



# *Rainbow Mary* and the Perceived Threat of LGBTQ+ Bodies in Poland

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*Abstract:* Examining the powerful protest art piece *Rainbow Mary* [Tęczowa Madonna] by Elżbieta Podleśna, this piece considers the reasons for Polish homophobia and transphobia as expressed by recent events including the rise of the conceptual right-wing framework of ‘gender ideology’, efforts to create ‘LGBT-free’ zones, and attempts at preventing Pride Parades. It argues that Polish right-wing hatred towards LGBTQ+ people is rooted in unresolved trauma and melancholia stemming from centuries of colonisation and occupation. Through a nationalistic insistence on Polish innocence and on messianic suffering, Polish LGBTQ+ people are framed by the right-wing as a threat to Polish sovereignty and thus understood as in need of expulsion. The piece argues that Polish feminist and queer protest art, and specifically Podleśna’s *Rainbow Mary*, partakes in what José Esteban Muñoz names *disidentification*, or the remaking of mainstream symbols so that they better serve LGBTQ+ people, remaking in the process what it means to be Polish.

*Keywords:* LGBTQ+, Poland, melancholia, protest art, queer and feminist art, disidentification

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The *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* (known in Polish as *Matka Boska Częstochowska*) is a Byzantine painting of unparalleled importance for Polish sovereignty.<sup>1</sup> It features a Black Mother Mary [Czarna Madonna] clad in a head covering, holding in her arms a Black baby Jesus, both of whom are encircled by golden halos. Mary’s right cheek is slashed with two vertical and one horizontal mark, legends attributing these to Hussite invasion in 1430. Located at Jasna Góra Monastery in Częstochowa, the 122 by 82-centimeter painting epitomises the cult of Mother Mary in Polish culture, even while its date of creation and origins

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remain undetermined. The painting's significance for Polish national identity is connected to Polish survival, Catholicism, and devotion to matriarchal symbology. This is evinced by annual pilgrimages to Częstochowa in the millions to view the painting.

**Image 1.** Elżbieta Podleśna, *Rainbow Mary* [Tęczowa Madonna], 2019.



*Image description:* The *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* painting, with Mary holding baby Jesus in her left arm. Both figures are clad in luxurious robes of navy and gold and red and gold, respectively. Each of their heads is surrounded by a rainbow halo of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple stripes.

*Source:* 'Rainbow Madonna' entry on Wikipedia, <https://bit.ly/3ynSR1T> (20.04.2021).

It should thus be of perhaps no surprise that the remaking of the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* into a queer icon by Elżbieta Podleśna was immediately contested by right-leaning citizens within Poland. In 2019 Podleśna digitally substituted the golden halos on both Mary and Jesus of the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* painting with six colored stripes from the pride rainbow (see Image 1), placing Polish veneration, survivance and patriotism in direct contact with Polish queerness and LGBTQ+ struggle (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Plus). *Rainbow Mary / Madonna* [Tęczowa Madonna]—or as at least one news source humorously named her ‘Matka Boska Tęczochowska’ [Our Mother of Rainbows]—appeared in the 2019 Pride Parade (known as the Equality March [Marsz Równości]) in Częstochowa, and Podleśna displayed the imagery throughout Płock via postering and stickering with the help of activists Anna Prus and Joanna Gzyra-Iskandar. Images of the posters were then circulated online across social media platforms and on news media. The postering action was intended to challenge Easter celebrations in the Catholic Saint Maksymilian Kolbe Parish at the Church of Saint Dominik that unequivocally framed LGBTQ+ people and ‘gender’ as sinful (Hartman 2019; Sitnicka 2020). Speaking to her political postering action, Podleśna indicated that ‘Nobody should be excluded from society. Sexual orientation is not a sin, or a crime and the Holy Mother would protect such people from the Church and from priests who think it is okay to condemn others’ (Easton 2019: n.p.).

While Podleśna’s protest art was confronted with accusations of ‘profanation’ by right-wing and Catholic media, Podleśna herself toggled Catholicism and feminist and queer values, eschewing the too easy homophobic interpretation that remaking a Polish symbol on queer terms somehow sullies its value and meaning. Podleśna, a psychologist by profession, is a prominent feminist activist in Poland instrumental in the 2017 Polish Women’s Strike, in challenging the xenophobia of Polish Independence Day marches in Warsaw in 2017, as well as in spray-painting actions challenging the right-wing ruling populist party Law and Justice [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość—PiS]. At the same time, Podleśna is also a secular Catholic, clearly invested in Polishness as much as in queerness, religiosity alongside feminism. Podleśna’s powerful *Rainbow Mary* image asks Polish folks to reassess their homophobic and transphobic panic, and to turn to their patriotism and religiosity as a source of LGBTQ+ acceptance. Indeed, the symbol strikes me for its ability to hold together, rather than split apart, right-leaning commitments to Polish sovereignty and the religious grounding that has historically been important to Polish survivance with what have been understood as left-leaning commitments to protecting the lives of LGBTQ+ people in Poland. In other words, *Rainbow Mary* provides possibilities for LGBTQ+ people in Poland to continue to be proud of their Polishness and religiosity while also being proud of their sexual and gender identities.

*Rainbow Mary*’s visual prominence has been made possible by the intermediality of ‘networked protest’ in which symbols are shared, edited and circulated online, creating patterns of interlinked online and offline activisms and fueling large scale involvement in protests (Kuntsman 2009; Tufekci 2018). Rather than disembodied modes of engagement, online forms of protest such as the online circulation of *Rainbow Mary* are entangled with offline protest, building communities of embodied dissent across geographical boundaries that are grounded in ‘networked affect’ and the circulation of embodied investment in social transformation (Hillis et al. 2015). The power of such feminist and queer symbols as *Rainbow Mary* is thus grounded in embodied action between online and offline spaces.

Yet despite *Rainbow Mary's* prominence, Podleśna was arrested in May of 2019, along with two other activists (Anna Prus and Joanna Gzyra-Iskandar), facing up to two years in prison for 'offending religious feelings' [obraza uczuć religijnych], which is a Blasphemy Law in Poland housed under Article 196 of the Penal Code (Hartman 2019; Sitnicka 2020). Activists on social media pointed out that Podleśna's art has been unfairly targeted, since there have historically been countless *Catholic* instances of paintings of Mother Mary decorated with rainbows and rainbow halos in Poland (see Image 2). Nonetheless, Podleśna's image was framed as a desecration of the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* and outspoken segments of the Polish population failed to see how *Rainbow Mary* extended Polish patriotism and religiosity to the hearts of those persecuted by the nation-state, and specifically to LGBTQ+ folks.

