives which conceive of the nation as

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\(^{140}\) Bartosiewicz, Anna. “Niepodległe, czyli rozszyfrowywanie polskości.”


having some fixed, pre-established, and reified essence and a subsequent re-imagination of the “nation” as fluid, a common culture capable of accommodating foreign ideas and people to create its unique and "hybrid" culture.\textsuperscript{143}

Returning to the architecture of the exhibit, all of the works purposefully face the entrance. When viewed from the back, the walls of the exhibition are all white and bare, as to indicate that when national narratives are articulated from a singular perspective we only see a partial narrative. As explained by Lipska, “It is only when we turn around that we notice that the other side of the walls is completely empty, suggesting a different, hidden and waiting history to be told.”\textsuperscript{144} The intention of this exhibit, as Lipska explains, is thus to deconstruct the “patriarchal order on which national narratives are built” through revealing its exclusions and contradictions.\textsuperscript{145} In the remainder of this chapter I will explain how the many works of this exhibition serve to acknowledge the racial heterogeneities of the nation, as well as the agency of women as more than just physical and symbolic reproducers of the nation. In doing so, this exhibition opens up the possibility for a more inclusive national narrative, one which no longer depends on a racialized and gendered “other” from which to secure its own sense of self and thus may be better disposed to celebrate, rather than admonish, differences.

As visitors navigate through the exhibition, they are guided to weave through the parallel walls upon which the works are displayed. The works displayed on the first of these walls serve as a sort of thesis statement for the rest of the exhibit by introducing the visitor to its major themes:


the exclusion of real women from the national narrative, nationalism’s contradictory employment of female sexuality, and the intersections of class, race, and gender inequalities within the nation.

Fig. 6 Various works, Jadwiga Sawicka 2012

Reading these works from left to right, the first to catch the visitor’s eye is Jadwiga Sawicka’s untitled work; a series of canvases that form pairs of masculine and feminine Polish adjectives meant to “evoke and processes” components of the contemporary national discourse. While the feminine adjectives are depicted on smaller canvases and in all lower case, the masculine adjectives are depicted vice-versa. By demonstrating the complex and at times contradictory relationship between gender and nationalism, Sawicka’s work touches upon the exclusion of real women from the national narrative, nationalism’s contradictory employment of female sexuality, and the intersections of class, race, and gender inequalities within the nation.

Additionally, in pairing masculine and feminine adjectives together, Sawicka’s works reflect the deeply ingrained associations informed by gendered language.

While some of the adjective pairings form binary oppositions such as Ojzysty (Fatherland) and macierzysty (Motherland), other pairings form more nuanced relationships. For instance, the masculine adjective, honorowy, meaning honorable, is placed next to the feminine adjective, niewierna, meaning unfaithful or disloyal. The semantic tension between the masculine, honorowy, and the feminine, niewierna, reflects the disparity of how men and women are regarded in the national narrative; while women’s commitment to the nation is held in suspicion, the men of the nation are indisputable patriots. In another pairing, the masculine adjective, rasowy (ethnically pure) is juxtaposed with the feminine adjective narodowa (national). This pairing speaks not only to the conflation of national identity and ethnic identity in contemporary nationalist discourse, but also the Polish language’s gendering of noun, nation, as feminine.148 It is this association of the nation with women’s bodies, and the conflation of national identity with ethnic identity, that has led to the policing of women’s sexuality and the exclusion of ethnic minorities, both in the name of national preservation. I believe that Lipska chose Sawicka’s work as the first word, so-to-speak, of the exhibition as to make clear that the role gender plays in the construction of nation and discourses of nationalism is not always clear; there are contradictions and complexities given the intersections of class, race, and gender that should not be overlooked.


