

British and Polish parliamentary discourse on drug policy

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Abstract

My research is based on a contextual, social constructionist approach. Its aim is to answer whether and how parliamentary discussions affect the solutions adopted by individual states in the field of drug policy. In addition, I am looking for common elements in the narratives of politicians, as well as an answer to whether and under what circumstances it would be possible for them to develop a common position. I will present a comparison of the Polish and British discourses. In my research, I used the narrative method to analyse parliamentary discussions on current drug laws in the given countries. The method contains three steps: reconstruction of the narrative structure, categorization of the narratives, and their comparison to broader ideological and philosophical views. The analysed discourses vastly differ from each other. The discussions held by British parliamentarians are dominated by narratives based on references to facts and scientific knowledge. Polish parliamentarians, on the other hand, referred mainly to emotions in their narratives. Moreover, British parliamentarians seem to be speaking on their own behalf while Polish parliamentarians directly present the position of their party. Polish parliamentarians also often refer to the policies pursued in other countries and present them as role models. British parliamentarians refer only to American solutions, at the same time assessing them negatively. A division into materialistic and postmaterialistic values seems to explain the differences in the approach to drug policy. Politicians who favour prohibition choose materialistic values and liberalization is often supported by politicians with postmaterialistic values.

Keywords: **Drug policy, narrative analysis, parliamentary discourse, drug dependence.**

Brytyjski i polski dyskurs parlamentarny na temat polityki narkotykowej

Streszczenie

Badania zostały oparte na kontekstowej odmianie konstrukcjonizmu społecznego. Ich celem jest odpowiedź na pytanie, czy i w jaki sposób dyskusje parlamentarne wpływają na rozwiązania przyjmowane przez poszczególne państwa w zakresie polityki narkotykowej. Ponadto poszukuję elementów wspólnych występujących w narracjach polityków oraz odpowiedzi na pytanie, czy i w jakich okolicznościach byłoby możliwe wypracowanie przez nich wspólnego stanowiska. Przedstawię porównanie polskich i brytyjskich debat. W moich badaniach wykorzystałam metodę narracyjną do analizy dyskusji parlamentarnych na temat obowiązujących ustaw narkotykowych w obu krajach. Metoda składa się z trzech etapów: rekonstrukcji struktury narracyjnej, kategoryzacji narracji oraz wpisania ich w szersze ramy światopoglądowe i ideologiczne. Analizowane dyskursy znacznie się od siebie różnią. Dyskusje prowadzone przez brytyjskich parlamentarzystów są zdominowane przez narracje nawiązujące do faktów i wiedzy naukowej. Polscy parlamentarzyści z kolei odwołują się głównie do emocji. Ponadto brytyjscy parlamentarzyści wydają się mówić we własnym imieniu, podczas gdy polscy bezpośrednio przedstawiają stanowisko swojej partii. Często podpierają się także polityką prowadzoną w innych krajach, uważając je za wzorce do naśladowania. Brytyjscy parlamentarzyści nawiązują jedynie do rozwiązań amerykańskich, jednocześnie oceniając je negatywnie. Podział na wartości materialistyczne i postmaterialistyczne wydaje się najlepiej wyjaśniać różnice w podejściu do polityki narkotykowej. Zwolennicy prohibicji częściej odwołują się do tych pierwszych, a liberalizacji do tych drugich.

Słowa kluczowe: **Polityka narkotykowa, analiza narracyjna, dyskurs parlamentarny, uzależnienie od narkotyków.**

INTRODUCTION

The United Kingdom was one of the first countries to consider the regulation of drugs on a larger scale. In the late nineteenth century, British politicians began to consider introducing prohibitions in their overseas colonies. After careful studies on this topic, it was decided that this was not the best solution and would do more harm than good. Thus, Great Britain became a counterweight to the United States, which initiated international talks on the prohibition of opium.

On the other hand, the history of drug policy in Poland is not long. Although the first regulations were drafted as early as 1923, they rather resulted from international obligations. The Treaty of Versailles ending the First World War forced all signatories to sign and ratify the International Opium Convention (Davenport-Hines 2006). However, the regulations were not widely discussed in Poland due to the many other issues that needed to be addressed after regaining independence.

In communist times, the problem of drug addiction was also not treated as a priority. Socialist authorities denied the existence of a problem, promoting a narrative that the problem of addiction developed due to capitalism and low satisfaction with the life of the disadvantaged classes – psychoactive substances were supposed to be an escape from everyday problems or an expression of rebellion against the system. In the Polish People's Republic, the problem of drug addiction could not exist, because happy people had no reason to use drugs. The authorities only recognized the existence of the problem of addiction to medicines, which, in their opinion, was the result of a medical error. It was only in the 1980s that officials decided to admit that Poland also has a problem with drug addiction. The first anti-drug law was passed in 1985 (Abucewicz 2012).

