THE PARADOX OF TRANSNATIONAL (NEO)NATIONALISM: NEO-NATIONALIST ENTANGLEMENTS WITH CAPITAL-"ISMS" IN MODERN POLAND

Madison Tepper

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Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Thesis Committee:
Dr. Mauro Caraccioli, Chair
Dr. Timothy Luke
Dr. François Debrix
ABSTRACT

The Polish Independence Day march in Warsaw in November 2017 drew a flurry of international media attention for its shocking mass display of far-right nationalism, connections to neo-Nazi groups, and feature of openly racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, and homophobic slogans. However, the dangerously “othering” nationalist ideologies expressed in Poland during this demonstration are far from unique. Over the past 20-30 years, eerily similar nationalist movements have simultaneously emerged across Eastern Europe and the West. Paradoxically, the nation-state has perhaps never had less agency as increasingly global capitalism continues to encroach upon the dominance of the nation itself. I argue that this trend of new nationalist movements indicates a departure from the traditional definitions of nationalism that requires a distinct category, which I refer to as neo-nationalism. In Chapter 1, I differentiate neo-nationalism from conventional understandings of nationalist politics and provide a working definition of neo-nationalism in the twenty-first century. I aim to show that a contextualization of these neo-nationalist movements alongside increasingly global capitalism is essential to understanding the othering natures of neo-nationalist ideologies and their paradoxical nature – both national and transnational, both shocking and entirely banal. I illustrate this by returning to the case of modern Poland, employing a visual rhetorical analysis from a Marxist-feminist perspective in order to demonstrate the manifestations of particular and dangerous dynamics of othering in Polish neo-nationalism. I refer to these dynamics as “capital-isms,” such that they are the “shocking” expression of what are in fact pervasive prejudices brought to the surface by the changing conditions of global capitalism. In Chapter 2, I examine the rhetoric surrounding the Polish Independence Day march in 2017 to highlight the paradoxes and power mechanisms at play in Polish neo-nationalism. I follow with an exploration of the rhetoric employed by the Polish far-right nationalist party, Law and Justice, with particular contextualization with regard to its relationship with the European Union in Chapter 3. Finally, I conclude this thesis by considering the implications of this research for the study of neo-nationalism going forward.

Keywords: nationalism, neo-nationalism, capitalism, globalization, Poland, Europe, USSR, European Union, Law and Justice Party, PiS
GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

The Polish Independence Day march in Warsaw in November 2017 drew a flurry of international media attention for its shocking mass display of far-right nationalism, connections to neo-Nazi groups, and feature of openly racist, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, and homophobic slogans. However, the dangerously “othering” nationalist ideologies expressed in Poland during this demonstration are far from unique. Over the past 20-30 years, eerily similar nationalist movements have simultaneously emerged across Eastern Europe and the West. In this thesis, I theorize the Polish far-right nationalism on display at the Independence Day march as part of a broader trend of neo-nationalist movements, which I demonstrate are paradoxical in nature. After establishing the defining characteristics of neo-nationalism as a phenomenon, I highlight these paradoxes through an analysis of Polish neo-nationalist rhetoric. Furthermore, by placing this rhetoric within its socioeconomic and historical contexts, I demonstrate that the “shocking” display of far-right nationalism in the march is an expression of what are in fact pervasive prejudices brought to the surface by the changing conditions of global capitalism.
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INTRODUCTION

On November 11th 2017, coinciding with Poland’s Independence Day, a march of approximately 60,000\(^1\) descended upon Warsaw. The march was primarily organized by two radical far-right white nationalist groups – All-Polish Youth and National Radical Camp (ONR).\(^2\) Though many participants in the march claimed that their presence was purely in celebration of Independence Day and did not identify themselves as belonging to these white nationalist groups or ideologies, their presence was nevertheless overwhelming. The event attracted not just Polish white nationalists and neo-fascists, but also far-right nationalists from across Europe and the United States. It was impossible to miss the mass display of signs and banners bearing openly racist rhetoric such as “White Europe of Brotherly Nations” and “Clean Blood,” or the chanting of slogans such as “Pure Poland, white Poland!”, “We want God!” (a reference to an old Polish religious and nationalist song), and “no to Islam,” among other overt and covert anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, xenophobic, and homophobic cries.\(^3\)

To understand the nationalist display that took place in Poland in the fall of 2017 requires not just an understanding of the evolution of nationalist expressions within the Polish nation-state itself. Further contextualization is needed within the reimagining of the national question that is taking place in the West in the present phase of global capitalism. In doing so, we can observe a

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\(^1\) Some estimates are as high as 100,000, while the organizing parties claim it exceeded that estimate. See: [https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/thousands-fascists-march-warsaw-171111052813155.html](https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/11/thousands-fascists-march-warsaw-171111052813155.html).


larger phenomenon which I refer to as “neo-nationalism,” a new wave of nationalism which is rearing its ugly head not just in Poland but across the Western and West-adjacent world.\(^4\)

I aim to show that Poland’s “shocking” display of neo-nationalism is anything but, and that it meaningfully coincides with several overlapping political trends: the recent success of Polish right-wing populist-nationalist party Law and Justice (PiS) in gaining a parliamentary majority; increasing hostility toward queer people and people of color under the PiS-led government; growing global and domestic socioeconomic inequality; Poland’s tenuous relationship with the EU; the general Eurocentric discourse surrounding the Middle Eastern and African refugee crisis; the growing prominence of neo-nationalist movements in global norm-setting (neo)liberal

\(^4\) Though I primarily reference the Polish case, these neo-nationalist dynamics can be observed in numerous Western and Eastern European nation-states, including but not limited to: The United States, Hungary, France, Turkey, Russia, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Austria.
\(^6\) Adam Stepien. *Some of the marchers carried the flags of far-right groups like the National Radical Camp.* November 11, 2017. Agencja Gazeta, Reuters, Warsaw, Poland.
countries such as the United States, France, the United Kingdom, Germany, and so on. Unsurprisingly, the convergence of these polarizing trends creates spaces in which ideologies rooted in “otherness” and “othering” can flourish.

Furthermore, it is not irrelevant that the majority of participants in the Polish independence march claimed not to subscribe to the organizing parties but nevertheless participated in a march that was publicly known to be organized by and for far-right nationalists. Nor is it surprising that Polish government officials would not initially acknowledge the far-right nationalist involvement with the march, nonetheless condemn it beyond disavowing the beliefs of “a small group of extremists” who “do not represent the whole.” The march and so much of the rhetoric surrounding it is shocking by design, intentionally spectacular, such that it is perceived as a departure from the norm rather than a reification thereof.

This narrative is not unique to Poland. Eerily similar dynamics can be seen throughout Western and Eastern Europe, as well as in the United States. The confluence of these common themes across borders reveals that neo-nationalist movements neither occur in a vacuum, nor are they isolated incidents. In fact, analyzing neo-nationalism as part of a larger phenomenon demonstrates that while each of these neo-nationalist movements have the appearance of being nationally specific, the essentialization of the nation-state within frameworks of international politics and global capitalism conceals the fact that these so-called “nationalist” movements are, paradoxically, not especially unique to their respective countries of origin.

Though the narrowly-focused international media coverage of the Polish Independence Day demonstration might indicate otherwise, neither the current iteration of Polish nationalism, nor its display in the march, nor still the conditions in which it has emerged are particularly
In the last three years alone, what most have termed “extreme,” “far-right,” or “populist” nationalist movements have seemingly abruptly gained significant ground in the most politically and economically powerful countries in the world. We need look no further than the United Kingdom’s dramatic popular vote to exit the European Union in “Brexit,” the ascendance of the alt-right movement and the Charlottesville marches in the United States, or, the continued hold of the Front National in France and the far-right parties and movements it birthed in the lead-up to and aftermath of the 2017 French presidential election to find evidence of the rise of “spectacular” hyper-nationalist movements that hold strong public support.

Similar movements have cropped up across Europe, from its Western borders to Eastern Europe and Russia. This trend is particularly interesting given that the nation-state as a political entity has perhaps never had less agency. As capitalist structures become increasingly globalized via transnational corporations, foreign direct investment, transnational blocs (such as the European Union), trade agreements, and other supranational institutions not beholden to the state, the structures of global capital have largely superseded the presupposed position of authority once held by the nation-state. The legitimacy of the nation-state further comes into question as it fails – as many of the Western nation-states have in the wake of the 2008 financial collapse – to respond to crises and inequalities created by the capitalist mechanisms to which it is bound, while the stateless bourgeois and global capitalist structures continue to thrive on the exploitation essential to their survival.8

7 The vast majority of international media coverage, with a few notable exceptions, focused on the Polish Independence Day march as an isolated incident, without establishing connections to domestic Polish nationalist ideologies or the international trend thereof.
8 My analysis is largely informed by William Robinson’s conception of global capitalism theory. Robinson works within the Gramscian tradition of historicism while expanding upon Gramsci’s conceptions of ‘hegemony,’ and ‘capitalist class,’ among others, to illuminate the mechanisms by which processes of globalization and global capitalism have created spaces in which a
In this project, I employ visual-rhetorical analysis from a Marxist-feminist and post-colonial perspective to examine the Polish case, which I argue can be useful in understanding the many paradoxes of this new wave of nationalist movements on a grander scale. As I develop throughout this thesis, it is precisely within and because of the spaces created by global capitalism’s erosion of the nation-state that new paradoxically transnational forms of nationalism – among them neo-nationalist movements – are able to take hold within the Western and West-adjacent nation-state. Specifically, when the state is incapable of adequately responding to the socioeconomic hardship that is created by this transnational capitalist class to various extents on a global scale, it employs a tactic of “othering” or scapegoating populations such as entire races, genders, cultures, nationalities, ethnicities, sexual orientations, and religions. The nation-state further subjugates those marginalized populations with the purported goal of addressing the concerns of those who are deemed part of the nation-state’s core. In the process, that re-inclusion takes place at the supposedly necessary expense of those who are excluded from it, both externally and internally.

Thus, this phenomenon of neo-nationalism has emerged in response to growing uncertainty with regard to the continued viability of the nation-state in an increasingly global capitalist political economy. Its explicit purpose is to reaffirm the legitimacy of the nation-state by placing responsibility for the struggles of its citizens on entire populations which are perceived as outside of the nation-state itself, a process and ideology that is incredibly dangerous.

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dominating transnational or supranational capitalist class structures have emerged. He refers to this global bourgeoisie as the transnational capitalist class (TCC), a group composed of those “social and class groups around the world who are integrated from above into global capitalism and whose own reproduction depends on a stable, open, and expanding global economy.” See: William I. Robinson, Global Capitalism and the Crisis of Humanity. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2014: 35.
Throughout the following chapters, I will refer to the ideological, systemic subjugation of these various populations (via racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia, homophobia, Islamophobia, etc.) by neo-nationalist ideologies for motives rooted in capitalism as “capital-ist” or as distinct “capital-isms.” I use this terminology as a descriptor in order to emphasize the fact that, as I demonstrate through visual-rhetorical analysis throughout this paper, the justification for this marginalization is frequently couched in the logic and language of economic benefit, in capitalistic notions of progress and efficiency.

My contention is that any analysis of modern (neo)nationalism (and the ideological othering inherent to it) that takes seriously the historical material contexts from which it emerges cannot stop where the borders of the nation-state do, but must rather take into account the transnational, international, national, and local. Therefore, analysis of a paradoxical phenomenon such as neo-nationalism must itself take on a paradoxical quality, such that it utilizes several units of analysis in ways which may initially seem antithetical to one another and to the broader argument. Even when examining the particular manifestations of neo-nationalism in a specific nation-state such as Poland, failure to take international and transnational political, social, and economic contexts into account in addition to those of the nation-state itself risks the analytical exclusion of factors crucial to understanding its emergence in a given nation-state, such as the language and symbols which function as much above the level of the nation-state as they do within it, even if seemingly paradoxically. This global decontextualization also prevents the detection of larger transnational trends which are incredibly concerning and perilous. In what follows, I establish the prevailing definitions of nationalism, differentiate neo-nationalism from these understandings of nationalism, and provide a working definition of neo-nationalism. Methodologically, I argue that a contextualization of visual-rhetorical representations of these neo-
nationalist movements alongside increasingly global capitalism is essential to understanding the othering natures of neo-nationalist ideologies and their paradoxical nature. In Chapter 1, I establish the theoretical and methodological lens I employ in this paper, and I provide a working definition of the neo-nationalist movements that I am attempting to examine. In Chapters 2 and 3, I then return to the case of modern Poland in order to demonstrate the paradoxical manifestations of these particular dynamics of othering, which I refer to in this thesis as “capital-isms,” in Polish neo-nationalism. I employ a top-down analysis of visual-rhetorical representations of neo-nationalism surrounding the 2017 Polish Independence Day march in 2017 in Chapter 2, followed by a bottom-up analysis of Law and Justice Party rhetoric in the context of European Union dynamics in Chapter 3. Finally, I conclude this thesis by considering the implications of this research for the study of neo-nationalism going forward.
CHAPTER ONE:  
THEORIZING NEO-NATIONALISM  

NEO-NATIONALISM DEFINED  

Few scholars have revisited the essential conceptualizations of nationalism (and nationalist movements have hardly been reconsidered) since the important contributions of canonical thinkers of nationalism such as Ernest Gellner, Benedict Anderson, and Eric Hobsbawm. Yet a contemporary reconsideration of nationalist movements themselves presents a critical opportunity. While conventional conceptions of nationalism are absolutely crucial to the practice of studying specific nationalism(s), I argue that the current wave of nationalist movements located primarily in Europe displays particular features which demand a new classification, distinct from nationalism in and of itself.

