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## Representations of the “Refugee Crisis” on Front Pages of Polish Weekly Magazines between 2015 and 2018

**Wizerunki „kryzysu uchodźczego” na okładkach polskich tygodników opinii (2015–2018)**

• **Abstrakt** •

Celem artykułu jest krytyczne spojrzenie z perspektywy postkolonialnej na dominujące narracje i wizualne reprezentacje tzw. „kryzysu uchodźczego” w polskich tygodnikach opinii w latach 2015–2018, a w szczególności na okładki tych gazet. Metodologicznie tekst osadzony jest w krytycznej analizie dyskursu medialnego. Dla celów porównawczych do analizy wybrano tygodniki opinii reprezentujące różne konteksty społeczno-polityczne oraz sympatie polityczne i przeznaczone dla różnych czytelników: *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Wprost*, *Politykę*, *Do Rzeczy*, *W Sieci*, *Gazetę Polską*, *Niedzielę*. Analizie zostaną poddane ilustracje wykorzystane na okładkach tygodników odnoszące się do uchodźców i kryzysu uchodźczego oraz nagłówki i informacje tekstowe stanowiące komentarz do opisywanych wydarzeń. Wiele opracowań europejskich potwierdziło, że media, a w szczególności prasa, uczestniczyły w przedstawianiu napływu uchodźców i migrantów z Afryki Północnej od 2015 roku w kategoriach kryzysu. Termin „kryzys uchodźczy” został spopularyzowany przez wiele gazet, nagłówków, artykułów i innych przekazów medialnych.

• **Abstract** •

Drawing from postcolonial studies and discourse analysis, in this article I will critically look at the dominant narratives and visual depictions of the so-called “refugee crisis” in contemporary Polish weekly magazines (2015–2018) with a special focus on their front pages. For comparative purposes, I will conduct qualitative analysis of the selected press titles representing different socio-political worldviews and aiming at various audiences, such as *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Wprost*, *Polityka*, *Do Rzeczy*, *W Sieci*, *Gazeta Polska*, *Niedziela*. I will have a look at the images used to illustrate the humanitarian crisis in combination with the analysis of titles and texts placed on front pages. Importantly, as many European reports underline, the press in particular, and the media in general, participated in framing the arrival of migrants and refugees from North Africa in 2015 as crisis. The term “refugee crisis” was popularized by numerous headlines, press articles, and other media accounts.

The analysis of weeklies’ front pages leads to the conclusion that the Polish society and mass media yield to the dominant discourse

Analiza okładek tygodników opinii pozwala wnioskować, że społeczeństwo polskie i media ulegają dominującemu dyskursowi definiującemu uchodźcę jako Innego, wroga, terrorystę czy najeźdźcę. Przekazy medialne manifestujące współczucie i chęć pomocy należą do rzadkości. Prasa zamiast dostarczać rzetelnych i wyważonych opinii, podsyca negatywny stosunek i uprzedzenia polskiego społeczeństwa wobec uchodźców z Afryki Północnej, przedstawiając ich jako zagrażających Polsce i jej obywatelom.

**Słowa kluczowe:** „kryzys uchodźczy”; tygodniki opinii; okładki; islam; Polska; migranci

defining a refugee as “Other,” enemy, terrorist, or invader. Sympathetic coverage is rare. The press, instead of delivering reliable and balanced opinions, rather tends to fuel negative attitudes and prejudices by maintaining the perception of refugees from North African and Middle East as endangering the Polish society.

**Keywords:** “refugee crisis”; weekly magazines; front pages; Islam; Poland; migrants

## Introduction

Since 9/11 and the war on terror that was launched in its aftermath, the Islamophobic sentiments have been strengthened in the United States and across Europe. The subsequent events – the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, terrorist attacks in Europe, the so-called Arab Spring, the recent conflict in Syria that resulted in mass immigration from North Africa to “Fortress Europe”<sup>1</sup> – although not all of them directly concerning Poland, evoked much interest and debate in the Polish media. Especially since 2015, the Muslim world in general and refugees and immigrants from Middle East and Africa in particular started to be represented as a monolithic bloc associated with fundamentalist extremists who do not value human life and human rights and as being completely different (and hostile) to European “civilization” and its Christian values. In Poland negative attitudes towards Muslims are mainly built around the religious difference and alleged threats that Islam poses for Polish Catholicism. According to Bertram and Jędrzejek, “the radical and negative discourse around refugees can be divided into three main trends: 1) attacks on the Polish government for giving in the dictatorship of Germany and the West and breaching Polish sovereignty; 2) evoking fear of the invasion of foreigners flooding Europe – savages, criminals, fanatics, among whom terrorists are lurking; 3) condemning immigrants that pretend to be refugees while they only want to get European social benefits” (Bertram & Jędrzejek, 2015). All of

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<sup>1</sup> “Fortress Europe” is a term used to refer to the processes of “securitization” of borders of the EU as well as to negative attitudes of Europeans toward immigration. It is a metaphor pointing to harsh immigration policies with regards to non-European arrivals and to difficult and unequal access to the EU countries for people from the so-called “third countries”.

these aspects were present in the media coverage of the humanitarian crisis and as the report *Moving Stories: International Review of How Media Cover Migration* summarizes, “The conclusions from many different parts of the world are remarkably similar: journalism under pressure from a weakening media economy; political bias and opportunism that drives the news agenda; the dangers of hate-speech, stereotyping and social exclusion of refugees and migrants” (Cooke & White, 2015, p. 5).