In this article, I would like to show a comparison between Polish and British parliamentary discourse on this issue. I believe it is of interest to compare countries that have such a different history in their approach to this problem, but at the same time are part of the same geographical area (Europe), and whose laws for a long time (until 2020) were influenced by the same institution – the European Union. I am looking for the common elements in the narratives of politicians as well as the differences. I am interested in whether and how this discourse influences the solutions chosen by politicians, and what kinds of narratives can be used to influence decision-makers to lean towards the most beneficial and scientifically informed outcomes. Answers to more specific research questions may help to achieve this goal:

- What values do politicians refer to in their statements?
- How are these values connected to broader ideological and worldview frameworks?
- Which definitions of the drug problem do politicians use, and how does this affect the solutions they prefer?

These are important issues from the perspective of social rehabilitation. Practitioners who work with individuals struggling with addiction point out the many difficulties arising from the current system, such as poor access to substitution therapies. Analysing parliamentary debates on drug policy may indicate how to engage with decision-makers so that they are more inclined to reform the law in this area.

It is important to mention language differences, which can cause confusions. The English word "drug" can be translated either as *narkotyki*, which is an illegal, psychoactive substance, or as *lek*, which is a medical substance used for healing. In this article, I use *drug* in the first meaning (unless discussing the narrative of a politician, who uses the word differently). The word "medicine" is used as the translation of *lek*.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Given the topic of my research and my focus on drug policy narratives, I am using social constructionism as the theoretical framework for my study. The formulation of specific drug policies depends on the social definitions of drugs, addiction, and the optimal ways of addressing these issues, in other words, of the social constructions relating to drug issues. It is important to note that approaches to drugs have varied across different times and cultures. Today, they are seen as dangerous substances from which people must be protected, yet in the 19th century, they were considered indispensable medical substances. In some cultures, drugs also held religious significance, for example coca leaves were used ritually in the Inca Empire. These different meanings ascribed to substances further justify the use of a constructionist approach.

However, it is important to note that different approaches to psychoactive substances do not change the effects these substances have on people. The Incas consumed coca because it enhanced endurance, which was crucial for survival in harsh geographic conditions. Prohibitive solutions became a topic of discussion as the development of chemistry and other sciences in the 19th century led to much more addictive substances being administered to patients as medicine (e.g., isolated morphine instead of opium), and the issue of addiction became more pronounced. Today, we also face real challenges, such as crime relating to the black market, the emergence of new synthetic psychoactive substances, and the availability of painkillers. Therefore, this work is based on the perspective of contextual constructionism, which assumes that beyond socially constructed realities, there is also an empirically experienced reality. This allows for a more comprehensive approach to the problem and enables me to answer my research questions.

METHODOLOGY

I used the Narrative Method of Discourse Analysis in my research, which is a broad concept that includes many different techniques. Depending on the specific technique, the concept of narration also differs. Narrative definitions can be divided into two categories: broad and narrow. A broad concept of narration is presented, for example, by Roland Barthes (1975), who defines it as any form of communication. In his opinion, there have never been people who would not use narratives and it is a natural form of interpersonal communication. A narrow approach to the narrative is presented, among others, by David Maines (1993), who describes narratives as stories containing specific features – they must refer to events from the past and be characterized by a chronology of events. In this article, I have decided to adopt a broad definition of narrative, which I understand as a collection of similar stories that allow politicians to present their position in the discourse and create a social and moral order.

The narrative analysis itself has its origins in literature studies, and later was adapted to the social sciences. Due to the various goals of researchers using this method, different techniques are used. For the purposes of my research, I decided to use a technique inspired by the one proposed by Michael Jones and Mark McBeth (2010).

The first stage of the analysis is the reconstruction of the narrative structure. This includes the context, plot, characters, and the moral. In the second stage, I categorize the individual narratives. Finally, I compare them to wider ideological and philosophical views.

The context is understood as a more general social or political situation. For example, Marjorie DeVault (1990) points out that narrative analysis is not only an interpretation of the plot itself, but also an interpretation of the story as representing a time and place.

The plot is the basic element of the narrative that combines the remaining ones and presents a certain story. The narrative analysis of Barbara Czarniawska (1998) focuses on the reconstruction of the plot – particularly on building connections between events that created the action. Tammy Smith (2007) also focuses on the plot, paying attention to the selection of events in stories on the same topic.

