

Anna Gruszczyńska
Ph.D. candidate
School of Languages and Social Sciences
Aston University, Birmingham, UK

WHEN HOMO-CITIZENS GO MARCHING IN: POLITICIZATION OF SEXUALITY AND THE LESBIAN AND GAY MOVEMENT IN POLAND

In this paper I would like to analyze the processes whereby from 2001 on, marches, pride parades and demonstrations have become the most visible and contested activity of the Polish lesbian and gay movement. As Graff argues in her report on the situation of sexual minorities in Poland in the post-accession landscape, through public activist events, the figure of the homosexual (even though “real” gays and lesbians might continue to live deeply closeted) has moved from the margin of collective consciousness to the centre of an increasingly polarized public debate (Graff 2006). The crux of the debate seems to be the hotly contested definition of Polish citizenship - as I attempt to show in this text, most of the protests against lesbian and gay demonstrations consist in the efforts of the right-wing to reclaim the category of “true Pole”. On the other hand, I argue that the gay and lesbian movement is using marches and pride parades to broaden the category of Polish citizenship so that it can also include sexual minorities who are being actively excluded by the right wing. In my analysis, I will rely on theories, which are helpful in the analysis of activism in public space, starting from theories which deal with the division into public and private, with a focus on the context of post-socialist transformation, through theories of citizenship and national identity.

Lesbian and gay marches and pride parades¹ in Poland stem from the tradition of demonstrations which celebrate the Stonewall rebellion as a historical moment of political resistance which started the contemporary movement for lesbian and gay rights (D’Emilio

¹ In the context of Polish lesbian and gay activism, the difference between marches and prides is merely nominal. On a practical level, there are very few differences between public events occurring in different cities, however, as I show in the section on public activism, in Warsaw the organizers prefer to use the name of Warsaw Pride or Equality Pride, while the activists in Krakow chose to call the yearly event the March for Tolerance and in Poznan the event is called the March of Equality.

2000:34).² As Kajinic argues, most of the Prides in the Western countries seem to have taken the road of depoliticisation by turning into grand carnevalesque celebrations of differences (Kajinic 2003:7). In Eastern Europe, the annual Pride events have become a litmus test for the strength of the local LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) communities world-wide as well as for the degree of the tolerance of the societies they take place in:

The growing strength and confidence of the LGBT movement in Central and Eastern Europe has been accompanied by increasing attempts to assert the right to freedom of assembly and expression through the holding of Pride or Equality marches. These attempts have been met with considerable hostility (ILGA-Europe 2006, electronic source).

As authors of the report on organizing prides in Central and Eastern Europe point out, within the past couple of years, prides were banned or attacked in a number of places: Budapest (2007), Bucharest (2005), Chisinau (2005-2007), Moscow (2006, 2007) and Riga (2005, 2006) (ILGA-Europe 2006, ILGA-Europe 2007, electronic source). Local and national politicians have used the danger of public disorder as a reason for banning marches, after having themselves used language likely to encourage extremist opposition from activists of faith-based or ultra right-wing organizations. Where marches have taken place, they were met with aggression from right wing-protesters, the most extreme case being Belgrade Pride in 2001, where a few dozen participants were confronted with about a thousand anti-parade protesters (Kajinic 2003).

The first lesbian and gay Pride Parade in Poland occurred in May 2001 in Warsaw and was organized by representatives of the Polish branch of International Lesbian and Gay Culture Network (Gorska 2006, electronic source). According to Graff, the first pride “allowed Warsaw’s lesbians and gays to assess their forces (...)Nonetheless, due to poor media coverage, it was hardly an important political event” (Graff 2006:437). Parades in 2002

² On the night of 27 June 1969, the police raided the Stonewall Inn bar in New York in one of the routine violent raids of gay bars. This time, however, the clientele of the bar fought the police back (Cruikshank 1992:20). A month later, on July 27th 1969, about 500 people walked in the first Pride parade to the Stonewall Inn. The lesbians, gay men and transsexuals were joined by members of the anti-war movement, leftists, feminists as well as supporters of the civil rights movement (Kates and Russel 2001:3).

and 2003 in Warsaw organized by ILGCN-Poland gathered increasing numbers of participants from all over the country, 2000 and 3500 respectively, despite low interest of the media³ (Gorska 2006).