Drawing from postcolonial studies and discourse analysis, in this article I will critically look at the dominant narratives and visual depictions of the so-called “refugee crisis”<sup>2</sup> in contemporary Polish weekly magazines (2015–2018) with a special focus on their front pages. For comparative purposes, I will conduct qualitative analysis of the selected press titles representing different socio-political worldviews and aiming at various audiences, such as *Tygodnik Powszechny*, *Wprost*, *Polityka*, *Do Rzeczy*, *W Sieci*, *Gazeta Polska*, *Niedziela*. *Tygodnik Powszechny* is a Catholic weekly focusing on social and cultural topics and aiming at intellectual audiences. *Wprost* is a weekly associated with liberal and centrist political views but also known for its provocative photos on front pages. *Polityka* is one of the oldest weekly magazines in Poland, today associated with centre and leftist political affiliations. *Do Rzeczy* and *W Sieci* are weeklies presenting right-wing and Christian-conservative political views. They are both known for their controversial and shocking front pages. *Gazeta Polska* is also a right-wing and conservative weekly known for organizing its clubs in many cities and towns across Poland. *Niedziela* is a Catholic weekly sponsored by the Catholic Church.

I will have a look at the images used to illustrate the humanitarian crisis in combination with the analysis of titles and texts placed on front pages. Importantly, as many European reports underline, the press in particular, and the media in general, participated in framing the arrival of migrants and refugees from North Africa in 2015 as crisis. The term “refugee crisis” was popularized by numerous headlines, press articles, and other media accounts. What is more, press contributed to associating refugees and migrants with “Others”, outsiders (sometimes vulnerable, more often dangerous) totally different from Europeans (Georgiou & Zabrowski, 2017, p. 3).

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<sup>2</sup> “Refugee crisis” is a problematic term as it suggests the responsibility of refugees for the situation they found themselves in. Instead, the expression “humanitarian crisis” can be used, which draws attention not to refugees but to states and the European Union that should find a solution to the suffering of refugees and address the humanitarian aspects of their migration. The word “crisis” itself refers to phenomena that are unexpected, threatening, or dangerous – something people are afraid of and would like to avoid. Such framing of these events also justifies undertaking of special measures by the government, since crisis situations usually demand so.

In this article I focus on front pages of the selected weekly magazines for several reasons. First, they draw attention to the particular problem dealt with in a given issue of the newspaper and aim at encouraging the reader to have a look at the article inside (Pisera, 2010, p. 75). They are designed in such a way so that the reader chooses the particular newspaper title over others. Second, I perceive front pages as the representation of contemporary socio-political problems, current affairs and reflection of certain societal emotions towards a particular problem such as the refugee crisis and fears connected therewith in the society. Third, they are a very specific form of press messages that we could compare to advertising and, in my opinion, often using similar tools as advertising to manipulate, get attention, evoke certain emotions and offer dominant narratives. However, front pages are rarely treated by readers as a form of advertising because weekly magazines are commonly considered opinion-formulating press (Pisera, 2010, pp. 75–76). Weeklies, sometimes mistakenly, are often regarded as “serious”, objective, unbiased, impartial, referring to facts and representing the truth. Fourth, the way front pages are designed is to have a significant influence on audiences by referring to certain shared knowledge of the society, common values, images, symbols – in other words to the “common sense” of a given culture (Fiske, 2003). According to survey conducted by CBOS<sup>3</sup>, Poles consider family, health and widely understood security (with regards to work, financial security, accommodation) as their highest values<sup>4</sup>. Finally, and crucially, front pages are often designed to shock, disgust, appeal through negative coverage by using clichés, stereotypes, generalizations and simplifications, which I will demonstrate on the selected examples in the subsequent part of this text.

## Refugees and Muslim Other before 2015

According to Geneva Convention of 1951, “a refugee is someone who has been forced to flee his or her country because of persecution, war or violence. A refugee has a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, political opinion or membership in a particular social group. Most likely, they cannot return home or are afraid to do so. War and ethnic, tribal and religious violence are leading causes of refugees fleeing their countries”<sup>5</sup>. So the understand-

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<sup>3</sup> Public Opinion Research Centre.

<sup>4</sup> CBOS. *Sens życia – wczoraj i dziś* (2017). Komunikat z badań, no. 41. Retrieved from: [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K\\_041\\_17.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_041_17.PDF).

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from: <https://www.unrefugees.org/refugee-facts/what-is-a-refugee/>. Full text of the Geneva Convention can be found here: <https://www.unhcr.org/3b66c2aa10>.

ing of refugees until recently was strictly connected with their legal status and a refugee was perceived as a victim of violence during war, conflict or political unrest. Generally speaking, victims “evoke a particular set of emotions such as empathy, sympathy or compassion. It is difficult to threaten society with victims” (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 7). The discourse around refugees is the result of a careful strategy to change the association of refugees with victims into thinking about them as “Other” that can endanger the society. As Kotras writes, “The collection ‘immigrants’ usually contains categories which were associated with: compassion, solidarity, curiosity, hope, help, minority”, however, some newspapers “systematically and with visible effect were reconstructing this collection into containing categories associated with: suspicion, defense, fear, carefulness, threat, terrorism, majority” (Kotras, 2016, p. 70).

