

Where the Wild Things Are: Fear of Islam and the Anti-Refugee Rhetoric in Hungary and in Poland

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Based on empirical research conducted in Hungary and Poland in 2016–2017, as well as on analysis of social media, blogs and newspaper articles, this article discusses Hungarian and Polish attitudes towards Muslims and Islam. Against a historical background, we analyse how the Hungarian and Polish governments responded to the large-scale influx of Muslim refugees during the 2015 ‘migration crisis’. The anti-immigrant narratives, fueled by both governments and the right-wing press, resulted in something akin to Islamophobia without Muslims. Instead of portraying the people arriving at the southern border of Europe as refugees seeking safety, they described the migration process in terms such as ‘raid’, ‘conquest’ and ‘penetration’. These narratives often implied that Muslims will combat Europe not only with terrorism but with the uterus of their women, who will bear enough children to outnumber native Poles and Hungarians. The paper ends with a discussion of positive attempts to improve attitudes towards refugees in Poland and Hungary.

Keywords: Islamophobia; gender; nationalism; Poland; Hungary

Introduction

The current ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe has resulted in public discussions about the threat that Muslim refugees pose to the Christian identity of the continent. The debates are especially fervent in the new accession countries in Central Europe. The expansion of the European Union (EU) eastwards meant an incorporation of countries whose values might not entirely align with the European ‘norm’. What we are currently seeing in Europe is a need to balance the EU’s security interests on the one hand and the interests of the development of democracy and the protection of human rights on the other.

In this article, we explore anti-immigrant narratives in Hungary and Poland, where the current Islamophobia without Muslims (Górak-Sosnowska 2016) is reminiscent of anti-Semitism without Jews (see Darnton 1981;

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Snyder 2017). The exploratory study that informs this paper is part of the first author's ongoing research agenda on attitudes towards 'The Other' (see Goździak and Nowak 2012) as well as a new project on norms and values in the European migration and refugee crisis (see the project website <http://novamigra.eu/>). The data sources that form the basis of this article include a literature review of articles published both in peer-reviewed journals and in the Polish and Hungarian popular press and an analysis of narratives posted on Hungarian and Polish social media (Facebook, Twitter, various Listservs). In Hungary, we monitored the Facebook page of 'ELÉG' (Enough) over a period of two weeks: one week prior and one week after the referendum asking Hungarians to vote whether the country should accept refugees. During this period, page administrators posted between 1 to 10 posts each day, with posting frequency drastically decreasing following the referendum. The last posts to be published on the page prior to 9 pm were recorded, since we assumed that users would be the most active during the evening hours. In Poland, we monitored *Cudzoziemiec – taki sam człowiek jak ty, TAK dla uchodźców* and *NIE dla rasizmu i ksenofobii*. These outlets regularly post articles from local Polish newspapers as well as information about legal action taken against Poles who physically or verbally attacked foreigners. We have also monitored websites such as *londynek.net*, *dublinek.net* and *Moja Norwegia*, where Poles living abroad comment on the migration situation in both Poland and in the countries of their current residence.

Additionally, we conducted some 20 face-to-face ethnographic interviews and several informal conversations with policy-makers and representatives of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) assisting or advocating on behalf of refugees and other forced migrants in Hungary and Poland. The interviews and conversations were conducted in Hungarian, Polish and English depending on the respondents' choice of primary language. Often, the interviews were carried out in a mixture of English and Hungarian or English and Polish. They lasted between 60 and 90 minutes and the informal conversations included both brief encounters lasting a few minutes and longer discussions of 30–60 minutes. In general, the interviewees talked to us 'off the record' and were reluctant to be tape-recorded or cited by name or even institutional affiliation. This is understandable, especially in Hungary, where the Fidesz government has consistently attacked civil society organisations working in the field of migration over previous years. Indeed, following his recent re-election, Viktor Orbán has revamped a legislative proposal for a Russian-style civil society law that would have organisations aiding 'illegal migration' registered as foreign agents, subject to national security screening, and the confiscation of 25 per cent of funds received from abroad (Than 2018).

In analysing the collected materials, we aimed to systematically discover themes and any special characteristics of messages (e.g. particular phrases and, in verbal communication, tone of voice) and to identify the way, in which messages changed over time and varied across mediums and outlets. This analysis was both observational and narrative in nature and relied less on the experimental elements normally associated with scientific research (reliability, validity and generalisability); however, it was particularly productive to pose further hypotheses and research questions (see Downe-Wamboldt 1992; Krippendorff 1989, 2004; Neuendorf 2002).

Theoretically, this research draws on the work of scholars such as Miller-Idriss (2009), Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008), and Wodak, de Cilia, Reisigl and Liebhart (1999), who are using qualitative interviews to capture ordinary people's articulations of the nation, national identity and national belonging. We have also used the concept of 'The Other' to frame both the data collection and the analysis. This is a concept that is particularly familiar to anthropologists. 'As merchants of the exotic, we have confronted the problem of representing the Other since long before the word was spelled with a capital O' (Sax 1998: 292). The concepts of nation and national identity have played a key role in the anthropological definition of 'The Other' as an object of study. Given the typical emphasis on culture in anthropology, it could be argued that the underlying concept of nation was that of nation-as-people as opposed to nation as a nation-state. Indeed, the relationship between national identity and attitude towards foreigners is determined by the social representation of the nation – i.e. the shared

images and beliefs about the national in-group and its relationship to other foreigners (van Dijk 1993). In the case of an ethnic-cultural representation – involving a vision of the nation as a community of people sharing a common cultural heritage – we can expect an intense identification with the nation to coincide with negative attitudes toward foreigners, the latter being perceived as a threat to the national culture. Conversely, in the case of civic representation – involving a vision of the nation as a dynamic community of equal citizens who are bound by and committed to a basic contract irrespective of their cultural heritage – an intense national identity can be expected to coincide with a positive attitude toward foreigners (Billiet, Maddens and Beerten 2003: 242).

Polish and Hungarian history is filled with stories of ‘us’ and ‘them’ and recurring conflicts with enemies who have threatened the countries’ autonomy (Davies 1981). Zdzisław Mach (1993, 1997) emphasises the importance of the idea of sovereignty in the formation of Polish national identity. Jan Kubik (1994) points out the power of national symbols in the fight against the communist state in the 1980s. Katherine Verdery (1996) concurs that, before 1989, the dynamics of identity construction in Eastern Europe were characterised by sharp distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (see also Haraszti 1978; Holy 1996; Lampland 1995; Ries 1997; Wedel 1986) but that, prior to 1989, the state or the Communist Party was labelled ‘them’ while the label ‘us’ was reserved for ‘the people’. This distinction seems to apply well to post-1956 Hungary, where János Kádár, who took part in launching the anti-Soviet revolution alongside Imre Nagy, betrayed the cause of the revolution only to become Hungary’s new dictator with Soviet backing. In essence, transitioning from the ‘us’ group to the socialist nomenclature of the region (Szegő 2012).

In the present article, we explore the question of how public discussions about religion and gender are used to support Poland’s and Hungary’s anti-refugee stance. We argue that, in addition to religion, Central Europeans use women – both Muslim refugee women and native Central European women – as pawns in the anti-refugee debates. The anti-Muslim narratives often invoke the need to protect ‘our women’ from the ‘wild’ and ‘barbaric Muslim men’ who will rape them. ‘More Muslims means more rapes’, say young men who fashion themselves as protectors of ‘traditional family values’ (Wigura 2016: 1). The right-wing, Central European press has portrayed the recent influx of refugees seeking safety in Europe as a ‘raid’, a ‘conquest’ and ‘penetration’, asserting that Muslims will combat Europe not only with terrorism but also with the uterus of their women, who will bear enough children to outnumber native Poles and Hungarians. We juxtapose these sentiments with gender discrimination in the region. Opposition to progressive laws criminalising domestic violence and the implementation of laws curtailing women’s access to reproductive health, supported and promoted by the Catholic Church and the Law and Justice Party in Poland and the Fidesz government in Hungary, are defended as the protection of ‘traditional family values’.

