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# FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Ana/ Gober/ Kubisa/ Muszel/ Nawojski/ Piotrowski/
Pluta/ Rakowska/ Ramme/ Sedysheva/ Snochowska-Gonzalez/
Struzik/ Wojnicka/ Zielińska/

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# FEMINIST MOVEMENTS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

JULIA KUBISA, KATARZYNA WOJNICKA

In recent years, Central Eastern Europe has been witnessing an unprecedented wave of feminist protests. In spring 2016, a group of Ukrainian, Russian and later, Kazakh activists organised a social media based campaign, where they stressed the immutable prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in contemporary post-Soviet societies. Campaigners used the #ЯнеБоюсьСказать (#IamNotScaredToSpeak) hashtag, which was quickly shared by thousands of women in the above-mentioned countries. The action clearly demonstrates similarities to the North-American and later, global #metoo movement. It is important to note however, that the Eastern European campaign not only preceded the more famous North-American mobilisation, but was also organised by, so called, "ordinary women" unlike its celebrity-focussed counterpart. In the paper entitled "The #яНеБоюсьСказать (#IamNotScaredToSpeak) campaign in the Russian speaking community of Facebook in July 2016: A Critical Discourse Analysis" Anna Sedysheva provides a unique analysis of the character of mobilisation that had started in Ukraine and was overtaken by Russian activists. Attacks on reproductive rights have galvanised public opinion and brought thousands of people into the streets in Poland. An effective platform, countering right-wing and highly patriarchal governments, has started to form around these protests.

Recent women's mobilisations are not restricted exclusively to this region, as feminist protests have occurred in other parts of the world as well. Over the past several months, we have witnessed the emergence of the global #metoo movement, women's marches in the USA,

and the anti-violence Latin American protest actions organised by NiUnaMenos, to name but a few. However, the specificity of Central Eastern European mobilisations requires a closer look, as they are strongly connected to the recent political changes that have occurred in several countries in the region.

One of the largest mobilisations in recent times, the Polish Black Protest and the All-Poland Women's Strike, can be viewed as part of women's protests taking place around the world. Women in Poland organised several influential demonstrations against the total ban on abortion that was planned by the government in 2016. It was called "Black Protest" due to the colours of the clothes worn by the participants. It was popularised by a #czarnyprotest (blackprotest) hashtag. The peak of the protests organised on 3rd October 2016, called All-Poland Women's Strike, mobilised thousands of women all over the country, becoming the first wide-spread demonstration on such a scale since the early 1980s and the first Solidarność social movement. It became an important point of reference for international women's movements and one year later, women in Poland joined the International Women's Strike on 8 March 2017 (see Majewska 2018, Korolczuk et al 2019).

These events, unprecedented in terms of scale, led us to enquire whether we are dealing with some kind of Central Eastern European specific movement or if there is a more global aspect to the changing phenomenon of women's mobilisation. While we cannot answer this question directly, the articles collected in this special issue show a variety of actions in Poland, Romania, Russia, Ukraine and internationally. These actions are taken up by women against problems that have much in common, such as sexual violence, severe limitations of reproductive rights and the rise of the political right-wing. The precarious status of women's rights in the region are revealed by authors analysing different aspects of Black Protest, namely Anna Sedysheva on the #Iamnotafraidtospeak movement in Russia and Ukraine, and Alexandra Ana on the precarious locations of Romanian feminist activists. These are rights and issues that can be easily dismissed, both in discursive terms and in terms of political decisions. Yet, their social and political dynamics, as well as their theoretical implications, have been inadequately analysed and the most pivotal problems they raise are still unresolved, despite having been prominent in the feminist agenda for decades.

The impact and strength of this new type of mobilisation, which can be seen as the most recent face of new social movements (Melucci 1980), definitely says something new about the current need for feminism. The political opportunity structure (Della Porta and Diani 2009) has recently been widened, unlike in previous research on feminist mobilisations in the region, which was focussed mainly on middle-class, white, native inhabitants from big cities. This is posited in the papers "Rocking the small-town boat: Black Protest activists in small and provincial Polish cities" by Magdalena Muszel and Grzegorz Piotrowski, "Solidarity despite and because of diversity, Activists of the Polish Women's Strike" by Jennifer Ramme and

Claudia Snochowska-Gonzalez or, in the case of migrant women's transnational mobilisation, see Greta Gober and Justyna Struzik's paper entitled "Feminist transnational diaspora in the making. The case of the #BlackProtest". The new political opportunity structure is not limited solely to a more diverse geographical dimension. It also includes new forms of on-line activism (Sedysheva 2018), new facets of protest forms (Kubisa and Rakowska 2018) and new protest's rhetoric (Kubisa and Rakowska 2018).

The layers and levels of discrimination, i.e. institutionalised misogyny in the form of attempts to restrict women's reproductive rights and the great scope of sexual harassment in every sphere of social life, is revealed by #metoo action. This is understood to be a new form of social mobilisation, pushing for the urgent need for action. Indeed, recent mobilisations have brought new types of actions with them. We claim that the particular novelty of recent mobilisations concerns the action, which has taken place in new contexts, in political, economic and cultural terms, in the post financial crisis social landscape, marked by austerity measures. The new populist governments, which combine a pronatalist approach and the objectification of women with a certain investment in social welfare, serve as a different kind of opposition to what was in place before. That is to say neoliberal governments, which avoided all debate on reproductive rights and refused to make social expenditure a priority. And yet, the feminist movement encounters threats of de-politicisation and ngoization, as Alexandra Ana discusses in her article.

The unprecedented wave of women's protests raises new questions for feminism, both for its theoretical investigations and for political practice. The Black Protest in Poland on 3 October 2016 took the form of a strike. A strike is a refusal of work, but what kind of work was being refused in this case? Julia Kubisa and Katarzyna Rakowska analyse the consequences of the use of industrial relations terminology for reproductive rights protests, both for women's movements and for trade unions, with the latter being the only organisations formally entitled to organise a strike.

It pays to reflect on how new forms of women's protests shape feminist debates. As the presented analysis suggests, in the Central European context one can observe a shift towards a more intersectional feminism (Collins & Bilge 2016), in which issues of gender, class, citizenship and status are brought together. In the context of social movement scholarship, intersectionality can be defined as an approach (both in terms of theory and practice) which enables analysis of such phenomena that is focussed on the overlap of a variety of social categories. Taking these together influences the social position of both individuals and groups in society, as well as the dynamic of particular social movements themselves (Wojnicka 2019). Such an approach enables a view of women's activism, not as homogeneous collective entities, but rather a colourful mosaic of unique but intertwined phenomena. We therefore place strong

significance on the usage of the plural form "feminisms" rather the singular, and therefore, limiting "feminism".

Moreover, inverting the framework of Joan Acker's "Class questions – Feminist Answers" (2005), together with the authors of the special issue articles, we stress the importance of including class and, in general, a more intersectional approach in contemporary Central and Eastern European women's protests analysis. Against the backdrop of these events we want to ask what the role of current women's movements could be in disentangling the unconscious alliance between feminism and neoliberalism? Do these movements provide space for care and mutual support in a way that allows us to move beyond this toxic relationship? The postulates formulated by current women's movements, especially in the Central and Eastern European context, concern the reproductive rights and dignity of women. What do these postulates express? The universalism of woman's experience? A sort of "middle class takeover" that universalises its experience to all participants? And whose voice is heard in them and why? Whose is not, and, again, why? Was the question of "representation of interests of the ordinary woman" that has been a recurring argument against feminism finally solved?

