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Greening Nationalism: Exploring nature rhetoric in far-right Polish discourse

Wysowska, Nina

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Greening Nationalism

Exploring nature rhetoric in far-right Polish discourse

Nina Wysowska

3092496

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1. Introduction

The powerful resurgence of far-right actors in Europe is evident and palpable while their nationalist and populist ideology is gaining momentum in mainstream politics (Henley, 2023, para. 3). Simultaneously, the inescapable consequences of anthropogenic climate change, proclaimed as the “the ultimate challenge”, command the attention of actors from all sides of the political spectrum (Barber, 2019; Conversi, 2020, p. 625). Traditionally, far-right actors are associated with climate denialism yet current views of the environmentalisms of the right are developing (Moore and Roberts, 2022, pp. 4-5). As climate change taps into the ultimate nationalistic objective of protecting the homeland, it makes climate action a “patriotic cause” (Barber, 2019, para. 17). Disguised under the cloak of nature protection, far-right actors address the nationalist anxieties of a threatened national identity ranging from supposed environmental protection to defending ‘life’ itself (Olsen, 1997, p. 46). While those subjects are often treated in separation, the far-right is tightening the relationship between the natural environment, national identity and gender. It thus becomes interesting to investigate the notions of those three themes to discover the ways they collectively serve advancing the nationalist agenda in what is one of Europe’s largest strongholds of nationalism - Poland (Pazzanese, 2017, para. 41).

The Polish right-wing ideology has been widely analyzed through the lens of memory politics or populism while environmentally-related issues are usually associated with the liberal left (Forchtner, 2019b, p. 1; Kotwas & Kubik, 2019). Enclosed in the notion of ‘nature rhetoric’, this paper reveals a deeper layer of the Polish far-right ideology, by encompassing not only the more apparent theme of the natural environment, but the interrelated concepts of national identity and gender. For this reason, the following research question will be investigated:

How is nature rhetoric used by Polish far-right actors to advance their nationalistic ideology?

Poland has faced illiberal derailment and violations of the European Union’s law, under the eight-year rule of the far-right populist Law and Justice Party (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, PiS), following the constitutional crisis of 2015 (Allen, 2020, p. vii; Drinóczi & Bień-Kacała, 2018, p. 1140). While right-wing extremism no longer holds political representation in the Polish parliament,

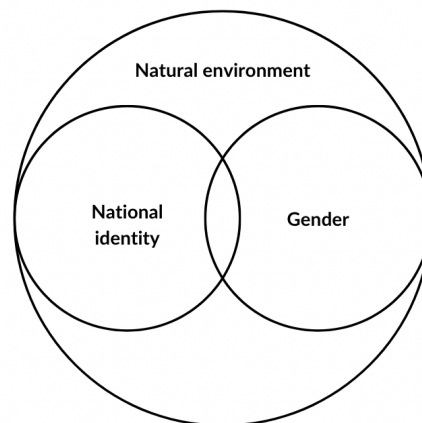
extreme-right groups like The National Radical Camp (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, ONR) are significant actors who manage to rally 60,000 people chanting slogans such as “Pure Poland, white Poland” during the yearly Independence March in Warsaw (Taylor, 2017). Furthermore, as a bastion of nationalism and Catholic traditionalism, Poland has a poor record regarding minority and women’s rights, ranking last in the index measuring respect of human rights (Rainbow Europe, 2023).

The analysis, constructed around the three themes, can provide thought-provoking insights to the corresponding academic fields. Scholars from the study of nationalism can enhance their knowledge through the findings from ecofeminism and right-wing ecology. Specifically, revealing the ways in which nature and women are traditionally equated to one another, highlights ways of imposing control on both entities (Ortner, 1972, p. 10). This intersects with the dominant hierarchical structures in nationalism which is a “supremely masculine enterprise” thus providing an interesting insight into women’s role in the patriarchal, nationalist tradition (Elias, 2008, p. 386). On a societal level, trends within the right-wing can be better understood thus contributing to tackling their societal consequences such as increasingly exclusionary politics regarding minorities, reinforcement of patriarchal structures and manipulative ecological policies. Importantly, the increase in radical right populism matched with a rise in extremism amongst European parties and groups threatens a democratic foundation (Henley, 2017). Studying the use of nature rhetoric by far-right actors is now more important than ever, as in light of aggravating climate change, political actors use environmental concerns to disguise their true ideology. Therefore, it is important to distinguish between true environmental care and its use as a pretext for nationalistic policies.

This paper will first draw on an overview of the existing literature reflecting the relationship between nature and nationalism in the past and present to then proceed to the theoretical foundation highlighting the interconnectedness of the three themes. Through a discourse analysis of PiS and ONR, this research attempts to offer comprehensive insights in the nexus between nationalism, gender and nature. Finally, the conclusion allows for a thorough understanding of the intimate relationship between the national identity and the motherland. These insights highlight the significance of a mother figure to the nation, beyond simply embodying a homeland.

2. Theoretical Scope

The following section discusses the literature outlining the expressions of nature in nationalism and the related effects of perceiving the nation as an extension of nature. Subsequently, the bridging theoretical argument focuses on the assumed closeness of women with nature which allows for the introduction of the gendered dimensions of this research. Through exploring the anti-feminist stances in defense of the ‘natural order’, the connection between the natural environment and gender can be established (Biehl, 1996, pp. 27-28; Olsen, 1997, p. 46). While the current scholarship is helpful to understand the mechanisms between two of the three themes, like nature and nationalism or the natural environment and gender, the three concepts remain isolated. Therefore, this country-specific research which investigates the natural environment, national identity and gender at once, attempts to advance the understanding of their interrelatedness within nationalistic ideology.



