



Solidarity of Sisters: Moral Politics in the Polish Left-Wing Discourse about LGBTQIA+¹

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Abstract

The paper is a summary of a pilot study applying George Lakoff's concept of *moral politics* in a Polish context. The part of the study under discussion involved an analysis of articles published in Polish left-wing press between 2019 and 2021, focusing on the issue of LGBTQIA+ rights. The results of the analysis support Lakoff's thesis that the way socio-political views are framed and expressed depends on an implicitly applied cognitive model of morality. The author discusses the conceptual metaphors of morality applied by the studied authors, relating them to the *nurturant parent* model of morality postulated by Lakoff, and providing preliminary insights into how Polish moral politics differs from its American counterpart.

Keywords: moral politics, morality, political discourse, cognitive linguistics, conceptual metaphor, idealised cognitive models, LGBTQIA+, queerness

Słowa kluczowe: moralna polityka, dyskurs polityczny, językoznawstwo kognitywne, metafora pojęciowa, wyidealizowane modele poznawcze, LGBTQIA+, queer

In contemporary Poland, discrimination of LGBTQIA+² persons remains a pressing issue, with the country repeatedly ranking as one of the most homophobic in Europe.³

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² The acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual, and other non-cisheteronormative persons.

³ ILGA Europe, *Rainbow Europe Map and Index 2023*, <https://www.ilga-europe.org/report/rainbow-europe-2023/> [access: 12.09.2023]. On the political context of homophobia in Poland, see e.g., A. Graff, *Looking at Pictures of Gay Men: Political Uses of Homophobia in Contemporary Poland*, "Public Culture" 2010, vol. 22, no. 3, pp. 583–603.; E. Korolczuk, A. Graff, "Worse than communism and nazism put together": *War on Gender in Poland*, [in:] *Anti-gender Campaigns in Europe: Mobilizing*

The rights of the LGBTQIA+ community are among the most polarising social issues, going beyond a binary opposition between queer⁴ solidarity and queerphobia. Among the many voices in the debate, the stance of those with explicitly left-wing beliefs is loud and clear.

The Polish Left is not a major political force. As these words are being written, Poland has a conservative government with the president, the prime minister, and the parliamentary majority hailing from the national-conservative party Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (Law and Justice). The parliamentary opposition is formed mainly by the centrist Platforma Obywatelska (Civic Platform), combining a neoliberal stance towards economy with an ambiguous (apparently progressive, but often conservative leaning) approach to social issues. Left-wing parties have a much smaller representation, and during elections, their entry into the parliament is not always a given. However, in the public discourse, the Left is an outspoken interlocutor, represented mainly by the younger generation. LGBTQIA+ rights are an important topic among young left-wing Poles and their stance on the issue is a major part of their socio-political identification.

This paper does not address the complexity of the situation of the queer community in Poland. Instead, it offers a partial insight into how the Polish Left talk about LGBTQIA+ issues, and what system of moral values underlies this standpoint. It does so by employing George Lakoff's theory of *moral politics*,⁵ binding together morality, political positions, and language.

About this study

The following discussion results from a pilot study conducted on a small textual corpus representing two extreme opposites on the Polish socio-political scene: radical Catholic conservatives and the secular Left. The analysis of the conservative texts was discussed in detail elsewhere.⁶ Below, I summarise the analysis of the left-wing corpus, comprised of articles published in two left-wing internet publications, "Krytyka Polityczna" and "OKO.press." From these publications, 54 articles were selected, published between July 2019 and December 2021, and including data-driven pieces, reportage, columns, interviews, and op-eds. The selected texts comment on significant events centred around LGBTQIA+ people and their rights, but also deal with more permanent issues, such as the struggles of trans youth and their families,

Against Equality, R. Kuhar, D. Paternotte (eds.), London–New York 2017, pp. 175–194; E. Korolczuk, A. Graff, *Gender as "Ebola from Brussels": The Anticolonial Frame and the Rise of Illiberal Populism*, "Signs" 2018, vol. 43, no. 4, pp. 797–821.

⁴ Throughout the paper, I use the term *queer* interchangeably with the acronym LGBTQIA+, referring to all the people whose identity, sexual orientation, and expression of gender diverge from the cis-heteronormative model.

⁵ G. Lakoff, *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think*, Chicago–London 2016.