Finally, the new type of activism, as observed in Poland and other countries in the region, raises questions about the type of mobilisation. In several papers the participants of mobilisations such as the Black Protest and the Women's Strike were defined as independent initiatives of "ordinary" women who had hitherto remained silent. Such arguments seem to be prevalent in the analysis of both Black Protest (Muszel and Piotrowski 2018; Ramme and Snochowska - Gonzalez 2018, and, to some extent, Nawojski, Pluta and Zielińska 2018) and on-line anti-violence activism (Sedysheva 2018). One conclusion that arises from discussions provided in the papers seems to suggest that in recent mobilisation, "ordinary" women, despite their constant presence in the feminist movement (Wojnicka 2019) finally gained public attention, which in the past was focussed mainly on "celebrity" feminists. Moreover, they gained voice due to the new multiway means of communication and the multitude of protest locations (Kubisa 2016, Kubisa 2018, Majewska 2017). The model of organisation of the protests analysed in this Issue allows a multiplicity of voices and narrations, in which the senders and the receivers constantly construct and re-construct the messages, amplifying the collective voice. It makes a significant change compared to older forms of feminist activities, organised in bigger cities, directed by the few. However, one can consider whether without this previous feminist activity, the current manifestation would be even possible (Kubisa 2017).

The current women's movement faces unprecedented challenges in political terms. The same Polish government that refuses fundamental women's rights, however, has adopted select social policies that help to secure the material existence of numerous families in Poland and effectively diminish labour market precarity. How can the women's movements solve this puzzle? As an answer, the authors emphasise the diversity of participants and the grass-roots

character of protests. This enables them to show that "prosocial" governments can be "antisocial" at the same time. Even though the governmental policies financially support selected families, their political approach is still based on objectification of women. Women's movements, on the contrary, are giving space and voice to these issues, which is transforming into women's agency (Kubisa 2017).

Thus, the main scope of this Special Issue is to shed the light on the specificity of recent feminist mobilisations in Central Eastern European countries, framed as a new form of women's social movement. The articles provide a contribution to the challenge of mapping the variety of movements in CEE countries. We present the analysis of certain types of protest and movements, as seen from local, national and transnational perspectives. Moreover, we deliver analyses of the interconnections between new forms of women's protest and neoliberalism. These are interconnections that can serve as a form of legitimisation of neoliberalism as well as attempts to rally against its ideology. The aim of this Special Issue is therefore, to examine the variety of forms of contemporary mobilisations, in all their social, political and theoretical implications. Hence, we especially focus on addressing the following points:

- The strategies of social movements - The organisational model of these protests and what is novel about them in terms of strategies of mobilisation, patterns of leadership, alliances and narration, and institutionalisation (Ana 2018)
- The place of social class in the movement, in its narration and in its strategies (Muszel and Piotrowski 2018; Ramme and Snochowska-Gonzalez 2018)
- The strike as a form of women's social protest (Kubisa and Rakowska 2018)
- The new actors and patterns of mobilisation such as social media (Sedysheva 2018)
- The human geography of women's protests – on the local, national, transnational and virtual levels – The forms of international solidarity, transnational activism and their local varieties (all authors)
- The political framework of the protest (Nawojski, Pluta and Zielinska 2018; Muszel and Piotrowski 2018)

We hope that the Special Issue will ignite a broader debate in feminist analysis, on the political and theoretical relations between the presented women's movements and the direction of contemporary feminisms. This Special Issue is a contribution to further theoretical and methodological investigations of the variety of women's protests.

We find the issue of representation of "ordinary women" especially vital in regard to the political context. Populist governments are eager to claim that they are representing "ordinary people", while advancing anti-women policies. Feminist movements in CEE countries clearly need comprehensive, intersectional frameworks for inclusive political actions that would

recognise the specifics of CEE contexts - the state and the gender regimes, and the recognition of gender relations. Specifically, we find it important that feminist movements should be theorised from within.

Finally, along with the above-mentioned topics that require further reflection and development, one particular issue connected to contemporary women's activism seems to be missing and its absence is significant. This particular issue concerns men and masculinities and their standpoint regarding the most current feminist mobilisation. This is especially important given that a large number of Central Eastern European countries are experiencing a certain form of re-masculinisation and a triumphant revision of patriarchy (Pascall & Lewis 2004; Novikova 2008; Tereskinas 2012), all of which raises questions about current sources of power and domination. To grasp these questions, we must engage in a deeper analysis of the current interlinking between masculinities, state and capital that creates the model of hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). Men and masculinities cannot be seen as a singular phenomenon and the question of different types of masculinities (subordinated/marginalised/non-hegemonic) and the variety of men's standpoints and reactions towards women's mobilisations therefore needs deeper reflection. Since protests are organised in opposition to the state, which is supported by a variety of (anti-choice, anti-feminist) organisations, the analysis of the dynamic of counter-movements requires similar attention. Despite these needs, however, the analysis of men's engagement has not been analysed, neither in the most current feminist initiatives nor in counter-movements, which has created a significant gap in knowledge regarding contemporary social mobilisation in Central and Eastern Europe. This particular absence is even more surprising taking into account the fact that critical men and masculinities studies in the region have significantly developed in the last decade (Wojnicka and Ciaputa 2011, Wojnicka and Kluczyńska 2015; Hrzenjak 2017). Moreover, the analysis of (also Eastern) European and Polish male anti- and pro-gender activism, that had been conducted before 2016 shows, that there is a growing number of men who identify themselves as feminists (Wojnicka 2012, Wojnicka 2016, Wojnicka 2017; Bergmann, Wojnicka and Scambor 2014).

This raises several questions regarding the contemporary position of "male allies" in the region: Have male feminists suddenly disappeared or decided to step back from sight and give more space to women? Or perhaps, the current mobilisation that included the #metoo movement has revealed a number of weaknesses of the "male allies" movement who not only did not hold the candle and were unable to go beyond declarative support for women's rights, but also, in several cases showed that they were "made from paper" male feminists and guardians of the most fundamentalist facet of patriarchy (Czyż at al. 2017). These questions require urgent answers.

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# WAS IT A STRIKE? NOTES ON THE POLISH WOMEN'S STRIKE AND THE STRIKE OF PARENTS OF PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

JULIA KUBISA, KATARZYNA RAKOWSKA

**Abstract**: Two significant social protests that took place in Poland in recent years – a massive mobilisation of women against a ban on abortion and an occupation of the Sejm building by carers of persons with disabilities – were called strikes. In this article, we analyse the Polish Women's Strike events of 2016, 2017 and 2018 and the strike of parents of persons with disabilities of 2018 from the perspective of a strike as a form of protest. What does it mean that both protests have been called strikes and what are the implications of incorporating the terminology of labour disputes by both protests? Strikes in Poland are a form of collective, institutionalized industrial action of workers in wage employment, organized only by a trade union registered in a certain workplace and its subject can be exclusively of workplace matters and not on matters that are political and beyond an employer's influence. The Polish Women's Strike and the protest of parents of persons with disabilities were not strikes de iure, however they rejected division between production (wage labour) and reproduction (non-wage labour), which gave a deeper meaning to the "refusal of work". The empowerment of this event was derived from taking over the concept of the strike and providing an inclusive space to connect different actions related to struggles for reproductive rights. We interpret this as a strategy of cooptation and occupation of typical protest actions reserved for wage labour.