Generally speaking, modern scholarship on nationalism agrees that the nation can be considered a social construction or a cultivated “imagined community,” as famously theorized by Benedict Anderson. Nationalism, in Ernest Gellner’s account, can be broadly considered “primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and national unit should be congruent,”9 which as Eric Hobsbawm further developed, “implies that the political duty of [citizens] to the polity which encompasses and represents the nation…overrides all other public obligations, and in extreme cases (such as wars) all other obligations of whatever kind.”10 This latter quality of public obligations – a crucial factor of the nationalism that Anderson, Gellner, and Hobsbawm were describing – has all but disappeared from nationalist movements, to the point where the citizen’s obligation to the nation-state has become so rote in the West as to be assumed

a priori. Thus, nationalist movements need no longer create submission of citizens to the nation-state, and by extension, the citizen’s power over the state occurs only in passing.

The new nationalist movements that I describe in this thesis have a decidedly different focus – one that explicitly pursues the perpetuation of capital-isms, of marginalization justified in capitalist terms, as its primary goal, rather than a side-effect. At stake is the re-centering of power by way of a nominal revitalization of the nation. I employ the term coined by Samir Amin – “neo-nationalism” – to designate this new iteration of nationalism.\footnote{See: Samir Amin. \textit{Class and Nation, Historically and in the Current Crisis}. New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1980: 35.} Neo-nationalism as a category does not in any way eschew the incredibly valuable and necessary work of classic theories of nationalism, but rather builds upon facets of this scholarship in order to mark a change in the nationalist zeitgeist.

The vast majority of authors writing on these new nationalist movements have used the preexisting vocabulary of prior nationalist narratives to differentiate them from nationalism in itself, referring to them as “popular nationalism,” “populist nationalism,” or “ethno-nationalism.” However, I argue that none of these terms adequately capture the full scope of characteristics of these movements. To refer to neo-nationalist movements as “popular” or “populist” would be misleading – neo-nationalism depends on an appearance of popular support but does not in fact require actual popular support, and the use of the term “populist” (itself an oft-contested term) obscures the fact that the leaders and parties of these new nationalist movements are always elites, though some may claim otherwise.

As is the case in Poland as well as in the majority of the other cases briefly mentioned above, neo-nationalist parties and candidates rely on a combination of strategic voter suppression,
manipulation of electoral processes, and a tactic of disinformation to maintain this appearance in order to create perceived legitimacy. Likewise, the term “ethno-nationalism” is insufficient here such that it captures only the ethnic, and perhaps racial facets of neo-nationalism (à cause de their interchangeable application in common usage, though the terms are not, in fact, synonymous), hence ignoring the other capital-isms to which I draw attention in this thesis. Furthermore, ethno-nationalism as a term is to some extent redundant and not descriptive of a phenomenon distinct from nationalism itself, which even in its most basic forms requires ethnicity/ethnicities around which national identity is initially constructed.\(^{12}\) Thus, the new nationalist movements being observed and explored in this work require an altogether new category – neo-nationalism.

Neo-nationalism, referred to in some scholarship as “new nationalism,” has only been discussed by a small handful of scholars whose approaches are largely disjointed. As such, the existing literature does not provide a clear and consistent set of defining characteristics.\(^{13}\) In the discipline of political science, scholarship on nationalism continues to be framed by the existing language of the aforementioned prominent theories of nationalism, rendering the language of neo-nationalism practically nonexistent in the field. Beyond the issue of language, analyses of neo-


nationalism within political science have rarely gone beyond the borders of the nation-state itself.\textsuperscript{14} These accounts presuppose the nation-state as static and the realm of interaction as \textit{international}. Hence, they fail to consider the national entanglements with the \textit{transnational}, which have only become more intertwined with increased globalization.\textsuperscript{15} As Robinson aptly notes, “nation-state-centric approaches reify institutions by substituting them for social forces and then giving them a fixed character in causal explanations, so that, for instance, national states are bestowed with agency in explaining global political and economic dynamics. Institutions such as states, however, are not actors with an independent life of their own; they are the products of social forces that reproduce as well as modify them and that are causal in historical explanations.”\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, they largely treat the public and economic spheres as separate, rather than themselves entangled and mutually constitutive. I argue that this essentialization of the nation-state and of public and private as distinct, disconnected categories within nationalism scholarship (and within the broader context of political science and international relations/studies) is not neutral. Rather, it is insidious such that it simultaneously conceals and upholds power structures of systemic socioeconomic

\textsuperscript{14} For example, a recent piece in \textit{The Economist} concludes that Poland is not a comparable case to far-right nationalism in states such as the US and Hungary simply because it is performing well economically while other nations face increasing socioeconomic hardship – I argue that looking at (neo)nationalism as a trend which can occur \textit{across} nation-state borders and not just within them demonstrates that this paradox is precisely demonstrative of a larger trend rooted in global capitalism. See: https://www.economist.com/europe/2018/04/21/polands-ruling-law-and-justice-party-is-doing-lasting-damage

\textsuperscript{15} For example, a February 2018 New York Times article by Stephen Erlanger and Marc Santora alleges that Polish nationalism “threatens Europe’s values, cohesion,” but conflates geographic Europe with the European Union and thus fails to recognize that the presence of neo-nationalist movements in nations across Europe in fact paints a rather cohesive picture of Europe’s current values, even if at odds with alleged values of the European Union. See: https://www.nytimes.com/2018/02/20/world/europe/poland-european-union.html

subjugation, which occur not just at the hands of nation-states, but also in the spaces of entanglement between the national and the international.

Introducing perspectives from other disciplines has proven to provide more insight to studies of neo-nationalism than analyses that have worked solely within the constraints of political science. The most comprehensive work on the trend of neo-nationalism thus far, compiled by André Gingrich and Marcus Banks in *Neo-Nationalism in Europe and Beyond: Perspectives from Social Anthropology*, introduces anthropological approaches into the conversation. The anthropological methods applied in this collection of works permit the authors to examine the culturally and nationally-specific facets of neo-nationalist movements without getting trapped by the nation-state as the unit of analysis. Furthermore, beyond incorporating transnational factors into their analyses, an anthropological focus examines political, social, and economic questions together, rather than as distinct “spheres,” a perspective I emulate in this thesis.

However, Gingrich and Banks’ edited volume lacks a single, clear definition of neo-nationalism or a set of broadly applicable features of neo-nationalist movements; it is vaguely defined only as “the nationalism of the current phase of transnational and global developments.”17 Additionally, as a result of the book being published in 2006, the contributing authors understandably could not account for trends in neo-nationalism that have only emerged in the last few years, namely the parliamentary legitimacy achieved by movements which they deem too extreme and illegitimate to be considered neo-nationalist.18 Others writing on this subject employ


18 Specifically, those movements engaging with pro-fascist, neo-Nazi, and other extreme right ideologies, which we have now seen gain incorporation into mainstream political parties and become elected and appointed to public office repeatedly. Ibid., 3-4.
the terms neo-nationalism and “new nationalism” without in any way qualifying what is meant by this terminology.

What the existing scholarship on nationalism and neo-nationalism lacks are theories of power and behavior which can account for the consistent ascendance of the same dominant groups – namely those of white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, Christian men – in neo-nationalist narratives, while remaining attentive to the oft-contradictory socioeconomic relations and cultural representations within a given nation-state. Thus, I aim to address these gaps in theory with the methodology and theory I utilize in this analysis of neo-nationalism. Specifically, I employ a method of visual-rhetorical analysis of expressions of neo-nationalism through a Marxist-feminist lens, which I argue brings to light the various paradoxes of neo-nationalist ideologies and movements.

The visual-rhetorical analysis that I use in this project is crucial to my argument, such that it enables the analysis of neo-nationalist narratives, language, and symbols as having a mutually constitutive, mobilizable, and tumultuous relationship with the political behavior/responses, logics, and ideologies thereof, often creating paradoxes and resulting in violence. As Murray Edelman notes in *Politics as Symbolic Action: Mass Arousal and Quiescence*,

> To explain political behavior as a response to fairly stable individual wants, reasoning, attitudes, and empirically based perceptions is therefore simplistic and misleading. Adequate explanation must focus on the complex element that intervenes between the environment and the behavior of human beings: creation and change in common meanings through symbolic apprehension in groups of people of interests, pressures, threats, and possibilities.¹⁹

This relationship and the paradoxes it generates are therefore concealed by our attempts to categorize, search for consistencies, and characterize “shocking” events such as the Polish

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Independence Day March of 2017 as “atypical” and “monstrous,” rather than acknowledging them as banal and quotidian. Therefore, “rather than taking it for granted that a [person] represents a stable set of political traits, beliefs, wants, and demands, we [must] search for the conditions and the mechanisms that evoke change or ambivalence in these respects.”20 Thus, if we understand neo-nationalism as paradoxical at several levels, the goal of research thereof must not be to look for consistencies therein, but rather to understand the mechanisms – confluences of language, symbols, and meanings – by which these paradoxes come to be. Understanding the ever-changing visual-rhetorics of a given mass political phenomenon, such as neo-nationalist movements, is therefore not just useful in understanding and explaining it, but is altogether imperative.

Thus, in this project, I focus on the narratives, language, rhetoric, visuals, and symbols deployed at key moments in neo-nationalist movements. Employing a methodology of visual-rhetorical analysis alongside a Marxist-feminist and post-colonial theoretical perspective/conception of power thus allows me to explore the ways in which expressions of neo-nationalism engage not just simultaneously, but *interconnectedly* with local, national-level, and trans-/supranational level rhetorics in non-neutral (capital-ist) ways, which traditional methodologies of the study of nationalism elide.

I argue that analyzing the visual rhetorics of neo-nationalism from this critical theoretical perspective highlights the paradoxes, the consistent inconsistencies emphasized by Edelman, that are present in expressions of neo-nationalism. Examining neo-nationalism from this perspective also provides the ability to draw connections that the separation of nation-state and transnational previously obscured, such that neo-nationalism is exposed as paradoxically possessing characteristics that largely transcend the nation, and that stem largely from global capitalism,

20 Ibid., 7.
without making the mistake of discounting the role of national visual-rhetorical cultural representations in propagating neo-nationalist ideologies.

This view of neo-nationalism from both below and above makes possible a concrete definition of the term, which the existing scholarship has thus far struggled propose. Below, I put forth what I argue are the defining factors of neo-nationalism:

1. Rhetorics of neo-nationalist movements necessarily and primarily feature phobic (i.e. xenophobic, Islamophobic) and “-ist” (i.e. racist, sexist) overtones justified in economic language – I refer to these features as “capital-isms.” Neo-nationalists define and position nation/national identity and belonging thereto on non-specific adherence to whiteness, Christianity, Western-ness, and straight cis-masculinity, which are posed as being the national tradition of a given nation-state. This is in contrast to representations of traditional nationalist movements, which position nationality on a (cultivated) shared culture and/or ethnicity and primarily serves to create obligation to the nation-state above all other obligation.

2. While neo-nationalist movements retain a facade of being nationally specific via their seemingly distinct realizations within each nation-state, the supporters and ideological justifications thereof are in fact paradoxically trans- or supra-national. Neo-nationalist movements have supporters across borders, use highly similar language and rhetoric tied to neo-nationalist movements abroad, and paradoxically pursue simultaneous acceptance within and national distinction from trans- and supra-national identities and structures such as the European Union and global capitalism.

3. Neo-nationalist movements experience some level of absorption into the structures of the nation-state. Neo-nationalist candidates are democratically elected to public office,
appointed to positions in the government, and have significant public support – or at least the appearance thereof. The legitimacy created by this relative success and purported popular support allows for open display of racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia, etc. (capital-isms) in the public sphere.