**Image 2.** Meme found on the Instagram page of feminist politician Agata Martyna Diduszko-Zyglewska (@agatadiduszko).



*Image description:* The prayer 'Zdrowaś Maryjo' [Hail Mary] superimposed over rainbow-based Catholic icons and devotional images with the words 'Nie Ty' [not you] over Podleśna's Rainbow Mary art piece. This meme signifies the homophobic limits of rainbow-based religious symbols and the hypocrisy in criminalising Podleśna.

*Source:* @agatadiduszko on Instagram, February 17, 2021.

Understanding that symbols travel and transform as well as that they wound and offend, this article explores possible reasons for the reluctance towards *Rainbow Mary* and towards public expressions of LGBTQ+ existence in Poland. As Szymon Wróbel writes, ‘for us Poles, this bitter time is a revival of national symbols’ (Wróbel 2011: 455). With a right-wing government in a narrow political lead, Poland is seeing increased polarisation between right and left leaning citizens. One of the central concerns of this divide has been discussions over LGBTQ+ people’s place in Poland, as contestations of *Rainbow Mary* evince. With right-wing brigades creating ‘LGBT-free zones’ [Strefy wolne od LGBT] throughout the nation, the positioning of LGBTQ+ people as ‘pedophiles’ by right-wing media, the physical stoning of gay people during Pride Parades and the burning of pride flags, Poland has become an alarmingly inhospitable space for LGBTQ+ people. Same-sex marriage is not legal in Poland, there is no legal recognition of homophobic or transphobic hate crimes and hate speech that is homophobic or transphobic in nature is not considered a criminal offence (Godzisz and Knut 2018). Also, prosecution for crimes ‘offending religious feelings’, such as the *Rainbow Mary* case, have increased in frequency in Poland, with 29 such indictments appearing in 2020.

This is especially wounding for LGBTQ+ Polish people given Poland’s prominent LGBTQ+ histories. One of Poland’s early anthems ‘Rota’ [The Oath] was penned in 1908 by Maria Konopnicka, an out lesbian, during the last years of the partitions, and Poland was one of the first modern nation-states to decriminalise homosexuality in 1932 (Amenta et al. 2021; Tomasik 2014). Poland’s gay histories notwithstanding, the current homophobic and transphobic environment in Poland has brought LGBTQ+ and feminist activism into visibility as never before seen in Poland. At the same time as LGBTQ+ people in Poland are facing hatred from large segments of the population, the COVID-19 pandemic has emboldened the PiS party to take steps towards the total criminalisation of abortion. While abortion was already mostly illegal in Poland and the European Union intentionally avoids oversight over reproductive issues, leaving these decisions up to each nation, on October 22, 2020, PiS passed legal action to criminalise the majority of the remaining 1000 per year legal abortions (Ramme 2019: 472). Polish people with and without uteruses responded in protests numbering hundreds of thousands, motivating the government to temporarily repeal this new law, only to reinstitute it again three months later, with an almost total ban on abortions in effect since January 27, 2021. The ironies of matriarchal religious worship in a nation-state that refuses to extend full freedom through the power of choice to women and other people with uteruses, should not be lost. Further, the struggles of LGBTQ+ folks and women in Poland are in many ways united struggles, as the ruling party PiS and the right-wing more broadly frame all challenges to gender—from gender roles to LGBTQ+ rights—as falling under the rubric of ‘gender ideology’, as I will discuss later in the piece. Women’s / reproductive and LGBTQ+ rights in Poland have thus become united struggles in the last few years, as is visible in the many windows displaying the right of choice / right to abortion lightning bolt alongside a rainbow flag—enfolding Polishness, the right to choose and LGBTQ+ rights into a cohesive national project of protest (see Image 3).

**Image 3.** The Polish right to choose / right to abortion lightning bolt flag alongside the rainbow pride flag. From Warsaw’s women’s strike [Strajk Kobiet] against the criminalisation of abortion.



*Image description:* A photo of a gray-colored apartment block with two flags hanging out of one of its windows. On the left is Poland’s red and white flag with a black thunder bolt (the symbol of the women’s strike in Poland) and on the right in the rainbow pride flag.

*Source:* @miloscniwyklucza on Instagram, November 1, 2020.

In what follows, I use *Rainbow Mary* as an entry point for thinking about how it is that segments of the Polish population can worship women, yet be misogynistic, tout ‘tolerance’, and yet express hatred towards LGBTQ+ people. I begin with arguing that queer and feminist symbols such as *Rainbow Mary* must be understood in networked contexts of protest characterised by intermediality, embodied action and the fluid movement of protest symbology between online and offline public spaces. Next, using the framework of bodyminds developed by disability studies scholars Sami Schalk and Margaret Price, which drives this special issue, I think about national Polish trauma as affecting the bodyminds of Polish people through intergenerational trauma. While many feminists have rightfully argued that homophobia and transphobia in Poland are not local issues but part of a transnational network of similar activity—‘a powerful transnational effort of religious fundamentalists and right-wing radicals to discredit gender equality’—in this piece I take a different approach, focusing on the speci-

ficity of LGBTQ+ struggles in Poland and Poland's specific psychic histories (Graff 2014: 434; Korolczuk 2015). Segments of the Polish population, I argue, hang onto nationalist Polish melancholia because of the generations of trauma Polish people have faced through occupation, colonisation and attempts at cultural annihilation. Still fresh on the heels of these centuries of trauma, right-wing Polish citizens in and beyond Poland find themselves unable to 'move on' and are deeply suspicious of 'foreignness' in all its forms. Looking at the model of melancholia specifically, as pivoted by Sigmund Freud (Freud 1917) and adapted by scholars such as David Eng and Shinhee Han (with 'racial melancholia'; Eng and Han 2000) and Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (with 'melancholic nationalism'; Ziarek 2007), I provide a bodymind model for nationalist frameworks of intolerance—of which homophobia and transphobia are part. I conclude the piece by turning to José Esteban Muñoz's (Muñoz 1999) work on 'disidentification', as the remaking of mainstream symbols on queer terms, to think about the possibility for bodyminds to be transformed through a positive recognition of national melancholia. I develop the term 'disidentificatory melancholia' to suggest that intermedial Polish feminist and queer activist work, including that of *Rainbow Mary*, remakes melancholia through disidentification, holding onto both the complexities of national trauma and the necessity of building on existing Polish symbology to speak for those rendered excludable by the state.