**Keywords:** strike, protest, Women's Strike, Black Protest, Parents of Disabled Persons, reproductive labour, care work

## Introduction

In recent years, two social movements that gathered political and social recognition in Poland used a term that was long associated with industrial relations. The massive protests against a planned ban on abortion in 2016, 2017 and 2018 named the Polish Women's Strike, and a protest occupation of the Sejm, the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament, by the people with disabilities and their carers, which was called "a strike" in the media debate are two important social phenomena that are linked in a multidimensional way. In both cases care and reproductive labour were brought to the front, as the major point of their political agenda. And in both cases their actions were framed as "a strike".

We analyse the Polish Women's Strike events of 2016, 2017 and 2018 and the protest of parents of persons with disabilities of 2018 from the perspective of the strike as a form of protest. We are interested in the meaning of the fact that both protests have been called strikes and in the theoretical and political implications of cooptation the terminology of labour disputes by both protests. In order to meet the aim of the article, we analyse both protests through the lens of the strike as an industrial action framework: in terms of the goals of a strike, the form and basis of mobilisation, the methods of action, the main actors, time and place, the institutional aspect, the agenda and demands, the major adversaries and the character of work. We apply the industrial relations framework of strike elements in order to analyse the potential consequences of the free use of terminology from one domain in another domain, both for social movements and for industrial relations discourse.

Formally, strikes in Poland are a form of collective, institutionalized industrial action of workers in wage employment. A strike can be organized only by a trade union registered in a certain workplace and its subject can be exclusively of workplace matters. Trade unions as strike organizer need to fulfill a detailed procedure and cannot strike on matters that are political and beyond the employer's influence. This article looks for a scientific elaboration on a social situation when a very specific term is used in a new context. In order to analyse this social phenomenon we use a triangulative approach, combining an industrial relations perspective with a special focus on the institution of the strike, a feminist perspective on gendered division of labour, and with a special attention to care work and reproductive labour. The concept of "politisation of care", coined by Linda Briskin (2013), is a proxy that enables this multifaceted framework.

The structure of the article is as follows: first we discuss the theoretical framework, then we present brief characteristics of two social protests and the research so far on the two protests. This allows us to situate our research questions. Next, we present the methodology and analytical tools, and the results and discussion that leads to answering the research questions.

## Theoretical framework

The usual axis of the abortion debate in Poland is focused on moral issues reflected in the "pro-choice"/ pro-life (anti-choice)" opposition, with Catholic church as the disposer of one morality and the feminist movement as the other one (Graff 2001, Szczuka 2004). The debate on care for people with disabilities is often framed into a discourse of "motherhood sacrifice" that can be characterised as moral and emotional (see Holub 2018). However, the term "strike" used in the case of both social protests enables us to seek a more material interpretation.

For our theoretical background we use the Polish framework of industrial action with special attention to the sociological concept of the strike and concepts of productive and reproductive work, and the politisation of care work.

A strike action is strictly regulated by Polish law as the ultimate step of industrial conflict (Ustawa 1991). A strike can be performed only by wage workers against an employer. It can be organized only by a trade union recognized in certain workplace. The subject of a strike can be exclusively of workplace matters like wage and working conditions. Strikes in Poland cannot be performed in order to change national government politics or law. Therefore, it is forbidden to strike for a higher minimum wage and political strikes are forbidden. Also a general strike is not allowed in Poland. Trade unions as strike organizers need to fulfill a detailed procedure before attempting to strike and it should be treated as an extreme action in the case when all others means of resolving industrial conflict failed. This procedure involves organizing, filing demands, parley, mediations and a strike referendum with a turnout of 50% of the workers, of whom at least 50% vote for the strike.

It is worth mentioning that according to Polish law not every group of workers has the right to strike. Many groups are excluded from the right to strike by their occupation, like policemen, firefighters, soldiers, customs officers and other public officers. Others do not have the right to strike due to their employment status. A collective bargaining process can be undertaken only by those employed under an employment contract that is regulated by the labour code, leaving behind many workers employed on the basis of civil contracts.

In the sociology of work, a strike is defined as "the collective withdrawal from work of a group of employees to exert pressure on the employer over any issue in which the two sides have a difference" (Watson 1995, 386). Hyman uses the classic definition of a strike presented by Griffin, for whom a strike is "a temporary stoppage of work by a group of employees in order to express a grievance or enforce a demand" (Hyman 1990, 17). Burns focuses on the practical aspects of a strike and emphasises its economical aspect. The biggest power of a strike is therefore stopping production, not only by withdrawing from work but also by sit-downs and blockades. Burns also brings attention to collective aspect of an industrial strike, underlying the importance of the solidarity of workers (Burns 2011). Brecher, on the other hand, sees a

broader class conflict, where the issue is not a struggle for power between two sides – employees and employers. "The real issue is an attempt by workers to wrest at least a part of the power over their lives away from their employers and exercise it themselves" (Brecher 2014, 297). In this concept, a strike has two important aspects: a tendency toward self-management and towards solidarity – powers that could transform society. That is why Brecher does not distinguish between political and economic struggles, stating that a strike has both qualities. In Polish sociology of work, Masewicz constructed a more operational definition of a strike, as an act of collective action of employees inspired and guided by a trade union or ad hoc determined representation (strike committee) that aims to change or preserve the status quo of workers' rights and occupational interests (Masewicz 1986). The most complex definition, focusing on the constitutive aspects of strike was presented by Kałuszka and Szymański, who define a strike as a class occurrence of the proletariat that consists of pressure towards employers or the state in the form of total or partial withdrawal from work or other forms of disturbance of the production process, in order to cause losses for an employer or to manifest a standpoint towards state authorities (Kałuszka, Szymański 1982). A similar definition is given in the Sociology of Work Encyclopedia (Smith, 2013), which describe a strike as "coordinated cessations of labour to maximize pressure on employers during labour disputes, are one of the main forms of worker collective action. Strikes vary considerably in terms of duration, scope, and participation. Some aim at obtaining better wages, benefits, and working conditions; others attempt to prevent cuts in these and still others are motivated by political objectives. […] Strikes are usually called by unions when negotiations fail to satisfy employee demands." Based on the latter two definitions, we propose to look at strike actions with the use of certain categories that can distinguish a strike action from other forms of protest.