THE PARADOX OF NEO-NATIONALIST ENTANGLEMENTS

If neo-nationalism emerges as the nation-state attempts to maintain the very national importance that global capitalism erodes, the nation-state must partake in active othering to reassert its dominance. This is not entirely dissimilar in motive to that which was employed during the rise of the modern nation-state and international community with the imperial project. As has been the case from its very conception, the nation-state and its markets continue to be built and maintained upon the subjugation of entire populations. What separates the nation-state and nationalism of the past from twenty-first century neo-nationalism is the changing character of global capitalism: namely, the transnational capitalist structures and the infrastructures which have been created to maintain them. Trans- and supra-national institutions, the migration and assimilation of peoples, and the creation of international codes of conduct means that this “other” of the nation is no longer as easy to locate, nor as easy to exploit as in the histories of imperialism.21

Rather than simply positioning itself against or as superior to colonized peoples and nations, the Western nation-state (along with those nation-states that wish to emulate it to gain inclusion) is now tasked with defining itself within supra- and trans-national structures such as the European Union as well as in contrast to all the nation-states of the international community.

21 As Ann Laura Stoler describes in her book Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times, imperial practices and ideologies have legacies that very much endure to this day, in ideologies and institutions alike. This point of view very much informs my perspective here and throughout.
Further, it must do so without the explicit modes of exploitation upon which it originally built itself. Thus, the twenty-first century European nation-state requires other, more covert modes of exploitation and subjugation to reassert itself as its continued dominance becomes less and less certain. That subjugation of peoples at the hands of the nation-state must now occur as much within the nation-state itself as outside it; the disenfranchisement of its own citizens/residents, as well as the disenfranchisement and exclusion of “external” members of said populations from entering the nation, now occurs via the systemic socioeconomic channels empowering the global capitalist class.

It is no secret that globalization and the global capitalist power dynamics that have emerged from it have largely legitimized and perpetuated structures and ideologies of subjugation that began with imperialism and colonialism, projects rooted in capitalistic motivation even as the seeds of capitalism were then just beginning to take root. Feminist and post-colonial scholars have long written on the reification of socioeconomic prejudice through global capitalist mechanisms. To justify the increased subjugation of mass numbers of the same populations that were once colonized/imperialized/brutalized (and to a large extent continue to be) requires the nation-state to participate in the covert realization of capital-isms. This intensified logic of domination, which is allegedly aimed at securing the future of the nation-state itself, thus

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22 See: Anthony Pagden, Lords of All the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c.1500-c.1800 (Yale University Press, 1995).
23 Such works which have to varying extents informed the perspective I take in this thesis include Samir Amin’s Class and Nation and Capitalism in the Age of Globalization, Ann Laura Stoler’s Duress, Shirin Rai’s Gender and the Political Economy of Development, Amy Lind’s Gendered Paradoxes: Women’s Movements, State Restructuring, and Global Development in Ecuador, Mike Davis’s Planet of Slums, Judith Butler’s Frames of War: When is Life Grievable?, Paul B. Preciado’s Testo Junkie: Sex, Drugs, and Biopolitics in the Pharmacopornographic Era, Ann McClintock’s Imperial Leather: Race Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Context, Kathi Weeks’s The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antework Politics, and Postwar Imaginaries, and of course, the various writings of Karl Marx and Michel Foucault.
establishes neo-nationalism as simply the ideological expression or declaration thereof by individuals, parties, etc. Accordingly, neo-nationalist rhetorics exhibit overtly xenophobic, racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, and/or Islamophobic overtones in their attempts to cultivate some distinct, exclusionary concept of a national identity. That articulation necessarily “others” some portion of the population in order to remain compatible with global capitalist modes of (re)production.²⁴

Paradoxically, these expressions of neo-nationalism do as much to reify trans- and supra-nationalism as they do to reestablish a strong national identity. As each nation-state moves to define itself upon strikingly similar terms of white, Christian, and straight cis-gendered masculinity, the concept of an ideologically homogenous pan-European or pan-Western “nation” or “imagined community” becomes all the more tangible.

**TAKING SERIOUSLY THE DANGERS OF NEO-NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY**

Who is defined as being a member of the nation-state in the context of these neo-nationalist movements and who is excluded? Furthermore, what is at stake for individuals living under neo-nationalism? I argue that the distinction between who belongs to the nation, and more importantly who is excluded from it, is a structural-level distinction of whose lives matter and whose do not,

²⁴ It is worth noting here that while (as many have rightfully pointed out) there are certainly parallels between the type of othering I identify here as neo-nationalism and that which was employed during the rise in fascist movements in the 1920s and 30s, there are also distinct and important differences. Perhaps most notably is that while fascist groups justify/ied their violent othering as being necessary to a complete *offensive reimagining* of the nation-state and its institutions in order to achieve its full potential, neo-nationalists instead *defensively* hide their violent othering behind *existing* nation-state structures and incorporate it into *existing* (democratic) institutions/processes which are already viewed as legitimate.
who society can let live or make die.\textsuperscript{25} I will highlight throughout this project, as many have before me, the continued socioeconomic subjugation of those who are deemed “deviant” to normative capitalist modes of production which have historically been dominated by the West – specifically people of color, women, non-Christians, and queer-identified people (including non-heterosexual orientations and non-binary gender identities), among others. It is not coincidental that these populations, especially at the intersections thereof, have historically been some of the least protected populations under the nation-state and continue to face indefensibly high levels of economic inequality, exploitation, and death both within and beyond the nation-state. It is these same populations who are being brutalized or murdered in Russia, and cruelly deported and/or turned away \textit{en masse} in the United States and Europe, who bore the brunt of the neo-nationalist slogans at the Polish Independence Day march. whose basic standards of living and human rights are not provided or protected, and whose losses of life are not investigated or even considered a loss at all. For millions of people, neo-nationalism (and the conditions out of which it is born and in turn reifies) is life or death. While it is imperative to trace the large-scale structural entanglements of neo-nationalism through its visual-rhetorical representations, it is equally crucial not to minimize its lived experience.

Thus, in the next two chapters, I utilize a top-down and bottom-up analysis of Polish neo-nationalism through a critical lens. Using a historical materialist approach informed by feminist and post-colonial perspectives, which I explain in more detail below, I employ a visual-rhetorical analysis of expressions of neo-nationalism in order to demonstrate the capital-\textit{ist} paradoxes at play in Polish neo-nationalism. In order to gain a comprehensive picture of Polish rhetorics of neo-

nationalism, my analytic scope includes (but is not limited to) official websites of political parties, candidates, and groups, public statements made by leaders and talking heads of movements, photos and videos of key moments, quotes from participants in movements/demonstrations and observers thereof, quotes from government officials, international and domestic media reactions, and what goes unsaid altogether. By tracing rhetorics of Polish neo-nationalism alongside the historical material context, I demonstrate the entanglements of the paradoxes of neo-nationalism in the changing conception of the nation-state within increasingly global capitalism and the capital-isms necessary to maintain them.

In particular, I trace Polish neo-nationalist visual rhetoric surrounding three key points in recent history. In Chapter 2, I focus on the 2017 Independence Day demonstration. In Chapter 3, I explore Polish-EU integration following the collapse of the USSR as well as the election of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) to parliamentary majority. I conclude by discussing the potential applications for this method of inquiry to other cases of neo-nationalism, to comparative studies, and to nationalism scholarship more generally.
INTRODUCTION

As I begin my analysis of Polish neo-nationalism, it is important to make clear that neither nationalism nor the prejudices I focus on in this project are new to Poland. Perhaps even more so than in many of the other nations presently experiencing neo-nationalist movements, Poland has a deep-seated history of nationalism and intolerance, most significantly as related to the strong, longstanding presence of Catholicism. This becomes abundantly clear as I delve into Polish neo-nationalist rhetorics, which often make references to the old language of nationalist and religious ideologies, more subtly in some instances than in others. As I will demonstrate in the analysis that follows, phrases such as “We Want God” have national significance beyond the clear connections to the Church itself, and function as a “dog whistle” for those engaged with the narratives of far-right nationalist ideologies. Following my earlier definition of neo-nationalism and its characteristics, it is not the sheer presence of these rhetorics that defines Poland’s present condition, but rather it is their specific entanglements with each other, with the structures of the nation-state, and with transnational concerns created by the dynamics of global capitalism as expressed through these rhetorics that mark this neo-nationalist phase.

Keeping this in mind, I take up my analysis of Polish neo-nationalist visual rhetorics in this chapter by looking at the historical significance of Polish Independence Day itself. I begin by outlining changes in the connotation of Independence Day in Poland over time, examining the rise of the Law and Justice Party (PiS), and by characterizing the language used in and surrounding the Independence Day march in November 2017. In teasing apart the entanglements of the neo-nationalist rhetoric deployed, I aim to demonstrate two interlocking themes in this chapter: first,
how the dangerous and multifaceted prejudices of Polish neo-nationalist ideology evolve over time; and second, the several paradoxes of modern Polish nationalism. Such paradoxes include narrative paradoxes/inconsistencies, the simultaneous “shocking” and banal nature of the march and coverage thereof, the internationality of participants in the march, and the ways in which expressions of Polish neo-nationalism are caught between the strong national identity engrained in hundreds of years of Polish nationalism and conformity to the transnational norms of capitalism now necessitated by the dynamics of an ever-globalizing world.

NATIONAL LEGACIES IN POLISH INDEPENDENCE DAY RHETORIC

To quote William Connolly, Poland has long-suffered from a “contingent history replete with multiple unfortunate happenstances,” primarily a result of its near-continuous occupation by various parties. The country’s “territorial history”, as Connolly puts it, “contains many elements that push against the needed confluence of belonging, egalitarianism, freedom, participation, and nationhood.”26 This history of the Polish national struggle does not disappear, nor do the conditions in which this struggle emerged. Rather, they make both conspicuous and inconspicuous appearances in modern Polish neo-nationalist narratives. The Polish nation does not exist in a vacuum, and must be understood as a nation/people which has been situated in inter- and transnational contexts as inferior to major exploitative powers by exploitative powers, in a system

26 William E. Connolly. *Facing the Planetary: Entangled Humanism and the Politics of Swarming*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017: 18. Though the history of the Polish nation/the struggle thereof is a crucial portion of the research conducted in the development of my argument, and I remain attentive to that history throughout, it is not my objective in this paper to restate this complex history. Several political scientists and historians of Eastern Europe such as George Sanford, Adriana Gozdecka-Sanford, and Mieczyslaw B. Biskupski, whom I reference in this paper, have done the important work of investigating and inscribing the complicated history of the Polish nation and people.
whose rules were established by those same powers.\textsuperscript{27} Poland is also a nation which has spent hundreds of years pushing back against that narrative in the struggle to situate itself otherwise in the international community, as a nation with worth. These contentious histories do not disappear, but rather embed themselves subtly in quotidian life, often in insidious ways, down to the very conception of what it means to be a Pole. As Ann Laura Stoler shows in her exploration of imperial legacies in \textit{Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times}, narratives which have long been steeped in historical, socioeconomic formations, such as those of the Polish nation, remain key features of contemporary politics. That these enduring narratives of the Polish nation do violence and conceal themselves as necessary and banal cannot be understated – they:

\begin{quote}
Thrive on the capacity to assign their systems of demarcation innocuous intentions and appellations. Rights are “temporarily” suspended for the greater public good; acts of state violence are reclassified as preemptive and protective; and circuits of knowledge production that connect the protection of privilege and the violence of disenfranchisement are blocked. Exclusions are posited as responsive and exceptional rather than quotidian and systemic.\textsuperscript{28}
\end{quote}

Though Polish neo-nationalist rhetoric may present itself as a revival of past ambitions, the entanglements of neo-nationalist movements with the \textit{capital-ist} dynamics of knowledge production in a global capitalist world demonstrate a far more dynamic set of political circumstances. In the years since the end of the Cold War (to the extent that it truly has ended), globalization and the structures of global capital have expanded exponentially, a process only made possible by the global political-economic environment that emerged from the end of the Cold

\textsuperscript{27} In the analysis of Polish neo-nationalist rhetoric that follows, I draw heavily from the Stolerian concept of duress, which she defines as “a relationship of actualized and anticipated violence” that “bears on those who are its perpetrator, produces anxieties, and expand[es] definitions of insecurities that are its effect…a form of power that slashes a scar across a social fabric that differently affects us all.” See: Ann Laura Stoler. \textit{Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times}. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016: 8.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 168-9.
War and the fall of the USSR that granted Poland its sovereignty. As Amin puts it, “The European East is in a peripheral situation of subordination to the European West analogous to the characteristic status of Latin America in relation to the United States.”

