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## FOR THE SAKE OF FAMILY AND RELIGION. NATIONALIST-RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE ON THE CONVENTION ON PREVENTING AND COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE<sup>1</sup>

This article focuses on the current wave of the cultural war in Poland which was triggered after the government's decision to ratify the European Council Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It examines the conservative, nationalist-religious discourse present in two daily mainstream Polish newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*. This article begins with a description of the position of the Catholic Church in Poland, its role and main discursive strategies used in the debate on the Convention. Then it underlines the significance of the nationalist-religious discourse for developing gender equality policies, focusing on an essentialist vision of femininity and masculinity, importance of the family as a private matter and an influential force and diversion from cultural and structural factors that foster violence.

Keywords: gender wars, Convention on preventing and combating violence against women, nationalist-religious discourse, gender equality policies

### INTRODUCTION

The Convention on preventing and combating violence against women presents a comprehensive approach to gender-based violence. It provides a broader definition of violence by shedding light on physical, sexual, psychological and economic violence in public and private spheres. More importantly, it emphasises the cultural and structural conditions of violence, recognising that “violence against women is a manifestation of historically unequal power relations between women and men, which have led to domination over, and discrimination against, women by men and to the prevention of the full advancement of women” and that “violence against women is one of the crucial social mechanisms by

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which women are forced into a subordinate position compared to men” (Convention 2011: Preamble). Gendered violence is linked not only with social justice but also with gender inequality. However, although it is clearly stated that women and girls are prone to higher risk of gender-based violence, the Convention does not question that men may also suffer from domestic violence.

Even though the Convention was opened for signature on 11 May 2011, this was not noticed in Polish public debate. The discussion ensued in March 2012 when Donald Tusk, the then Polish Prime Minister, announced that the government would make a decision regarding the ratification of the Convention “soon”. This statement attracted adverse comments and sparked off an intense and heated debate. Jarosław Gowin, the then Ministry of Justice, stated that the aim of the Convention is to promote “same-sex marriage” and “the Convention stands in direct conflict with a “healthy, traditional model’ for marriage (as a union of one man and one woman) and child-rearing allegedly delineated by the Polish constitution”. He also pointed out that it is the concept of gender which gives this document its ideological character (cf. Gajos-Kaniewska 2012; Siedlecka 2012a). When his opinion hit the headlines of newspapers it received a great deal of attention. Since then, “gender” has become the heart of the media coverage. The debate has been shaped by right-wing and conservative circles (politicians, journalists, conservative women’s and pro-family organizations) and some members of the Roman Catholic Church who have opposed the Convention (the conservative, nationalist-religious discourse) while feminists, pro-equality activists, academics, women’s organizations working in the field of equality and the Plenipotentiary for Equal Treatment have emphasised its importance and relevance for gender-equality policy (the counter-discourse based on individual rights and equality).

The controversy over the Convention surrounds the definition of gender understood as “the socially constructed roles, behaviours, activities and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for women and men” (Convention 2011: Article 3c) and the obligation imposed on all states to “take the necessary measures to promote changes in the social and cultural patterns of behaviour of women and men with a view to eradicating prejudices, customs, traditions and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority of women or on stereotyped roles for women and men” (Convention 2011: Article 12.1). By focusing on the concept of gender, the debate on the Convention has opened a new arena of cultural war in Poland, alongside gender-equality education, reproductive rights and abortion, in-vitro fertilization and biopolitics. According to Elżbieta Korolczuk (2014) this war on gender can be seen as transnational and multi-faceted as it has been occurring in many countries such as Canada, the US, France and Ukraine. It has, however, a local colour shaping the narratives and the intensity of the discursive processes through which the notions of gender regime, gender equality policy, citizenship and democracy are (re-)produced.

Following the observation on the debate in two mainstream daily newspapers, *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, this article reflects on the conservative, nationalist-religious discourse shaped by the Catholic Church and right-wing circles. It examines how the Convention is spoken of: What arguments structure the discourse on the Convention? How does the Catholic Church construct itself by producing this discourse? What vision of gender equality policy emerges from the nationalist-religious discourse on the Convention? To address

these questions, the article is organized to first provide information about the methodological approach. It is then followed by an analysis of the role of the Catholic Church and the argumentative strategies used in the nationalist-religious discourse. In the last part, the article discusses the implications of the discourse for gender equality policy.

## METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

This article offers an analysis of the Convention-based debate which took place between May 2011 and April 2015 in two mainstream daily newspapers: *Gazeta Wyborcza* and *Rzeczpospolita*, a time when a gender war – or cultural war – broke out with a vengeance. These newspapers were chosen because of their high circulation rates, the number of readers and their influence on public opinion since – as Barbara Jabłońska (2006: 64) notices – “media are the producers and distributors of knowledge which enables people to find an orientation in the world, and for many people, they are the main source of information”. It is worth noting that only articles which referred to the Convention were chosen for the final sample while articles on other aspects of the war on gender, such as reproductive rights and gender-equality education, were excluded. Therefore, the analysis is based on 67 articles and media interviews from *Gazeta Wyborcza* and 61 from *Rzeczpospolita*. The articles and interviews were not published evenly over the time period – most of them were published in relation to political events such as the Prime Minister’s declaration to sign the Convention (March 2012), the Minister of Justice’s statement against the ratification of the Convention (April 2012), signing of the Convention (December 2012), the parliamentary discussions on the bill introducing the Convention (August 2014–March 2015) and the ratification of the Convention by the President (March–April 2015). The Convention was also a subject of media coverage in 2013 (especially in *Rzeczpospolita*) as the war on gender continued and the Catholic Church and conservative politicians mobilized to fight so-called “gender ideology”.

While there are different approaches to the analysis of discourse in social sciences (cf. Wodak and Krzyżanowski 2008; Wodak and Meyer 2001), this study uses feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA). Such an approach brings together feminist study and critical discourse analysis (CDA) to provide better understanding of how discourse can produce, reproduce, and sustain in social practice the relations among gender, ideology and power (Lazar 2007a: 1). CDA provides an analytical approach to the study of power, dominance, social order and discrimination in social and political contexts; it emphasizes that discourse is shaped by sociocultural and political factors, and also that discourse shapes social reality, identity and relations between people (Wodak and Meyer 2001; van Dijk 2001; Fairclough 1992, 2003). Teun van Dijk (1993: 131) notices that CDA offers “pragmatics, semiotics and discourse analysis to go beyond mere description and explanation, and pay more explicit attention to the socio-political and cultural presuppositions and implications of discourse”. This approach constitutes a basis for the framework of FCDA, which indicates the need to form “feminist politics of articulation” (Wetherell 1999 quoted in Lazar 2007a: 3) to allow the theoretization and analysis of the oppressive nature of gender understood as a concept underlying various social practices. As Michelle Lazar (2007b: 142) summarizes: “[t]he aim of feminist critical discourse studies, therefore, is to show up the

complex, subtle, and sometimes not so subtle, ways in which frequently taken-for-granted gendered assumptions and hegemonic power relations are discursively produced, sustained, negotiated, and challenged in different contexts and communities”.

This study adopts a framework of FCDA proposed by Michelle Lazar (2007a, 2007b) which is built upon five elements: feminist analytical activism, gender as analytical structure, complexity of gender and power relations, discourse in the (de)construction of gender, and critical reflexivity as praxis. Her approach highlights that FCDA is a form of social action, a political project addressing social injustice and inequalities (cf. van Dijk 2001; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Lazar 2007a, 2007b). Of central importance for FCDA is its emancipatory role: it is not limited to the theoretical analysis of social inequalities but is motivated by the need to challenge patriarchal social order. Through the analysis of discourses, it aims at developing critical awareness and strategies of resistance, which would lead to changing the unequal balance of power between women and men. It questions the dualism of the gender structure based upon the hierarchical relation of domination, which privileges men in terms of having access to political, economic and social capital. Moreover, FCDA addresses multiple inequalities by studying gender not as a separate social category but as intersecting with race, ethnicity, sexuality, social class, age and disability, to name a few (cf. Crenshaw 1989; Ferree 2009; Yuval-Davis 1997). Such an approach allows examination of how power relations affect different groups of women and men and “how gender ideology and gendered relations of power get (re)produced, negotiated, and contested in representations of social practices, in social relationships between people, and in people’s social and personal identities in texts and talk” (Lazar 2007b: 150). On this basis, Michelle Lazar (2007a: 11, 2007b: 150) emphasizes the need to address the principle of “gender relationality” and “gender performativity”. While applying these ideas in research, it is necessary to look at the ways of “doing gender” in societies, as well as at the forms of control of knowledge which influence the interpretation of the world and the participants’ power over and access to the discourses which are produced (cf. van Dijk 1993).

## ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH IN POLAND: MORAL AUTHORITY OR POLITICAL FORCE?

Since the conservative, nationalist-religious discourse has largely dominated the debate, it is interesting to briefly look at the position of one of the most important actors who triggered and carried out the debate, namely the Roman Catholic Church in Poland. Although there is a formal separation of church and state, the Catholic Church has played a central role in Polish history and society. Mirosława Grabowska (2008) claims that “the Catholic Church in Poland does not have any political power but has enormous influence over authorities in power”. In her opinion, this situation can be described as an “endorsed church” where “the fact that the Church represents the majority of society is acknowledged and the role played by the Church historically is credited by society. The Catholic Church is symbolically honoured, for example, with the Concordat” (Grabowska 2008). The privileged situation of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland is also a result of its role during Communism and the transformation period, leading to its growing influence on public debate as well

as intervention in the area of morality and legislation. This process of the Catholic Church gaining real power has not been questioned during Poland's accession to the European Union (EU) by the political parties which, in order to secure the support of the Church and a significant group of (Catholic) voters, made substantial compromises related, amongst others, to gender equality policy and women's rights, especially reproductive rights (*List stu kobiet* 2002; Heinen and Portet 2009: 20). Up until now, the dominant position of the Catholic Church has not been challenged by the authorities because "Catholicism in Poland is something more and something less than religion. Something more, because it is not only a faith but a way of being, of perceiving the world, a way of classifying people, a subject of fashion, fascination, snobbery, an open tool of power and hidden tool of censorship (and certainly auto-censorship). It is a pillar of the dominant model of upbringing and social relationships, a collection of slogans and political statements for a variety of parties, not necessarily only right-wing. It is much less than religious faith, because it very often comes down to shallow rituals" (Środa 2007: 654).

Although there is a widespread acceptance of the presence of the Church in the public spheres (e.g. religious education in school, participation of the clergy in state ceremonies, consecration of public places) and its public pronouncement on moral role issues, the political activity of the Church has been criticised over the past years. According to a poll taken in 2015, 55% of Poles thought that the Church should not take positions on legislation voted in the Sejm and 84% were against the Church instructing people how to vote in elections (CBOS 2015b). Moreover, there is also a discord between the Church's teachings and the views of Poles. For instance, the majority of Polish society questions the Church's teaching on family-related issues such as in-vitro fertilization, contraception, abortion and invalidating marriage (CBOS 2015a). Despite growing criticism of the Church's teaching among Poles, the Church's hierarchs have continued to view its political engagement as necessary. During the debate on the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence, the Church, together with right-wing and conservative politicians (especially Jarosław Gowin and Beata Kempa), became one of the most important actors shaping the political scene by introducing religious and moral arguments. It openly intervened in the gender equality policy by calling for the withdrawal of the Convention from the ratification process: open letters and position statements were issued by the Episcopate (including the letters addressed to the President and MPs), bishop's letters were read during sermons, a lecture delivered by priest Dariusz Oko was organized in the Parliament by the "Stop gender ideology" Committee and interviews with Church leaders were published in newspapers. The words of Casanova (2009: 15) apply once again in the case of the debate on the Convention:

Indeed, religious politics and the politics of gender appear to be so ubiquitously entangled that it is not surprising that so many analysts have even been tempted to interpret what they construct as a singular global resurgence of religious "fundamentalism" in all religious traditions as primarily a patriarchal reaction against the common global threat of gender equality, the emancipation of women, and feminism.