The literature distinguishes between several categories of strikes in relation to different aspects of activity. Considering the scope of a strike it can be local, performed in one workplace, a branch strike and a mass or general strike that includes most or a great number of workers from different workplaces and branches. In relation to the aims of the strike, there are offensive or revindicative strikes that aim to acquire new rights or benefits, and defensive strikes that want to maintain the status quo. In relation to methods researchers distinguish between traditional strikes when employees stop working and leave the workplace and sit-in strikes that involve occupation of the workplace. For the purpose of our research we want to mention also solidarity strikes, which aim to support other striking workers or the demands of those who cannot strike (Kałuszka, Szymański 1982, Masewicz 1986).

The sociology of work focuses also on other forms of labour protests apart from strike. In our analysis we use the concepts of blockade, occupation, picket and demonstration as other forms of protests accompanying strikes or performed instead of a strike. Those forms of protest in the Polish context were characterised by Jarosław Witkowski (2012). Occupation is

a protest during which protesters take into possession workplace buildings and its appliances, thus disturbing normal production activity. A blockade, on the other hand, is an action that forecloses the usage of public buildings, roads, passages, tracks and other communication routes, and blocks or makes harder to enter certain buildings or locations. A picket usually takes the form of displaying posters, handing out leaflets, especially during rallies (Witkowski 2012). The word demonstration is used for rallies bigger than pickets, especially those including marching (Dialog 2019).

The second dimension of our theoretical framework is built on the concepts of productive and reproductive labour, the public patriarchy and the politicization of care work. In order to grasp the meaning of the social movements' agenda we turn to the feminist theories that elaborate on the concept of reproductive labour and the specifics of care work. Women's unpaid work at home became a vital subject for feminists in the 1970s analysed with sociological and economic tools and inspired by Karl Marx' and Friedrich Engels' discussion on the reproduction of labour, necessary to the maintenance of that productive economy. Various feminist scholars argued that reproductive labour should be socially recognized as indispensable to the maintenance of a productive labour force and society (Dalla Costa 1972; Hartmann 1976; Secombe 1974; Duffy 2007). This brought further debates on the gendered division of labour, because of which women are constantly denied equal status on the labour market due to the invisible burden of reproductive labour performed at home. The term "reproductive labour" can be understood as work that maintains daily life (physical or mental health, food preparation and service, cleaning, personal care) or work that reproduces the next generation (care of children and youth) (see Nakano Glenn 1992; Duffy 2007). One of the most prominent voices in the debate, Silvia Federici (1975), applied a productive labour framework to the conditions of housework. In her view, what is called love is actually unwaged work; what is called frigidity is absenteeism; and each miscarriage is a work accident. She called neurosis, suicides and desexualisation occupational diseases.

Reproductive labour is not, however, a sort of a private relation between a working husband and housewife. It is a domain of structural exploitation. In the view of Silvia Federici and other marxists feminists, women who perform reproductive labour are directly exploited by capital the way workers are exploited (see Tong 2002). One of the ways of obscuring the exploitative character of the activity that is socially and economically indispensable is its devaluation. Nancy Fraser adds that work for social reproduction comprises both affective and material labour and points out that "capitalist societies separate social reproduction from economic production, associating the first with women, and obscuring its importance and value" (Fraser 2016, 102). Sylvia Walby's work on gender regime helps us understand the transfer from private to public patriarchy, present in six interrelated structures: paid work, household production, culture, sexuality, violence and the state (Walby 1990, 1997). Therefore

the reproductive labour and its value should be seen as part of a socio-economic system, regulated and controlled by the gendered state. In the ongoing gender regimes, care and care work are still considered as some kind of natural vocation and ability of women, who perform it as a form of "labour of love". When care becomes a profession, it is undervalued in terms of wages and working conditions. Yet, at the same time, the social needs for care and care work are increasing – due to the ageing of society, higher participation of women in the labour market, and the change of gender roles and relations. The tensions between the social needs and the ongoing undervaluation of care and care work are clearly observed. This enables a reformulation of the reproductive labour and care work into the domain of struggle. Linda Briskin (2013) draws attention to the strike activity of nurses – an occupational group that performs care as a profession, referring to it as "'politicization of caring": a recognition of the collective responsibility for caring, and the impact of deteriorating conditions of nursing work on quality care; the rejection of essentialist claims that women are responsible for caring work by virtue of being women; the demand that the skills involved in caring work be recognised and rewarded; and the willingness to mobilise collectively to these ends'. (Briskin 2013, 120). Silvia Federici (2008) discusses the possibilities of setting a fight against reproductive labour, but not the people who are part of the care relation. She calls for a distinction between the creation of human beings and the reproduction of them as future workers in a form of labour-power. Thus the struggle in reproductive labour is not against people who are cared for, but against the systemic processes and mechanisms of oppression that take away the control over reproduction and care from their performers. Therefore, our framework does not only include the concept of reproductive labour but also the potential of labour-based protest in the domain that is usually privatised and treated as a natural duty and calling. The feminist framework of reproductive and care work consists of the recognition of social reproduction and care as work, the exploitation of persons performing this work in a gendered state and capitalist relations, and the potential for struggle against the oppression in order to define and perform reproduction and care work on their terms.

## Two strikes: the Polish Women's Strike and the Protest of Parents of Persons with Disabilities

In order to understand the phenomenon of both protests in the strike perspective, we now move to the contextual description of the events and processes that took place before the actual 'strikes' happened. Both protests have grown on the ground of longstanding social struggles. In order to understand the Polish Women's Strike, it is important to point out that the political actions against the severe anti-abortion law date back to the early 1990s, when access to abortion was institutionally denied by Polish Parliament with three exceptions (Mrozek 2018).

The subsequent years brought the development of the so called "abortion underground" (Kacpura et al 2016) and, interestingly, a drop in the fertility rate (GUS 2016). In political terms, the severe law shaped new divisions: it triggered the formation of the feminist movement and, at the same time, political initiatives that aimed at the introduction of a total ban on abortion. However, the political mainstream adopted the "compromise" approach, pointing out that the present legal situation is a balance between different social needs, the so called "protection of life" and basic safety of women (Kacpura et al 2016, Chmielewska et al, 2017). In terms of mobilisation for the purpose of legal change, over past few decades the anti-choice side made several attempts to bring a petition to Parliament that would lead to a total ban on abortion, with the most serious case in 2007 when a group of MPs from the ruling coalition tried to introduce "life protection from conception" to the Polish constitution. All those attempts failed, but it is worth mentioning that each time they were based on a large scale mobilisation of members of the Catholic church. The feminist social movement kept organizing demonstrations, pickets and different forms of social action that would bring abortion to public debate in the context of women's dignity, social and economic safety and freedom of choice. Even though other points of the feminist agenda were mainstreamed (such as care work institutions, discrimination on the labour market, political representation), abortion was still framed as a controversial topic, even though feminist organizations pointed out the massive scale of the "abortion underground" (Kacpura et al 2016, Szczuka 2004).

In 2016, half a year after Law and Justice won Parliamentary and presidential elections, also thanks to the support of anti-choice movements, the Prime Minister announced governmental support for the idea of a total ban on abortion. At the same time an extremely conservative organization Ordo Iuris started collecting signatures in support of prison sentences for women undergoing abortion procedures and gynaecologists performing them, and a criminal investigation procedure that would check if miscarriage was or was not induced by medical abortifacients. Those two events triggered social discontent: demonstrations and pickets organized by newly formed *Gals for Gals* (Dziewuchy Dziewuchom), a grassroot movement; and the start of a legislative initiative *Save the Women* for the liberalisation of the anti-abortion law, organized by a group of social democratic feminists.