This left Poland, like many of the former Eastern Bloc states, tasked with rebuilding their societies in an entirely different international environment, struggling to gain a seat at an exclusive, long-established table with rules for entry specifically designed to maintain the privilege of (post)colonial powers and the exploitation of others. The rules of the game now dictate that states that wanted to become major players must also aspire to become colonizers and exploiters. Poland is no exception to this dynamic of dominated-becoming-dominator. With large gender-based income disparities, the Polish government has refused shelter and work to refugees and asylum seekers from the Middle East and Africa (read: Muslim and largely women/children) on grounds of economic security, but has no qualms importing/exploiting Filipino (read: Catholic and a more “proportionate” gender distribution) laborers to address its growing skilled labor crisis. The tensions of navigating this difficult space of not-West but not-Global-South, of not-colonizer but not-quite-colonized, of European-but-not-European, are made visible in the deployment of Polish neo-nationalist rhetoric.

In the following sections, I use the 2017 Independence Day march, a specific event/point in time in which we can witness the culmination of neo-nationalist rhetoric and ideology, as my case. I examine the visuals and language deployed both during and with regard to the event itself.

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in order to demonstrate the paradoxical entanglements of modern Polish nationalism with transnational rhetorics of social and economic domination. In using this method of visual-rhetorical analysis, I demonstrate the ways in which the roots of neo-nationalist narratives in the longstanding subjugation of the Polish nation-state by Western powers become entangled with the everyday lived experience of systemic prejudice and violence now being committed by Polish neo-nationalists and the Polish nation-state itself.

HISTORICAL CONTEXTS OF POLISH INDEPENDENCE DAY

Although the November 2017 march on Polish Independence Day had overt neo-nationalist motives, it is clear that Polish Independence Day did not originate as a site for the deployment of neo-nationalist rhetoric. The national holiday was initially created in 1937 to commemorate the date on which Poland regained sovereignty from the various empires by which it had previously been ruled/partitioned since the late 1700s, popularly understood to have been achieved on November 11th, 1918 – the date which marks the end of World War I, when Marshal Józef Piłsudski gained control of Poland.31 Even prior to its receipt of official status as a state holiday in 1937, Polish independence had been celebrated informally on that date since 1918.32 Although November 11th was one of several dates with national significance for Poles, “it became the chosen one because it answered so much longing of the Polish spirit: victory, redemption of the past, heroism, the providential figure, the romantic past; the conviction that Poland is not like other nations of Eastern Europe, it represents far more. November 11th is a day on which you reflect on

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32 Ibid.
the triumph and tragedy of being a Pole. It is Independence Day because it saved the spirit of Poland. And November 11th is modern Poland: the past revived and transcended.”33 Like any day of independence, Poland’s Independence Day has been imbued with national(ist) mythology and symbolism since its inception.

Unlike other independence days, however, Poland’s has become one of the most internationally visible displays of neo-nationalist extremism to date. In teasing out the connection between neo-nationalism and Polish Independence Day, I ask two primary questions; firstly, how did a relatively commonplace annual Independence Day celebration become an international gathering for far-right nationalist groups? And secondly, was the 2017 march truly an isolated incident, as shocking and unprecedented in Poland as international reaction to the event seems to indicate? I intend to show that the November 2017 display of far-right nationalist rhetoric was not by any means isolated, but rather a predictable ideological development which has emerged in reaction to specific inter- and transnational dynamics within global capitalism and in which Poland has always been made to occupy a tenuous space.

In order to determine how neo-nationalist rhetoric became entangled with Polish Independence Day, it is first necessary to follow the development of Polish Independence Day itself in the years since its creation. Formal statewide celebration of Independence Day in Poland was short-lived, as German occupation at the start World War II in 1939 outlawed the event just two years after it was established. Independence Day celebrations remained illegal in Poland through Russian/Soviet occupation, only becoming legal again with the dissolution of the USSR in 1989.

33 Ibid., 178.
However, throughout this fifty-year ban, Poles continued to participate in illicit celebrations of Polish independence on November 11th, primarily at commemorative Catholic masses and through underground groups and organizations that worked closely with the Church.\textsuperscript{34} In the late 1970s, the Church’s involvement became more explicit, with parishes, priests, bishops, and other members of the clergy publicly offering their blessings to nationalist groups and supporting November 11th as an important holiday for the Polish nation.\textsuperscript{35} While the Catholic church had always had a presence in Polish independence celebrations and a strong connection to Polish national identity due to its longstanding prominence in Polish culture, it was now instrumental to the facilitation of continued November 11th celebrations. This last point is crucial to understanding the importance of the Catholic Church to the PiS party and the development of neo-nationalist ‘capital-ist’ rhetoric alongside modern independence celebrations. The first Independence Day march in Warsaw actually occurred in 2008.\textsuperscript{36} The so-called “March of Independence” was organized by far-right nationalist groups National Radical Camp (ONR), an anti-Semitic group whose members are predominantly Catholic, and All-Polish Youth, which has roots going back as far as 1922 and is heavily tied to the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{37} Not surprisingly, these same two groups were the two primary organizing parties of the mass demonstration of November 2017. At the time of the initial 2008 “March of Independence,” Independence Day celebrations still took place primarily in local communities and churches. There were no large-scale or state-endorsed public Independence Day activities, no marches or gatherings in the capital. Nationalist

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 100-2, 128.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 133-4.
\textsuperscript{36} Perhaps tellingly, this initial demonstration seems to have received little media attention in Poland at the time. A thorough search of major international and Polish media outlets turns up no coverage of the 2008 event itself, only coverage of later (read: larger) demonstrations which acknowledge that far-right Independence Day demonstrations indeed began in 2008.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 170.
groups were thus not hijacking existing celebrations, but altogether creating the very concept of a nationwide “celebration” of Polish independence. In fact, they were fulfilling a longstanding desire for such a public display.

Though the first “March of Independence” in 2008 was minor, the visibility of far-right nationalists at Independence Day celebrations gradually built up over the next nine years, eventually culminating in the 60,000-person strong demonstration in 2017. For Poles who had long expressed interest in street celebrations on Independence Day, these marches presented an all too welcome opportunity to take to the streets in celebration of Polish independence, even if their own motivations were not rooted in far-right nationalist ideology. Understandings of Polish independence, sovereignty, culture, and the celebration thereof, were thus irrevocably tied to nationalist extremism. Despite attempts by then-President Bronisław Komorowski to reclaim the day and quell the violence and extremist ideologies propagated in these marches (the legality of which has been a matter of debate), the state-official alternative Independence March in 2012, “Together for the Independent,” has not garnered the same support. Such attempts were not just futile, as attendance at the anti-government march dwarfed the officially sanctioned celebration even in its first year. They also, however, fueled violence and became reframed in support of the narrative of persecution in these extreme nationalist ideologies, principally due to Komorowski’s characterization of far-right nationalist groups as “extremists and hooligans” from whom Independence Day must be recovered.38

It is clear that far-right nationalists have increasingly dominated Poland’s Independence Day demonstrations. But who exactly comprises these neo-nationalist groups, and why does it

matter? In asking these questions, we must also look to prevailing conceptions of who comprises and who is excluded from the Polish nation and people.

**FROM WHOM DOES POLAND DECLARE ITSELF INDEPENDENT?**

A key question underlying recent neo-nationalist polemics in Poland is, who is Polish? But perhaps more importantly, who is not? The neo-nationalist rhetorics that have gradually emerged in Poland surrounding the annual Independence Day marches reveal that those who are included as members of the Polish nation-state are decidedly white, Catholic, heterosexual, and cis-male. Any declaration and celebration of Polish independence is thus inherently also a declaration of Polish independence from people of color, from Jews and Muslims, from queer people, and from women/femininity. Although these dynamics are particularly visible in this intensely neo-nationalist space, those who fall inside these categories of non-Polish otherness face very real persecution within Poland that extends far beyond the scope of a once-annual demonstration, which I will explore in greater detail in Chapter 3.

As I established in my earlier definition of neo-nationalism, although neo-nationalist rhetorics are particularly revealing of discriminatory ideologies, their prejudice is intricately and deliberately woven into the power structures and institutions of the nation-state itself.

Yet before presenting some of the specific ‘capital-isms’ present in neo-nationalist rhetorics as deployed in Polish Independence Day demonstrations, a word of caution is necessary. Given my argument that these rhetorics are heavily entangled with each other and with specific political, social, and economic contexts, it is difficult to even begin to talk about them as distinct from one another and from their relevant circumstances. Hence in this chapter I begin by establishing the various ‘capital-isms’ with which these neo-nationalist rhetorics engage in and of
themselves, in anticipation of the particular historical-material contexts in which they have emerged, which I discuss in Chapters 3. As a result, Chapter 2 only scratches the surface of the neo-nationalist employment of ‘capital-isms,’ their relevance to each other, to Polish domestic/international concerns, and to larger transnational issues within global capitalism.

I ultimately aim to demonstrate that Polish neo-nationalism is underpinned by “resurgence from ruination” narratives, which invoke a selective, but not entirely unsubstantiated view of Poland as victim of international mistreatment. In this section, I focus my visual-rhetorical analysis of Polish neo-nationalism on the ideology and rhetoric of National Radical Camp (ONR) and All-Polish Youth. The two groups are vital fountainheads of contemporary Polish neo-nationalism, and by juxtaposing their historical roots with the current economic and political circumstances surrounding the 2017 Independence Day march, I aim to illuminate the ways in which these narratives become paradoxically entangled with capital-ist prejudices.

POLISH NEO-NATIONALIST GROUPS AND INDEPENDENCE DAY RHETORIC

As a preface to dissecting the particular rhetoric of the 2017 March for Independence, it is necessary to contextualize its two primary organizers, *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All-Polish Youth) and *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny* (ONR, or National Radical Camp). Down to the language of the names of the groups themselves, each is steeped in their own long histories of hatred and white supremacist ideology. National Radical Camp takes its name directly from an anti-Semitic group that existed prior to World War II. All-Polish Youth similarly draws its name from an extreme nationalist youth organization founded in 1922 and predicated on exclusion and persecution of
Though each of the original groups had long been dissolved, it is telling that their modern incarnations chose to take these same names when they formed in the 1980s and 90s.

Today, both groups are considered far-right Catholic fundamentalist nationalists and are often labeled as fascist and neo-Nazi groups by various NGOs and organizations in the Western international community-at-large. Considering that All-Polish Youth and ONR have previously and repeatedly “taken to the streets to protest against Muslim immigration, gay rights, the EU and anything [they consider to undermine] Polish Catholic values,” these accusations are not without merit. The ONR flag - a hand holding a knife such that it resembles a swastika – was included in Polish police handbooks on explicitly racist symbols until a PiS official pressured the Interior Ministry into pulling the book from circulation.

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41 See Fig. 3.


43 A well-known far-right cleric led a corresponding mass at a local cathedral prior to the march, preaching “uncompromising national-Catholic radicalism” as “chemotherapy” to treat the “malignant tumor” of refugees and minorities in Poland. See: http://www.romea.cz/en/news/world/poland-local-catholic-church-apologizes-for-neo-fascist-mass-in-cathedral
Similarly, All-Polish Youth has been labeled as an extremist homophobic hate group by organizations such as Amnesty International and the Human Rights Watch.\(^\text{44}\) It is also worth noting that former and current PiS officials have prior ties to the ONR, All-Polish Youth, and/or other smaller affiliated Catholic-nationalist groups. The former chairman of All-Polish Youth was Poland’s Vice Prime Minister in 2006 during PiS’s earlier electoral success, and the PiS led a governing coalition with the League of Polish Families, an offshoot of All-Polish Youth, that same year. While the organizing parties and the Polish government have repeatedly claimed that the march is a simple show of patriotism, it is extremely clear from the stated objectives of these two groups alone that the event is explicitly organized with far-right extreme nationalist ideologies and participants in mind.\(^\text{45}\) These radical motives are further elucidated by the rhetoric employed by far-right nationalist marchers by way of slogans, banners, and chants.

Reactions of Polish officials and PiS statements further legitimate this extremist sentiment, invoking the vocabulary of marginalization and frustration on the part of right-wing groups. In a description of its platform, the PiS party asserts that they “reject political correctness, i.e. constraints increasingly affecting many Europeans, imposed today not only through cultural aggression, but also through administrative actions and criminal reprisals.”\(^\text{46}\)


\(^{45}\) As one headline quoting President Andrzej Duda noted, “A small group of marchers waving controversial banners during an Independence Day march have harmed Poland’s image abroad’’, which prompted PiS party chief, Jarosław Kaczyński, to say “there were some extremely unfortunate” and “completely unacceptable” incidents during the event, the “fringe of the fringe” and “very likely a provocation.” See: http://www.thenews.pl/1/9/Artykul/335904,Poland%E2%80%99s-image-abroad-harmed-by-a-small-group-of-marchers-president

In what follows, I unpack each of the key phrases, chants, and slogans used during the march, making particular note of the groups generating neo-nationalist rhetoric and the portions of the general population which they target. The slogans that I highlight below are a comprehensive list of those reported on by major media outlets, compiled via a survey of more than 80 articles from over 20 leading sources, spanning US, British, German, French, Polish, Middle Eastern, and independent international perspectives.47

After situating key expressions of neo-nationalist sentiment, I then juxtapose the sentiments of neo-nationalist rhetoric against the changing dynamics of Independence Day violence and state response, demonstrating the entanglement of this rhetoric with the persecution of marginalized groups at the individual and state levels. Specifically, I highlight the ways in which these rhetorics paradoxically both contribute to and conceal increased violence towards the groups targeted by neo-nationalist discourse. Positioning this rhetoric alongside the lived experience of protestors, I highlight the shift in state response from protecting the few anti-nationalist demonstrators from the far-right, to defending the mass of far-right nationalist protestors (overwhelmingly cis-heterosexual white Christian men). By policing and committing violence against the comparatively miniscule group of anti-nationalist protestors (largely comprised of women, queer-identified individuals, and racial and religious minorities) it once protected, the Polish state now seems poised on being the primary expression of neo-nationalist division.