The social campaign organized by the Campaign Against Homophobia, called “Niech nas zobacza” [“Let them see us”] in the spring of 2003 was a breakthrough in terms of public visibility of gays and lesbians in Poland (Warkocki 2004, Leszkowicz and Kitlinski 2005, Graff 2006). The first project of this kind in Poland, “Let Them See Us” was a social advertising campaign which consisted in an exhibition of 30 photographs of ordinary looking same-sex couples (15 lesbians and 15 gay men), holding hands. The exhibition was connected to a nation-wide billboard campaign, which raised considerable opposition on the part of local authorities as well as right-wing and faith-based groups which tried to ensure that the billboards are not shown in public spaces (Gruszczynska 2004). Warkocki argues that “Let Them See Us” was a spark that started a fire. Until then, he writes,

homosexuals functioned in collective consciousness a bit like extra-terrestrials: they exist somewhere, someone claims to have seen them, or even talked to them, supposedly they have green antennae. [Thanks to the campaign] Poles were confronted with the fact that some of them actually were homosexual (Warkocki 2004:101).

Another landmark event with regard to public lesbian and gay activism turned out to be the Krakow March for Tolerance in May 2004. Kubica, who analyzes the actors involved in the Krakow March for Tolerance in 2004, sees the anxieties connected with Poland’s entrance into the EU as at least partly responsible for the heated opposition against the event from the local government, city council, university authorities, local right-wing and Catholic

³ There are no detailed analyses of media coverage of the pride parades between 2001-2003, so I am relying only on anecdotal evidence. The low media coverage might have been connected with the fact that the first three prides took place on first of May, Labour Day, where traditionally there are many public events such as marches, picnics and gatherings in the city centre. The journalists might have easily chosen to overlook the gay and lesbian event and concentrate on countless other events occurring in the city at the same time.

organizations who tried to convince Krakow mayor to block the march on grounds of public depravity (Kubica 2006:70).

The March for Tolerance was the only public event planned during the four-day festival of gay and lesbian art and culture *Kultura dla Tolerancji* [Culture for Tolerance] (Kubica 2006:71). About 1500 persons participated in the March for Tolerance on 7 May 2004. March participants were attacked by an illegal demonstration⁴ comprised of local politicians of *Liga Polskich Rodzin* [The League of Polish Families], members of the ultra right-wing organization *Młodzież Wszechpolska* [All-Polish Youth], skinheads, football hooligans (Kula and Pelowski 2004, electronic source). They threw eggs and stones at the marchers, shouting “Gas the gays”, “Faggots go home”, “Deviants and perverts” (Kozak 2004, electronic source). Over a month after the march in Krakow, Lech Kaczynski, the mayor of Warsaw, cancelled the Warsaw Pride in June 2004 mentioning security reasons – and referring explicitly to the events in Krakow, and the possibility of danger to public health and morality, as reasons for the cancellation (Kubica 2006:79). One thousand demonstrators held a legal rally in protest against the ban.⁵

In November 2004, as a reaction to the attack on the March for Tolerance in Krakow and the ban of Warsaw Pride, the first March of Equality was held in Poznan. The March took place on 20 November despite the protests of right-wing parties and Church authorities claiming that the event would be “promoting homosexuality which is a serious disease” (Kowalczyk 2005:42). The main slogans of the march were “Different but equal” and “Everybody belongs to some minority”. On the day of the March the participants managed only to cross the street, before they were attacked by a group of right-wing protesters who threw eggs and lemons, and shouted “Gay trash, get your hands away from the children”,

⁴ According to Polish law, gatherings in public spaces, larger than a group of 14 persons, need to be registered with the city council three days before the planned date of the demonstration. The right-wing opponents of the March for Tolerance submitted the application to register their demonstration too late, only one day before the planned date (Pelowski and Kula 2004, electronic source).