The first row of the exhibition is completed by two works that, together, illustrate how national gender inequalities are much complex, given their intersections with class and race-based inequalities, and thus will not be corrected by simply granting women the right to vote. The first of these works, a photograph taken from Bownik’s series Reverse 8, depicts Józef Piłsudski's military jacket turned inside out. Revealing the inside of Piłsudski’s uniform serves as a symbolic reversal of the patriarchal order, perhaps reflecting on one point in Polish history in which the patriarchal order was reversed: Piłsudski's granting of suffrage to Polish women. However, the juxtaposition of Bownik’s work next to Ewa Ciepielewska’s portraits of Rosa Luxemburg, serve to demonstrate how the granting of suffrage in 1918 did not bring about real equality for Polish women. Luxemburg was a radical political activist who questioned the efficacy of suffrage to bring about true equality among the sexes.\footnote{Luxemburg, Rosa, and Horace B. Davis. 1976. \textit{The national question: selected writings}. New York: Monthly Review Pr.} Luxemburg argued that while suffrage granted political mobility to bourgeois women, it offered little to no improvement in the life of marginalized women.\footnote{Luxemburg, Rosa, and Horace B. Davis. 1976. \textit{The national question: selected writings}.} Thus the women who were empowered by Piłsudski’s establishment of equal voting rights among the sexes were those who benefitted themselves from the patriarchal order and had very little interest in tackling the class or race-based oppression of women.\footnote{Dubrowska, Magdalena. “Niepodległe i wymazane z historii. Wystawa: Niepodległe. Kobiety a dyskurs narodowy.” \textit{Magazyn Kuluralny} (2018). \url{http://cojestgrane24.wyborcza.pl/cjg24/1,13,24117837,146950,Niepodlegle-i-wymazane-z-historii---Wystawa--Niepo.html} (accessed March 6, 2019).} Luxemburg’s critique of bourgeois feminism, what we today refer to as “first wave feminism,” holds particular weight in contemporary Poland, where the nominal equality of men and women has allowed female politicians to rise to power, such as former prime minister Beata Szydło, while lower-class women remain marginalized by patriarchal social policies.
Uncovering the National Contributions of (Real) Women

In the remainder of this chapter, I will further elucidate how the museum’s works display its three major themes: the exclusion of real women from the national narrative, nationalism’s contradictory employment of female sexuality, and the intersections of class, race, and gender inequalities within the nation; beginning with the first of these. According to its description, this exhibition seeks to “reveal the gendered character of historical narratives by showing how women have been overlooked in the national narrative” as well as draw attention to the forgotten women who have played an active role in the nation, not only in Poland, but internationally. In highlighting the contributions of actual women in the national struggle, many of the works in this exhibition serve to challenge traditional gender hierarchies of the nation that confine women to the private sphere. As explained by Lipska in an interview with Vogue, “It seemed to me that showing the history of women who fought for independence, and partly their own independence, could become a repository of strength. To lay the foundation for building positive female myths. Not those connected with oppression or exclusion, but those based on subversive political imagination, agency, the power of breaking social conventions and restrictions that women impose on the dominant culture.”

Returning to Ciepielewskas’s work, this portrait of Rosa Luxemburg serves to highlight the contributions of a forgotten female figure. Lipska explains, that Luxembourg is featured at the forefront of this exhibition, and in several additional works throughout, because she is an example of a female figure that has largely been overlooked by the national narrative. While

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Luxembourg has been practically erased from Polish history, her writings and works on nationalism, are particularly relevant today. Lipska argues, “the continued saliency of her ideas on nationalisms and the rebellion of unprivileged classes, show that she is an extremely up-to-date political thinker.” In Ciepielewski’s portrayal of Luxembourg, as shown above, she is holding a flag that reads “heimat” (homeland). The words at the bottom of the work complete this well-known saying, “Heimat ist da wo da Herz ist” (home is where the heart is). According to the museum’s description of the work, this is in reference to Luxembourg’s contention that “nationality is not defined to the borders of a nation-state,” and also reflects Luxembourg’s multinational upbringing, having being born in Russian-occupied Poland, moving to Germany as a young adult, and later returning to Poland in 1905 to participate in the nationalist struggle. Ciepielewski’s inclusion of this aphorism in her work might also serve to reflect on a similar notion as that put forth by Virginia Woolf in her work “Three Guineas,” in which she famously remarks, “As a woman, I have no country. As a woman, I want no country. As a woman, my country is the whole world.” Woolf, like Luxembourg, recognized that the interests of women are universally understood as secondary, if not antithetical, to the interest of the nation, as the nation is understood to depend on the submission of women for its survival.