⁶ M. Ciołkosz, *Moralna polityka konserwatystów w polskim dyskursie na temat LGBTQIA+*, "Studia Religioznawcza" 2022, vol. 55, no. 2, pp. 103–117.

the deficiencies in Polish health care for queer people, and the history of the queer movement in Poland.

The texts underwent a qualitative analysis applying Lakoff's theories of *conceptual metaphor*⁷ and *moral politics*.⁸ Metaphorical descriptions of morality found in the studied discourse were identified, coded, and compared with those postulated by Lakoff's theory.

Morality: A brief introduction

The main topic of this paper is the relation between morality and socio-political beliefs. Generally, morality may be understood as a psychological system humans use to evaluate and manage social interactions. This includes both pre-conscious, fast, automatic, and emotionally charged evaluations of someone's behaviour as right or wrong (*moral intuitions*), and conscious reasoning about this behaviour based on socially shared norms and leading to explicit moral judgment (*moral reasoning*).⁹ Morality pertains to a few distinct categories of socially relevant issues. Psychologist Joseph Haidt posits the existence of at least five foundations of morality, including sensitivity to the suffering of others, concerns about fairness and equality, concerns with loyalty and obligations towards one's social group, sensitivity to social order and social roles, and concerns with purity, both physical and symbolic.¹⁰

Moral intuitions and reasoning underpin all domains of social life and the functioning of all social institutions. It is widely accepted that religion and morality go hand in hand; people in different parts of the globe tend to believe that a person needs to believe in a god to be moral¹¹ and are more likely to attribute extremely immoral behaviour to atheists.¹² Cognitive-evolutionary researchers of religion hypothesise that this conflation of religion and morality is a result of their interdependence: even in the earliest human societies, shared beliefs in deities and participation in rituals supported moral behaviour, contributing to greater social cohesion, and thus rendering religion both socially useful and evolutionarily adaptive.¹³

⁷ G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, Chicago 1980.

⁸ G. Lakoff, *Moral...*, *op. cit.*

⁹ J. Haidt, *The New Synthesis in Moral Psychology*, "Science" 2007, no. 316, pp. 998–1002.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*. Recently Haidt and colleagues have postulated additional moral foundations related to the concepts of liberty, honour, and ownership. See: <http://moralfoundations.org> [access: 21.01.2024].

¹¹ R. McKay, H. Whitehouse, *Religion and Morality*, "Psychological Bulletin" 2015, vol. 141, no. 2, pp. 447–448.

¹² W.M. Gervais, D. Xygalatas, R.T. McKay, M. van Elk, E.E. Buchtel, M. Aveyard, S.R. Schiavoone, I. Dar-Nimrod, A.M. Svedholm-Häkkinen, T. Riekkki, *Global Evidence of Extreme Intuitive Moral Prejudice Against Atheists*, "Nature Human Behaviour" 2017, vol. 83, no. 151, pp. 1–5.

¹³ A. Norenzayan, *Does Religion Make People Moral?* "Behaviour" 2014, vol. 151, no. 2–3, p. 365–384; J. Teehan, *The Cognitive Science of Religion: Implications for Morality*, "Unisinos Journal of Philosophy" 2018, vol. 19, no. 3, pp. 272–281.

That morality underpins secular domains of life is less widely appreciated. The concept of secular morality has been in use at least since the Enlightenment¹⁴ and multiple domains of public and private life are founded on secular ethics. Nonetheless, the widespread association of secularity with value-free rationality on one hand, and of morality with piousness on the other, may lead to the conclusion that such domains of public life as politics are morally neutral. Political debates are often construed as exchanges of rational arguments, while disagreements are interpreted as clashes of incompatible interests of different social groups. Politics, however, is a fundamentally social matter and as such it is a moral matter. Political views are moral views, and a sense of right and wrong associated with them is deeply grounded in moral intuitions. This argument – that politics is inherently and inevitably moral – is one of the tenets of Lakoff’s moral politics.

Moral politics: What connects morality, family, and metaphor?

Cognitive linguist George Lakoff is best known for his claim about the *embodiment of meaning*: the way people think and speak is determined by the way they sense, move, and interact in the world. Lakoff’s theory of *conceptual metaphor*, formulated together with Mark Johnson,¹⁵ posits that metaphorisation is fundamental for this embodied thinking and speaking. More than just ornaments to language, metaphors are relations we establish between concepts to better understand them. We grasp abstract, complex, or unfamiliar concepts by representing them in terms of simple, more tangible, more familiar ones (e.g., discussion in terms of a war or relationships in terms of a journey).