We begin this article with some historical context, including a discussion of the conceptualisation of national identity among Hungarian and Polish youth and a brief presentation of the position of Muslims in both countries. We then look at the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, which sparked a fear of Islam and resulted in hostility towards Muslim refugees and immigrants. We finish the paper by setting out some positive strategies aimed at improving attitudes towards refugees in both Poland and Hungary.

Who is Hungarian, who is Polish?

The 1920 Treaty of Trianon¹ transformed Hungary from a multi-ethnic state where Magyars made up 50 per cent of the population into a state where Hungarians comprised 90 per cent of all citizens (Behr, Fata, Kulcsar, Lassu and Nagy 2002). Despite the change in the ethnic composition, Hungarians are obsessed with not losing their national identity (Csepeli and Örkény 2000) and see migration as a real threat to this *status quo*. Similarly,

for most of their history, the Polish people existed within a framework of multinational and multi-ethnic societies and polities. Before WWII, vast parts of Eastern Poland were inhabited by Lithuanians, Ukrainians and Belarussians. There were also significant numbers of Jewish and German minorities. The population census of 1931 showed that Poles constituted 68.9 per cent of the population (Grodź 2010). However, within five years of the end of WWII, Poland also became an ethnic monolith, with over 95 per cent of its population consisting of Polish Catholics (Curp 2006).

Many of the theories of national identity assert that nations are ‘not anything real, objective, or indispensable; they are only “constructs”, contingent and artificial, deliberately created’ (Walicki 1998: 611; see also Gellner 1983). Benedict Anderson (2006) wrote about nations as ‘imagined communities’ and Rogers Brubaker (1992, 1996) considered nations as ‘illusory or spurious communities’ that are constructed, contingent and fluctuating, rather than as ‘enduring components of social structure’. These assertions do not ring true in the public debates in Central Europe.

Two notions of what constitutes membership in a nation have been operating in contemporary Hungary and Poland. The first considers the ‘nation’ to be political and individualistic, where the ties between the individual and the state are civic in nature. Therefore, at least in principle, nationality can be achieved both by birth and by choice. This is what the German sociologist, Ferdinand Tönnies (1957), calls *Gesellschaft*. *Gesellschaft* is ‘determined by physical and spatial categorisation, can be delineated with strict (political) boundaries, generating political and economic integrity for the national community’ (Örkény 2005: 33). In the second meaning, ‘nation’ is collective and ethnic, and membership in a particular nation cannot be acquired except through blood and cannot be changed. This is what Tönnies calls *Gemeinschaft*. *Gemeinschaft* is based on cultural identification – common language, culture and history – irrespective of the geographical location of the members of the nation. Thus, members of the Magyar and Polish diaspora and their descendants belong to the Hungarian and Polish nations, respectively, despite the fact that they do not live or might not have even been born within the physical boundaries of the nation-state.

Cespeli and Örkény (2000) indicate that, in Hungary, younger, urban and well-educated Hungarians identify with the ‘state-oriented and political in nature’ concept of a nation, while rural, less-educated and older Hungarians tend to base their national identity on descent and cultural ties. Comparatively, Polish national identity has been historically constructed around cultural, religious and ethnic lines (Galent and Kubicki 2012). It seems, however, that, in some circles, the main traits of the Polish national identity shifted from ethnic elements towards civic ones after the 1989 transformation (Galent and Kubicki 2010). This shift has been the most prominent in large urban settings among college-educated young people. Many cities in Poland – Poznań, Wrocław and Cracow, among others – have become part of the network of open cities aimed at attracting human capital and integrating migrants. According to Galent and Kubicki (2010), it is this new, young and educated urban middle class that is assuming a more cosmopolitan identity and is cooperating and sometimes even competing with ‘The Others’ in the free market of material and cultural resources. However, they do not treat this competition through a prism of distrust and resentment. In contrast, young people with less education seem to be at the forefront of creating national identity based on blood, ancestry and ethnicity.

The national liberation and independence which Hungary and Poland have gained since 1989 have provided the impetus to ‘fetishise the national state’ (Örkény 2005: 29) and the ‘people’ (Jenne 2016). This ‘fetishisation’ has become quite prominent in recent years, especially after the landslide victory of the national conservative Fidesz (Hungarian Civic Alliance) Party in the 2010 national elections in Hungary and the ascent to power of the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) – Law and Justice – Party in Poland in 2015. Public discourses in both countries have focused on what it means to be a true Hungarian (*igaz(i) magyar*) or a true Pole (*prawdziwy Polak*). In an interview published in *Polityka*, Konrad Dulkowski, coordinator of the Centre to Monitor Racist and Xenophobic Behaviour, summed it up as follows: ‘Now every action against the other/stranger is prized

as a responsibility of a true Pole' – *Teraz każde działanie przeciwko jakiegokolwiek obcemu jest pochwalane jako obowiązek prawdziwego Polaka* (Sojda 2017; see also Blaszkiewicz, no date). In Hungary, Fidesz politicians have openly attended and endorsed ethno-nationalist festivals like the 'saddle parade' (*nyereg szemle*) that place conserving Hungarian traditions at the centre of their message (Szabó 2014). In a strange fusion of pre-Christian shamanistic rituals and Christian doctrines, 'tradition guarding' (*hagyományőrzés*) often carries a very restrictive understanding of what it means to be a true Hungarian today (Gilicze 2014). The irony, of course, is that the Carpathian basin has witnessed an almost constant flow of mass migration from Anatolia to Asia, the Caucasus and so on – a historic fact that is often ignored by members of this sub-culture.

Most countries deploy an array of national symbols as a means of forming collective consciousness and cultivating national identity. However, in Poland and Hungary, these expressions go beyond 'banal nationalism' (Billig 1995) in the form of everyday rituals – the use of the national currency, the saluting of the flag, the singing of the national anthem and the observing of national holidays. The fetishisation of national symbols has taken a much more dangerous form. In Hungary, the red and white striped Árpád flag has become commonplace at Fidesz and Jobbik rallies. The Árpád flag is represented on the Hungarian coat of arms; however, the flag on its own is also symbolic of the Árpád family, the founding Royal Family of Christian Hungary. This flag first become controversial when a modified version of it, depicting an arrow-cross in the centre of an otherwise plainly striped red and white flag was used as the flag of the Arrow Cross Party in the 1940s. Fascistic versions of the flag use nine rather than eight stripes (starting and ending in red). The 'Map of Greater Hungary', showing the country's pre-1920 Treaty of Trianon borders, is also prominently displayed in many places. This map is a symbol of foreign oppressors taking Hungary's power away (Saltman 2014). Inexplicably, the flag of Szeklerland (*Székelyföld*), a region in the middle of Romania where 71 per cent of the population is composed of ethnic Hungarians (Institutul National De Statistică 2011), adorns the Hungarian Parliament, along with the Hungarian national flag, while the EU flag is conspicuously missing. Ironically, during the communist regime, possessing a keyring in the colour of the national Hungarian flag was cause for arrest since displaying the national flag was equated with nationalism (Cieśla 2016), which was frowned upon.

In Poland, flaunting national symbols was considered ill-mannered but not forbidden in the way it was in Hungary. This situation, however, has changed drastically in recent years. In 2009, several online stores such as *Ultrapatriot.pl* and *Polscypatrioci.pl* were established to sell shirts and gadgets to members of ultra-nationalistic parties and organisations such as *Stronnictwo Narodowe* (National Party), *Młodzież Wszechpolska* (All Polish Youth), *ONR* (National Radical Camp) or *NP* (Poland Forward). In 2014, following the 60th anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising, the 'Fighting Anchor', a symbol of hope for regaining independence widely used during World War II, appeared on cars and banners, often accompanied by slogans such as 'Poland for Poles', 'Great Poland' or 'Death to the Enemies of the Fatherland' (Cieśla 2016).

In both countries, the prevailing public debate defines national identity 'not only from within, namely from the features that fellow-nationals share in common but also from without, that is, through distinguishing and differentiating the nation from other nations or ethnic groups' (Triandafyllidou 1998: 593). Belonging to a nation implies not only knowing who 'we' are but also recognising who the 'others' are. In this conceptualisation, national identity becomes meaningful only through the contrast with others. Hungarians are Christian, not Jewish; Poles are Catholic, not Muslim. 'Muslim refugees are not welcome because they could never become one of us', argued some of our interviewees, especially those representing the more conservative organisations. So far, this debate is an abstract discussion, as there are very few Muslims in both countries. The phenomenon we are dealing with is Islamophobia, except without Muslims.