Characters play an important role in the plot and can be divided into heroes, villains and victims. The characters are the most polemical element of the analysis. According to Jerome Bruner (1991), only people can be characters (and perhaps personified animals and objects acting consciously in the name of achieving a goal). This approach complicates the “victims” sub-category of characters. According to Francesca Polletta (2006), the role of a victim takes away autonomy and the character becomes passive. It evokes a feeling of compassion, not respect. Barthes’ (1975) understanding of characters is much broader. In his opinion, we should not consider them in terms of “persons”, but as “actants”. In studies of public policies, significant non-human objects may also qualify as characters, e.g. Piotr Pawliszak (2017) in his analysis of the ecological propaganda discourse in the Polish People’s Republic treats the Colorado potato beetle as a character. Since drugs play an important role in the presented narratives, I also decided to treat them as characters.

A moral is the summary of the story and a presentation of the preferred course of action or solution to the problem. It links the first stage of analysis with subsequent ones, because it is the moral that primarily contain the values that allow a given narrative to be connected to a wider worldview framework.

The narrative analysis can be performed in two ways: either “top-down”, where the researcher determines which elements should appear and checks whether they are present in a given narrative or not; or “bottom-up”, where the researcher checks which elements are present, without prior assumptions (Manning, Cullum-Swan 1998). Initially, I wanted to use the top-down analysis method by distinguishing three categories of narrative: supporters of prohibition, supporters of legalization/legal control, and supporters of harm reduction. It turned out that while the categories are relevant to the Polish discourse, they are not to the British one. This is why I decided to change the approach and use the “bottom-up” method to distinguish other categories of narrative. The categories will therefore be selected on the basis of thematic codes.

The analysed material contain transcripts of the parliamentary sessions when discussions on drug policy acts took place. I chose to analyse discussion on the current law in each country: the British Misuse of Drugs Act of 1971 and the Polish Anti-Drug Act of 2005. I also decided to analyse the discussion on the Polish Anti-Drug Act of 1997 as it was much more developed than in 2005, and therefore allows a better comparison to be made to the British discourse. The analysis includes all speeches made during parliamentary debates on (anti-)drug laws, with the exception of those unrelated to the topic (e.g., requests for breaks in the proceedings). The transcripts of the UK Parliament are available on the website <https://hansard.parliament.uk/>. To find the relevant records, I entered the name of the act in the search engine. The transcripts of the Polish Sejm can be found on the website <https://www.sejm.gov.pl/sejm9.nsf/stenogramy.xsp>, while the Senate’s transcripts are available at <https://www.senat.gov.pl/prace/posiedzenia/>. I accessed the relevant debates by searching the laws of interest on the website <https://isap.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/search.xsp> and checking their legislative history.

RESULTS

1. Discourse in the United Kingdom

1.1. Context

The main reason why work on the Misuse of Drugs Act started was the growing problem of the extensive prescribing of controlled drugs by doctors. This caused an increased number of addictions to these substances. There were also increasingly more medicines becoming available with a psychoactive and addictive effect. This became a problem not only in the British Isles, and led to the signing of the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances in 1971.

However, it was not only medical considerations that were an important topic in the early 1970s. Over the previous decade, the use of psychoactive substances had become increasingly popular among young people. Youth subcultures were developing and some of them were using specific drugs (e.g., amphetamines among Mods).

It was concluded that the problem of addiction was increasing – among middle-aged people due to the abuse of psychotropic drugs, and among the young people because of the use of the illegal substances. The Misuse of Drugs Act aimed to address these issues.

1.2. Narratives

1.2.1. Plot: The punishment should be for the criminals, addicted people need help, not prison. It is important to distinguish between addicted people who require treatment and therapy, and those who experiment with drugs and need education. It is necessary to form committees that will research the drug market, react to new drugs, and divide known drugs into illegal ones and medicines that can be dangerous if misused. It is important to solve other problems that lead people to use drugs as well. Characters: The villains are drug producers and smugglers as well as some doctors who overprescribe controlled substances. The victims are addicted people.

Moral: It is necessary to create an extensive drug policy system that encompasses many aspects (including prevention, treatment and education).

1.2.2. Plot: Young people have the right to experiment and this should be accepted. There is no point in overcrowding prisons with them. Young people cannot be placed in prison for something that is socially acceptable in their environment. A young person can become a criminal after such an experience. The focus should be on helping young people recover from addiction. There are too few people trained to help them (doctors, therapists, social workers, youth workers). It is important to create a support system. The act is an expression of hypocrisy – it targets drugs that are fashionable among young people, but does nothing about the drugs that are popular among middle-aged people (e.g., the act does not include nicotine).

Characters: Young people are presented as victims.

Moral: Young people should be able to make their own choices. The system should treat everyone equally.