“We want God!”: The official slogan of the 2017 March for Independence, “We Want God,” is itself incredibly revealing. This phrase was carefully selected by the ONR and All-Polish Youth

47 It is, of course, worth noting that this list is likely not representative of the full range of slogans present at the march, but rather the most egregious/report-worthy.”
for its historical and recent relevance for Poles. The phrase was first used when Pope John Paul II returned to his native Poland in 1979, while Poland was still under atheist Soviet rule, calling for Poles to resist the Soviet regime through faith and a return to Catholicism. In response, the crowd of an estimated 250,000\(^4\) Poles and others that came to hear him speak chanted, “We Want God! We Want God! We want God in our Polish books, we want God in our Polish schools.”\(^4\)

\[\text{Fig. 4} \quad \text{Poles sing “We Want God!” in the presence of Pope John Paul II in Warsaw 1979}\]

This moment is credited with inspiring Solidarity, the first independent trade union recognized by the Eastern Bloc, and ultimately with being a major factor in the dissolution of the communist regime of the Soviet Union itself.\(^5\) The phrase “We Want God!” was thus incorporated into mainstream Polish nationalist mythology, as well as (neo)liberal/capitalist mythology, becoming


a well-known nationalist song that today is often referenced by far-right Polish Catholic-nationalists.

The historical Catholic relevance to Polish independence, however, is not the phrase’s only significance. In July 2017, just four months prior to the November 2017 March for Independence, US President Donald Trump referenced this Polish nationalist song in a speech made in Warsaw, to great applause.52 The inclusion of “We Want God!” in this speech served as a sort of dog whistle. Though innocuous to many, to those aware of its connotation it can be read as a sign of solidarity between “alt-right” nationalist sentiment in the United States with that in Poland. It is certainly not coincidental that the parties resurrected a nearly 40-year-old Catholic nationalist hymn for the Independence Day march, an event at which prominent American alt-right/neo-Nazi Richard Spencer was initially invited to speak, just months after President Trump used the phrase in a speech that praised Poland’s “Catholic values,” its resistance to the European Union, and its strict attitude toward refugees. In selecting this phrase as the official slogan of the 2017 March for Independence, ONR and All-Polish Youth deliberately sought to reaffirm associations of Polish independence and nationalism with the Catholic Church, but also invoked the transnational ties between far-right nationalist movements.

**White, Catholic Poland:** Other (not unfamiliar) rhetoric employed at the march demonstrates the supranational nature and capital-ist entanglements of Polish neo-nationalism. Although initial expressions of neo-nationalism could be linked to religious sentiment, the overwhelming majority of neo-nationalist rhetoric utilized in the Polish March for Independence was transparently white

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supremacist and, frankly, required no explanation. To list some of the more prominent xenophobic, racist, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic slogans displayed on banners and chanted at the march, these include: “Refugees get out,”53 “Europe will be white or uninhabited,”54 “White Europe of Brotherly Nations,” “Pure Blood, Clear Mind”55 “clean blood,” “No to Islam,”56 “sieg heil,” and “Catholic Poland, not secular.”

Many of these slogans, such as “refugees get out” and those regarding a “white Europe” are in direct response to the refugee “crises” in the Middle East and Northern Africa. Given their necessarily xenophobic/racist and Islamophobic overtones, such slogans aim to further the perception that the majority of said refugees, as black and brown Muslims, hail from regions of lesser worth than Europe.57 Other phrases, particularly those mentioning “clean” or “pure blood,” and of course the “sieg heil” or Nazi salute, have direct connections to classic Nazi and neo-Nazi terminology. Moreover, if the anti-Semitism of white supremacist/(neo-)Nazi and Catholic rhetoric was not already clear, when asked by a reporter why he chose to participate in the march, a seemingly non-extremist marcher specifically selected by a state television station to downplay

54 Ibid.
55 Ibid.
57 Some early reports stated that the phrase “Pray for Islamic holocaust” was also being used, though these reports were later retracted – the slogan was not present in the 2017 Independence Day march, but it was used in a small far-right nationalist demonstration in 2015. Interestingly, the retraction of this information ultimately provided fuel for PiS allegations of “fake news” and biased reporting in Western media.
the far-right nationalist presence at the march cheerily responded on live television that “he was taking part to ‘remove jewry from power.’”\(^{58}\)

It is difficult to ascertain the extent to which Poles support these explicitly hateful expressions in and of themselves. It is clear, however, that at the very least, they have not resulted in a significant reduction in support for the PiS party and its objectives. As of October 2018, the PiS polls at 40% support, were elections to take place at the time of polling.\(^{59}\) Additionally, polls conducted through November 12\(^{th}\) and November 18\(^{th}\), 2017 – just after the Independence Day festivities – put PiS support at 45%\(^{60}\) and 37.7%\(^{61}\), respectively. For each of the polling bodies, this marks less than a 2% decrease in PiS support from its results the month prior. The same two pollsters place the PiS at no more than 35%\(^{62}\) support and as low as 31.8%\(^{63}\) support in November and December of 2015, the months immediately following its election to parliamentary majority in late October of 2015. In short, the PiS has continued to grow in popularity since it won 37.6%

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\(^{63}\) "Aktualne Dane Z Sondaży Politycznych." IBRiŚ. https://www.ibris.pl/Wyniki_badan_IBRiS.
percent of the vote in October 2015, and the vitriolic statements that made international news in November 2017 had little impact, if any, on support for the party.

**Straight, Cis-Gendered Male Poland:** Perhaps less obvious than some of the more overt xenophobic, racist, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic rhetoric of the march were its homophobic and misogynistic undertones. While little of the rhetoric present in the 2017 march directly spoke to anti-queer and misogynistic attitudes, homophobia and misogyny were nevertheless very present, largely through the heavy presence of the Catholic church and Catholic-based rhetoric.

Even on an average day, Poland is not a queer-friendly space. A march organized and enacted by far-right nationalist groups and a leading political party which have built themselves upon explicitly and implicitly homophobic platforms presents an even more dangerous environment for queer-identified persons. In its emphasis on “continuing,” “developing,” and “improving the lives of Polish families,” the PiS implicitly advocates for family as a heterosexual institution, invoking language used by the Church and the League of Polish Families, a Catholic nationalist movement/party from which All-Polish Youth emerged, and which made up a significant portion of PiS leader Jarosław Kaczyński’s cabinet during his brief stint as Prime Minister from 2006-2007.64 There are no official estimates of LGBTQ+ hate crime incidences in Poland due to a lack of such a category in Polish law.65 However, independent/resistance

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64 Ibid., "Prawo i Sprawiedliwość."
65 This is itself indicative of overall negative/unaccepting attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals and communities in Poland. As is the case in many states, the Polish state and those living within it are less accepting of such individuals the more they deviate from heteronormative, homonormative, and reproductive norms. See: Anna L. Weissmann, “Repronormativity and the Reproduction of the Nation-State: The State and Sexuality Collide”, in *Journal of GLBT Family Studies*, Volume 13, 2017 - Issue 3, pp. 277-305. Online: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1550428X.2016.1210065
publications such as Gazeta Wyborcza and human rights organizations have reported an increase in violence towards LGBTQ+ individuals and organizations in the years since neo-nationalism began to take hold in Poland.

Prominent examples of such violence include: the burning of the Tęcza installation in 2013, its permanent removal in 2015 (described at the time of its burning by a PiS official as a “faggot rainbow”\(^6\))\(^6\), several attacks on the Warsaw building of Polish gay rights NGO KPH in 2016 and 2017 by white men often sporting clothing with nationalist/neo-Nazi slogans and images,\(^7\)\(^7\) and brutal physical attacks and murders of LGBTQ+ individuals that, like those against other minority groups, are repeatedly underreported and/or mishandled by police and the justice system.\(^8\)\(^8\)

Similarly, gender-based discrimination or violence is not considered a hate crime under Polish penal law, and there were no reports of specifically misogynistic rhetoric during the 2017 march. Nevertheless, misogynistic and homophobic undertones are certainly detectable in both the violence and the general demographics participating in the march. It is impossible not to notice that the vast majority of those participating in the march were cis-gendered men, which is certainly indicative of the environments and beliefs fostered by Polish far-right nationalism.


It is telling that women and queer individuals visibly formed a much more significant portion of the estimated 5,000 counter-protesters.\textsuperscript{72} Equally telling is how (male) far-right nationalist protesters violently pushed and kicked a group of women chanting anti-fascist slogans.\textsuperscript{73}

\textsuperscript{72} This demographic divide is even more visible in far-right and anti-fascist protests which have occurred since those of November 11\textsuperscript{th}, 2017. See: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aqBTcM264g0.


\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

As Agnieszka Graff and Elżbieta Korolczuk note in their analysis of the “Stop Gender” campaign, “Polish ‘anti-genderism’ is part of a broader transnational trend,” as well as being simultaneously “locally embedded.”\(^7\) The campaign encompasses both misogynistic and homophobic rhetoric, targeting women, non-binary and trans* individuals, as well as non-heterosexual orientations. Furthermore, it ties into PiS rhetoric (not unlike that in the United States) against “political correctness.” For Poland, as in many of the states in which similar movements have emerged, the “Stop Gender” campaign is intimately tied to conservative Catholicism, as is PiS and other Polish (neo)nationalist rhetoric.

Even symbolically, the imagery of the far-right nationalists at the march reads as incredibly masculine: red flares, neo-Nazi symbols, military-style outfits and marches/chants, shouting, and


the turbulent crowd convey an overtly masculine aesthetic. Considering these webs of entanglement, it is not surprising that the Polish Independence Day march was not particularly welcoming to women and queer people.

“Death to Enemies of the Homeland”: It seems appropriate to include in this exploration of neo-nationalist rhetoric at the Polish March for Independence a phrase that is perhaps the most revealing of the very real and dangerous stakes of neo-nationalist ideologies – “Death to Enemies of the Homeland.” In this one phrase, neo-nationalists make clear that those deemed incompatible with Polish notions of success are “enemies of the homeland.” These notions have naturally changed over time; yet in the context of the Soviet Union’s collapse and the aggressive transformation of Poland via its entry into the global, capitalist economy, those excluded happen to increasingly include people of color, non-Christians, queer-identified individuals, and women. Further troubling is that those who see themselves representing Poland, the “real” one, will exclude these groups from the benefits of citizenship by whatever means necessary, be they violence or death. In addition to those already mentioned in this chapter, instances of this violent exclusion enacted by the nation-state in an effort to maintain a “pure,” “white,” “Catholic” Poland being made particularly legible include Poland’s refusal to take in refugees and migrants despite its agreement with the EU to do so; a call to “hang Jews” at an ONR demonstration in April 2015, which was reported but unprosecuted; the attack on a 14-year-old Turkish girl in January 2018

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79 Notably, the use of the term “homeland” in the context of the nation is linguistically similar to the centrality of the “heartland” in Russian nationalism with particular regard to former Bloc territories, demonstrating further potential transnational entanglements of Polish neo-nationalist rhetoric. See: Charles Clover. “Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland: The Reemergence of Geopolitics.” *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 2 (1999): 11.
during which the attacker shouted “Poland for Poles,” the media characterization of which as a hate crime was criticized by the head of the Ministry of Interior and Administration as being “fake news,” arguing that “media present this girl as a dark girl. It’s not true.” and the massive increase in xenophobic attacks alone in Poland, which paradoxically doubled from 850 to over 1700 incidences between 2013 and 2015, despite very minimal increase in ethnic, racial, and religious minorities. As I will develop in greater detail in Chapter 3, these groups of people against which so-called defenders of Poland are positioned in their claim for independence is further complicated by a final “enemy of the homeland” from which Poland wishes to simultaneously include and exclude itself – Western Europe.