Furthermore, before 2015 refugees were not perceived as representatives of a particular race, ethnicity, religion or nationality; it was a concept referring to a diverse group of people. At the beginning of the so-called refugee crisis, the word “refugee” changed semantically and started to be associated with concrete features: “Within a few months refugee lost the face of victim and gained the face of danger created by fear managers. The word ‘refugee’, used in numerous political and media accounts, became for Poles synonymous to Arab–Muslim dark-skinned immigrant–terrorist” (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 8). Those fear managers are politicians and the media supporting them; they manipulated with the word “refugee” to become “synonymous to ‘danger of the Other’ easier to accept than words directly referring to skin color, origin or religion” (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 8). Research on media coverage of refugee crisis conducted across Europe confirms this shift in representing refugees: “The sympathetic and empathetic response of a large proportion of the European press in the summer and especially early autumn of 2015 was gradually replaced by suspicion and, in some cases, hostility towards refugees and migrants” (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 3).

Unlike the word “refugee”, which did not have a negative meaning before 2015, the dominant representations of the Muslim world were already based on orientalist, essentialist, and stereotypical thinking. Let me shortly summarize the main ways of representing the Muslim Other in the media.

First, the association with terrorism as well as with the oppression of women became the dominant image that permeated the media and public discourses globally, which was also accompanied by a negative perception of Islam as – to use the words of Edward W. Said (1980) – “antihuman, antidemocratic, anti-Semitic, antirational”. At the same time, terrorism and (Muslim) terrorists became

a popular, attractive (and profitable) theme to be explored by the media in general, and film and television in particular: “A slew of TV dramas cashed in on salacious possibilities of Arab or Muslim terrorist threats and assured viewers with depictions of the U.S. government’s heroic efforts to combat this new, pulse-quicken- ing terrorism” (Alsultany, 2012, p. 2). Similar tropes can be found in the Polish context as the main argument in the anti-refugee rhetoric, repeated over and over again, was the issue of security and the alleged threat refugees, who are potential terrorists, pose to national security; it was also assumed that they increase the level of criminality (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 10). The issue of security and protection of freedom thus became the dominant trope in the anti-Muslim discourse.

Second, Muslims are represented as a “Monolithic bloc, a closed and united group of people who are totally different from or even intimidating and hostile to a likewise closed ‘West’, which is Christian, secular, liberal, and democratic” (Gündüz, 2007, p. 2). Ignoring of internal complexity and generalizations about the so-called Muslim and Western worlds also disregard different levels and conditions of religiosity or secularity, the engagement into religious practices, multi-denominational character of some nations, the existence of ethnic or national minorities. As Alsultany claims, “The result is particularly damaging, since it reduces the inherent – and enormous – variety of the world’s Muslim population, projecting all Muslims as one very particular type: fanatical, misogynistic, anti-American [and anti-European]” (Alsultany, 2012, p. 9)<sup>6</sup>. This orientalist way of thinking – understood as not only a collection of false impressions or misleading representations but rather as an “illusory fantasy” – is a systematized set of theories and practices maintained and consolidated in Western consciousness across generations (Said, 1978, p. 36), which is built on a number of binary and sharp differences that put Muslim cultures (otherness) always in necessary opposition to European/American world (sameness). These dichotomies juxtapose the so-called “Orient mind” with Western “enlightened knowledge” (Said, 1978, p. 31), backwardness with civilization, chaos with order, irrationality with rationality, weakness with power, violence with peace, etc.

Third, there is a division into two sharp binary oppositions: fundamentalist Muslims and moderate Muslims and in the context of the refugee crisis – Muslim refugees and Christian refugees, bad (Muslim) Arabs and good (Christian) Arabs or Africans. “[I]t becomes unclear just where fundamentalism begins and

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<sup>6</sup> Alsultany in her work elaborates on the US context, however, similar understanding of the Muslim world can be found in many European countries, including Poland.

moderate Islam ends. This blurred line makes every Muslim [regardless of gender, citizenship, or age] a potential fundamentalist and puts the burden of proof on Muslims to show that they are not fundamentalists” (Yenigun, 2004, p. 54). In Poland this division into “good” and “bad” Muslims goes along the lines of “our” Muslims (that is the Tatar minority, whose presence within the Polish society dates back to 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century) (Górska, 2013), and “alien” Muslims – recent immigrants (post-1989) mainly from Arab countries (Egypt, Jordan) but also Turkey.

Fourth, this division into “good” and “bad” Muslims is also connected to the level of assimilation, secularization, and integration. The more integrated, undistinguished within the society and not expressing otherness (clothing, religious symbols and practices, etc.), the more accepted they are. “Bad” Muslims are those who manifest their religious beliefs, publicly demand tolerance for their faith and respect for their cultural traditions, and express hatred towards the Western world. Alsultany elaborates on the question: “‘Why do they hate us?’ The U.S. government offered a decisive answer that had the power to frame and hijack the system of meaning during the War on Terror: ‘They hate us for our freedom’. This question and answer – which was in turn widely circulated in television and print journalism, and before too long in television dramas as well – effectively foreclosed the many other possible conversations” (Alsultany, 2012, pp. 6–7).