2.1. The history of nature and nationalism

2.1.1. The völkisch movement and eco-organicism

The intertwining of the natural environment and the broad concept of ‘nature’ in right-wing politics dates back to the nineteenth century with the members of fascistic and National Socialist groups expressing “organic ethno-nationalist” interests in the environment (Forchtner, 2019b, p. 6). The notion of ‘nature = nation’ reflects the organic relation between the land and the people, signifying an interdependent, not only biological, yet also symbolic bond between homeland and people (p. 5). Historically, British, Italian or Portuguese fascists embodied the ‘return to the land’ rhetoric which, stemming from Romantic ideas, emphasizes the superiority of rurality over an

urban lifestyle and is seen as key to the people constituting the nation (p. 6). However, not until German Nationalist Socialist thought has this ideology crystallized through the thorough study of environmental issues combined with “ethnonationalist, Social Darwinist and racist ideas” (p. 6). The *völkisch* political thought viewed the people as an inherent, organic part of the land they inhabit, to which they are tied not only by culture, but also through “ties of blood” (Moore and Roberts, 2022, p. 27). The infamous Nazi phrase of ‘Blood and Soil’ is a notable expression of the “quasi-mystical connection between the ‘blood’ (the race or *Volk*) and ‘soil’ (the land and the natural environment)” (Staudenmaier, 1997, p. 14) which was essential to the preservation of the German race. The *völkisch* movement was termed a “pathological response” (p. 7) to modernity, through which the progress and success of industrial capitalism was feared. At the same time, cosmopolitanism or urban civilization was tied to the figure of the Jew (p. 7). This unification of “ethnocentric populism with nature mysticism” (p. 7) longing for the ‘return to the land’ and a simple, rural lifestyle in harmony with nature was a convincing concealment of the true colors of German antisemitism and nationalism.

Olsen (1997) introduces a theory of eco-organicism grounded in the view that society is a “natural” community reflecting an “ecosystem” and presupposes an “already existing latent identity between society and nature [...] at a collective level” (pp. 51-52). This means nations or ethnic groups are treated as a “closed and unified ecosystem” (p. 52). The two main traits of this theory suppose that ecosystems (both natural and social) are diverse amongst one another, however as “each system possesses unique characteristics”, the preservation of that uniqueness is crucial to the “health and survival of that system” (p. 52). Thus, the appearance of “foreign species” is a danger to the system’s ecological balance which posits the nation as a “unique and fragile natural entity” (p. 52). These attributes have two broad consequences for this research. Firstly, given that what matters is the organic entity of the *Volk* and not individuals, emphasis is given to the preservation of the organism as a whole, meaning not only the people and their health, but also preserving the natural environment (p. 53). Environmental protection thus becomes key to the survival of the nation as it represents national identity and culture. Another resulting issue is the threat from ‘invasive species’ which, apart from types of animals and plants that had potential to deteriorate the natural ecosystem, related to migrants and the overall risk from ‘multiculturalism’ (Moore & Roberts, 2022, p. 25; Forchter, 2019b, p. 5; Olsen, 1997, p. 55). Historically, this has been put into practice

by imposing racial quotas on immigration, which enabled to protect the homeland and notably the environment (Moore & Roberts, 2022, p. 25).

2.2. Contemporary expressions of nature in nationalist ideology

2.2.1. Organicist nationalism

Interestingly, perceiving the nation as an organism is not only a conception of the past. Based on an analysis of contemporary nationalist ideologies, scholars like Maiz (2003, p. 251) highlight organicist nationalism as one of the three main types present in current studies of nationalism. It characterizes itself by a “thick ethnic concept” (p. 261) where the determination of a nation relies on biological determinants like race and cultural ones such as the national spirit (*Volkgeist*). This results in ethnic homogeneity and exclusivity determined by language and race or ethical values reflected in custom or religion. As a consequence, the ‘us’ and ‘them’ distinction arises, through rejection and hatred of all that is foreign. Therefore, all decisions about expressing the will to belong to a specific nation have already been “settled a priori by appeal to ethnic nature and culture” (p. 262). These pre-determinations suppress the internal significance of politics and the will of its citizens leading to the exclusion of democracy (p. 262). This creates racial and ethnic tensions and oppressions of who is seen as a ‘foe’ leading to what Maiz (2003, p. 262) conceptualizes to be an ethnocratic state with incidents of xenophobia or compulsory assimilation.

2.2.3. Rurality (and populism)

Another significant theme when investigating far-right articulations of nature, is the overarching focus and glorification of the countryside and “rural values” (Staudenmaier, 1996, p. 6) and a condemnation of urbanity. Apart from the unquestioned bond between the German population and nature, the National Socialist ideology puts emphasis on re-agrarianization and organic agriculture (p. 17). Nowadays, radical right populists use rural areas as a symbol of the “abandoned losers of globalization” (Valero, 2022, p. 761). Through imposing a social divide between the stereotypes of the rural people and the urban elite, radical-right populists are successfully building on two crucial elements, “nostalgic identity anxiety and rural discontent” (p. 762). Forchtner & Kolvraa (2015, p. 199) inquired into the presence of nature within the ideologies of contemporary populist radical right parties (PRRP). The scholars found that the political actors extolled the wonders of

the countryside and would often emphasize the right of the citizens to enjoy the rural lifestyle and its tranquil scenery as compared to the repulsiveness of modern cities (p. 204).

The abovementioned combination of theoretical perspectives exposed ways the natural environment can be used and manipulated to advance a homogenous and 'pure' conception of a national ideology. The following section will explore gendered relations within far-right ecology, to reveal the ways in which women constitute part of nature thus are also utilized in advancing nationalistic thought.