DYNAMICS OF INDEPENDENCE DAY VIOLENCE AND STATE RESPONSE

The “March of Independence” was violent and inciteful from its conception, and it only became increasingly so as the marches increased in size and visibility. While the march began to draw particularly large crowds estimated at 20,000 in 2011 and 2012, it also drew increased resistance. The marches gave way to mass riots as anti-fascist protestors attempting to block the far-right nationalist marchers were met with flares, bricks, and physical violence. In 2011, 210 far-


82 These values were determined using police reports, which suggests that the number of attacks is likely much higher than those reported.


84 Ibid., "Poland Independence Day March Turns Violent."
right nationalist demonstrators were arrested on charges such as destruction of property, assault, and use of flares.\textsuperscript{85} The sheer violent capacity exercised by the 2011 demonstrators prompted massive police presence for the subsequent marches. In 2012, \textit{several thousand} police officers were stationed along the march route in Warsaw and attempted to ensure the protection of anti-fascist protestors.\textsuperscript{86} Nevertheless, the heavy violence continued and increased in intensity.

In 2012, 176 Poles were arrested; in 2013, demonstrators set fire to the “Tęcza” Rainbow Arch installation symbolizing tolerance of LGBTQ communities and attempted to attack the Russian embassy; in 2014, the march garnered minor attention in international news for the level of violence, with far-right nationalist demonstrators launching flares, rocks, metal barriers, and paving stones at police \textit{en masse}.\textsuperscript{87} Police resorted to use of rubber bullets, tear gas, pepper spray, and water cannons in order to quell the violet outbreaks of extremist nationalist protestors.\textsuperscript{88}

Curiously, the 2015 and 2016 marches were considerably more peaceful despite continued increases in turnout, then estimated at 40,000 participants. The decrease in riots and violence is not indicative of a decreased radical nationalist presence at the march, as one might initially expect. Paradoxically, 2015 marks the ascendance of the far-right Law and Justice Party to parliamentary majority in Poland, and the “peacefulness” of the Independence Day marches in 2015 and 2016 is

\textsuperscript{85} Even as far back as 2011, we can see that the Independence Day demonstrations had begun to take on international characteristics – nearly half of those arrested were non-Poles, the majority of those foreigners being German (largely neo-Nazis). See: http://fakty.interia.pl/polska/news-176-zatrzymanych-po-marszu-niepodleglosci,nId,925593


instead indicative of a corresponding change in police and state crackdown on far-right nationalist extremism. In the 2017 march, 45 anti-fascist counterprotesters were arrested, while not one of the far-right extremists chanting or displaying blatant hate speech or participating in physical violence were arrested, a stark contrast from the efforts in 2014 and prior years to subdue the far-right nationalist extremism. Such sentiments were just as present as ever, if not more so, but simply no longer faced opposition from the state.

Far from censuring the movement, the ruling party offered both overt and covert support for the far-right nationalist marches, allowing the previously separated state-sanctioned march and extremist demonstration to largely merge, further blurring the already murky line between extreme nationalist demonstrators and the self-proclaimed “everyday Polish patriot.” It should come as no surprise that increasing domestic and international support for (or at the very least complacency toward) far-right extreme nationalist ideologies encouraged a staggering jump in participation of 20,000 and drew in droves of participants from abroad in 2017.

At an event purportedly celebrating Polish independence, extremists from the US, Italy, the UK, Hungary, Sweden, Slovakia, and other countries had a paradoxically significant presence. United States alt-right neo-Nazi Richard Spencer was initially scheduled to speak at a

90 Of course, despite their claims otherwise, the “simple patriot” is, at best, complicit in far-right nationalism simply for being willing to participate in a march which was publicly known to have been organized by far-right nationalist extremists. We might draw parallels between such defenses as those who voted for President Trump for “economic reasons,” and therefore claim not to themselves be racist, homophobic, etc.
conference of nationalists coinciding with demonstration. Though he was slated to appear alongside speakers affiliated with a Ukrainian political party with ties to neo-Nazi group Azov Battalion, Spencer cancelled his visit last-minute due to concern of deportation.\textsuperscript{92} The PiS formally protested his planned appearance in response to international pressure to do so, coming primarily from the UK, Germany, and EU officials, as well as international Jewish groups such as the American Jewish Committee.\textsuperscript{93} The racist, sexist, xenophobic, and homophobic vitriol and violence displayed by Spencer and his followers in the Charlottesville, Virginia rally in August 2017 made the true colors of the Polish “March for Independence” a touch too transparent.

In reality, the Warsaw Independence Day march in 2017 became just as much a celebration of violent transnational white supremacism, xenophobia, racism, homophobia, misogyny, Islamophobia, and antisemitism, as it was one of the Polish nation, firmly placing it within the conceptualization of neo-nationalism which I have laid out above. Theorizing the changing dynamics of the state response to, lack of response to, and even propagation of the violence (and associations therewith) of the Independence Day march within the larger structures of global capitalism allows me to consider the rhetorics surrounding Independence Day violence as indicative of two trends: first, the paradoxically mutually constitutive relationship between Polish national identity and national, international, and transnational rhetoric of neo-nationalism; And

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second, the ways in which these structural-level relationships both shape and are shaped by actors and state agents, such that very real violence is enacted upon very real individuals, and said violence is not neutral in its application.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I have shown that examining the development of Poland’s Independence Day itself reveals that the transition to neo-nationalism is not as sudden a change as it might initially seem. Analyzing the rhetorics surrounding the very conception of Independence Day demonstrations, how it is utilized by demonstrators in the March for Independence, and how its meanings are negotiated by the Polish state in response to the changing social dynamics of the marches, elucidates a clear timeline of escalation of the racist, misogynistic, homophobic, xenophobic, Islamophobic, and anti-Semitic nature of neo-nationalist ideologies. Furthermore, that the ‘capital-ist’ ideologies which were rendered so conspicuous by the 2017 March for Independence are deployed in the name of the Polish nation-state, but are not specific to Poland itself, demonstrates the paradoxically trans-national nature of neo-nationalism.

The work that I have done thus far in this chapter, as well as the visual-rhetorical analysis which follows, has demonstrated the insidious ways that the centuries-old subjugation of the Polish nation-state by Western colonial (read: exploitative capitalist) powers (and the narratives thereof of varying veracity) becomes entangled with the everyday lived experience of systemic prejudice and violence now being committed by Polish neo-nationalists and the Polish nation-state itself. As such, neo-nationalist ideology becomes hardly distinguishable from the conception of the Polish people.
Yet the annual Polish Independence Day march, though claiming to be a simple celebration of the Polish nation, has paradoxically become transnational itself, increasingly drawing marchers from abroad and invoking symbols and rhetoric which are understood across and beyond borders. As far-right nationalist extremism has become more visible and legitimized internationally, police and official state responses within Poland to the presence of far-right extremism at the “March of Independence” have changed accordingly, uniquely capturing specific moments in which the Polish far-right nationalist movement reveals itself as stepping firmly into the territory of neo-nationalism. Paradoxically, Polish neo-nationalism thus has significance not just within Poland, but also for Poland’s relationship with the European Union as well as with the broader international community, such that Poland simultaneously includes itself in and distances itself from “the West.”

In the next chapter, I interrogate Poland’s situation within the inter- and transnational by examining the rhetorics within and surrounding Poland’s relationship to the European Union after its integration in 2004 and in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis alongside the rise of the Law and Justice Party. In doing so, I reveal the entanglements of the prejudices present in Polish neo-nationalist rhetoric with global political and socioeconomic contexts.
CHAPTER THREE: LAW AND (IN)JUSTICE

INTRODUCTION

It is anything but coincidental that the year of the Polish Independence Day march, public display of neo-nationalist extremism was heard around the world. President Donald Trump came into power earlier that year and the alt-right gained massive visibility in the US. UK conservatism and the threat of Brexit had been emboldened, calling the future of the EU into question. More globally, far-right nationalist parties and movements have become particularly visible and legitimated in Hungary, Germany, Turkey, France, the Czech Republic, and Austria, among others. Thus, the neo-nationalist rhetorics in which the Polish marches and its organizing groups are based have themselves developed transnationally.

As I outlined in Chapter 2, the annual Independence Day march in Poland and the rhetoric surrounding development thereof offers a rare glimpse into the innerworkings of the perplexingly national and transnational nature of neo-nationalism. The year of the first “March of Independence” demonstration in Poland is, of course, highly significant in international politics and economics, as it was the setting when the value of the euro infamously collapsed in the 2008 global financial crisis just two months before the November 11 festivities. On the heels of Poland’s relatively recent ascendance to the European Union four years prior in 2004, itself contentious due to both Western European and domestic Polish fears of European integration, economic concerns increasingly began serving as a springboard for political radicalization. It was around this time in the 2005 general elections that the Law and Justice Party (PiS or Prawo i Sprawiedliwość) first performed well, taking a significant number of seats in the Sejm (the lower house of parliament)
and the Senate.⁹⁴ As I have maintained above, it is my argument that these political-economic occurrences are highly related, both with one another and to the development of capital-ist neo-nationalist rhetoric in Poland. Specifically, I have argued that the rhetorics of Euroscepticism/backlash in the wake of the 2004 EU integration and subsequent instabilities in global capitalism ultimately amalgamate in 2008 and the years that followed, such that they could be invoked by far-right nationalists in the name of a racially, sexually, religiously, and gender-homogenous Polish nation.

In this chapter, I follow the particular development of these greater neo-nationalist rhetorics in the years leading up to the 2017 March for Independence in order to demonstrate the entangled state of neo-nationalist prejudices with the transnational socioeconomic concerns that have emerged within global capitalism. I first examine Poland’s ascension to the European Union following the dissolution of the USSR in December 1991, alongside the development of the Law and Justice Party from its founding in 2001 to the 2017 March for Independence. I then examine specific features of the PiS platform and how the rhetoric thereof serves as coverings for neo-nationalist sentiments and ideological aspirations. I conclude this chapter by exploring the rhetoric surrounding current points of tension between the European Union and neo-nationalist Poland regarding the refugee crisis, freedom of press, and the justice system.

**PiS Euroscepticism: Ascension, Othering, and the European Union**

From the founding of the European Union in 1993, Eastern European integration was a source of international anxiety. Western Europeans certainly feared cultural differences with those

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⁹⁴ I use the shorthand, PiS, and translation of ‘Law and Justice Party’ interchangeably throughout this chapter.
in the East, but worries of economic weakness in the region following the fall of the USSR were of primary concern. This anxiety became more pronounced than ever as the EU moved to adopt a transnational currency among member states – the euro – in 1999. Concerns about Eastern European-EU integration were not limited to the West, however. Poland’s EU integration was at the time – and remains to this day – a major point of conflict among Poles as well. For some Poles, European integration presented economic opportunities and represented a rejection of the Eastern bloc. For others, it symbolized Westernization and a loss of national identity, which had been so crucial in Poland throughout its time under the USSR communist regime and its subsequent fall, as well as a loss of rights to self-determination, for which Poland had long fought and had only just regained in 1991.

The Law and Justice Party was formed in 2001, just two years after the adoption of the euro, when debates over Polish EU integration were at their most intense. From its founding, the party took a strong conservative and nationalistic stance. As Poland was still struggling to establish itself in the wake of the dissolution of the Eastern bloc, Law and Justice emerged as a staunchly anti-communist party, calling for a “strong Poland” within Europe, as well as in relation to the United States and Russia. Keeping in mind Poland’s history under the USSR communist regime and the previously established role of Catholicism in Polish resistance efforts, it is unsurprising that the PiS vision of a strong Poland was then, and continues to be, one rooted heavily in Polish Catholic values, economic development, and unrestricted self-determination.

While the party was not at the time entirely opposed to EU integration, and in fact believed it was necessary to establishing a strong Polish state which could be taken seriously as a European

96 Ibid.
and global contender, a degree of Euroscepticism was nevertheless an important part PiS ideology even in these early stages. Law and Justice was open to EU integration and adoption of the euro, but it was opposed to the strict terms of ascension required by the European Union. The party viewed these requirements as encroaching upon a strong Polish national identity and sovereignty, and shortchanging Poland’s status as a valuable member of the European Union.\footnote{Ibid.}

Though the Law and Justice party displayed moderate Eurosceptic attitudes early on, they initially caused very little actual conflict with the European Union. That their Euroscepticism was at the time only mild in practice certainly did not prevent the PiS from capitalizing on the reignited nationalistic Euroscepticism, which was/is often rooted in xenophobia and anti-Semitism,\footnote{Mojtiewicz, Czeslaw. "Fears and Doubts in Poland: INTERNAL OBSTACLES TO EUROPEAN INTEGRATION." World Affairs 158, no. 2 (1995): 93-99. http://www.jstor.org/stable/20672452.} in order to achieve significant electoral gains in 2005, taking 27\% of the vote.\footnote{Ibid., "Law and Justice (Prawo I Sprawiedliwość, PiS)".} It is not coincidental that this sudden surge in PiS votes occurs just one year after Poland’s ascension to the EU in 2004, given the uncertainty surrounding when and upon what terms Poland would eventually enter the eurozone.\footnote{Ibid., "Law and Justice (Prawo I Sprawiedliwość, PiS)".}

It is not until the financial crisis in 2008, however, that the Law and Justice Party begins to take on the extreme nationalist Euroscepticism with which it has come to be associated. As of 2008, Poland had not yet met the economic conditions required of it in order to adopt the euro. Poland’s economy was operating at a high level of debt and contained large structural deficits deemed too unstable for the collective responsibility of eurozone membership.\footnote{Grzegorz Libor, Jolanta Galuszka, and Ireneusz Galuszka. 2013. “Economic and Political Implications of the Poland’s Accession to the European Fiscal Union.” Rivista Internazionale Di}
financial crash, the Polish government intended to move forward with the necessary preparations to enter the eurozone, if slowly. However, perhaps unexpectedly, that Poland was still on its own currency – the złoty – and that it already had a large (and growing) debt, ultimately worked in its favor in the wake of the 2008 crash.