Finally, in thinking about Islam as a threat to Christianity and democracy, it is inscribed that Europe is undergoing a more and more intensive process of Islamization through immigration, naturalization, and a high birth rate among Muslim diaspora. Fear of “conquest”, “flood”, domination of Islam in Europe is particularly visible on the front pages I will analyze in the remainder of the article. European and Polish identities are today allegedly endangered by the Muslims’ growing influence. Interestingly, Samuel Parker observes “the use of water metaphors (floods, tides, swamped, etc.) in media reports about refugees and asylum seekers” to emphasize this threat, where “‘flood’ and ‘overflowed’ are used to construct an account of large numbers of people trying to enter the country” (Parker, 2015). Polish politicians between 2015 and 2017 used the following rhetoric to describe the “invasion” of refugees: “‘Waves are coming’ to ‘conquer’ us, ‘invade’ us, ‘colonize’ us, ‘Islamize’ us, ‘to introduce Sharia law’, ‘implement jihad’” (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 11).

In other words, “Migrants are described as a threat. There is a tendency, both among many politicians and in sections of the mainstream media, to lump migrants together and present them as a seemingly endless tide of people who will steal jobs, become a burden on the state and ultimately threaten the native way

of life” (Cooke & White, 2015, p. 7). Such media and political statements significantly influenced the attitudes of the Polish society towards refugees.

## Changing Moods of the Polish Society Regarding Welcoming Refugees

Polish attitudes to refugees from the Middle East and Africa have been researched well and the public opinion polls indicated that in May 2015 only 21% of respondents were against accepting refugees from conflict zones. Yet, for another three years the number of Poles supporting welcoming refugees was significantly decreasing (in winter 2018 approx. 63% did not want any refugees in Poland) (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 7). What was the reason for such a shift in attitudes?

Research done by Hanna Frejłak, Paweł Cywiński, Filip Katner, and Jarosław Ziółkowski (*Ilościowa analiza dyskursu polityków na temat uchodźców i zarządzania strachem*) published in 2019 shows when the problem of refugees started to be a political issue – used by politicians to evoke fear and the sense of threat. The study juxtaposed major events connected with mass immigration of refugees to Europe, terrorist attacks, and international aspects of the refugee crisis with commentaries of major Polish politicians (president, prime ministers, ministers, major opposition leaders, party leaders, etc.). The conclusion was that politicians spread their anti-refugee rhetoric in autumn of 2015 and early spring of 2017 (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 10). I shortly summarize the findings of this research below.

We can divide the period between 2015 and 2018 into several phases. First, in winter and spring of 2015 politicians were not commenting too much on refugees and Poles were generally speaking supportive towards refugees, showing empathy and sympathy towards them. Simultaneously, there was a relatively scarce media interest in the topic of refugees. Second, the negative sentiments towards refugees started to worsen in the summer of 2015 – in opinion polls 38% of respondents was against welcoming them; the media (including weekly magazines that I will refer to later on) began to show images of crowds of people coming to Southern Europe. Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz agreed to accept six thousand of refugees, which evoked heated debate and opposition of the right-wing elites. The entire parliamentary campaign in 2015 of the Law and Justice party (PiS) was built on anti-refugee and anti-immigrant fears (Jarosław Kaczyński stated, for example, that refugees bring germs), which proved to be successful. The sense of danger, fear, and threat was systematically evoked in political and media debates and the



problem of refugees was vividly discussed by the press and visualized by threatening images of the flood of migrants coming to Europe. The coverage was relatively unilateral with appeals to common values, shared emotions and potential threats of Islamization and loosing sovereignty. Third, after Brussel’s attacks in March 2016<sup>7</sup>, political comments became completely unilateral: Poles’ safety is of crucial importance; there is no possibility to accept refugees (Prime Minister Beata Szydło made it clear in her statement, officially withdrawing from acceptance of refugees). The rest of 2016 was relatively peaceful, even after the Berlin attack in December 2016<sup>8</sup>: “It turns out that terrorist attacks had little influence on activity of right-wing opinion leaders. The subsequent attacks – for example in Paris (2015)<sup>9</sup>, Brussels (2016) or Barcelona (2017)<sup>10</sup> – met with desultory commentaries on the part of political leaders. Soon after the attacks there was no narrative mobilization of the Polish right-wing parties” (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 10). Nonetheless, Poles’ attitudes towards refugees worsened. As opinion polls showed, in December 2016, 52% of respondents were against welcoming refugees from conflicted areas and in April 2017, 74% of them did not want to accept refugees from Middle East and Africa<sup>11</sup>, so the number significantly increased since the spring of 2015.