⁵ Based on the information from the website www.paradarownosci.pl.

“Lesbians and faggots are ideal citizens of the European Union”, “Healthy Poles are not like that”. The police turned the participants back to the starting point and informed that their safety could not be guaranteed should the march be continued (Kowalczyk 2005:41).

In May 2005, the Mayor of Warsaw, Lech Kaczynski, banned the Warsaw Pride for the second time, claiming that the parade would interfere with the unveiling of a statue to Stanislaw “Grot”-Rowecki, the leader of the Polish underground during the Nazi occupation of Warsaw in the Second World War. Kaczynski also added that he was “for tolerance, but against propagating gay orientation” (Baczkowski 2005, electronic source). On 12 June 2005, about 3,000 demonstrators defied the ban, thus resorting to civil disobedience. The presence of then vice-Prime Minister Izabela Jaruga-Nowacka as well as European MPs from the German Green Party, Claudia Roth and Volker Beck, made it possible for the participants to march through the streets of Warsaw, enjoying police protection from right-wing March opponents, who were throwing eggs and bottles and tried to block the streets (Baczkowski 2005). The following week, however, the Mayor issued permission for the radical right wing All-Polish Youth to hold a “Normality Parade” to “remedy the bad image of Poland that Equality Parade” might have caused (Wiktor 2005, electronic source).

As Graff remarks, in the fall of 2005 the issue of freedom of assembly for representatives of sexual minorities and organizations supporting sexual minorities became one of the key themes of the presidential elections, where the candidate’s attitude towards sexual minorities served as a litmus test for his views on modern democracy, Poland’s westernization, freedom of speech and “traditional values” (Graff 2006). Lech Kaczynski, now president of Poland, representative of the right-wing party Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc [Law and Justice], began his presidential campaign in the summer of 2005 by producing a widely-publicized leaflet entitled “Catholic Poland in Christian Europe,” where he elaborated on his desire to rebuild Poland as a Catholic nation, based on strong moral principles. The leaflet

listed two previous bans of Warsaw Pride (in 2004 and 2005) among his successes in the fight against “demoralization” (Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc 2005). Kazimierz Ujazdowski, representative of Law and Justice, when appointed the minister of culture, openly called for "no tolerance for homosexuals and deviants," adding "[l]et's not mistake the brutal propaganda of homosexual attitudes with calls for tolerance. For them our rule will indeed mean a dark night" (quoted in Kowalczyk 2006, unpublished manuscript). The governmental and presidential elections, which took place in September of 2005, brought a victory of the right wing parties: Law and Justice and the League of Polish Families. The ban of the Poznan March of Equality came only a month after the elections, becoming a symbol of the new political regime.

Despite the fact that the organizers of the second March of Equality in Poznan had complied with all the legal requirements, on 15 November 2005 the Poznan Mayor refused to issue a permit for the march, arguing that the event would cause “significant danger to public morality and property” (Graff 2006:438). On 19 November 2005, the police brutally broke up the peaceful demonstration and arrested 68 participants out of about 200 (Kowalczyk 2006). The events in Poznan sparked a huge wave of protests against the attack on democratic principles in Poland and a discussion on the freedom of assembly and sexual minorities’ rights (Kowalczyk 2006). The ban on Poznan March of Equality was declared illegal in December 2005 by the Regional Administrative Court (Tomaszewicz 2006, electronic source).

