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The menace of Jewish anti-Polonism during the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’: antisemitic conspiratorial thinking on the Christian far right in Poland

KINGA POLYNCZUK-ALENIUS 

ABSTRACT Polynczuk-Alenius’s article contributes to a better understanding of the racist moment in Poland that began in the aftermath of the ‘refugee crisis’ in 2015. It does so by zooming in on Christian far-right discourse and reconstructing a cognitive map of the social world manufactured therein. To this end, it analyses the blog of the former Catholic priest Jacek Międlar, now a far-right activist and one of the leaders of the anti-refugee movement. In doing so, the article relies on two compatible bodies of research that have rarely been used together. Theoretically, the article approaches Christian far-right discourse as an articulation of the paranoid style and concentrates on its conspiratorial aspect. Analytically, it uses the fourfold model of authoritarian communication developed by the Frankfurt School to dissect systematically the conspiratorial tale expounded on Międlar’s blog. Accordingly, the empirical analysis of 116 blog posts treats the following themes: 1) the discontent diagnosed by Międlar (anti-Polonism, epitomized by the suppression of nationalist and Christian values in favour of European universalism); 2) the alleged operators of anti-Polonism (the Jewish-orchestrated conspiracy bent on dominating the world and its puppets); 3) the movement that will rise up against this cabal (namely, the Polish Catholic nationalists armed with conservative values); and 4) the leader of the struggle (Międlar himself as a Christ-like martyr figure). The article concludes that the anti-Muslim discourse, premised on an appeal to racist sentiments, served as a gateway into the conspiratorial, deeply antisemitic world-view of the Christian far-right milieu. In Poland, as elsewhere, such a world-view, stored and transmitted through the fringe far-right discourse, usually seems to gain traction in wider society during times of crisis.

KEYWORDS antisemitism, authoritarian communication, Christian radicalism, cognitive mapping, conspiracy theory, far right, paranoid style, Poland

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This article springs from a critical impulse to understand better a venomously racist moment in Poland that was unleashed in the aftermath of the ‘refugee crisis’ in the latter half of 2015. The humanitarian crisis generated a moral crossroads that was cynically exploited by the ultraconservative Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS, Law and Justice) party. Not only did it catapult PiS to power, but it also resulted in the virtual withdrawal of help for incoming asylum-seekers and the collapse of solidarity with the receiving countries, Greece and Italy. Moreover, it caused a dramatic deterioration in public attitudes towards potential refugees in general and Muslims in particular.¹ A number of analyses have been published that strive to disentangle these developments,² some of them explicitly naming Jacek Międlar, a former Catholic priest and current far-right activist, as the vocal spearhead of the anti-refugee movement.³ In the context in which the PiS’s racist ‘anti-immigration’ discourse constitutes the norm,⁴ Międlar’s far-right views can be described as ‘pathological normalcy’ in that they are connected to mainstream positions but they radicalize those stances even further by vehemently rejecting the liberal democratic values of pluralism and minority rights.⁵

In this article, I set out to dig beneath the surface of Międlar’s loudly professed anti-Muslim sentiment and dive into the broader world-view that he espouses on his personal blog.⁶ Although, in the grand scheme of things, Międlar’s discourse admittedly comes from a fringe Christian far-right position, there is merit in scrutinizing how it is articulated in his blog. To begin with, the far-right milieu in general is significant in that it stores and

- 1 Konrad Pędziwiatr, ‘The Catholic Church in Poland on Muslims and Islam’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 52, no. 5, 2018, 461–78.
- 2 Monika Bobako, ‘Semi-peripheral Islamophobias: the political diversity of anti-Muslim discourses in Poland’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 52, no. 5, 2018, 448–60; Jarosław Jańczak, ‘Why do Poles oppose immigrants? The Polish political elite’s (anti-)immigration rhetoric’, in Clarke Rountree and Jouni Tilli (eds), *National Rhetorics in the Syrian Immigration Crisis: Victims, Frauds, and Floods* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press 2019), 125–52; Michał Krzyżanowski, ‘Discursive shifts in ethno-nationalist politics: on politicization and mediatization of the “refugee crisis” in Poland’, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, vol. 16, nos 1–2, 2018, 76–96.
- 3 Elżbieta M. Goździak and Péter Márton, ‘Where the wild things are: fear of Islam and the anti-refugee rhetoric in Hungary and in Poland’, *Central and Eastern European Migration Review*, vol. 7, no. 2, 2018, 125–51; Kasia Narkowicz, ‘“Refugees not welcome here”: state, church and civil society responses to the refugee crisis in Poland’, *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 31, no. 4, 2018, 357–73; Pędziwiatr, ‘The Catholic Church in Poland on Muslims and Islam’.
- 4 Kinga Polynczuk-Alenius, ‘At the intersection of racism and nationalism: theorising and contextualising the “anti-immigration” discourse in Poland’, *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 27, no. 3, 2021, 766–81.
- 5 Cas Mudde, ‘The populist radical right: a pathological normalcy’, *West European Politics*, vol. 33, no. 6, 2010, 1167–86.
- 6 ‘JacekMiędlar’ at www.jacekmiedlar.pl (viewed 16 November 2021).

transmits into the future a discursive repository of racism in its broadest and crudest forms.⁷ Moreover, the far right has always been quick to seize on 'new' media and communication technologies that provide unregulated space for radical voices that have previously been marginalized in the mainstream so-called 'legacy media',⁸ thereby rendering the blogosphere a worthwhile object of study. Finally, Międlar's opinions, if not his methods, are popular among the current and upcoming clergy, which measurably amplifies their significance given the prominent role of the Catholic Church in Polish social and political life.⁹

With this in mind, the key empirical objective of this article is to reconstruct a map of the social world manufactured by the Polish Christian far-right discourse as epitomized by Międlar. To do this, I rely on a reading of Fredric Jameson's notion of a 'cognitive map'—that is, a 'mental map of the social and global totality we all carry around in our heads in variously garbled forms'¹⁰—that brackets out the Marxist understanding of totality and substitutes it with a more general descriptor of the global *context*. To account for Międlar's twisted way of seeing the world, I will be aided by two related strands of literature that are rarely used together. The first is the abundant research centred on the idea of the 'paranoid style',¹¹ and its conspiratorial aspect,¹² which Richard Hofstadter defines as the belief in 'a vast and sinister conspiracy, a gigantic and yet subtle machinery of influence set in motion to undermine and destroy a way of life'.¹³ For my specific purposes, I also view conspiracy theories as racializations, whereby racialized Others are reduced to a psychological and moral essence of plotting and scheming and, as such, are constructed as radically different and inherently hostile.¹⁴ This insight

- 7 Michael Billig, 'Rhetoric of the conspiracy theory: arguments in National Front propaganda', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 22, no. 2, 1988, 23–34.
- 8 Les Back, 'Aryans reading Adorno: cyber-culture and twenty-first-century racism', *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 25, no. 4, 2002, 628–51; Paolo Gerbaudo, 'Social media and populism: an elective affinity?', *Media, Culture & Society*, vol. 40, no. 5, 2018, 745–53; Andrew Fergus Wilson, 'The bitter end: apocalypse and conspiracy in white nationalist responses to the Islamic State attacks in Paris', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 51, no. 5, 2017, 412–31.
- 9 Pędziwiatr, 'The Catholic Church in Poland on Muslims and Islam', 475.
- 10 Fredric Jameson, 'Cognitive mapping', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1988), 347–57 (353).
- 11 Richard Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1966).
- 12 For example, Billig, 'Rhetoric of the conspiracy theory'; Wilson, 'The bitter end'; Jovan Byford, *Conspiracy Theories: A Critical Introduction* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2011); Mark Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories: Secrecy and Power in American Culture*, 2nd edn (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press 2008).
- 13 Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 29.
- 14 Reza Zia-Ebrahimi, 'When the Elders of Zion relocated to Eurabia: conspiratorial racialization in antisemitism and Islamophobia', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 52, no. 4, 2018, 314–37.

enables us to understand the conflation of anti-Muslim racism and antisemitism that underpins Międlar's discourse.

Conceptualized this way, conspiracy theory is plugged into older research on authoritarian communication in the interwar United States by the Frankfurt School, particularly in the works of Theodor Adorno,¹⁵ and Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman.¹⁶ There are three reasons for this operation. First, authoritarian communication is propelled by the same mode of conspiratorial thinking as the paranoid style. Second, relatedly, the four categories discerned by the Frankfurt School to analyse authoritarian communication—'Discontent', 'The Opponent', 'The Movement' and 'The Leader'¹⁷—both mirror and elaborate the 'anatomy' of conspiracy theories,¹⁸ particularly by paying closer attention to the figure of the leader, thereby providing an incisive prism through which to analyse the empirical material at hand. Third, drawing on the Frankfurt School research conducted in the 1930s helps accomplish the second objective of this article, which is to tease out continuities in Christian far-right discourses.

Hence, I set out to show that there is nothing inherently original in Międlar's discourse and that it is, rather, an example of cultural 'hybridity' and ideological syncretism characteristic of the far right worldwide.¹⁹ In Międlar's case, it is a piecemeal assemblage of paranoid cognitive mapping, timeless conspiracy theories and themes of authoritarian communication. I pursue this argument in the remaining four parts of the article. First, I discuss a twofold framework for analysing Międlar's discourse: 1) the paranoid style in politics, with its conspiratorial aspect, as a peculiar mode of cognitive mapping; and 2) the four categories developed by Lowenthal and Guterman to dissect authoritarian communication.²⁰ Second, I introduce my method and the analysed empirical materials. Subsequently, I follow Lowenthal and Guterman's four categories for presenting my main findings. Finally, I offer some conclusions on the discursive resources, both local and global, on which Międlar's iteration of the Christian radical far-right discourse draws.

