

Who is afraid of sexual minorities? Homosexuals, moral panic and the exercise of social control¹

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In spite of over thirty years existence in the British academy and almost twenty in the American moral panic theory is hardly known in Polish social science. There may be hundreds of other concepts that Polish scholars are unfamiliar with but that specific one is, I believe, a particular loss, as moral panic theory might provide a very useful tool for analysing many of the contemporary phenomena in Polish society.

Most of the contemporary analyses of moral panics I am familiar with are limited to well established democratic countries like Britain (Cricher 2002), USA (Welch 2000), Sweden (Johansson 2000), and Australia (Gryson 2004). That situation is not, I believe, a result of the fact that 'moral panics are a phenomenon of modern Western cultures' (Grayson 2004) but rather that there is insufficient theoretical and empirical research among other societies. This is another reason for applying moral panic theory to a country like Poland, which in spite of fifteen years of democracy is still in transition (Sztompka 2003). It would be interesting to examine how and if economical and political situations determine moral panics. Also, the significantly unique cultural context of the country where more than 90 per cent of its people are Catholic² may specifically affect the way the society regards some social issues, compared with other, less religious nations.

The main purpose of my work is to introduce the theory and see how useful it may be when looking at some social problems in the Polish context. I am specifically interested in the panic that took place last year around gay lifestyles. Polish sociologist, Jan Kochanowski, commented on the events in 2004: 'There is a growing aggression in the public sphere.....The so called 'militants' have been organised by angry lads (...) who want to get rid of anything that is strange and out of the ordinary' (*Trybuna* 22.11.2004). There are two reasons for my choice of focus. First, unlike in some other moral panic cases (paedophilia in particular), in 'gay' panic there is no general agreement as to the threat posed by the 'folk devils'³ – homosexuals, which makes the threat somewhat ambiguous. Second, the phenomenon is very characteristic of Polish society generally as there is no other example of such heightened concern about homosexuality in other, even very religious European countries. And it is probable that such culturally bound moral panics that might tell most about a nation's condition.

For years sexual minorities in Poland have been suppressed, culturally by strong Catholicism and politically, by the communist system before 1989 and the growing power of right-wing politicians at present. It seems though that 2004 was a crucial year for gay activists. The Polish membership of the EU from May 2004 gave homosexuals some courage to come out of the shadows and claim more

¹ © Iwona Zielinska 2005. All rights reserved. I would like to thank Dr Maggie Wykes for her patience and invaluable help in completing this paper.

² According to a national survey carried out by CBOS in 2001 96 per cent of Poles are Catholics, 86 per cent of them are fairly regular church-goers. This tendency has been stable since 1986 (probably much earlier that this, however there is not much data available as the communist government was making effort to suppress polish religiousness) (CBOS 2001).

³ Stanley Cohen popularised the term in his book *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (1972) without actually giving a clear definition of it. He referred the phrase 'folk devils' to deviants, delinquents, wrongdoers, who disturb social order causing anxiety among the public. Goode and Ben-Yehuda, on the other hand, provide an unambiguous but rather narrow explanation, pointing out that 'a folk devil is the personification of evil (...) that is stripped of all favourable characteristics and imparted with exclusively negative ones' (1994:28).

tolerance and acceptance from both the public and the politicians (Kaszubska 2004)⁴. Marches and parades were organised by gay, feminist and liberal organisations in order to draw attention and raise important questions about gays' status in the legal and social systems. That caused great concern among many church people as well as politicians and nationalist organisations, who felt that social and moral order might be at a threat. A leading Polish newspaper noted: 'The Festival 'Culture for Tolerance' organised by the gay movement is causing lots of controversy – there are protests from rightwing politicians as well as catholic organisations' *Wyborcza* (03.05.2004).

I will look at these events in 2004 by using a processual and attributional model of moral panics (Cricher 2004), in order to see what kind of formal and informal mechanisms of social control were employed, who by and why they felt threatened by these events What propositions were put forward for 'coping' and what kind of action was taken to deal with the problem?⁵ I will look at the media representations of gay people and the 2004 events to distinguish the main discourses used to account for the struggle for homosexual acceptance.