## 1. Intermedial queer and feminist protest

Before delving into an analysis of the nationalist psychic motivations behind homophobia and transphobia in Poland, I want to outline the ways in which *Rainbow Mary* is part of contemporary intermedial queer and feminist protest in Poland and globally. As is well known, social media has been effectively utilised as a tool by political activists, used in the fight against authoritarian regimes as well as against structural racism, sexism, homophobia, and transphobia. Challenging ideas of 'digital dualism' that see online and offline engagement as separate and distinct, global and local feminist, antiracist and antiauthoritarian movements have evinced that on and offline protest is interconnected, intermedial and mutually fueling (Bijan 2015; Danylyuk 2018; Jurgenson 2011; Kuntsman 2009; Nakamura 2002; Tufekci 2018). Like many other participatory political movements, Polish feminist and queer struggles in Poland, especially from September 2016 onwards with the start of the 'Black Protest' [Czarny Protest] against initial proposals to further restrict abortion laws in Poland, have drawn on the potentials of social media and challenged ideas around digital dualism and the specious idea of the 'second self' of online engagement (Hall 2019; Jurgenson 2011; Kuntsman 2012; Turkle 1984).

One way in which we can understand the challenge to digital dualism presented by social media engaged movements, such as those currently taking place in Poland, is through their *intermedial* quality. Intermediality is a term that was first coined by artist Dick Higgins in his 1966 'Statement on Intermedia'. In it he writes that artistic 'media have broken down their traditional forms' so that what is 'music' can also be 'poetry' because of 'the dialectic between the media' (n.p.). The use of the term was part of a broader interest in the 1960s to theorise media and its convergence, described through various terms including 'media ecology'

by Marshall McLuhan and as a ‘media system’ by Hans Frederik Dahl and Peppino Ortoleva (Balbi and Magaudda 2018: 156–158). As part of a broader thinking on media convergence, ‘intermediality’ was developed to think about new forms of aesthetic expression and the convergence of techniques, mediums and genres in art-making. This early thinking on intermediality also had politicised qualities, with Higgins concerned with US militarism and the Vietnam War and supportive of labour movements of the time (Kemp-Welch 2018: 110). Since Higgins’s 1966 statement, intermediality has been taken up by art studies and communication studies to reference the ways in which forms of media tend to blur and overlap into one another, all the more so when it comes to protest and protest art (Arfara et al. 2018a).

In contemporary contexts, intermediality refers to the fluidity with which art and protest move between the online and the offline—so much so that it is difficult to know where something starts or how it builds: the so-called online and offline are inseparable. Recent feminist and queer protests in Poland have been effective at mobilising emotions and bodies because they provide intermedial fluid crossovers between online sharing and posting and in-person, on the street action and protest. *Rainbow Mary*’s power as just one of many symbols of recent Polish protests must thus be understood in this inherently intermedial series of spaces. For example, as a Polish-Canadian scholar working from North America, *Rainbow Mary* is known to me only through social media. Nonetheless, the image’s presence on social media has had the affective capacity to mobilise my anger and sorrow as a Polish queer and has even motivated me to attend small-scale protests against Polish homophobia, transphobia and sexism in Canada. While *Rainbow Mary* existed in its originally planted locations around the city of Płock for only one day, the image continues to live on the internet over two years from when it was posted (Podleśna 2018). This is all to say that *Rainbow Mary* could not exist in the same way it does, and certainly the image could not have reached me as a scholar currently based in North America, had it not been for its intermediality.

Intermediality and networked protest-making also lead to increased bodymind investment and embodied feeling, rather than to its diminishment. For instance, while I have been told that as a Polish immigrant living in Canada, I have the luxury of not needing to care about the fight for LGBTQ+ justice and abortion rights in Poland, I have found the opposite to be true. Drawing on the words of Adi Kuntsman, as a queer person of Polish diaspora, ‘my life, like the lives of other queer immigrants ... causes rage and violence ... within and outside our émigré communities’ (Kuntsman 2009: viii). In large part because of the intermediality of Polish feminist and queer protest art, I can *feel* the struggles taking place on a different continent as pertaining directly to my own bodymind and I am moved to action and allyship. In this sense, networked intermediality leads to ‘an intense experience and emotion ... heightened awareness of one’s own body and a clearer understanding of a particular situation’ (Arfara et al. 2018b: 8). Building ‘networked affect’, intermedial circulation allows for embodied investment in struggles that might be taking place in locations geographically distant from me, but that feel immediate, relevant and vital (Hillis et al. 2015). The intermediality of *Rainbow Mary* as a networked image that anyone with internet access can look to, creates more possibilities for protest, action and most importantly for emotional investment—for ‘new digital psycho-geographies’ (Harvie 2009: 56). Kuntsman articulates this as the embodied process of ‘reverberation’, which refers to ‘the movement of emotions and feelings in and out of cyberspace, through bodies, psyches, texts and machines’ (Kuntsman 2012: 1–2;



2009). In other work, Kuntsman refers to the ‘cybertouch of war, violence and death’ and the ways that events, past and present, can touch us, gesturing again to the material and embodied inseparability of digital and nondigital presence (Kuntsman 2010: 9).

Yet networked affect and embodied responses to intermedial circulation are also utilised by the populist right-wing and by ultra-right political parties in Poland to fuel homophobic, transphobic and misogynist rhetoric. My mother, for example, spending the last 25+ years of her life in a diasporic Canadian context yet firmly grounded in her pre-immigration life in Poland, is stirred not by queer and feminist Polish activism but by right-wing news sources. Using YouTube as her primary source of Polish news, networked affect takes place for her through ultra-right Polish calls to Polish sovereignty and its weaponisation of LGBTQ+ people, reproductive rights and migrants. In addition to effectively employing TV promotion (since about 78 percent of Polish people in Poland watch TV daily) and other traditional media, right-wing parties in Poland such as PiS have also grasped the importance of social media promotion (Lipiński and Stępińska 2018: 5). Since around 2014, with the electoral success of far-right politician Janusz Korwin-Mikke and musician turned center-right politician Paweł Kukiz, right-wing political parties have drawn on social media to build a following among younger voters (Lipiński and Stępińska 2018). Social media is utilised by right-wing parties as a supposedly anti-establishment platform, eliciting the feeling of speaking directly to those right-leaning citizens who feel like they are not seen by traditional and mainstream media (Lipiński and Stępińska 2018: 8).

Confronting right-wing ideology, *Rainbow Mary*, as a networked intermedial image, invites not only LGBTQ+ people in Poland, but also LGBTQ+ Polish people in diaspora and LGBTQ+ people across nation-affiliations, to connect to its symbology of Polish queerness. Since Polish images of queerness have been muted and erased historically, a symbol such as *Rainbow Mary* is of paramount importance in visualising what it might mean to be both Polish and queer, even when one lives in diaspora. The image’s intermediality, its existence as an object that is both online and offline, is a key element of its symbolic power. It is through its fluid existence that it is possible to facilitate ‘an extraordinary enlargement of the possibilities of the public sphere’ (Lister et al. 2009: 219), so that I am personally called to become part of its public while living on another continent. Intermediality is of central importance to how contemporary Polish queer and feminist protest images function and it helps to explain the massive scale of public involvement in recent pro-choice and LGBTQ+ justice movements in Poland. Through intermediality, individuals across Poland and beyond its borders can become emotionally entangled with the power of visual representations such as *Rainbow Mary* and are invited into a broader public struggling for human rights under an increasingly authoritarian Polish government. I will return to the power of intermedial protest in the final section of this piece, after considering some of the nationalist frameworks that shape homophobia and transphobia in Poland.

