

A critical discourse analysis of the media coverage of the migration crisis in Poland

The Polish Catholic Church's perception of the 'migration crisis'

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This paper discusses the Polish Catholic Church's perception of the recent European migration crisis by examining its discursive practices through the lens of critical discourse analysis. We focus on two of the official communication channels of the Church: the website of the Polish Episcopate Conference (PEC) and the weekly magazine *ekai.pl*, published by the PEC-owned Catholic Information Agency (CIA). We demonstrate that despite the official appeal of the Polish Episcopate for Christian hospitality, views of bishops participating in the public debate on the migration crisis are not unanimous, but polarised. These internal divisions on the issue parallel the ambivalent stance of the Polish Church on Poland's place in the European Union. The negative attitude of the majority of Poles to migrants, resulting in the refusal to participate in the European relocation programme, is sanctioned not only by the ruling political party but also by some representatives of religious authorities.

Introduction

This paper focuses on the representations of the recent so-called migration crisis by the Polish Catholic Church and its responses to this situation. We explore the links between religion and socially shaped perceptions and attitudes towards migrants and refugees and we demonstrate that the stance of the Church with regard to the migration crisis is not unanimous. The discursive practices analysed here have a long tradition and draw heavily on historically sanctioned constructions of Polish national identity and the relationship between Poland and the rest of Europe. In our discussion we consider the socio-political and historical contexts in which the representations and responses to the migration crisis are shaped. We argue that the exclusion of migrants is sanctioned by the ruling political party and by some representatives of religious authorities, despite the official appeal of the Church for Christian hospitality.

The number of refugees increased dramatically in 2015, mainly as a result of ongoing and new conflicts in Africa and Asia, with 65.3 million people forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, generalised violence, or human rights violations (UNHCR 2016: 2). This situation is constructed and experienced as a 'crisis' and it is broadly covered in the media. This 'crisis' denotes a time of uncertainty and 'shifting material, social, political and symbolic ground' (Holmes and Castañeda 2016: 13). It occupies a central place in international and domestic politics and produces diverse and contradictory discourses and responses. Some argue that the crisis has been exacerbated by the EU leaders' failure to formulate joint, coherent responses, a 'lack of political will' and the shifts in many member states towards increasingly restrictive migration policies and exclusionary rhetoric (Berry *et al.* 2016: 4). European leaders unwilling to take a more decisive and coherent approach to the migration crisis are becoming easy prey for nationalist and populist sentiments. The polarisation of views on the crisis among political elites is reflective of, and contributes to, high levels of public anxiety about immigration and asylum across Europe. Results of a recent survey reveal that the vast majority of Poles (74%) are against the settlement of refugees from Muslim countries in Poland (CBOS 2017). A shift towards more negative attitudes towards migrants and refugees in Europe, and in Poland in particular, is apparent.

Although some social actors have greater influence than others, there is no single agent to whom this shift can be attributed. One of the societal sources of power in influencing social perceptions is a privileged access to media and communication (van Dijk 1993: 255). The media however not only shapes the perceptions, knowledge and opinions of its audience but also draws on widespread opinions and collective 'common sense', by using arguments that have a long history and have proved to be persuasive for readers and listeners (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999: 111). Therefore, as Nick Lynn and Susan Lea (2003: 426) argue, 'making sense of the attitudes that currently prevail requires an awareness and understanding of the wider discursive context within which refugees and those regarded as asylum seekers are situated'. The construction and representation of the so-called migration crisis is culturally and historically specific. There is a growing volume of literature applying a critical approach to the media coverage of migration (Lynn and Lea 2003, KhosraviNik 2010, Teo 2000, van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999), including the current refugee crisis in different national

contexts (Berry *et al.* 2016, Colombo 2017, Kallius *et al.* 2016, Goodman *et al.* 2016, Bertram *et al.* 2017, Holmes and Castaneda 2016). We aim to add to this body of work by looking at the representation of the refugee crisis in Poland, as it is shaped by the Catholic Church.