Theoretical offsets

This section outlines two theoretical avenues into exploring the current Christian radical far-right discourse in Poland. The first is to conceptualize

15 Theodor W. Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2000).

16 Leo Lowenthal and Norbert Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit: A Study of the Techniques of the American Agitator* (New York: Harper & Brothers 1949).

17 *Ibid.*, 6.

18 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 71–94.

19 Back, *Aryans Reading Adorno*, 631.

20 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*.

this discourse as a mode of conspiratorial thinking, that is, an impaired way of making sense—cognitive mapping—of the surrounding social context on both a local and global scale. The second is to thematize the content of this discourse through recourse to the dissection of authoritarian communication as posited by the Frankfurt School.

Cognitive mapping, conspiracy theories and racialization

In his foundational text, Hofstadter introduces the ‘paranoid style’ as ‘a way of seeing the world and expressing oneself’ that hinges on ‘the qualities of heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy’.²¹ As anticipated earlier, it is the conspiratorial component that is of greatest interest here. Defined in terms of content, conspiracy theory is ‘the conviction that a secret, omnipotent individual or group covertly controls the political and social order or some part thereof’.²² As a mode of cognitive mapping, conspiracy theory is an attempt to make sense of a complex global situation—which constitutes the context of individual lives—by concocting a graspable, though not necessarily probable or logical, explanation.²³ As an epistemological approach, conspiracy theory is a totalizing narrative that seeks to encompass and resolve within itself all the complexities and contradictions of the contemporary world.²⁴ Formulated this way, conspiracy theory appears as a form of independent sense-making, which might be seen as an empowering reassertion of agency, even if erroneous.²⁵

Yet, I wish to emphasize that most conspiracy theories, and certainly the one dissected in this article, have been deployed as a reactionary device in defence of conservative values and order.²⁶ As such, conspiracy theories tend to emerge as a maladaptive coping mechanism under circumstances of social change, upheaval or crisis and, through recourse to spurious evidence, superstition or prejudice,²⁷ they serve to grasp a rapidly unfolding and/or complex situation that is beyond individual control and comprehension.²⁸ In the quest for a simple and comprehensive explanation, conspiracy theories ‘unravel’ a powerful, ubiquitous yet invisible cabal as the driving

21 Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 3–4.

22 Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*, 1; see also Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 21.

23 Jeffrey M. Bale, ‘Political paranoia v. political realism: on distinguishing between bogus conspiracy theories and genuine conspiratorial politics’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 41, no. 1, 2007, 45–60 (51); Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*; Jameson, ‘Cognitive mapping’, 356; Wilson, ‘The bitter end’, 420; Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*.

24 Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*, 14; Wilson, ‘The bitter end’, 420.

25 Jameson, ‘Cognitive mapping’, 356; see also Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*, 287–8.

26 Wilson, ‘The bitter end’, 421.

27 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 21.

28 Jan-Willem van Prooijen and Karen M. Douglas, ‘Conspiracy theories as part of history: the role of societal crisis situation’, *Memory Studies*, vol. 10, no. 3, 2017,

force and orchestrator of history.²⁹ Such pervasive and almighty schemes can be termed ‘superconspiracies’ because they are composed of multilayered and nested plots, albeit traceable to a singular group of plotters.³⁰

At this juncture, two crucial characteristics of Christian far-right conspiracy theories come into play. First, in the hands of Christian fundamentalists, conspiracy theories necessarily split the world into two: a miserable, oppressed majority and a conspiratorial, oppressive minority.³¹ This dualistic order is cast as a Manichaeian division between absolute ‘good’ and absolute ‘evil’, thereby pitting the two groups against each other in perennial conflict. Second, being not only Christian but also nationalist radicals, they imagine the evil plotters as religious and ethnic Others, traditionally and most commonly Jews.³² To account for the pernicious fusion of religion and ‘race’ in the figure of the evil conspirator, Reza Zia-Ebrahimi writes about ‘conspiratorial racialization’, whereby a selected out-group is stripped down to a psychological and moral essence of conspiring and, thereby, positioned as inherently and inevitably opposed to the in-group.³³ The eschatological struggle against evil is, then, at the heart of Christian far-right conspiracy theories, in which evil is animated by the singular will to destroy the ‘good’ way of life. Viewed through this lens, dramatic changes in the surrounding world appear as a harbinger of an impending apocalypse, heralding the Second Coming that brings with it the final defeat of the cabal and the eternal triumph of the faithful.

Conspiracy theory as a mode of authoritarian communication

As mentioned earlier, the Frankfurt School’s research on authoritarian communication in the interwar United States provides a concise and incisive analytical model for investigating the conspiratorial aspect of Christian far-right discourse. Lowenthal and Guterman outline the general framework as follows:

323–33; see also Aleksander Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, trans. from the Polish by Richard Lourie, 2nd edn (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press 1988), 188.

29 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 32, 34; see also Bale, ‘Political paranoia v. political realism’, 53; and Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 29.

30 Michael Barkun, *Culture of Conspiracy: Apocalyptic Visions in Contemporary America* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press 2003), 54.

31 Markku Ruotsila, ‘Mrs Webster’s religion: conspiracist extremism on the Christian far right’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 38, no. 2, 2004, 109–26.

32 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 46.

33 Zia-Ebrahimi, ‘When the Elders of Zion relocated to Eurabia’, 318. Similarly, Byford writes about the ‘associational *shift* whereby someone who is believed to be involved in the conspiracy is given attributes associated with the conspiratorial body’ (Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 73).

The immediate cause of the activity of an [agitator] . . . is a social condition that a section of the population feels to be iniquitous or frustrating. This discontent he articulates by pointing out its presumed causes. He proposes to defeat the social groups held responsible for perpetuating the social condition that gives rise to discontent. Finally, he promotes a movement capable of achieving this objective, and he proposes himself as its leader.³⁴

Lowenthal and Guterman offer a fourfold classification to analyse the workings of such agitation: 'Discontent', 'The Movement', 'The Opponent' and 'The Leader'. First, the 'Discontent' arises from a combination of grievances: economic (too many resources are being handed out to foreign nations/nationals); political (international commitments restrict individual liberties); cultural (media are serving the enemies of the nation); and moral (enemies benefit from our toil).³⁵ This assessment resonates with a feeling of dispossession, of having one's homeland and tradition taken away, that Hofstadter diagnoses as a precondition for engaging with the paranoid style.³⁶ Inflicting such misery is clearly part and parcel of the opponent's conspiratorial plan.³⁷

Second, and crucially, 'The Opponent' is not singular but an ever-expanding cluster of conspirators,³⁸ who plot, jointly and separately, against the in-group.³⁹ Symptomatically, instead of attacking empirical reality, which is beyond individual control, agitators devise fetishes. Thus, the portrayal of ubiquitous enemies inevitably becomes self-contradictory: threatening, ruthless and omnipotent but, at the same time, inferior, helpless and weak.⁴⁰ They are powerful enough to bring misery and to propel history by their own volition, but they can be easily defeated in the face of the impending apocalypse: the stronger they become, the closer their imminent collapse in the Second Coming.⁴¹ By plugging into the pervasive antisemitism of the time, interwar agitators portrayed all their opponents as a symbolic, organized 'Jewry': nearly mythological arch-enemies, straw men sketched with the crayons of prejudice, projections and archaic imaginaries.⁴² Thus, conspiratorial racialization was at play: the repugnant moral characteristics of the enemy were constructed as both the consequence and the cause of their somatic features.⁴³

34 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 6. Although the agitators that Lowenthal and Guterman focused on were primarily men, there was one woman, Elizabeth Dilling, in their midst.

35 *Ibid.*, 12–13; see also Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 26.

36 Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 23.

37 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 77.

38 *Ibid.*, 73.

39 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 38.

40 *Ibid.*, 58; Zia-Ebrahimi, 'When the Elders of Zion relocated to Eurabia', 332.

41 See Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 85; Fenster, *Conspiracy Theories*, 15; Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, 190; and Ruotsila, 'Mrs Webster's religion', 126.

42 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 107.

43 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 65.

Third, 'The Movement', which is spearheaded by the agitator and tasked with quashing the evil cabal, seeks to gather those who are frustrated with, and humiliated by, their life situation. Such individuals are taken to embody the 'national essence', and their perceived misery is interpreted as an assault on that essence. They are receptive to agitation because their resentments, caused by a set of complex and highly abstract factors, can easily be mobilized and projected on to various scapegoats.⁴⁴ Critically, such cognitive mapping allows the attribution of the general discontent as well as any individual's predicament to the viciousness of the enemies. It also invents an external cause for every ill of the in-group, thereby precluding introspection and intervention.⁴⁵ This dislocation of blame, paired with exclusionary nationalism, offers followers a sense of belonging, although not solidarity, and of purpose, albeit muddled.⁴⁶

Finally, to defeat the cabal and thus eradicate the root cause of their discontent, the followers must unite under the heroic leadership of an agitator, who is a pioneer in seeing through the scheme.⁴⁷ What constitutes the basis of such unity is not the commonality of interests but the illusion of proximity to, and intimacy with, the agitator.⁴⁸ To create this illusion and justify their claims to leadership, agitators present themselves as follows:

The agitator's references to himself thus fall into two groups or themes: one covering his familiarity and the other his aloofness, one in a minor key establishing him as a 'great little man,' and the other in a major key as a bullet-proof martyr who despite his extraordinary sufferings always emerges victorious over his enemies.⁴⁹

Thus, while agitators share the concerns and hardships of their underdog audience, they present themselves as being endowed by some higher power with a mission to lead the movement composed of those who see through the conspiracy and into the 'real' sources of societal discontent.⁵⁰ Envisioning themselves as victimized and persecuted for speaking the unspeakable, agitators confirm both their own righteousness and the viciousness of their enemies.⁵¹ This serves a sinister purpose: it 'rationalize[s]

44 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 26; Jameson, 'Cognitive mapping', 356; Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 23.