2.3. Mother Nature and nationalism

2.3.1. Men = culture; women = nature

The "dominant and ancient" dichotomy suggests men to be connected with culture while women to be one with nature (Plumwood, 1993 p. 20). Ortner (1972) explains this argument through an attempt to determine why women, no matter the culture, hold an inferior position in most societies - what she calls the "universal fact of female devaluation" (p. 10). The author answers this puzzle by determining that what each culture sees "as being at a lower order of existence than itself" is the general concept of 'nature' due to humanity's desire "to rise and assert control [over it]" (p. 10). The connection of women with nature has been viewed by ecofeminists like Plumwood (1993) to be "regressive and insulting" with imagery of women as "earth mothers" (p. 20), content in their passive life concentrated around reproduction. This dualism has been further reinforced in popular culture with nature's personification under the pseudonym of 'Mother Nature' (Jelinski, 2011, pp. 37). In western belief, *she* is often seen as capricious and to be blamed for incidents like bad weather yet *she* is good when providing resources or blessing humans with picturesque landscapes or beautiful sunsets (p. 38).

The nature-women association has shown to be formed involuntarily and unconsciously due to the stereotypes of both the female gender and nature up (Liu, Geng, Ye & Zhou, 2019, p. 38). It is based on the popular anthropomorphization where the natural world is given stereotypical characteristics of the female gender (p. 37). According to gender socialization theory, girls are supposed to be "caring, cooperative, and empathetic" while they are expected to take on the role

of a “nurturing caregiver” (p. 38) when they grow up. This perception of women's association with nature also stems from physiological functions like the process of lactating during and after pregnancy, which extends the “natural” bond between the mother and the child (Ortner, 1972, p. 16). Additionally, Ortner (1972) argues that the closeness of women with “the domestic circle” (p. 17) adds to her association with nature due to the similarities between infants and animals. However, this also adds on another dualism, namely the domestic and social system. Women automatically become part of the domestic, which compared to the social is viewed as inferior (p. 17). This is because the domestic reflected in “the domestic unit - the biological family” takes on the role of preparing and socializing new members of society while the “social entity” is already made up of “alliances and relationships” (p. 17). Logically then, society is superior to the domestic system as the latter merely creates the “procreative units” (p. 18) which the former is composed of. Therefore, the perpetual cycle of subordination continues.

2.3.2. Eco-naturalism and the protection of life

Contrastingly to eco-organicism which presupposes a pre-existing identity between society and nature, eco-naturalism highlights nature’s normative standard “with which to realize a natural social order” (Olsen, 1997, p. 51). This means “laws of nature” (p. 43) are taken as a model for society and its structure. Supporting one of the attributes of right-wing ecology, eco-naturalism associates itself with the idea of the nation being nature’s product and humans embedded in it and not above it (p. 46). This results in the parallel being drawn between environmental protection and “the protection of life” (p. 46). This introduces important aspects in understanding the ideology around prominent and controversial issues within right-wing politics like abortion. According to the theory of eco-naturalism, protection of nature is part of the broader category of ‘life’ which is understood to be bestowed by God and thus should be protected (p. 46). As women are directly linked to ‘life’ as a consequence of reproduction, they also become the objects to be protected. Therefore, abortion is seen to be anti-ecological as it destroys something that God has gifted and symbolizes humanity’s largest intrusion into life and thus nature (pp. 46-47). This also extends to the protection of the homeland, the people (*Volk*) and the culture which is reflected in Hartmut Hesse’s (1992) essay titled “The Protection of the Homeland is the Protection of Life”. The defense of life does not only concern external existence like the natural world but also “human life in all its manifestations” (Olsen, 1997, p. 48), including the nation as far as it is “ethno-culturally pure”

(p. 48). Highlighting the implicit interconnectedness of the three themes, this “ecological ethic” (p. 48) demonstrates that the defense of nature, homeland and life are indivisible.

2.3.3. Gender populism & gendered nationalism

The natural ties between the people of a nation and the motherland are transferred to the gender discourse with gender populism reflecting the “natural” hetero-normative dichotomy (Agius, Rosamond & Kinnvall, 2020, p. 436). According to this concept, men and women are naturally tied to their positions in society in terms of the roles they occupy and thus the power they possess (p. 436). Mudde (2019) investigates the cases of Brazil, Poland and Hungary to note the threat that ‘gender ideology’ constitutes to the traditional structure of family and women’s role as “figurative mothers of the nation-state” (Agius et al., p. 437). In response to the perceived decline of the ‘natural order’, leaders and governments engage in a gendered nationalism which “seeks to recover the idea of a strong nation that has been weakened through feminization” (p. 439). Domination over the “female sexuality, bodies and reproduction” (p. 436) has been found to be essential to nationalism and a way to preserve the natural order. Additionally, other “processes of Othering” like homophobia attempt to preserve the gendered hierarchy “within and among nations” (Slootmaeckers, 2019, p. 241). Processes of Othering reinforce the ‘us’ and ‘them’ divide as “a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group” (Schwalbe et al., 2000, p. 422). Therefore, reducing them to be viewed in stereotypical and negative terms leads to their dehumanization (Jensen, 2011, p. 65).

2.4. Conceptualization

In the context of this research, nature rhetoric is to be understood as the articulations and broad expressions of ‘nature’, in relation to the three themes that guide this research. The rhetoric is expected to span from the simple expression of ‘land’ in relation to the theory of eco-organicism, to being associated with women and ‘life’; thus, accounting for anti-feminist discourses occupied with the protection of a hetero-normative family.

Another clarification must be made in terms of the far-right political spectrum. What distinguishes the far-right from, for example, the moderate right is its indifference or hostility to liberal democracy (Pirro, 2022, p. 104). Within the far-right, the (populist) radical right and extreme right

constitute the most significant elements to this paper. Conceptually, the prior is characterized in tension with liberal democracy and these actors are most likely to be parties while the latter is strictly against democracy and often takes the shape of a movement or group (p. 102). PiS, considering its breaches of the constitution and nationalist-populist ideology, is agreed to be a radical right populist party thus constitutes the far-right (Allen, 2020, p. xii; Jasiński, 2018, p. 134; Minkenberg, 2013, p. 14). The National Radical Camp (ONR) constitutes the extreme right dimension of the far-right as it is actively campaigning against democracy (Pankowski, 2018, p. 3).