The power of the Catholic Church in contemporary Poland is largely enhanced and realised through its access to the media (Ramet 2006, Velikonja 2003, Zuba 2010). The ‘voice of the Church’ in Poland is heard through a number of established, traditional Catholic media, as well as the relatively new internet-based media. Some of the Catholic media in Poland, such as the nationally broadcasted ‘Radio Maryja’ reach large audiences and are capable of gathering listeners into a social interest group with a very strong identity: ‘The family of Radio Maryja’. The supporters of Radio Maryja have been involved in organising religious, social and political actions providing strong support and a platform for the voicing of nationalist, xenophobic and Euro-sceptical views (Filas and Płaneta 2009). The status of the radio station as the ‘voice of the Catholic Church in Poland’ is, however, questionable. Although it was funded by Fr Tadeusz Rydzyk of the Congregation of the Most Holy Redeemer and is owned by that religious order, it remains independent from the Polish Church hierarchy. Despite the initiative of the Polish Episcopate to set up a special commission to monitor the actions of Radio Maryja and curb its political involvement, the Episcopate remains divided with regard to Fr Rydzyk’s actions and the station enjoys the strong support of some Polish bishops (Napieralski 2017).

In a previous study we have analysed how migration discourses are shaped and reproduced by large-circulation Catholic weekly magazines. We discussed how the views presented by the two Catholic magazines differ radically, depending on the broader ideological stances of these outlets (Krotofil and Motak 2018). Similar to Radio Maryja, the assertion that these weekly magazines represent the stance of the Catholic Church in Poland is debatable, as they remain independent of the Episcopate. In this paper therefore we will focus on two official communication channels of the Catholic Church: the website of the Polish Episcopate Conference (PEC) and publications produced by the Catholic Information Agency (CIA), owned by the Polish Episcopate. The latter was established in 1993, as an internet-based information agency producing press bulletins and magazines currently accessible through websites, Twitter and Facebook. In our analysis we will focus on the free-access CIA magazine, *ekai.pl*. The texts published

by the CIA and on the PEC website potentially reach wide audiences, as they are reprinted by different mainstream media outlets and, in the case of sermons or official statements issued by the Episcopate, communicated directly to people attending mass in their parish churches. At the same time we assume that the Church exercises greater institutional control over the content of the PEC website and material produced by the CIA, as compared to the weekly magazines we have analysed in the previous study (Krotofil and Motak 2018).

Data collection and analysis method

The primary data used in this study comprises of statements, notes, reports, sermons and interviews with Polish bishops published on the PEC website and by the internet weekly magazine *ekai.pl*, published by the CIA. We searched the website and the magazine for texts on migrants, refugees and the migration crisis published between August 2015 and December 2016. All texts containing references to these topics were screened for relevance, retrieved in a full version and entered into a database. All retrieved texts were analysed individually in relation to their function, structure, themes, and rhetorical strategies. The texts were also considered together in order to identify the recurrent themes and discourses and ideological differences within the main themes (see appendix for the table summarising emergent themes and categories). In our analysis we focused on the language choices made by Church authorities and their communicative aims. We have assumed that language is a form of social practice; it is through language that certain practices, ideas, values and identities are constructed and naturalised (Machin and Mayr 2012: 3). Discourse is shaped by situational, institutional and social contexts and at the same time it influences socio-political reality. Social roles, identities, interpersonal reactions and social conditions are constituted through discourse. Some of these are communicated but remain implicit and unjust for certain groups (e.g. migrants, or asylum seekers).

By using critical discourse analysis (CDA) methods we aimed to draw out 'invisible' practices related to the migration crisis, to look beneath the level of explicit argumentation into the realm of linguistic practices and reveal their political and ideological bases. We chose this method in order to be able to uncover discursive practices which are reproducing and legitimising social injustice and to demonstrate a continuity between current discourses on migration and past realisations of exclusivist ideologies. From the range

of critical approaches classified as CDA, we applied the principles of the discourse-historical approach (Wodak 2001: 64–94). A discourse-historical approach aims to consider a range of different genres of discourse referring to a particular political issue and to integrate a historical dimension into the analysis (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999: 91). In the analysis we used the background and contextual knowledge and aimed to embed the analysis in a wider frame of social and political relations. Therefore in our discussion we draw on our primary data, as well as on the previous analysis of religious media coverage of the migration crisis, public speeches of religious authorities and literature describing the broader context of the Polish relationship with the European Union and implications of this relationship in relation to migration and religion.

Poland and migration crisis

The sociohistorical context of the Polish response to the migration crisis is influenced by a number of factors, including well-established discourses of ethnic nationalism and religious homogeneity, a strong association between Polish ethnic and religious identities and a national mythology which positions Poland as the last bastion of Christianity in Europe. There is an inherent paradox in the dominant discourses on the Polish past and present. The image of a multicultural, tolerant Poland of the past is constructed alongside the ‘historically’ sanctioned notion of a country of one religion (Catholicism) and one truly Polish ethnicity. The ethnic and religious ‘homogeneity’ of Poland is however a relatively recent phenomenon which resulted from very violent events and a political process during the post-war period¹ (Zubrzycki 2016). The memory of diversity was suppressed, the notion of an ethno-national and denominational homogeneity was naturalised by the state and the Church and was used to legitimise the privileged position of the Catholic Church.

