

(and particularly the work of Edward Said) to analyse the cultural and political implications of Poland's location between the West and the East.⁶ In this context, I propose to interpret Polish Islamophobia as a phenomenon fuelled by fears, resentments and aspirations that are characteristic of a society that has striven to be included, both symbolically and economically, in a club of modernized, developed and 'fully European' countries, and yet —due to its historically grounded semi-peripherality—is structurally doomed to be the western economies' 'assembly plant' and a reservoir of cheap labour. In my view, taking these circumstances into account is *conditio sine qua non* of any attempt at grasping and understanding both the sources of Polish 'Islamophobia without Muslims' and the diverse forms that it has taken in recent years.⁷

'Europe' and 'Islam': empty signifiers of Islamophobic discourse

The most general characteristics of European Islamophobic discourses is that they reproduce the Orientalist conceptual framework in which 'Islam' is opposed to 'Europe' (or 'the West'). As this binary framework, most famously analysed by Edward Said,⁸ misinterprets the existence of both Muslim Europeans of immigrant ancestry as well as large and diverse indigenous Muslim communities in Europe (such as Balkan Muslims or Polish and Lithuanian Tatars), it turns out to be a powerful instrument of Othering those perceived primarily as the followers of Islam in European societies. However, it is not only the sociological and historical inadequacy of this framework that attests to its status of ideological construction. What seems equally relevant is the fact that within it both the concepts of 'Islam' and 'Europe' (or 'the West') function as 'empty signifiers', that is, as categories that are filled with different meanings depending on particular political or

6 See Maria Janion, *Niesamowita Słowiańszczyzna: Fantazmaty literatury* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo Literackie 2007); and Jan Sowa, *Fantomowe ciało króla: Peryferyjne zmagania z nowoczesną formą* (Cracow: Universitas 2011).

7 While proposing semi-peripherality as a framework for understanding Polish Islamophobia, I do not want to suggest that the notion provides the ultimate explanation for this phenomenon and its causes. My claim is that Polish semi-peripherality constitutes one of the important factors that have shaped the conditions in which present-day anti-Muslim attitudes have developed and that it helps to interpret the diversity of Polish Islamophobic discourses. However, any in-depth study of the causes of these attitudes should also take into account other factors (such as, for example, the heritage of Polish antisemitism or historical trajectories of Polish nationalism).

8 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books 1979). It should be noted that, in this critique of Orientalism, Said himself did not particularly focus on the issue of religion. However, as Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar show, this issue turns out to be crucial for understanding the historical dynamics of Orientalism. Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar, 'Orientalism and the Jews: an introduction', in Ivan Davidson Kalmar and Derek J. Penslar (eds), *Orientalism and the Jews* (Hanover, NH and London: University Press of New England 2004), xiii–xl (xxi).

discursive demands. A closer examination of Islamophobic discourses of different political orientations reveals that, although they all strongly emphasize the incompatibility of 'Islam' and 'Europe', they assume a very different understanding of these notions.

This difference becomes clear if one compares 'liberal-progressive' and 'conservative' types of Islamophobic discourses.⁹ In the former, 'Europe' usually stands for a normative ideal encompassing *modern principles* of democracy, human rights, sexual freedom, gender equality and secularism. By contrast, 'Islam' and 'Muslim culture' are constructed in complete opposition to these values. In these discourses, they represent a religious traditionalism that endorses gender hierarchy, political authoritarianism and oppression of sexual and religious minorities, and is averse to individual autonomy and secular political orders. In this context, opposing 'the Islamic' is seen as a defence of progress, universalism and human emancipation. It is often perceived as both an affirmation of the achievements of western civilization and an attempt to rescue Muslim subjects from the backwardness imposed on them by their religion.¹⁰

In conservative right-wing Islamophobic discourses, 'Europe' means something different. On the one hand, it is described by reference to a common *heritage, cultural identity and tradition* that constitute 'Europe' (or 'the West') as a unique community of values rooted in Christianity (or Judaeo-Christianity)