As a result of these factors, Poland was not only the sole European Union member state to avoid the recession, but in fact experienced economic growth.\textsuperscript{102} That Poland was suddenly in a position of economic prosperity, both within Europe and globally, while major Western industrial economies plummeted into recession lent a certain amount of credence to the PiS’s nationalist narrative that the country has not been given proper respect within Europe/the EU, and abroad. Despite the fact that Poland was the only EU state to prosper during the global recession, the EU would still require Poland to undergo extensive austerity measures to reduce its debt, many of which were not required of the original member states in order to adopt the euro. This, in combination with fear generated by the fact that the eurozone was so susceptible to falling into deep recession, provided economic justification for the nationalist euro-xenophobia that emerged. Not only was the European Union a threat to Polish national identity, self-determination, and Catholic values as the PiS had long argued, but full integration was now also economically risky and unbenevolent for a prospering Poland.

Unsurprisingly, in the years since the economic crisis, PiS rhetoric has become explicitly anti-eurozone integration and the PiS has adopted platform initiatives inherently contradictory to the conditions of European Union membership.\textsuperscript{103} Although it is clear that the Law and Justice


\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., "Law and Justice (Prawo I Sprawiedliwość, PiS)".
Party began to acquire distinct *capital-ist* qualities in the mid-2000s, it still lacked the level of popular support and representation in Polish government necessary to enact significant *capital-ist* policy. In 2010, the party actually lost some electoral ground to centrists during a time of unexpected turnover, which I explore in more detail below. It is therefore important to reiterate that the PiS’s eventual election to parliamentary majority in 2015 cannot be solely attributed to attitudes stemming from the 2008 financial crisis and resulting global recession alone. Once again, the surge in support for the PiS Party that resulted in it gaining control of the Polish government in 2015 coincides with a highly significant time in global political economy – the refugee crisis. As I highlighted in Chapter 2, the prevalence of Islamophobic and racist rhetoric within Polish neo-nationalism in response to the European refugee crisis is a foundational expression of the movement. In the section that follows, I examine PiS rhetoric in order to demonstrate the party’s manipulation of state officials and institutions to propagate neo-nationalist ideologies, propaganda/disinformation, and claims rooted in global socioeconomic issues. In particular, this rhetoric clashes with European Union debates regarding the refugee crisis, in order to maintain popular support within Poland and enact allegedly “justified” *capital-ist* policy.

**PRESENT-DAY PiS RHETORIC AND POLICY: LAW AND JUSTICE FOR WHOM?**

To tease apart the connections of the Law and Justice Party to Polish neo-nationalism and *capital-isms*, it is first necessary to briefly backtrack to the history of the PiS in order to understand the relevant actors and party dynamics. In particular, it is crucial to understand the role of Poland’s *de facto* leader, Jarosław Kaczyński, in fostering the neo-nationalist attitudes which I unpacked in Chapter 2 and further develop in this chapter.
The Law and Justice party was formed in the crucial early years of Polish self-determination by identical twins Lech and Jarosław Kaczyński. Jarosław briefly served as Prime Minister of Poland from 2006-2007, appointed by Lech, who served as the chairman of the party from its formation in 2001-2003 and later as president of Poland from 2005 until 2010, when he died in a plane crash along with several other Polish officials and clergy members.\textsuperscript{104} After an unsuccessful bid to replace Lech Kaczyński as president of Poland following his death, Jarosław Kaczyński became a member of the Sejm and the Law and Justice Party’s leader. It was under the leadership of Jarosław Kaczyński that the PiS party rose to prominence, ultimately gaining electoral majority in the 2015 elections in a monumental vote. As Katheryn Detwiler and Ann Snitow have put it, “for the first time since the fall of communism, Poland is being governed by one party alone… With even less daylight between them than is usual in Poland, both church and state are now aggressively attacking feminists, the “homosexual lobby,” and the liberal values of a threatening West.”\textsuperscript{105}

The party won the majority on a platform, organized by Kaczyński, of alleged respect for human rights and life. The following excerpt, for instance, comes from the PiS official website:

\begin{quotation}
At the core of the program of Law and Justice lies the respect for the inherent and inalienable dignity of every human being. The protection of this dignity is the chief duty and justification for the existence of a political community. This dignity is the foundation of the most elementary rights of the human person. Three of these rights
\end{quotation}

\textsuperscript{104} Interestingly, this plane crash has become fodder for PiS propaganda. Jarosław Kaczyński has claimed that Russian tampering was responsible for the plane crash, and the party has recently reopened investigations despite multiple independent investigations having previously found no such evidence. The plane crash has become part of a larger narrative of Polish victimization in Law and Justice propaganda. See: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/russia-faces-investigation-amid-claims-it-polish-president-was-assassinated-in-2010-plane-crash-a6853446.html See also: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/vladimir-putin-polish-president-lech-kaczynski-plane-crash-russia-poland-defence-minister-antoni-a8111831.html

have a special meaning - the right to life, the right to freedom and the right to equality rooted in human solidarity.106

In the official PiS platform, much of the neo-nationalist language which I have unpacked in the previous chapter can be recognized. Parallel goals include “raising self-esteem among Poles,” a rejection of “political correctness” and “all actions aimed at cultural unification,” “cultural aggression,” and upholding of the Polish family, values, nation, and community. Some of the capital-entanglements with far-right Polish nationalist rhetoric can also be seen in this platform: the language of “rapid development,” “fundamental modernization,” “efficiency,” and Poland as an “economic body” is seen as essential to the continuation of the Polish nation and people, as well as everyday life and values in Poland. But what goes unsaid in the platform also offers a glimpse into the ways in which many of these dynamics are concealed. The language of Catholicism, for example, is nowhere to be found, covertly embedded instead within the language of “values” and “family.” Racism and xenophobia are couched within the rejection of “cultural unification.” Ideology, nationalism, and antidemocratic governmental actions are disguised by references to “dignity of the human being,” “democracy,” “sovereignty,” and “lawfulness.”

Despite his relatively minor official role in Polish government, Jarosław Kaczyński is widely understood to be the “mastermind” behind the PiS political strategy and effectively all government activity in the time since the party gained control of the parliament and the presidency in the 2015 elections.107 Kaczyński’s influence over the government and its officials extends to current President Andrzej Duda, who was backed by Kaczyński and the Law and Justice Party

106 Ibid., "Prawo i Sprawiedliwość”.
during his candidacy and was himself a member of the party.\textsuperscript{108} Although President Duda formally removed himself from the party upon becoming president, this was more an act of propaganda to create the illusion of impartiality than a genuine recusal. He remains aligned with the party in function and defers to PiS ideology and policies with few exceptions. Kaczyński is also said to have hand-selected the two most recent Prime Ministers of Poland, Beata Szydło and now Mateusz Morawiecki, effectively installing them as puppet leaders.\textsuperscript{109}

Kaczyński’s authority is not limited to platforms and party members, as he has led the party in successful efforts to make Polish media outlets (including television, papers, online publications, and radio) increasingly state controlled and censored, as well as giving parliament unprecedented authority over its court system, as well as simplifying the process for the dismissal of judges. I argue below that these efforts have been enacted with the specific purpose of proliferating neo-nationalist rhetoric that, paradoxically, simultaneously distracts from and legitimizes discriminatory, capital-ist policies.

**NEO-NATIONALIST MANIPULATION OF STATE INSTITUTIONS**

**Media or State Propaganda?**

During the span of time that the PiS has been in power, the Polish media has become increasingly state-controlled and, as a result, polarized. The major Polish media outlets which had previously been considered independent, such as Polish Television (TVP) and Radio Poland, now

\textsuperscript{108} It is not irrelevant that the PiS-backed Duda announced his own presidential candidacy alongside the party at the 2015 Independence Day March. See: http://polska.newsweek.pl/andrzej-duda-kandydatem-pis-na-prezydenta-newsweek-pl,artykuly,351591,1.html

offer sterilized accounts of the news that are highly sympathetic to the PiS party. At best, their coverage is uncritical and at worst it omits major details and actively propagates “disinformation” and propaganda.\footnote{Tellingly, at the time of writing, the first article presented on the Radio Poland website declares “Support for Polish Ruling Party Remains Strong”} Reporters Without Borders, an independent NGO that evaluates freedom of information and publishes the World Press Freedom Index, ranked Poland at an all-time low in 2017. They cited the PiS party’s pointed reform of public media into “national media,” as well as its persecution of journalists and suppression/attack on publications that are perceived as being “anti-government,” which I will further explore below.\footnote{Reporters Without Borders. \textit{Poland.} Report. 2018. https://rsf.org/en/poland. see also: \url{http://www.krakowpost.com/18995/2018/04/poland-record-low-press-freedom-index-reporters-without-borders}} Transparent reporting on the PiS and the general political climate in Poland is thus relegated primarily to small resistance outlets (which are rarely published in English), Jewish-specific publications\footnote{The majority of which are Zionist in nature, and which I have therefore opted not to utilize in this analysis. This is itself likely a product of the long history of severe anti-Semitism in Poland.}, and a handful expatriate blogs and websites.\footnote{It is worth noting that even the sources I employ in this project are indicative of the increased PiS control over the Polish media. Non-state-run media coming out of Poland is increasingly hard to find, especially those that are published in English due to concern over Poland’s international image. Keeping these limitations in mind for this project, outside of my analysis of state neo-nationalist rhetoric, I pull from the more independent of the major Polish media outlets, international media coverage, expatriate publications, and resistance sources that could be roughly translated.}

In addition to increasing state control of the media, the PiS Party also engages in active censorship of those remaining non-state media outlets. Polish Defense Minister Antoni Macierewicz personally called for the prosecution of Tomasz Piatek, a reporter who revealed information about PiS officials which was not sympathetic to the party.\footnote{Bielecki, Tomasz. "The Polish Reporter Who Told PiS Defense Minister's Secrets | DW | 07.11.2017." DW. November 07, 2017. \url{http://www.dw.com/en/the-polish-reporter-who-told-pis-defense-ministers-secrets/a-41282561}.} Independent television
channel TVN24 was fined 1.5 million złoty ($450,000) for covering protests against the PiS restrictions on media, which the National Broadcasting Council (KRRiT) claimed “violated the media code, which prohibits ‘promoting illegal activities and encouraging behavior that threatens security.’” The PiS also passed an overtly anti-Semitic law targeting media earlier this year, making any accusation that the “Polish state or people of involvement or responsibility for the Nazi occupation during World War II” punishable by three years in prison or a fine.

Responses of Polish officials in the days following the 2017 March for Independence are themselves indicative of the extent to which the PiS has been successful in controlling major Polish media outlets. It is safe to assume that President Duda’s deafening two-day silence after the march and eventual meager commentary were not incidental, but intensely strategized within the party. In addition to the president’s delayed response, a barrage of sympathetic coverage was released in the next few days. President Duda responded, “there is no room…in our country for xenophobia, for pathological nationalism, for anti-Semitism… ‘Such approaches mean exclusion from our society,’ he added. ‘One can’t equate patriotism with nationalism.’” Kaczyński is quoted as saying that the PiS “referred to traditions that ‘have nothing to do with anti-Semitism or racism,’” later adding that, “‘there were some extremely unfortunate’ and ‘completely

unacceptable’ incidents during the march, but…these occurrences were the ‘fringe of the fringe’” and that they were “very likely a provocation.”\textsuperscript{119}

Kaczyński further stoked the narrative of Polish victimization, claiming that “those who want to harm Poland know perfectly well how to do that…These kinds of slogans, this kind of nonsense, shameful nonsense, is very damaging to us.”\textsuperscript{120} The Polish foreign minister Witold Waszczykowski echoed these sentiments, alleging that “reactions abroad were ‘extremely exaggerated and unjustified…based on fake news rather than facts.’”\textsuperscript{121} TVP Info, a state media outlet, released an otherwise unsubstantiated report that investigations revealed that the offensive slogans and banners were the responsibility of an “extreme nationalist collective” known as the “Black Bloc.”\textsuperscript{122} These statements paint Poland as a victim of “fake news”\textsuperscript{123} and conspiracy to sully its international reputation. Again, in these statements, we see the paradoxes at play in the spectacle of neo-nationalist rhetoric – by characterizing these events as simultaneously out of the norm and exaggerated, as the monstrous actions of a select few extremists, the PiS conceals both its complicity in the events and the banality of the capital-\textit{ist} prejudices espoused by their rhetoric.