Finally, the term “nationalistic ideology” could be viewed as quite broad due to the large scope which ‘nationalism’ encompasses. Due to the character of the analyzed actors, the nationalism discussed in this paper represents a more ‘radical’ than ‘moderate’ type. Mudde (2007, p. 17) conceptualized this type of nationalism expressed by the far-right to be correspondent to nativism. Nativism is an ideology highlighting the exclusivity of the nation to solely the native group while “nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state” (p. 19). In relation to this research, the nativist ideological characteristics of the actors are apparent in the analysis section of this paper.

3. Methodology

3.1. Case selection

In order to answer the research question, an investigation into the discourse of the Law and Justice Party (PiS) and the National Radical Camp (ONR) is undertaken.

3.1.1. PiS

The Law and Justice Party (PiS) is the most suitable actor for the analysis as this far-right party held total political power in Poland from 2015 to 2023, enjoying single-party majority and a very closely aligned president, who holds office to this day (Bialozyt & Sus, 2024; Żuk & Szulecki, 2020, p. 2). PiS is an exemplary case of a radical right-wing populist party, highlighting strong nationalistic identities (with incidences of ultranationalism), emphasizing conservatism in family values and close relations to the Catholic Church as well as nativism (reflected in the strong anti-immigration policies) (Żuk & Szulecki, 2020, p. 2). Additionally, populism is reflected in the dichotomy of the corrupted liberal elites and “the true Polish people” who PiS governs over (p. 2). Known for its anti-feminist and anti-homosexual discourse, the PiS government has a history of violating fundamental women’s rights by introducing a near-total abortion ban as well as introducing ‘gender ideology’ as a threat to Polish identity (Margolis, 2021).

3.1.2. ONR

The name of the National Radical Camp (ONR) dates back to an anti-Semitic movement from 1934 which now, adapted to current laws and realities, engages in “provocative street marches” with uniforms based on the fascistic design and the Nazi salute and organizes the aforementioned yearly Independence March (Pankowski, 2012, p. 3). As Mudde (2019) states, as cited in Duffin (2022, p. 23), marches are a critical point for far-right organizations to “organize, educate and indoctrinate their followers”. This particular march is an exceptional example of how ONR’s efforts translate on a larger scale to manifest their ultranationalist ideology. ONR is “arguably” Poland’s “most-active right-wing extremist organization” (Pankowski, 2012, p. 3) and has a “long nationalist tradition” (Abbass, Tvdrá, Walach, Rydliński & Nociar, 2011, p. 3) which is why it has been chosen to be representative of the Polish extreme right. It explicitly opposes democracy guided by their main values: “God, Honour, Fatherland, Family, Tradition and Friendship” (ONR,

2017). PiS, although not officially affiliated to ONR, has defended and actively chosen to not delegitimize the organization despite overt fascistic sentiments and racist attacks (Ost, 2018, p. 117). PiS MPs have a history of financial and moral support for right-wing extremist events with encouraging and mobilizing the youth sharing nationalistic and religious sentiments (Abbass et al., 2011, p. 3). PiS politicians appeared on the Independence March and some top ministers praised the ultranationalists' activities while slogans like "Death to the Enemies of the Fatherland" (Ost, 2018, p. 117) have been chanted. This only reinforces the ideological similarities between PiS and ONR and highlights how far-right discourse is incorporated and accommodated in the mainstream political sphere (Bennett & Kwiatkowski, 2019, p. 239).

3.2. Research method

Discourse analysis is the best method to answer the research question as it allows for a focus on not only the content, but also the structure of the discourse. This allows for an exploration of the language and also the wider context behind the sentence, reflecting the nature rhetoric which serves to explore the nationalistic ideology. Ideology is connected to "the underlying patterns of meaning, frames of interpretation, world views, or forms of everyday thinking and explanation" (Verschueren, 2012, p. 7) which permits this paper to focus on how ideas are expressed but also the rhetorics they serve.

3.3. Timeframe and sources

The material, sourced between 2016 and 2024, reflects PiS' reign following the success in the 2015 and 2019 elections and their constant large electoral support (26% as of April, 2024) (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej [CBOS], 2024). The analyzed sources consist of party documents from the official website (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość, [PiS], n.d.). A total of five lengthy documents, including the party's manifesto and policy documents, are suitable for the analysis as they provide the most straightforward and unbiased reflection of the party ideology. In terms of ONR, the 'ideological declaration' and the associated magazine - *Kierunki* (English meaning: *Directions*) (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny, [ONR], 2017; *Kierunki*, n.d.) is analyzed. The monthly set of articles involves the writings of multiple authors connected with ONR thus giving a representative scope of the organization's nationalistic ideology. Only articles from 2022 until February 2024 were available through the official website thus the head of the editorial office was

contacted, who provided access to an archive. This allowed a selection of articles in line with the 2016 - 2024 timeframe. In order to answer the research question, the sources were selected based on whether their content addressed at least two of the main themes: national identity, gender or the natural environment, totaling fourteen articles. It is important to note that all the sources, of which the summary can be found in Appendix A, have been translated by the author from Polish to English.