Moral panic: a review of the literature

The scholars and researchers interested in moral panic theory tend to agree that the main contribution belongs to Stanley Cohen, the author of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics* (see McRobbie 1994, Thompson 1998, Critcher 2003). Despite some ambiguities, the opening paragraph of the book has been widely used as a definition of a moral panic phenomena:

'Society appears to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or a group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned by the editors, bishops, politicians and other right-thinking people; socially accredited experts pronounce their diagnoses and solutions; ways of coping are evolved or (more often) resorted to; the condition then disappears, submerges or deteriorates and become more visible' (Cohen 2002: 1).

Cohen looked at the genesis and development of moral panic and social labelling. For this the Mods and Rockers⁶ conflict, which took place in the 1960s, is used to explain the nature of social concern about this particular form of deviance. He highlights the role of the media in shaping and defining social problems but perhaps, the most interesting part of Cohen's work is that on societal reaction to moral panic in general and to the Mods and Rockers in particular. He analysed in detail the reaction from two types of social control: the official – in the forms of the police and the courts, and the informal, represented by action groups, like that organised by an owner of a hotel, Mr. Blake who felt that rioting groups in a seaside town might threaten the tourist business (Cohen 2002: 166). Cohen argued that the nature of social reaction depends on the kind and amount of information available in the public arena. He also added that it is important to recognise 'what interests are to be protected as this knowledge shapes the subsequent campaign for rule creation' (ibid.: 93).

Cohen's media-oriented analysis of moral panics was elaborated by Stuart Hall and other researchers working at the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural (Cricher 2003: 131). In 1976 *Policing the Crisis* was written from the Centre. The CCCS researchers examined the problem of mugging in the 1970s which, according to them, led to another national moral panic. But the perspective used in their analysis differs, in many respects, from the one used by Cohen. First of all they placed the media at the centre of their interests and introduced the notion of the 'social creation of news' (Hall et al 1976: 162-5). The stories presented by the media, they would say, do not simply illustrate the reality we live in. A story has to be considered as a final product of a complicated process which begins with the selection of what is to be reported and continues with the signification of the selected

⁴ A few days after joining the EU the Polish gay movement organised a four day festival 'Culture for Tolerance'. One of the Polish journalists commented on this: 'Just after entering the European Union some questions arose: are we tolerant, can we accept others, how people of different religion, different skin colour, different sexual orientation feel like in our society? Intolerance is now one of the pivotal issues we need to discuss during the Festival for Tolerance' (Kaszubska 2004).

⁵ The term 'problem' will be used here in a constructionist perspective. That means that the situation might not be objectively problematic but is perceived as such by a significant part of a society (Miller, Holstein 1993).

⁶ Mods and Rockers were two rival youth gangs in the 1960s in Britain. In his work Stanley Cohen (1972) analysed the riots caused by the gangs in a seaside town Clacton in terms of the responses of the media, police, courts and the public.

news by attributing meanings (ibid.: 162). Also, the organisation and hierarchy of the mass media institutions both play a role in the process of news-making (ibid.). In other words Hall et al. looked at the media in their analysis not only in relation to the public but also in relation to some other mechanisms such as pressure from the authorities and the role of gatekeepers⁷ in news-making. The media obtain their information about threats from key primary definers of social reality (Hall et al 1976: 59), such as police, politicians, academic experts and others in powerful and authoritative positions. The media (secondary definers) amplify that perceived threat to the existing social order, and the police and courts then act to eliminate the threat⁸. The media so ensure by default rather than conspiracy that the dominant ideas or ideologies are constantly reproduced because they rely on information provided by the members of powerful social groups who are 'naturally' definers of dominant ideology.

The CCCS also introduced into moral panic theory the concept of a 'signification spiral' (Thompson 1998: 16). This is a process of publicly signifying certain events as important by moral experts, politicians, interest groups and editors, which results in a continuous escalation of the meanings attached to those events. In practice analysing 'signification spirals' became a main tool used in decoding discourse as that can reveal how a perception of moral disorder is created for the public.

In the beginning of the 1990s American scholars started to show some interest in the concept of moral panic. In 1992 Philip Jenkins published his book on moral panic cases in Great Britain placing stress on the role of interest group in creating moral panics. He also contributes the ideas of the role of 'symbolic politics' and 'politics of substitution' (Thompson 1998: 21) to the understanding of the concept. Jenkins argues that claims makers draw attention to a specific problem, in part because it symbolizes another issue. For example the panic over HIV in the 1980s might have initially focused on those at risk but it was also a symbolic attempt to bring back (hetero)sexual boundaries (see: Wykes 2002: 171-5).