9 I use the term 'liberal-progressive' to denote a political position that should be distinguished from that of both the conservative liberals (who in fact comprise the majority of those called 'liberals' in Poland and also, ironically, members of the post-Communist party Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej, known as 'leftists') and also the 'leftist-progressives' (who are a tiny group lacking representation in mainstream politics). For a discussion of the specificity of ideological divisions in Poland, see Beata Pająk-Patkowska, 'Wymiar lewica-prawica w Polsce—podziały ideologiczne w polskim społeczeństwie', *Środkowoeuropejskie Studia Polityczne*, no. 1, 2010, 79–96. Relevant insights can also be found in Kinga Dunin, 'Gdzie ten polski liberalizm?', *Newsweek Polska*, 17 January 2009, available online at www.newsweek.pl/europa/gdzie-ten-polski-liberalizm,44004,1,1.html (viewed 6 August 2018).

10 Among prominent champions of these kinds of views are Ayan Hirshi Ali: see, for example, the interview by Rogier van Bakel, "'The trouble is the West': Ayaan Hirsi Ali on Islam, immigration, civil liberties, and the fate of the West", *Reason*, November 2007, available on the *Reason: Free Minds and Free Markets* website at <http://reason.com/archives/2007/10/10/the-trouble-is-the-west>; Richard Dawkins and other representatives of 'New Atheism': see Jerome Taylor, 'Atheists Richard Dawkins, Christopher Hitchens and Sam Harris face Islamophobia backlash', *Independent*, 12 April 2013, available online at www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/atheists-richard-dawkins-christopher-hitchens-and-sam-harris-face-islamophobia-backlash-8570580.html; and many influential feminists such as Elizabeth Badinter (who has been at the forefront of the anti-veil campaign in France): see, for example, Marion Van Renterghem, 'Elisabeth Badinter, la griffe de la République', *Le Monde*, 19 June 2016, available online at www.crif.org/fr/revuedepresse/elisabeth-badinter-la-griffe-de-la-republique; Alice Schwarzer in Germany: see the interview with Schwarzer, 'Muslim integration: eyes wide shut', *Der Spiegel*, 25 November 2004, available online at www.spiegel.de/international/spiegel/muslim-integration-eyes-wide-shut-a-329261.html (all viewed 6 August 2018); and Magdalena Środa in Poland, whose views I discuss further in the text.

and developed in the course of western history. In this account, defending 'Europe' against 'Islam' is not so much about affirming the liberal values of individualism and enlightenment as it is about protecting the distinctiveness and integrity of European (western) culture, as well as establishing strict criteria for belonging to it. However, in these Islamophobic discourses, the term 'Europe' also has a second meaning that refers not to the 'essence' of European identity but to its current condition. In these discourses, Europe *in its current state* is a scene of degeneration, weakness and self-denial caused by the 'onslaught' of liberal permissiveness, multiculturalism and a betrayal of the glory of the European past. By-products of this degeneration are declining European ('white') demographics, spiritual emptiness (atheism) and moral corruption linked to the destruction of the traditional family (as reflected in LGBT rights and feminism). It is exactly this state of affairs that is supposed to make Europe (the West) vulnerable and powerless *vis-à-vis* the 'Islamic threat'. Thus, conservative right-wing Islamophobia turns out to be a discourse of hostility that has two enemies: one is 'Islam'; and the other is the liberal and leftist 'progressivism' that is responsible for weakening the West and undermining the very basis of its political and cultural superiority.¹¹

In fact, the realities of Islamophobic politics are messy and are marked by instrumental cross-borrowings of arguments forged in very different locations of the political spectrum. This can be exemplified by conservatives' strategy of justifying their anti-Muslim politics by referring to women's rights or to liberal feminist concerns about defending the 'civilizational integrity' of the West against the 'Islamic invasion'.¹² Nonetheless, the analytical differentiation between 'liberal-progressive' and 'conservative' anti-Islamic discourses might help us to understand diverse ideological sources of Islamophobia in present-day Europe. This differentiation can also be applied to the Polish context, in which, however, it must be complemented by clarification of the specific meanings that 'progressivism' and 'conservatism' acquire in the conditions of Polish semi-peripherality.