3.4. Coding frame

The coding frame (Appendix A) consists of three main analytical categories, as per the theoretical framework basing on the three themes. The coding followed a blended approach of both deductive and inductive coding which allowed most concepts to be drawn from the literature and the theoretical framework while identifying new elements during the data analysis process (Graebner, Martin & Roundy, 2012, p. 281). Within the category of the natural environment, the subcategory of ‘nature = nation’, derived from right-wing ecology, reflects the organicist conception of a nation an extension of nature, where attachment to place becomes the biological determinant for belonging and supports the exclusionary politics (Olsen, 1997, [abstract]). The second subcategory of countryside and rurality has been deducted based on the PiS party documents as the “rural identity” was a big trend of the party’s expression of nature in nationalism (Folvarčný & Kopeček, 2020, p. 176). Within the category of national identity, the subcategory of ‘ethnic nationalism’ highlights the homogenous base of Polish society and is vital in understanding “the ideology of nationalism and xenophobia” (Pankowski, 2018, pp. 1-2). The second subcategory of ‘patriotism’ is found to be very influential amongst populist discourses and is “one of the major national values” (Kania-Lundholm, 2012, p. 18; Marzęcki, 2020, p. 33). Last but not least, the category of gender is also divided into two subcategories: ‘Role of women’ and ‘Heteronormative notion of family’. The former reflects the theoretical dualism of equaling women to nature and highlighting the control over their bodies in the form of, for example, restricted abortion access (Plumwood, 1993 p. 20). The latter encompasses the cornerstone of the Polish nation - the heteronormative family - and thus focuses on what may endanger it. For example, “gender ideology and LGBT movement” has been shown to be one of the biggest public contemporary threats according to an opinion poll in 2019 (Korolczuk, 2020, p. 167).

4. Analysis

4.1. Nature = nation = woman

At the outset, ONR's (2017) ideological declaration demonstrates the intimate association of the nation with nature when they declare: "The nation is the highest land value" (p. 2). The nation is defined as a "permanent, *organic* [emphasis added] cultural community of past, current and future generations" where the "national heritage, understood as a multigenerational material and linguistic asset, is tightly associated with devotion to the homeland, with particular emphasis of the natural environment" (p. 7). The connection of the place to the people is particularly highlighted through the description of the nation as being "organic". This reflects the theory of eco-organicism which identifies an inherent identity between society and the natural world (Olsen, 1997, p. 51). In one of ONR's articles titled *Nationalism is natural*, the author compares nationalism to be natural like birth or death as it is "above any purely intellectual constructs" since it bases on what "escapes intellect", that being the "shadows of the ancestors, the voice of blood and soil" (Słomka, 2024a, p. 9). The appropriation of the Nazi "Blood and Soil" slogan only strengthens the nativist, organic bond between the people and the land they inhabit. When describing the nation and heritage, Słomka (2024a), pays particular attention to the motherland (*ziemia-macierz*) which is what "allows it [the nation] to last, create culture, build heritage" (p. 6). He reiterates the organic connection of the people to the land through declaring that we are connected to the motherland "through blood, no matter where we were born" (p. 8). Additionally, the use of "motherland" has an implicit meaning as it puts women at the center of the nation's survival. Not only related to their reproductive capacity, mothers are being paralleled with the homeland to emphasize their essence to national identity and the natural environment.

An article titled *Human, Nation, Nature*, continues to echo the eco-organicist perspective when stating: "Man is part of Nature. In God's plan of creation we were not separated from Nature" (Słomka, 2024b, p. 1). The author views the nation as an "organism, not a machine" and notes "The separation of man and culture from what is organic, makes it increasingly difficult for people to be building organic communities" (p. 3). According to the author, globalist ideologists are to blame for the destruction of what is "the sole essence of ecology - the bonds linking humans to

other species, to ecosystems, to general-understood Nature” (p. 4). The author reinforces human’s inherent connection to nature through recalling Heidegger’s *Being and Time* who proved that we “exist to die” which the “progressive world is trying to if not reject, then remove from man’s sight” (p. 4). He encourages us to accept our “debt towards nature” as “after death you must become ash, you must return to the depths of the motherland” (p. 5). Significantly, the subsequent use of ‘motherland’ (*ziemia-macierz*) instead of ‘fatherland’ (*ojczyzna*) reiterates the alliance of women (mothers) and nature and their natural interconnectedness, literally till death. The author presents women as those who understand the importance of “common heritage” and its influence on the future better than “us men” (p. 6). He reiterates that women, be it “our sisters, wives, mothers” are the ones who “give birth and who bury [the dead] - as both are part of life - part of this inseparable circle in which every community, including the nation revolves” (p. 6). This further emphasizes the view of women and nature as both reflections of life and death as well as the interlaced relationship between national identity, gender and natural environment. Another ONR author highlights the conflation of women and nationhood by stating that “Next to God, the Polish soul loves the homeland, which it understands not as a biological environment, but as the most beloved Mother.” (Jarosz, 2023d, p. 3).

4.2. Rurality and the countryside

Analyzing nature rhetoric in relation to PiS, ‘nature’ is best reflected in the countryside and the large focus on agricultural policy. The ex-Prime Minister has promised a “return of the state to the countryside and smaller cities” (PiS, 2016, p. 3). The document further states that “our country grew out from the work of the Polish farmer and [their] attachment to the land [. ...] The crops you [the farmers] harvest are a testimony of love to the Polish land, which [the PiS] government has sworn to protect” (p. 7). In another document, the Polish farmers are praised for having “fed and defended”, and “the Polish countryside, always, even in the darkest periods, have been the stronghold of Polishness” (PiS, 2023, p. 217). This reinforces the notion that the countryside “is where the roots of our identity lie” (PiS, 2021, p. 3) which highlights the importance of the natural environment in the consolidation of the national identity. The rural land is even connected to the general well-being of the nation as the party emphasizes: “there is no free Poland, without Polish countryside, there is no independence without the land, there is no harmony in the nation if the villagers are treated badly” (PiS, 2017, p. 4). The countryside is also idolized to be a place where

one can pursue a “healthy, calm and close to nature” life and is the “space to live in beauty” (PiS, 2023, p. 235) as contrasted to the inferior city lifestyle.