A strong alliance between Polish national and Catholic identities was reinforced in the post-war period through a discourse of a struggle against alien forces, represented by other religions (Jews), or political

1 Ethnic Poles comprised 65 per cent of the population of Poland just before the Second World War; by the late 1940s they accounted for about 95 per cent of the People’s Republic. The religious makeup of the population also changed dramatically in the same period (Zubrzycki 2016).

ideologies (communism, liberalism), which were constructed as the enemies of Christianity. In line with this, Poland was called upon to defend Christianity, thus fulfilling the country's most important destiny and becoming a bastion of Christianity (*antemurale christianitatis*).² The Church managed to maintain its monopolistic position as a religious institution, as well as its political influence after the transformation of 1989, but faced a new challenge (Demereth 2000, Velikonja 2003). The collapse of communism opened up the prospect of Polish entry into the European Union. This prospect seemed threatening to Polish bishops who feared secularisation, the undermining of traditional values, an exposure to pluralistic worldviews and a consequent weakening of the religious dimension of national identity (Ramet 2006: 137–43; Szumigalska 2015: 351).

In the construction of Polish identity in relation to the European Union the idea of pluralism has also been vigorously contested by intellectuals and politicians on the right. A populist conservative party, the Law and Justice Party (PiS), as for 2018 holding a majority in the Parliament, has absorbed a big portion of the radical nationalist ideology and cadres in recent years (Pankowski 2012). The party won the majority of seats in the parliamentary elections of October 2015; the victory was marked by a turn towards more socially conservative policies. Among other significant shifts in policy, PiS took a more antagonistic stance towards responses to the refugee crisis proposed by the European Union, compared to the previous centre-right Civic Platform government. In March 2016, the Law and Justice government announced that Poland would not participate in the European relocation programme, or accept any refugees under the scheme. Populist sentiments were evoked to harness public support for this decision. In the speech given during the party convention in June 2016, the leader of Law and Justice, Jarosław Kaczyński, stated that Poland is under pressure to 'create a multi-cultural society, a new identity', adding that 'everyone who knows the situation in Western Europe also knows that this means a deterioration in the quality of life' (Kaczyński 2016). Some observers argue that the Polish Catholic Church formed a political partnership with the ruling party and has become intertwined with Euroscepticism and the promotion of 'national values' (Guerra 2016), which might have significant implications for the Church representation of the 'migration crisis'.

2 This national myth was first developed when Polish armies confronted the Ottomans in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Porter-Szucs 2011).

The Polish Catholic Church in the face of the refugee crisis

The findings presented in this section describe the dominant discourses and related ideological positions taken by Church leaders. We will look at ‘who does what and to whom’ in Church authorities’ narratives, and discuss rhetorical strategies used to construct a particular version of reality: social identities, events and resulting social interactions. The Polish Catholic Church actively participates in the debates on the refugee crisis; the texts published by the CIA and on the PEC website include interviews with bishops, their sermons and statements, reports from Polish Episcopate Conference meetings and official notes. There is a high degree of thematic convergence across these different genres; in our primary data we identified the following main themes: 1) who is coming to Europe; 2) the causes of and current responses to the migration crisis, including mistakes made; 3) the proposed solutions; 4) the responses of the Church in Poland to the crisis; and 5) the future of Europe. Although the themes are convergent, ideological tensions can be identified within the Church. The bishops’ position towards migrants and refugees is ambivalent, marked by internal divisions and lacking coherence. In the following section we discuss each theme in more detail. To exemplify the internal differences within the Church we present extracts from the Statement of the Presidium of the Polish Episcopate Conference on Refugees which arguably reflects the official stance of the Catholic Church in Poland, and excerpts from interviews with, and sermons by, individual members of the PEC.

Who is coming to Europe? The representation of migrants and refugees

Representations of migrants and refugees differ significantly within the Church. The leaders of the Polish Church, including the president of the PEC and the primate of Poland, tend to use the language of compassion and describe migrants and refugees as ‘sufferers’ (CIA 2016a). Those who died tragically while trying to come to Europe are individualised and humanised in bishops’ prayers and sermons when names, dates and circumstances of death are stated (PEC 2016b). Bishops also often evoke the notion of a shared humanity and refer to migrants and refugees coming to Europe as ‘brothers and sisters’ (CIA 2016a, PEC 2016c), as illustrated in a quote from the head of the PEC Council for the Migration, Tourism and Pilgrimage, Bishop Krzysztof Zadarko, who states that ‘... human being coming to us

is a challenge to each Christian, they are a brother and a sister. Even if they are not a Catholic, or a Christian, we have to look at them through these categories' (PEC 2016c).

