

Free The Eagle

Fighting against Far-right Nationalism by Reclaiming Polish Patriotism

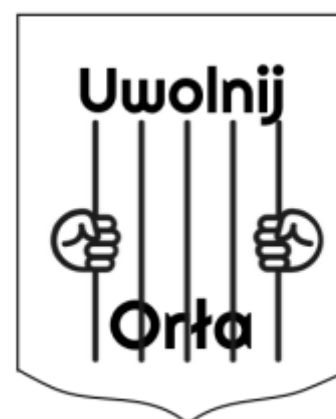
Our group, consisting of Yosef, Maria, and Joanna, collectively agreed to confront and tackle the age old problem of anti-Semitism within Europe, and more specifically within Poland. What makes anti-Semitism unique for Poland and more broadly for Europe is that it was the most effective ideology to create and unite nationalism all across Europe. Simply put, nationalism only succeeded when it is dividing and excluding the Other, and that exclusion and Other was Europe's most popular discriminated minority, the Jews. But beyond the social phenomenon that is anti-Semitism within the framework of European society, what makes the trend of anti-Semitism unique to Poland in the 21st century is the small number of practicing and noticeable Jews within the country. In fact, almost 90% of Poles have never met a Jew before in his or her life. (Winiewski, 2013) Thus, this strange trend of loathing the ghost of a minority that expired decades earlier appears as a result of establishing Polish nationalism following the collapse of the Soviet occupation. Therefore, in order to deconstruct anti-Semitism, we decided to focus on deconstructing its source which is Polish nationalism.

One of the most outward manifestations of Polish nationalism is the November March for Independence. Within recent years, the number of demonstrators in the Polish Independence March has grown exponentially. What once was a march conceived and demonstrated by a few hundred Polish nationalists in 2009, now draws an upward of 70,000 demonstrators. Yet, where this march has been a safe space to celebrate Polish independence, it has become polluted by hateful rhetoric that includes but are not limited to xenophobic, anti-Semitic, and fascists slogans and language.

Polish pride has become hijacked and we are here to reclaim Polish patriotism and to free the eagle.

Our logo of "free the eagle" means just that. The national Polish animal, the eagle has been illegally caged and imprisoned by hateful nationalists?. We, as a collective nation must scrub this hateful stain clean and simply unlock the doors to let the eagles fly free.

Because we aim to confront and combat the oppressive and discriminatory language and behavior of far right nationalists, we decided to meet them face to face and on their own playground - the Independence March. Within this realm, we will target the Polish moderate marchers by acknowledging and supporting their pride of Poland. But unlike the nationalists who mechanize their love for Poland at the expense of others through oppression and discrimination, our message is to mechanize love for Poland based on its diversity, inclusivity, and acceptance.



In order to implement these changes, we decided to channel the rising trend within Poland to express Polish nationalism on clothing. Nationalist slogans and rhetoric on shirts is wildly popular at protests and marches. Therefore, we decided to design and distribute our own logos and message of what it truly means to be a Pole on clothing, more



specifically on T- shirts.

In order to influence Polish moderates, while simultaneously undermining Polish nationalists, we set out to rewrite and widen Poland's narrative of resistance and its longer history of multiculturalism, namely its significant Other, the Jews. Poland's claim to fame has been the only country to have actively resisted the German Nazi Occupation. But the nationalists only acknowledge and celebrate one Uprising, that of August in 1944. Yet, there were two uprisings. The uprising of the Warsaw Ghetto a year earlier in 1943 – a small act of resistance by Poland's Jews before their pending extermination. A significant act of resistance that is both tragic and heroic, but nonetheless is largely ignored in nationalists circles as an anti-Semitic campaign to rid Poland of its Jewish roots. But our group aims to merge these two historical events into Poland's collective conscious, and by doing so, we will reduce anti-Semitic rhetoric and embrace Poland's multicultural past and present. Therefore, in order to convey this message, our shirts will demonstrate Poland's unique history during the second World War, where it will be commemorating Warsaw as the city of "Two Uprisings," of 1943 and 1944. Furthermore, on the back of the shirt, we designed a few but definitely not all of the heroes and heroines, Jews and non-Jews, male and female of each uprising.

To implement our ideas within concrete resources, we created an active and loud Facebook page, where participants can express not only their frustrations for Polish nationalist behaviour, but excitement to reclaim patriotism and provide an open and accepting space within Poland. To garner support for our T-shirt campaign, we posted photos of the t-shirts strewn on and around famous and infamous memorials, like



the commemorative site dedicated to Jan Karski and others in and around Warsaw. Furthermore, the logo of jail bars symbolize a bird cage, where the Polish eagle remains trapped by ignorant Polish nationalists. Thus, our campaign and slogan aims to free the eagle, so it can “fly in an open and free space for everyone”. Furthermore, Facebook provides a solid source for networking with other similar social campaigns in and around Poland. We hope to market our campaign for NGOs and even small businesses to mass distribute and publicize our product in November.



In order to prepare for Poland’s Independence Day on November 11th, we created a short trailer. As we saw, the trailer slyly imitates a movie trailer to garner mystery and support for our campaign. The trailer conveys the bare bones of our campaign. Because the march is in November, we do not want to exhaust and burn out our potential audience. Rather, we want to slowly build tension and excitement that will lure and last

until the eventful day in November. Furthermore, the trailer represents a fight, a boxer or fighter preparing through hard work of physical and mental to combat his opponent. We did so because ultimately our campaign, that directly confronts violent and aggressive nationalist, will likely manifest in confrontations that will result in physical and verbal violence. This is a fight that involves pain, commitment, and conflict.



Our future is this November and the next, and the next. Until the march has replaced an aggressive expression of racist nationalism to a tolerant patriotism of Poland. While there is a unique aspect of occupation within Polish history, there is a stronger narrative of resistance. A resistance that demanded dignity in the face of history's darkest of evils. Although Poland has regained its independence from the Soviet Union in 1989, it remains imprisoned, if only mentally, by its far right extremists. But a resistance is brewing within the small towns and big cities that will overthrow this injustice and reinstate equality and acceptance and celebration of difference.

We are all chained, barred caged, but this November let us reclaim our patriotism and free the eagle.