## THE STRATEGIES OF THE NATIONALIST-RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE

Since the beginning, the debate on the Convention has not revolved around violence against women and domestic violence as much as around the concept of gender. This is reflected in the main strategy adopted in the conservative, nationalist-religious discourse based on the arguments evoking anxiety around gender. Gender is seen as foreign notion, conflicting with natural law and threatening to Polish culture and civilisation. It undermines the traditional roles of women and men and thereby – the traditional social order (*Konwencja może pomóc...* 2015; Pietryga 2013). The Catholic Church in Poland and the right-wing circles' position is outspoken: the traditional family is the foundation of the society and the Convention has been demonised as a regulation introducing gender and therefore destroying family by leading to loosening family ties and introducing its alternative models. This is illustrated in the following fragments:

[Archbishop Hoser's words why the Convention is dangerous] The Convention, in a package of a problem of aggression, introduces a new definition of sex. This definition suggests that the traditional social roles of women and men are stereotypes and stereotypes should be fought. The traditional family generates violence because the roles of father and mother are asymmetrical, belittling woman's dignity. In practice, it means a transformation of society through the transformation of traditional structures, which have always existed in the history of humanity. The Convention is to form other, considered as equivalent, forms of family, namely same-sex marriage or a marriage with several people. This is a programmed deregulation of society. (*Grozi nam...* 2012)

We, the Forum of Polish Women, believe that a feminist definition of sex, undermining its biological aspect, threatens family and marital relations. Ties, which – it is worth remembering – are protected by the Constitution. (*Konwencja ograniczy...* 2012)

To intensify the sense of threat, a high level of hostility and aggressiveness of the language describing the Convention and particularly the notion of gender, is applied in the rhetoric in the conservative discourse. This strategy of using hyperbolic language aims at mobilising political support against the gender equality policies and shaping a vision of nation and citizenship (cf. Radkowska-Walkowicz 2014; Środa 2010; Zielińska 2004).

The strategy aimed at evoking the sense of being under threat is intertwined with the strategy to diminish the authority of the European Union and Europe. In the nationalist-religious discourse, the negative image and influence of Europe and the EU is clearly visible. The Archbishop Józef Michalik, the head of Poland's Episcopate, portrays the Convention in the following way: "An enormous lie which we took from the European Union by accepting the convention on violence, that culture, religion begets violence" (Wiśniewska 2013). Not surprisingly, Poland is juxtaposed with laic Europe which cunningly tries to impose values endangering Polish tradition, culture and religion. This strategy, used also during Poland's accession to the European Union, is seen in the following comment made by Bishop Ryczan and quoted in an article published in *Gazeta Wyborcza*:

It [the Convention] limits the rights of parents to bring up their children, deceitfully introduces the ideology of gender. After all, in Poland, a woman is more respected than in other European

countries. Ladies and gentlemen MPs from all political groups, do not touch upon the Polish family. Family and family home are a bastion of Polishness, patriotism, tradition, development, faith. [...] Why does Poland need such a bill? Europe has no authority to reach the Polish family with its leftist's hand. Unfortunately, it cannot be defended by the mass media. The voice of Radio Maryja and Trwam TV is blessed but what does it mean in the face of an armada of laic media? It is sad because it is happening in a Catholic country. (Mamoń 2014)

The arguments used in the strategy aimed at diminishing the authority of the EU and Europe point out that the Convention does not provide support for women suffering from domestic violence (Grochal 2015; Pietryga 2012, 2014), but it is only another example of transposition of European law resulting in the loss of state sovereignty. First, the Convention enables a foreign institution – GREVIO – to control and influence the Polish family. Second, the Convention will impose its own standards enabling pro-equality movements and activists to redefine the boundaries of belonging and moral discourse shaping a particular vision of democracy in Poland based on European left-liberal discourse emphasising tolerance, equality and justice.

The conservative discourse created by the opponents of the Convention is also legitimised by a reference to law. The Catholic Church and the right-wing conservative circles claim that there is no need to implement a new law as the current national regulations cover all issues mentioned in the Convention.