A closer look at the language choices reveals, however, a degree of ambivalence in this affirmative statement. The bishop adopts a compassionate stance towards migrants and refugees, but by saying that they should be looked at as brothers and sisters 'even if they are not Catholic, or Christian', he constructs the divide between 'us' and 'them' and reproduces the discourse of a religious other. This quote illustrates how the implications constructed within discourse, might be direct contradictions of explicit messages.³ Similar ambivalence in the representation of migrants and refugees is evident in another statement, where the same bishop criticises 'the protest against migrants, refugees, Islamists and the Islamisation of Europe' (PEC 2016c). While he explicitly expresses critical views of those who are hostile towards migrants and 'do not wish to see strangers' in Poland, by placing the categories of 'refugee' and 'Islamist' together, he is blurring the boundaries between them.

The conflation of nouns used to represent migrants is apparent also in discourses produced by Church leaders who represent more negative attitudes towards migrants. In an interview with Archbishop Henryk Hoser of Warsaw (Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015) the terms 'refugee', 'emigrant', 'migrant' and 'follower of Islam' are used interchangeably without any attempts to distinguish or define them. The tendency to collapse the terms used to denote people crossing national borders has been widespread in international media and political discourses (Berry *et al.* 2016: 15) and with time has entered everyday discourses (Goodman *et al.* 2016). The terminology becomes even more confusing as the 'lines are increasingly blurred between the categories of "refugee", "terrorist" and "Muslim"' (Mavelli and Wilson 2016: 2).

An important aspect in the representation of social actors is the motives which are being attributed to them. The motives of those coming to Europe are scrutinised by the Church leaders. While the bishops say that some of these people have been forced to flee their countries (PEC 2016b), they also foreground an economic motivation by stating that 'some run away because of war and religious prosecution, others come in search of a better life' (PEC

3 Elsewhere the same bishop explicitly opposes the use of race, language or religion as criteria in deciding who should receive help in another interview (Królak 2015).



'To die of hope: prayer vigil for refugees in Poznań Cathedral'. A poster published on PEC website.

2016a). Some bishops argue that those coming to take advantage of the social welfare system do so because they live in extreme poverty (Królak 2015), and admit that 'the issue of accepting refugees and dividing them into economic or war-victims by default is a political matter' (CIA 2015a). Others take a more antagonistic stance by implying that those coming to Europe have primarily an economic motivation, yet once they reach Europe, they do not want to work, but rely on the social welfare system of the destination country: 'many emigrants in the West are not willing to work at all, as is the case in Switzerland, where 80–90 per cent are on the dole' (Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015). In this quote the bishop uses generalisation and aggregation to create an impression of scientific objectivity; however he does not name the source of the quoted 'statistics'. Thus people coming to Europe are morally divided into 'good' and 'bad' migrants (Mavelli and Wilson 2016: 5), the 'deserving' refugee and the 'undeserving' migrant (Holmes and Castañeda 2016: 13), 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' asylum seekers (Berry *et al.* 2016: 15).

Polish bishops engage also with the widespread discourses representing migrants as a security threat; some by reproducing and legitimising these discourses, others by contesting them. The head of the PEC Council for the Migration, Tourism and Pilgrimage belongs to the latter group, repeatedly

stating that in relation to migrants and security threats, the media present 'a distorted picture of reality and shut us away from another human being' (PEC 2016c). He challenges the basis of the popular rhetoric by asking questions: 'What does it mean to say Muslims will threaten us? Are we assuming in advance that they will poison or murder us?' (Królak 2015).