45 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 95–6.

46 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 48.

47 Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 31.

48 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 1; Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 118.

49 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 119.

50 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 3; Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 124; Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 77.

51 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 11; Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 127.

aggressiveness under the guise of self-defence', for the agitator's solution to discontent is to turn the tables and torment the enemies.⁵²

Empirical case, material and method

To recapitulate, the key empirical objective of this article is to map the social world manufactured by the Polish Christian far-right discourse. To do this, the analysis zooms in on Jacek Międlar, a former Catholic priest and a prime representative of the Christian far-right milieu in Poland. Prior to his suspension from the priesthood, Międlar served as an unofficial chaplain of the far-right movement. He first captured public attention in the autumn of 2015, during the peak of the so-called 'refugee crisis', when he appeared in priestly attire at 'anti-Islam' demonstrations. These demonstrations became notorious for chants such as 'Fuck Arabs' and 'All Poland Sings Together: Refugees Fuck Off'. Subsequently, on 11 November 2015, Międlar showed up at the annual march to mark Narodowe Święto Niepodległości (National Independence Day), where he restated his racist anti-Muslim views.⁵³ For that, he was banned by his superiors from public speaking and participating in nationalist events, and was sent to an enclosed order. However, he violated the ban when he delivered a sermon at the mass celebrating the eighty-second anniversary of the Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny (ONR, National Radical Camp), in which he urged Polish nationalists to stop being passive like 'Jews under Egyptian servitude' and to defend Poland's national interest.⁵⁴

In his preaching, he insisted on the harmony between Christianity, especially Catholicism, and radical nationalism: 'Many of you will hear that you are fascists . . . that you are Nazis, and that you don't care about Christian values. Nonsense! . . . In our heart there is the Gospel, Christ and those values for which we are ready to lay down our lives, for Poland and for Christianity.'⁵⁵ Międlar was suspended in the spring of 2016; he then

52 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 11.

53 The National Independence Day march is an infamous large-scale manifestation, organized annually in Warsaw by far-right groups but attended also by a large number of unaffiliated participants. It takes place on 11 November, Poland's National Independence Day, which marks the regaining of independence in 1918 after 123 years of partitions. See Rafał Pankowski and Marcin Kormak, 'Radical nationalism in Poland: from theory to practice', in Ralf Melzer and Sebastian Serafin (eds), *Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter-Strategies and Labor-Market Oriented Exit Strategies* (Berlin: Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung 2013), 157–68.

54 The ONR is a fascist, far-right organization, originally established in 1934. Despite having been outlawed by the national authorities soon thereafter, it continued its operations illegally until 1939. It was revived in 1993. See Pankowski and Kormak, 'Radical nationalism in Poland'.

55 Zuzanna Radzik and Błażej Strzelczyk, 'Duszpasterz narodowców', *Tygodnika Powszechnego*, 12 November 2015, available at www.tygodnikpowszechny.pl/ks-miedlar-duszpasterz-narodowcow-31164 (viewed 17 November 2021). All translations from

voluntarily left the priesthood and moved on to become a media personality. Hosted and interviewed by the mainstream media (private television stations, public broadcasters and the tabloid press), he also took his message to online nationalist platforms—though these collaborations ended controversially—but mostly to personal social media channels and the radical ‘news portal’ that he himself established.⁵⁶ Even though his influence has waned, together with the urgency of the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, now and again Międlar’s actions attract negative public attention, both domestically and internationally, such as when he was barred from entering the United Kingdom to participate in a far-right rally,⁵⁷ or when he published his autobiography entitled, in a thinly veiled reference to *Mein Kampf*, *Moja walka o prawdę: Wyznania byłego księdza* (My Struggle for the Truth: Confessions of a Former Priest).⁵⁸ In any case, Międlar’s significance lies in the apparent normalization of his views and himself as a media persona, which is attested by his brief membership in the Association of Polish Journalists in 2021.⁵⁹

The material analysed here was collected from Międlar’s personal blog, the strapline of which is ‘Bóg—Honor—Ojczyzna!’ (‘God—Honour—Fatherland. Official blog’).⁶⁰ The blog is hosted on a server located in San Francisco, perhaps to reduce the risk of it being removed due to the efforts of Polish activists, as did happen in the case of his profiles on *Facebook* and *YouTube*.⁶¹ While I am unable to determine the size of the blog’s audience, based on the number of followers of his other channels (over 19,000 on *Twitter* on 1 December 2021, and 52,000 on *YouTube* prior to the channel’s deletion in March 2019),⁶² I estimate it to be between 12,000 and 24,000.

the Polish, including media articles and Międlar’s blog posts, unless otherwise stated, are by the author.

56 *wPrawo* website, available at <https://wprawo.pl> (viewed 17 November 2021).

57 Mark Townsend and Rajeev Syal, ‘Far-right Polish priest detained at Stansted airport’, *Guardian*, 25 February 2017, available at www.theguardian.com/world/2017/feb/25/far-right-polish-priest-jacek-miedlar-detained-at-stansted-airport (viewed 17 November 2021).

58 Katarzyna Markusz, ‘Polish bookstore chain stops carrying author accused of anti-Semitism’, *The Times of Israel*, 19 November 2018, available at www.timesofisrael.com/polish-bookstore-chain-stops-carrying-author-accused-of-anti-semitism (viewed 17 November 2021).

59 Cezary Kawecki, ‘Jacek Międlar nie jest już członkiem Stowarzyszenia Dziennikarzy Polskich. “Naruszenie procedur”’, *Gazeta.pl*, 25 March 2021, available at <https://wiadomosci.gazeta.pl/wiadomosci/7,114883,26920354,jacek-miedlar-nie-jest-juz-czlonkiem-stowarzyszenia-dziennikarzy.html> (viewed 17 November 2021).

60 See ‘JacekMiędlar’. ‘Bóg, Honor i Ojczyzna!’ is one of Poland’s unofficial mottos.

61 Still, due to hosting problems, the blog was inaccessible for several days at the end of 2019, only to return at the beginning of January 2020.

62 See ‘YouTube zamknął konto Jacka Międlara’, *rp.pl*, 28 March 2019, available at www.rp.pl/spoleczenstwo/art9400121-youtube-zamknal-konto-jacka-miedlara (viewed 1 December 2021).

The texts for the analysis were selected in a two-step process. First, I collected all postings published between the time the blog was established on 30 December 2016 and 3 January 2018. Within this time frame, Międlar published a total of 262 items, emerging as quite a prolific writer with an average of five items per week. The corpus was a true hotchpotch of genres, ranging: from vlogs to original pieces of writing (varied in length but roughly about 500 words on average); and from repostings of Międlar's writing from other outlets, particularly his brainchild, the 'news portal' *wPrawo.pl*, to interviews that Międlar gave to other media as well as to other representatives of the nationalist movement, who were mainly Polish contacts but also included international ones, such as Jayda Fransen of Britain First. My original intent was to analyse the whole corpus but, on reading through the posts, I realized that the texts revealed a one-track mind, and that saturation point would be reached too quickly. Consequently, in the second step, I randomly selected 116 posts for closer examination.

Subsequently, I performed the textual analysis by organizing and interpreting the material using the four themes introduced above: 'Discontent', 'The Opponent', 'The Movement' and 'The Leader'. The basic unit of analysis was a clause, and each post was thereby classified under multiple themes. Still, it is worth noting the occurrence of the main themes across all posts: only 9 posts spoke primarily about discontent, 13 about the leader and 39 about the movement, while almost half of the sample (55 posts) revelled in descriptions of opponents.⁶³

The anatomy of a Jewish anti-Polish conspiracy

In a nutshell, Międlar's blog maps the condition of discontent that has befallen the Polish nation, manufactured as a singular entity.⁶⁴ He constructs this discontent as (the result of) victimization suffered at the hands of enemies, who are a motley crew of identifiable domestic figureheads, knowable grand operators (European Union) and clandestine Jewish puppeteers. Międlar asserts that the movement will be recruited from the ranks of the Polish nation under his leadership as the first martyr and the primary target of persecution. In what follows, I elaborate on the different elements of this cognitive map, while simultaneously pointing to their antecedents in Polish Christian far-right discourse.

The Discontent: anti-Polonism

The discontent that Międlar identifies remains characteristically vague. He seeks to ride the tide of resentment and frustration rather than truly diagnose

63 On the significance of descriptions of the cabal in conspiracy theories, see Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 71–2.

64 *Ibid.*, 82.

Discontent

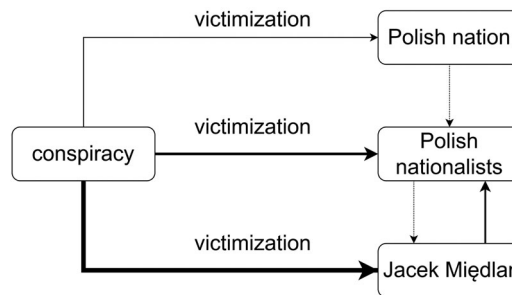


Figure 1 Discontent, as diagnosed by the discourse on Międlar's blog

its symptoms or cure its causes.⁶⁵ One may infer, however, that this murky discontent is a result of 'anti-Polonism'. Symbolic in nature, anti-Polonism designates the alleged suppression of Polishness in favour of 'European' – universalist and liberal – values:

There is no doubt that this Pole-basher's spectacle . . . is one of the many demonstrations of the way to destroy nations from within [by] introducing multiculturalism, political correctness, infernal tolerance, consequently moving the boundary between values and their antitheses.⁶⁶

In a manner typical of the Polish Christian far-right discourse, Międlar connects the suppression of Polish *national* values with the decaying of *Christian* values, the coexistence of which secures the health and survival of the Polish nation ('the destruction of the Christian order in Poland').⁶⁷ A similar diagnosis of Polish national identity, and the way of life associated with it, as being under threat was embedded in the interwar nationalist movement,⁶⁸

65 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 6, 11.