In 1994 Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda wrote a systematic introduction to the moral panic theory. Not only did they point to the main ideas and the contributors but also introduced for the first time main indicators of the phenomena: concern, hostility, consensus, disproportionality and volatility (1994:33-41). Although the usefulness of some of them in analysing moral panic phenomena has been questioned (Cohen 2002, *Introduction to the Third Edition*, pp. XXVIII, Bratholomew and Dickeson 1998), the indicators have been broadly used by some researchers (Victor 1998, Thompson 1998, Critcher 2003). What is particularly distinctive in the American approach is the minimal interest in the role of media played in whipping up a panic. Unlike their British counterparts they pay little attention to the role played by the media but focus rather on social problems and collective behaviour perspectives in explaining the moral panic phenomena⁹ (Thompson 1998).

One of the latest works in the moral panic area is Chas Critcher's *Moral Panic and the media* (2003). By analysing some of the major social concerns in Britain, like AIDS, paedophilia and ecstasy-use, he tries to see if there is any clear pattern in moral panic cases. What is most interesting is that he rejects public concern as a pre-requisite to create moral panic. For Critcher, public concern is a 'bonus' for the media, pressure groups and claims-makers are positively able to create moral panic without public support¹⁰. This approach presents a rather controversial way of looking at moral panic theory as up until now the phenomenon was *about* public concern.

Moral panic theory has not gone unchallenged (Goody, Ben-Yehuda 1994: 43). The main criticism, questioning the validity of the concept in the case of mugging (Hall et al 1978), came from

⁷ A gatekeeper is a media person (journalist, an editor) responsible for selecting the news to be presented for the public (White 1950, Golding and Elliot 1979).

⁸ In the 1970s Hall et al. (1978) analysed the case of 'mugging' as a new and rapidly growing phenomenon. In fact, the crime was not new, only the label was, and official statistics did not support the view that it was growing rapidly. According to Hall et al., the media whipped up a moral panic around the issue of mugging, which served to legitimate the increase in punitive measures - police 'mugging squads' and heavy sentences. Hall et al. see the media as playing a key role in developing and maintaining the pressure for 'law and order' (see Wykes 2001: 35) by becoming the vehicle for transmission of the dominant ideology.

⁹ In their work Goody and Ben-Yehuda analysed the Renaissance witch-hunt in terms of moral panic phenomena (pp.144-184) clearly indicating that the media are not indispensable to fuel a panic. For Critcher though *moral panics are unthinkable without the media* (2003:131).

¹⁰ The latest example of creating unsubstantial alarm, according to Critcher, is binge drinking, where the media, politicians and organisations try to 'construct' a problem despite lack of distinct public support (Critcher 2005).

Waddington in his article titled *Mugging as Moral Panic: a question of proportion* (1986). Contrary to Hall et al, Waddington argued that the rise in street crime in the early 1970s was reality and not just manufactured by the ruling elite news in order to distract public attention from the crisis in capitalism. Also Cohen himself admits in the latest edition of his work (2002) some theoretical limitations between panics and folk devils (pp.XXIV). In spite of these weaknesses the moral panic theory 'worked its way into English language' (Downes, Rock 1998: 371) and continues to attract interest of criminologists, sociologists and media theorists alike.

Homosexuals in Poland

In order to understand the contemporary gay and lesbian situation in Poland it is important to outline some social and historical background.

Despite more liberal laws than in neighbouring countries such as the Soviet Union and East Germany, the Polish gay movement did not develop publicly until the late 1980s. The main reason for this was the cultural obstacle of strong Catholicism which promoted family values within which heterosexual relationships lead to procreation. That resulted in lack of tolerance, prejudice and fear of 'other' kinds of sexuality. In the 1960s there was a growing interest in sexual minorities from criminology scholars who were making efforts to prove that homosexuals are more likely to become offenders than heterosexuals (Giza 1963). Alternatively some criminologists were pointing out that 'homosexual prostitutions resulted in consolidation of homosexual behaviour which very often resulted in a life-long ailment' (ibid.; p.44). So homosexuality at that time was treated as either a sort of deviancy or illness.