Islamophobia without Muslims

Unlike in the United Kingdom, France or Germany, there are very few immigrants in Hungary and Poland, and even fewer Muslims. According to the last census conducted in 2011, there were 5 500 Muslims, mostly Sunni, living in Hungary. The census did allow for dual identification, hence ‘the sum of residents declaring Hungarian and Arab ethnicity is higher than those declaring their affiliation to Islam’. Indeed, over 70 per cent declared themselves Hungarian, while 42.5 per cent considered themselves to be Arab by ethnicity (Bayrakli and Hafez 2015: 278). Budapest, a city of more than 2 million, has only one mosque and a handful of prayer rooms. The last minaret was built 500 years ago by the occupying Ottoman Turks (Pall and Sayfo 2016). While large numbers of Muslim refugees transitioned through Hungary in 2015, very few received permission to stay, therefore the number of Muslims in Hungary continues to be negligible. Yet 72 per cent of Hungarians, the highest proportion of any European country, see Islam and Muslims in a very negative light (Wike, Stokes and Simmons 2016).

The presence of Muslims in Poland dates back to the 14th century when Tartars settled in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (Rynkowski 2015). In north-eastern Poland, there are villages – Kruszyniany and Bohoniki – where Muslim Tartars have lived peacefully alongside their Catholic and Eastern Orthodox brethren for a long time. According to the 2011 Census, there are approximately 2 000 Tatars living in Poland today. Other sources, however, put the number between 1 500 and in excess of 5 000 (Dziąćko n.d.).

In addition to Tartars, there are also other Muslims of more recent immigrant stock living in Poland. At a conference at the Józef Tischner European University in Cracow, held in July 2011 to debate the situation of Muslims in Poland and the effects of the Arab Spring on Polish Muslims, panelists presented papers about Poles of Syrian, Egyptian and Turkish origin who are well integrated and play an important role in civic and community organisations in different parts of the country. Their families came to Poland in the 1970s as part of the Soviet bloc scheme to attract non-European young people to communist ideas. After 1989, small numbers of Chechen, Afghan and Iraqi refugees settled in Poland (Grodź 2010). Konrad Pędziwiatr (2015) estimates the number of Muslims in Poland to be between 25 000 and 40 000 people, while Grodź (2010) places the number within the range 15 000 to 30 000.

Despite the fact that the Muslim minority in Poland is about 0.1 per cent of the total population (Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr 2017b), public opinion surveys conducted by the Public Opinion Research Centre (CBOS) show that only 23 per cent of Poles hold favourable views of Islam and Muslims; 44 per cent declare very unfavourable attitudes towards Muslims and an additional 33 per cent do not have an opinion (CBOS 2015a). CBOS emphasised that the opinions which Poles hold about Muslims are mainly based on information found in the popular media. The researchers stressed that only 12 per cent of Poles personally know a Muslim. Poles who indicate that they have personal relationships with Muslims are highly educated, have the highest *per capita* income of the surveyed population, do not go to church, and identify as liberals.

Interestingly, prior to 2015 there was virtually no discussion of Muslim immigration to Poland, for the very simple reason that almost no migrants from Muslim countries were going there and acceptance of foreigners was growing steadily (Porter-Szűcs 2016). Just seven years ago, at the 2011 conference in Cracow mentioned above, the consensus was that Muslims are contributing members of society and should feel welcome in Poland. At around the same time, in 2012, CBOS conducted a survey of attitudes towards different religions. The attitudes towards Muslims and Islam then were much more favourable than in 2017. Of those surveyed, 48 per cent indicated that they would welcome Muslims in their workplace, while 45 per cent declared that they would not be opposed to having a Muslim neighbour and 41 per cent would accept a Muslim person as their boss. However, only 21 per cent would welcome a Muslim son- or daughter-in-law (CBOS 2012).

Historically, the encounters with Muslims in Hungary and Poland took different forms. Some were violent, while others were characterised as peaceful coexistence. The Ottoman occupation of Hungary (1541–1699) is still present in the public sphere. However, according to some writers, the Ottoman era is not remembered as a Christian–Muslim conflict but, rather, as a foreign occupation in the same way that the Catholic Austrians, who conquered Hungary after the Turks left, or the atheist Soviets, who controlled the country until 1989, were regarded (Pall and Sayfo 2016).

On the other hand, the Polish King, Jan III Sobieski, is remembered in Polish historiography as the defender of Christian Europe against Muslim Ottomans. The 1683 Battle of Vienna, where Sobieski defeated the Grand Vizier Kara Mustafa and his 200 000-strong army of Turkish warriors – the latter had apparently spent decades perfecting the art of reducing enemy cities to rubble and plundering them with impunity – is often invoked by members of the All Polish Youth (*Młodzież Wszechpolska*) who want to defend Poland against Muslims refugees.

These events from the past are considered to be watershed moments and have become part of the narratives of national crises. ‘Defeat is a thing of the past and cannot be repeated’, assert many Poles and Hungarians. The Hungarian national anthem, written almost a century before the Treaty of Trianon, draws on memories of defeat suffered at the hands of foreign powers – such as the 16th century Ottoman occupation of the country lasting nearly 150 years – and portrays Hungarians as a tormented people who have already suffered a fair share of injustices; they must defend themselves and Europe from a similar fate.

Interestingly, in the second part of the 20th century, Hungary and Poland built strong political and economic relationships with several Middle Eastern countries. Many students from Arab countries – Algeria, Syria and Iraq – studied at universities in Budapest, Debrecen and Pécs, pursuing engineering and medical degrees. Some of them married Hungarians and settled in the country (Pall and Sayfo 2016). By the mid-2010s, Jobbik, the far-right political party, forged strong ties with Muslim countries, inviting Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to send observers to monitor the 2009 European parliamentary elections (Political Radical 2014). The party’s sympathy with Islam isolated Jobbik from the mainstream European far-right. Today, the Hungarian government continues its efforts to strengthen economic ties with Muslim countries in the Middle East and Asia – Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Saudi Arabia (Éltető and Völgyi 2013) – and highlights the importance of a dialogue between different cultures (*Daily News Hungary* 2016) in the international arena. The Orbán government has been promoting a policy of ‘Eastern-opening’ in order to secure new export markets for Hungarian products.

In the 1980s many Polish nurses and medical doctors worked in Arab countries. PolService, the Polish Trade Enterprise, used to arrange two-year contracts for healthcare professionals to work in Algeria, Libya, Morocco, Tunisia and the United Arab Emirates. In 1986 alone, 950 Polish medical specialists (nurses, doctors and technicians) worked on individual contracts in the Middle East (Miśkiewicz 1988). Thousands more worked under collective contracts, where medical teams were recruited to staff entire hospitals. Additionally, over 1 400 Polish medical professionals were employed in Libya in 1986 (Goździak 2016). In the late 1980s, nearly 2 800 Polish engineers and technicians worked in Iraq building roads in the south of the country (Pohl 2003).

At home, however, as evidenced by the refusal to admit Middle Eastern refugees, the Polish government remained unequivocally hostile towards Muslim migrants. ‘The Polish government will not change its mind about the refugees. It’s a final decision’, Elżbieta Witek, chief of the Prime Minister’s cabinet office, told TVP, the state broadcaster. ‘I’m a Christian and a Catholic and I try to be a good person, and the Polish government acts in the same way... A good Christian is someone who helps, not necessarily by accepting refugees’ (Cienski 2017). In turn, post-Socialist Hungarian governments failed to take a pro-active role in helping or

integrating refugees fleeing from the atrocities of the Yugoslav wars in the 1990s, or even migrants looking to move to Hungary from Transylvania (Tóth 2003).