In mid-2016 both petitions, *Save the Women* and Ordo Iuris, were submitted to Parliament. The feminist initiative was immediately rejected, while the OI petition proceeded to further discussions. This provoked demonstrations by Save the Women, and by the left-wing party Razem, which called on supporters to dress in black and join pickets or to post photos in social media, using #blackprotest (#czarnyprotest) as the hashtag. Unlike the previous attempts of the extreme conservatives groups, this one was interpreted as a real threat, considering the support expressed by the Prime Minister. When a Polish actress suggested an all-Poland women's strike, inspired by the action of women in Iceland in 1975 who quit work and home

duties for a day, this idea quickly became viral. During one of the gatherings in Wroclaw, the activist Marta Lempart called for a nationwide women's strike and her call for action is considered the beginning of the Polish Women's Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet – OSK), a nationwide grassroots movement of protest. On 3 October 2016 the Women's Strike gathered thousands. For some towns they were first demonstrations since the strikes of the 1980s during state socialism (Leśniewicz 2016). Women used social media to mobilise and to express their support and demands. The action was very grassroots, organized not by formal women's organizations but a loose network of activists, with the support in the form of resources from the feminist movement and the opposition social movement. The idea of a day of strike gained support from individual employers, the local public administration and faculties at the universities – they were literally telling employees to take a day off on October 3rd or announcing that they will be closed on that day. The participants blocked streets, picketed at the local offices of Law and Justice and joined in massive gatherings on the cities' biggest squares. A couple of days later the government withdrew the support for the OI legislative initiative (Chmielewska et al 2017).

On the 8th of March 2017, the action was repeated as the International Women's Strike in the form of a demonstration in Warsaw and other bigger cities. The winter of 2018 brought another wave of legislative initiatives that aimed at a total ban on abortion. The project was proceeded quickly through the Parliament. This triggered immediate reactions – in less than a week the Gals for Gals and the Polish Women's Strike movement organized massive demonstrations on the 23rd of March, Friday, breaking a certain "demonstration taboo" that demonstrations should not be organized on working days during traffic hours. Almost 55,000 people marched from the Parliament building to the headquarters of Law and Justice in Warsaw, while in other cities people gathered again on the biggest squares. This time Law and Justice and its government were not the only addressee of the protest – the Catholic Church was directly addressed as well, as one of the major influential political actors (Korolczuk 2018, Kubisa 2018). As an effect of the protests, Law and Justice did not proceed with a project that proposed a ban on abortion.

The struggle of parents of persons with disabilities also lasted several years. In 2014 a group of parents of persons with disabilities and their children were protesting in the Sejm, occupying the building for 17 days. They demanded rising benefits for carers who resigned from wage work to take care of their disabled family members and rising social security allowance to the level of minimum wage. The Parliament raised the benefit but did not match the level demanded. After 17 days of occupation, the group decided to suspend the protest. After four years of further advocacy and negotiations, parents of persons with disabilities decided to renew the protest. The new occupation was initiated and performed by an informal

group Parents of Disabled Persons (Rodzice Osób Niepełnosprawnych – RON). Part of this group were people who performed the 2014 protest.

On the 18th of April 2018, 18 people, both parents and persons with disabilities, entered the building of the Polish Sejm and started an occupation. They demanded establishing minimum living conditions for persons with disabilities and rising benefits for adult disabled persons. The protest was strenuous: they slept on mattresses on marble floors and did not have access to basic facilities such as a kitchen or tables. Everyday they provided and received care work in public space.The protesters bore both the economical and health costs of the strike. Moreover, the protest faced repercussions from the Parliamentary Guard who used violence (Pacewicz 2018), blocked access to the elevator and bathrooms with a shower (Wprost 2018) which added to additional stress. During the protest, the group got smaller. For some participants the conditions of occupation had too much impact on their physical and psychological wellbeing. Those who left the building for personal reasons were not let back in by the Parliamentary Guard.

The protest of parents of disabled persons was supported by various allies such as informal groups and collectives: The 8th March Women's Coalition (Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca, PK8M), the Polish Women's Strike Warsaw (Warszawski Strajk Kobiet), NGO Citizens Solidarity in Action (Obywatele Solidarni w Akcji OSA), trade union Workers' Initiative (Inicjatywa Pracownicza) and a few MPs, like Joanna Scheuring-Wielgus from the liberal Nowoczesna Party who invited the group to the Sejm building and supported the protest on a daily basis.

Everyday the Women on Strike Warsaw with members of other groups, using OSA infrastructure, held an action of support . Food and other necessities were delivered to the occupied building by some Members of Parliament. Supporters of the protest held picketst every day at 16:00 hours in front of the Sejm building. The rally was held in the form of "open microphone". This became quickly a platform of sharing confessions about everyday life experiences of caring for relatives with disabilities. The supporters organized three larger supporting actions. On the 1st of May, during International Workers' Day, collectives of The 8th March Women's Coalition, Women on Strike Warsaw, the Syrena Collective, the trade union Workers' Initiative and the feminist online newspaper Codziennik Feministyczny held a picnic in front of Parliament. The event gathered several hundred participants and offered different kinds of activities like open microphones, drawing postcards to protesters, information stands and even a game of targeting pictures of politicians of the ruling party with fruit, vegetables and eggs. Two demonstrations of support were held during the protest. One of them was held on Polish Mother's Day and used the slogan "Super Mother's Day". Solidarity actions also took place in other Polish cities like Białystok, Gdańsk, Kielce, Kraków, Poznań, Toruń, Wrocław and towns like Grodzisk Mazowiecki, Legnica and Głogów.

Another form of participation and support for the protest was the activity in social media. Organizers of the strike – Parents of Disabled Persons – posted daily updates from the Parliament. Women on Strike Warsaw announced the public collection of necessities and collected donations every day through social media. Hashtag actions #supermatki in which women who care for their children with disabilities described their life experiences, and support actions like selfies with slogans of support were shared through Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.

After 40 days of negotiations, the protest ended on the 27th of May 2018, when the 11 remaining people left the building. The demands were not met by the government, who introduced some changes in access to services for disabled people but did not raise benefits. RON is still advocating for their original demands through media and opposition politicians.