66 Jacek Międlar, 'Szkoła Frankfurcka na deskach Teatru Powszechnego. Kto zainicjował "długi marsz przez kulturę"?' (blog), 26 April 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/04/26/szkola-frankfurcka-na-deskach-teatru-powszechnego-kto-zainicjowal-dlugi-marsz-przez-kulture> (viewed 18 November 2021). The 'spectacle' in question was a performance of 'The Curse', based on a play by Stanisław Wyspiański, directed by Oliver Frlić and produced at the Powszechny Theatre in Warsaw.

67 Jacek Międlar, 'Czy prezydent Andrzej Duda wezwał władze Izraela do walki z antypolonizmem?' (blog), 27 January 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/01/27/czy-prezydent-andrzej-duda-wezwal-wladze-izraela-do-walki-z-antypolonizmem> (viewed 19 November 2021). See also Geneviève Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz: Nationalism and Religion in Post-Communist Poland* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press 2006), 85.

68 Michael C. Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press 1997), 13.

and later powered the discourse of the Catholic far-right press at the turn of the twenty-first century.⁶⁹

Crucially, however, according to Międlar, not only is Poland submerged in this state of discontent but the whole of Europe, whose moral and cultural legacy, arbitrarily reduced to Christianity and nation-states,⁷⁰ is currently under siege from without, facilitated as it is by the malaise within.⁷¹ With an extremely racist, sexist and overall hateful figure of speech, Międlar compares the present European situation to the condition of a prostitute suffering from AIDS:

I watch with satisfaction the demise of the old, wrinkled, HIV-infected European Union . . . The metaphor of HIV, on the one hand, symbolizes the weakened immune system . . . and, on the other, reveals the source of infection. Now, I should take out of my briefcase a geographical world map and point to the continents that surround Europe. I guess I do not have to explain anything more?⁷²

For Międlar, non-Europeans are the personification of Europe's symbolic discontent. Their sheer presence taints the purity of Europe, contaminates its culture and weakens its moral constitution. This assertion clearly recalls the sentiment of the wider white nationalist movement, wherein the proximity of non-white bodies is a source of injury and 'bad feeling', physical as well as psychological.⁷³ Moreover, in a gesture of conspiratorial racialization, anyone who is not Christian and/or 'Aryan' becomes an opponent.⁷⁴ In this manner, Międlar taps into the notion of an ethnic nation that was, for a long time, treated in Poland as the only legitimate template for a national entity and that still structures the far-right imagination.⁷⁵

The Opponents: the Jewish conspiracy and its puppets

Fuelled by hostility, Międlar's world organically splits into two camps, reflecting the Manichaeic division between good and evil that is coded in conspiracy theories: his national(ist) community and its opponents.

69 Marcin Starnawski, 'Nationalist discourse and the ultra-conservative press in contemporary Poland: a case study of *Nasz Dziennik*', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 37, no. 1, 2003, 65–81.

70 See Wilson, 'The bitter end', 424–5.

71 Bobako, 'Semi-peripheral Islamophobias', 452.

72 Jacek Międlar, 'Bez kompromisów! Dorznijmy unijną prostytutkę z HIV-em. To dla Polski wróg numer jeden' (blog), 8 September 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/09/08/bez-kompromisow-dorznijmy-unijna-prostyutke-z-hiv-em-to-dla-polski-wrog-numer-jeden> (viewed 18 November 2021).

73 Sara Ahmed, 'Affective economies', *Social Text*, vol. 22, no. 2, 2004, 117–39.

74 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 50.

75 Geneviève Zubrzycki succinctly summarizes this view as 'a theology of the nation characterized by both a religious and a historical perspective, influenced by the biblical notion of the chosen people and by nineteenth-century Polish messianism while incorporating . . . [an] ethnic definition of the national community' (Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, 63).

Accordingly, his discourse constructs an intricate and multilayered web of conspiring enemies who are collectively responsible for the discontent that has overtaken the Polish nation.⁷⁶ At the lowest level are the external and internal ‘pawn’ enemies who can be encountered in everyday life. Predictably, given Międlar’s emergence at the height of the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, Muslims are identified as particularly threatening external enemies, described as ‘Islamic aggressors’,⁷⁷ who seek to eradicate Christian Europe either through terrorism,⁷⁸ or unimpeded procreation.⁷⁹ He is, however, aware that, in the virtual absence of Muslims,⁸⁰ anti-Islam sentiments can lubricate his audience’s resentment only so long: ‘Of course, the influx of Islamists does not directly concern us Poles, but it is a direct problem of our neighbours with whom we cooperate internationally and whose Christian heritage is our common good.’⁸¹ In this context, he turns the spotlight on to those actually present migrants whose alleged nationalist and anti-Polish inclinations are seen as a threat to Poland: ‘The dangerous influx that concerns us is a wave of Ukrainian migrants, over 20 per cent of whom already identify with the monstrous pagan Banderite chauvinism’.⁸²

76 See Barkun, *Culture of Conspiracy*, 54.

77 Jacek Międlar, ‘Dżihad w smartfonach’ (blog), 30 December 2016, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2016/12/30/dzihad-w-smartfonach> (viewed 18 November 2021).

78 Jacek Międlar, ‘Manipulacja strachem! Żydzi w wychodkach, czyli przestraszyć, obrzydzić i zmanipulować’ (blog), 23 November 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/11/23/manipulacja-strachem-zydzi-w-wychodkach-czyli-przestraszyc-obrzydzi-i-zmanipulowac> (viewed 18 November 2021).

79 Jacek Międlar, ‘“W trosce o ekologię przestańmy się rozmnażać! Niech zaleje nas islam”. Eugeniczny apel szwedzkich ekologów’ (blog), 21 September 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/09/21/w-trosce-o-ekologie-przestanny-sie-rozmnazac-niech-zaleje-nas-islam-eugeniczny-apel-szwedzkich-ekologow/> (viewed 18 November 2021). See also Zia-Ebrahimi, ‘When the Elders of Zion relocated to Eurabia’, 325.

80 According to the latest 2011 Census, the Muslim minority constituted less than 0.1 per cent of Poland’s population. See Główny Urząd Statystyczny/Statistics Poland, ‘Struktura narodowo-etniczna, językowa i wyznaniowa ludności Polski—NSP 2011’, 10 December 2015, available at <https://stat.gov.pl/spisy-powszechne/nsp-2011/nsp-2011-wyniki/struktura-narodowo-etniczna-jezykowa-i-wyznaniowa-ludnosci-polski-nsp-2011,22,1.html> (viewed 18 November 2021). Moreover, since the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’, the number of asylum applications filed in Poland has been consistently low (down from 12,325 in 2015 to 4,100 in 2018, compared to the total of 38.5 million inhabitants), and the number of asylum applications granted has been minuscule (348 in 2015 and 406 in 2018). See ‘Statistics’, formerly available on the *Urząd do Spraw Cudzoziemców/Office for Foreigners* website at <https://udsc.gov.pl/en/statystyki> (viewed 28 October 2019).

81 Jacek Międlar, ‘Czy jestem gotowy na dialog z innowiercami? Dialog międzyreligijny (3/5)’ (blog), 2 May 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/05/02/czy-jestem-gotowy-na-dialog-z-innowiercami-dialog-miedzyreligijny-35/> (viewed 18 November 2021).

82 *Ibid.* Międlar refers here to Stepan Bandera, a highly controversial Ukrainian ultranationalist. In the interwar period, Bandera was involved in terrorist activities against Polish officials, including the assassination of the Minister of the Interior,

Despite his outspoken hostility towards foreign arrivals, Międlar pays much more attention to the multiple enemies and traitors within.⁸³ The first such group comprises the Catholic hierarchs against whom he holds a personal grudge. Although, as a Polish nationalist, Międlar implicitly recognizes the leadership of the 'Polish pope', John Paul II,⁸⁴ he rejects the modernizing trajectory set in motion by the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s and currently pursued by Pope Francis, which he considers heretical.⁸⁵ 'There is no doubt that, through their infernal behaviour, the Church hierarchy, and with it the current successor of Saint Peter, spits in Christ's face . . . which is leading the Church to self-destruction. I urge you: let's reclaim the Church for Christians.'⁸⁶ Further enraged by the official denunciation of nationalism by the Episcopal Conference of Poland, Międlar called the Church hierarchs 'a caricature of an episcopate . . . who lead their lambs to the slaughter'.⁸⁷ He sees them as playing into the hands of the anti-Polish cabal by condemning ethnic nationalism, which has long provided the foundation for national culture, identity and way of life.⁸⁸ In criticizing a certain liberal bishop, Międlar went so far as to name him the 'devil's son'.⁸⁹

The second subset of internal enemies includes a wide group that Międlar dubs 'lefties' (*lewactwo*).⁹⁰ This broad bloc encompasses progressive social movements and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), the so-called

Bronisław Pieracki. Międlar also alludes to Bandera's possible links to the massacres of the Polish population in Volhynia during the Second World War.

83 See Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 24.

84 Jacek Międlar, "'Dlaczego Żydzi czują się urażeni, gdy mówi się do nich per Żydzie'?" FB kasuje pytanie! Milczy gdy szargana jest świętość JPPII! . . .' (blog), 7 March 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/03/07/dlaczego-zydzi-czuja-sie-urazeni-gdy-mowi-sie-do-nich-per-zydzie-fb-kasuje-pytanie-milczy-gdy-szargana-jest-swietosc-jpii-interwenujemy-18> (viewed 18 November 2021).