Fourth, in spring of 2017 politicians began to spread their anti-refugee rhetoric again due to the EU’s pressure to accept refugees. Although the number of terrorist attacks decreased, politicians started to talk about Islamist terrorism and strengthened the already enhanced feeling of distrust and fear of refugees. Such narrative concerning national security “intermingled other stories of sovereignty, ‘getting up from knees’ and evil European Union. [...] Once again the schematic thinking came into play – ‘refugees are deadly threat, we will protect you’” (Cywiński, Katner & Ziółkowski, 2019, p. 11). In 2017, refugees in opinion polls

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<sup>7</sup> On March 22, 2016, three coordinated attacks took place in Brussels – two at Brussels Airport in Zaventem and one at Maalbeek metro station. 34 people were killed and 300 injured. Islamic State admitted to stand behind the explosions.

<sup>8</sup> On December 19, 2016, a truck drove into the Christmas market in Berlin. 12 people were killed and 56 injured. A Polish truck driver was killed by the assassin, who took over the vehicle. Again the Islamic State took responsibility for the attack.

<sup>9</sup> On November 13, 2015, a series of attacks took place in a few public places in Paris. 130 people were killed and 413 injured: “The attacks were described by President Francois Hollande as an ‘act of war’ organised by the Islamic State (IS) militant group”. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-34818994>.

<sup>10</sup> On August 17, 2017, a van drove into a pedestrian area La Rambla in Barcelona killing 13 people and injuring 130.

<sup>11</sup> *Stosunek do przyjmowania uchodźców* (2017). CBOS, no. 44. Retrieved from: [https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K\\_044\\_17.PDF](https://www.cbos.pl/SPISKOM.POL/2017/K_044_17.PDF).

were found the second largest threat for Poles after terrorist attacks. Under such circumstances, “Media struggle[d] to provide balanced coverage when political leaders respond[ed] with a mix of bigotry and panic – some announcing they will only take in Christian migrants while others plan[ned] to establish walls and razor wire fences” (Cooke & White, 2015, p. 5). Such narrative seemed to be effective as, according to estimates, within the two years between 2015 and 2017 11 million Poles changed their opinion about accepting refugees from North Africa. It is hard to find other topic that would contribute to such radical shift in attitude of the Polish society (Cywiński, Katner & Ziólkowski, 2019, p. 8).

In the next section of this article I will focus on how the press, and especially front pages of weekly magazines, contributed to this change of opinions. What kind of images and commentaries were offered to the readers?

### **Refugees on the Front Pages of Weekly Magazines**

The results of the analysis of the selected weeklies’ front pages show that the media participated in evoking fear and negative attitudes towards refugees through the images and texts they chose to present on the covers. As writes Alsultany in the U.S. context, “Fear was evident across the United States, often stoked by the rhetoric and policies of Bush administration, news reports, and other cultural productions that reminded the public of an ever-present, unresolved, and often mysterious threat”, thus perpetuating the “state of endless fear” (Alsultany, 2012, p. 6). While investigating the “state of endless fear” in reference to refugees in Poland, we need to remember that fear of the unknown, of the “Other”, can be a useful emotion to manipulate audiences. Fear makes people think more intensely about their security and safety, fear can push people to prejudice and xenophobia, it makes people blame others more willingly for unexpected events or unwanted circumstances. Scared people trust more faithfully those who want to defend and protect them and explain inhumane behavior in reference to refugees with exaggerated danger they allegedly pose to the society. What is more, fear is a feeling that can weaken rational thinking and let stereotypes and misinterpretations win over more balanced and nuanced narratives.

The cover of *W Sieci* from September 2015 (no. 39) offers an answer to this need of finding someone to protect us: “Orban and Kaczyński: They Are Defending Europe against Madness of the Left and Islamists”. In the picture we see the two politicians with serious faces, the Hungarian and Polish flags behind them and the Polish 16<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century “winged” cavalry (husaria) at the back-

ground. The overall meaning of this cover is that there are only two countries in Europe and their leaders who know how to protect Europe against and fight with the Muslim aggressors. It refers to Poland’s war with the Ottoman Empire in 1620–1621. Not only Orban and Kaczyński will defend Europe against Islamists but also against internal leftist elites that call for compassion and welcoming refugees in Poland and Hungary.

Importantly in this context, a number of front pages of *Do Rzeczy* brought up the topic of the domestic debate on the “refugee crisis” by claiming that those who want to protect Poland and Polish society from dangerous outsiders are accused of being racist and xenophobic. In January 2017 (no. 3) they published a front cover with a page-size photo of a woman wearing black burqa (we can only see her sad blue eyes) and a commentary: “They Want to Make Us Racists”. Similar image and message is used in January 2018, when *Do Rzeczy* (no. 5) shows a photo of a woman whose face is painted into white and red colours symbolizing the Polish flag and one cheek is covered with a darker red color and a swastika. This time the newspaper announces: “They Want to Make Us Fascists”, again complaining about being accused of discrimination and bias while it only wants to save Poland from dangerous influences of the European Union and the difficult presence of refugees. “Us” in this context means the newspaper but also the readers, which aims at evoking negative feelings towards those who accuse the society of being racist or fascist.