The theory of *moral politics* combines the tenets of the theory of conceptual metaphor with Lakoff’s conclusions about systematising and generalising knowledge.¹⁶ It posits that a) the way we think and speak about politics is structured by the metaphor *nation is family* (and, by extension, *government is parent*) and b) political discourse is propelled by differing cognitive models of morality, built from hierarchies of metaphors specific to differing experiential models of family. In plain terms, people disagree in political matters because they have divergent moral priorities resulting from the different ways they were brought up.

Living in a family (or in an equivalent thereof) is a significant human experience. Interactions with family members and attitudes of caregivers towards children are turned into templates used to make sense of other social relations, such as those between a country’s government and its citizens. The values cultivated in a family – actions interpreted as good or bad, qualities considered laudable or condemnable, and ways in which care, respect, or resentment towards one another are expressed –

¹⁴ J. Teehan, *Ethics, Secular and Religious: An Evolved-Cognitive Analysis*, [in:] *The Oxford Handbook of Secularism*, P. Zuckerman, J.R. Shook (eds.), Oxford 2017, pp. 1–24.

¹⁵ G. Lakoff, M. Johnson, *op. cit.*

¹⁶ G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind*, Chicago 1987.

become implicit guidelines for moral intuitions and judgements. According to Lakoff, these guidelines take a form of *metaphors of morality* – salient domains of the family experience used to represent the abstract concepts of right or wrong as tangible, personally meaningful ideas. Those ideas, on the other hand, provide implicit motivations for beliefs about political issues.

Lakoff identified two prototypical¹⁷ models of morality, corresponding to prototypical political positions: *strict father morality* underlying *conservatism*, and *nurturant parent morality* underlying *progressivism/liberalism*. While actual moral and political stances are many, they can all be interpreted – argues Lakoff – as variations of the two prototypes.

Strict father morality is based on the experience of a family with a clear division of roles between parents of opposite gender. The father is responsible for providing for and protecting the family, has all the authority and sets strict rules of the family's functioning. The mother is responsible for upholding the father's authority. The hierarchical relations between family members are based on authority and obedience. A strict father assumes that the world is dangerous, and life is a constant fight for survival. He also believes that people, if left to their own devices, are driven solely by the urge to satisfy their desires. To curb this urge and act morally, they need a system of punishments and rewards. In line with these assumptions, the goal of parenting is bringing up strong, disciplined, and self-sufficient individuals. This is done by punishing actions that don't comply with the father's authority and rewarding those that do.

The model of family underlying *nurturant parent morality* assumes equal responsibility of parents for bringing up children. Family members are bound by relations of non-hierarchical interdependence founded on mutual care. Nurturant parents assume that coexistence in a society requires empathy; therefore, they strive to bring up happy, empathetic, pro-social people. Since they believe that children learn by imitating their actions, they create for them a safe, caring environment to teach them empathy and care. The parents' authority results from the respect shown to the children. While the parents are the ultimate decision-makers, the children are treated seriously as legitimate partners in discussion.

Moral systems related to the two family models are built from structured groups of metaphors of morality. While both systems use similar metaphorical domains, the hierarchy of these domains differs. The two main groups of metaphors are *the strength group* and *the nurturance group*, the former having the highest priority in *strict father morality*, and the latter in *nurturant parent morality*. A separate metaphor of morality – that of *moral self-interest* – has medium priority in both discussed models. Since it is not relevant for the following analysis, it will not be discussed here.

The strength group consists of metaphors of *moral strength*, *moral authority*, *moral order*, *moral boundaries*, *moral essence*, *moral wholeness*, *moral purity*, and

¹⁷ Lakoff's understanding of a prototype is based on E. Rosch, *Principles of Categorization*, [in:] *Cognition and Categorization*, E. Rosch, B.B. Lloyd (eds.), Hillsdale 1978, pp. 27–48.

moral health. Only the first five will be described here as they are relevant for the forthcoming discussion.