85 For the similar denunciation by NESTA Webster of most organized Christian churches as apostates, see Ruotsila, 'Mrs Webster's religion', 115. In the Polish context, such accusations surfaced during the 'war of the crosses' in the late 1990s (see Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, 190–1).

86 Jacek Międlar, 'Aborcjoniści Franciszka. "Można zabijać do 18. tygodnia", "Łykajcie pigułki dzień po", "Jezus maszerowałby w Marszu Kobiet" . . .' (blog), 22 June 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/06/22/aborcjonisci-franciszka> (viewed 18 November 2021).

87 Międlar, 'Bez kompromisów!'

88 Starnawski, 'Nationalist discourse and the ultra-conservative press in contemporary Poland', 65.

89 Jacek Międlar, 'Bp Pieronek sugeruje, że "mamy w Polsce dyktaturę". Ja twierdzę, że mamy na Wawelu czorta' (blog), 4 October 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/10/04/bp-pieronek-sugeruje-ze-mamy-w-polsce-dyktature-ja-twierdze-ze-mamy-na-wawelu-czorta> (viewed 18 November 2021).

90 'Lewactwo' is an amorphous term that dates from the Stalinist era, and employed by the political and radical right in Poland to discredit the left as well as the liberal environment. See Łukasz Drozda, *Lewactwo: Historia dyskursu o polskiej lewicy radykalnej* (Warsaw: Instytut Wydawniczy Książka i Prasa 2015). I would like to thank the reviewer for this observation.

The Opponents

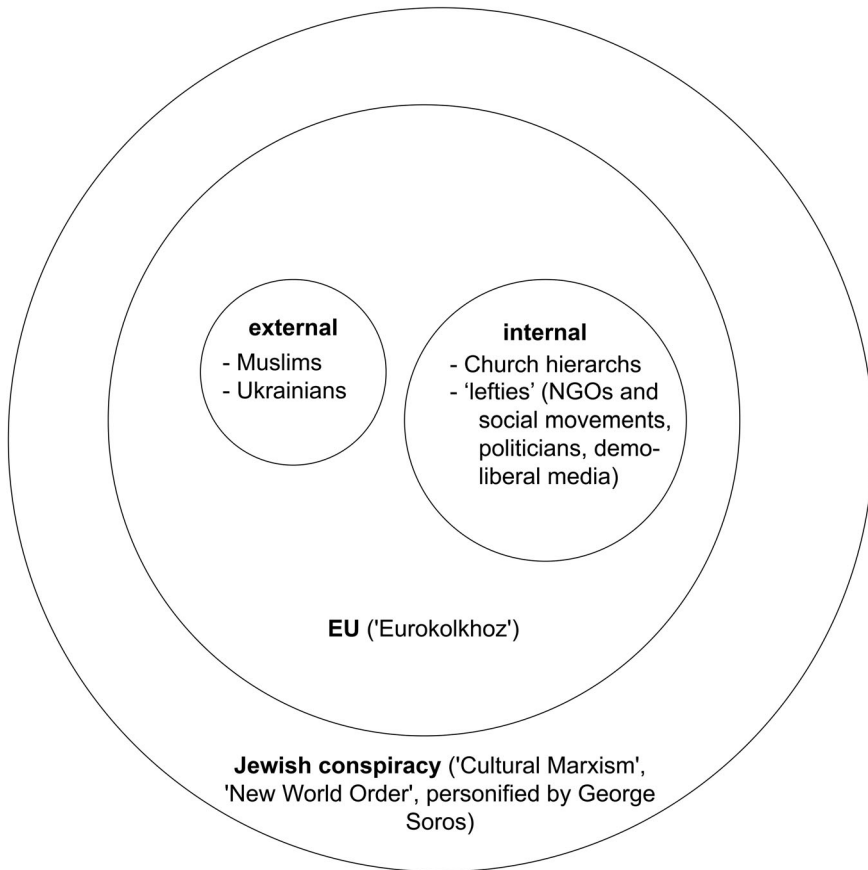


Figure 2 Cluster of opponents in Międlar's discourse

'demo-liberal' media and certain representatives of the political elite. Their common denominator is that they are 'notoriously lax in morals'.⁹¹ Bearing in mind that, for Międlar, the contours of morality are delineated by nationalist and conservative Catholic values, those who come from left and liberal positions are 'an ideological heir to Adolf Hitler, period',⁹² because of their 'anti-Polonism' and 'Pole-bashing' actions.⁹³ In slandering

91 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 13; see also Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 76; and Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 31–2.

92 Międlar, "W trosce o ekologię przestańmy się rozmnażać!"; see also Międlar, "Jak pokochałam Adolfa Hitlera". Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus w 74. rocznicę legalizacji aborcji na ziemiach polskich' (blog), 9 March 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/03/09/jak-pokochałam-adolfa-hitlera-joanna-scheuring-wielgus-w-74-rocznice-legalizacji-aborcji-na-ziemiach-polski> (viewed 18 November 2021).

93 Międlar, "Jak pokochałam Adolfa Hitlera"; Jacek Międlar, 'Polska nie ma dla nich żadnej wartości! Żydowskie organizacje w Polsce chcą eurokołchozu.

Polish patriots, they draw inspiration not only from fascism but also from 'sovietizm'; Międlar describes *Gazeta Wyborcza*, an emblematic 'demoliberal' newspaper, 'to this day as a bulwark of neo-sovietizm and devoted to the glorification of the murderous Red Army'.⁹⁴

The vicious but easily identifiable internal and external opponents are, however, merely pawns in the implementation of an 'internationalist' agenda to dispose of the European nation-states.⁹⁵ Currently, as twenty years ago,⁹⁶ the primary executor of this plan is the European Union (EU), the 'Eurokolchoz', as Międlar calls it, founded on 'contempt for traditional values and nation-states'.⁹⁷ Thus, 'to nationalists who strive to build a Europe of Free Nations, it should be clear that, in its present form, the European Union is the number one enemy. Destroying it is one way to freedom.'⁹⁸ Revelling in sadism, which he otherwise attributes to his enemies, Międlar urges: 'While building the nationalist-Christian "me", let's butcher the Union prostitute. Let's give her an ampule of potassium cyanide—the nationalist-Christian radicalism—which will finish her off, and the Europe of Free Nations will be ours.'⁹⁹

On Międlar's garbled cognitive map, the EU is but a tool conjured up by the super-conspiracy to put 'cultural Marxism' into practice.¹⁰⁰ While the 'internationalist' agenda threatens the political sovereignty of nation-states, 'cultural Marxism' promotes the destruction of '[Latin] culture, the model of the traditional family and public decency in the media, and all through so-called "social justice", "tolerance", "political correctness" or "cultural pluralism"'.¹⁰¹ Particularly curious is his ill-informed, conspiratorial interpretation of the connection between 'cultural Marxism' (originally a theory in cultural studies) and the Frankfurt School:

Powtórka z XX-lecia międzywojennego? (blog), 25 August 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/08/25/polska-nie-ma-dla-nich-zadnej-wartosci-zydowskie-organizacje-w-polsce-chca-eurokolchozu-powtorka-z-xx-lecia-miedzywojennego> (viewed 22 November 2021).

94 Jacek Międlar, "Wielka Polska wolna od neosowietyzmu i nowoczesnych parchów musi wyrosnąć spośród nas!" 78. rocznica agresji sowieckiej na Polskę (blog), 18 September 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/09/18/wielka-polska-wolna-od-neosowietyzmu-i-nowoczesnych-parchow-musi-wyrosnac-sposrod-nas-78-rocznica-agresji-sowieckiej-na-polske-wideo> (viewed 18 November 2021).

95 This universalist agenda was previously attributed, for example, to the Illuminati with the League of Nations as their tool (see Ruotsila, 'Mrs Webster's religion', 114, 117).

96 Starnawski, 'Nationalist discourse and the ultra-conservative press in contemporary Poland', 71; Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, 209.

97 Międlar, 'Polska nie ma dla nich żadnej wartości!'. See also Bobako, 'Semi-peripheral Islamophobia', 458.

98 Międlar, 'Bez kompromisów!'.

99 Ibid.

100 Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 78.

101 Międlar, 'Szkoła Frankfurcka na deskach Teatru Powszechnego. Kto zainicjował "długi marsz przez kulturę"?'.

[In 1923] in Weimar [*sic*], Germany, the Frankfurt School was established, a Marxist think-tank set up by Georg Lukacs, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno. The cultural terror launched by the representatives of the Frankfurt School was aimed at denigrating western civilization. The propaganda carried out by the Frankfurt School was packaged in concepts such as 'justice', 'equality', 'brotherhood', 'tolerance', 'freedom' and 'love', and all the manifestations of Christianity were, in line with Theodor Adorno's conception of the 'authoritarian personality', reduced to the categories of racism, fascism and xenophobia.¹⁰²

By transforming their meaning,¹⁰³ Międlar dismisses universalist values as antithetical to the traditional Christian and nationalist ethos, as relativism bent on softening the conservative moral fibre and as an ideology that transforms Christians into weaklings susceptible to external control. In this way, he betrays the classic 'pluralophobia': a fear of cultural pluralism, tolerance and political correctness, which has long been present in the discourse of the Christian far-right in Poland.¹⁰⁴

In unravelling the super-conspiracy, Międlar identifies yet another familiar level: atop the cluster of opponents sits the global Jewish conspiracy,¹⁰⁵ which seeks to implement a 'New World Order' in the nations it deprives of their traditional values.¹⁰⁶ This theory, suffused with political antisemitism, is most elaborately articulated in a post related to the protest that New York rabbis organized to oppose the US ban on entry for nationals of several Muslim countries, which is worth quoting at length:

While Jews outside of Israel seem to be champions of multiculturalism, they have made their own country a chauvinistic ghetto. . . . The mixing of cultures and nationalities is, for Jews, a tool of globalism, that is, the realization of talmudic,¹⁰⁷ and at the same time chauvinistic, postulates aimed at destroying Christian civilization and weakening the strength of nation-states. . . . This position is not denied by the adherents of Judaism . . . who openly talk about the need to destroy the Latin civilization, their only true competitor for world domination, or the need to colonize nation-states associated— to a greater or lesser degree—with Christianity by means of the mass migration of representatives of other cultures. . . . It turns out that the New York protests,

102 Ibid.

103 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 31.