However, Luxembourg is by no means the only woman whose achievements have been left out of the national narrative. In another work, Zuzanna Janin points to the largely overlooked role that women played in the creation of the first independent trade union in Communist Poland: Solidarność. Janin juxtaposes two photographs depicting the decisive protest out of which

Solidarność would emerge, in a shipyard of Gdansk. The photo on the left is an actual photograph from this protest, while the photograph on the right is a dramatized recreation of the event taken from a film about Solidarność’s founder, Lech Wałęsa, entitled “Wałęsa. Man of Hope.” Janin photoshops the images in order to reverse the two figures leading the protest in each photograph. While the actual photograph shows one of the female leaders of the movement, Ewa Ossowska, standing alongside Walesa. In the scene from the movie, she is replaced by a man. The manner in which this event is remembered and dramatized in the film demonstrates how men are regarded as national heroes by “official” historical narratives, while the actual women who played a decisive role in nationalist struggles are made invisible.

Sanja Iveković’s work, *Invisible Women of Solidarity*, also reflects the unsung role played by women in the Solidarity movement. Iveković’s work is a play off an iconic Solidarity poster encouraging Poles to vote in the first democratic elections following the country’s transition from communism in 1989. While the original poster depicts Gary Cooper, a fictional character from the American Western *High Noon*, Iveković’s version features a silhouette of a woman. According to the museum’s description, “The work questions the manner of representing women in history while undermining the masculine symbolism that appropriates and marginalizes the accomplishments of women.” While the works in the National Museum in Warsaw portray women as passive and symbolic characters of the national narrative, in reality, Polish women played a significant role in the national struggles for independence. As Iveković’s work demonstrates, the participation of women in the Solidarity movement was essential for its

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success. It was a female crane operator, Anna Walentynowicz, who initiated the first of Solidarity’s many strikes. However, in Gdansk, female demonstrators were met with a banner reading, “women, don’t disturb us, we are fighting for Poland.” Moreover, while women made up 50% of the movement’s membership, only one woman was included in its board of leaders. Women were also active in the nation’s fight for independence throughout the partitions, as well as during the Nazi invasion of the Second World War. Patryk Zakrzewski explains that during the era of partitions women initially engaged in the national struggle in manners considered to be appropriate for their gender, i.e. embodying the model of the patriotic mother, reproducing the next generation, instilling patriotic values in their children, and tending to wounded soldiers. However, Zakrzewski explains that women increasingly became involved in military combat.

For instance, in 1912, female legions were formed to fulfill tasks such as mail delivery, provisional formations, and even espionage. While the commander of the Polish forces, Marshal Piłsudski forbade the participation of female legions in military combat, there are reports of women, like Zofia Plewińska, joining the fight in masculine disguise. While Zakrzewski notes that women’s engagement in the national struggle proved a useful bargaining chip in their quest for suffrage following the nation’s gaining of independence, this did not greatly improve the lives of a majority of Polish women as they were still understood as the keepers of the domestic sphere. This is a rather common occurrence in nationalist movements. The temporary disregard for traditional national gender roles during the national struggle is excused by

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extenuating circumstances.\textsuperscript{165} However, following the gaining or regaining of sovereignty, the restoration of “traditional” gender roles is understood as necessary for the restoration of an “authentic” national identity.\textsuperscript{166} Ranjoo Seodu Herr explains that this “putting women back into their place,” serves as a means of naturalizing the nationalist project. The reinstatement of a gender hierarchy, modeled after that of the family unit, serves to reinforce the notion of the nation as an “extended family.”\textsuperscript{167} The enforcement of a strict gender hierarchy not only facilitates internal legitimacy for the national project, but it also serves to assert the nation’s masculine image and external legitimacy. As Seodu Herr explains, nationalism is conceived as “an effort to revive the injured dignity of an "emasculated" nation that has been degraded by the "penetration, occupation, and cultural domination" of a foreign aggressor.”\textsuperscript{168}

Agnieszka Graff observes this as a common theme throughout Polish national history. Women are permitted to sidestep traditional gender roles when it is necessitated for “national survival ,” but only when this participation does not intercede with their paramount biological duties as “mothers of the nation.”\textsuperscript{169} As Araszkiewicz and Czarnacka explain, “The curse of Poland’s complicated, martyrological history is the ‘then you’ mechanism underlying its resistance movements, which allowed women to be involved in the struggle without their empowerment: first independence, then you; first socialism, then you; and finally: first capitalism, then you.”\textsuperscript{170} True equality for Polish women has always been postponed in this manner; as the interests of women are understood as secondary, if not antithetical to the interests

\textsuperscript{167} Herr, Ranjoo Seodu. “The Possibility of Nationalist Feminism.”
\textsuperscript{168} Herr, Ranjoo Seodu.
\textsuperscript{169} Herr, Ranjoo Seodu.
of the nation. In the inclusion of these works that bring light to actual women’s active involvement in the national struggle for independence, the exhibition serves as a critical counter to allegorical representations of the nation, such as those found in the National Museum in Warsaw, which reduce women to subservient symbols. These works instead speak to the individuality and interests of the real women of the nation; revealing that at times these interests may run counter to the stereotypically feminine ideals set by Polonia or the Matka Polka.