The metaphors in *the strength group* are bound by the construal of evil as a physical force and of being moral as countering this force. The metaphor of *moral strength* equates morality with fighting internal and external evils. Internal evils take a form of vices (or *moral weaknesses*), which must be countered by corresponding virtues. In *strict father morality*, vices such as self-indulgence, laziness, or cowardice can be fought with self-discipline, industry, or courage. In *nurturant parent morality*, qualities such as social responsibility, open-mindedness, or cooperativeness are considered virtues, whereas being selfish, narrow-minded, or uncooperative is seen as a vice.

According to the metaphor of *moral authority*, exerting authority is a moral act. Moral authority belongs to the leader of a community (the metaphorical father), without whom the members of the community (metaphorical children) wouldn't know what is good or bad for them.

The metaphor of *moral authority* forms a coherent whole with that of *moral order*. According to the latter, there exists a natural, universal moral order with an inherent hierarchy of dominance based on moral superiority: God dominates over humans, adults over children, men over women, and the wealthy over the less wealthy. The last hierarchy reflects the meritocracy underlying the conservative system of values: the assumption that people become wealthy thanks to their moral virtues places them high in moral hierarchy. Notably, the progressive construal of moral authority is based on different criteria: trustworthiness, honesty, and capacity to nurture social ties. At the same time, these qualities do not place one high in the social order since the latter is not hierarchical.

Moral authority and *moral order* determine *moral boundaries*. The latter metaphor presents moral action as bounded movement along permissible routes and immoral deeds as “deviating from the path.”

According to the metaphor of *moral essence*, each person has an essence (or “character”) that determines their moral or immoral behaviour. Character is shaped during childhood and reaches its final form at the verge of adulthood. Ineffective upbringing may result in a person's “weak character,” which may manifest as inability to be successful, tendency towards addiction, or proneness to criminal activity.

The *nurturance group*, subservient to the metaphors from *the strength group* in the conservative model of morality, has the highest priority in the progressive model. It consists of the metaphors of *moral nurturance*, *moral empathy*, *moral self-development*, *moral growth*, *moral happiness*, and *moral fair distribution*. Just like in the *strength group*, the metaphors in this group constitute a coherent whole interconnected by the concept of mutual care. Due to the focus of the following discussion, only the first four metaphors from this group will be discussed.

The metaphor of *moral nurturance* equates morality not with fighting evil, but with being caring. One should care not only for others and for oneself, but also for social ties – construing social relations as sentient beings reflects the high priority attributed to intersubjectivity and interdependence in *the nurturance group*.

The experience of intersubjectivity underlies particularly the metaphor of *moral empathy*. According to this metaphor, the ability to feel what others feel is moral. It is empathy that makes nurturance a moral imperative: care for others and the need to protect them from harm results from the ability to empathise with what they are experiencing.

The metaphors of *moral self-development* and *moral growth* assume that morality can increase over time, leading to greater capacity for care. In a sense, this metaphor is opposite to that of *moral essence*: according to the latter, a person with an ill-developed moral essence remains morally incapacitated for life. According to the former, everyone can keep developing morally, provided they are appropriately supported and nurtured.

To summarise, according to Lakoff, persons with conservative political views construe their country as a family headed by a strict father, and they associate with morality such concepts as strength, hierarchical order, and authority. They see morality as an essential quality – one that is inherent to a person and once established, cannot be altered. On the other hand, progressives construe their country as a caring family with non-hierarchical relations. They attribute the highest moral value to concepts such as nurturance, empathy, fairness, and happiness. They construe morality in non-essentialist terms, as a quality that can be acquired and developed over time.

How universal is moral politics?

Lakoff's theory was developed in North America, and it reflects the bipartisan model operative in the United States: conservative morality corresponds to prototypical Republican and progressive morality to prototypical Democratic values.¹⁸

The applicability of moral politics is potentially broader. Since living in a family is a universal human experience, analogous correspondence between family models, moral values, and political positions can be expected across the globe. Moreover, different variations of the two prototypes postulated by Lakoff are expected to cover a variety of moral and socio-political positions enacted by actual political actors in different modern democratic states. However, families and norms of child-rearing differ across cultures. So do social practices, through which moral values are conveyed. Therefore, prototypical models of morality in different countries may diverge from what Lakoff proposed, leading to different interpretations of socio-political issues. Polish and American cultures are obviously very different, although there is enough affinity between them to expect at least partial overlap of their respective models of morality. The discussion presented below suggests that while many of the metaphors of morality used by Poles may overlap with those postulated by Lakoff, others could be idiosyncratic.