Unravelling these meanings requires reflecting on the nature of the basic divisions that have structured political conflicts and debates in Poland since

11 Two of the most prominent supporters of these kinds of views are Samuel Huntington and Oriana Fallaci (the latter declared herself non-religious but has called herself an 'atheist Christian'). Such views are common in right-wing circles in Poland and among some members of the Polish Catholic Church. Interestingly, however, they entail strong criticism of an official discourse on Islam that was developed by the Catholic popes (with the exception of Benedict XVI but including John Paul II) after the Second Vatican Council. The criticism is directed at the very idea of inter-faith dialogue with Muslims and, more recently, at Pope Francis's openness towards Muslim refugees and immigrants. The exemplary expression of these views can be found in a book by the editor-in-chief of *Do Rzeczy*, a popular right-wing weekly. Paweł Lisicki, *Dżihad i Samozałada Zachodu* (Lublin: Fabryka Słów 2015).

12 Gargi Bhattacharyya, *Dangerous Brown Men: Exploiting Sex, Violence and Feminism in the War on the Terror* (London and New York: Zed Books 2008).

1989 when the post-Communist transformation began. As research on peripheral societies has shown, the main antagonisms that organize their political life usually revolve around a question of what constitutes desirable relations with 'the centre'.¹³ In the case of post-Communist Poland, it has meant that, on one side, there have been those who believe that Polish society should 'catch up' and imitate models of modernization that have been realized by the countries of the centre. This includes economic as well as social modernization, that is to say, the adaptation of liberal cultural standards. On the other side of the debate, there have been those who fear that following the Western European, liberal model of modernization would result in Poland losing its newly regained political independence, and would be just another means of suppressing the authentic cultural and religious identity of the country.

In the context of Polish post-Communist semi-peripherality, 'liberal progressivism' can thus be understood as a project of social and political *assimilation* to the universal model of 'civilizational' advancement most fully represented by the societies of Western Europe. A central feature of this approach is the belief that emulating western institutional arrangements, integrating with capitalist economies and changing both individual as well as collective attitudes, will allow Poland to become a country of the centre. Proponents of this vision usually assume that the main reason for Poland's 'civilizational' deficits is the Communist period that blocked the free-market economy, suppressed the democratic aspirations of the people and in fact constituted a forced detachment of Poland from 'Europe'. In their view, the post-Communist transformation in Poland can be best understood as a process of 'returning to Europe'.

Understandably, this political and cultural aspiration has created the need constantly to confirm Poland's 'European' or 'western' credentials. What is more, since in this vision the imagined 'Europeanness' (or 'westernness') is affirmatively identified with the principles of the neoliberal capitalist order, a distinctive feature of liberal, assimilatory discourses has become the promotion of the ideal of the 'westernized', mobile and entrepreneurial individual.¹⁴ In the context of rising economic inequality and unemployment brought about by the post-Communist transformation, these discourses have led to a collective stigmatization of those who fail to realize the ideal, who do not succeed in the sphere of the free-market economy. As Michał Buchowski has shown, these assimilatory, liberal discourses have virtually 'Orientalized' the victims of the transformation and constructed them as responsible for their own social and economic exclusion.¹⁵

13 Zarycki, *Peryferie*, 152.

14 Elizabeth C. Dunn, *Privatizing Poland: Baby Food, Big Business, and the Remaking of Labor* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2004).

15 Michał Buchowski, 'The specter of Orientalism in Europe: from exotic Other to stigmatized brother', *Anthropological Quarterly*, vol. 79, no. 3, 2006, 463–82.

Liberal feminism and Islamophobia in Poland

It is exactly this assimilatory mechanism of differentiating oneself from those who do not fit in the liberal vision of 'Europe' or 'the West' that lies at the root of 'liberal-progressive' Islamophobia in Poland. This can be best illustrated by the attitudes towards Islam that have been adopted in the liberal branch of Polish feminism. Although it must be noted that the 'Muslim question' has been rather marginal to feminist interests in Poland, it has appeared mostly in connection with the issue of the violation of women's rights in Islam. In the aftermath of 9/11, some feminists explicitly endorsed the anti-Islamic discourse of Oriana Fallaci, uncritically identified with the position of Ayan Hirshi Ali and supported the publication of Islamophobic books.¹⁶ They have also commonly referenced 'the Islamic' as a synonym of backwardness, barbarity and oppression.¹⁷ This is particularly visible in various statements articulated from inside the Kongres Kobiet (Women's Congress), which is a highly publicized mainstream liberal women's movement initiated in 2009 by prominent female representatives of the Polish business, political and media establishment.