The third March of Equality in Poznan in November 2006 took place without major disturbances, despite initial protests from city authorities regarding the choice of the organizers as to the starting place, that is, the Mickiewicz Square which commemorates the

victims of 1956 uprisings in Poznan⁶ (Przybylska and Szostak 2006, electronic source). Similarly, in Warsaw two court decisions in September 2005 and January 2006 ruled that the ban of 2005 Warsaw Pride was unconstitutional, and so in June 2006 the Warsaw March of Equality proceeded legally (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2007, electronic source). In Krakow, the organizers of the 2005 March for Tolerance decided to cancel the event because of the death of Pope John Paul II three weeks before the planned date of the march, claiming that “the grieving Krakow is not an appropriate place for a public discussion about lesbian and gay rights”.⁷ The March for Tolerance in Krakow, April 2006, was attacked by members of a counter-demonstration called the March of Tradition and Culture, organized by the All Polish Youth. The March for Tolerance changed its route to avoid a clash, but some members of the Tradition March ran after it, hurling stones and eggs (Amnesty 2006, electronic source). A similar clash between the March for Tolerance and March of Tradition and Culture occurred in April 2007 (Jalowiec and Romanowski 2007, electronic source).

At the beginning of May 2007, Polish lesbian and gay organizations were celebrating an important legal victory in European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, which stated clearly that the ban of Warsaw Pride in 2005 violated the constitutional right of assembly (Lempicka 2007, electronic source). The legal victories have also meant that currently, the right-wing politicians appear to be moving away from policing lesbian and gay demonstrations into the area of education and the efforts of politicians seem to be concentrated on curbing the “promoting homosexuality”.⁸

⁶ According to the organizers, the starting point was chosen as a symbol of freedom fighters and was connected with the overall theme of the March of Equality in 2006 „In solidarity against discrimination” (Minalto 2006, electronic source).

⁷ Based on the information from the Culture for Tolerance festival organizers’ website <http://tolerancja.gej.net/2005/index.php?strona=pokaz>

⁸ Polish vice-minister of education, Miroslaw Orzechowski is working on a draft of a law forbidding “promotion of homosexuality” by teachers and barring access of lesbian and gay organizations to schools (Galczyńska 2007:1). Similar plans are being made to forbid “promotion of homosexuality” in public mass media (Uhlig 2007, electronic source).

The question arises, then, if marches are indeed the most effective strategy of attaining visibility and belonging for non-heterosexual citizens. At the same time, the fact that the debate on lesbian and gay visibility has shifted in the direction of education should come as no surprise. It could be interpreted as an attempt to reframe the debate in terms of protecting children and youth against the dangers of „promotion of homosexuality”, which theme had already been signalled in the case of „Let them see us” campaign. Politicians and publicists were protesting against the campaign which according to them interfered with the right of Polish families to remain in a space free of sexual minorities. Ludicrous as it may sound, the opponents also worried about the potential influence of the campaign on kids and teenagers, who might be influenced to experiment with “the homosexual lifestyle” after seeing posters portraying happy homosexual couples (Zaremba 2003).

THEORIES OF PUBLIC SPACE

Researchers working within the field of feminist geography point out that public space, and specifically urban space is constructed as heterosexual and heterosexist (Valentine 1993, 1996; Duncan 1996, Brickell 2000, Corteen 2002). Heterosexism privileges heterosexuality as “the only true, pure and natural sexuality which discredits and makes deviant any other expression of sexuality” (Chouinard and Grant 1996:180). The production of heteronormative space is a performative act naturalized through repetition and regulation (Bell et al 1994, Bell and Valentine 1995). This repetition takes many forms: from heterosexual couples kissing and holding hands in the streets and on public transportation, to advertisements and window displays which present images of contented nuclear families, from music and movies to other mainstream culture products articulating heterosexual desires that fill shopping malls, bars and restaurants (Valentine 1993:398). At the same time, naturalized heterosexuality makes sexuality in public spaces nearly invisible to the straight population, and so “what they do in

private is nobody's business" is a commonly heard expression in reference to gays and lesbians (Valentine 1993:399). These claims might explain to some extent why over the recent years lesbian and gay demonstrations in Krakow, Poznan and Warsaw evoked such strong protests from local city and Church authorities, while the events surrounding these demonstrations (movie screenings, concerts etc.) went for the most part unnoticed (Kowalczyk 2006, Kubica 2006, Krzeminski et al 2006).