Yet Islamophobia was not dominant in the 1990s and early 2000s in Hungary. Two relatively small groups were its main proponents, namely a group of Jewish liberals who could not dissociate their sympathy for Israel from their hostility towards Muslim countries,² and the members of the Faith Church – American-style Born Again Pentecostals – who saw Islam as a manifestation of the Antichrist (Pall and Sayfo 2016). These anti-Muslim sentiments were significantly less prevalent than today's anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant attitudes.

Pall and Sayfo (2016) explain the current Islamophobia, stressing the socio-political developments that have occurred in Hungary since 2013, when half a million Hungarians migrated to Great Britain and Germany in search of better livelihoods. In order to legitimise their presence in Western Europe – where they were not necessarily received with open arms – the Hungarian migrants adopted a strong anti-Muslim stance. Immediately after Poland's accession to the European Union in 2004, Poles began migrating – in large numbers – to Western Europe. The number of Polish migrants staying abroad for longer than two months tripled between early 2004 and early 2007 from approximately 250 000 to 522 000 (Kaczmarczyk and Okólski 2008). By the end of 2015, according to the Polish Main Statistical Office, 2 397 000 Poles resided outside Poland, an increase of 3.3 per cent in comparison with 2014 (GUS 2016). Like Hungarians, Polish migrants have adopted strong anti-Muslim attitudes. For example, analysis of articles and comments posted on *londynek.net* indicate a deeply entrenched hatred of Muslims. The language used to describe Muslim immigrants in the UK, Germany or Sweden is vulgar and racist; South Asians are often called '*ciapaci*' (referring to the flatbread preferred by many Asians) or '*koziojebcy*' (accusing Muslims of engaging in sexual intercourse with goats). Stories about 'no-go-zones' in France or Sweden where Sharia laws prevail and disdain for local legal norms is, reportedly, paramount, abound.

In both Hungary and Poland, the Christian identity has been exploited for political gain. The Fidesz Party won two back-to-back elections in 2010 and 2014. Moreover, while Hungary remains one of the least religious countries in Europe – less than 10 per cent of Hungarians attend church regularly – Fidesz continues to strengthen its Christian-nationalist profile, funding activities of the youth organisation of its minor coalition partner, the Christian Democratic Party (KDNP), in an effort to attract an unlikely demographic, namely young professionals who regard Christianity as a core part of their identity.

Nonetheless, it is difficult to gauge the level of societal support for Christian politics. The KDNP has managed to jump the parliamentary electoral threshold of 5 per cent only twice since the democratic transition – in 1989, they reached 6.4 per cent and, in 1994, 7.05 per cent. KDNP candidates have not distinguished themselves independently from Fidesz in any election since 2002 and dual membership in KDNP and Fidesz is actively encouraged by KDNP (*mandiner.hu* 2012).

In a parallel development, the popularity of the extreme right dramatically increased during the final years of the first decade of the 21st century; Jobbik entered parliament in 2010 with 12 per cent of the votes amongst both low-educated rural and highly-educated urban voters. Extreme-right ideology has been especially successful amongst young people (aged 15+) while Hungarian society has not become more traditional or religious overall (Molnár, Attila and Péter 2011). Nonetheless, a radicalisation of public discourse did take place in Hungary and Poland following the 2015 Paris terrorist attacks. In Hungary, this radicalisation has been fuelled by government-orchestrated propaganda campaigns. It is important to note, that increased migration came at a time when the popularity of Fidesz was waning. Traditionally, migration was a most popular topic among the extreme right but Fidesz successfully adopted it, taking it away from Jobbik. The opposition parties – non-Jobbik, mostly leftist – did not see political opportunity in the migration 'crisis', as it would have been very difficult to present a positive narrative of migration (Kiss 2016). Things changed in 2015.

The 2015 refugee ‘crisis’: a threat to the Christian identity of Europe

By the end of 2015, according to the Hungarian authorities, 391 384 mainly Muslim refugees and asylum-seekers crossed the Serbian-Hungarian border and descended on the Keleti Railway Station in Budapest, shocking many Hungarians. Instead of seeing refugees fleeing war-torn countries, many Hungarians saw them as a very real threat to their way of life. Only a fraction of the arrivals received permanent residency status (KSH.hu n.d.). Yet, for Viktor Orbán, the arrival of refugees was not a humanitarian challenge but a Muslim invasion that required an appropriate response: closing the Balkan land route to the European Union. A 100-mile-long, four-meter-high, razor-wire-topped fence on Hungary’s southern borders with Serbia and Croatia was erected to keep refugees out. Hungarian border police, guns in holsters, swagger in pairs alongside the fence in a scene reminiscent of the Cold War. Yet, somehow, this is not ‘enough’. Hungary is recruiting 3 000 ‘border-hunters’ to join the 10 000 police and soldiers already patrolling the border (Goździak 2017), parts of which have recently been electrified. These actions link Christianity with the nation (*keresztény-nemzeti eszme*) (Fekete 2016: 40) and stand in sharp contrast with the events of 1989, when Hungary opened its border with Austria and let thousands of East Germans through to West Germany (Haraszti 2015).

While it is true that the unprecedented influx of refugees and asylum-seekers in 2015 did result in at least a handful of jihadi terrorists entering the Schengen Zone through Hungary,³ the government has systematically used the arrival of refugees as an opportunity to strengthen their Christian discourse and simultaneously stigmatise refugees as terrorists. The conservative media likened the migration to the Ottoman era ‘when Hungary was a “bastion”, defending Christianity from “Muslim hordes”’ (Pall and Sayfo 2016: 6). Antal Rogán, at the time leader of the Hungarian Fidesz’ parliamentary group, warned of a future ‘United European Caliphate’ (Villányi 2015), while former Secretary of State László L. Simon urged Hungarians to make more babies in order to counter the negative cultural effects of mass migration such as the envisioned ‘impending victory of Islamic parties imposing polygamy and destroying the remainder of European culture’ (Simon 2015: 231). Beyond political statements, armed military police patrols on the streets of Budapest, in metro stations and in public spaces, have become a regular sight, as is the case in Paris and Brussels, while Hungary has yet to experience a terrorist attack.

While very few Muslim refugees coming from the Middle East reached the Polish borders in 2015, the migration that was occurring elsewhere in Europe has been greatly politicised, especially by the populist national-conservative Law and Justice Party, KORWiN, and far-right groups that formed part of Kukiz’15. Political candidates expressed openly xenophobic, racist and Islamophobic views, produced anti-immigration posters and participated in demonstrations ‘against the Islamisation of Poland and Europe’ (Pędziwiatr 2015). Kamil Kupiec, representing the KORWiN party in Cracow, used an electoral poster that read ‘Instead of immigrants we want repatriates’. Ewa Damaszek, also from KORWiN, proclaimed ‘Silesia is our home. Islam has its own’. Ms Damaszek is referring here to people of Polish origin whose ancestors have relocated to Kazakhstan, Siberia, Azerbaijan or other countries.

In mid-2015, the Council of the European Union adopted a decision to reallocate some 120 000 migrants from Greece and Italy, asking Hungary to find homes for 1 294 people. Hungary, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Romania voted against the scheme. The Hungarian and Slovakian governments argued the illegality of the plan in front of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In the Autumn of 2016, Viktor Orbán, the Prime Minister of Hungary, called for a referendum and asked Hungarians a simple question: ‘Do you want the European Union to prescribe the mandatory settlement of non-Hungarian citizens in Hungary without the consent of the National Assembly?’ Voter turnout was 39 per cent. This fell far short of the 50 per cent participation required to make the referendum valid under Hungarian law. Never one to let facts get in the way of politics, Orbán,

whose Eurosceptic Fidesz party has more support than all opposition parties combined, said in a televised speech:

The European Union's proposal is to let the migrants in and distribute them in mandatory fashion among the member states and for Brussels to decide about this distribution. Hungarians today considered this proposal and they rejected it. Hungarians decided that only we Hungarians can decide with whom we want to live. The question was 'Brussels or Budapest' and we decided this issue is exclusively the competence of Budapest (Goździak, 2017 blog post).

Orbán decided that the 3.3 million Hungarians who voted 'No' in the referendum speak for the whole country of 10 million Hungarians. After his speech, there were fireworks over the Danube River in the colours of the Hungarian flag.