A good example here is an event organized during the annual meeting of Kongres Kobiet in 2016. During this meeting Kongres's leaders distributed brown paper bags to members of the audience who were asked to wear them on their heads. This was to symbolize women's oppression in Muslim societies and was explicitly presented as a metaphor of both Polish women's submission to the patriarchal order and the neo-traditionalist assault on women's rights that has been supported by the Catholic Church. As the persuasive force of this type of 'metaphor' and other comparisons depends on the Islamophobic mindset of their recipients, they not only reproduced Orientalist stereotypes of Islam but also assumed that Islamophobic attitudes are self-evident and widespread in Polish society. What was particularly disturbing about it, however, was the fact that it took place in the context of a rising wave of anti-Muslim xenophobia that was additionally strengthened by reactions to the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015.

Similar logics can be discerned in statements repeated on different occasions by the influential Kongres leader, a philosophy professor and former

16 See, for example, Renata Lis, 'Bronię Oriany Fallaci', *Zadra: Pismo Feministyczne*, no. 1 (10), 2002, 50–1; Maria Ciechomska, 'Wściekłość i wstyd', *Zadra: Pismo Feministyczne*, no. 1 (22), 2005, 8–11; and Agata Araszkiewicz, 'Islam w oczach kobiet', *Czas Kultury*, no. 6 (129), 2005, 190–4.

17 See, for example, Maja Wolna, 'Spoza zasłony: Próba spojrzenia na kobietę w islamie w 15 odsłonach', *Artmix* (online), no. 21 (31), 7 October 2013, available on the *Obieg* website at <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/artmix/29999>; and Agnieszka Kołek, 'Islam zamykający usta feministkom za ich przyzwoleniem? – w poszukiwaniu odpowiedzi w kulturze postmodernizmu', *Artmix* (online), no. 31 (21), 10 October 2013, available on the *Obieg* website at <http://archiwum-obieg.u-jazdowski.pl/artmix/30041> (both viewed 6 August 2018).

Plenipotentiary for the Equal Status of Women and Men in the Polish government, Magdalena Środa. Środa, who is also the co-author of many of the Kongres's official documents, compares unspecified 'Islamic countries' to the totalitarian regimes of Nazi Germany, the Vichy regime in France and the Communist dictatorship in Romania. She suggests that Poland, dominated by the conservative forces of Catholicism, is growing to resemble these political systems (and particularly 'Islamic countries') that constitute the polar opposite of the 'civilized world' that respects women's rights.¹⁸ What is significant for my argument is the fact that both Kongres Kobiet and Środa as its leader have been perceived as representing only the privileged sectors of the female population of Poland, and supporting a neoliberal agenda. Since they subscribe to the culturally liberal and economically neoliberal idea of 'westernness', they produce discourses that combine anti-Islamic slogans with a vision of women's emancipation in which issues of class and social justice are marginalized.¹⁹

Examination of the xenophobic discourses about the *non-present Muslim Other* that have been used by some representatives of Polish liberal feminism and its organizations shows that these discourses in fact serve as a kind of political idiom that is meant to express local ideological struggles rather than conflicts related to Islam. Since, from a liberal feminist perspective, a main factor responsible for the gradual restriction of women's rights in Poland after 1989 is the Catholic Church and its increasingly politicized presence in Polish public life, the feminist 'Islamophobia without Muslims' should rather be understood as a variation of criticism of religion in general.²⁰ On this ground, politicized

18 For some of the many of Środa's public statements that contain this type of argument, see, for example, Mateusz Zardzewiały, 'Prof. Magdalena Środa komentuje: Totalitarny zakaz aborcji', *Super Express*, 4 April 2016, available online at www.se.pl/wiadomosci/opinie/prof-magdalena-sroda-komentuje-totalitarny-zakaz-aborcji_802735.html; and Magdalena Środa, 'Islamizacja Polski', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 23 September 2015, available online at <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75968,18875145,islamizacja-polski.html>. These arguments were also repeated in a Kongres Kobiet document concerning a project to restrict abortion law in Poland: 'Stanowisko Kongresu Kobiet w sprawie planowanego całkowitego zakazu aborcji', 2 April 2016, available on the Kongres Kobiet website at www.kongreskobiet.pl/pl-PL/news/show/stanowisko_kongresu_kobiet_w_sprawie_planowanego_calkowitego_zakazu_aborcji (all viewed 6 August 2018).