104 Starnawski, 'Nationalist discourse and the ultra-conservative press in contemporary Poland', 76.

105 On the persistence of political antisemitism in Poland, see Antoni Sulek, 'Ordinary Poles look at the Jews', *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 26, no. 2, 2012, 425–44.

106 Barkun, *Culture of Conspiracy*, 39.

107 In antisemitic conspiracy theories, the Talmud is typically seen as a blueprint for achieving world domination (see Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 78).

and—by extension—the multiculturalism promoted by Jews, is not some ‘leftist Utopia’ but a deliberate tool for destroying Christian civilization and nation-states. . . . On the one hand, it is pathetic that Jewish rabbis, portrayed in global media as heroes who fight for ‘social justice’, are in reality pawns in a chauvinistic, hateful game.¹⁰⁸

Thus, in drawing a typically distorted, conspiratorial cognitive map,¹⁰⁹ Międlar interprets globalization, with its complex interdependencies, migrations and multiculturalisms, as a scheme geared towards ensuring the undivided domination of the world by Jews.¹¹⁰ In racializing the omnipotent and power-hungry Jews, Międlar blends political antisemitism with religious antisemitism in making use of the Bible to strip the Jews down to an unchangeable and not-entirely-human essence:¹¹¹ ‘Jewry has transformed throughout the centuries, but I guess nobody denies that their resentment towards Christians . . . has remained unchanged. Jesus became part of that rotten community to destroy it from the foundations up and, consequently, to “make everything new” (cf. Rev. 21:5).’¹¹² In the pseudo-theological light of this religious antisemitism, the ultimate objective of the Jewish conspiracy—the destruction of Christianity and world domination—can be interpreted as a second, this time symbolic, crucifixion. As such, it buttresses ‘the identification of the Jews with the Devil (as Christ-killers)’, and reinforces their image as ‘diabolical plotters’,¹¹³ spearheaded as they are by the Hungarian-American investor, George Soros, openly dubbed as a ‘tool of Satan’.¹¹⁴ This anticipated second crucifixion, however, also spells the Second Coming—the final defeat of the enemy—and thus provides the parameters for the mission of Polish nationalists.

108 Jacek Międlar, ‘Dlaczego Żydom zależy na multikulturalizmie? Protesty rabinów w Nowym Jorku’ (blog), 21 February 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/02/21/dlaczego-zydom-zalezy-na-multikulturalizmie-protesty-rabinow-w-nowym-jorku> (viewed 18 November 2017).

109 Jameson, ‘Cognitive mapping’, 356.

110 Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, 189.

111 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas’ Radio Addresses*, 107.

112 Jacek Międlar, ‘Dlaczego Jezus był żydem? Kontrowersje i dopowiedzenie’ (blog), 11 May 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/05/11/dlaczego-jezus-byl-zydem-kontrowersje-i-dopowiedzenie-wideo> (viewed 22 November 2021).

113 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas’ Radio Addresses*, 125; see also Franz L Neumann, ‘Anxiety and politics’, *tripleC*, vol. 15, no. 2, 2017, 612–36 (623).

114 Jacek Międlar, ‘“Soros jest narzędziem Szatana”! Węgierski rząd eliminuje Georga Sorosa, a “pałka antysemityzmu” idzie w ruch’ (blog), 16 October 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/10/16/soros-jest-narzedziem-szatana-węgierski-rząd-eliminuje-georga-sorosa-a-palka-antysemityzmu-idzie-w-ruch> (viewed 22 November 2021).

The Movement: Polish Catholic nationalists

The movement that Międlar seeks to create is to be composed of Polish Christian-nationalist radicals who are united against the oppression they have endured at the hands of enemies. The very existence of this potential movement is sanctioned, and made sense of, through messianic suffering. Thus, the representations of opponents often seamlessly fade into the descriptions of the Polish nation as the foremost victim of the Jewish conspiracy due to its strong Catholic-nationalist identity: 'the anti-Polish campaign might be the realization of a deliberate plan to destroy our nation'.¹¹⁵ Indeed, anti-Polonism, or 'Polonophobia', 'is one of the cardinal sins of Judaists'.¹¹⁶ By asserting that Jews have been carrying out an 'anti-Polish' campaign for centuries,¹¹⁷ Międlar harks back to the nineteenth-century conspiracy theory of 'Judaeo-Polonia', according to which the true aim of Jews living in Poland was to establish a Jewish state on Polish soil,¹¹⁸ as well as the phantasm of a 'Judeo-Commune' that first emerged during the Polish-Soviet War (1919–20) to suggest that Jews schemed to implant Communism in Poland.¹¹⁹ With this thesis in mind, he devises an ahistorical account that arbitrarily pushes all the Jews who have ever inhabited Poland outside the boundaries of the Polish nation.¹²⁰

Feuds between the Polish and Jewish nations have built up over the centuries. . . . These feuds had already begun at the birth of our statehood when, in the eleventh century, one of the first Jews on Polish territory, instead of engaging in the construction of the new state, which was a kind of El Dorado for Jews, Rabbi Ibrahim ibn Jakub occupied himself with exporting Slavic slaves. . . . Unfortunately, for centuries, despite perfect conditions, Jews were reluctant to assimilate into the Polish nation. During the partitions, they were often the occupiers' officials, and they created their own capital, striving for an

115 Jacek Międlar, 'Jak Żydzi pomagali Niemcom mordować Żydów' (blog), 11 February 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/02/11/jak-zydzi-pomagali-niemcom-mordowac-zydow-niewygodna-prawda> (viewed 22 November 2021).

116 Ibid.; Jacek Międlar, 'Żydzi u boku żołnierzy NSZ. Obalamy mit o antysemityzmie!' (blog), 1 February 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/02/01/zydzi-u-boku-zolnierzy-nsz-obalamy-mit-o-antysemityzmie> (viewed 22 November 2021).

117 For a deconstruction of the curious yet pervasive assumption that Jewish 'anti-Polonism' is what reinforces antisemitism in Poland, see Joanna Tokarska-Bakir, 'How to exit the conspiracy of silence? Social sciences facing the Polish-Jewish relations', *East European Politics and Societies*, vol. 25, no. 1, 2011, 129–52.

118 Iwona Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory: The Jew in Contemporary Poland* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers 1989), 58; Joanna Beata Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other: The Image of the Jew from 1880 to the Present* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press 2006), 250; Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 12.

119 Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 50.

120 See Brian Porter, 'The Catholic nation: religion, identity, and the narratives of Polish history', *Slavic and East European Journal*, vol. 45, no. 2, 2001, 289–99.

advantage in trade and industry, and following the January Uprising (1863) they bought back noble estates, confiscated by the Tsarist administration, for a song. . . . In the twentieth century, Orthodox Jews collaborated with Communists and the Soviets . . . who in 1939 [they] euphorically welcomed to Polish lands.¹²¹

This post is a prelude to the ‘victim/perpetrator reversal’,¹²² which emerges when Międlar announces that Jews, as members of the Sonderkommando, actively participated in carrying out the Holocaust.¹²³ Consumed by self-hatred, Jews project their guilt on to heroic Poles:

Operations of the Sonderkommando units were extreme displays of antisemitic savagery with which, fortunately, Poles did not soil their hands. . . . Th[e current] Polonophobic campaign might be the result of a psychological mechanism called projection, i.e. an attempt by Jews, wet with blood up to their elbows, to shift the blame on to heroic Poles, who more than once sacrificed their lives in the fight against German and Jewish antisemitism.¹²⁴

The ascription of ruthlessness and savagery to Jews linked with ‘anti-Polonism’, identified as the lubricant of the Jewish conspiracy, serves to position the Polish nation as an innocent victim and heroic martyr.¹²⁵ Plugging into Polish messianic nationalism,¹²⁶ Międlar views this suffering as a necessary overture to the Second Coming, imagined as the eternal triumph of Christian civilization and the damnation of its opponents.¹²⁷ Aware of their impending fate at the hands of the Polish ‘Messiah’, the enemies begin to lose their power and reveal their inherent fearful weakness.¹²⁸

We have a history that any country in the world would envy. . . . Our occupiers, both overt and covert . . . are afraid of our exceptionalism . . . Their acts against us are meticulously planned and are the result particularly of

121 Międlar, ‘Czy prezydent Andrzej Duda wezwał władze Izraela do walki z antypolonizmem?’.

122 Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2015), *passim*.

123 While Holocaust denial is hardly possible in the country whose inhabitants witnessed the genocide first-hand, such an outrageous claim is enabled by the fact that Polish complicity in the Holocaust has not been sufficiently processed in the collective memory. See Dan Stone, ‘On neighbours and those knocking at the door: Holocaust memory and Europe’s refugee crisis’, *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 52, nos. 2–3, 2018, 231–43 (235); Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 116–17.

124 Międlar, ‘Jak Żydzi pomagali Niemcom mordować Żydów’; see also Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 85.

125 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas’ Radio Addresses*, 86.

126 Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, 49.

127 Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, 189.