On the other hand, a stark example of the reproduction of a discourse of threat can be found in the interview with Archbishop Hoser. He comments on migrants' 'excellent techniques of moving across land and sea' and mentions 'a hypothesis' that the influx of migrants might be seen as 'a movement controlled by jihadists, who benefit from refugees and put refugees' money into the accounts of their organisation – for purchase of weapons and continuation of war' (Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015). According to this 'hypothesis' migrants are being used; they are not themselves jihadists. However, a strong association between migrants and jihadists is being constructed in this assertion. By presenting this view as a hypothesis, the bishop uses a hedging strategy; he hides behind 'a hypothesis' and avoids taking responsibility for the statement. Later on in this interview he reinforces the association between migration and security threats by stating that:

As for today's refugees, 75–80 per cent of them are young men. Television shows women with children, but these pictures are not representative – the self-assured men are approaching Europe, and when they settle here, they will bring their families. But they will also constitute a perfect breeding ground for recruitment of fanatics. And there is no way to control this. (Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015)

In this statement the bishop uses the discursive strategies of aggregation and generalisation to present refugees as a uniform group, sharing similar characteristics and intentions, consisting predominantly of strong, resourceful and potentially dangerous men. The reference to families in this quote is ambivalent, as on the one hand it evokes the positive image of a family that is very prominent in the broader discourse of the Catholic Church. On the other hand it suggests that the number of people coming to Europe will be infinitely larger than the current estimates, predicting a situation getting out of control.

Causes and responses to the migration crisis

Polish bishops talk about the migration crisis as a challenge for Europe (PEC 2016a, 2016c) and a problem to be solved (PEC 2016d) and engage in the debate on the most appropriate responses to the crisis. They acknowledge that the crisis has provoked some polarisation of views among political elites and laypersons (PEC 2016a). In the statement of the Presidium of the Polish Episcopate Conference, Church leaders point to military conflicts as the main cause of the current crisis (PEC 2015). Exploring further the nature of these conflicts, bishops assert the interference of superpowers and their role in fuelling these conflicts (PEC 2016a, 2016b; Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015; Królak 2015).

The more conservative leaders make explicit connections between the crisis and the perceived decay of 'Western civilisation'. In the interview quoted above, Archbishop Hoser links the migration from outside of Europe with low birth rates in European countries. He uses this assertion as a starting point to describe the 'biological and demographical void' in Europe which is the consequence of a moral void. In his view Europe is in the grasp of relativism, nihilism, neo-Marxism, atheism and subjectivism. It has lost its soul and identity, rejected its Christian roots and negated human nature (Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015). In line with this perception of European elites, Hoser criticises current responses to the migration crisis in other European countries and advocates the selection of migrants to be allowed into Europe on the basis of confessional criteria:

In Sweden, in refugee camps, they do not separate Christians from Muslims, although they [Muslims] torment the followers of Jesus. In the name of the principle that nobody should be segregated on the basis of confession. Pure ideology and ignorance of the reality. (Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015)

The bishop reinforces the notion of a religious other with a very strong, one-sided valuation; the religious other is the perpetrator who 'torments' Christians for no apparent reason. Discourses of the 'bad' refugee and the 'good' refugee intersect with religious discourses and a hierarchy of worthiness is constructed with potentially fatal consequences. In this process religion, and religious otherness in particular, plays an increasingly important role (Mavelli and Wilson 2017: 3).

Concerns expressing great degree of pessimism and anxiety can be seen as a response to the processes in which centres where meaning and values are negotiated have become exterritorial, and disconnected from the local. The leaders of the European Union symbolise the centre where the problems related to the migration crisis are assessed and solutions proposed with a degree of disregard to individual state members and their local problems. As such they are represented as hostile, immoral and anti-Christian. Spatial segregation, separation, exclusion and fundamentalist tendencies are imminent aspects of this experience (Bauman 1998), readily embraced by those who advocate against allowing migrants to settle in Poland. More moderate representatives of the Church see an opportunity to learn from past experiences in Western Europe where migration is not a new phenomenon (Królak 2015). They also cast some doubt on the European Union's integrity and capability to find solutions, but highlight that by crossing religious boundaries Christians earn the esteem of those receiving their help and promote a favourable image of Christianity among Muslims (Królak 2015).

Proposed solutions to the 'problem'

According to the Statement of the Presidium of the Polish Episcopate Conference on Refugees (PEC 2015) all Christians are 'called upon to help' those in need and demonstrate Christian hospitality. In the same document however the bishops use discursive tools to distance themselves and Polish Catholics from migrants and refugees. In the bishops' view, the most appropriate way to help refugees is to help them 'where they are'. The organisation delegated to represent Polish Catholics in humanitarian aid efforts in the conflict zones is Pomoc Kościołowi w Potrzebie – 'Aid to the Church in Need' (PEC 2015). Catholics are encouraged to remember refugees in their prayers. Nevertheless, bishops stress that 'our prayer should be accompanied by active involvement' and go on to describe this involvement as 'an effort to extinguish conflicts which force people to save themselves by running away from their country' (PEC 2015). This assertion accomplishes the complex ideological task of absolving laypersons from responsibility. It allows readers to come to the simple conclusion that there is not much they can do about international conflicts. Financial donations are also mentioned as a way of helping, but any spontaneous grassroots activities are implicitly discouraged by the assertion that a single organisation (Caritas) should be responsible for

overseeing any actions and any help initiatives should be centrally controlled ‘to avoid mistakes’.