## Research on the Polish Women's Strike and Parents of Persons with Disabilities protest so far

The Polish Women's Strike as a social phenomenon was already discussed through various feminist lenses, both in scientific and in more essayistic ways. The first distinguishable theme in the research is focused on the variety of tools for inclusion, with the internet playing a major role in the form of hashtags such as #czarnyprotest and selfies posted on social media. Majewska (2017) pointed out the change of dynamics between the strong position of the creator and the weak position of the participant, showing the strength of collective creation of the protest by the weak and excluded – the women. Korolczuk (2016) discussed the idea of *connectivism,* which she described as activism in borderless space that enables emotional engagement, personalisation of political messages and use of information technologies. Kubisa (2017) looked for similarities between feminist demonstrations that are organized in an inclusive way, enabling children and persons with disabilities to take part in the demonstration in a special bus, and the inclusive character of social media actions, calling them "a virtual bus" for those who could not participate in person. Other discussed themes were the role of black outfits as a form of democratisation of the protest (Majewska 2018), the questioning of the private/public sphere division, reproduction and body issues as political issues in the form of an ironic incorporation of discourse. Kubisa pointed out the variety of engagement of different public actors – individual employers being faster in declaring support for the protest than trade unions (Kubisa 2016a). Król and Pustułka (2018) brought the perspective of reproductive justice. They observed that the success of the Polish Women's Strike was rooted in the variety of women who participated – different in their experiences and age, family situation – all united under the broad notion of reproductive justice, identified as access to safe pregnancy

terminations, sexual education, free access to contraception and sterilization, as well as good prenatal care standards.

The protest of parents of persons with disabilities was mostly commented on in the form of expert analysis. Bakalarczyk (2018) discussed the system of benefits for persons with disabilities and their carers, the possibilities of the realisation of protest demands, the comparison between the protests of 2014 and 2018, and strategies of protest: the engagement of a feminist group and introduction of voices of persons with disabilities. Both protests inspired analogies with the so called first Solidarity movement – Majewska (2018) suggests that the Polish Women's Strike should be seen in this perspective, and Szcześniak (2018b) builds this reference to the protest of parents of persons with disabilities.

Both protests were analysed through different axes, yet the strike aspect itself was not analysed so far. Our input into the research on both protests moves the debate onto the meaning of use of the term "strike". We elaborate on the argument of "strike takeover" and the blurring of the division between the production and reproductive labour as it was initially discussed by Kubisa in her essays on the Polish Women's Strike (Kubisa 2016a, 2017). We broaden this argument by adding the analysis of the protest of parents of persons with disabilities. We use the tools of industrial relations research and a feminist framework that recognizes social reproduction as a domain of exploitation and struggle, in order to to answer the following research questions: Were the Polish Women's Strike and the Protest of Parents of Disabled Persons a strike? What are the implications of those protests for the understanding of a strike from an industrial relations perspective and feminist perspective?

## Methodology and analytical framework

For the purpose of the analysis, we focus on four cases of the Polish Women's Strike: Black Monday on the 3rd of October 2016, International Women's Day on the 8th of March 2017, the anniversary of Black Monday on the 3th of October 2017 and Black Friday on the 23rd of March 2018; and on the protest of Parents of Disabled Persons: 18th of April – 27th of May 2018. Using the method of content analysis (Babbie 2013, Silverman 2018), we collected media materials according to following criteria: interviews with the leaders and active participants of both protests in the form of written interviews and video, and media commentaries and descriptions of the protests. We collected data on the Polish Women's Strike from 13 media materials on 2016 protest, 15 media materials on 2017 protest, 8 on 2018 protest and 24 on the Protest of Parents of Disabled Personss (see Annex). The material was searched and categorised on the basis of the criteria of the presence of "strike" terminology, description of actions, attitudes of leaders and participants and the sequence of events. The material was acquired via online search with combined keywords: "strike", "Polish Women's Strike", and

"protest of carers of persons with disabilities". The data was organized in a grid represented by a matrix with rows containing consequent protests and columns containing analytical categories derived from strike definitions. Our research strategy was based on a search for representations of the strike according to the analytical framework on which we elaborated..

In order to meet the aim of the article, we analyse both protests through the lens of a strike as an industrial action. We apply the industrial relations framework of strike analysis in order to analyse potential consequences of the free use of terminology from one domain in another domain, both for a social movement and for the industrial relations discourse. Based on sociological definitions of strike by Kaluszka and Szymański (1982) and Sociology of Work Encyclopedia (Smith 2013) and Polish law (Ustawa 1991), we identify certain characteristics of a strike:

1. A workers' strike is a collective, agreed upon action. Analysing data, we focused on the scale and group dynamics, solidarity and communication aspects of the protest.
2. A workers' strike is an act of disobedience conducted by employees. By law a strike is organized by a trade union that represents workers. For the purpose of the analysis of collected data, we asked who were the organizers and participants of the protests, who were the representing and negotiating bodies. We also asked who could participate in the protests, and whether there were any participation criteria.
3. A workers' strike is an action of refusal of work that aims at production stoppage. We discussed what is the definition of work that participants use and what strategies and tactics they use to refuse that work.
4. A workers' strike is an act of grievance. The strike has its goals and demands. In this context, we investigated the demands of the protesters and their development over time.
5. A workers' strike is an ultimate action and is preceded by negotiations and mediations. We asked about the history of protests, the duration of conflict and previous actions of the protesters.
6. A workers' strike always is organized against an employer or state, so it has certain recipients for its demands. For the purpose of the research, we asked who were the recipients of the protesters' demands.

For our analytical framework, we transpose these categories defining workers' strikes to the analysed protests. We investigate whether the characteristics of industrial actions can be found in features of women's and disable persons' parents strikes by searching for distinctions of strikes in research material, especially in the testimonies of strike participants reported in the media.

The use of the word "strike" in the case of both protests suggests that they produced their own definitions of labour. By using the analytical framework of industrial relations, we show how labour was defined by the protesters and in what forms they were trying to refuse

to work. We investigate the consequences of those notions of labour for feminism and for industrial relations.

## Results

### Strike as a collective action

A strike is an agreed, collective action of workers, where by collective action we mean "action taken by a group (either directly or on its behalf through an organization) in pursuit of members' perceived shared interests" (Marshall 2003). A strike by Polish law can be organized only by a trade union, that is why it is collective action *per se*.

The Women's Strike was coordinated by an informal group, the Polish Women's Strike, but various events were organized by different informal organizations. In this manner it was a collective and agreed action, though most participants joined spontaneously not through organizations, rather through social media callouts and campaigns. Given the mass mobility of the actions and their mostly outdoor, public character, the Women's Strike more closely resembled a civil society protest.

The coordinating organization – the Polish Women's Strike and its local committees – did not resemble a trade union as strike organizer. The groups were informal and spontaneously formed through social media. The groups did not have formal democratic character and were coordinated by activists that were not chosen as representatives, but rather volunteered to take responsibility either for media campaigns or organizing national and local events on the ground.

Formal and informal groups joined the protests and were organizing various activities during the protests. Some registered pickets, others initiated civil disobedience through road blockades; there were flash mobs, concerts, common singing, readings, lectures, discussions, collective arts and crafts activities and banner preparations. The Women's Strikes were open to different activities and OSK members collected and posted them as event programs including location and time. On the one hand, the protests were spontaneous and had a greatly participatory character; on the other hand, they were well coordinated on a local and national scale.

What was exceptional for the women's rights protest were the numbers. The issue of reproductive rights and reproductive labour had not engaged that number of protesters to this scale in Polish history. The first Women's Strike on the 3rd October 2016 gathered between 100 to 200 thousand protesters in the streets over 140 towns and cities all over Poland (Kubisa 2016, OSK, n.d., CBOS 2016). The strike on the 8th of March 2017 and the anniversary of the first strike on the 3rd of October 2017 were both organised in over 80 cities and towns. The

Black Friday protest of the 23rd March 2018 was held in over 20 towns and cities but the main demonstration in Warsaw gathered almost 90 thousand participants (Szczęśniak 2018b).