128 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 52.

paralysing fear! Are they by any chance afraid that Poland might become the Messiah of nations?¹²⁹

Most Poles, Międlar acknowledges, are aware neither of the plot against them nor the mission to quash it. This obliviousness is in itself a consequence—and proof—of the Jewish conspiracy whose tentacles penetrate crucial national institutions,¹³⁰ such as the judiciary,¹³¹ the government,¹³² the Catholic Church hierarchy,¹³³ the ‘establishment’,¹³⁴ mainstream media,¹³⁵ NGOs,¹³⁶ and academia.¹³⁷ Given the negligible Jewish presence in Poland,¹³⁸ Międlar either alludes to those ‘who change their names’ or

- 129 Jacek Międlar, “Nasze ulice, nasze kamienice.” *Moje przemówienie podczas marszu we Wrocławiu (11.11.2017)* (blog), 27 November 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/11/27/nasze-ulice-nasze-kamienice-moje-przemowienie-podczas-marszu-we-wroclawiu-11-11-2017-wideo-i-tekst>; see also Jacek Międlar, “Cytując Talmud robi z nas oprawców.” *B’nai B’rith idzie ze mną na wojnę. Są jak zorganizowana grupa przestępcza!* (blog), 13 December 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/12/13/cytujac-talmud-robi-z-nas-oprawcow-bnai-brith-idzie-ze-mna-na-wojnesa-jak-zorganizowana-grupa-przestepcza> (both viewed 22 November 2021).
- 130 Billig, ‘Rhetoric of the conspiracy theory’, 26. On the ‘endeavour to maintain secrecy’, see Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 79–81.
- 131 Jacek Międlar, ‘Dlaczego sąd wpuścił żydów, a zamknął drzwi przed Polakami? Pokrętnie tłumaczenia prezesa Macieja Skórniaka’ (blog), 7 April 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/04/07/dlaczego-sad-wpuscil-zydow-a-zamknal-drzwi-przed-polakami-pokrętnie-tlumaczenie-prezesa-macieja-skorniaka-emisjatv>; Jacek Międlar, “Nigdy się nie poddam!” Prosto z więzienia WYWIAD z Piotrem Rybakiem. O planach na przyszłość, ataku na jego najbliższych i . . . Pawle Bednarzu’ (reposted interview), 23 November 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/11/23/nigdy-sie-nie-poddam-prosto-z-wiezienia-wywiad-z-piotrem-rybakiem-o-planach-na-przyszlosc-ataku-na-jego-najblizszych-i-pawle-bednarzu> (both viewed 22 November 2021).
- 132 Jacek Międlar, ‘Komitet Żydów Amerykańskich z siedzibą w Warszawie. Kogo do Europy sprowadza polski MSZ?’ (blog), 17 March 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/03/17/komitet-zydow-amerykanskich-z-siedziba-w-warszawie-kogo-do-europy-sprowadza-polski-msz> (viewed 22 November 2021).
- 133 Międlar, ‘Bez kompromisów!’; Jacek Międlar, “Zabić księży!” Prymas Polski na smyczy . . .’ (blog), 19 October 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/10/19/zabic-ksiezy-prymas-polski-na-smyczy> (viewed 22 November 2021).
- 134 Jacek Międlar, ‘Dość tego! Narodowe Muzeum Żydów w Amsterdamie o „polskim obozie pracy”! „Napisałismy to świadomie”’ (blog), 29 August 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/08/29/dosc-tego-narodowe-muzeum-zydow-w-amsterdamie-o-polskim-obozie-pracy-napisalismsy-to-swiadomie> (viewed 22 November 2021).
- 135 Międlar, ‘Żydzi u boku żołnierzy NSZ’.
- 136 Międlar, ‘Polska nie ma dla nich żadnej wartości!’.
- 137 Jacek Międlar, ‘Czy Franciszka i Baumana dzieli tylko krzesło?’ (blog), 26 January 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/01/26/czy-franciszka-i-baumana-dzieli-tylko-krzeslo> (viewed 22 November 2021).
- 138 On the tendency among ‘ordinary Poles’ to overestimate significantly the Jewish presence in Poland, see Sułek, ‘Ordinary Poles look at the Jews’, 427.

invents Jewish proxies (the ‘Shabbes goys’).¹³⁹ Such innuendos serve as a litmus test to separate those who are duped by the plotters from those who see through the conspiracy.¹⁴⁰

The latter are invited to join Międlar in his twofold quest. On a discursive plane, the movement sets out to reclaim nationalism from the ‘lefties’ who seek to vilify it by infusing it with false meanings such as ‘blood, war, evil and intolerance’.¹⁴¹ In contrast, Międlar argues, ‘Polish nationalism’ is a ‘particularly dynamic patriotism, devoid of any racist and chauvinist attitude’.¹⁴² Therefore, it is ‘coherent with the official doctrine of the Catholic Church’ in that it ‘respects other nations’ and ‘is truly noble’.¹⁴³ Once the Polish Catholic-nationalist movement has endured the necessary persecution,¹⁴⁴ it will unite with its counterparts across Europe in a nationalist international,¹⁴⁵ for ‘we now live in the end times, and it is the final bell for the national-Christian unification’.¹⁴⁶ Then, the crusade will move to a ‘physical’ plane to set in motion a very distinct mode of ‘interreligious dialogue’:

Obviously, if the other side is aggressive and hateful towards us, our duty is to incapacitate the opponent who is a real threat to our loved ones, which unfortunately is rather likely in the case of Jews and Islamists, given the[ir] doctrine that openly calls for hatred towards Christians.¹⁴⁷

Similar to this perverted chain of projections, Międlar ascribes his own hateful attitude to his opponents and rationalizes violence, both symbolic

139 Międlar, “‘Nasze ulice, nasze kamienice’”; Międlar, ‘Bez kompromisów!’; see also Geneviève Zubrzycki, “‘Poles-Catholics’ and “symbolic Jews’’: Jewishness as social closure in Poland’, *Studies in Contemporary Jewry*, vol. 21, 2005, 65–87.

140 Międlar, ‘Dlaczego Żydom zależy na multikulturalizmie?’.

141 Międlar, ‘Bez kompromisów!’.

142 Jacek Międlar, ‘Andrzej Duda na manowcach! Lewym sierpowym w Polskę i Polaków’ (blog), 15 November 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/11/15/andrzej-duda-na-manowcach-lewym-sierpowym-w-polske-i-polakow> (viewed 22 November 2021).

143 Międlar, ‘Bez kompromisów!’.

144 Jacek Międlar, ‘Bunt starego milicjanta, czyli kolejna próba uderzenia w postawy patriotyczne, kibiców i rząd’, (blog), 23 August 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/08/23/bunt-starego-milicjanta-czyli-kolejna-proba-uderzenia-w-postawy-patriotyczne-kibicow-i-rzad> (viewed 22 November 2021).

145 On the ‘transnationalism’ of the far right and its amplification by online media, see Gavan Titley, *Racism and Media* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage 2019), 102–3.

146 Jacek Międlar, “‘Polska i chrześcijaństwo to dla nich ekstremizm’”. Czego boi się neobolszewia? Komentarz po zatrzymaniu w WB’ (blog), 4 July 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/07/04/polska-i-chrzescijanstwo-to-dla-nich-ekstremizm-czego-boi-sie-neobolszewia-komentarz-po-zatrzymaniu-w-wb> (viewed 22 November 2021); see also Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 83–4; and Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 30.

147 Międlar, ‘Czy jestem gotowy na dialog z innowiercami?’.

and physical, as self-defence.¹⁴⁸ Consequently, he hints at the solution to 'Discontent': to turn the tables, to torment the enemies and, eventually, to purge them from the world since, in a Manichaeian vision, no dialogue or compromise is possible with absolute evil.¹⁴⁹

The Leader: Międlar as a martyr

The movement, in Międlar's account, will recruit its ranks from among Poland's nationalists, who are considered to be the most persecuted faction of the oppressed nation. Thus, martyrdom is both its *raison d'être* and its *modus operandi*.¹⁵⁰ Międlar clearly envisions himself as the principal martyr, setting an example to be followed by others. He is persecuted by those who are the pawns of the conspiracy: primarily the Catholic hierarchs but also certain politicians and activists.¹⁵¹ The way he sees it, his crime is 'speaking the truth' and preaching conservative values: '[P]lease note that, for speaking the truth, I was treated worse, especially for preaching national values, than . . . a priest . . . who raped a thirteen-year-old girl for several months and who was never suspended.'¹⁵² Yet, he endures.

To spin this tale, Międlar extends the global super-conspiracy, which targets the Christian way of life in general and the Polish nation in particular, into his personal milieu.¹⁵³ In doing so, he draws overstretched parallels between his suspension from the priesthood and the 1980s murder of a priest associated with the Solidarity trade union by the Communist security services:

. . . the Church hierarchs who at any cost want to . . . tie the 'rebellious' priests up, to 'cut off' their tongues, and to throw them into the abyss of 'absence'.

148 Adorno, *The Psychological Technique of Martin Luther Thomas' Radio Addresses*, 11; see also Ahmed, 'Affective economies', 118.

149 See Byford, *Conspiracy Theories*, 82; and Hofstadter, *The Paranoid Style in American Politics and Other Essays*, 31.

150 See Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 35.

151 Jacek Międlar, 'Chciał zniszczyć Macierewicza i Kamińskiego! Teraz oskarża mnie w procesie z Scheuring-Wielgus. KIM JEST PROKURATOR?' (blog), 6 April 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/04/06/chcial-zniszczyc-macierewicza-i-kaminskiego-teraz-oskarza-mnie-w-procesie-z-scheuring-wielgus-kim-jest-oskarzyciel>; Jacek Międlar, 'Chcieli mnie oskarżyć za miłość do Ojczyzny! Prokuratura Krajowa interweniuje. Gleichgewicht, Gawel i Dutkiewicz, głupio wam?' (blog), 6 September 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/09/06/chcieli-mnie-oskarzyc-za-milosc-do-ojczyzny-prokuratura-krajowa-interweniuje-gleichgewicht-gawel-i-dutkiewicz-glupio-wam> (both viewed 23 November 2021).