The document structure highlights the tension between an evangelical duty to help those in need and the concerns that come with accepting responsibility for active engagement. The issue of inviting migrants and refugees to come to live in Poland is addressed only indirectly by pointing out that the state and its secular institutions should be responsible for organising help. The bishops claim that the state and Polish government are the stakeholders who invite migrants and as such have to guarantee security, and the material means to support refugees. In other documents Polish bishops address the issue of inviting refugees to settle in Poland in a more direct way. Church leaders attempt to embrace the Pope’s appeal for each parish to welcome a refugee family and explicitly state that ‘we must not put up fences’ (PEC 2016b). Some bishops believe that Polish parishes are able to respond to this challenge (Królak 2015) and advocate a balanced strategy, as expressed by the president of the PEC: ‘We need to prepare an action plan; we cannot say that we will accept everyone, nor that we will throw everyone out’ (PEC 2016b).

From a critical-discourse-analysis point of view it could however be argued that the action to be taken is represented in the abstract: the bishop does not elaborate on the action plan, and does not propose any tangible solutions to the immediate problem. Where processes are replaced by generalisations and abstractions, some ideological goals are achieved (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999), and in this example the Church appears to be committed to welcoming refugees, but no details are given on what it actually does in that respect. A more practical approach to this issue is apparent in the interview with Bishop Zadarko, who tries to reassure people that Poland is capable of accepting refugees and has past experiences to build upon. He discusses the practicalities of the process and foresees that refugees will go to refugee camps first, as their arrival will be regulated by law. There will be an adjustment period; refugees will be educated and prepared to start a new life in Poland. The bishops believe that practical issues can be resolved by parishes cooperating with local government (Królak 2015). In contrast, some Church leaders openly state that they see no solutions to the migration crisis (Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015). Archbishop Hoser implies that accepting refugees in Polish parishes is not feasible due to practical problems and asks ‘what are the parishes supposed to do with a family that

does not know the language, doesn't have work, financial means?' (Petrowa-Wasilewicz 2015). He also evokes the populist agenda to 'help our own' first, by pointing out that Caritas in Poland is struggling to help all hungry Poles. To reinforce the notion that welcoming migrants into local parishes is a bad idea, he gives an example of a Syrian family who 'rejected' the hospitality offered by one of the parishes: 'They had everything, but they ran away at night, because they had better earnings prospects in Germany. They were offered a gift which they did not want to receive.' Although he does not support the idea of welcoming refugees in parishes, he adds that it would be more rational to accept Christian refugees, reproducing again the discourse of the religious other.

These examples demonstrate how the Church is divided with respect to welcoming migrants and refugees from outside of Europe. Individual bishops voice diametrically different views. Collectively Church authorities present the Church as active in supporting migrants and refugees coming to Europe, but distance themselves from this idea by glossing over the practical steps that need to be taken.

Refugees in Poland: how the Church in Poland responds to the crisis

In the context of the migration crisis, Church leaders highlight the role of the Church in awakening people's consciences (PEC 2016b) and shaping people's hearts (PEC 2016a). They articulate their goal as an effort to change perceptions and open people up towards migrants (CIA 2015b). In the bishops' views the attitudes Polish Catholics display towards migrants and refugees are of great importance, a matter of identity (PEC 2016a). In line with this assertion, the initiatives of the Catholic Church in Poland in response to the refugee crisis are described in number of documents released by the CIA. According to a report published in 2016 (Przeciszewski 2016), the Catholic Church in Poland prays for refugees, and offers various forms of direct, practical support. The Church has been helping refugees for many years, mainly through the Polish branch of Caritas (Caritas Polska). This organisation coordinates money collections, and sends money and parcels to the regions of conflict (e.g. Syria), and neighbouring countries, where large numbers of refugees are staying (e.g. Lebanon). Caritas also maintains help centres for migrants and refugees in Poland and declares that it is ready to welcome refugees should Poland open its borders to refugees from Africa and the Middle East. The document also describes the initiative



UMRZEĆ Z NADZIEI

**Modlitwa za uchodźców,
którzy zginęli w drodze
do Europy**



Pod przewodnictwem
kard. Kazimierza Nycza

**1 października 2016,
godz. 20.00**
bazylika archikatedralna
pw. Męczeństwa
św. Jana Chrzciciela
w Warszawie



'To die of hope: prayer vigil for those who died during their journey to Europe'. A poster published by Caritas Polska and distributed in parishes organizing prayers for refugees and reproduced in Catholic media, including the PEC website.

called 'family for the family', organised by Caritas, where Polish families, groups or organisations declare that they will be helping and supporting a particular refugee family in Aleppo or Lebanon, or a Lebanese family stricken by poverty.