Uncovering the Contradictory Employment of Female Sexuality

In addition to revealing the absences of women from national narratives, this exhibition also serves to reflect on the manner in which women are typically presented in national narratives. Lipska explains that a central theme of the exhibition is the policing of women’s sexuality, in the name of the nation and the nation-building project. Similar to the argument advanced in my preceding chapter, Lipska explains in her interview with Vogue that the allegorical figures of the nation both deny and employ female sexuality. While the image of Polonia is eroticized as an object of desire, in order to inspire the self-sacrifice of men on behalf of the nation, the Matka Polka is denied sexuality as a symbol of the nation’s morality. There is, of course, a glaring contradiction in the expectation of the nation’s women here; they are to be chaste as embodiments of the nation’s morality and virtue, but also reproduce to ensure the nation’s continuity.

Rosa Luxemburg has been a symbol of alternative nationalism outside of Poland as well. For example Sanja Ivekovic’s brings light to the contradictory expectations of women within the Luxembourg in her work “Lady Rosa of Luxembourg,” a recreation of Luxembourg City’s online resource.

Monument of Remembrance. Write 1-2 lines of where this is located, what it looks like While the original monument, located in the city center, depicts a golden Nike, the goddess of freedom, in commemoration of Luxembourgers who lost their life during the World Wars. Ivekovic’s recreation of the monument ascribes corporeality to this allegorical figure by giving her the name of a real woman, Rosa Luxemburg and depicting her as an expectant mother. The public shock and backlash to Ivekovic’s recreation of the monument, which was placed in proximity to the original, is quite revealing in regard to continued saliency of these contradictory expectations placed on women. As part of the presentation of Ivekovic’s work, the museum also displayed multiple binders full of news articles from all over Europe, expressing disdain and skepticism towards this work. By ascribing corporeality to this allegorical feminine figure, Ivekovic reflects on the contradiction between the female form being used to symbolize freedom, while the reproductive freedom of actual women is limited in the forced fulfillment of their national duty as “mothers of the nation.”

The monument’s original inscription, “La Résistance, La Justice, La Liberté, L’Indépendance," is replaced with the demeaning German saying, “Kinder, Küche, Kirche” (Children, Kitchen, Church), describing the 19th century idea of women’s place in society; further shedding light on the contradictions between the use of feminine allegorical figure to symbolize principles of liberty and freedom, while actual women are denied such privileges.

Katarzyna Górska’s Ten Virgins, created in 1995, is a commentary on how women’s reproductive rights were sacrificed in the name of the nation through the 1993 anti-abortion act. The work is a collection of ten photographs of naked women holding their ultrasound results;

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revealing that half the women are pregnant while the other half are not. According to the exhibition’s description, the work draws attention to the issue of underground abortion which arose as a significant problem following the introduction of the 1993 anti-abortion act. Lipska explains that her intention in including this work was not to suggest that abortion is emancipating for women, but rather to draw attention to the contradictions of granting nominal equality for women, while not allowing women to make important decisions about their own bodies. As Lipska argues, “Either we will treat women subjectively, letting them decide in their own cause according to their beliefs, or the dream of an equality society will remain a fiction. Democracy cannot be built by exclusion and violence.”