All anti-discrimination standards mentioned in this document [Convention] have already been implemented in Poland. From the technical point of view, there is nothing new apart from the ideological paradigm and the commitment to social engineering in an area which until now was treated as a purely private sphere and free from state intervention. (Stepkowski 2015)

The Convention as a whole is presented in the nationalist-religious discourse as anticonstitutional (Siedlecka 2014; Klausziński 2014). Primarily, the opponents of the Convention refer to Article 18 of the Constitution on the protection of marriage, family, motherhood and parenthood claiming that the Convention violates it by imposing on a state an obligation to combat gender stereotypes and cultural practices which put women in an underprivileged situation. To counterbalance the arguments presented in the equality discourse, they also argue that women and men are equally prone to violence and that 'promoting' the images of women as victims may undermine the attention paid to acts of violence against men. They conclude that the Convention can lead to discrimination against men, and to violation of the constitutional measures of gender equality. Moreover, the Convention is presented as detrimental for exercising other individual rights guaranteed in the Constitution. This belief is illustrated, amongst others, in the following quotation:

The government intends to equip the police with the possibility of issuing an order to leave the premises and a restraining order. Only a prosecutor acting under the supervision of the court currently has this power. This problem is important because the idea is that a police officer acting without the supervision of a prosecutor or a court will be given power which drastically violates the property law, the right to privacy, respect for family life, and freedom of movement. (Banasiuk 2014)

The strategy referring to legal provision is further based on the assumption that the Convention violates national law because it does not abide by Christian values and principles shaping the Constitution. To prove the lack of suitability of the Convention, the then Vice-Minister of Justice Michał Królikowski argued that the Convention violates human dignity inscribed in the Polish Constitution, which in his opinion is based on Christian personalism and Christianity – on family. Marzena Wróbel, an MP, argues that the Convention is against the Polish Constitution and undermines the principles of Christianity, the model of the traditional family and the role of women. She further asserts: “I do not wish anybody to liberate me from my tradition, culture and the history of my nation” (Tutak-Goll 2014).

The nationalist-religious discourse also attempts to devalue the pro-equality opinions and actions. Although the opponents of the Convention admit that this legal document includes “unquestionable legitimate demands because any form of violence, and particularly violence against women, is repugnant and it should be definitely fought” (*Rozmowa Rzeczpospolitej...* 2012), they disagree with the diagnosis of the sources of and measures to combat violence proposed in the Convention. This line of reasoning is further justified by quoting the statistic: the level of violence is higher outside the family – in cohabiting couples and in countries with better legal regulations like Sweden (Terlikowski 2015). This data, however, is often taken out of context, presented without proper explanation and used to support one-sided judgements. To further devalue the actions undertaken by proponents of the Convention, the argument related to misuse of public funding is employed. The Convention is presented as a new way of getting funding from the state (and thereby – from citizens’ taxes) by pro-equality activists to promote gender ideology and to spend “a nice time at international symposiums, conferences and debates” (Pietryga 2013). In some articles it can be seen that the conservative discourse takes a more aggressive and emotional tone: “Gender equality is heresy” (Olejnik 2014) – admits Beata Kempa of the Law and Justice political party. Remarkably, children – the future of the nation – play a central role in this strategy. As illustrated in the following quotation, they are shown as vulnerable, confused about their gender roles, and in need of protection from the influence of equality education:

Beata Kempa: Why there is so much fuss about the ratification of the Convention on preventing of domestic violence which foregrounds sociocultural gender rather than biological sex? One has to be totally bonkers to think so. Under the guise of gender, educational experiments on children take place in some kindergartens, namely children participate in sexual education. (*Gender jest gorsze...* 2014)

To effectively undermine the importance of the Convention, its opponents adopt a strategy aimed at questioning and diminishing the academic value of the concept of gender. The nationalist-religious discourse is legitimised by referring to science to show that the notion of gender is not grounded in proper scholarship. Gender is spoken of as an ad-hoc concept “invented for the purpose of this convention” (Siedlecka 2012a), a (neo)marxist ideology leading to the destruction of a world based on “natural order and common sense” (Łukaszewicz 2014) and replacing the class struggle with gender struggle over the family (Nowakowska 2014). Equating gender with ideology undermines the relevance and significance of the Convention

and takes away the language that could be used to empower women. Women's rights are not addressed here as human rights, and that can be seen as a step back in recognizing the autonomy of women.