Duncan (1996), analyzing the intersections of space and sexualities, claims that the public/private distinction functions as one of the most important spatial ordering principles. The mutual interdependence and complementarity of public and private spheres has been central to the self-understanding of Western political systems, with a rigid distinction between the public sphere, connected to political activity and traditionally ascribed to men, and private sphere, connected to the „home”, which belonged to women (Ackelsberg and Shanley 1996). However, as Chimiak argues, analyzing the intersections of private/public sphere in Poland functioned in a very different way during communism, with the private sphere as the haven free of ideology and a substitute for civil society, while the public domain was occupied by the omnipresent socialist state (Chimiak 2003). Furthermore, in socialism, contrary to the capitalist system, women enjoyed formal equality with men⁹ in the public sphere, at least when it comes to the access to labour market or education (Einhorn and Sever 2003). Finally, as Watson argues, gender as an identity category (and thus, the division into public and private sphere based on gender) was devoid of relevance within the realm of the socialist system, since everybody was equally deprived of citizenship rights, that is, a real possibility of participation in the public sphere which had been taken over by the party (Watson 1997). As Duhacek adds, under state socialism it was the domestic sphere that held a position of the “alternative” public sphere in which greater autonomy could be exercised, as a site of a

⁹ One should add, though, that despite formal rhetoric of the equality between genders, in reality most women were suffering from the „double burden” of paid work and housework (See Funk 1993, Kiczko and Farkasova 1993, Peto 1994).

political freedom untainted by state intervention (Duhacek 1998). The private space became a space of freedom where individuals could express themselves freely, and where men and women formed solidarity families protecting themselves from “the big Patriarch”; the communist state (Mudure 2004, electronic source). Men joined with women in the private sphere, retreating to protect core national values against the onslaught in the public sphere, in which many men were as powerless as women (Siklova 1997:79). Nevertheless, the model of family-as replacement of public sphere is undeniably based on the traditional, heterosexual model of the family (Einhorn 1993:59).

As Scott Long argues, in the conditions of post-socialist transformation, lesbian and gay activists are faced with a highly challenging task:

Eastern movements must participate in producing two kinds of knowledge. (...) The first is a founding and grounding knowledge about the differentiation of private and public, the division of the spheres: about how the fragile private sphere can be defined and protected. The second is knowledge about the ways in which that differentiation can then be made porous, transgressed or transacted across so that political action becomes possible (Long 1999:258).

Thus, by entering the public sphere as part of their fight to attain subject status for sexual minorities, lesbian and gay activists are breaking a social contract, on the basis of which gender and sexuality were not relevant identity categories in socialism. On the other hand, transformational processes after 1989 were based on the liberal ideology, according to which sexuality should belong to the private sphere (Long 1999). This is summed up brilliantly by Majcherek, whose contribution to the discussion on the topic of sexual minorities in Poland consists in a protest against the alleged flamboyance of gays and lesbians in public sphere:

Freeing sexual life from public surveillance and regulation was one of the biggest gains of the process of human development. Thus, when some homosexuals are demanding access to public space so that they can demonstrate their sexuality freely, they are rejecting the achievements of the liberal socio-political order which gave up intruding upon the intimate life of citizens (Majcherek 2007, electronic source).

However, the extent of protests against lesbian and gay public activism shows clearly, that despite assumed neutrality, public space welcomes first and foremost heterosexual citizens and polices all citizens who cross the unspoken boundaries of compulsory heterosexuality. Thus, the fight about the shape of public space is also a fight to define who deserves to be accorded the status of a fully fledged citizen, which I am going to tackle in the next part of this paper.