Intersections of Class, Race, and Gender Inequalities within the Nation

In the previous two sections, I have demonstrated how the works of this exhibit demonstrate both the exclusion of real women from the national narrative and the, often contradictory, employment of female sexuality in the name of national preservation. However, as I will elucidate in this section, the gender inequalities perpetuated by patriarchal national narratives do not affect all women identically. Due to the intersections of race and class-based discrimination, women of color and working women, are disproportionately disenfranchised by patriarchal forms of ethnonationalism. In addition to the works described so far, the exhibition also features the work of many artists from the Global South throughout. In an interview with Girlsroom Lipska explains that her intention in including these work from artists from Africa and South America in the exhibition was to give the visitor a chance to get to know the perspective of

people who are left out of the discourse not only as a result of their gender, but also due to their race.\footnote{Szempruch, Matylda. “Niepodlegle Kobiety A Dyskurs Narodowy W MSN Jako Umacnianie Feministycznego Archiwum.” Girls Room (2018). http://www.girlsroom.pl/zycie/7698-niepodlegle-kobiety-a-dyskurs-narodowy-w-muzeum-sztuki-nowoczesnej-jako-krok-w-umacnianii (accessed March 14, 2019).} Further, Lipska explains that white European feminism has tended to distort the experiences of women of other cultures and thus, “the entire exhibition, tries to go beyond Western categories.”\footnote{Kusztra, Kaja. “Z dziejów emancypacji.” Vogue.pl (2018). https://www.vogue.pl/a/wlaczanie-wykluczonych (accessed March 19, 2019).} The inclusion of these works is crucial for the deconstruction of patriarchal national narratives. As Luxembourg had already argued, nominal gender equality that only really benefits white upper-class women is not true equality. In fact, white upper-class women often benefit from patriarchal forms of nationalism. The exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities by patriarchal forms of ethno-nationalism is often justified in the name of (white) women’s protection. Kudzanai Chiurai’s short film, \emph{We Live in Silence}, brings together the themes of women as well as ethnic minorities being left out of the national narrative. A still from Chiurai’s work depicting a black woman, dressed in a white suit, being resurrected in the image of Jesus is the last work displayed in the exhibition, its final word so-to-speak. Chiurai explains he intended the depiction of Jesus as a female to initiate questions about authority and gender.\footnote{Blignaut, Charl. “Jesus is a black woman.” City Press (2012). http://www.goodman-gallery.com/files/upload/news/19207Newsjesusisablackwomanbycharlblignaut.pdf (accessed March 5, 2019).} In the Polish context, this image serves to challenge exclusivist articulations of national identity which have historically been expressed through the allegorical national figure of the white Virgin Mary.

In addition to reducing the many women to passive embodiments of national culture and vessels of national identity, the presentation of national identity through a singular and homogenized body effectively ignores or “paints” over alternative identities, ethnicities and
religions, that have made up the Polish nation for centuries, for instance Jews, Tatars, and Roma, among others. While the racial and ethnic composition of contemporary Poland is largely homogeneous, the nation has a rich history of diversity. The depiction of the nation as an innocent white woman, as in the National Museum in Warsaw, ignores the reality that the nation’s homogeneous ethnic composition today is largely the result of the violent extermination of its Jewish minority during its Nazi occupation in WWII and its subsequent isolation during the period of its incorporation into the Soviet Bloc.

Preceding the era of partitions, Poland was noteworthily tolerant of the diverse religions and ethnicities that made up the nation. Hugh Trevor-Roper argues that Poland was the most tolerant country in Europe from the 11th century until the era of partitions.\textsuperscript{183} In the mid-16th century, 80\% of the world’s Jews were living in Poland, namely, on behalf of King Casimir III’s granting of a safe haven to this population of people during the crusades.\textsuperscript{184} Poland’s Jewish population began to face blatant antisemitism in the 18th and 19th century as nationalists began to look for a scapegoat on which to place the blame for the nation’s unsuccessful struggle for independence. Roman Dmowski and his fellow Endeks excluded Jews from the narrow definition of Polishness, but they did not advocate for violence against this portion of the population. The annihilation of Poland’s Jewish community was directed by the German Nazis during WWII.\textsuperscript{185} Before the Holocaust, Poland had one of the largest Jewish populations in Europe, numbering around 3.3 million. After, this population was reduced to around 45,000.\textsuperscript{186} Today, the heritage of the nation’s once very large Jewish population is for the most part

\textsuperscript{184} Sanford, George. 2010. Historical dictionary of Poland. Lanham, Md: Scarecrow Press.
\textsuperscript{186} https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/remaining-jewish-population-of-europe-in-1945
excluded from the national narrative. Erica Leher observes both “stark absences and awkward ‘otherings’ of Jews” in her 2017 study of Warsaw Museums which subject around Polish national identity and history. Leher contributes this to what she terms, a “new ghettoization of Jews,” in which the stories of Poland’s Jewish community are confined to their own separate museums while remaining absent in institutions seen as telling “real” Polish stories.