1.2.3. Plot: Society must be educated. People take drugs because they have stopped believing in traditional social values. They want to live, not wait for retirement (which is uncertain). Introducing more restrictions is risky – addicted people are not criminals by nature, but can become ones in order to get drugs from the black market. The United States has this problem, but not Britain as yet – this must not be allowed to happen.

Characters: People from lower social strata are seen as victims.

Moral: Drug policy should be based on education, not punishment.

1.2.4. Plot: It should be noted that the problem is not unique to London. It is greatest there, but London also has various forms of prevention and help, which do not exist in the provinces.

Characters: The people living in the provinces are portrayed as victims of unequal access to help.

Moral: Addicted people should have equal access to help.

1.2.5. Plot: The chemical side of addiction is one thing, but most of all, the focus should be on people and their problems. It is also necessary to look at the problems of the use of nicotine and alcohol. Drugs are a problem, but relatively less so than other psychoactive substances. The United States has draconian laws, and still the drug problem there is infinitely greater than in Britain, so it's not a question of bans and penalties. Children should be a priority and the punishment for encouraging them to try drugs should be most severe.

Characters: The enemies are those who encourage children to use drugs. The victim, on the other hand, is society as a whole, because the law focuses on relatively less important problems.

Moral: Drug policy should focus on child protection and the actual risk/size of the problem.

1.2.6. Plot: The law has to be accepted and respected by society. If society become more liberal, this should be taken into account. Cannabis should be regulated separately because marijuana is less dangerous than heroin or amphetamines. There is no scientific evidence that marijuana leads to hard drugs. A distinction should also be made between drug possession and encouraging the use of drugs – these are two different crimes. Drugs can also have medical uses and this should be kept in mind (e.g., LSD is effective in treating psychosexual problems).

Characters: It is hard to identify villains, heroes, or victims in this narrative. All the characters play a neutral role here.

Moral: The law should be socially acceptable.

1.2.7. Plot: Public figures have great influence on the behaviour of others, so they should be more responsible. Regardless of whether someone is a religious leader or a music star, they should be held responsible for promoting drugs.

Characters: The narrative indicates public figures who use drugs, especially musicians, as the villains.

Moral: Public figures should be punished for encouraging the use of drugs.

2. Results in Poland

2.1. Context

2.1.1. Context of the 1997 Anti-Drug Act

As mentioned at the beginning, the discussion on a drug policy in Poland is relatively new. It was only after 1989 that the issue gained importance and was widely discussed. Undoubtedly, the most important issue to note was its objective visibility. On the one hand, the availability of "compote" (home-made heroin) led to an increased number of addicts, on the other hand, the spread of HIV [as a result of shared needle use] caused increasing fear. In the short term, AIDS epidemic led to a reduction of the problem of drug addiction in the early 1990s, but the opiates were soon replaced by the other substances such as amphetamines, cocaine and ecstasy. More often, the drugs were linked to the black market and its violent character as well. Because of the increase of negative connotations, a large part of society began to demand more repressive actions (Abramowicz et al. 2018).

In 1989, the political regime changed and Poland became a democratic and capitalist country. Apart from positive changes, the systemic transformation brought some unintended negative consequences. The most important ones were connected to the economic reforms, which resulted in the impoverishment of a large part of the Polish population, increased unemployment and greater stratification (polarization), and thus increased social conflicts, a sense of hopelessness or lack of prospects.

The cult of the American president, Ronald Reagan, who played a significant role in Poland regaining its sovereignty, is certainly also important (Pilarek, Chodakiewicz 2018). Reagan's presidency was characterized by two wars: the war against communism and the war on drugs, known as the "zero tolerance" policy toward drugs. The latter one culminated in the signing of the UN Convention Against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances in 1988 (Davenport-Hines 2006).

2.1.2. Context of the 2005 Anti-Drug Act

In 2004, Poland joined the European Union. Member States are obliged to adapt national laws to EU requirements. This was the main reason why work on a new act was started. However, it did not bring any breakthrough changes. The discussion took place during a campaign preceding double elections – for the Parliament and the presidency. The campaign was full of brutal attacks of the political opponent ad personam. In addition, increasing antagonism between the different political forces emerged, which affected debates on issues other than the elections themselves. It was also the beginning of the conflict between the Civic Platform and the Law and Justice parties, which still polarizes Poland's political scene and at the same time blocks substantive discussions (Kujawski 2017). In the following years, the quality of Polish parliamentary discourse was becoming increasingly worse.