From the mid 1970s. the Polish Security Apparatus (SA)¹¹ became interested in gay men. Specially trained by the SA, and selected for their attractiveness, men, both gay and straight, were used to seduce other gay artists, intellectuals or writers. Then, blackmailed by the SA, these victims were forced to agree to provide information on their colleagues, who might have been presenting anti-government views or any anticommunist behaviour. It is believed that these kind of activities caused Michel Foucault to leave Poland when he was trying to organise the French Institute in Warsaw (Macey 1993, Leszczynski 2000).

At the beginning of the 1980s, while gay movements started to flourish in Western Europe and the USA, Polish homosexuals were still hiding their sexual identities from their intolerant Polish Catholic neighbours on one hand and the communist regime on the other. In the mid 1980s the Security Apparatus introduced a secret campaign called 'Hyacinth' (Mrok 1996). The main purpose of it was to create a national database of all homosexuals and people who had some sort of contact with them. Many people were arrested and questioned, humiliated and ridiculed. Later on the SA people responsible for the action explained that this was to prevent the spread of HIV (Kurpios 2002). The campaign turned out to be counter-productive as gays became very vigilant, distrustful, and as a consequence they had gone 'underground'¹².

No surprise then, that later, when Poland became a democratic country, the majority of gay people still chose not to come out for fear of social ostracism and lack of understanding. Yet, it seems that the younger, 'untraumatised', so to say, generation who travelled widely and experienced more liberal social attitudes in other countries decided to change the situation. The Polish membership of the EU from May 2004 gave them more encouragement. Now there are several organisations which publish gay magazines, give help and support, organize anti-homophobic campaigns and try to popularise tolerance. Yet in 2001 a national opinion poll showed that only 5 per cent of respondents thought homosexuality was normal (88 per cent - thought of it as 'some kind of abnormality' – CBOS 2001). In 2003, 56 per cent were against any form of legalisation of gay relationships, and as many as 36 per cent believed gay people should not be allowed to have sexual relationships (CBOS 2003). That indicates strong conservative moral firmness, possibly supported by solid Catholic Church position.

The 2002 report on sexual discrimination, carried out by the major gay organisation Lambda, tried to

¹¹ The Security Apparatus was a body dedicated to trace and repress any subversive behaviour during the communist regime.

¹² According to Kurpios (2001) Austrian gay organisation HOSI-Wien, which was to gather information about gays' situation in Eastern Europe, organised a secret meeting with six Polish correspondents in 1983 in one of the parks in Warsaw. The meeting resulted in unofficial publication of the first gay informative bulletin which existed until 1987.

assess the amount of prejudice against sexual minorities in Poland. According to this, every eighth person taking part in the survey experienced some kind of assault. Thirty per cent of them were victims of psychological violence, and in over 40 per cent of the cases a friend or a family member was the offender (Lambda Association Report 2002). It is really worrying that 75 per cent of physical abuse cases and 85 per cent of psychological abuse cases are not getting reported to the police in fear of the police reaction to a victim's sexual orientation (ibid.). This apprehension and lack of trust is probably the consequence of the communist time when the police – Peoples' Militia at that time – were actually the government's apparatus, hence commonly distrusted. Even today the body, that is to protect all citizens, is not trusted enough to fulfil its role. The respondents of the survey reported also discrimination in social services, public life, church and their work place. This is probably why almost 70 per cent of gay respondents said they would not reveal their sexual identity in the work place and almost 30 per cent hide the truth from their friends and family members (Lambda Association Report 2002).

2004 was particularly important for the Polish gay movement. For many, joining the EU raised hopes for a better situation, in terms of social tolerance and awareness. But soon it turned out it was much easier to introduce some institutional changes than the cultural and attitudinal ones. Just one week after joining the EU the anti-homophobic organisation arranged the 'March of Tolerance' in Krakow. The campaign caused growing concern from some rightwing politicians and catholic organisations. As one of the Polish magazines put it: '[there is] general homophobia, unprecedented tolerance for the most offending statements on homosexuality made by some politicians and church people' (*Przegląd* 30.11.2004). Krakow is well known to be one of the most conservative and rightwing cities in Poland. Yet despite unsympathetic feelings the march became a huge success as 'more than 1.500 people took part in it. There were artists, politicians and just average Krakowians' (*Wyborcza* 8.05.2004). At the same time an anti-march had been organised, mostly by nationalist activists from the United Polish Youth (UPY) organisation. And they were not isolated in their angry action. Opposing the organization of the 'March of Tolerance' were also political parties, such as the League of Polish Families (*Wyborcza*, 04.04.2004). The Law and Justice party (PiS) and the Public Platform (PO) charged the mayor of Krakow with participating in the public promotion of homosexuality and in effect damaging the city's good name (*Wyborcza*, 06.05.2004).