The works in the National Museum in Warsaw that present Polish national identity as exclusively Catholic and white, overlook the presence of Jewish people in the Polish national narrative. Similarly, the myth of Poland as the bulwark of European Christendom from Ottoman invaders to the East overlooks six centuries of Muslim Tatars fighting alongside their fellow Poles to defend the nation. The Tatars, descendants of Turkic peoples from Central Asia, have called the modern day territory of Poland their home since the beginning of the 14th century. During the Russo-Polish War, the Tatar cavalry played a significant role in holding back the invading Bolsheviks. Like Poland’s Jewish population, the Tatars were the victims of significant casualties during WWII. Today the community of Tatars in Poland is quite small, estimates of their population range between 2000 to 5000. The Roma population are similarly unrepresented in these presentations of national identity. Before the period of partitions, the Roma people were granted full citizenship by the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth Constitution. The Roma were also victims of the Nazi-led genocide during WWII.

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188 Leher, Erica. “Hiding in plain sight: Voice and silence in contemporary Polish curating.”
In including the work of artists from the Global South, Lipska is perhaps challenging Polish, as well as other European, national narratives that have historically constructed their identity as “civilized” nations in alterity to the supposed “barbarism” of nations to the East or South, by pointing to the historic and continued intimacies between ethnic groups. Another work in the exhibition, an excerpt from Emma Wolukau-Wanambwa’s short film, *Paradise* (2012), serves to undermine this racial binary by telling the story of Polish refugees relocated to Uganda following Nazi Germany’s invasion of Russia in 1942. Tens of thousands of Polish civilians were evacuated to nations throughout Asia and Africa, including Kenya, Uganda, Tanganyika and Northern Rhodesia. The retelling of this moment of history, in which the Polish people were very much dependent on the people and places they have historically claimed superiority over, is quite significant, as today the country actively rejects refugees from Africa and the Middle East, based on the belief that the cultures of these nations are “backwards” and misogynistic. The aim of this thesis has been to emphasize the danger in the practice of gendered and racialized othering as a means of national identity formation; as it dehumanizes ethnic and religious minorities and casts women of the nation as “vessels” of the race, rather than autonomous citizens. The popularization of exclusive, ethnic-based, national narratives has resulted in the restriction of women’s reproductive rights, the defunding of women’s advocacy NGOs, as well as an increase of violence towards ethnic minorities.

As globalization ushers in the further integration of national economies, the myth of ethnically homogeneous nations will become increasingly difficult to maintain, as labor migrates

from the peripheries of the global economy to the center. China’s New Silk Road project will incorporate Poland in its revival of this ancient trade route; uniting the East and West like never before. Thus Poland, as well as other European nations, must work towards more inclusive forms of nationalism in order to better cope with (and perhaps even learn to celebrate) the inevitable multiculturalism that globalization will usher in.
Chapter Five: Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have analyzed two museum exhibitions in Warsaw with the aims of revealing how contemporary nationalist movements (have) and continue to confine women to symbolic roles as the bearers of national identity in the production and propagation of exclusionary national narratives, as well as how this might be countered to allow for a more inclusive form of nationalism. In my third chapter I looked at the Krzycząc: Polska! Niepodległa 1918 exhibition, housed in the National Museum in Warsaw, as an illustrative example of how the Law and Justice party has employed physical and symbolic femininity in order to create a discursive condition of crisis; positioning themselves as the “patriarchal protectors” of the nation to legitimize their authoritarian tendencies. I argue that the representation of the Polish nation through a homogeneous female body has resulted in the policing of women’s bodies as a means of national preservation, as well as the violent exclusion of ethnic minorities who are not represented by this national embodiment.

In my fourth chapter, I looked at the Niepodległe exhibition, housed in the Warsaw Modern Museum as illustrative of an alternative, and more inclusive means of national identity formation. While the representation of the Polish nation through a homogeneous female body in the National Museum is reflective of a patriarchal form of nationalism in which the policing of women’s bodies is understood as a means of national preservation, and all those who are not represented by this national embodiment are violently excluded. The exhibition in the Warsaw Modern Museum, on the other hand, presents an alternative, and more inclusive, form of nationalism, through acknowledging the heterogenous roles and identities taken up by the actual women of the nation. To conclude, I argue that the deconstructive and open-ended form of national identity and narrative formation illustrated by the latter exhibition might be utilized as a
model of resistance to the exclusive and increasingly illiberal form of nationalism being advanced by the Law and Justice party in contemporary Poland.