2.2. Narratives

2.2.1. Plot: It is necessary to put children first. Soft regulations can make drug dealers feel unpunished and free to enter schools to offer illegal substances to pupils. An uncompromising prohibition is an educational signal showing young people that drugs are bad, harmful, and should not be used. Treating the offense of possessing small amounts of drugs for personal use more leniently may be perceived as a signal that it is ok to experiment with drugs. Recognizing marijuana as a medicine can result in young people considering cannabis as safe and they could perceive this as permission to use it recreationally. Severe punishments may help parents raise their children – many of them do not know that their children are using drugs, they often find out about this problem from police interventions.

Characters: The victims are children who are exposed to drugs or drug dealers. The villains are drug dealers as well as the psychoactive substances themselves. The heroes are the police fighting drug-related crimes (and revealing the problem

to parents), as well as the politicians introducing regulations to protect children. The role of young people is ambivalent – on the one hand, they are mentioned together with children as victims; on the other hand, they are partially assigned the role of villain who, unprotected, will reach for the “forbidden fruit”.

Moral: It is necessary to introduce the most restrictive law.

2.2.2. Plot: The repressive approach can destroy the lives of many young people who, as part of a rebellion or an experiment try drugs, may be sentenced to prison instead of getting help. It is naive to believe that the bans will prevent young people from using drugs. In order to protect young people, it is necessary to provide them with the conditions to go through the period of rebellion in a controlled manner. Stigmatizing young people’s behaviour can cause them more harm than the drugs themselves.

Characters: Adolescents are the victims of a repressive system that prevents them from searching for their identity.

Moral: It is necessary to accept the nature of youth and not take actions that may have negative consequences for their future.

2.2.3. Plot: It is necessary to provide clean injection equipment to addicted people. This is aimed at preventing the spread of disease, to help fight the AIDS epidemic.

Characters: The villain is a virus that causes a serious and deadly disease. The victims are the people who are infected with HIV, the addicts who are more exposed to the transmission of the virus, and at the same time all of society, which is at risk of becoming infected with the disease.

Moral: It is necessary to take all possible measures to prevent the spread of the virus.

2.2.4. Plot: An epidemic of a serious disease is another reason to introduce repressive measures. Fear for one’s health can discourage people from taking drugs, and those who get infected may blame themselves. The virus can help eliminate drugs from society.

Characters: The addicts who expose themselves and others to a serious disease by their behaviour are the villains. The virus plays a double role: on the one hand, it is a villain from whom people must be protected, on the other hand, it can also be seen as a hero who helps to free society from the problem of drug addiction.

Moral: Introduce the most repressive law possible as this can protect society.

2.2.5. Plot: The policy of “zero tolerance” works best. Making it possible to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of drugs is harmful. Although it is aimed to help addicts or occasional users, there is a risk that it will be abused by criminals. Dealers would be able to continue their business – the difference is only that they would always possess only a small amount of drugs. Those caught with drugs could justify their possession as being for their own use. Therefore, this should not be made possible.

Characters: Drug criminals are seen as villains as they harm society and take advantage of any “loopholes” to continue their criminal activities.

Moral: A restrictive law is a sign of strength in the fight against drug-related crime.

2.2.6. Plot: Having severe penalties for people who possess drugs for their own use means that the police focus mainly on them, and therefore do not address problems with organized crime. Dealers remain unpunished while addicted people are brought to justice. This is understandable when police work is evaluated on the basis of statistics. Punishment will not help addicts because they need therapy and are afraid to ask for help due to the risk of prosecution. Severe penalties make it difficult to address the problems of addiction. There is also no point in punishing people who use drugs occasionally, experimentally. A single use of drugs should not bring deeper negative consequences, while imprisonment and contact with demoralized people is a much greater risk factor.

Characters: The villains are drug criminals who trade and manufacture illegal substances. The victims are drug addicts and “recreational users” who face the same penalties as criminals. The role of the victim is also played by police officers who, due to the regulations, cannot perform their work properly and focus on more serious crime.

Moral: Treating drug users in a less penalizing way allows law enforcement to perform their role better.

2.2.7. Plot: The welfare of drug addicts and ensuring their access to therapy is important. Too much emphasis on penalties can make it difficult to conduct corrective, educational and harm reduction activities.

Characters: Addicts are victims and their place is in an addiction treatment program, not in a prison.

Moral: Focus policies on preventive and therapeutic measures, not punitive ones.

2.2.8. Plot: There are addicts who become drug dealers in order to finance their drugs. There are also addicts who commit other crimes, such as theft, to finance their drugs. Therefore, they can no longer be treated as sick people, but should be treated as criminals. The behaviour of addicts is a threat to society and they should therefore be treated in the same way as other drug offenders.

Characters: People addicted to drugs are portrayed as the villains.

Moral: A restrictive law prevents crime.