Several Facebook pages echoed the messages of the government campaign. As indicated above, we monitored the most prominent pro-government Facebook page in Hungary. The 'ELÉG' (Enough) Facebook page boasted 128 000 likes and a mission statement to fight left-liberal lies and propaganda, including attitudes towards refugees.⁴ The page has been identified in Hungarian media as the most prominent page in a Fidesz run network of propaganda pages (Haszán 2018a, b) or as part of Fidesz's 'Facebook Army', which aims to shield pro-Fidesz users from reality (Herczeg 2018). The page, along with other Fidesz influenced media outlets such as the Public Service Television Broadcaster (MTV) or the privately owned TV2, are all part of a larger government controlled propaganda network. Along with a number of national and local newspapers, these outlets often coordinate their stories which at times are based on explicit directions from Fidesz party apparatchiks (Ráti 2018). The 'ELÉG' page regularly echoes government orchestrated communication campaigns (Ács 2018). In light of these connections between 'ELÉG' and the government messaging, we can safely assume that the posts of the page were representative of the messaging that Fidesz wanted to convey to its camp in order to mobilise them ahead of the referendum. The posts' rhetoric, called on voters to defend Christian values and Hungarian national identity in order to stop Hungary from becoming a breeding ground for terrorism. The following comments were illustrative of the type of discourse that unfolded on the Facebook page in relation to these posts:

Shoot 99 of them with bullets drenched in pig's blood. Let the 100th go, and tell the others what happened. That will teach them.

I will vote no, because I want to live in Hungary as a Hungarian. I don't want Muslims as my neighbours. I live in the south. We've already experienced the destruction that these people cause.

Since they reproduce like rats, they occupy the life space of non-Muslims, they pop-up all over the planet, they take what they want. A normal person wouldn't want that.

Who wants their grandchildren to suddenly come home with a migrant fiancée or bride... what will happen with the Hungarians?

I have three grandchildren, three girls, thank God! Anyone who doesn't vote should fucking die. Whoever votes yes, should die in agony!

The Hungarian referendum will have precedent-setting value as well. If a wave of referenda starts in Europe (and it will) European people can start resisting multiculturalism on a wider scale we can save Europe from being discoloured, from destruction, from the incomparable rampaging of the left-wing!

[responding to someone] were you this stupid when your mother gave birth to you or did you learn it from your father? Have you already offered your mother and your daughters to the migrants? Are they already at the border giving sexual relief to at least be able to justify their existence?

The fear that Muslim women will bear lots of children and the local population will be outnumbered, somehow diluted or ‘discoloured’ by Muslims and multiculturalism is palpable in these posts. In Poland, similar sentiments often go hand-in-hand with posts suggesting that Muslim men will rape Polish women, and therefore must not be allowed to come to Poland. Opponents of admitting Muslim refugees also assert that the Polish government and Polish men have a duty to protect their women.

Rather than accepting the EU decision, the Hungarian government spent approximately €28 million euros on a xenophobic anti-immigrant campaign (Dull 2016). As indicated above, by the end of 2015 a total of 391 384 refugees and asylum seekers entered Hungary through its southern border. This means that the government spent around €70 per refugee in a country where the monthly welfare check for the unemployed is around €70 (Kormany.hu 2015). Undoubtedly this amount could have been used more effectively either to provide transitional financial assistance to refugees or use the money to facilitate integration of asylum seekers who wanted to settle in Hungary. Attracting migrants to stay would have made particular sense in light of Fidesz’s strategic goal to stop the long-declining Hungarian birth rate and the aging of the Hungarian society (Előd 2018).

Instead, in order to further prevent the European Union from sending refugees to Hungary, Mr. Orbán proposed a constitutional amendment to reflect ‘the will of the people’ (Mno.hu 2016). It was presented to the Parliament on October 10, 2016, but the bill was rejected by a narrow margin. The far-right Jobbik party, which contends that some of the new arrivals pose a security threat, sealed the bill’s rejection by boycotting the vote. However, it held out a lifeline to Orbán by indicating that it would support the ban if Orbán scrapped a separate investor visa scheme under which foreigners could effectively buy the right to live in Hungary (and move freely within Schengen) in exchange for buying government bonds with a 5-year maturity for at least €300 000. Some 10 000 Chinese have taken advantage of the scheme to move to Hungary, as did smaller numbers of affluent investors from Russia and the Middle East (Fábián and Németh 2016).

Somewhat contradictory to this anti-refugee sentiment, was the outpouring of assistance offered by civil society organisations and civilians to refugees who descended on the Keleti Railway Station in the Summer of 2015 (Koncz and Polyák 2015). As Migration Aid volunteers recount, volunteers brought toys and sweets for the refugee children and turned the station into a playground during the afternoons. However, when Migration Aid volunteers started to use chalk to draw colourful pictures on the asphalt, as a creative means to help refugee children deal with their trauma, the Hungarian police reminded the volunteers that the children could be made liable for the ‘violation of public order’. In contrast to the civil society’s engagement with children, the Hungarian government tried to undermine and limit the population’s sympathy towards refugees. Employees of the Hungarian state television were told ‘not to broadcast images of refugee children’ (Anarki 2015). Ultimately, the task of visually capturing the everyday life of refugee families and their children, as the only means to bridge the distance between the refugees and the receiving societies, was left to volunteers and Facebook activists, such as the photo blogger Budapest Seen. Budapest Seen captured activities at the train station, at the Slovenian and Serbian border, and elsewhere in the country, where both NGO workers and regular citizens were providing much needed water, food, sanitary napkins for women, diapers for babies, and medical assistance.

Poland, a much larger country than Hungary, was asked by the EU to accept 6 500 refugees. The proposed quota constitutes less than 0.02 per cent of the Polish population of 40 million, but has sparked a lot of outrage. The anti-refugee rally in November 2015 in the city of Wrocław captured the populism that has been on display in Poland in the last couple of years. Thousands of protesters marched, denouncing the EU proposal. The rally members chanted anti-Islam and anti-migrant slogans declaring their loyalty to ‘God, Honour, and Fatherland’. They finished the gathering by burning an effigy – not of a Muslim or a refugee, but a Hassidic Jew – wrapped in the EU flag (Tharoor 2016).

In a YouTube chat, Jarosław Kaczyński, the president of the Law and Justice party, said: ‘After recent events connected with acts of terror, [Poland] will not accept refugees because there is no mechanism that would ensure security’ (Kaczyński 2016). Kaczyński also rejected the EU suggestion that countries which do not want to accept refugees should pay €250 000 for each asylum-seeker they turn away. According to Eurostat (2015), Poland accepted just 0.21 asylum-seekers per 1 000 citizens, compared to 0.5 per thousand in the United Kingdom or 8.43 in Sweden.

Many Poles agree with the party leadership. More than half of the Poles surveyed by CBOS in 2017 were adamant that Poland should not admit any refugees; 40 per cent of the respondents agreed the country should provide temporary refuge until it is safe for the refugees to go back home. Only four per cent of the survey participants favoured permanent resettlement of refugees in Poland. A higher proportion of respondents – almost two-thirds – were against relocating to Poland Middle Eastern and Northern African refugees already in the European Union. Only 28 per cent of the survey respondents think that Poland should share the responsibility with other EU countries and accept some of the refugees (CBOS 2017). Debates observed in the public sphere – on Polish TV, in churches, and cafes – centred on rejecting Muslim refugees and allowing Christians from the Middle East to settle in Poland. The Warsaw-based Estera Foundation, proclaimed that they would support resettlement of Christians from Syria. Miriam Shaded, the head of Estera, said that Muslim refugees pose a threat to Poland:

They [non-Christian refugees] can be a threat to Poland. I think it is a great way for ISIS to locate their troops... all around Europe (Wasik and Foy 2015).

A study financed by the Visegrád Fund and conducted between July 2016 and June 2017, examined opinions of young people (17 to 30-year old) about the recent ‘migration crisis’. In Poland, young people were almost equally divided between those who would accept refugees from countries affected by armed conflict (43 per cent) and those who would not (46 per cent). When asked if they were ready to welcome refugees into their neighbourhoods, 43 per cent indicated they were not ready, while 41 per cent said they would receive refugees; 16 per cent said they did not know what they would do (Visegrád Fund 2017). Unfortunately, the study did not provide information on educational levels of the youth who participated in the survey. It would be interesting to know whether education affected people’s opinions.