## CHALLENGES FOR GENDER EQUALITY POLICIES

Although the controversy around the Convention is another phase of the cultural wars, it provides important understanding into how gender equality and women's rights can be strategically used in pursuit of the Catholic Church's agenda. The vision of gender equality policy emerging from the nationalist-religious discourse is clear: there is neither a need to address power differences between men and women nor to introduce instruments to counterbalance gender inequalities. Quite to the contrary: it suffices to restore "traditional canons of education referring to the ethos of chivalry" (Skórzyńska and Banasiuk 2014). The approach proposed by the Catholic Church and the conservatives remains anchored in the traditional gender contract, which does not impact on the increase of women in politics or in the labour market, and does not decrease the level of violence. The arguments used in the nationalist-religious discourse show that gender equality is situated in the shadow of, or even as an opposition to, a call for reinforcing the traditional model of family.

The nationalist-religious discourse petrifies the gender order built on the essentialist concept of women and men. Through the discussion of what constitutes "normalcy", it emphasises the notion of rigid boundaries of femininity and masculinity as well as the real essence of sexes shaped by biological factors, independently from social and cultural ones. Hence, in this discourse, femininity and masculinity are set in stone and have universal meaning embedded in the biological – and therefore "natural" – characteristics. Such an essentialist, determinist concept is juxtaposed with and threatened by the notion of gender as fluid and exceeding binary opposition. In effect, through the strategies used in the nationalist-religious discourse, the Convention is blamed for leading to identity confusion by creating the possibility to choose one's own sexual identity regardless of one's sex, and/or change one's sex at any time or even to "rework boys on girls and vice versa" (Nowakowska 2014). This discourse entangles femininity and masculinity with sexuality: while the dominant, essentialist vision maintains a distinction between women and men as intrinsically heterosexual, the gender order introduced by the regulations in the Convention problematizes heteronormativity and frames sexual identity as being constantly (re)constructed through "doing gender".

Do you know what that means? If there would be people who come up with idea in the morning that they are a girl, they would be a girl from the morning till the evening, and if they come up with idea to be a boy in the evening, they would be a boy from the evening till the morning (deputy Beata Kempa). (Ostałowska 2015)

Sex is not sex in the Convention, but [it] is gender, thereby [the Convention] treats a bearded guy as a woman only if he uses lipstick and wears a dress. If such an unsterotypical "woman" comes to us from outside the EU, thanks to the Convention, she will be able to get asylum and social benefits funded by Polish taxpayers. (Banasiuk 2015)

To make their vision of gender order and family prevailing in the society, the opponents of the Convention legitimize their strategy through emotion – in this case fear. The concern about upholding the “natural” order and stability of the society is expressed by Tomasz Pitucha (PiS, local politician) who claims “The Convention means the dismantling of Polish society. We cannot be passive. What are we waiting for?” (Jackowski 2015). Through a negative presentation of “the Other” – be it the Convention, gender, homosexual circles or pro-equality activists – the opponents of the Convention urge members of the society to mobilize in the name of protection of the traditional gender order, innocence of children and, paradoxically, gender equality. First, this quest for reinforcing the family is presented in the nationalist-religious discourse as a tool advancing gender equality:

If someone wants to quell violence, instead of weakening marriage and the family, destroying traditional religious and cultural patterns, he/she should weaken the cohabiting relations, discourage divorce, and promote traditional (i.e. monogamous, heterosexual and capable of having children) marriages. The cohabiting relation is more often a source of violence against women and children. To find out, it is enough to look at the western statistics (not all yet undisclosed). If, therefore, Ewa Kopacz’s government wants to quell violence, it has to reject the Convention, and begin to better protect the family and support the Church. This method is much more effective. (Terlikowski 2015)