## 2. Much to mourn: Melancholia at work in Polish national and nationalist frameworks

In a broad sense, Polish people have experienced centuries of trauma. Many Polish generations, mine included, have been raised on the legacies of this pain through intergenerational

trauma. Poland survived a 150-year period of colonisation by Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Empire and Prussia (1772–1918) during which it was ‘wiped off the map’ of Europe. During this period the Polish nation survived without statehood, with Polish language forbidden in schools and Polish histories and traditions suppressed by institutions. In the twentieth century, shortly after regaining sovereignty in 1918, Poland faced renewed occupation from Nazi Germany as well as Nazi German genocide of Jewish people during the Second World War (1939–1945) and then Soviet occupation during the state-socialist era (1947–1989). During both regimes, Polish people were murdered, brutalised, raped and famined by the millions, and once again forced to suppress Polish culture. Throughout these oppressive regimes, and especially during state socialism, the Catholic Church emerged as a key pillar of Polishness, adding comfort and guidance to an oppressed people and forming a space of political dissent against external occupation—serving as ‘both the institutional and symbolic center of independent Polish national identity’ (Herbert 2019: 25).

In recent decades this collective trauma has been weaponised by the right-wing to frame Polish people as perpetually innocent of antisemitism and racism, and LGBTQ+ people and feminists as ‘the new totalitarianism’ that must be quashed for Polish sovereignty to survive intact. The PiS party, formed in 2001, has shifted since its inception from a center-right to radical-right party, centering in its rhetoric a commitment to a nationalist Catholic Polish identity grounded in taking on the Western powers and marginalising those deemed as threats to Polish security, including LGBTQ+ people and migrants (Lipiński and Stępińska 2018: 7). For example, in the 2015 Polish parliamentary elections, PiS used its platform to oppose the acceptance of 7,000 migrants using ‘victim-perpetrator reversals, us-them dichotomy, equating refugees with terrorists’ (Lipiński and Stępińska 2018: 8). More recently, in the 2020 presidential election won narrowly by PiS, elected Andrzej Duda actively framed LGBTQ+ people as ‘an ideology’ rather than as people. Often drawing on histories of struggle against occupation, on resistance efforts during WWII and state socialism and on Solidarity movement activism, right-wing politicians function as ‘memory entrepreneurs ... [who] can manipulate traumatic memories in a population to justify the subversion of democratic processes, which is particularly dangerous’ (Gaufman 2017: 34). Far-right Polish nationalists routinely frame queer, transgender and feminist citizens alongside migrants from other Eastern European and Muslim-majority countries as a new wave of enemies and would-be occupiers within Poland’s borders, evoking historical Polish traumas and the political theatre of mourning to build hatred towards these groups. In this context, queerness is too often framed as ‘new’, as a Western and sometimes Soviet Communist import, as unpatriotic and as immoral.

Drawing on Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (Ziarek 2007) alongside Sigmund Freud’s model of melancholia and the work of post-Freudian theorists of melancholia, I argue that Polish nationalist paranoia around LGBTQ+ people as threatening Polish sovereignty stems out of a ‘national paradigm of innocent suffering’ (Freud 1917: 309). Imagining Polishness as innocent suffering, Polish nationalists, right-wing groups and political parties, frame queerness as *not* Polish and as against Polish sovereignty. In this context, *Rainbow Mary* emerges as a duplicitous symbol of national theft and betrayal, rather than as a queer celebration of Polishness.

As formulated by Sigmund Freud in his essay ‘Mourning and Melancholia’ (Freud 1917), melancholia is a state of unresolved grief. Unlike mourning, framed as a normal and ‘successful’ response to loss, Freud situated melancholia as an unresolved attachment to one’s lost object. Whereas with mourning one eventually lets go of one’s lost object and is able to move on and find sustenance and attachment to other objects, with melancholia—Freud stipulated—one develops a pathological orientation to one’s lost object, never being able to let go. As such, melancholia is endless and ongoing grief. What is more, this grief was framed by Freud as inherently pathological, characterised by ‘a profoundly painful dejection, cessation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment’ (Freud 1917: 244). In this sense, melancholia is an affliction of the bodymind, coursing through ‘the enmeshment of the mind and the body’ so that the embodied mind is consumed in pain (Price 2015; Schalk 2018: 5).

Drawing on Freud’s (Freud 1917) formulation of melancholia, Ziarek (Ziarek 2007) argues that ‘melancholic nationalism’ is a response to collective grief and trauma experienced within and by a nation. Polish nationalism emerges from the rubble of 150 years of colonial occupation, followed by Nazi German and Soviet colonial occupations. As such, Polish nationalism surfaces through narratives of Polish suffering, under a ‘compensatory paradigm of Polish nationality, associated with the topos of messianic suffering’ (Ziarek 2007: 309). Importantly, Polish nationhood is not the only national identity structured around melancholic sentiment; for example Adi Kuntsman discusses Russian-Israeli ‘community [as one] of irresolvable suffering’ with Russian-Israelis often framing themselves as ‘perpetual sufferer[s], whose suffering gives [them] a position of moral sanctity’ that can be utilised in nationalist ways, as for example with the condoning of the Israeli occupation of Palestinian land (Kuntsman 2009: 183). To better understand how melancholia can be a national, community-based or group-based affliction, it is instrumental to turn to melancholia’s theorisations alongside racialisation.

Melancholia, as an inability to let go of one’s lost object, can function in ways that are a ‘structure of everyday group experience’, rather than a pathology, especially for minoritarian and racialised subjects who experience everyday oppression (Eng and Han 2000: 667). David Eng and Shinhee Han (2000) discuss the importance of depathologising the concept of melancholia and recognising how much it structures the everyday quality of life for minoritarian and oppressed communities, and specifically for Asian Americans. While in a Freudian (Freud 1917) formulation, melancholia is pathological and mourning is ‘normal’, Eng and Han stress how melancholia itself *is* normal under conditions of ongoing external strain and oppression, such as racism in a white U.S. context. ‘Racial melancholia’, they argue, is a de-pathologised and everyday state of coping and negotiating life under racist conditions, requiring ‘intergenerational negotiation between mourning *and* melancholia’ (Eng and Han 2000: 680). Before them, José Esteban Muñoz argued also that melancholia, especially for ‘blacks, queers, or any queers of color, is not a pathology but an integral part of everyday lives’ and one that ‘helps us (re)construct identity’ (Muñoz 1999: 74).