Other forms of help listed in the report include actions of the Polish branch of Aid to the Church in Need, focused mainly on helping Christians in the Middle East. The report describes the efforts of PEC to establish cooperation with the Polish government and mentions dioceses which have declared their readiness to welcome refugee families. Figures are quoted foregrounding the large sums of money donated by the Church to support these initiatives and detailing the number of people who have benefited from them. By constructing the image of the Church as heavily involved and active in helping refugees, and accountable for its actions, the report addresses some of the critical voices accusing the Church in Poland of a passive and evasive attitude and diverging from the stance of the universal Church. The report concludes that 'Pope Francis and the president of the PEC, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, speak with one voice with regards to refugees' (Przeciszewski 2016).

The positive image of the Catholic Church in Poland is extended to lay Catholics. Some of the bishops defend those who express fear and mistrust of refugees (CIA 2016b), present it as a consequence of a negative portrayal of migrants and refugees being spread by the media and a lack of direct contacts with Muslims (Królak 2015). For example, the statement by Bishop Zadarko, the head of the PEC Council for Migration, Tourism and Pilgrimage, highlights the potential for change towards more positive attitudes and expresses a degree of optimism with regards to interactions between refugees coming to Poland and the host society:

First of all, we have to realise that the both sides – that is, the receiving one, as well as they who are to be received – have to accept one very important thing: that we have to get to know each other, to accept our culture, our identity, our legislation, also to learn the language. Because these are the main barriers, these are the places, where immigrants come across difficulties and then inevitably close themselves and create ghettos. (PEC 2016d)

In this statement, Bishop Zadarko goes beyond describing how much Poles are helping in the areas of conflict, or in other locations outside of Poland and asserts that they are also capable of becoming hosts, accepting newcomers into their country, and open to learning about different cultures and customs. In this way the bishop protects and reinforces the positive identity of his own group. Simultaneously he sets boundaries of hospitality, requiring the same levels of openness and willingness to learn new ways of life from the newcomers.

What the future holds

From the point of view of Church leaders, the construction of the migration crisis as a challenge is not based on secularist assumptions. It is not a question of how to integrate Muslim refugees into laicised societies, but a question of how to tolerate Muslim migrants in a Europe which has been, and should remain, Christian. While some bishops remain relatively optimistic about the future, others are forecasting major disaster as a consequence of mass migration.

Liberal circles in the Church ascribe to a relatively optimistic vision of the future. The head of the PEC Council for Migration, Tourism and Pilgrimage in the interview quoted earlier admits that 'the situation is dynamic' and 'nobody can say anything for certain' (Królak 2015). Given these caveats however he challenges the widespread notion of a huge wave of refugees rapidly coming into Poland and its overwhelming consequences. In his opinion the process will be well organised and controlled, with safety measures in place. He believes that with a degree of goodwill creative solutions can be found and that there is no reason to panic: 'nowadays we are not dealing with any kind of military conquest, or pre-planned strategy that would lead armed Islamists to exterminate the population of Europe. These [beliefs] are emotionally laden shortcuts and oversimplifications' (Królak 2015). Here he is making reference to the rhetoric used by far-right nationalists based on comparisons between current migration and the Ottoman expansion into Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. He asserts that Christianity can co-exist peacefully with Islam and engages in polemics with the populist opinions that migrants coming to Poland from outside of Europe pose a threat. He opposes the views of those who are concerned with ghettoization and suggests that this can be avoided (PEC 2016d).

By contrast, Archbishop Hoser precludes the possibility of European societies being religiously diverse. In his view the religious other appearing at the gates of Europe signifies the imminent ‘clash of civilisations’ (see Huntington 1993: 22–49). He states that ‘if the Europeans do not return to the Christian identity, they will not solve the problem of emigrants storming their continent’. Hoser presents the ‘migration problem’ as an apocalyptic ‘sign of the times’ and a virtually deadly threat to Europe undergoing cultural ‘mutation’ by the negation of its Christian identity. In his view, Europe is abandoning its ‘metaphysical foundations’ and, consequently, is moving towards the brink of extinction. The bishop sees no human means of ‘overcoming that impasse’ and foresees a Europe in ‘ashes and rubble’. By means of references to damaged foundations, ashes and rubble, the Bishop evokes fear and moral panic. He reinforces this apocalyptic vision by stating that he ‘fears an outbreak of the third world war’. The bishop constructs Europe’s future and present as a very precarious state of affairs where biological, political and spiritual continuity is at stake. His apocalyptic vision of the future and the notion of crisis represent an ideological continuity. The ‘crisis’ implies a rare event challenging the existing order (Goodman *et al.* 2016: 105), what comes next, according to his narrative, is constructed as a disaster.