CITIZENS IN PUBLIC SPACE

The question of citizenship has particular resonance for sexual dissidents (Bell 1995:139). As Diane Richardson points out, there is now a considerable body of literature which analyses the ways in which ideas of citizenship are based upon “certain assumptions about sexuality, in particular hegemonic heterosexuality” (Richardson 2000:257). These ideas can influence a wide range of citizen rights and entitlements, such as welfare, recognition of same-sex partnerships or legal decision-making by partners. As Johnson adds, writing about the ways in which the heteronormative aspects of citizenship are sustained:

gays and lesbians can be excluded from rights and entitlements which heterosexuals have and/or those rights and entitlements can be conceived of in ways that are more appropriate to conventional heterosexual relationships than same sex ones (Johnson 2002:320).

On the basis of official state policy, Polish gays and lesbians function as non-citizens, and at best as second-class citizens. Lech Kaczynski, after banning the Warsaw Pride in 2004 said that he would ban the Pride in 2005 “no matter what the organizers wrote in the application form [to hold the march]. They can protest as citizens but not as homosexuals” (quoted in Krzyzaniak-Gumowska 2005, electronic source). As opposition to the event became a rallying point in the parliamentary and presidential election campaign, Kaczynski's party Law and Justice ran television spots saying, “Rather than provocative parades of homosexuals, we want state help for Polish families”, thus implying that gay and lesbian citizens function

outside of Polish families and are not entitled for state help (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2006, electronic source). Two years later, when Kaczynski (now president of Poland) was challenged at the National Forum of Europe about the decision to ban Warsaw Pride in 2005, he sustained his original decision, arguing that "homosexuals are entitled to the same rights as everyone else, but if homosexuality were freely promoted as a lifestyle the human race could disappear" (quoted in de Breadun 2007, electronic source).

Finally, judging by the protests against marches and prides, gays and lesbians should not appear in public space, unless they can move only within space devoid of religious and national symbols. For instance, Polish Ministry of Culture is currently working on a draft of a bill that would enable local authorities to ban assemblies whose aim could interfere with the religious or national character of the space in question (Siedlecka 2007, electronic source). This way, non-heterosexual persons are excluded from public sphere for being non-Poles and for posing a potential threat to the unity of the nation, which issue I will take up in the further part of the article devoted to the issues of national identity. Nevertheless, participation in the public sphere is implicit in attaining full citizenship:

If people cannot be present in public spaces (streets, squares, parks, cinemas, churches, town halls) without feeling uncomfortable, victimised and basically "out of place", then it must be questionable whether or not these people can be regarded as citizens at all: or, at least, whether they will regard themselves as full citizens on an equal footing with other people who seem perfectly "at home" when moving about in public spaces (Painter and Philo 1995:115).

The reaction of the lesbian and gay activists in May 2005 was to call for an illegal demonstration, which took place despite the ban:

As representatives of the Equality Foundation – the organizer of Equality Pride we cannot encourage people to break the law (...) But as private persons we want all citizens, who espouse the idea of democracy and freedom to take advantage of the right to freedom of expression. As citizens we have the right to come on Saturday 11 May 2005 at 12 in front of the parliament building, at Wiejska Street, say what

we think about the lack of respect for us and for fundamental human and citizen rights in Poland.¹⁰

To claim citizenship is an attempt at belonging, a means of establishing a legitimate place in society and within the nation (Weeks 1998). Marody and Mandes claim that in the 18th and 19th century when the concept of nation as the dominant form of community organization was shaped in Western countries, Poland was partitioned and had no opportunity to develop a modern understanding of nationhood. The feeling of national identity was based on a distinct language and Catholic religion (Marody and Mandes 2005:13). According to Marody and Mandes, in Poland, religion and broadly defined “Christian values” were (and still are) the main source of collective rituals through which the national identity was formed and is sustained in Polish society (Marody and Mandes 2005:17).