While it is impossible to equate racial melancholia with nation-based melancholia amongst a group of people who are primarily white, what I want to draw on from Eng and

Han (2000) is the possibility of understanding melancholia as a collective, rather than individual state. Freud himself wrote that '[m]ourning is regularly the reaction to the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on. In some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition' (Freud 1917: 243). Importantly, in this formulation, Freud stipulated loss and grief as resulting not only from personal loss but also from the loss and injury attached to 'one's country, liberty, an ideal, and so on' (243), creating possibilities for thinking about loss on a collective level. This resonates with Eng and Han's (2000) analysis of racial melancholia as a psychic community strategy of surviving intergenerational trauma in racist contexts. Other theorists such as Éva Tettenborn (Tettenborn 2006), have similarly situated melancholia as a collective navigation of racism that can be utilised for political empowerment and in the face of racism. 'Black melancholia', Tettenborn (Tettenborn 2006) argues, is a literary device African American authors have used to claim full subjecthood through the human right to feel loss, and far from Freud's pathological (and white and middle class) reading, melancholia in this sense becomes a strategy of survival.

In parallel though distinct ways, it can be said that Polish people, as a collective, are characterised by melancholia and intergenerational trauma due to centuries of oppression through colonisation and dictatorial external regimes, creating a 'community of tears' (Wróbel 2011: 455). Importantly, this melancholia has taken on nationalistic qualities, such that Polish nationhood is overidentified with suffering and unable to acknowledge any histories or present-day realities of how Polish nationalism can also cause suffering to groups within its borders. For example, Ziarek (Ziarek 2007) explores how in the decades after the Holocaust, in which 3 million Jewish-Polish people died at the hands of German Nazis, Polish collective national grief often overlooked the Jewish loss of life, such that the 3 million non-Jewish Polish deaths were remembered in the face of ongoing Soviet regime repression through commemorative plaques and annual events, but Jewish deaths were not. This uneven commemoration of loss points to failures in imagining who is Polish in the first place, which lives are rendered 'grievable' (Butler 2009) and which Polish lives amount to national collective trauma and loss. Importantly, during Soviet occupation, it was routine practice to have Polish histories erased and manicured so they were supportive of Soviet and state-socialist narratives of freedom and victory, erasing also those countless acts of violence and murder committed by the Soviet state-socialist government, memory of which survived only because of 'unofficial secret counterknowledge, transmitted usually through family ties and the links of friendship, [which ...] managed to preserve the collective memory of numerous events erased from the communist version of history' (Ziarek 2007: 310). When figured as a nation always oppressed and one that suffers at the hands of foreign powers, Polish nationalist frameworks continue to formulate Poland as 'the crucified Christ of nations', and never as one that enacts suffering on others. If the Polish nation-state only ever suffers, but does not inflict suffering, then it becomes difficult to acknowledge violence done against marginalised and minoritarian groups in Poland. This relates directly to a right-wing rhetorical reconceptualisation of gayness and transness as a violent imposition, a rhetorical strategy that diminishes the possibility for a national recognition of homophobia and transphobia within Poland as itself violent.

An analysis of the persistent ‘obsession with innocence’ (Tokarska-Bakir 2001) and ‘redemptive suffering’ (Ziarek 2007: 311) helps unravel the logic behind the right-wing formulation of Polish harm and violence as itself innocent. Returning to Freud’s formulation of melancholia, Polish melancholic nationalism consists of an inability to move past historical grief, loss and trauma through ‘self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminat[ing] in a delusional expectation of punishment’ (Freud 1917: 244). Arguably never having received the reparations that were Poland’s due, Polish nationalists and right-leaning citizens have lingered in an injured bodymind, persistent in seeking a righting for the wrongs done, while unable also to recognise how this melancholia has been expressed in hateful and harmful ways to compensate for loss and injury. As Ziarek (Ziarek 2007) writes, melancholia is especially apt for thinking about Polish nationalism under colonisation, because Polish nationhood survived without any statehood for 150 years in contexts where Polish culture, language and traditions were outlawed. Under such conditions, Polish nationhood became characterised by an unresolvable loss and melancholia. Further, despite persistent uprisings and attempts at sovereignty, Poland continued to be subjugated, further fueling a national collective melancholia. Ziarek’s relating of Polish reluctance towards mourning Jewish life and acknowledging Polish antisemitism is one example of this melancholic nationalism. Another equally harmful expression of Polish melancholic nationalism has been hatred against LGBTQ+ people in Poland.

### 3. Expressions of homophobia and transphobia in Poland

As mentioned in the introduction, there has been mounting hatred in recent years against LGBTQ+ people within Poland. The rise of the conceptual right-wing framework of ‘gender ideology’, efforts to create LGBT-free zones and attempts at preventing Pride Parades / Equality Marches [Marsze Równości], all point to ways in which Polish nationalism has been set into play through melancholic nationalism. The formulation of ‘gender ideology’ [ideologia dżender] or ‘genderism’ by the right-wing is a catch-all to describe anything to do with feminist, queer or transgender approaches to gender. The use of ‘gender ideology’ and similar terms is a transnational trend cropping up in post state-socialist countries (like Poland, Russia, Ukraine, Slovakia, Georgia and Hungary) as well as in Western countries (like France, Germany and the US) with the rise of right-wing populism (Corredor 2019; Kuhar and Paternotte 2017; Salvatori 2018: 75). The hateful framing of all efforts at gender equality and sexual justice as ‘gender ideology’ has been active in the Polish public sphere since at least 2013 and highly influenced by Polish ties to Catholicism and the Vatican (Grabowska 2013; Graff 2014; Hall 2019; Salvatori 2018). For example, a feminist critique of gender roles or of violence against women as much as calls for all-gender bathrooms and sex education for children, could be enfolded under the right-wing rubric of ‘gender ideology’. The phrase ‘gender ideology’ suggests that thinking about gender in any form that contests current Polish gender norms, is a form of ‘ideology’ (but that status quo ideas and norms around gender are not ideological but ‘natural’ and ‘normal’) (Korolczuk 2015).

In the Polish context, the motivation behind this ideological framework is the protection of children from ‘new’ ideas around gender and sexuality, which are seen as either Soviet-

Communist or Western imports that threatens Polish families, Polish gender norms and traditions, Catholicism and Polishness itself. ‘Gender ideology’ was articulated in 2013 by Bishop Tadeusz Pieronek as ‘worse than Communism and Nazism put together’, directly drawing on Polish histories of colonisation and weaponising them against gender and sexual minorities as well as against feminists (qtd. in Graff 2014: 432). As a threat to national sovereignty and Polishness, LGBTQ+ people in Poland are thus understood as dangerous bodies with dangerous ideas—dangerous bodyminds. Further still, ‘gender ideology’ suggests that some bodies themselves, and specifically LGBTQ+ bodies, are in and of themselves an ‘ideology’ rather than embodied persons and citizens with human rights.