4.3. Survival of and threats to the nation

Given the main objective of preserving the health and survival of the organism (the Polish nation), another common trend appears to be the need for stability and security. The notion of protection from various physical or ideological threats is highlighted in PiS’ discourse. While they admit that the “foreign forces” have “left their mark on the architecture, urban tissues, nature and culture”, they “strive to regain this proud, yet forgotten Fatherland” (PiS, 2023, p. 234). This reiterates the sense of interconnection between the homeland and national identity by including nature into what has to be reclaimed and repaired.

Nowadays, while the threats are no longer present in the form of invading forces, they are being represented as immigrants which pose a threat to the safety of the country, and more notably - the Polish women. ONR (2017) states that “By condemning biological racism, we call for maintaining a state of ethnic homogeneity, which favors the maintenance of social peace and state stability” (p. 2). In face of an incident of rape by a Middle-Eastern immigrant on a European woman, the author makes an appeal “to all Polish women, to find inner strength and courage to reject the attempts to impose on us foreign newcomers, who have contempt for European values and pose a threat to us.” (Seweryn, 2023, p. 2). Commonly in far-right ecologism, immigrants are viewed as “invasive species” (Moore & Roberts, 2022, p. 25; Forchter, 2019b, p. 5) destroying the environment, however this mention relates directly to the protection of women. As they are an extension of life and thus nature, they are defended from the perceived harm that immigrants could pose on them.

4.3.1. Preservation of the heteronormative family

Perpetuating the cycle of fear and threat to the stability and health of the nation, PiS (2019) rejects the “harmful ideologies that interfere with social structures - in family, marriage, community” (p. 8). Interestingly, both PiS and ONR use very similar language in relation to the significance of family. PiS (2023) defines a family as a “basic, most important social unit, which a person belongs to” and it is formed upon a “permanent relationship between a woman and a man” (p. 14). Similarly, ONR (2017) swears to specifically protect the family which is “the foundation and

wealth of the Nation, its basic unit, understood as an inseparable marital union of a woman and a man” (p. 3). Notably, both actors exclude the existence of any other union than a heterosexual one as well as emphasizing that the relationship must be monogamous and permanent (PiS, 2019, p. 11). Utilizing the gender populist lens, family is seen as the cornerstone of the nation’s survival which justifies its exceptional protection. PiS’ (2023) discourse continues to demonstrate the essence of the family as it is where, the “fundamental condition for the survival of generations is realized - generational continuity” (p. 14). The concept of a “natural family” is used both by PiS, which declares to “firmly defend [it]” (PiS, 2023, p. 14; PiS, 2019, p. 11), and ONR who blames the “family crisis” on progress and the consequential “cultural impairment” (Słomka, 2024b, p. 3). The ‘progress ideologists’ are attempting to destroy “everything that is natural - [the family]” while simultaneously conducting an “attack on the Nation” (Słomka, 2024b, p. 3). The conflation of the natural to the social, reflected in the family and the nation, follows the theory of eco-naturalism where “the nation is a product of nature herself” (Olsen, 1997, p. 46). Accordingly, ONR’s discourse highlights the significance of protecting the environment by encouraging to nurture the human bond with the natural environment as its breakage “leads to environment degradation and the spiritual degeneration of every living creature” (Busse, 2023, pp. 3-4). These efforts translate to the preservation of the nation through the protection of the traditional family from dangers of homosexuality, broken marriages or declining fertility rates. The latter is described as a “suicide of the nation” as the “very biological existence of the nation is at risk” (Wiśniewski, 2021, p. 2). ONR’s magazine also comes to criticize the parents that ‘break up’ their families through separation or divorce as how can those children “be able to build the Great Poland? [...] At last only a well-functioning family can be the future of the nation” (Jarosz, 2023a, p. 6).

4.3.2. Threats: ‘Gender ideology’ & feminism

In terms of the so-called ‘gender ideology’, the author comes to declare homosexuality as a “sin against nature, and these sins are qualified as the most serious sins” (p. 3) and seeks to stop “the madness in the form of an increasingly aggressive LGBT community” (Jarosz, 2023c, p. 1). Emphasizing their biological incompatibility with nature, ONR highlights that their sexual intercourse does not contribute to “the extension of the [human] species” (Jarosz, 2019, p. 2) nor the nation.

Although PiS' documents do not speak out directly against homosexuality due to the controversy of the topic, it seems to share ONR's stance as they vouch to protect the "autonomy" of families from the "ideological offensive" (PiS 2019, p. 212). The PiS (2019) party manifesto claims that:

The spread of gender ideology is dangerous for the family and for parenthood. [...] It is important to put up barriers against the spread of gender ideology. More important however are actions to strengthen the family, defend parenthood, the special role of the mother and the respect for motherhood, which should not be treated as a burden, but a distinction and privilege. (p. 11)