2.2.9. Plot: Drug addiction appeared in Poland due to the opening of borders and the growing popularity of the youth culture from the West. Pop culture and youth idols are responsible for destroying the nation. A repressive law would guarantee the preservation of Polish culture. Anyone who does not support repressive solutions is a supporter of the "civilization of death". Over-indulgence and tolerance are weaknesses that destroy the nation. Making one concession would result in demands for others. Traditional values and the national heritage are in danger.

Characters: The role of villains is presented as the West, pop culture idols or people who just do not share traditional vision of the world. The heroes are everyone who falls in the category of "we", e.g., the narrators themselves, a nation fighting an external threat, people who share the same values.

Moral: An uncompromising fight with the villains is necessary to save the nation.

2.2.10. Plot: Society agrees to limit its freedoms for the sake of security and justice. Punishing addicts is necessary, as it discourages others from reaching for drugs.

Characters: Politicians present themselves as heroes, guardians of community safety. Addicts play the double role of villain and victim. On the one hand, they are a risk to security and therefore deserve punishment. On the other hand, they are victims of the fight against a greater enemy: drug mafias and the psychoactive substances themselves.

Moral: It is necessary to sacrifice addicted people for the "greater good", understood as ensuring safety and protecting society from drug-related crime.

2.2.11. Plot: The problems caused by stigmatization and repression should not be overlooked. Giving too many rights to law enforcement can lead to provocations in order to improve statistics or to discredit a political opponent and, as a result, to imprison innocent people.

Characters: Addicts are victims of both the system and the addiction. People who could be tempted to abuse the system are the villains.

Moral: The system is robust enough to allow access to medical marijuana without abuse, and it is important to ensure the unconditional dignity of every human being.

2.2.12. Plot: People turn to psychoactive substances because life has little to offer them. They have to cope with problems such as poverty or unemployment. The problem of drug addiction will not be solved by introducing severe penalties, but by addressing other social problems. People would not use psychoactive substances if they were satisfied with their lives. Intoxication is an attempt to escape from reality and the problems people struggle with on a daily basis.

Characters: Addicted people are presented as victims not only of the drugs themselves, but also of a system in which they cannot provide for their basic needs.

Moral: It is better to focus on solving other social problems that correlate with the increase in addiction.

2.2.13. Plot: Medical marijuana may not cure patients, but it allows them to die with dignity and to reduce their pain. It can also provide hope for sick people for whom conventional medicine no longer offers solutions. Marijuana is not an irreplaceable medicine, but rather a substance intended to alleviate suffering. The stigmatization of marijuana as a drug results in doctors not wanting to prescribe it because of fear of criminal charges. Scientists have similar concerns and research into the therapeutic efficacy of marijuana is not often conducted. There are also problems with the availability of medical marijuana, and even if a patient manages to obtain a prescription, there are long waiting times for its import to Poland and it is expensive. There are cases when repressive prohibition led to the imprisonment of patients who imported marijuana for themselves.

Characters: Sick people seeking pain alleviation are the victims. Doctors and scientists who fear punishment are also portrayed as victims and, ultimately, the victim is society as a whole because there is a lack of reliable scientific research on the medical effects of marijuana. The villains in this story are people who stigmatize marijuana and thus make it difficult to access.

Moral: Legalizing the use of marijuana for medical purposes to ease the suffering of patients is a moral responsibility.

2.2.14. Plot: If medical marijuana was legal, there would be no control over it. It can be grown on a balcony or in pots. The yield resulting from the cultivation of hemp by state institutions is uncertain as well because of weather conditions, and therefore workers can steal this marijuana to sell it on the black market. Marijuana is not real medicine, because it does not heal, but only alleviates the effects of disease, such as pain. There is a lack of scientific evidence that medical marijuana is effective. Marijuana is dangerous. There are documented cases of murders being committed by persons under the influence of this substance.

Characters: Marijuana is portrayed as a villain that may be helpful under proper control, but should be first seen as an enemy. The villains are also those who have committed crimes under the influence of marijuana. People who struggle with diseases are the victims in this narrative – they need help, but not at the expense of endangering the rest of society.

Moral: There should be as much control as possible over medical marijuana.

2.2.15. Plot: Since the unsolvable problem of alcohol addiction already exists, the problem of drugs should be tackled even more severely. There are different cultural determinants for alcohol and drugs. Consuming alcohol has been part of Polish culture for centuries, so it is impossible to forbid it. Drinking is a tradition that makes alcohol prohibition ineffective. The issue of drugs is different. They have become popular recently, so it is possible to completely eliminate the problem.

Characters: Drugs in this narrative are seen as the villains to be fought. Alcohol is also a villain, but one whose presence must be accepted. Addicts are victims of these substances and they should be helped, but first of all, others should be protected from drugs so that they don't develop a problem.