For example, at the seventy-fifth anniversary of the Warsaw Uprising (that claimed 16,000 lives of Polish resistance fighters and between 150,000 to 200,000 Polish civilian lives in the final days of WWII, from August 1 to October 2, 1944), right-leaning citizens marched with an anti-LGBTQ+ banner (see Image 4). On the banner, three symbols are rendered on parallel with each other: the sickle and hammer symbolizing Soviet state-socialist oppression, the Nazi German swastika referencing the Nazi regime and a circle with the colors of the pride flag, symbolizing LGBTQ+ people and so-called ‘gender ideology’. Resonant with Bishop Pieronek’s words that ‘gender ideology’ is a worse evil than Soviet state-socialist and Nazi German occupation combined, this banner presents LGBTQ+ people as deadly to Polish people, as occupiers of Polish spaces and as a target that must be removed for Polishness to survive intact.

**Image 4.** A hateful banner with the text ‘Stop Totalitaryzmom’ [Stop Totalitarianisms], demonstrating the equating of Nazi occupation and state-socialist Soviet occupation of Poland with the LGBTQ+ fight for freedom and equality. From the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw uprising, August 1, 2019, Warsaw.



*Image description:* A photo from the 75th anniversary of the Warsaw uprising featuring mostly white men marching holding Polish flags. In the foreground, several of these men are holding a white banner that translates to ‘Stop Totalitarianisms’ and that has three circular symbols crossed out: the sickle and hammer, the Nazi swastika and the rainbow flag.

*Source:* ‘Nie Zapomnimy’ [We Won’t Forget] on Reddit, [https://www.reddit.com/r/Polska/comments/gooxz8/nie\\_zapomnimy/](https://www.reddit.com/r/Polska/comments/gooxz8/nie_zapomnimy/) (20.04.2021).

Indeed, Podleśna attributed her motivation in creating *Rainbow Mary* to the invocation of ‘gender ideology’ alongside the framing of LGBTQ+ people as sinful by the Catholic Church of Saint Dominik in Płock at an Easter celebration. At the church Easter event, above a cross covered in a red-and-white shawl (symbolising Poland), was an invocation for Christ to protect church-goers from a long list of ‘sins’ including ‘hejt’, jealousy, aggression, gossip, egotism, robbery, greed, contempt, as well as ‘LGBT’ and ‘gender’ (Sitnicka 2020) (see Image 5). This display, photographed and circulated on social media and Polish news sources, understandably infuriated LGBTQ+ people in Poland, visually crystallising the religious right’s ideological conflation of so-called ‘gender ideology’ and LGBTQ+ people with sin.

**Image 5.** The installation at the Church of Saint Dominik in Płock at an Easter celebration featuring a banner that reads ‘Protect us from the Flames of Not Believing’ [Zachowaj nas od Ognia Niewiary].



*Image description:* A photo of a wooden cross with a Polish red and white shawl on it against a navy background. The cross is situated under a sign that translates as ‘Protect us from the Flames of Not Believing’. Around the cross are pink hydrangea flowers as well as boxes with various ‘sins’ written on them such as hatred, LGBT, and gender.

*Source:* PortalPłock, <https://bit.ly/3yjmAZM> (20.04.2021).

Related to the above discourses that equate LGBTQ+ people with foreign occupation, LGBT-free zones [Strefy wolne od LGBT] started being implemented as resolutions in 2019 due to lobbying by ultra-conservative groups such as Ordo Iuris (see Image 6). The zones started appearing in response to Warsaw's liberal mayor, Rafał Trzaskowski having signed a declaration in support of LGBTQ+ rights and in favor of including LGBTQ+ content in sex education in the city. The zones act to create spaces within municipalities and regions in south-east Poland that bar 'gender ideology' and LGBTQ+ people. Up to one third of Poland declared itself an 'LGBT-free' zone as of June 2020, with the European Union denying funding to municipalities that have declared themselves as such and the European Parliament declaring in March 2021 that all of the EU is an LGBTIQ Freedom Zone (see Image 7 and 'Atlas of Hate' [Atlas Nienawiści] for updates). 'LGBT-free' zones are intended to create spaces where LGBTQ+ people cannot be open and visible, and indeed are not welcome to enter. While mostly symbolic rather than legal in function, these zones explicitly demarcate some Polish spaces as not for LGBTQ+ people with the goal of protecting the purity of Polish nationhood from the perceived negative influences and threats of 'gender ideology' and LGBTQ+ bodies.

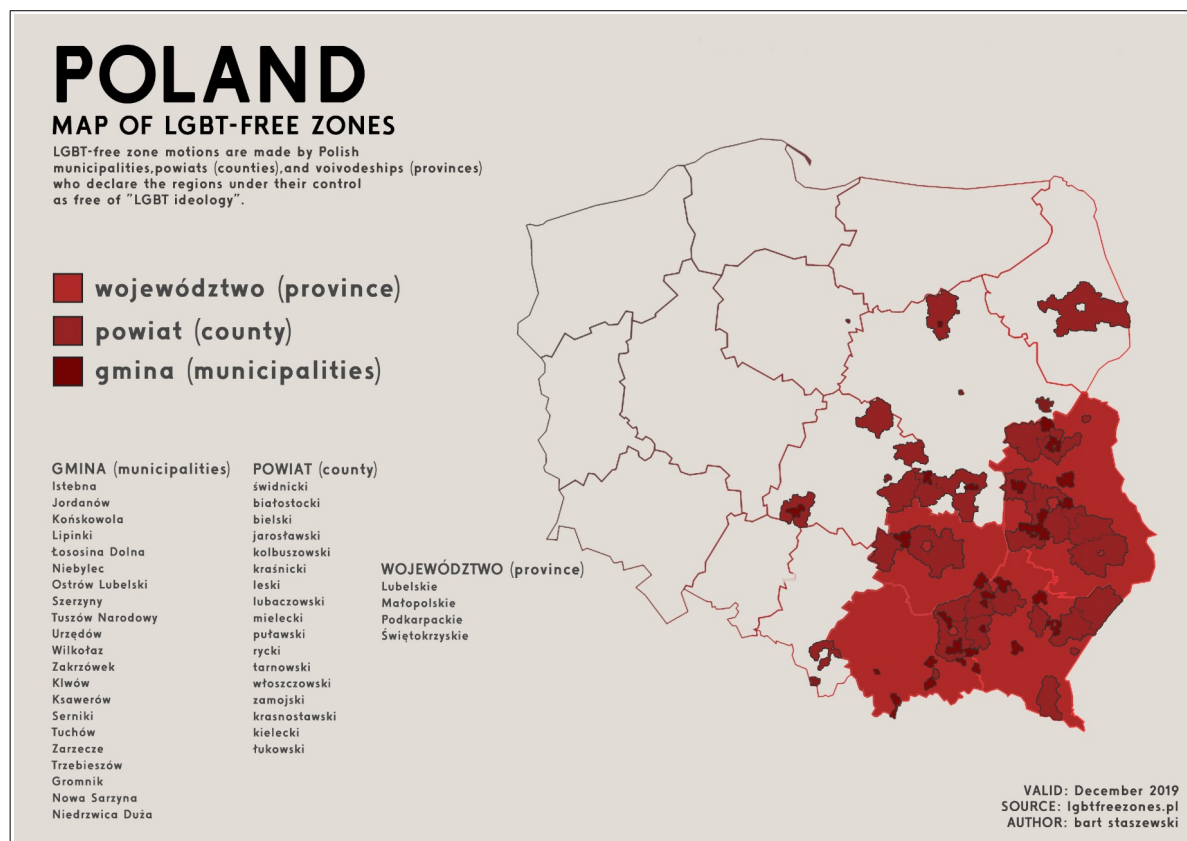
**Image 6.** Examples of stickers that were distributed in the Polish far-right magazine, *Gazeta Polska*, that can be used to indicate an 'LGBT-free' zone.