Preserving the traditional family structures and perpetuating the 'natural' power structures between men and women is PiS' priority, reflecting the theories of gender populism and gendered nationalism. In the newest document titled "Safe Future of Poles", PiS (2023) states: "We consider it unacceptable to kill unborn children" while adding: "At the same time, we defend women's dignity and health" (p. 15). For PiS this idea of defense also encompasses denying basic women's rights by imposing a near-total abortion ban and leading to the deaths of multiple women (Koralewska & Zielińska, 2020, p. 673). PiS (2019) sees all practices such as abortion, in-vitro or euthanasia as "limitless ways of interfering with human nature" and makes it its main objective to "firmly defend life and oppose every form of violence which threatens it, both physical and ideological" (p. 7). In a similar yet more direct tone, ONR claims that "abortion on demand in Poland was first legalized by none other than Adolf Hitler" thus justifying calling contemporary feminists, "femi-nazis" (Zarieczna, 2018, p. 1). ONR's magazine further ridicules women who undertake the in-vitro procedure through claiming that "The mother's love for a child, even unborn, was perceived by many of us as selfless love, ready for sacrifice. Unfortunately, this is slowly becoming less and less obvious" (Jarosz, 2023b, p. 6). In this view, women are inferior to the fetus as they are simply seen as machines necessary for reproduction and should be "ready for sacrifice" (p. 6). Corresponding to the theory of eco-naturalism, abortion or in-vitro are seen as unecological; they are huge intrusions into life and nature following the claim that nature is part of "life" (Olsen, 1997, pp. 46-47). Protection of human life is essential to the protection of nature and the homeland which restates the interrelated importance of national identity which resonates through the rejection of abortion. ONR reflects the significance of women as the primary bond

between one's national identity and the homeland through citing a 19th century poem: "The love for the homeland will be sucked out with mother's milk" and claims "Polish women have reborn Poland" (Gąsiorek, 2016, p. 2).

PiS (2019) glorifies the role of women as a mother and thanks them for the "hundreds of years of sacrifice that Polish women devoted to raising children" (p. 62). Interestingly, ONR views Falangism, a Spanish conservative movement highlighting traditional gender roles, as the ideal reflection of the role for women. The author outlines those optimal characteristics as follows:

[...] the guardian of the home, who is completely absorbed in raising children, taking care of the home, and being a submissive to her husband and faithful wives. On the other hand, [she is] active and involved in social life, concerned about the good of the homeland, brave, sporty and organized activists. (Reczek, 2016, pp. 3-4)

The perfect balance is found in the traditional committed housewife which contributes to the preservation of the nation and the patriotic and agile member devoted to the fight for the 'Great Poland'. However, the main purpose of women is underlined to primarily become a mother as "it was perceived as a duty towards the fatherland" (Jarosz, 2023d, p. 3). As anticipated, the feminist movement is being blamed for the degradation of this traditional role of women, as the ideology has "reduced women to the role of workers in the hands of capitalists" (Gąsiorek, 2024, p. 3). The belonging of women to the domestic circle is glorified and restated when claiming that feminists "did not give a choice to women who wanted to stay at home, focus on family." (Gąsiorek, 2024, p. 4). Echoing gender populism and gendered nationalism, this solidifies the 'natural' position of women in society, which returns them to their destined roles as mothers, ensuring the survival of the nation.

4.4. Discussion

The aforementioned analysis highlighted how nature rhetoric reflected in the organic connection to the land, the countryside or the domination over women is utilized by Polish right-wing actors to progress their nationalistic ideology. PiS and ONR use the natural environment to conflate the nation with nature in the concept of the homeland and give it its 'organic' character echoing the

theories of eco-organicism and organicist nationalism. The nature rhetoric of both PiS and ONR pointed in a direction of striving for the preservation and survival of the nation and thus protecting it from any threats. The view of a nation, as an organism and a product of nature, favors the collective over the individual. However, the analysis revealed an additional layer of the collective national identity - the hetero-normative family - which has shown to constitute the essential foundation of the Polish nation. Therefore, the anti-feminist, anti-abortion or anti-LGBTQ+ stances are displayed in a new light, as these actors see them as pure threats to the stability of their homeland. The idea of preservation for the sake of future generations is also very prominent, both through caring for the natural environment but also as the cornerstone of the nation itself which accounts for the preoccupation with pro-heteronormative family politics. The national identity, leaning on the fundamental values of tradition, family, continuity and stability allow for the advancement of the nationalistic ideology.

Building on the gendered perspectives in nationalism, which associate women with nature, it is interesting to note that the analyzed discourse revealed another dimension of women's role (Ortner, 1972). Noted mainly in the discourse of ONR, a woman is not only seen as responsible for reproduction which keeps the nation afloat but also bears a key role within the circle of life by being the one to bury the dead (Słomka, 2024a, p. 6). This further connects women with nature due to the body's decomposition after death which ONR understands as paying off the debt towards nature and the motherland (Słomka, 2024a, p. 5). Both PiS and ONR engage in an alleged 'protection of women' as they understand their value to the preservation of the nation however at the same time, they restrain their reproductive rights and reduce them to reproductive machines and 'mothers' of the nation.

5. Conclusion

Through the application of discourse analysis, this paper has revealed how nature rhetoric can interlace national identity, gender and natural environment to expose ways in which far-right Polish actors advance their nationalistic ideology. Through tying the Polish national identity to the land, nationalistic sentiments are reinforced all while positioning women as the mothers of the Polish nation. The notion of their ‘protection’ from all kinds of physical and ideological threats like immigrants, abortion or the LGBTQ+ ideology, highlights their essential role. Notably, the preoccupation with the preservation of the heteronormative family order, echoing gender populism and gendered nationalism, has been crucial to understanding the ideology. The actors’ discourse hints towards a sense of fear of destruction of the natural order which would correspondingly hinder the advancement of their nationalistic ideology. This investigation has been productive in discovering how an understudied application of nature rhetoric can aid to understand why far-right actors couple a strong sense of national identity with anti-feminism. Through those interdisciplinary insights, the academic discourse in the sphere of nationalism, ecofeminism and right-wing ecology is enriched. While political scientists can realize the influence of patriarchy and gendered dimensions in the study of nationalism, ecofeminists can critically analyze the importance of women for protecting national identity as well as the natural environment which the nation is part of. Scholars of right-wing ecology can delve beyond the traditional notion of far-right climate denialism and uncover the complexity of the relationship between the natural environment, the preservation of the national identity and protection of the heteronormative family structure. On a societal level, this paper is appropriate in gaining understanding of two major trends which threaten the foundation of our democratic society - mainly the rise in nationalism and the accelerating climate crisis. This study thus provides insights into those complex issues by revealing how nature rhetoric can be used as a tool of justification or concealment of harmful nationalistic ideologies. Additionally, examining the discourse of two actors situated along different points of the far-right spectrum enhances the representativeness of the research through analyzing a radical, yet more mainstream, populist perspective (PiS) and an overtly extremist one (ONR).