The anti-march was joined also by some elderly people who represented strong catholic views. Demonstrators brought signs: 'Our street, your clinic', 'Zero tolerance for violating the laws of God and morality.'¹³ In the opinion of the protest's organizers, lurking beneath the innocence of the 'March of Tolerance' was the next form of attack by the homosexual lobby on the underlying morals of the Polish people, which for centuries have built upon Catholic beliefs. 'We are saying a categorical NO to parades organised by homosexuals (...). We do not want to imperil society by watching this type of pathology. Especially our children are at risk' wrote the United Polish Youth in their protest declaration on their official website (www.wszechpolacy.pl), 08.06.2004).

The march stirred unrest and gave rise to further actions from right-wing politicians and dogmatically anti-gay organizations. The president of Warsaw refused to grant permission to the International Lesbian & Gay Cultural Network to organise the Parade of Equality scheduled for June 11 2004 (*Wyborcza*, 27.05.2004). The Parade had been organised annually since 2001 in Warsaw by the ILGCN as a protest against sexual discrimination in Poland. Now for the first time the organisers did not receive permission to pursue the 'tradition'. The ostensible reason was the security issue (*Wyborcza* 18.05.2004). However it is well known that the president has strong connections to the right-wing party 'Law and Justice' (*Wyborcza* 10.06.2004). While the gay organisations were not losing their hopes and continued with the preparation for the Parade the catholic radical organisation launched their own campaign by flooding the city with a leaflet titled 'Say NO! to the promotion of homosexuality in Warsaw' (from the organization's website: www.piotrskarga.pl), June 2004). They also kept sending hundreds of protest letters to the Polish Prime Minister calling him not to legalize same-sex marriages¹⁴. As time had run short, the parade had to be cancelled. However the ILGCN did not give up and made an agreement with the Humanistic Environment Group to be their cover and organised a demonstration for freedom instead, which more than a thousand people took part in

¹³ <http://tolerancia.gej.net/english/nojava.php?strona=prasa>, review of the press coverage on the festival Culture for Tolerance 7-9.05.2004.

¹⁴ It is interesting to know that at the moment the Polish gay and lesbian movement does not even claim right for sex-same marriages; they want registration of partners' relationships, regardless of their sex (Uminska 2004b).

(*Wyborcza* 11.06.2004).

Some five months later a new liberal organisation called 'The Greens 2004' planned to organise another anti-discrimination campaign in Poznan, called the 'March of Equality', aimed at supporting all national and sexual minorities. From the very beginning the idea brought lots of controversy. In some churches people were encouraged to sign a petition to the president of Poznan to ban the March and during the time of the event prayers for tougher morality were organised (*Wyborcza*, 16.11.2004). Right after the beginning of the March the United Polish Youth started their own protest¹⁵ with some support from the local right-wing politicians (ibid.). In the middle of the route the March's participants were attacked, supposedly by football fans, with eggs, oranges, and even stones (*Wyborcza*, 22.11.2004). The organisers of the event were forced to stop the March as they were afraid the violence would worsen. Three days after the whole event a group of right-wing politicians from Poznan issued a petition to the city's president to make him pledge not to allow organising 'a manifestation which aims at promotion of homosexuality' ever again (Warkocki, Sypniewski 2004, *Wyborcza*, 07.12.2004))

The 2004 situation attracted special media attention. Suddenly gay activists were interviewed, debates were organised and battles between right-wing politicians and gay campaigners was a sure winner on the media agenda (Warkocki 2004). The mainstream media seemed to be objective and often in favour of gays and lesbians, promoting more tolerance among the readers and viewers (ibid.). Nonetheless, they often focused on the sensationalism of the problem, overlooking the fact that actually the whole situation posed a threat not only to violation of human rights but also to democracy in general (especially in the Warsaw case, where gay organisations were refused permission to organise the Parade of Equality, against the basics of any democratic country foundation (*Wyborcza* 06.06.2004)).