19 The link between these ideological elements was aptly pinpointed by two left-wing feminists, Kamila Kuryło and Ewa Majewska, in their open letter to Kongres Kobiet in which they criticized the Islamophobic event with the paper bags. The letter was published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*, one of the leading Polish newspapers. Kamila Kuryło and Ewa Majewska, 'Alert dla Równości—List otwarty do Organizatorów Kongresu Kobiet 2016', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 14 May 2016, available online at <http://wyborcza.pl/1,95891,20075661,alert-dla-rownosci-list-otwarty-do-organizatorek-kongresu.html> (viewed 6 August 2018).

20 This can be illustrated by the feminist endorsement of the views presented in the anti-religious and particularly anti-Islamic book, Ophelia Benson and Jeremy Stangroom, *Does God Hate Women?* (London and New York: Continuum 2009). The book was

Catholicism and Islam are perceived as related phenomena and are opposed as inherently anti-modern, anti-liberal, anti-women forces.²¹

In this situation, it is the ideal of liberal democratic Europe with its commitment to secularism, women's rights and sexual freedom that constitutes a natural normative alternative to a vision of 'culturally sovereign' traditionalist Catholic Poland (rhetorically compared to 'Islamic countries'). Polish feminist 'Islamophobia without Muslims' can thus be interpreted, first, as a by-product of the struggle with internal anti-modernist, anti-liberal tendencies in Polish society that are associated with the most conservative strands of Polish Catholicism and, second, as an expression of the aspiration to be included in a 'civilized world', whose standards and principles might help to eradicate local, 'native' backwardness. It is the political-intellectual framework adopted by liberal feminism in Poland in its struggle against this version of Catholicism that makes it difficult to counter deeply embedded, although usually rather unreflective, anti-Islamic attitudes. However, it is noteworthy that the recent upsurge of right-wing Islamophobia—especially in its cynical versions that instrumentalize women's rights—seems to have inspired, in some feminist circles, a search for alternative frameworks.²²

Conservative Islamophobia and the resentment of the semi-periphery

Describing the Islamophobic tropes present in the discourses of Polish liberal feminism is not to suggest that this political position bears the sole responsibility—or even the larger part of it—for the development of anti-Muslim sentiments in Poland. These sentiments have been fuelled mostly by the growing popularity of nationalist ideas (in Eastern Europe in general) that were radicalized during the so-called 'refugee crisis' in 2015, which coincided with parliamentary elections and subsequent political change in Poland.

published in Poland under the auspices of *Feminoteka*, an important feminist foundation and think-tank.

- 21 This 'chain of equivalence' includes—in the liberal discourse—also the right-wing Catholic-nationalist party *Prawo i Sprawiedliwość* (PiS, Law and Justice) that has governed Poland since the autumn of 2015. A popular way to express opposition to the party is to call it PiSlam and its members PiSlamists. Jakub Dymek, 'PiSlam i dyktatura albo Schetyna i Petru', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 18 July 2017, available online at <http://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114871,22112065,pislam-i-dyktatura-albo-schetyna-i-petru-dymek-opozycji-brakuje.html> (viewed 6 August 2018).
- 22 As a result of criticism provoked by the Islamophobic event with paper bags organized by Kongres Kobiet in 2016, the problem of feminist Islamophobia became a topic of the panel discussion that took place during the Kongres's annual meeting in 2017. On another occasion, Magdalena Środa responded to my book, containing critical analysis of her Islamophobic statements, and admitted that her earlier perception of Islam had not been well thought out: Monika Bobako, *Islamofobia jako technologia władzy: Studium z antropologii politycznej* (Cracow: Universitas 2017).