In addition to these condemnations of a select few “extremists” and biased international media coverage, party officials reiterated the PiS official platform, which opens with the claim that

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid. "Polish Senate Speaker Calls Remark by Ex Hillary Clinton Aide 'brazen Lie'."


\textsuperscript{123} The term “fake news” is itself a term taken directly from US alt-right neo-nationalists, further demonstrating the transnational nature of neo-nationalist rhetoric/methods.
“At the core of the program of Law and Justice lies the respect for the inherent and inalienable dignity of every human being… the right to life, the right to freedom and the right to equality rooted in human solidarity.”

Paradoxically, these statements are in stark contrast to the actual practices and policies of the party. Meanwhile, despite agreements with the EU to accept 7,000 refugees, Poland has taken in less than 50 refugees, refuses to accept any non-Christians, and alleges that “refugees…will spread infectious diseases.” Kaczyński has himself stated that “migrants could bring ‘epidemics’ to Europe and that they carried ‘various parasites and protozoa, which don’t affect their organisms, but which could be dangerous here.’” His language parallels anti-Semitic Nazi propaganda, as well as fear-driven statements about migrants to the US, such as President Trump’s allegations that Mexican migrants are criminals and rapists who bring drugs into the US. The PiS has justified this policy by blaming economic struggles in Poland on refugees, an argument ripped directly from European and American refugee crisis discourses, though Poland itself has neither the severe socioeconomic inequality, the economic stagnation that several of these nations are experiencing, nor has it actually taken in refugees to begin with.

Manipulation of Courts

Perhaps the most egregious of Law and Justice’s efforts to control state institutions is its attempt to gut the Constitutional Tribunal, the Polish supreme court. This project is an ongoing

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124 Ibid., "Prawo i Sprawiedliwość."
127 Ibid.
and longstanding one, beginning shortly after the October 2015 PiS win with the party appointing five new judges to the tribunal despite the previous appointment of five judges to those same positions by the previous government. Though the tribunal ruled that the PiS would have to honor three of the five original appointments, the PiS refused to do so and the new President Duda declined to swear in the previously appointed judges. What has been called a “constitutional crisis” continued when the party then passed legislation severely limiting the tribunal’s power, requiring a two-thirds majority ruling (increased from a simple majority) and increasing the minimum number of judges to hear a case a case from nine to thirteen.

Though this, too, was struck down by the tribunal, the party once again refused to honor the ruling, arguing that it was invalid as only twelve judges heard the case, prompting the European Union’s first investigation as to whether or not Poland had violated the rule of law condition of its membership in the EU. As a result of this EU investigation, the narrative surrounding this battle over the courts became entangled with PiS and neo-nationalist efforts to other itself from Europe, contrasting “a conservative, Catholic Poland and its family values with a godless, freethinking, gender-bending Western Europe” and accusing “past governments, the opposition and the urban elites of hankering after European approval and acceptance to the detriment of Polish interests.”

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130 Ibid.
But Poland is not just other from or a member of the EU; rather, it is paradoxically other and member, constantly towing the line between acceptance by the West and a rejection of Western European “values” (or alleged lack thereof). This dynamic is exemplified in the continued attempts to infringe upon the power of the tribunal, while simultaneously packing it with PiS-appointed judges. Such efforts escalated in 2017 and 2018, resulting in a bill passed by both houses of parliament that would entirely dissolve the tribunal appointees. President Duda professed intent to pass the bill, arguing that “This view that it’s an abuse of democratic standards is unfounded…It’s the opposite. What is happening is a deepening of democracy. The judges will no longer rule themselves… they are servants of the Polish people.”\textsuperscript{132} He ultimately vetoed the bill, however, in response to increasing threats from the European Union to cut EU funds if the judicial crisis continued, money which Poland is a major recipient of and which has largely been used by the PiS to invest in the poor countryside to garner support.\textsuperscript{133}

Still, Poland could not be perceived as giving into the European Union on this issue, and the PiS needed a restructuring of the court to continue passing unconstitutional, prejudicial law, such as that of media censorship. President Duda and Kaczyński rewrote the legislation to instead lower the required retirement age of judges, such that roughly half of the existing appointed judges were forced to retire. Moreover, the majority of judicial selection power was redistributed to the lower house of parliament which, unlike the upper house, is controlled by the PiS.\textsuperscript{134} Though the European Court of Justice ordered Poland to freeze this judicial overhaul in October 2018 due to potential violations of EU law regarding an independent judiciary, it has yet to formally decide


\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., Erlanger and Santora.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., Santora and Berendt.
whether or not Poland has indeed violated that policy. And while Poland has halted the process “in compliance” with this order, the PiS has not reversed its passage of the laws or the forced retirements/new appointments which have already been made.

CONCLUSION

As I have demonstrated in this chapter, using a bottom-up approach to unpack the Polish political climate, the Law and Justice Party itself, and Polish neo-nationalism helps to show that all are heavily steeped in inter- and transnational economic and political dynamics. Poland’s refusal to accept refugees comes not just from xenophobia, racism, and Islamophobia; rather, it is further rooted in a paradoxical, simultaneous desire to other itself and secure membership/respect from the European Union and the broader Western-centric international community. Indeed, Polish neo-nationalist rhetoric mobilizes decidedly Western/non-Polish political and economic justifications in its vocal rejection of the refugee relocation quota assigned to it by the EU. As I have argued above, these paradoxically transnational entanglements of the Polish neo-nationalist rhetorical project are made legible in statements made by Law and Justice officials, as well as in the PiS platform itself.

I have also shown that in order to legitimize the capitalist violence inherent (even if covertly) in its platform against people of color, refugees, women, the LGBTQ+ community, and religious minorities, the PiS has necessarily engaged in the manipulation of independent and state institutions. Furthermore, these interventions in Polish domestic institutions by the PiS party are themselves intertwined with Poland’s intentional testing of its relationship to the European Union. It is by no coincidence that attacks by the Law and Justice Party on freedom of the press and Poland’s judicial system have aggravated the already-tense relationship between Poland and the
EU for its refusal to honor its refugee resettlement requirements. The (albeit incredibly belated) EU response to this flagrant manipulation of media and the courts with investigations and threats to withhold funds from Poland are anything but incidental. Rather, they paradoxically serve to further the narrative of Polish victimization and threatened sovereignty so essential to PiS neo-nationalist ideology and objectives. Likewise, Poland’s selective semi-compliance and non-response to these warnings further reflects its desired image of simultaneous member *and* other.

Moreover, Poland’s continued EU membership (despite its systematic defiance of EU membership requirements including freedom of press, human rights, independence of judiciary, refugee relocation quotas, and adoption of eurozone incorporation policies) has clear implications for the broader status of the European Union. The very legitimacy of the European Union as a transnational institution is called into question when its member states altogether disregard so-called “European values.” Thus, in yet another respect, the implications of Polish neo-nationalism extend far beyond its borders.
CONCLUSION: GLOBAL IMPLICATIONS OF NEO-NATIONALISM

It seems fitting to conclude this project by examining the 2018 Polish March of Independence, one year on from the events which initially inspired this inquiry. Curiously, the 2018 march received very little coverage in international media compared to the year prior. The 2018 demonstration was even more contentious in Poland than that of 2017 (a direct result of the international attention garnered the year prior), making the lack of international interest in the 2018 march all the more striking. Anticipating additional violence and hate speech, outgoing Warsaw mayor Hanna Beata Gronkiewicz-Waltz banned the far-right march on November 7th, just five days prior to the annual November 11th event, only to have the ban overturned by Polish courts two days later. In the time between the ban and its overturning, however, President Duda announced the Polish state-organized event, which would take the same route and proceed at the same time as the original neo-nationalist march.

In the end, both the state-organized and the far-right nationalist-organized marches proceeded together, presumably separated/one after the other, but their lines were in actuality heavily blurred. The positioning of Polish neo-nationalism firmly between the Polish nation-state and the trans-national was more visible than ever. The visuals emerging from the transnational entanglements of this conglomerate 2018 march are almost poetic – “Polish soldiers stood side-by-side with members of the National-Radical Camp (ONR), the successor to a pre-war Polish

fascist movement, and representatives of Forza Nuova, an Italian neo-fascist movement, as they were addressed by Duda at the march’s inauguration.”

Although overtly racist banners and chants were less visible than the year prior, neo-nationalists were nevertheless all too present, and the transnational linkages of their rhetoric were on full display. As reported in *The Guardian*, “All-Polish Youth…posted a video of an EU flag being set on fire on the march, as some…chanted ‘down with the European Union.’”

The international radio silence regarding this year’s march is perhaps also telling of the extent to which neo-nationalism has paradoxically become commonplace in the West. In a report from the BBC, which just last year condemned the participants in the march as far-right extremists, PiS-supporting marchers, many of whom sported Polish flag armbands (an inarguable tie to Nazi symbolism) were described as “ordinary, patriotic Poles.”

Despite – or perhaps because of – the controversy surrounding the 2018 march, turnout to the event was estimated at 200,000, more than double that of the 2017 march.

This project began with a simple observation – not only have extreme far-right nationalist movements seemingly suddenly emerged in nations across the Global West, but these nationalist movements seem to exhibit startlingly similar characteristics with one another. In addition to similar themes of a national identity built around the violent exclusion of people of color, non-Christians, LGBTQ+ individuals, and women, but also the methods employed by nationalists and even the actual language of these movements bore striking resemblances across borders and cultures. It would seem entirely antithetical to the traditional conceptions of nationalism and

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137 Ibid.
138 Ibid.
140 Ibid.
national identity that several nation-states with unique cultures and long histories of nationalist mythologies would display allegedly “nationalist” movements that seem hardly specific to their own long-established national constructions.

The far-right nationalist movement in Poland that became so public after its Independence Day march in November 2017 struck me as a particularly perplexing case given its deliberate exchange of nationalist rhetoric, and even individual supporters of nationalist movements, from abroad. In my efforts to theorize both the Polish case and the greater trend of these paradoxically transnational nationalist movements, it became clear that traditional scholarship on nationalism and methodologies for the study thereof provided neither sufficient theoretical perspectives nor the necessary language to analyze a type of nationalist movement which is itself transnational – neither bound by the borders and culture of the nation-state nor entirely separate from them.

Thus, in this thesis, I embarked upon two primary tasks. In Chapter 1, I provided a definition and theory of these new nationalist movements – neo-nationalism – that, by drawing from historical materialist, feminist, and post-colonial theoretical perspectives, accounts for both the subject matter and the transnational nature of neo-nationalist phenomenon. In the two chapters that follow, I apply that theory of neo-nationalism and a method of visual-rhetorical analysis to contemporary Poland in order to demonstrate the entanglements of these nationalist rhetorics with what I have described as “capital-isms” in the context of the current state of global capitalism. I used a top-down approach in Chapter 2, and then a bottom-up approach in Chapter 3, to capture the paradoxical nature of Polish neo-nationalist rhetoric. Such paradoxes explored through neo-nationalist rhetoric include the simultaneous embeddedness of neo-nationalist rhetoric in the transnational and localized political climate of Poland and the Law and Justice Party, paradoxes
and inconsistencies within neo-nationalist narratives themselves, and the “spectacular” but banal facets of neo-nationalist rhetoric.

Though much remains to be explored, it is clear, at the very least, that neo-nationalism is a phenomenon which will not soon disappear. As the legitimacy of the European Union becomes increasingly nebulous at the same time that the nation-state struggles to reassert itself in the face of erosion under global capitalism, we cannot lose sight of the very real, and very life or death, consequences of these changing dynamics for historically marginalized groups. In spaces of such instability, where neo-nationalist ideologies are likely to continue to take hold, racial and ethnic minorities, women, LGBTQ+ individuals, non-Christians, and other “others” are already and will continue to be the first to have their basic security threatened. Thus, I aim to have provided a useful definition of neo-nationalism which can be applied to further analyses of this current wave of movements and to have further demonstrated the necessity of a top-down, bottom-up, and itself paradoxical methodological approach that pulls from a variety of disciplines and theoretical approaches in understanding this phenomenon of neo-nationalism. As violence committed against subjugated groups throughout the West continues to rise, it is more crucial than ever that research aiming to understand and/or tackle the problem of neo-nationalist movements takes these stakes seriously.
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