*Image description:* A photo of a white hand holding two stickers. The stickers have the pride flag colors in a circle that is crossed off with a bold x and a text which translates as 'LGBT-free zone'.

*Source:* @mycielski on Twitter, July 19, 2019.



**Image 7.** A map of the ‘LGBT-free’ zones throughout Poland (in red).

*Image description:* An image of the map of Poland with the areas that are LGBT-free zones marked in shades of red. The title of the image reads ‘Poland: Map of LGBT-Free Zones’.

*Source:* ‘Polish Government Gives Cash to “LGBT-free” Town’, .coda, September 1, 2020. <https://www.codastory.com/disinformation/polish-government-gives-cash-to-lgbt-free-town/> (20.04.2021).

In October 2020 the right-wing lobby group Life and Family Foundation [Fundacja Życie i Rodzina] collected signatures to institute a bill that would outlaw Equality Marches in Poland. The group successfully generated 200,000 signatures, mostly through church congregations, in support of the proposed bill. The ‘Stop LGBT’ proposal argues that events such as Pride propagate ‘homopropaganda’ and are threatening to the Polish family (Sullivan 2020). Indeed, as the right-wing lobby group Life and Family Foundation outlines, images such as *Rainbow Mary* and other ‘profanation’ against Catholic and Polish symbols are framed as key motivations for banning Pride Parades from Polish streets because they ‘[insult] Catholic symbols ... ridicule ... the emblem, flag and other national symbols’ (qtd. in Sullivan 2020: n.p.). While the introduction of such a ban is unlikely to take place as it would break with the Constitution, be against the right of assembly and threaten Polish membership in the EU, these efforts are nonetheless being undertaken to quash the visibility of LGBTQ+ people and their allies, eliminating queers from the visual landscape of the country.

In combination, understandings of LGBTQ+ people as espousing ‘gender ideology’, the creation of ‘LGBT-free’ zones and efforts at outlawing Pride Parades / Equality Marches, all signal deep homophobic and transphobic sentiment in Poland. That so many people align

themselves with hatred towards LGBTQ+ people is not incidental but tied directly to nationalism and religiosity as well as to ideas of melancholic nationalism. Attachment to Polishness as *always* under attack and *always* suffering, directly stems out of unresolved national trauma that takes form in a collective melancholia. Polishness as a ‘national paradigm of innocent suffering’ (Ziarek 2007: 309), emboldens right-wing nationalist leaders and everyday citizens to assume that they are innocent of hatred and violence, even when committing homophobic and transphobic actions leveled at the exclusion, expulsion and erasure of LGBTQ+ bodies. What is more, this homophobia and transphobia is framed as in service of protecting the Polish nation towards the centuries-long goal of sovereignty without external colonisation or foreign occupation. This double move to protect Polish sovereignty by attacking LGBTQ+ people and to protect the right to attack through gesturing to national innocence, characterises the psychology behind Polish homophobia and transphobia.

#### 4. Disidentificatory melancholia for Polish queers and feminists

On March 3, 2021, a Polish court in Płock acquitted Podleśna as well as the two other activists, Prus and Gzyra-Iskandar, of all charges. While all three had been accused of ‘offending religious feelings’, the court found that the rainbow additions to the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* reprint were not motivated by a desire to offend religious practitioners but rather by a desire to challenge discrimination. Echoing Podleśna’s framing, the judge offered the following statement: ‘The goal [of the activists] was to support LGBT people. ... There is no provision in the catechism of the Catholic church that excludes non-heteronormative persons. There is love, mutual respect and understanding’ (Front Line Defenders 2021: n.p.). While ending well for Podleśna and providing a landmark case in Poland in defense of LGBTQ+ activisms, *Rainbow Mary’s* travels and the homophobic and transphobic responses that the art piece elicited invite analyses of why and how Polish histories of struggle can be utilised in hateful ways.

With melancholic nationalism fueling hateful responses to LGBTQ+ people in Poland, symbols such as *Rainbow Mary* become endowed with threatening qualities. Rather than being seen as a remaking of Polish national icons for a new age, symbols such as *Rainbow Mary* become framed as hateful in themselves. This is also true of the remaking of other national symbols by queer and feminist protestors in recent years. One example is the remaking of the P-anchor symbol of ‘Fighting Poland’ [Polska Walcząca] into ‘Polish Women Fighting’ [Polki Walczące] by feminists, which was also framed by right-wing nationalists as insulting Poland and its national symbols, with some of its creators put on trial for profanity against national symbols in 2016 (Ramme 2019: 475). For context, the P-anchor symbol of ‘Fighting Poland’ was used by the Underground Polish State and Home Army [Armia Krajowa] during WWII to represent the fight against Nazi German occupation. The feminist renewal of the symbol transforms the anchor into a set of breasts, drawing connections between past national and present-day feminist struggles for liberation. Similarly, the draping of pride flags on national monuments by queer and feminist activists and the remaking of the Polish solidarity sign ‘Solidarność’ into a feminist pro-choice rallying call ‘Wypierdalać’ [Fuck Off] by

feminists more recently, have also been met with disapproval from the right, so ardent to protect national symbols at any and all cost.