That change was caused by accumulated social disaffection and anger that found expression in a political language that focused on the idea of national sovereignty and the restoration of 'traditional' values and identities.²³ In this context, the question of Poland's participation in the European Union's emergency policies regarding refugees became a central issue in the electoral campaign, and was used by right-wing politicians who turned Islamophobia into an instrument of an internal, nationalist agenda. Consequently, the Polish public sphere witnessed unprecedented escalation of aggressive anti-Muslim, anti-refugee hatred.²⁴

However, these Polish right-wing nationalist Islamophobic discourses significantly differ from the liberal-feminist ones discussed above. Paradoxically, it is the *rejection* of the very normative ideal of 'Europe' underwriting liberal Islamophobia that constitutes a building block of right-wing anti-Islamic discourses in Poland. As 'liberal Europe' is accused of 'bringing Muslims to Europe' and 'politically correct' propaganda of promoting multiculturalism, it is presented as a collaborator and an integral part of the 'Muslim menace'. This kind of thinking is certainly present in Western European countries as well. However, due to the fact that the liberal model of European-ness promoted by the institutions of the European Union are perceived in right-wing political circles in Poland as a kind of quasi-colonial attempt at culturally and politically subjugating the country, opposition to this model is seen in these circles as a defence of political sovereignty and cultural autonomy. One of the most common tropes of right-wing Islamophobia is its characterization of the alleged 'mayhem' caused by the Muslim presence that has been unleashed in western multicultural countries and that has resulted in the creation of 'sharia zones', the intimidation of the 'ethnically European' population by the Muslim minority and a growing helplessness of the authorities *vis-à-vis* its claims. This kind of discourse supports the right-wing refusal to accept European multicultural policies as a model for Poland and justifies the need to manage the immigration and refugee issues in a sovereign manner.²⁵

23 These circumstances are discussed in Leszek Koczanowicz, 'The Polish case: community and democracy under the PiS', *New Left Review*, no. 102, November–December 2016, 77–96.

24 As the Centrum Badań Opinii Społecznej (CBOS) survey shows, between May 2015 and January 2016 the number of Poles who opposed admitting refugees more than doubled (from 21 to 53 per cent). See CBOS, 'Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców', *Komunikat z badań*, no. 12, 2016. See also Konrad Pędziwiatr, 'Islamophobia in Poland: National Report 2016', in Enes Bayraklı and Farid Hafez (eds), *European Islamophobia Report 2016* (Istanbul: SETA 2017), 411–43.

25 This discourse has been deployed by the ruling party, PiS, and its supporters. After they gained control of the public media, it became the dominant discourse on state-sponsored television channels. It has been evident in the most popular right-wing weeklies *Do Rzeczy* and *W Sieci* and in conservative Catholic journals (and their websites), such as *Frona* or *Polonia Christiana*, as well as on Radio Maryja. In more elaborate forms it can be found in books written by right-wing journalists. See, for example, Lisicki,

Thus, it must be noted that right-wing nationalist Islamophobia in Poland is as much anti-Islamic as it is directed against the 'colonial domination of the European Union' and the liberal project of political and cultural modernization based on the egalitarian values of the Enlightenment. In this context, it is worth linking the violent paroxysm of Islamophobia during the 'refugee crisis' of 2015 with another example of moral panic that was stirred up in Poland around so-called 'gender ideology' in 2012–14.²⁶ This comparison is justified on two grounds: first of all, the right-wing anti-gender and the Islamophobic campaigns were both run and supported by the same political actors (including leading politicians, Catholic dignitaries and lower-ranked priests, political parties, social organizations and so on).²⁷ Second, both the 'war on gender ideology' and the anti-Islamic, anti-refugee campaign that escalated in 2015 served the same ideological purpose of demonizing the European Union (as a colonial endeavour of the western elites) and attacking liberal political and cultural ideas, policies and organizations, both in the wider European context and in Poland. In this sense, both were instrumental in the political mobilization that has taken place under the banner of *reclaiming* national sovereignty, national heritage and national pride.²⁸

Explanations of the causes of the current outburst of nationalist sentiment in Poland differ significantly and are dependent on how the direction that the Polish post-Communist transformation took after 1989 is understood. However, the framework of the modern world-system theory that I am adopting in this text allows us to link this outburst with the semi-peripheral character of Poland's inclusion in the global capitalist system after the collapse of the Eastern Bloc. Within this framework, growing economic inequalities and instability as well as the patchy modernization of the country appears to be

Dżihad i Samozagłada Zachodu; Tomasz P. Terlikowski, *Kalifat Europa* (Cracow: Wydawnictwo AA 2016); and Stanisław Krajski, *Masoneria, islam, uchodźcy – czy czeka nas wielka apokalipsa?* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo św. Tomasza z Akwinu 2016).