The women's strike participation was not exemplified only through rallies, pickets and demonstrations. Many women expressed their solidarity with the protests by wearing black clothes. For example, during the first strike of 2016 around half a million women wore black clothes to express support for the strike (OSK). This online protest participation is a new trend that was not possible before social media expansion. In addition, the range of social media action broke Polish records, generating 44 million reach of #BlackProtest hashtag and additional 14 million for #BlackMonday. #BlackProtest hashtag was the most popular hashtag on Polish social media in 2016 (Polityka w sieci 2016).

The protest of Parents of Persons with Disabilities was not a mass protest, but it also should be regarded as a collective action. Though informal, the group acted as trade union representing workers in industrial conflict. It was well organized; the actions and strategy of the group seemed agreed upon; and the group had collective demands and lead speakers that presented group demands to the media. The occupying group was representing a broader social group of parents of persons with disabilities, taking action on behalf of 288 thousands family carers of adult people. (Szczerbiak 2018)

The protest of Parents of Disabled Persons was supported by various allies such as informal groups and collectives. Support pickets and demonstrations that were held in front of the Sejm building resembled "standing at the factory gate" – demonstrations held by families and members of the community during sit-down workers' strikes. This kind of support action is well recognized in Poland and became especially popular during the strikes of Solidarity in the 1980s. Standing at the factory gates shows support to striking workers but also puts additional pressure on the recipients of the demands. In the case of the protest of Parents of Disabled Persons, this kind of action also gave the other parents of persons with disabilities the possibility to participate and express their demands, not only by joining the occupation which was prevented by the Parliamentary Guard.

In the context of this article, it is worth mentioning that the strikes were not widely supported by trade unions. The Women's Strike was supported by and officially participated in an organized manner by the independent union Workers' Initiative. Letters of support were issued by the Union of Polish Teachers (along with ideas on what can be done to support the action without leaving the workplace) and All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions just before the start of strike on the 3rd of October 2016. Forum Związków Zawodowych pointed out that abortion is a matter of individual views. NSZZ Solidarność's catholic profile was generally contradictory to the values of the Polish Women's Strike. The protest of Parents of Disabled Persons was supported by the Workers' Initiative, the Union of Polish Teachers, All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions and Trade Union of Psychologists and non-organized workers of

Polish Theater in Poznań. However, most of this support was declarative and did not translate into participation in demonstrations or pickets.

## Strike participants

In terms of subject criteria, a workers' strike can be only by wage workers. In terms of institutional criteria, workers' strikes can be organized only by a trade union after meeting a number of formal norms as parley, mediation and referendum.

The Women's Strike did not established any formal criteria to participate and claimed to represent all women, but there were many practical problems with participation. Generally speaking, women that worked under an employment contract could refuse work in legal way. Only an employment contract offers the possibility of leave on request, child care day or a day off due to blood donations – the three most used tools for wage worker to organize a strike without executing strike procedure. Precarious jobs are widespread in Poland, with over 1.2 million workers (7,7%) employed on the basis of civil contracts (GUS 2018a) and over 2.2 million (13%) self-employed outside of agriculture (GUS 2018b). This leaves almost 2.5 million workers without the possibility to participate legally in the strike by using Labour Code tools. Some of the civil contract workers and self-employed decided not to deliver services and stopped economical activity for the days of protests.

Another form of protesting during the Women's Strikes was participation in demonstrations. Demonstrations were formally open to everybody. Women who wanted to participate could face obstacles to not being able to stop care work on dependent persons such as children, disabled or elderly people. Moreover, though demonstrations were held in many towns and cities, many women could face troubles with getting into the place of events. This is true especially for people living outside big cities and in villages, as 13 million people in Poland live in counties without locally organized public transport (Dulak, Jakubowski 2018). Going to a nearby town or city depends on private cars or market-oriented private lines that do not tend to stop in remote areas.

Social media actions gave the widest possibility to participate in protests, including those who could not participate in demonstrations or could not refuse wage-work. *Hashtag feminism* is used to draw attention to political problems, unite activists, and creates a positive and safe space for women (Chen, Pain, Barner 2018).

The occupation of the Sejm was conducted by a specific, small group. The protest was started by 18 people – members of an informal group Parents of Disabled Persons (RON). It was impossible to join the protest after the initial group started the occupation, since the Parliamentary Guard stopped visits for the public (Kowalski 2018). A sit-in protest would not be possible for many disabled persons and their parents. People using specialized equipment,

especially electronic devices, would not be able to participate. In addition, parents of persons that need constant care, or who could not delegate their responsibilities would be excluded. Limited access to the protest was also caused by holding the protest in one city – Warsaw. Many people willing to participate could not come as the journey requires time, economical costs and for many disabled persons traveling is not possible due to health issues.

Support actions and demonstrations that were held outside the building were more accessible and open to everybody that wanted to join. Thanks to this form of supporting protest, other parents of persons with disabilities that did not take active part in occupation came to the location, sometimes from other towns and cities outside of Warsaw and could express their support and tell their stories of non-wage care labour. The pickets gathered from dozen to several dozen people a day. Similar solidarity actions took place in other cities in Poland. Another form of participation and support for the protest was activity in social media in the form of daily updates posted by organizers and by support groups, and of the hashtag action #supermatki that enabled virtual participation of carers who could not join the protest due to care work obligations and the severe state of the health of persons with disabilities.

## Strike as a refusal of work

In the case of both protests, labour was defined both as productive and reproductive. The latter meant having and raising children, care work performed for family as well as all household chores. Organizing legal workers' strikes was impossible due to a restrictive Polish law. As mentioned above, legal workers strike can be organized only by trade unions and can refer only to specific workplace issues such as wage and labour conditions. The Women's Strike participants chose to refuse two kinds of labour, both paid work and reproductive labour. In order to refuse work, the participants of the protests used other legal ways – leave on request, a day for child care or blood donation. Those who could not use those methods – for example, because of precarious employment under a civil contract that does not guarantee the options mentioned – emphasized their support for the strike by wearing black clothes to work. Some women even faced repercussions for doing so, as it was interpreted by employers as manifesting political views in a politically-neutral work environment. (Makowski 2017, Szewczyk 2017)

Organizers encouraged others to refuse non-wage work as well. Refusal of reproductive and care work manifested in summons to transfer responsibilities to men – fathers of children, husbands and partners for the events of strike. Some women refused the unpaid work in practice by attending several hours of rallies and meetings, while leaving their children with men; others took their children with them for demonstrations and other events. Women who refused wage and non-wage work engaged in mutual, joint activities. Especially during the first Women's Strike on the 3rd of October 2016, there were callouts to spend the time of the strike

in a useful manner through collaborative embroidery, visits to dog shelters, blood donations, participation in various lectures and discussions. Public space blockades and public service disturbances were an important aspect of the protests. Participants of the Women's Strike events were using performances and sit-ins to disturb car and public transport movement, especially during early rush hours, which caused delays and traffic. This resembled the strategy of a sit-in strike that aims to stop workplace performance by occupation of the space and stoppage of suppliers and distributors to enter workplace premises. Men in different cities organized support groups that took care of children or provided food and hot beverages for striking women. Individuals also expressed their support for the strike by taking care of their own children during the protest, taking pride in the fact and spreading it through social media.