Podleśna created *Rainbow Mary* with the idea that ‘the Holy Mother would protect’ LGBTQ+ persons (Easton 2019: n.p.), though *Rainbow Mary* was framed by the right as fundamentally violating a Polish Catholic symbol of sovereignty. As Jennifer Ramme (Ramme 2019) argues, feminist and queer remakings of national and religious symbols in Poland such as *Rainbow Mary*, are misread as attacking Polish patriotism when they in fact can be best understood as efforts to remake patriotism so that it is more inclusive of women and LGBTQ+ people. More so than ‘patriotic’, I understand this remaking of national and religious Polish symbology through what José Esteban Muñoz (Muñoz 1999) describes as ‘disidentification’—an LGBTQ+ remaking of mainstream symbols so that they can better serve and include LGBTQ+ people. Through disidentification, I argue, the remaking of national symbols allows for a positive recognition of national / collective melancholia and the possibility for preventing the deployment of hatred through melancholic nationalism. As Ziarek writes,

it is only by acknowledging this unconscious threat [of melancholic nationalism] and by ‘traversing’ the destructive fantasy that promises to protect us against it that contemporary Poland stands a chance of inventing new, more ethical modes of collectivity and solidarity, no longer predicated on the narcissistic investment in its own suffering but more concerned with the responsibility for the suffering of others. (Ziarek 2007: 322)

Symbolic reinvention such as that of *Rainbow Mary*, partakes in such ‘inventing [of] new, more ethical modes of collectivity and solidarity’, demanding Polish accountability while building community amongst LGBTQ+ Polish folks (Ziarek 2007: 322).

Writing on Latinx performance art, Muñoz frames disidentification as ‘the process by which the artist reformulates’ a given object, event or moment that originally functioned to exclude or wound, to make a ‘rich antinormative treasure [trove] of queer possibility’ (1999: x). Notably, this process of remaking is often an intermedial one, playing with performance, sound, video, photography, text and more recently online circulation. Podleśna’s *Rainbow Mary* does exactly the work of disidentification, operating from *within* the visual code of Polish symbols of oppression and national struggle, while recentring the minoritarian queer perspective of someone excluded from those national narratives. Polish melancholic nationalism becomes attached to cultural objects such as the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* painting, speaking to and of Polishness as a site of perpetual suffering and the unresolved grief of generations. Understanding this weight of meaning, Podleśna’s remaking of the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* works on and with this cultural and national symbol to express queer minoritarian Polish subjecthood. Through ‘recycling or re-forming an object that has already been invested with powerful energy’, Podleśna undertakes the work of transforming a national symbol so that it openly speaks to violence against LGBTQ+ people and argues for their inclusion in the national frame (Muñoz 1999: 39). As Muñoz articulates, ‘like a melancholic subject holding on to a lost object, a disidentificatory subject works to hold on to this object and invest it with new life’ (Muñoz 1999: 12). In just this way, Podleśna holds on to the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* as a symbol of Polishness, and holds it dear, while

also remaking it in such a way that it can provide shelter for the LGBTQ+ folks. The new image—*Rainbow Mary*—emerges as a ‘survival strategy the minority subject practices in order to negotiate a phobic majoritarian public sphere that continuously elides or punishes the existence of subjects who do not conform to the phantasm of normative citizenship’ (Muñoz 1999: 4). LGBTQ+ people in Poland, explicitly and violently excluded from the right to be in public spaces, the right to be with each other, to gather and love and to have epistemological agency in the world, are refashioned in Podleśna’s work as at the very heart of Polishness—at the very center of Polish survival and sovereignty. This would not be possible without the image’s lasting effects, its circulation beyond the city of Płock to other Polish towns and cities and to the Polish diaspora, through the affordances of intermediality, social media and online news sources.

Intermediality is a crucial part of this process of Polish disidentification. As mentioned earlier, it is through *Rainbow Mary*’s inherently intermedial existence as an online and offline figuration, that I myself was able to become emotionally invested and affectively moved to analyse this symbol. Elżbieta Korolczuk, writing on the ‘Black Protest’ [Czarny Protest] of 2016, which was launched in opposition to further constraining abortion laws in Poland, discusses networked ‘connective action’ as including the sharing of imagery through social media (Korolczuk 2016). *Rainbow Mary*, relying on connective action, extends civic and emotional participation to those otherwise not able to attend in-person and on the ground events and protests. I am moved to embodied protest through the ‘networked affect’ of the online and offline circulation of the image (Hillis et al. 2015). Seeing the *Rainbow Mary* image online—tweeted, Instagrammed, on Facebook and even on right-wing media—causes ‘reverberation’ and I am moved to embodied responses through feeling rage and grief (Kuntsman 2012). Whilst geographically I could not be further from Poland, *Rainbow Mary*’s intermedial life makes it possible for me to be affectively invested and moved to action. Importantly, *Rainbow Mary* and other recent Polish feminist and queer symbology, as mentioned above, offer me the symbolic arsenal I have been seeking for much of my life as a displaced Polish queer person growing up in a conservative Polish diaspora. As an intermedial piece of protest art, *Rainbow Mary* allows for the complex work of disidentification to happen across public and private spaces, both individually and collectively, and across great expanses.

Challenging Polish ‘normative citizenship’ (Muñoz 1999: 4) that so relies on expunging LGBTQ+ people and queer ways of life and love through state instruments such as the banning of gay marriage, the permissibility of homophobic and transphobic hate crimes and hate speech and the endorsement of discrimination against LGBTQ+ people, Podleśna’s art has produced a new, even utopian vision for LGBTQ+ inclusion at the very heart of Polishness. This in turn creates space for a positive identification of melancholia that holds both melancholic grief and disidentificatory potential together. ‘Disidentificatory melancholia’ emerges in Podleśna’s work, and other Polish protest art that reworks national symbols to carve out queer and feminist spaces, to both sit with centuries of oppression *and* to disidentify from the weaponisation of oppression through nationalist calls to hate. Rather than rejecting the ‘original’ painting of the *Black Madonna of Częstochowa* or vandalising it—as some have accused Podleśna of doing—*Rainbow Mary* is a loving remaking of the national maternal symbol to include LGBTQ+ people. Asking us to rethink sovereignty and legacies of trauma from a distinctly *queer* Polish perspective, *Rainbow Mary* remakes a ‘cultural field from the perspec-

tive of a minority subject who is disempowered in such a representational hierarchy' (Muñoz 1999: 25). Through disidentification, the new image rides the pain and intergenerational trauma that haunt Polishness while also interrogating the ways in which collective pain has been utilised towards nationalist models of hurt and exclusion. Disidentificatory melancholia surfaces as a strategy of coping, of love and of hope, a way forward in seeing LGBTQ+ people included and celebrated within Polish nationhood.

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