Since 2015, PiS has taken control of the Constitutional Tribunal, the Supreme Court, as well as the country’s institutions of education, culture, and public media. While control over the former two has allowed PiS to carry out their political project largely unchecked, control over the latter three has allowed the party to present this extension of power to the executive branch as necessary, if not welcome, under present circumstances. In addition to taking de-facto control over the constitutional tribunal, state media, and ministries of culture and education, the party has enacted a counterterrorism law that grants Poland’s domestic intelligence agency the ability to access to personal data without approval from a court and expands the powers of law enforcement in any situation in which there is a suspicion that a crime relating to terrorism might occur. These illiberal transformations of Poland’s democracy and the imperilment of the rule of law, have prompted the E.U. to invoke article 7 against Poland. Article 7 allows the E.U. to invoke sanctions against member states which breach its fundamental values of “human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities.” While a number of these values have been undermined by the Law and Justice party’s exclusive nationalism, it was ultimately the party’s judicial reforms which prompted the invocation of Article 7. The party has employed its extended powers to

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197 “What is Article 7 of the EU Treaty?.” Deutsche Welle
curb the resistance of its adversaries, increasingly negating the possibility for democratic negotiations.

Although the country is heading down a dangerous path towards authoritarianism, there is a possibility for resistance while remnants of the country’s democracy remain intact. I emphasize that this resistance must be anti-essentialist. Throughout Europe, especially in the Nordic countries, we can observe essentialist forms of feminism forming alliances with exclusive and essentialist forms of nationalism. In what has been described as femonationalism and homonationalism, anti-Muslim racism is justified in the name of protecting the rights of women and the LGBTQ from supposedly homophobic and misogynistic peoples of the Middle East and North Africa. \(^{198}\) Anti-racist, or anti-essentialist feminism, on the other hand, is critical of the mobilization of racism in the name of the supposed “protection” of women, and refuses to be complicit in a form of nationalism that limits national membership to a single “bloodline, tradition or religion.” \(^{199}\) As Cynthia Cockburn explains, non-essentialist feminist movements constitute a powerful counter to exclusive forms of nationalism through, “embracing difference, challenging values that exclude people, believing in the capabilities of every individual to contribute to society, and working to develop common values into something that can support every individual in their diversity.” \(^{200}\) Non-essentialist form of feminism may offer a means by which Polish nationalism might come to accommodate “a multitude of experiences” as constitutive of its unique and open-ended culture. This will require a move away from popular


ideas of the nation as a natural extension of the family and thus possessing some pre-established or refined essence or a preordained hierarchical order amongst its members.\(^\text{201}\)

Such a project is already being taken up in Poland. As Bogumila Hall explains, women’s movements have been at the forefront of the struggle against PiS’s authoritarianism, “aligning their quest for reproductive rights and bodily autonomy with the larger resistance to the ruling party.”\(^\text{202}\) While the hegemonic national narrative in Poland celebrates and reinforces a ‘natural’ sexual division of labor in the family in order to ensure women’s adherence to their role as physical and symbolic bearers of national identity; the recent mobilization of Poland’s feminist movement demonstrates the powerful capability of women to resist essentialist understandings of national identity, by refusing to allow their bodies to be made its markers and conduits. We can see this manifested in the Black Protests of 2016 and 2017, in which women took to the streets all over the country dressed in black to demonstrate that they would not be treated as incubators to be regulated by the state. The first of the Black Protests were organized in September 2016, following the proposal of a new bill in March of 2016 that would have made abortion illegal in almost all cases, and punishable by jail time. Organizers of the movement estimate that 200,000 people participated in protests around the country, while nearly half a million wore black in solidarity. While the 2016 protests were successful in installing the bill in a subcommittee, the 2019 elections will be a significant determinate of the bill’s fate.\(^\text{203}\)