Thiele (2003), writing about the European Union accession process, claims that while Polish politicians involved in the process seemed dedicated to attaining (Western) European values, they were even keener on defending the national values, constructed as Christian family values. According to Thiele, the conservative right perceived Poland’s entry into the EU as an opportunity to reintroduce Christian values into the mostly secular societies of Western Europe, with Poland profiling itself as the new religious-conservative power in the European Union (Thiele 2003, electronic source). As Graff argues, in a recent overview of the situation of gays and lesbians in Poland, these political longings are even more visible in the post-accession landscape. Law and Justice, the conservative party now in power, owes its popularity to its promise of a “moral revolution”, whose part was to be “a dark night for sexual minorities”:

Last but not least, their mission is to reinforce traditional family values and patriotic sentiments: Poland may have joined the European Union, but we will have none of the EU’s “loose” attitudes towards sex. For better or worse, sexual minorities are now positioned as a symbol of this “looseness” (Graff 2006:440).

¹⁰ Based on the information from the Warsaw Pride 2005 organizers website <http://www.paradarownosci.pl/index.php>

A further example of the way that Polish government officials understand the civilizational mission of the Polish nation could be the following extract from the official speech of Giertych, Poland's minister of education and representative of the ultra-right-wing League of Polish Families, during the meeting of European education ministers in Heidelberg in March 2007. According to the homophobic and racist vision of the minister of education, Poland's role is to stop the "homosexual lobby" from destroying the European continent as well as to protect Europe from being populated by Others – non-Europeans and non-Christians :

Today [Europe's] freedom is endangered by attempting to impose opinions of small ideological groups. (...)Thankfully in my own country we know how to talk about this sincerely. Propaganda of homosexuality reaches younger and younger children. (...) If by all means we will not support the family there will be no future for us as a continent. We shall become a continent settled by caring for families members of the Muslim world. We also cannot promote as normal same-sex partnerships when teaching youth, as those partnerships objectively constitute deviation from the natural law.¹¹

Tim Edensor points out that a common way of defining belonging is by paying attention to what constitutes "key" resemblances and differences (Edensor 2002:41). As Kubica argues, writing about the wave of protests against Krakow March for Tolerance in 2004, in Poland the key resemblances are defined via the "obviousness" of the (presumably) heterosexual Catholic Pole identity (Kubica 2006:97). Today, due to the losses suffered in World War II, Poland is one of the most ethnically homogeneous countries in Europe (Levinson 1998:63). In the absence of other minorities, gays and lesbians have become one part of the "other" against which the nation is defined, and so homosexuality is constructed as "un-Polish" (O'Dwyer and Schwartz 2006). This is a theme very often exploited by protesters against lesbian and gay demonstrations in Poland, most whom come from radical right-wing, nationalist organizations such as Młodzież Wszechpolska [All-Polish Youth] and Narodowe Odrodzenie Polski [National Rebirth of Poland]. They legitimize their protests against marches and prides

¹¹ On the basis of information from <http://www.globalgayz.com/Giertych%20speech%20Heidelberg.doc>

on the basis of a need to protect the spaces of religious and national **importance** from the Others – non-heterosexuals, non-Catholics, non-Poles. One can evoke here images from the Normality Parade in 2005 or the March of Tradition and Culture in Krakow in 2006 and 2007 (a counter-demonstration to the March for Tolerance), with a recurring theme of young men with Polish flags, who apart from using anti-Semitic and homophobic slogans were also chanting “one big Catholic Poland”, “Poland only for the Poles”, “God, honour and fatherland”, thus marking the division between “real –Poles” and non-Poles, that is, sexual deviants.

Participants of the March of Tolerance responded with banners that said “I love Poland” and incorporated motifs of the Polish flag and the rainbow flag, thus subverting the rigid definition of a “true Pole” imposed by the homophobic and nationalistic right-wing.¹² As I tried to show in this article, public space can also enable destabilization of some of the established norms regarding the claims as to who deserves to be included in the category of a “true Pole”. Admittedly, it is hard to judge whether at the moment marches and parades are the most important or simply the most visible strategy of the lesbian and gay movement, nevertheless, they have permanently changed the landscape of Polish public sphere as well as the debate on the issue of sexual minorities.

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¹² The slogan „I love Poland” was also the main theme of this year’s „Culture for Tolerance” festival. On the basis of information from www.tolerancja.org.pl

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