Moral: Prohibition prevents the drug addiction problem from growing so that it does not become as big of a problem as alcoholism.

2.2.16. Plot: Prohibition will not work against drugs in the same way that it has not worked against alcohol. Marijuana is less harmful than alcohol. Prohibition is general ineffective, as more and more people are imprisoned, but trade and production are much less curtailed. A division into "hard" drugs, such as heroin and cocaine, which are a major danger to health, and "soft" drugs, such as a marijuana or hallucinogens, is needed. The policy towards the latter should be much less restrictive.

Characters: Recreational marijuana users are the victims of anti-marijuana propaganda and are disadvantaged compared with their drinking peers. Society as a whole is also seen as a victim of prohibition, which is very damaging.

Moral: The aim of liberalizing the law is to avoid the negative consequences of prohibition and to find other ways to solve the problem of addiction.

COMPARISON

The British and Polish transcripts differ significantly. First of all, the House of Lords is different from the Senate. While senators are members of political parties and elected to office, the lords have their place in Parliament due to tradition. Lords perform their function for life, so they have more freedom, e.g., they do not have to seek re-election. This is a problem when comparing the debates in the Senate with the ones taking place in the House of Lords.

The discussion in the House of Commons turned out to be different from the debates in the Sejm as well. The British way of conducting a debate is interesting – completely different from the one presented in the Polish Parliament. In the UK, statements try to refer to facts, the goal of the politicians does not seem to be to arouse specific emotions. The culture of how views are expressed is also different, the language is controlled, not offensive to the political opponent or to drug users, the speakers are courteous towards their adversaries. Most of all, however, it is difficult to find a party positions in their speeches – the statements reflect the opinions of individual politicians, and not the line proposed by their party.

What distinguishes the drug debate in the British Parliament from the Polish one is also the very definition of the problem itself. In the Polish discourse, it is a very important problem that exists in and of itself. In Great Britain, it is a component of the general problem of addiction and both parties emphasize that the problem of drugs is not on the same scale as the problem of alcohol abuse. Moreover, some statements postulate that illicit drugs and medicines should not be distinguished because medicines may be misused and lead to addiction (e.g., the excessive use of barbiturates), while drugs may also be used medically (e.g., LSD in psychotherapy). It is possible that the reason for these differences is due to the history of the debate in both countries. The division into illegal drugs and medicines in Poland is from the time of communism and past propaganda; this point of view will likely not change easily. Polish politicians also spoke about alcohol abuse, but again saw it as a separate problem. In Polish history, alcohol was always the most popular drug, while illicit drugs seem to be rather new. In contrast, Great Britain had many overseas colonies, where people had different traditions and customs with a diversity of drugs that could have brought a broader look at the problem.

It can be said that the British narratives relate to the interactionist concept of Howard Becker (2009). One of his interests was the process of establishing rules of conduct. He believed that rules are derived from the values that are important for a given society. Analyses of the narratives contained in the British transcripts indicate that British politicians are aware that they are dealing with a process of changing social values – and therefore they understand that a change of views may be necessary. Quite often there is a juxtaposition between the values of young people and those of older people. Sometimes there is a reason to respect the views of young people, other times it is argued that adults should be a beacon for youth. In both cases, however, the generational differences are emphasized. Some politicians also point to the general liberalization of society's views, not only in the field of drugs, but also regarding other moral issues. It is postulated that when creating law, politicians should listen to the voice of public opinion, because if the law is not supported by society, it will not be obeyed, and so this will spoil law in general. Some politicians point out that the increase in the demand for psychoactive substances is influenced by a change in the mentality of people who are no longer satisfied with the perspective of retirement, but with living "here and now". The last remark reminds me of the thesis of John Frendreis and Raymond Tatalovich (2020), who in their article Postmaterialism and referenda voting to legalize marijuana argued that the changes taking place in US state laws on marijuana were caused by a shift of local society from materialistic to postmaterialistic values. They referred to the views of Ronald Inglehart, who described this change as a departure from traditional values, such as economic security, in favour

of “self-fulfilment” and personal choice. It seems that this could also apply to British society and explain the changes that the politicians themselves are talking about.

Polish politicians, on the contrary, have a much more paternalistic approach, especially those who represent right wing parties. When talking about young people, politicians tend to either assume the worst about them and implement as many restriction as possible, or speak about them with indulgence and suggest giving youth leeway, but at the same guide them to uphold the values of the older generations. Polish politicians also do not perceive an ability to compromise on values. In their narratives, the extreme right wing parties present the threat to traditional values and try to convince people to protect them with no mercy or compromise. They see the changes in society, but, in contrast to British politicians, they do not think that these changes are inevitable. Liberal and left wing politicians are more open to liberalizing drug laws and often recognize the unintended, negative consequences of prohibition, such as stigmatization.