Emotions and negative language used in reference to refugees shaped the narrative about them across Europe: “In most countries the story has been dominated by two themes – numbers and emotions. Most of the time coverage is politically led with media often following an agenda dominated by loose language and talk of invasion and swarms. At other moments the story has been laced with humanity, empathy and a focus on the suffering of those involved. What is unquestionable is that media everywhere play a vital role in bringing the world’s attention to these events” (Cooke & White, 2015, p. 5). As I elaborate below, in Poland the sympathetic coverage of the refugee journey to Europe was uncommon. Instead, the “state of endless fear” mentioned above was evoked on the front pages of the Polish weeklies by referring to certain statements against the refugees such as the issue of providing safety and security, the question of sovereignty and the notion of the clash of civilizations. Therefore, “the most common metaphor found to be used, as a rhetorical device, was that of the criminal metaphor. This creates a picture of the asylum seeker or refugee as a potential threat to security” (Parker, 2015).

Generally speaking, the analysis of front pages of weeklies shows that Islam is unanimously depicted as an immense threat to Catholicism, Polishness, and national values connected therewith. Kotras summarizes this rhetoric as follows,

“‘We’ are representing the ‘right’ values, ‘They’ are representing the ‘wrong’ ones. In this place we can recall the myth about Poland as the Christianity Outpost which was often used to describe a significant role of our country in the history of Europe. Nowadays the history repeats and Poland can stop the flood of invaders – Muslims” (Kotras, 2016, p. 67). The “we” vs. “them” narratives that inscribe themselves into the orientalist ways of approaching the Muslim world described earlier, is characteristic for the whole analyzed period between 2015 and 2018.

I distinguished three recurring themes that front pages commented on that I want to elaborate below: anti-Muslim sentiments and fear of Islam, refugees as a threat to Europe, and refugees as victims in need of help. I will indicate when those narratives were the most popular.

### **Anti-Muslim Sentiments and Fear of Islam**

Anti-Muslim sentiments are openly manifested in depicting the “refugee crisis” and they are very often based on evoking the sense of danger refugees pose to Polish national and ethnic identity. A closer look at such narratives in weekly magazines indicates that anti-Muslim sentiments were perpetuated throughout the analyzed period between 2015 and 2017. For example, *Do Rzeczy* (no. 38) in September 2015 shows a photo of crowded refugees, mostly men. It is taken from air so that the crowd seems large and vibrant. The caption says, “These Are Invaders Not Refugees”. This inscribes itself into a popular opinion that these are mostly men who are immigrating (not women and children) to benefit from the European welfare states while they should fight for their homeland instead. Gendered construction of a refugee is visible on this example – women are more likely to be accepted and perceived as victims in need of help whereas men are a threat endangering European societies and European women so they should not be allowed to migrate.

Kotras emphasizes in his analysis of press articles: “Immigrants are not the opportunity for our society but they are a threat. They are not refugees but hostile invaders. The main actor – an immigrant, is presented as anti-hero not a hero. What we are facing is the civilization clash” (Kotras, 2016, p. 67). As Parker observed, “A recurring theme [...] was the ‘unwanted invader’ repertoire. Here the asylum seeker or refugee is positioned as actively unwanted; as someone to be fearful of, in contrast to the passive majority of the country” (Parker, 2015). It is clear that this way of depicting refugees dominated media narratives in Poland – they started to be perceived as unwelcomed intruders, invaders, and terrorists.

Fear of Islam is perpetuated by numerous newspapers. *Do Rzeczy* (no. 26) asks a question on its front page in June 2015: “Will Somebody Protect Us against Jihad? The West Is Losing Confrontation with Islam”, putting equation mark between jihad and Islam and referring to the dichotomous division between the West and Islam, which only fuels the “we” vs. “they” rhetoric. In a similar manner, *Wprost* (2016, no. 13) shows a face of a deadly terrorist surrounded by smoke. The text on this cover reads: “What Will Save Us from Islam’s Hell?”, and again a strong derogatory word “hell” is used in reference to Islam. *Gazeta Polska* (2016, no. 29) warns its readers: “Islam is Coming. Terrorism. France, Turkey, Whose Next?”, by showing a photo of a terrorist wearing a gun and associating Islam with terrorism. As the above examples show, the expressions “hell”, “jihad”, “confrontation” and “terrorism” used in reference to Islam frame it as dangerous, deadly and threatening to the Western world.

*Gazeta Polska* (no. 30) goes even further in fueling Islamophobic sentiments in June 2017, dehumanizing and humiliating refugees. One of its front pages shows a photo of a crowd of refugees wearing traditional Muslim clothes and warns its readers: “Immigrants Brought Deadly Diseases”, which is in line with the statement by Jarosław Kaczyński about refugees bringing germs. This front page coincides with an increase of anti-refugee rhetoric among Polish politicians in 2017 that I described in the previous section of this article.

As mentioned above, successful managing of fear consists in evoking the sense of threat of refugees and simultaneously showing the best answer to this threat – closing borders, refusing to accept refugees, condemning the European Union for trying to allocate them in various countries in Europe. *Wprost*’s (2016, no. 10) front page offers such a response: “Forbid Islam! Let’s Protect Ourselves before It’s Too Late”, quoting Miriam Shaded, a Polish-Syrian activist from Estera Foundation, who advocated for inviting Christian refugees from Syria to Poland. She is famous for her anti-Muslim opinions and calling for ban of Islam in Poland.