While the vast majority (75 per cent) of the Polish youth did not notice more refugees in their local area, 66.7 per cent affirmed that there are no positive effects stemming from arrival of refugees. The researchers involved in the study attributed these statements to the power of media discourses that portray refugees in very negative light. In our own research, we have also seen negative effects of media, especially social media, on attitudes towards refugees. According to the Visegrád study, young Poles are mainly afraid of cultural and religious tensions (82.5 per cent), followed by increase in crime (65.1 per cent) and terrorist attacks (58.7 per cent).

Poles see also Muslim men as a threat to the safety of Polish women. In the winter of 2016, shortly after the alleged mass sexual assaults of women in Cologne on the 2015 New Year’s Eve, a popular right-wing

Polish weekly, *wSieci* (The Network) published a deeply provocative magazine cover. It showed a young blonde woman, garbed loosely in the EU flag, being groped by three men. The cover line read: ‘The Islamic rape of Europe’. The magazine echoed the sentiments of Polish right-wing groups, both secular and Catholic, who portrayed Muslim men as polygamous and abusive, and an imminent threat to the safety of Polish (and more generally, white European) women. While the magazine cover might be connected with the sexual assaults in Germany, the magazine’s rendition of a young white woman, violated by dark-skinned men, is also eerily reminiscent of the nationalist propaganda of the WWII era with its imagery of a scheming Jewish spider eyeing a blonde *Fräulein* or a French colonial soldier groping a fair-skinned girl (Taroon 2016).

The call to protect Polish women from ‘wild Muslim men’ is happening at the same time when women’s rights in Poland are being severely curtailed. In October 2017, police in several Polish cities raided offices of the Women’s Rights Centre and *Baba*, two nongovernmental organisations that support domestic violence victims and promote women’s rights (Bielecka 2017). While some called the reports fake news (Młynarz 2017), Polish parliamentarians periodically do call for Poland’s withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention (EU News 2016), a treaty aimed at preventing violence against women, supporting survivors, and holding perpetrators to account. The Polish Catholic Church claims the convention is a source of evil ‘gender ideology’ aimed at destroying Polish traditional values (Komosa 2014).

The prospect of mosques being built by refugees is also threatening to Poles. In the spring of 2010, when news of the first mosque to be built in Warsaw was announced, posters portraying a female figure in a niqab standing in front of missile-shaped minarets appeared in the city centre. The posters that read ‘Stop the Radical Mosque in Warsaw’ were part of a campaign spearheaded by *Europa Przyszłości* (Europe of the Future). ‘Focusing on the niqab-clad body at the forefront of the poster, (...) the group emphasised the central position of Muslim women in the perceived “clash of civilisations” that have now supposedly reached Poland. This sentiment was shared by Catholic right-wing groups who also warned against ‘Islamisation’ of the continent by focusing considerable attention on women in Islam’ (Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr 2017a: 289). While Muslim men are portrayed in public debates as polygamous and abusive, Muslim women are described as caged in the hijab, secluded, and forced into marriage.

These opinions are not limited to Poland and Hungary. In Central Europe, Muslims and Islam mobilise gender narratives through two lenses (Narkowicz 2014): that of rescue narratives (Bracke 2012) and that of threat narratives (Puar and Rai 2002). Additionally, in Poland, Islamophobia – seen through a gendered framework – deployed two apparently contradictory narratives: that of secular liberal values and that of Catholic national values (Narkowicz and Pędziwiatr 2017a).

Many Poles and Hungarians characterise Islam as misogynistic and gender oppressive. They are not alone. Many feminist scholars also represent Islam as inherently gender oppressive. In fact, as Riffat Hassan argues, ‘propaganda against Islam and Muslims is nothing new in the West. (...) Europeans always constructed Islam as a civilisational adversary and the religion, an antithesis of European values’ (Hasan 2012: 61). In the wake of the 9/11 attacks on New York in 2001 and the subsequent U.S. bombing of Afghanistan in October of the same year, the oppression of Afghan women was used to justify the attempt to overthrow the Taliban (Rawi 2004).

In Poland, the secular proponents of rescue narratives argue that the oppression of women in Islam conflicts with Western liberal values of gender equity. They seem to be united in an imagined community where gender equality is a norm and further differentiate themselves from the Muslim Other. However, the situation of women in Polish society is far from this idealised vision of equality. Despite women’s elevated image in Polish culture as ‘reproducers of the nation’, women are disadvantaged politically, socially, and economically. In 2010, Agnieszka Nowak (2010) described the status of women in Poland as ‘permanent crisis’. Analysts observed that after 1989, gender policy was seen as a remnant of communism and state-socialist policies. As

a result, the 1989 transformation reinforced the traditional vision of women as mothers and wives, their marginalisation in the public sphere as well as the rise of anti-feminist discourses and problems with achieving women's emancipation (Szelewa 2011; Warat 2014). Recent protests – Black Monday in 2016 and Black Tuesday in 2017 – brought thousands of women (and some male allies) to the streets to protest restrictions on women's rights, including access to abortion and other reproductive health solutions.

By and large, Polish youths living in Poland are not afraid of economic consequences of migration. Only 6.3 per cent are concerned about salary reductions and 12.6 per cent worry about losing jobs to refugees. Nonetheless, content analysis of social media platforms used by Poles living and working abroad – especially in the United Kingdom and Norway – suggests that the economic competition with refugees and migrants is quite pronounced in the minds of Polish migrants, young and old. They feel threatened by refugees and migrants from outside Europe both at home and abroad.

The debate about migration is quite engendered. Both Poles and Hungarians have been opposed to accepting male refugees. Władysław Kosiniak-Kamysz, the leader of the Polish People's Party, said: 'We'll never close the door to orphans, but let the young men fight for the freedom of their countries'. Indeed, much of the social media discourse focused on TV portrayals of young refugee men, talking on cell phones and wearing modern Western clothing. This was not the image Poles and Hungarians equated with being a refugee. The opinions expressed by many of our interviewees portrayed the young men as 'cowards' who did not want to fight for their country. If Poland and Hungary were to open their doors to refugees, they should admit only women and children, wrote many discussants on social media. Newspaper articles echoed these sentiments (Niezalezna.pl 2017; Pawlicki 2017).

The main fear Poles and Hungarians express is the fear of Islam. Seventy-three per cent of Poles in the Visegrád study expressed fear of Muslim refugees. Only 16 per cent would host Muslim refugees in their homes – 56 per cent find that idea unacceptable. In another study, 44 per cent of the surveyed Poles indicated that they dislike Muslims compared to 23 per cent who like them. Around 20 per cent of Poles did not wish to have a Muslim colleague or a neighbour, much less a family member. Half of the surveyed Poles rejected the idea of marrying a Muslim or welcoming a Muslim son or daughter-in-law to their family. According to a study on prejudices, Poles perceive Muslims and Arabs as incompetent and emotionally cold. Additionally, Poles associate Islam with terrorism (Stefaniak 2015). Eurobarometer research indicates that Poles and Hungarians fear terrorism more often than citizens of old member states (European Commission 2015). The Migration Research Institute published reports on security risks posed by Muslims in Europe, providing 'scientific' justification for the Hungarian government's anti-immigrant policies (MIT 2015).

There were also more balanced opinions, especially those expressed by Zoltan Szombathy, a professor of Islamic history at ELTE (Somogyi 2015), Zsolt Rostoványi, at the time Rector of Corvinus University (Rostoványi 2015), and Erzsébet N. Rózsa of the Hungarian Institute of Foreign Affairs (Hirado.hu 2016). They highlighted that the vast majority of Muslims denounce radicalism and that the integration challenges faced by some Muslim immigrants stem from socio-cultural and not religious issues. The general public did not pay much attention to these arguments. The question for the Catholic Poland and Christian Hungary remains: what happened to the biblical precept of welcoming the stranger? Both countries use Christianity to defend their stance, but it seems that they read the Bible very selectively. Interestingly, the call to 'welcome the stranger', through protection and hospitality, and to honour the stranger or those of other faiths with respect and equality, is deeply rooted in all major religions (UNHCR 2013) and adhered to by many refugee resettlement agencies, not just Christian ones (see <https://www.hias.org/>).