It might seem surprising that the views expressed by representatives of the extreme right are very similar to those promoted by the communist regime for many years. Until the 1980s, the problem of drug addiction in Poland was denied, believing it to be a problem of the capitalist West. In the 1970s, drug use was also associated with youth movements. The construction of the narrative focusing on the figure of the enemy and referring to the emotions of fear and anxiety strongly resembles communist propaganda (Abucewicz 2012). In both cases, efforts were made to emphasize the external threat against which society should be defended. These narratives are also linked with a dualistic worldview and war rhetoric (Jakubowska-Branicka 2017). In contrast, the issue of pop culture and subcultures was discussed in the British Parliament in a completely different manner. Even when a politician postulated punishments for rock stars for promoting drugs, he attempted to use arguments of reason instead of emotions. While Polish politicians were speaking about enemies of the nation, British ones were explaining that public figures should be more responsible because they have more influence than an average person and it doesn't matter if they are the singers or the priests.

Overall, the British discourse on drug policy is more similar to the point of view of Polish left wing politicians. Similar issues are important in both narratives – to focus on education and treatment, to solve other social problems as well as the values of human dignity, equality and wellbeing. The perspective of advocating a restrictive law seems to be absent in the British discourse. On the other hand, the most common view in the Polish debate is to implement a policy of “zero tolerance” and this preference is usually justified by values such as security. Therefore, we can connect the preferred drug policy to value systems, as described by Inglehart. Permissive narratives will refer to postmaterialistic values, while paternalistic one will align with materialistic values.

However, the attitude of British society and British politicians did not affect the introduction of a softer law, so it can be said that the politicians were guided in their decisions by the opposite of what they said. There may be many reasons for this, for example, the average age of parliamentarians who were still closer to the values of the older generation, or the belief that the situation is really getting out of control and there are problems that need to be solved. The signing of the UN Convention on Psychotropic Substances was also not without significance.

The law also became more restrictive in Poland. At first, this is understandable as the Polish law in the early 1990s was extremely lenient. However, every successive change in the drug policy made it more restrictive. Considering the bad condition of the public debate in Poland and the domination of right wing parties, it is not likely that the situation will change soon. It is also interesting that the British drug law has remained the same since the 1970s, while Poland has had two different drug acts since 1989 – and at the beginning of 2022, another one was discussed (Parliament voted against it). Which situation is better is debatable – on the one hand, the society of 1971 is not the same as the one in 2022, so some of the solutions may be outdated. On the other hand, changing the law so often suggest that it was not prepared well at the outset and did not bring the expected results.

CONCLUSION

The British view on the law and drug policy seems to be consistent over time. As mentioned in the introduction, the first attempts to regulate drugs were made at the end of the 19th century, when two commissions were established to investigate whether prohibiting opium and marijuana was a good solution (Davenport-Hines 2006). Both committees produced powerful reports summarizing the conversations with a number of people from various professions and dissuaded decision-makers from the idea of prohibition. They argued that it would harm the local communities in the British colonies that use these substances as part of their folk medicine. Consequences, such as the development of a black market, were also pointed out. Reports formed the basis of a liberal drug policy during this period. It can be assumed that British politicians were guided by realism and pragmatism in their decisions. These values are also visible in the debate of the 1970s – the British discussion is not dominated by references to emotions, but by arguments referring to scientific knowledge and “common sense”. We can also notice that in the UK, many narratives refer to postmaterialistic values, such as human dignity or freedom.

On the other hand, it seems that Poland is still searching for effective solutions. Because of the turbulences in its history, it was not possible to develop a consistent and indigenous drug policy. Polish solutions mostly reflect US or USSR drug policies. It is understandable that after regaining independence in 1918, there were many more immediate issues to be addressed than

a drug policy (especially as drugs were not strongly present in Polish society outside of medical use). After World War II, Poland was under the control of the USSR and there was not much opportunity for debate. Finally, after 1989, the ability to discuss important issues emerged, but historical conflicts and alliances seem to determine the views of Polish politicians. The cult of Reagan, as well as having the drug problem ignored by the communist regime, resulted in the approval of a "zero tolerance" policy following American trends. These historical circumstances may be the reason why Polish politicians more often refer to materialistic values, such as security, and choose solutions based on prohibition. However, we also should note that the Polish debate is much more polarized and quite often politicians favour solutions based on their affiliation. Therefore, the drug policy will either become stricter or more liberal depending on who is governing. This may suggest that practitioners should focus more on developing public awareness campaigns about the issue aimed at the general public rather than trying to convince politicians of their arguments.

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