Some front pages chose the dichotomous ways of depicting Muslim refugees – they are either dangerous terrorists or passive helpless victims. The examples of this clash of bipolar images are offered by the two covers of weekly magazines. *Polityka*’s (no. 39) front page from September 2015 shows a famous Solidarity symbol wrapped in barbed wire (like those we can see in refugee camps), accompanying it with the text: “Why Do We Care about Refugees? Between Solidarity and Fear”. Such framing of the narrative fuels readers’ uncertainty and doubt with regards to refugees. Another example comes from *Wprost* (2015, no. 36), which shows an image of a refugee woman carrying her little child (reminding Virgin Mary) with the European Union stars as an aureole. The woman is Muslim; she

is depicted as the victim – sad and vulnerable. The commentary puts a question mark on her innocence: “Immigrants. Martyrs or Invaders”. As these two examples show, clearly the choice is only twofold – refugees have to necessarily be either victims (martyrs) or aggressors (invaders). Noteworthy, the two covers come from the same period – the fall of 2015, when the negative anti-refugee rhetoric was spread across the country in numerous political and media messages. The two newspapers, typically not associated with the right-wing Christian-conservative political affiliation, decided to use the language of fear and negative emotions.

### Refugees as a Threat to Europe

Another powerful argument against the refugees is that they contribute to the collapse of the European civilization and to “Europe’s suicide” (Bertram & Jędrzejek, 2015), because it is infected with the “virus of multikulti [i.e., multiculturalism]” (Sydow, 2016). This aspect of representation of refugees was present on front pages of weekly magazines within the two years between 2015 and 2017, however, the main focus was in the fall of 2015, which is the time of parliamentary campaign and intensified anti-refugee statements formulated by various politicians.

In the context of the refugee crisis, the European Union is represented in a negative way, as it wants to open its borders to refugees. One of the front pages of *Gazeta Polska* (2017, no. 35) shows an image of the Eiffel Tower with a crescent moon – the symbol of Islam – at the top and circled around with the stars – the symbol of the European Union. The title at the centre of this image reads: “Caliphate Europe”, warning its readers about possible dominance of Islam at the heart of Europe. In a less graphic way, *Tygodnik Powszechny* (2014, no. 45) uses the image of a girl wearing burqa in a close-up and comments: “Islam at the Gate: What is Europe Afraid of?” Islam at the gate of Europe is clearly considered a potential threat, which makes Europeans worried about their safety and national identities. Another cover of *Tygodnik Powszechny* (2015, no. 47), after the Paris attacks, presents a photo of a broken glass with the French flag in the background and states: “Jihad at the Heart of Europe: How Will Our World Change?”. “Islam at the gate”, “jihad at the heart of Europe” – these are expressions that create a sense of fear and negative emotions towards Muslim refugees and immigrants. Surprisingly, these comments come from *Tygodnik Powszechny* which is considered a balanced weekly, sensitive to socio-political issues and promoting multicultural and multireligious dialogue. As I will show below, on other occasion it actually tackles the coming of refugees in a sympathetic and compassionate way.

According to weekly magazines, not only is Islam responsible for Europe’s suicide, but it also violates Europe in the worst possible way. In February 2016, *W Sieci* (no. 7) offers a front page showing a woman dressed in the EU flag being kept by invisible aggressors (predominantly non-white), who sexually assault her. The photo is accompanied by a text: “Islam’s Rape on Europe: What the Media and Brussel’s Elites Hide from the EU’s Citizens?”. Kotras perceives the attackers “as rapists who want to sexually harass ‘our women’. That is why we have to defend our land, our values and our women” (Kotras, 2016, p. 67). It is a recurring pattern on the analyzed front pages – women symbolize Europe or Poland, who is in need of saving from dangerous Muslim attackers.

Those Polish politicians who were in favor of assisting the EU in accepting refugees were often accused of selling Poland, endangering country’s sovereignty and even betraying Poland. In 2015, *W Sieci* (no. 38) published two front pages illustrating this line of thinking. The first one shows the Prime Minister Ewa Kopacz dressed in burqa and wearing explosives as if she were a suicide bomber. The newspaper comments on this photo in the following way: “Ewa Kopacz Makes Hell at Berlin’s Order”. A week earlier (2015, no. 37) on the cover of the same weekly there appeared terrorist-like looking Middle Eastern men holding Polish national emblem with the white eagle lurking at the Polish border. Such image brings associations with the German invasion of Poland in 1939. The text on the cover reads: “They Are Coming! Germany Is Pushing for Suicidal Plan – Tusk and Kopacz Are Giving In”. As Marcin Kotras underlines, “the immigration problem in magazines was anchored as the conspiracy of elites. Once again (like it was many times in Poland’s history) ‘They’ want to tell us what ‘We’ should do in ‘Our’ country. The immigration problem is embedded in the classical dichotomy ‘We’ and ‘They’. The conservative magazines locate themselves inside the ‘We’ collection. ‘They’ were objectified as: the European Union authorities (and elites), Western Europe state leaders (especially German Chancellor Angela Merkel) and Polish government (with its Prime Minister of that time – Ewa Kopacz)” (Kotras, 2016, p. 66). Less prominent local politicians are also suspected of serving “them” on the cover of *Gazeta Polska* (no. 26) that reads in June 2017: “Mayors from Civic Platform Will Bring Islamists”, commenting on the willingness of some mayors from the oppositional party to accept refugees in their cities. Such image also coincides with anti-refugee statements of politicians.