152 Jacek Międlar, 'Fakty, o których mówię po raz pierwszy! OBSZERNY WYWIAD. "Pocałowanie Koranu byłoby dla mnie równoznaczne z pocałowaniem Mein Kampf"' (reposted interview), 24 January 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/01/24/fakty-o-ktorych-mowie-po-raz-pierwszy-obszerny-wywiad-pocalowanie-koranu-byloby-dla-mnie-rownoznacne-z-pocalowaniem-mein-kampf-dla-wmeritum-pl> (viewed 23 November 2021).

153 Lowenthal and Guterman, *Prophets of Deceit*, 128.

Because, is it not almost the same, only not paid for with blood . . . to deprive a priest of the opportunity to preach the truth, to close him up in a monastery and, finally . . . to suspend him? Is this not what has been done to me? . . . Blood was not spilled, but an ‘uncomfortable’ and ‘rebellious puppy’ was removed for good. . . . Harassment and suspension are types of modern murder, committed not by the [security service] functionaries but by superiors who, in the name of Christ, should stand up for the truth and defend their own ‘household’.¹⁵⁴

This obsession with persecution goes hand in hand with delusions of grandeur, prompting Międlar to view himself in the likeness of Jesus Christ: ‘The harder I was hit, the more my faith grew and the stronger I felt. . . . Obviously, it is sad on a human level but, on the other hand, the words of the Gospel come to mind: Jesus on the road to Golgotha was *also* almost alone.’¹⁵⁵

Once he made this leap, the next step was easy: Międlar does not hesitate to portray himself as a personification of both the Polish nation and the Catholic religion. A post about his detention at Stanstead airport in London, titled ‘Poland and Christianity Ridiculed!’ is telling here.¹⁵⁶ Such self-presentation extends the imaginary persecution of the leader to the whole nation and to religion as a constitutive part thereof. As such, this adds extra urgency to Międlar’s call for retribution.

Conspiracy-powered hatred in far-right radicalism at times of crisis

This article reconstructs a cognitive map of the social world manufactured by the radical variety of Polish Christian far-right discourse. As a theoretical contribution, I pair two bodies of literature that are rarely used together: research on the ‘paranoid style’ and its conspiratorial aspect in particular, and the Frankfurt School’s analyses of authoritarian communication. Empirically, I explore the blog of a former Catholic priest, Jacek Międlar, who galvanized Polish public opinion as a vocal spokesperson of the anti-Muslim cause during the 2015 ‘refugee crisis’.

On the whole, Międlar’s discourse is a selective and confused combination of global conspiracy theories: including both persistent ideas, such as the Jewish plot to control the world that undergirds political antisemitism, and

154 Międlar, ‘“Zabić księży!”’.

155 Międlar, ‘Fakty, o których mówię po raz pierwszy!’ (emphasis added).

156 Jacek Międlar ‘Kpiny z Polski i chrześcijaństwa! Oszustwo Border Force! DOKUMENTY i ciąg dalszy wstrząsających faktów o pobycie na londyńskim lotnisku’ (blog), 26 February 2017, available at <https://jacekmiedlar.pl/2017/02/26/kpiny-z-polski-o-i-chrzescijanstwa-oszustwo-border-force-dokumenty-i-ciag-dalszych-wstrzasajacych-faktow-o-pobycie-na-londyńskim-lotnisku> (viewed 23 November 2021).

newer inventions, such as the New World Order. Accordingly, his blog offers an eschatological tale that foresees the final battle between good and evil, understood as Polish Catholic-nationalism and the Jewish anti-Polish conspiracy, respectively. Międlar's world is binary, split between a very narrow group of the suffering Catholic-nationalist 'we' and an ever-expanding cabal of the oppressive 'them'. The latter are represented as bent on uprooting conservative values and, consequently, making people more malleable and susceptible to Jewish control. While the ruthless plotters target anyone who stands in their way, they pay very close attention to Poland, whose commitment to nationalist and Christian values they find particularly threatening. Yet, once they have endured the suffering that has been inflicted on them, the Polish Catholic-nationalists will quash the conspiracy, paving the way for the Second Coming of conservative Christianity and nationalism. Predictably, Międlar locates himself at the heart of this crusade: indeed, he constructs and lays bare to his readers the whole hostile world simply as explanation for his own failure in pursuing a career in the priesthood, which was conditioned by the empirical reality that Catholic bigotry is losing traction, both within the Church and without.¹⁵⁷

In this story, Międlar recycles traditional Polish nationalist metanarratives. The placing of the Jews at the centre of Polish misfortunes dates back to the period of partitions and heated debates on the 'Jewish question' in the late nineteenth century when there was a sizeable Jewish population in Poland.¹⁵⁸ Similarly, Międlar owes his very public persona to the thesis positing a congruence between 'the fight of the Polish national camp against Jewry' and the interests and teaching of the Catholic Church; this was articulated in 1935 in a nationalist weekly,¹⁵⁹ and again repeated in the late 1990s in the debate surrounding the 'war of the crosses' controversy that drove a wedge between Catholic and Jewish communities and revived the mythology of an anti-Polish Jewish conspiracy.¹⁶⁰ This mythology, of which Międlar makes the most, is predicated on the enduring fictions of 'Judaeo-Polonia' and the 'Judaeo-Commune'. Historically, it has led to accusations against Jews of orchestrating student demonstrations¹⁶¹ and 'smear campaigns' in the 1960s, supposedly with an eye to 'the multilation of the [Polish] nation's borders and memory, its body and soul'.¹⁶² Furthermore, the optimistic prediction of the final defeat of the enemy, which resonates with a messianic tinge of Polish nationalism, is pulled from low-brow inter-war literature.¹⁶³

157 Neumann, 'Anxiety and politics', 626.

158 Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, 188; Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 41.

159 J., 'Katolicyzm, rasizm i sprawa żydowska', *Myśl Narodowa*, 15 December 1935.

160 Zubrzycki, *The Crosses of Auschwitz*, 167.

161 Michlic, *Poland's Threatening Other*, 250.

162 Steinlauf, *Bondage to the Dead*, 85; see also Irwin-Zarecka, *Neutralizing Memory*, 62.

163 Hertz, *The Jews in Polish Culture*, 190.

Finally, I want to conclude by situating this case more firmly in the context of global developments. First, in terms of its racist content as well as confused syncretism, Międlar's discourse is reminiscent of the online presence of the far right worldwide.¹⁶⁴ Second, his use of the Internet to mainstream radical views and embed them in the media landscape connects him to the global Alt.Right network.¹⁶⁵ Third, the analysis revealed that for Międlar—in a way reminiscent of Michael Billig's investigation of British fascists in the 1980s¹⁶⁶—the timely appeal to racist sentiments against would-be Muslim arrivals served as a pretext for laying out a conspiratorial, deeply antisemitic world-view. Fourth, it is symptomatic that Międlar's paranoid style and conspiratorial thinking gained currency in relation to the moral panic that was stirred up by the arrival of asylum-seekers in 2015. Typically, this mode of cognitive mapping becomes appealing as a coping mechanism in times of crisis, conflict, dramatic changes and social upheavals, the complexity of which cannot be comprehended, and conjunctural causes cannot be grasped.¹⁶⁷ At such moments, demagoguery harnesses the resentment that has been caused by the social context, which is beyond the individual's control, and canalizes it as prejudice against people whose relative weakness renders them controllable, such as migrants and minorities. At its peak, this kind of distorted cognitive mapping might potentially turn lethal, but its explanatory power and mass appeal eventually wane, as has happened to Międlar, who was demoted from anti-Muslim rhetorical trailblazer to indicted antisemite.¹⁶⁸

Alas, it seems that conspiratorial thinking lined with the most virulent forms of hatred works as a useful tool of populist politics, which survives on manufacturing crises and circulating fear.¹⁶⁹ While public attitudes towards refugees and asylum-seekers in Poland have measurably improved,¹⁷⁰ the conspiratorial hatred has been redeployed against the LGBTQ+ community. Indeed, the politically sanctioned anti-LGBTQ+ campaign that portrays the community not as people but as a destructive 'ideology' hostile towards conservative and, above all, family values have

164 Back, 'Aryans reading Adorno', 632.

165 Titley, *Racism and Media*, 102.

166 Billig, 'Rhetoric of the conspiracy theory', 23.


167 Van Prooijen and Douglas, 'Conspiracy theories as part of history', 327.

168 Jacek Harłukowicz, 'Polityk PiS: "Jacek Międlar zaczął nas atakować"'. Koniec bezkarności kaznodziei antysemitów', *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 25 December 2019, available at <https://wroclaw.wyborcza.pl/wroclaw/7,35771,25543750,polityk-pis-jacek-miedlar-zaczal-nas-atakowac-koniec-bezkarnosci.html> (viewed 23 November 2021).

169 Ahmed, 'Affective economies', 127.

170 Leszek Rudziński, 'Sondaż: Polacy zmielili zdanie ws. przyjmowania uchodźców', *Polska Times*, 22 February 2021, available at <https://polskatimes.pl/sondaz-polacy-zmielili-zdanie-ws-przymowania-uchodzcow/ar/c1-15454664> (viewed 23 November 2021).

rendered Poland the most homophobic country in the EU for the second year running.¹⁷¹

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171 'Poland', in ILGA-Europe, *Annual Review of the Human Rights Situation of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex People Covering the Period from January to December 2020* (Brussels: ILGA-Europe 2021), available on the *Rainbow Europe* website at <https://rainbow-europe.org/annual-review> (viewed 23 November 2021).