¹⁸ These prototypes do not necessarily reflect the actual moral and political stances of Republican or Democratic politicians at a given time. For a popular (yet thoroughly informed) summary of the transformation of the Democratic political agenda in the 20th century, see: E. Burmila, *Chaotic Neutral: How the Democrats Lost Their Soul in the Center*, New York 2022.

Battling an evil ideology: Polish conservatives against queerness

Poland's reputation as one of the most queerphobic countries in Europe reflects the queerphobia enacted by conservative political actors. Poland has never fully embraced non-heteronormativity, which remained an elephant in the room until the twenty-first century.¹⁹ In recent years, the rights of the Polish LGBTQIA+ community have become a matter of public debate, leading to conservatives stigmatising queerness as a threat to the country's values. When queerphobia received a governmental seal of approval, it became increasingly open, leading to acts of verbal, physical, and even legislative abuse.

The polarisation of the discourse about non-heteronormativity in Polish right-wing and left-wing press became acute around the beginning of the twenty-first century²⁰ and persists today, influencing the arguments of all the parties involved. Therefore, a quick summary of the conservatives' narrative, to which the Left responds, may be helpful in clarifying the latter's stance on the matter.

In their condemnation of the LGBTQIA+ community, the studied conservative authors employ the metaphors from the *strength group* copiously. They do so mainly to describe the *opposite* of morality, characterising – in their perception – queer people and their vision of society. The said authors believe that queer rights are a part of an unnatural *immoral order* (referred to as “LGBT ideology”) that certain powerful actors want to implement to overthrow the Catholic moral order.²¹ The said actors, represented mainly by the European Union and by Polish opposition, are construed as *immoral authority*, attempting to take over the citizens' constitutional freedoms. The “LGBT ideology” is presented as totalitarian and is commonly identified with Marxism.

The proponents of the immoral order are seen as a belligerent force waging an ideological war against Christian civilisation. The metaphor of *moral strength* is therefore used jointly with that of *moral war*: “LGBT ideology” is an invader who must be combatted. Although this invader is construed as powerful and dangerous, LGBTQIA+ people themselves are not. They are described as *morally weak* – mere pawns played by much mightier agents, lacking discipline and temperance, and seeking only to satisfy their whims. The studied authors tend to infantilise queer people, writing about them with a mixture of contempt and patronising forbearance. They present them either as God's lost children bereft of proper moral authority,²² or as spoiled brats vandalising the country through their unruly activism. The

¹⁹ Ł. Szulc, *Queer in Poland: Under Construction*, [in:] *Queer in Europe: Contemporary Case Studies*, L. Downing, R. Gillett (eds.), London–New York 2011, pp. 159–172.

²⁰ D. Hall, *W poszukiwaniu miejsca. Chrześcijaństwo LGBT w Polsce*, Warszawa 2016, pp. 133–163.

²¹ For a discussion of the rift between Polish Catholicism and homosexuality, see: D. Hall, *Antagonism in the Making: Religion and Homosexuality in Post-Communist Poland*, [in:] *Religious and Sexual Nationalisms in Central and Eastern Europe*, S. Sremac, R.R. Ganzevoort (eds.), Leiden 2015, p. 74–92.

²² A moral queer life according to the conservative moral order would imply either celibacy or pursuing reparative therapy. See: D. Hall, *Religion and Homosexuality in the Public Domain: Polish Debates about Reparative Therapy*, “European Societies” 2017, no. 19, pp. 600–622.

moral immaturity of LGBTQIA+ persons is partially attributed to the attempt of the “LGBT ideology” to undermine the concept of *moral essence*. The initiatives towards destigmatising sexuality by providing comprehensive sex education and adequate healthcare are interpreted as turning sexuality into the new human essence. Homosexuality is also construed in essentialist terms: unrestrained homosexual “tendencies” are believed to contribute to a person’s inherent immorality, leading to further transgressions.²³

Fatherless sisters: The Polish queer community in search for solidarity

Despite the queerphobia endorsed by conservatives, the Polish LGBTQIA+ community and their allies have a strong presence in the public domain. Activists, politicians, journalists, and scholars lend their voices to the plea for queer rights, countering the narrative of the Polish right.