Nevertheless, there are two key factors which reflect the limitations of the research. Firstly, the sample of two actors (PiS and ONR) may not be a representative number to generalize the conclusion to the whole Polish far-right. There are multiple other actors such as the Confederacy

for Freedom and Independence Party which has been a rising far-right force and a fierce opponent to PiS' traditional right-wing monopoly (Tomasiewicz, 2020, p. 7). However, due to the restrictions in words and time, this paper presented the discourse of what are one of the most dominant actors in the Polish far-right (Minkenberg, 2013, p. 14). Secondly, the context is essential when discussing ideological stances and while some historical factors have been taken into account, this research did not discuss the role of Catholicism in Polish politics and society. The Catholic Church is an extremely important and influential institution in Poland which is known to be in alliance with PiS (Meyer Resende & Henning, 2021, p. 1). Religious concerns regarding abortion or homosexuality, might offer an alternative explanatory factor for the anti-feminist and anti-LGBTQ+ discourse. Since the seventeenth century the figure of a Pole has been equated to that of a Catholic thus highlighting the long-standing conservative tradition (Heinen & Portet, 2009, p. 4). Importantly, religion also influences two of the main themes of this research, namely national identity and gender due to the essential figure of the Polish Mother (*Matka Polka*) also reflected in the Mother of God (*Matka Boska*) which personified the symbol of resistance during occupation (Heinen & Portet, 2009, p. 4).

Therefore, future studies should account for the influence of religion when examining nationalistic ideology in Poland, both in regards to national identity and gender. Additionally, in order to improve the analysis of nature rhetoric, future research could also utilize the framework outlining the aesthetic, symbolic and material dimension of nature in nationalism by Forchtner & Kolvraa (2015). This could be helpful in articulating more specific notions within the natural environment in connection to aestheticism related to the protection of nature due to its beauty, symbolism relating to the nation's historical belonging to the land and materialism reflecting nature's capacity to provide resources (Forchtner & Kolvraa, 2015, pp. 204-206). Therefore, in a time when so much is at stake, given the accelerating climate and democratic crises, it is essential to keep pursuing research within the nature - nation nexus. It is of utmost importance to pay close attention to the disguised nature rhetoric in the discourse of far-right actors to prevent nativist policies and instead encourage true environmental protection.

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Appendix A: Coding Frame

- Summarized version with one translated quote per category

Category	Sub-category	Indicators	PiS examples	ONR example
Natural Environment	Nature = nation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organic connection of the people to the land • Organicist nationalism 	“The state will "return" to the countryside and smaller towns, said Prime Minister Szydło.” (PiS, 2016, p. 3)	“The nation is the highest land value: the nation, understood as a lasting, organic cultural community of past, present and future generations, is our highest temporal value” (ONR, 2017, p. 2)
	Countryside/Rurality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Linking the countryside to the Polish national identity • Glorifying rural life • Protecting the natural beauty of the countryside 	“The countryside and agriculture - this is where the roots of our identity lie; Poland was born from this tradition. When we ask about who we are and where we come from, our thoughts go primarily to the countryside” (PiS, 2021, p. 3)	“We understand the hierarchy, we understand our place in it and from these clear positions we formulate our demands for nature protection in the name of the Nation, Humanity and God the Creator” (Słomka, 2024b, p. 5)
National identity	Ethnic nationalism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ethnic homogeneity • Nativism • Protection of the ‘natural order’ 	“Mindful of the painful experience of the past, including the recent one, we reject the emerging legal systems built on a harmful ideology interfering with social structures - family, marriage, communities, with the aim of building a "brave new world" and a new man.” (PiS, 2019, p. 8)	“By condemning biological racism, we call for maintaining a state of ethnic homogeneity, which is conducive to maintaining social peace and state stability.” (ONR, 2017, p. 2)
	Patriotism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Historical sentiments • National pride • Victimization rhetoric 	“Foreign influences in times of dependency left their mark on architecture, urbanism, nature and culture. That is why we strive to regain this proud but forgotten	“The Polish state [...] will be obliged to strengthen national identity, in particular by cultivating Polish cultural heritage and pursuing a rational policy of memory based on historical truth, free from

			homeland.” (PiS, 2023, p. 234)	external influences.” . (ONR, 2017, p. 3)
Gender	Role of women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nature= woman • Traditional role of women as mothers and care-givers • Control of female sexuality e.g., abortion laws 	<p>“By taking action to strengthen the family, defend parenthood, the special role of mothers and respect for motherhood. We consider it unacceptable to kill unborn children. At the same time, we defend women's dignity and health” (PiS, 2023, p. 15)</p>	<p>“The Phalangists had no doubt that women were created primarily to be mothers. This resulted not only from the teachings of the Church, but was also perceived as a duty towards the fatherland” (Jarosz, 2023d, p. 3)</p>
	Heteronormative notion of family	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Traditional views on heterosexual marriages only (anti-LGBTQ+) • Emphasis on reproduction and future generations 	<p>“The basic, most important social unit of which a person is a member is the family. It is based on a lasting union between a man and a woman.” (PiS, 2023, p. 14)</p>	<p>“The family, being the foundation and wealth of the Nation, its basic unit, understood as the indissoluble marital union of a woman and a man, will be subject to special protection, especially in the face of the demographic crisis and the spreading civilization of death leading to its decay and annihilation.” (ONR, 2017, p. 3)</p>