What happened to welcoming the stranger, no matter what her religion?

Blatantly disregarding the call issued by Pope Francis to welcome the strangers, many Hungarian and Polish clergy launched anti-Muslim refugees campaigns. Gyula Marfi, the Archbishop of Veszprem, called the refugees ‘invaders’ and ‘Islamists’ (Németh 2015) and asserted that the main reason for the migration of Muslim refugees is *jihad* (Barcsa and Máté-Tóth 2016). Bishop Laszlo Kiss-Riggo joined the choir and declared that the Pope was wrong to call for compassion and ignorant of the Muslim threat to Hungary’s Christian character (Witte 2015). Bela Balas, Bishop of Kaposvar, published an apocalyptic letter in the *Heti Válasz* magazine entitled ‘*Evening news from the European caliphate in the first century after Christianity*’, where he evoked destruction of churches, persecution of Christian believers and priests, banning of pork and wine, censorship, and emigration of European citizens (Balás 2015). These attitudes resonate with the legacy of Ottokár Prohászka, Bishop of Székesfehérvár between 1905 and 1927 and prominent Anti-Semite ideologue, calling for the extermination of Jews whom he characterised as a festering disease on the body of Christian Hungary. Prohászka still has several standing statues and high schools named after him today.

Not all Hungarian clergy had negative attitudes towards the Pope’s call to action. Péter Mustó, a Jesuit priest, and Csaba Böjte, a Franciscan monk, responded positively to Pope Francis’ message of humanitarian responsibility towards refugees. István Bogárdi Szabó, the Bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church’s Synod, called for the expansion of the Refugee Mission. Miklós Beer, the Catholic Bishop of Vác, thought that Hungarians ought to be a lot more worried about Charlie Hebdo’s liberal atheists’ spirituality than about Muslims who pray three times a day and want to live by the Koran. Péter Ganec, a Lutheran Bishop, visited one of the refugee camps and called for compassion and assistance to refugees. Others, however, thought it was not their responsibility. The Hungarian Baptists believed that it was more important to invest in helping refugees in their countries of origin than providing assistance in Hungary. Leaders of several Hungarian Jewish communities publically empathised with the persecution faced by Muslim refugees, but called on governments of rich Arab countries to step up and help. They also emphasised the need for strict control of immigration but maintained that the decision should be in the hands of the Hungarian government (Barcsa and Máté-Tóth 2016).

In Poland, a country where Catholics comprise between 87 to 94 per cent of the population, the Pope’s request to welcome refugees was met with scepticism and diplomatic reluctance. In an official response, the Polish Episcopate failed to indicate whether the Pontiff’s call to action would be implemented or not. Instead, the Episcopate pushed the responsibility to help asylum seekers onto the Polish government. ‘When it comes to a specific assistance to refugees in Poland, there is no doubt that the major initiative rests on the shoulders of secular power’, stated the bishops’ communique, issued in September 2015.

Some clergy were more direct in their opposition to refugee admissions. Archbishop Hoser, for example, stressed that Muslim refugees would face insurmountable challenges in understanding and accepting Christian values and therefore would not be able to integrate into Polish society. Archbishop Hoser clearly represents a conservative stance and thinks that isolating both religions is a preferred alternative to finding creative solution to ensure peaceful co-existence of Islam and Catholicism. Deacon Jacek Jan Pawłowicz goes further. On his Facebook page, he regularly posts hostile, often vulgar, sentiments insulting Islam and Arab refugees. He claims that Syrians would turn aggressive as soon as they are granted refugee status. ‘These wild people – euphemistically called refugees – cannot respect anything, neither our rights nor culture’, he wrote. Pawłowicz also called for women who support refugee admission to ‘open their eyes’. ‘Maybe when such a ‘refugee’ rapes them, then they will understand why they were so fiercely agitating for and for whom they opened the door to our Polish house’, he wrote. While some Polish media outlets criticised Deacon Pawłowicz, the Episcopate has not initiated any investigation into his hate speech. Possibly the biggest offender is Jacek

Międlar. This young priest, currently suspended by the Catholic Church, speaks at far-right rallies and incites Polish youth to face the enemies of the homeland and the enemies of the Church. During one of his speeches he said: ‘You have to be a complete idiot if you don’t see the danger that comes with the waves of migrants/occupants’. Recently, Międlar gained international notoriety when he was stopped by border officials after landing at Stansted airport, intending to speak at a meeting of the far-right ‘Britain First’ organisation. In a tweet, Międlar complained that he was a victim; all he wanted to do was to protect children from ‘Muslim grooming gangs’ (Tempest 2017).

Father Międlar’s stance is not shared by all Polish clergy. The metropolitan of Wrocław, Archbishop Józef Kupny, has tweeted his support of Muslim refugees: ‘We must not shut the doors to our brothers and sisters only because they believe differently than we do’. Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek, from the more liberal wing of the Church, told the *Rzeczpospolita* newspaper that accepting a few hundred asylum seekers isn’t much of a problem for a country of 38 million. ‘Not accepting refugees practically means resigning from being a Christian’, he said. ‘I’m ashamed of those who don’t want to do their duty not just as Christians but as human beings’.

As we were writing this paper, the Polish Catholic Church organised a controversial prayer day on the borders surrounding the country. Parishioners from some 300 churches were bussed to border areas to pray the rosary on the feast day that marks the anniversary of the 1571 sea battle of Lepanto, a Christian victory over Ottoman Turks. Organisers said the prayer was not directed against anyone or anything; however, some commentators viewed the event as support for the Polish government’s refusal to accept Muslim migrants. Just a few days before the prayer event, Archbishop Wojciech Polak, standing at an outdoor pulpit at Jasna Góra shrine in the city of Częstochowa, Poland’s holiest Roman Catholic site, delivered a very different message to the president and prime minister seated before him: ‘We must be open and compassionate and ready to help those most needy, weak and persecuted, migrants and refugees’ (Scislowka 2017). Sceptics wonder if this is too little, too late.

From words to action

In Poland, Islamophobia has been expressed for a number of years, mainly on the Internet. This is not surprising, given the relatively small number of Muslims living in the country. CBOS research on Internet content shows that over 80 per cent of comments about Middle Eastern and North African refugees were negative, while positive opinions constituted a mere six per cent (CBOS 2015a). Recently, however, the hatred of Muslims is increasingly demonstrated in actions aimed at Muslims or people mistakenly believed to be Muslim (Górak-Sosnowska 2016). Indeed, *Ośrodek Monitorowania Zachowań Rasistowskich i Ksenofobicznych* (Centre for Monitoring Racist and Xenophobic Behaviour) as well as the press have been documenting increased anti-Muslim attacks. The same toxic environment is also present in Hungary; it results from years of government propaganda. There have been several incidents of police being called to investigate ‘suspicious’ groups of people or individuals believed to be illegal migrants in a handful of cities around the country. These instances involved locals calling police to report a group of ‘Negros and brown coloured men’ wandering in the city of Cegléd, speaking a foreign tongue; they turned out to be tourists (Rényi 2018), a pair of Sri Lankan students working as volunteers at a home for disabled children in the outskirts of Budapest (Tóth 2017), and a woman walking home from the hairdresser with a scarf wrapped around her head on the street in the town of Csongrád (K.T. 2018).