Secondly, the Convention is spoken of as a measure which limits parents’ right and responsibility to decide on children’s upbringing and education by allowing the state to interfere and thereby crossing the boundary between public and private spheres (*Konwencja ograniczy...* 2012; Stępkowski 2015). The ratification of the Convention urges the authorities to combat gender-based stereotypes and this obligation is presented in the nationalist-religious discourse as paving the way towards educational programmes promoting non-traditional gender roles, homosexuality and transsexuality. Aleksander Stępkowski, from the organization Ordo Iuris<sup>2</sup>, in his article “Gender engineering” threatens that “the homosexual circles will again raise the demand to include in the handbook for junior high schools and high schools information promoting knowledge about the customs in their subcultures” (Stępkowski 2015). To spread moral panic among parents, situations when – in the name of equality – parents are punished for passing traditional, Christian values on to their children are invoked in this discourse (Ferfecki 2013; *Konwencja ograniczy...* 2012).

When it comes to thinking about combating violence against women, the nationalist-religious discourse can be read as resisting addressing violence against women as a problem related to patriarchal structures and unequal power between women and men. Although the image of the Catholic Church and conservative circles as supportive of measures to protect women from violence is created, the way of addressing the problem of violence is far from a feminist perspective emphasising the role of power in relationships. In other words, the nationalist-religious discourse recognises the prevention of violence as necessary and required for building a democratic, just society, but it does not acknowledge cultural or/and structural factors as roots of violence. This standpoint has profound implications for

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<sup>2</sup> Ordo Iuris is a legal organization aimed at promotion of legal culture from the perspective of a traditional social order. They refer to the Catholic religion in their work.

gender equality policies. Lack of recognition of abovementioned causes of violence means that the power inequality in an intimate relationship is silenced and men's responsibility for violence diminished. This also determines the solutions proposed to combat violence: since family is perceived as belonging to the private sphere, it is not seen as a political issue, and therefore, it should not be regulated or controlled by the state or policies (Stępkowski 2015; Grochal 2014)<sup>3</sup>. The nationalist-religious discourse also employs a strategy showing the Convention as anticonstitutional, as it fails to provide protection to men who suffer from violence. This can be read as an attempt at degendering violence and misinterpreting the Convention. Such representation of the problem of violence overlooks the fact that men are also protected by the Convention and ignores extensive research indicating that women constitute the majority of victims of violence. Hence, in the nationalist-religious discourse, women's rights are subject to ideological manipulation and many arguments are rather used to divert attention from solutions addressing cultural and structural roots of violence. The latter also includes a change of the Catholic Church's position on domestic violence and violence against women.

Through nationalist-religious discourse, the Church hinders women's emancipation and recognition of their rights (cf. Casanova 2009; Phillips 2009). This strategy serves as a political tool to control women and illustrates the infantilization of women: The Church dictates what women should do and what they should not, and defines their roles and the way they should be fulfilled. Therefore, the right to make decisions is taken away from women, who are not treated as autonomous, independent and rational persons (cf. Środa 2010: 36). Family, not the individual, has greater value and the individual – usually the woman – has to be sacrificed for the sake of the family. Her role is confined to supporting family, bearing the community's values and guaranteeing the community's future. This entanglement of gender, family, nation and religion has historical roots in Poland and has heavy weighting on women (Graff 2008) and in the context of violence this may lead to situations in which patriarchal practices are sustained and the woman – who is seen in relation to other members of the family – is told to continue in an abusive relationship for the sake of the family. Religiosity is thus often one of the greatest barriers to combatting violence against women as embedded in cultural contexts (Środa 2007: 655–656). This is in line with Maciej Gdula's view (2010: 71–72) that the public and political activity of the Church is based on two pillars: pastoral attitudes towards the exercise of power, and the patriarchy. In the latter case, the church arrogates to itself power over women in the public and private spheres and constructs itself a guarantor of patriarchal order and national identity. The essentialist discourse on gender roles coupled with the protection of family as private sphere can be also seen as a strategy to protect Polish society from the influences of the EU and its regulations. From that perspective, the Roman Catholic Church appears to be not only a defender of patriarchal social order, but also a defender of Polish nationality, a symbol of stability and normalcy.

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<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, it is frequently stressed that the family and marriage understood as a relationship between a man and a woman are protected by the Constitution and thereby the Polish authorities are obliged to protect them (Siedlecka 2012b). This implies that the state may only intervene in case of non-traditional families as an attempt to restore the natural gender order.