Like in the case of the conservative texts, in the left-wing material – written by both queer people and their cis-heteronormative allies – the metaphors of morality listed by Lakoff can be identified. Both the metaphors from the strength group and the nurturance group are used, although the latter include metaphorical domains not accounted for by Lakoff’s model.

Queer strength: Against immoral displays of power

Like their conservative counterpart, the left-wing authors associate the notion of *moral strength* with *moral war*. They call for a *fight* against violence, hate-speech, and social exclusion. As postulated by Lakoff, these metaphors are subservient to the notion of *moral nurturance*: the evils the left-wing authors want to battle are the opposites of empathy and care.

Despite their conservative depiction as invaders, the left-wing authors construe their actions in terms of defence rather than offence. They also bring up the concept of *alliance* as an important part of warfare (“How do we defeat those who are against [us] without allies?”²⁴), and associate moral strength with interdependence and support (“LGBT+ people are not alone in their fight for their rights”²⁵).

The studied authors also address the conservatives’ displays of belligerent fervour. They see the rhetoric of warfare in the conservative discourse as a sign of *moral weakness* and of an implicit acknowledgement that conservative values are untenable in the changing world (“this is not how hegemons in full control of the

²³ Polish conservative milieus commonly associate homosexuality with paedophilia.

²⁴ A. Konieczńska, K. Szczuka, *Bycie osobą sojuszniczą społeczności LGBTQ+ to obowiązek każdego*, “Krytyka Polityczna” 2021, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/anna-koniecznska-rozmowa-lgbt-sojuszniczka/> [access: 13.09.2023].

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

situation behave; these are actions of an army that is still large but already in a panic retreat”²⁶).

The young run the world: Of a new moral order and authority

While the conservatives’ claim that the “LGBT ideology” intends to violently crush traditional values is grossly exaggerated, the Polish Left does perceive the current moral order as flawed and unacceptable. They question the universality of the moral values upheld by the Right, recognising in them “repression known from totalitarian systems.”²⁷ That both sides of the discourse construe each other as totalitarian is both ironic and justifiable. Just like conservatives, the Left perceive totalitarianism as the prototypical *immoral ideology*; therefore, they bring it up to underscore the dangers of conservatism.

In their reflections on *moral authority*, the studied authors point out a particular form of its abuse, expressed in patronising attitudes towards queer people. After some influential voices have criticised the Polish LGBTQIA+ community for behaving inappropriately during protests (e.g., for shouting, using swearwords, or destroying homophobic artefacts), a stereotype of a “false ally” emerged, who claims to support the discriminated groups, but simultaneously undermines their cause. The false ally, who typically represents late Baby Boomer generation or early Generation X, has witnessed or taken part in the political change of 1989, is male, well educated, and affiliated with the neoliberal opposition. The young left-wing authors reject the authority of such persons and list “do not patronise” as one of the core principles of supporting the queer community.

The moral authority taken away from the older generation is given to young queer persons themselves. The parents of trans children – who often feel abandoned by the state – see their offspring as experts in being trans and go as far as calling them “their teachers.”²⁸ Special authority is attributed to the entire Generation Z, due to their ability to navigate a diverse and inclusive world. The slightly older authors hope to learn from “the well-wishing Generation Z revolutionaries,”²⁹ capable of “changing the language” and “taking care that everyone’s included.”³⁰

²⁶ M. Danielewski, *Rok tęczowego przełomu. Mimo szczucia, ataków i propagandy nienawiści emancypacja LGBT przyspiesza*, “OKO.press” 2019, <https://oko.press/byc-moze-to-byt-rok-przelomu-mimo-szczucia-atakow-i-propagandy-nienawisci-polska-jest-bardziej-teczowa> [access: 13.09.2023].

²⁷ B. Treder, *Ustawa ‘Stop LGBT’ Godek to nowy level nienawiści [list]*, “Krytyka Polityczna” 2021, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/stop-lgbt-godek-list/> [access: 13.09.2023].

²⁸ A. Ambroziak, *Pride to duma, to wolność, to bycie sobą. Co to znaczy dziś w Polsce?*, “OKO.press” 2021, <https://oko.press/pride-to-duma-to-wolnosc-to-bycie-soba> [access: 13.09.2023].

²⁹ H. Bezkurkow, *Młodzi coraz częściej identyfikują się jako LGBT+.* *To rewolucja z szacunku i empatii*, “OKO.press” 2021, <https://oko.press/mlodzi-coraz-czesciej-identyfikuja-sie-jako-lgbt-to-rewolucja-z-szacunku-i-empatii> [access: 13.09.2023].