Research questions and methods

Given these events, occurring quite uniquely in Europe at present, I was curious as to how to make sense of them as a Polish phenomenon. Looking towards other cultures I came across 'moral panics' and the ensuing research focussing on media discourse and social control. It seemed to me that the anti-gay protest in 2004 in Poland would provide a perfect case-study with this theoretical and methodological paradigm.

The aim of my research is not to prove whether or not the growing visibility of homosexuals in 2004 resulted in a moral panic. As Professor Critcher claims, moral panic is not a thing, but an abstract concept, a model of a process (Critcher 2003: 2). In sociology these kinds of models are called 'ideal types'. The concept of ideal type was introduced by Max Weber (Weber 1949), who originated a break from an earlier positivistic approach to social research by popularising this heuristic device. Although the ideal type cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality, it provides a useful tool against which the real examples can be measured and assessed. An ideal type 'has the significance of a purely ideal limiting concept with which the real situations or action is compared and surveyed for the explication of its significant components' (Weber 1949: 93, original emphasis). Having this in mind my first question is whether moral panic theory works in the Polish context. I will be asking to what extent moral panic theory can provide an explanation for the 2004 events and if so how useful is it to apply moral panic analysis to these particular events?

Stanley Cohen - the founder of the moral panic concept, pointed in his analysis to different stages in the process of a moral panic (1972: 12). These, later, became a base for other research (Jenkins 1992, Thompson 1999, Matthews 2002, Critcher 2003) and distinguish five main stages in the moral panic phenomena. In order to address my question I will apply the five-stage model to see how applicable it is for the Polish case.

1 The first stage deals with the emergence of the problem, when 'there is a general apprehension that something is wrong and at this point a form of behaviour comes to be perceived as a threat (Critcher 2003:17). In this I should be able to define the threat to social and moral order. What was the nature of the threat? What was novel about the threat? Who saw the gay movements

¹⁵ It is interesting to know that at the moment the Polish gay and lesbian movement does not even claim right for sex-same marriages; they want registration of partners' relationships, regardless of their sex (Uminska 2004b).

as a threat and why?

2 The second stage, called the inventory phase, is where the focus is placed on the way 'the situation was initially interpreted and presented by mass media' (Cohen 1972:18). In other words the media is believed to play a main role by labelling and stereotyping deviants, the 'folk devils', what results is more interests in the problem from pressure groups, politicians and the public¹⁶. By looking at the mainstream media and the rightwing publications I will try to see if there were any attempts to construct gay and lesbians as 'folk devils' in order to justify the actions taken. Also, I will establish if the media was the only source of inventory or if there were any alternative sources, like politicians, catholic organisations, and church.

3 In the third stage there is a rapid growth of concern, which should be visible in public discussions, media publications or internet debates, where particularly concerned groups or organizations – moral entrepreneurs¹⁷ try to *pronounce upon the nature of the problem and its best remedies* (Critchler 2003: 17). One of the indicators of social concern – easily measurable by quantitative analysis - is a sudden upsurge in the media coverage (Goody, Ben-Yehuda 1994:207). Also, I will access any opinion polls on gay rights carried out at the time and then compare the results with the ones from 2001 survey.

4 Next is the reaction stage, in which 'current powers are exploited' to deal with the threat, if these are 'deemed insufficient, demands for legal reform will follow' (Critchler 2003: 18). Moral entrepreneurs then propose solutions, and take up some action. In the Polish gay case it is clear that the most concerned sectors were the church people, catholic organisations, nationalists and right-wing politicians. By analysing the media coverage and actually interviewing some of the anti-gay activists I will trace what were the propositions of coping and if the propositions were effective or only symbolic.

5 The last phase looks at the results of a moral panic. Were there any institutional changes? Did any new organisations, on any side of the argument, appear? Have the events resulted in any law changes? (Cohen 1972: 9). Also I will assess the extent to which the status of the problem has changed, compared to the beginning of 2004.