The possibility for resistance was also manifested in the more recent, Sto Flag (One hundred flag) parade organized by the Warsaw Modern Art Museum in celebration of the centenary of women’s rights, but also in protest to the continued subordination of women in the national narrative. Individuals were invited to create their own version of the Polish flag, one which they felt better represented their own experiences and identity. The aim of the parade was not to create a new flag that would exhaustively represent all Polish experiences and identities; but rather to create a space where a multitude of flags, representing a multitude of subjectivities might fly freely and proudly.\textsuperscript{204} The Sto Flag parade, as well as the aforementioned far-right nationalist marches in Warsaw, demonstrate how the battle over the articulation of Polish national identity is taking place in the streets and in cultural institutions like the museum. These efforts have become increasingly crucial as the country nears the 2019 parliamentary elections. These elections will determine the future of the aforementioned bill proposing the total ban of abortion, and thus the future of Polish women’s reproductive rights. More broadly, this election will determine whether the Law and Justice party will continue to enjoy their parliamentary majority and be given four more years to further transform the country’s democracy into an authoritarian state and solidify their rule.

Preceding the 2019 elections, the Law and Justice party have continued their scapegoating approach for accruing political support, this time targeting the LGBT community. As Kaczyński stated in April of 2019, “We are dealing with a direct attack on the family and children – the sexualization of children, that entire LGBT movement, gender...This is imported, but they today actually threaten our identity, our nation, its continuation and therefore the Polish

state.” Kaczyński statement demonstrates how the party continues to champion an exclusive form of Polishness, understood to be inextricably linked to Catholicism and conservative family values. Threats to this narrowed understanding of Polishness are articulated as threats to the nation’s women and children. In 2015, the influx of refugees of the Muslim faith was feared to undermine the nation’s Catholic majority. In 2015 and again in 2019, policies which aim to prevent gender and sexual-orientation-based discrimination are feared as threatening traditional family-values. The Law and Justice party seek to garner legitimacy and political support through presenting itself as the patriarchal protectors of a nation “under siege.”

To further ensure the continuation of its rule, we can observe the party employing its expanded power to crack-down on attempts to resist this exclusive form of nationalism. For instance, in response to the aforementioned Black Protests, PiS employed its control over state media to shame women who participated in the protests as ignoring their domestic duties, in the coverage of the event by the public Polish broadcaster, TVP. The day after the 2017 Black Protest, police raided the offices of two women’s NGOs in four cities and seized their computers and documents as part of an ongoing investigation. By positioning themselves as the “patriarchal protectors” of the nation to legitimize their authoritarian tendencies, PiS has been able to initiate an “illiberal transformation” of Poland’s democracy, endangering the civil liberties, not only of those who are subjugated or excluded from the national narrative but, of all Poles. The dominance of PiS’s version of national identity, over alternative articulations, is

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further illustrated in a scene from the Independence Day march of 2017. In the sea of nearly 60,000 participants of the march, many of which members of radical right parties, 14 women sat in a circle of resistance holding a sign reading “STOP RASIZMOWI” (stop fascism). The women were verbally and physically attacked; one woman was left unconscious after being picked up and dropped on the ground. While authorities opened an investigation on the incident, none of the women’s attackers were charged. Instead, thirteen of the women were charged with obstructing a lawful assembly.

Elżbieta Podleśna, one of the 14 women who attempted to resist the 2017 nationalist March, is again speaking out against the Law and Justice party’s fear mongering. However, we can further observe the waning possibility for resistance exemplified by Podlesna arrest on Monday, May 6, 2018, for creating posters depicting the icon of the Virgin Mary housed in the Jasna Gora monastery (sometimes referred as the Queen of Poland) with a rainbow Halo. Poland’s Interior and Administration Minister Joachim Brudziński, a member of the ruling Law and Justice Party, announced on Twitter that police had arrested Podlesna on grounds of “profaning the image of the #Czestochowa Mother of God.” Podlesna’s poster undertakes a similar project as the works in the Modern art museum; taking a national symbol currently used to justify national exclusions --and subverting it as to make it a symbol of resistance. However, as demonstrated through Podlesna’s arrest, the possibilities for this type of resistance have become increasingly precarious. Again, I argue that it is imperative that we be paying attention to what is happening in contemporary Poland, as this situation demonstrates how discourses of

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209 Żukowski, Grzegorz. “Why we must support 14 women determined to fight hate in Poland” Amnesty International (2019).
210 Żukowski. “Why we must support 14 women determined to fight hate in Poland”
211 Żukowski.
emergency or crisis, articulated through the medium of the women’s body, may serve to vindicate the authoritarian transformation of a country’s democracy, putting the rights and liberties of not only women and minorities at stake but of all Polish citizens.
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