## Christians, Victims, Citizens? Sympathetic Coverage

Sympathetic coverage of refugees on the front pages of the weekly magazines is scarce. The Catholic weekly *Niedziela* explored the image of the victim by showing injured and abandoned children, damaged cities, overcrowded camps, neglected and miserable refugees living in inhumane conditions. It commented on the refugees' journey by referring to their experiences with such expressions as: "People on the Road" (2016, no. 25), "They Die on the Way to Europe" (2016, no. 40), "Syria Awaits Help" (2017, no. 1). One of the covers of *Niedziela* from 2017 (no. 46) indirectly refers to the division described above into more welcomed and less welcomed refugees. The text on the cover reads: "Let's Save Christians", limiting help from Poland only to Christian refugees. This message inscribes itself into the argumentation of some Catholic organizations and right-wing politicians that accepting Christian refugees from Syria could be an alternative to the plan of the EU welcoming of all refugees. Human rights activists called such approach discriminatory on grounds of religious affiliation and uncommon in humanitarian interventions in the conflict zone (Gašior, 2015).

In contrast to *Niedziela's* postulate to accept only Christian refugees, *Tygodnik Powszechny* (2015, no. 37) offers a sympathetic image of a male refugee holding a little baby and the comment referring to the Bible: "I Was a Stranger and You Welcomed Me" (Matthew 25:35), which evokes compassion and understanding for the difficult refugee experiences. Christian values are understood here differently than in the previous example – as unconditional acceptance of refugees regardless of their origin, race, gender or religion, empathy towards those who are in need and understanding for the suffering of others. What is also unique in this photo is the fact that a man, a father, is represented as a welcomed refugee and a harmless victim.

*Polityka's* (no. 38) front page from September 2015 is the only one in the analyzed period that shows an image of the Muslim family – a couple with a newborn baby. They seem to be happy, smiling and embracing each other. The newspaper's comments this photo as follows, "New Poles? Muslims from Allocation: What Will We Do When They Come?". The image itself is very positive but the text undermines it as it suggests that the society might not know what to do when the refugees come to Poland. This cover is significantly different from other analyzed here as it escapes the usual representation of women as victims and of men as aggressors. Neither of the front pages from the analyzed period focused on refugee families, their experiences and expectations, on their everyday problems. Instead, they rather perpetuate the image of Muslim men as ter-



rorists and invaders and women as helpless, miserable victims. Interestingly, this cover comes from the period of when anti-refugee rhetoric was mainstreamed by the media, which proves that *Polityka* at least made an attempt to tackle the issue of refugees differently.

## Conclusions

The analysis of weeklies' front pages leads to the conclusion that the Polish society and mass media yield to the dominant discourse defining a refugee as “Other”, enemy, terrorist, or invader. As I have shown above, sympathetic coverage is rare. The binary logic of thinking of refugees as either victim or terrorist dominates in most of the analyzed weekly magazines and enhances a stereotypical and generalized perception of Muslim cultures necessarily perceived as “Otherness”, different from us and thus suspicious. The press, instead of delivering reliable and balanced opinions, rather tends to fuel negative attitudes and prejudices by maintaining the perception of refugees from North Africa and Middle East as endangering the Polish society.

Poles already manifest their anti-Muslim sentiments. The Facebook fan page “No to Islamization of Europe” was liked by more than 300 thousand users in May 2020. On the one hand, they are fueled by fear of people of different religion, ethnicity, nationality and race resulting from a lack of multicultural experience of Poles. The size of the Muslim community in Poland is relatively small, so people are afraid of the unknown, which contributes to racist and ethnocentric attitudes. Interestingly in this context, “Refugees, despite their absence, became an important actor in Poland, significant Other, someone who is different from us, embodies unwanted characteristics. [...] Refugee is the negation of our nation, on the other hand our nation is the negation of the Other. In this way the Other is our negative reflection representing everything we would not like to be. The role of the Other is given nowadays to Muslims, although Polish anti-Islamism is of phantom character – it exists without their physical presence” (Sydow, 2016).

As the analysis of the weekly magazines' front pages shows, refugees are not given any voice, do not tell their own stories, even if they are represented in the sympathetic way. Many critics consider this as a major failure of the media in reporting on the “refugee crisis”: “Refugees and migrants were given limited opportunities to speak directly of their experiences and suffering. Most often they were spoken about and represented in images as silent actors and victims” (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 3).

Another important conclusion is that the refugee crisis was dealt with in these weekly magazines superficially, often in a sensational way, without paying attention to the actual experiences of refugees, their everyday struggle. Furthermore, the wider socio-political context of their migration was completely neglected. In case of the war in Syria, the refugee situation was seldom linked to the conflict zone and the detailed circumstances of the war were missing from the coverage. What is more, the press did not tell individual stories explaining who refugees were, what they came for, what they dreamt of (Georgiou & Zaborowski, 2017, p. 3). The opportunity to tell their stories, to show to the Polish society their various cultural backgrounds, to get to know their religious beliefs was missed. Neither of the analyzed front pages asked a question about the reasons for which refugees were migrating, their goals or expectations. It was assumed that they come for help at best, or to invade, destroy and threaten Poland and Europe at worst.

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