³⁰ A. Ambroziak, *Matki transplciowych dzieci: “Wszystko by im się dało, byle chciały żyć”*, “OKO.press” 2021, <https://oko.press/matki-transplciowych-dzieci-wszystko-by-im-sie-dalo-byle-chcialy-zyc> [access: 13.09.2023].

Seen as embedded in the overarching metaphor *nation is family*, this attribution of moral authority is telling. In the left-wing experience, the metaphorical “parents” (the government and the opposition) are oppressive, patronising, and therefore discredited as authority figures. Instead, authority is attributed to young citizens – the nation’s “siblings.” This sentiment is expressed directly in a popular slogan from Polish anti-government protests: “When the state does not protect me, I will defend my sister” (pol. “Kiedy państwo mnie nie chroni, mojej siostry będę bronić”).

Over the rainbow: Crossing moral boundaries

The left-wing authors often construe the revision of the moral order in terms of *crossing boundaries*. Activism oriented towards progressive social politics is called “trailblazing” or “breaking barriers.”³¹ Social change is equated with expanding the margins of society, so that people previously moved to those margins can be included. Notably, not only the outer social boundaries, but also the inner limits of one’s identity should be expanded. As “the rainbowhood of identities and identifications has opened,”³² one should be free to explore it, using the many names subsumed in the LGBTQIA+ acronym as “maps” or “road signs” in “the search for the truth about oneself.”³³

Sisters in arms: Of moral nurturance and acquired empathy

In the analysed left-wing corpus, the metaphors from the nurturance group abound. The concept of *moral empathy* is especially prevalent, and the studied authors clearly put *moral empathy* above *moral authority*, *order*, and *essence* in moral hierarchy.

The emphasis on empathy might result from a sense that it is an acquired virtue, one that Poland as a country has yet to develop. “The heritage of the Third Polish Republic is individual egoism,” writes one of the authors. “Absolutely everything has been done, as part of moving away from the People’s Republic of Poland, to kill any form of community as an archaic survival of the system, beginning with public property, through cooperativity, to any other communitarian action.”³⁴

The concept of *nurturance* is construed mainly in terms of *protection* and *defence*. The studied authors call for protecting whistle-blowers, LGBTQIA+ persons, and youth, especially queer youth at risk of suicide. They also criticise the authorities for failing to protect the queer community and blame them for harming children under

³¹ R. Biedroń, K. Śmiszek, M. Kurc, *Biedroń i Śmiszek. Do szafy nie ma powrotu*, “Krytyka Polityczna” 2021, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/biedron-smiszek-nie-ideologia-wywiad/> [access: 13.09.2023].

³² E. Siedlecka, *Tęcza znaczy wolność. Żadna kontrrewolucja nie zatrzyma tej radosnej rebelii*, “OKO.press” 2021, <https://oko.press/tecza-znaczy-wolnosc-zadna-kontrrewolucja-nie-zatrzyma-tej-radosnej-rebelii> [access: 13.09.2023].

³³ H. Bezkurkow, *op. cit.*

³⁴ Galopujący Major (pseud.), *Żądanie empatii jako przejaw ideowego konfliktu pokoleniowego*. “Krytyka Polityczna” 2020, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/felietony/galopujacy-major/zadanie-empatii-jako-przejaw-ideowego-konfliktu-pokoleniowego/> [access: 13.09.2023].

the pretence of caring for them, e.g., through failing to recognise the parenthood of same-sex couples.

You'll never walk alone: Of moral solidarity

Within the nurturance group, one metaphor that can't be subsumed under any other category proposed by Lakoff is *moral solidarity*. The concept of solidarity is central to the Polish pursuit of liberty, with Solidarity (*Solidarność*) being the name of the independent trade union instrumental in the political transformation of 1989. While the young Polish Left may be disillusioned with the aftermath of Solidarity's rise to power, they have appropriated the concept itself as one of the core values of grass-roots socio-political movements. They see solidarity as resulting from empathy and construe it in terms of a bond between siblings, namely *sisterhood*. The experiential basis for understanding solidarity (and its embodied expression) is marching together during protests and Pride parades. The slogan "You'll never walk alone" (pol. *Nigdy nie będziesz szła sama*),³⁵ often repeated during anti-government protests, is a poignant application of the metaphor *solidarity is walking together*.