Conclusion

The media constitutes a major source of prejudicial views among people who do not have personal experience with regard to particular groups (van Dijk 1987). For that reason the Catholic Church in Poland with its privileged access to media and ability to articulate opinions and shape the views of society and political parties has a particularly important role to play. Local faith communities can ‘keep alive the imagination of an alternative future for forced migrants and our response to their circumstances’ (Ager and Ager 2017: 51), and use cultural capital to influence political processes in relation to the crisis. Their role is, however, shaped by the particular socio-cultural and political context in which they operate. In Poland, the long history of a dominance of the Catholic Church and widespread, historically-sanctioned ideologies of Polish national identity, as well as concerns about the nation’s place in Europe influence the Church leaders’ discourses on the migration crisis.

In this paper, we have analysed the official stance of the Polish Catholic Church towards the migration crisis. The leaders of the Church actively

participate in the debate on the crisis through the media channels that they control, but their views are not unanimous. The key document published by the Catholic Church in Poland on the issue of the migration crisis is the Statement of the Presidium of the Polish Episcopate Conference on Refugees (PEC 2015). While this statement presents a relatively moderate stance, the views of individual bishops are much more polarised, as is evident in their interviews, statements and sermons. We demonstrated that discursive practices and underlying ideologies evade simple classifications along the lines of positive vs. negative stances towards migrants and refugees. Even the most eager supporters and advocates of the displaced people at times reproduce the othering discourses, whereas those who seem to be very hostile towards migrants and refugees occasionally take a more moderate stance. There is a consensus that Europe is facing a crisis challenging the existing order, but different discursive practices within the Church either emphasise or alleviate the moral panic. The bishops protect the image of the Catholic Church as holding the values of Christian compassion and hospitality at its core, but at the same time fear for its privileged position in Christian Europe and in Catholic Poland in particular.

The discursive practices observed in the face of the migration crisis bear many similarities to discourses on European integration and Poland's place in the European Union. In 2004 Poland, along with nine other states, became a member of the European Union. The changes in its economy and politics, as well as its cultural norms and values, that started with the political transformation of 1989 have been stimulated and become more rapid and drastic following the accession. The expansion of the European Union and work on the European constitution has posed questions regarding European identity and the role of religion in the formation of that identity. One of the prominent themes debated in Poland in the pre-accession period was that of 'Catholic Poland integrating into secular Europe' and the potential implications of that process (Szumigalska 2015, Guerra 2012; Ramet 2006). For the Church leaders European integration was associated with the potential risk of laicization and dismantling of tradition (Zuba 2006). However, some bishops 'accepted enthusiastically the papal apostolic assignment' and agreed that the mission of Poland is 'to restore Europe to Christianity' (Casanova 2003). The attitudes of Church officials have evolved over time and became more pro-European at the turn of the century. Nevertheless, the Church has remained internally divided on the issue (Szumigalska 2015: 344). The

reaffirmation of national identity and the revival of the 'place' became prominent in Polish debates during the process of EU accession and recently gained further momentum at the beginning of the current migration crisis. It seems that, faced with the migration crisis, the Church leaders identify similar risks and challenges for Polish Catholics, and remain similarly divided with regards to the potential consequences of the changing socio-political reality.

The ambivalence of the Catholic Church in Poland and internal divisions with regard to the migration crisis have significant potential implications. As Luca Mavelli and Erin Wilson (2017: 15) notice, 'the moral resources available in different religious traditions and communities may be harnessed – and indeed, are already being deployed – not only to challenge the egoism of a state-centric neo-liberal world, but also to promote a vision of solidarity beyond the limits of secularism.' Poland continues to refuse to participate in the relocation programme and none of the broader migration 'challenges' discussed in this paper have been solved. It remains to be seen if the Church in Poland will speak in truly one voice and mobilise its symbolic capital to challenge the existing power relations and government policies, and advocate for the displaced, or will become one of the major forces reinforcing the *status quo*.

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