Much of these actions are aimed at demonising and dehumanising Muslims. One initiative called for sending bacon to a local mosque in hopes of defiling the place of worship and causing Muslims to abandon it (Woźnicki 2014). Another involved sharing an Internet meme calling for Muslims to be sent to concentration camps (Szymanik 2015). Very few Poles – only 12 per cent – have ever met a Muslim (Stefaniak 2015), but

when they do, these encounters sometimes become violent as evidenced by the examples of ‘foreign-looking’ individuals being beaten by locals. In mid-September 2017, a young Chechen woman bringing her son to a day care in Warsaw was severely beaten by a father of a child that attends the same childcare facility. A passer-by who tried to defend the young mother was cursed out by the perpetrator. The same day, in Cracow, a young Egyptian working in a neighbourhood kebab restaurant was attacked by three Polish men in their 20s who shouted that Ahmed and Allen, the owner of the kebab joint, ought to ‘go where they came from’, because ‘there is no room for the likes of them in Poland’. One study in Łomża, the location of a camp housing Chechen refugees, indicated that direct contact with refugees decreased a level of acceptance of Muslims (Bilewicz 2011). This contradicts the findings of the surveys conducted by the German Marshall Fund, which assert that people who know immigrants and are friends with refugees are more likely to have favourable opinions about migrants (GMF 2014). However, the authors of the Łomża study concluded that the contact was very superficial (Bilewicz 2011). We have observed the same phenomenon among Polish migrants to the United Kingdom, Germany, or Sweden, who often work alongside Muslims, but don’t bother to get to know them. Instead, they tell tall tales about the dangers that await non-Muslims in predominantly Muslim neighbourhoods, especially women who can be attacked and raped at a moment’s notice (on-going field research among Polish migrants in Europe).

It is often said that older people are more conservative and less open to Others. In Poland, the opposite seems to be true. According to a recent opinion poll, 59 per cent of Poles between the ages of 18 to 24 believed that Islam causes danger compared to 37 per cent of Poles age 65 and older (CBOS 2015b). Young Poles were also found to be more prone to accept anti-Islamic hate speech and felt more insecure in the company of Muslims (Stefaniak 2015). Available surveys have not analysed differences of opinion between men and women, although most available research, including our own, indicates that gender plays an important role in the anti-immigrant debates and incidents.

Towards solutions and resolutions

This exploratory study aimed at identifying expressions of anti-immigrant sentiments in public discussions. As we showed above, it is not difficult to find such attitudes. Many have been well documented. Research shows that there are many publications on Islamophobia and more broadly xenophobia in Hungary and in Poland – several of them informed this paper – but far fewer practical resources on how to affect a paradigm shift and change people’s attitudes towards refugees and immigrants, especially Muslim newcomers. Agnieszka Zielonka, a Polish psychologist, says that the situation Poles are now facing, namely the possibility of hosting non-Christian refugees, is new, and therefore they do not know how to behave. Instead of soberly analysing the situation, she adds, they observe their Central European neighbours and follow suit (cited in Wasik 2016).

Ironically, both Poles and Hungarians have a long history of seeking refuge in many countries. Starting in 1942, the port city of Pahlevi (now known as Anzali) became the main landing point for Polish refugees entering Iran from the Soviet Union, receiving up to 2 500 refugees per day. General Anders evacuated 74 000 Polish troops, including approximately 41 000 civilians, many of them children, to Iran. In total, over 116 000 refugees were relocated to Iran. Approximately 5 000–6 000 of the Polish refugees were Jewish (Holocaust Encyclopaedia online n.d.). In the wake of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, close to 200,000 Hungarians crossed into Austria. About 30 000 of these refugees were airlifted to the United States (Pastor 2016). In the early 1980s, thousands of Polish asylum seekers passed through camps in Austria and Germany to seek a new home in Europe, Canada, and the United States. Somehow, this history seems to be forgotten in the contemporary discourses.

In the remainder of this paper, we offer a few examples of possible strategies aimed at improving Poles' and Hungarians' attitudes towards newcomers. Perhaps they will become a springboard for new, creative strategies.

Contrary to popular belief, not all countries with a long history of welcoming immigrants officially endorse multiculturalism. Canada does, but the United States does not. Yet, the US government has developed a legal framework that protects newcomers and guarantees them a broad array of rights. Some of these rights have been ruthlessly curtailed by the current administration, but their decades-long existence provides the basis for protection of immigrants and contestation in the courts of law. In 2016, Poland's right-wing government scrapped a state council tasked with combating racism. Despite an increase in hate crime in the country (Bieńkowski and Świdorska 2017; Patzer 2016), many xenophobic actions are not being prosecuted.

Most policy-makers – in Europe and elsewhere – favour integration, but integration policies are not a substitute for actions at the community level, where the web of local relationships determines the immigrants' experience and affects local attitudes towards newcomers. Advocates and service providers working with migrants suggest that individuals who have personal contact with immigrants have more immigrant-friendly attitudes than persons without such contact. Staff at Migrant Info Point in Poland and members of MigSzol (Migrant Solidarity) in Hungary, for example, organise a lot of informal initiatives, such as international picnics and cultural evenings, to share examples of migrants' cuisine, music, and poetry with local populations. Research confirms the viability of such simple strategies. The more arenas in which the contact is made, the greater the goodwill, says a Norwegian researcher Svein Blom (2010). For example, the proportion of people who believe that most immigrants abuse the social welfare system drops from 40 per cent among persons with no contact with immigrants to 18 per cent among those who are acquainted with immigrants. Correspondingly, the proportion who believe that most immigrants make an important contribution to the society increases from 60 per cent among persons with no contact with immigrants to over 80 per cent among people with contacts with immigrants in three or more arenas. Blom observes:

Attitudes are more positive among respondents who know a large number of immigrants, and who have frequent contact with them (daily). Whether it is the contact with immigrants that generates positive attitudes, or whether it is the positive attitudes that generate contact is unclear. It is most likely to be both (Blom 2010: 145).

The conflict in Łomża mentioned above led to the closing of the refugee camp. However, a few refugees decided to stay and live in the town. A local Foundation 'Ocalenie' (Rescue) organised several information and anti-discrimination campaigns, sporting and artistic events, and a celebration of Refugee Day. Thanks to these actions, the inhabitants of Łomża had a real opportunity to meet and interact with their new neighbours, and to understand their history and needs. As a result, the level of prejudice has fallen in the city. Once again it turned out that personal contact has the power to demolish interpersonal walls.

The power of information and knowledge cannot be underestimated. In the Fall of 2016, Polish anthropologists and ethnologists organised a national convention in Poznań, during which they developed a manifesto against xenophobia, racism and hate speech:

As representatives of ethnology and social and cultural anthropology, we feel special responsibility for the shape of knowledge about culture and society, and we are increasingly concerned about the growing ignorance about migration, refugees, multiculturalism, and national, ethnic or religious identities present in public debate, media, education and politics, read the manifesto.

They also vowed to disseminate information about different cultures and groups of migrants.

In addition to scholars, especially migration scholars, the news media significantly influence the popular perceptions of refugees and migrants, in some cases reinforcing stereotypes. Poles and Hungarians using social media to debate the refugee situation often rely on media stories that have not been vetted. They also tend to cite almost exclusively stories from foreign or diaspora press related to terrorism and other extreme cases of violence involving individuals that are perceived to be foreign-born. There is a need for a more balanced portrayal by Polish media of migration issues at home and abroad. The same holds true for Hungary, where the national service broadcaster and one of the two largest private television stations owned by a Fidesz oligarch are widely seen to be little more than mouthpieces in pushing Fidesz propaganda. There is a need for human interest stories about the refugee flight. A culture of exchange of reliable, balanced information about refugees and migrants is crucial. If the ‘them’ versus ‘us’ logic is continuously amplified for short-sighted political purposes as is the case in both countries, there is a real danger of xenophobia, hatred and narrow mindedness becoming the social norm in Polish and Hungarian societies.

Notes

¹ The Treaty of Trianon was the peace agreement of 1920 to formally end World War I between most of the Allies of WWI and the Kingdom of Hungary, the latter being one of the successor states to Austria-Hungary.

² See articles by Laszlo Seres, publicist of the Hungarian weekly, *Heti Világgazdaság* (HVG).

³ At least 14 jihadi terrorists responsible for the 2015 Paris and Brussels attacks entered Schengen through Hungary and spent several weeks in Budapest before continuing on to Belgium (lemonde.fr 2016).

⁴ We monitored the page over a period of two weeks: one week prior and one week after the referendum. During this period, page administrators posted between 1 to 10 posts each day, with posting frequency drastically decreasing following the referendum. The last posts to be published on the page prior to 9 pm were recorded since we assumed users to be most active during the evening hours.


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