Leaving kindergarten: Of moral growth and moral education

The studied authors often write about becoming more moral, although they focus on the moral growth of the entire society rather than of individuals. Some talk about "social maturing towards equality," noticing that, in terms of equality education, "Polish society has yet to leave kindergarten."³⁶ Others see the process of social maturing as a result of generational change. Teenagers and young adults in Poland are "from a different era"³⁷ and therefore perceive the existence of queer people as "self-explanatory."³⁸

Moral growth is associated with *moral education* (as in the metaphor *non-egalitarian society is kindergarten*). Lack of education is named as the reason for most failures to protect the LGBTQIA+ community. The conservatives' queerphobia is a result of their refusal to learn. Physicians and psychotherapists lack the knowledge necessary to care for transgender youth. Teachers lack equality education that would help them communicate with queer students. On the other hand, proper education can guarantee safety (e.g., through preventing sexually transmitted diseases, violence, discrimination, and suicides of queer youth) and can help "disenchant the imaginary

³⁵ "Będziesz szła" is a feminine future imperfect form of the verb "iść" ("to walk"), indicating that the expression is directed towards a person identifying as female, in line with the metaphor *solidarity is sisterhood*.

³⁶ N. Kuta, P. Januszewska, *Znikająca litera „T”, czyli jak zabija transfobia*, "Krytyka Polityczna" 2021, <https://krytykapolityczna.pl/kraj/paulina-januszewska-nina-kuta-transfobia-wywiad/> [access: 13.09.2023].

³⁷ E. Słowińska, M.K. Nowak, *Gdyby politycy zobaczyli, z czym mierzą się transpłciowe dzieci i ich rodzice, nie gadaliby głupot*, "OKO.press" 2021, <https://oko.press/transpłciowe-dzieci-grupa-wsparcia-dla-rodzicow> [access: 13.09.2023].

³⁸ E. Siedlecka, *op. cit.*

enemy” that LGBTQIA+ people are perceived as.³⁹ For that reason, queer activists see themselves primarily as educators, and consider sharing their knowledge their moral duty.

Summary: Towards Polish moral politics

Based on the foregoing discussion, the moral discourse of left-wing authors writing about LGBTQIA+ issues can be summarised as follows. The Left sees the current moral order as waning and wishes to substitute it with a non-hierarchical order, achieved through crossing and expanding moral boundaries, and based on interdependence of citizens, understood in terms of empathy, solidarity, and sisterhood. The Left values the moral authority of the young generation, while perceiving the actions of the older socio-political actors as harmful or patronising. They also attribute high moral value to education and see it as the most important factor of social change.

The foregoing discussion shows that Lakoff’s theory of moral politics can be potentially useful in interpreting Polish political discourse. However, it should be revised to better fit Polish socio-political circumstances. The presence of metaphors of *moral solidarity* and *moral education* suggests that there may be other Polish metaphors of morality not identified by Lakoff. All in all, Polish moral politics should be studied based on material discussing a broad spectrum of socio-political issues, and the discourse of the neoliberal and other significant political actors should be included in the analysis.

Moreover, questions arise in relation to the Polish experience of parenthood and its influence on moral politics. In light of Lakoff’s theory, the attitude of the Polish Left towards figures of authority suggests that reliable parental authority is not a common experience among Poles, and that bonds between siblings play an important role in Polish families. How contemporary Polish adults construe their family life, and how this construal bears on their perception of their government, is a pertinent question to ask.

Another question concerns the role of Catholicism in shaping Polish moral politics. While conservatives openly identify their values as Catholic, and the Left are opposed to the prevailing influence of the Polish Catholic Church on public life, the neoliberal actors attempt to reconcile advocating for democracy with supporting the Catholic tradition. The impact of Catholicism on the formation and transformation of contemporary Polish moral values should be studied extensively.

³⁹ K. Zillmann, P. Pacewicz, *Katarzyna Zillmann, srebrna medalistka z Tokio, opowiada nam o swoim (drugim) coming oucie w TVP*, “OKO.press”, 2021, <https://oko.press/katarzyna-zillmann-srebrna-medalistka-z-tokio-opowiada-nam-o-swoim-drugim-coming-oucie-w-tvp> [access: 13.09.2023].

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