## CONCLUSION

Poland is another country where the cultural wars have been taking place since the 1990s and the Convention is yet another area where the struggle over women's rights can be observed. This resistance towards gender equality can be seen as part of a transnational phenomenon (Korolczuk 2014) but without doubt the anti-gender mobilizations, including the media debate on the Convention, have a local colour. The fragile democratic system, the importance of the Catholic Church as a political actor, the susceptibility to right-wing arguments, and the relatively weak women's movement (Graff 2014b: 434) – these are only few factors distinguishing the “gender wars” in Poland.

The debate on the Convention is not only a part of a transnational phenomenon, but it also demonstrates the resemblance between arguments and strategies used in discourses against gender equality in different areas, be they sexual education, reproductive rights, in-vitro fertilization or biopolitics (cf. Grabowska 2013, 2014; Korolczuk 2013; Radkowska-Walkowicz 2012). As in other debates, the Convention is discussed mainly as a question of conflicting visions of gender order. The main arguments presented in the conservative discourse refer to the threat to the traditional family model, culture and religion. The Convention is depicted as a coup on state sovereignty by imposing foreign, incongruous regulations, a form of social engineering or a (neo)marxism ideology, as well as being responsible for the promotion of feminism and homosexuality. Not surprisingly, most attempts to use “gender” or “gender ideology” in conservative discourse target feminist, LGBT people and pro-equality activists who are constructed as negative others. What came as a surprise in the debate on the Convention is the mobilization around the word “gender”, which permeates through all key themes employed in the previous debates in the area of women's rights. Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek in this context asserts that “I survived Nazism, communism, I'll also survive genderism” (*Episkopat: przemoc...* 2015). This rhetoric of nationalist-religious discourse, constructed by the leaders of Catholic Church and right-wing circles, is strong to the extent that it permeates to the counter-discourse. As Agnieszka Graff (2014a) admits:

Lakoff is right – the right wing rules even in my column. Have you noticed how easily I repeated this mendacious right-wing propaganda? Supposedly I do not agree with them, I try to speak with irony, but I quickly recreated their point of view, using a ready from a right-wing newspaper. I can't do anything about Łuczewskiego, but I could have written why it is important to support the convention.

The nationalist-religious discourse has three major implications for gender equality policies: it reinforces essentialist visions of femininity and masculinity and homophobia, puts high importance on family as a strictly private matter but also an influential force, and takes attention from cultural and structural factors that foster violence. This perspective fails to acknowledge the unequal power relations between women and men and the human-rights perspective on domestic violence. At the same time, it focuses on the relations between gender, religion and politics to justify the position of the Church in the Polish public sphere. Although the Catholic Church expresses a commitment to social justice, analysis of the

nationalist-religious discourse reveals that under the pretext of caring about all citizens, the Church exerts control and power over women and limits their right to self-determination.

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W IMIĘ RODZINY I RELIGII. Dyskurs narodowo-religijny  
dotyczący Konwencji o zapobieganiu i zwalczaniu przemocy wobec kobiet  
i przemocy domowej

Artykuł porusza kwestię wojny kulturowej w Polsce, której kolejna odsłona nastąpiła po ogłoszeniu przez rząd decyzji o ratyfikacji Konwencji Rady Europy w sprawie zapobiegania i zwalczania przemocy wobec kobiet i przemocy domowej. Jego celem jest zrekonstruowanie konserwatywnego, nacjonalistyczno-religijnego dyskursu obecnego na łamach „Gazety Wyborczej” i „Rzeczpospolitej” przez opisanie głównych strategii dyskursywnych wykorzystanych przez Kościół rzymskokatolicki oraz środowiska prawicowe w debacie na temat konwencji. Kolejna część artykułu pokazuje konsekwencje dyskursu narodowo-religijnego dla realizacji polityki równości płci.

Słowa kluczowe: wojny genderowe, Konwencja w sprawie zapobiegania i zwalczania przemocy wobec kobiet, dyskurs narodowo-religijny, polityka równości płci