- 26 Elżbieta Korolczuk, '“The war on gender” from a transnational perspective: lessons for feminist strategising', September 2014, available on the *Heinrich Böll Stiftung* website at https://pl.boell.org/sites/default/files/uploads/2014/10/war_on_gender_korolczuk.pdf; Weronika Grzebalska, 'Anti-genderism and the crisis of neoliberal democracy', 7 March 2016, available on the *VisegradInsight* website at <http://visegradinsight.eu/why-the-war-on-gender-ideology-matters-and-not-just-to-feminists> (both viewed 7 August 2018).
- 27 Examples of the political actors active in both campaigns include but are not limited to: the Minister of Science and Higher Education Jarosław Gowin (he was Minister of Justice when the anti-gender campaign began); members of PiS; members of the Kukiz'15 movement; prominent priests-academics Dariusz Oko and Paweł Bortkiewicz; the popular right-wing weeklies *Do Rzeczy* and *W Sieci*; the conservative Catholic journals *Polonia Christiana* and *Frona*; the daily *Nasz Dziennik*; a network of organizations linked to Radio Maryja; and the organization Kongres Kobiet Konserwatywnych.
- 28 For an in-depth analysis of the ideological links between the anti-gender and anti-Muslim campaigns in Poland, see Bobako, *Islamofobia jako Technologia Władzy*, esp. ch. 6, 'Islamofobia resentmentu: Antymuzułmański dyskurs religijnej prawicy w Polsce' (311–71).

a systemic result of the unreflective adoption of neoliberal policies rather than a problem of the 'demanding attitudes' of post-Communist Polish citizens or a feature of a 'transitory period' that will be overcome in the process of further integration with capitalist economic structures. Paradoxically, it is the relative economic success that Poland has achieved in recent years combined with the increasing social and institutional integration of the country in Europe that has made visible (and strongly felt) the contradictions between great hopes and expectations, on the one hand, and social reality, on the other. The recent upsurge of nationalist sentiments in Poland should be read against this background as a form of resentful—even if highly selective—rejection of the project of European modernization.

It is not incidental that the outburst of nationalism in Poland has taken place in the social-political context marked by the virtual absence of left-wing narratives that might provide an alternative vehicle for the expression of frustration and anger. Although the weakness of such narratives is also the case in Western Europe, in Poland (and other countries in the region)—due to obvious historical reasons—it has a special twist. As the symbolic delegitimization of the socialist period and any ideas or social arrangements associated with it remains very strong, developing leftist political language has proven very difficult and is hindered by actors coming from both the nationalist and liberal ends of the political spectrum. As a result, even the groups most severely affected by neoliberal policies identify with the ideas that underpin them.²⁹ From this perspective, nationalist ideology in Poland, as well as the 'Islamophobia without Muslims' that has been incorporated in it, can be interpreted as a useful instrument of affirmation of national pride and identity that is in fact a way to channel social disaffection away from the dominating structures of economic power. Reference to neo-Marxist accounts of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century antisemitism and its role in stabilizing capitalist relations of power suggests a similar function that politicized anti-Muslim hatred plays in present-day Europe.

The denial of semi-peripherality and the roots of Islamophobia in Poland

Islamophobia is a 'prismatic' phenomenon that can become a vehicle for diverse political discourses in which Islam, as a symbol of Otherness, might

29 The youngest Polish adults, who are particularly affected by unemployment and insecurity, might be an example. Surveys show that support for free-market, libertarian ideologies is very strong in members of this group, and they also have the most xenophobic attitudes of all social groups in Poland. See Dorota Hall and Agnieszka Mikulska-Jolles, *Uprzedzenia, strach czy niewiedza? Młodzi Polacy o powodach niechęci do przyjmowania uchodźców*, Analizy, Raporty, Ekspertyzy, no. 1 (Warsaw: Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej 2016), 18, 31, available on the *Stowarzyszenie Interwencji Prawnej* website at <https://interwencjaprawna.pl/docs/ARE-116-uprzedzenia-mlodych-polakow.pdf> (viewed 7 August 2018).