Another way of applying the model to the Polish context is to check the validity of the indicators, which were introduced to the concept by the American scholars Erich Goode and Nachman Ben-Yehuda. These proved to be a very transparent way of examining a case from the moral panic perspective. The main features of a moral panic they identify are: *consensus* among at least a significant sector of a society that there is a real threat which need to be dealt with; *concern* about that threat; *hostility* towards those who pose a danger (gay and lesbians in my case); and *disproportionality* between the real scale of a threat and the public perception of it. They also point to *volatility* of moral panics - their ability to appear suddenly and sometimes to diminish and become unnoticeable despite the problem which gave rise to the concern not being resolved (Goody, Ben-Yehuda 1994: 33-41)

My second research question considers the implications of homosexuals being constructed as folk devils – outsiders, deviants, wrongdoers, who threaten the moral order of a society. What were the mechanisms of this process? Who was involved in it? Who was interested in vilifying the gay people and why? Was there any interest group involved? What was the media representation of gays and lesbians? Did it correspond to the gay antagonists' attitude or did it contradict it? What were the main discourses presented in the media? Did they reflect anybody's interest? In order to clarify these points I will be analysing discourse, using both quantitative and qualitative methods as used in for example Ndangam's analysis of British newspaper coverage of child abuse (2003). I will be looking at the most popular Polish newspaper and at the major rightwing daily paper to assess differences in constructing and presenting gay people. Also, I will try to interview some of the main anti-gay activists – right-wing politicians, catholic organisation leaders and members of the United Polish Youth, using unstructured,

¹⁶ Cohen showed how the press coverage on the riots caused by the Mods and Rockers resulted initially in just public concern (pp. 122-7), then reaction from a moral entrepreneur Geoffrey Blake (pp.101-110), and some legislation changes in the end (pp.111).

¹⁷ Cohen adapted the term 'moral entrepreneur' from Becker's studies on marijuana users (1963) to indicate extremely concerned individuals or groups who perceive 'a condition which is trouble-making, difficult or threatening and requiring action (...) and, if appropriate, a method of control is suggested' (Cohen 2002:90).

in-depth interviews.

Finally, I want to ask what were the means of social control as a response to the new 'threat'. Theories of social control focus generally on the strategies and techniques which help regulate human behaviour and thus lead to conformity and compliance to the rules of society (Cohen 1985). When analysing the 2004 events in Poland I will be looking at the means of social control from the macro-social as well as from the micro-social perspective. The former relates to formal control systems, including the legal system such as laws, law enforcement, powerful groups in society (who can help influence laws and norms) and the economic and social directives of government or private organisations. The micro-social perspective focuses on informal and unofficial control systems based often on social exclusion and ostracism. I will use the work of theorists such as Habermas (1984), Becker (1963), Lemert (1967) and Matza (1969). I will be particularly interested in what were the propositions for coping? Who from? What were the official and unofficial actions? Who were the claim-makers? Did they have media support? And what were the results? I expect the interview data to be my main source of material to provide answers to, at least, some of these questions. The in-depth interviews with the main anti-gay activists are scheduled to be carried out in all the three cities where the demonstration took place – Kakow, Warsaw and Poznan. I will draw on the methods used by Trutkowski in his book *Social Representations of Politics* (org. Spoleczne reprezentacje polityki, 2000) to design this phase of the research.

There are certain societal areas in which normative violation may result in heightened concern more clearly or often than 'violations' of other areas. These are certainly sexuality, children and violence¹⁸. Regardless of some cultural differences the moral panics in these areas are very likely to have similar pattern. Despite lack of analyses, I believe Polish society, in a similar way to British society, experienced a panic about paedophiles (Cricher 2002), drug use (Wykes 2002, Critcher 2003), and hooligans (Pearson 1983, Cohen 2002). Therefore it is dubious that analysing any of these cases would contribute to moral panic theory unless compared with other countries' cases to assess similarities and differences (cross-cultural studies – Critcher 2003). The gay case, on the other hand, might be particularly interesting as it is very culturally restricted to Poland and hence might say a lot about Polish contemporary society.

There are no other examples of such public homophobia in European countries in the 21st century so looking at the 'moral panic' over the gay rights and practices may be able to reveal some aspect of culture, politics, and the media that are unique to Poland and in this paper I have set out the theoretical and methodological reasons for undertaking such a study.

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¹⁸ Cohen, in the *Introduction to the Third Edition* to his book (2002), argues that objects of moral panic belong to seven familiar clusters of social identity: 1. young, violent males, 1. school violence, 3. drugs, 4. child abuse, 5. sex violence, welfare cheats and single mothers, 7. refugees and asylum seekers (Cohen 2002: VIII-XXI). Although some of these categories seem to be culturally limited it appears that sex, violence and children in most of the cases will result in growing amount of concern both in the UK and Poland.

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