For parents of persons with disabilities, the daily activities of care are private emotions and a full-time job at the same time. They provide care which can be characterised as work, including emotional care, food preparation, hygiene and medical care. However, their benefits and working conditions are not regulated by any regulations that apply to paid work and their 24/7 efforts are privatised by the state. This kind of work is strongly connected to the emotional bond between caregiver and care receiver. It is impossible to refuse this kind of work as refusal would be aimed against the most vulnerable people.

The refusal of work by parents of persons with disabilities was performed by refusing to do it in limited, imposed spaces – at home. The refusal of work meant that it was transferred from a private, hidden space to the public space of the Sejm building. The occupation of a public building also meant a decision of resignation from part of the care work. Participants of the protest did not receive the required rehabilitation and medical care. Parents did not perform household chores such as cleaning and cooking. The occupation also meant the disturbance of work of one of the most important national institutions. As in the case of the Women's Strike, the Parents of Disabled Persons protest meant that part of the administrative and legislative work of a public institution was disturbed and slowed down. The occupation was even more significant as it was hold during a NATO summit in the Parliament.

## Strike demands

Traditionally, strikes are organized in order to improve the conditions of work and increase wages. The Women's Strikes started as a defensive strike against the restriction of the abortion law and as a defence of existing rules. Very quickly the demands widened to cover various social issues including unpaid care and reproductive work.

In early 2017, a new initiative, "Save the Women 2017" (Ratujmy kobiety 2017), started working on a citizen legislation initiative to liberalize the existing abortion law. The initiative mobilized hundreds of women to gather the required one hundred thousand of signatures on

the streets of Polish cities. At the same time, the first economical and social issues concerning reproductive work had been raised. The statement of the Polish Women's Strike from March 2017 said: "We demand improvement of the economical situation of women. We strongly disagree with the preservation of existing systemic inequalities between genders" (OSK). A year later in March 2018 the demands already included wage and benefits demands as medication cost refunds for people after organ transplantations, changes in the Alimony Fund or 500 PLN benefit for single parents.

The strike of parents of persons with disabilities was an offensive strike from the beginning and concerned issues of work conditions and wage. The main demand was introducing a new social benefit for disabled persons in the amount of 500 PLN, with reference to 500 PLN benefit that parents of minors receive. Protesters also demanded an official social minimum for a household with disabled persons and full refund of costs of diapers, medication and other equipment required in everyday life.

## Strike as ultimate action

Strike is an ultimate form of industrial action and has to be preceded by a formal collective dispute of organizing, parley, mediation and referendum. Both the Women's Strike and the strike of parents of persons with disabilities were preceded by prior actions. The feminist movement in Poland tried to change the abortion regulations several times since the law was restricted in 1993. For the last time before the first strike on the 3rd of October 2016, the project of Save the Women was rejected by Parliament on the 23rd September 2016, which initiated the massive action of the Women's Strike.

The same applies to the protest of Parents of Persons with Disabilities. Their occupation of the Sejm building was a renewal of the previous protest that was suspended in 2014. Both protests of 2014 and 2018 were preceded by months of negotiations between the protest groups and the public administration.

## Strike against whom?

According to Polish law, the recipient of the strike demands can only be an employer and the conflict can only be organized around issues concerning the workplace. Despite that, as it is practiced around the world, there were historical workers' strikes directed toward the government. Usually those protests were conducted by well-organized occupational groups within specific industries like miners or teachers. The recipient of the demands of both the women's and the parents' protests was the government, as it is hard to define and strike against the "employer" of reproductive and care work. The state though was defined as the organizer

of the conditions of reproductive work. In the case of the Women's Strike, the recipient of the demands were also the Polish Catholic church and the ruling party Law and Justice (Prawo i Sprawiedliwość – PiS).

Workers participating in strikes often face repercussions from employers. This was also the case for some participants of the Women's Strikes. Reprisals included demotion to lower level jobs or even termination of contracts (Suchanow 2017). For example, 10 teachers from Zabrze faced disciplinary action for wearing black clothes to work during protest (Woźnicki 2017). Other kinds of action against the participants of the parents of persons with disabilities strike. They received 24 months prohibition from entering the Parliamentary premises. This prevents them from participating in various parliamentary commissions and meetings on new legislation concerning disabled people (Dziennik 2018).

## Discussion

The analysed protests fulfilled many of the strike characteristics. They were collective actions: led by many people who shared the same agenda but not organized by any formal organization. The group that represented the Parents of Disabled Persons resembled a trade union more than groups coordinating and participating in the Women's Strike, especially the OSK which identifies itself as a coordinator and not a representative of protests. In terms of trade union representation, both protests did not get significant trade union support, except from the independent union Workers Initiative that actively participated in both protests.

In terms of the participants of the strike, the protest of the Parents of Persons with Disabilities took a more traditional form. The group was consistent and identifiable compared to the Women's Strike participants. Only the supporting events, such as pickets and demonstrations in front of the Parliament building, were more diverse, gathering various organized and unaffiliated participants. At the same time, the Women's Strike was more spontaneous and diversified per se, resembling a civil action more than a workers' strike.

The same relates to the requirements to participate. The protest of Parents of Disabled Persons resembled a trade union action. In order to participate in the group occupying Parliament, one had to be a member of the initiating informal organization RON that started the sit-in strike. This group consisted of parents of persons with disabilities and the persons themselves. It was not formed ad-hoc. Although informal, it had a long history of representing the needs of family caregivers in front of public bodies. In addition, because the work done by the parents of persons with disabilities is not recognized as work by the labour code, the refusal of work did not need to fulfill the formal requirements of an industrial action.

Participation in the Women's Strike was not formally restricted. Anybody could join, regardless of identity or membership status. But because the protest was not recognised as an

industrial action by Polish law, many faced problems getting off work. Most participants used individual legal tools of work absence, although the scale is difficult to estimate.

Pickets, demonstrations and other events that did not require leaving wage work (since they usually were held after traditional working hours) were more widely participated in. Nevertheless participation in public events such as pickets and demonstrations required going out of the home, so still they were difficult to attend by woman performing non-wage reproductive or care labour. The social media protest had the widest range. It is not a novelty though, and there have been several social media calls to actions during classic industrial conflicts over the past few years, like the workers' strike in the coal mines in 2015 or the recent 2018 LOT Polish Airlines strike, gathering supporters through selfies, hashtags and on-line discussions. Although not new in form, the women's protest had an unprecedented scale of thousands of participants on social media generating somewhere in the range of several million recipients.

Formally, it was more difficult to refuse to work during the Women's Strike, as it was considered a protest of individuals by Polish law and was not organized by trade unions according to the complicated collective bargain procedure. Participants usually used individualised tools to refuse wage work. Interestingly, many employers – from local government offices to big and small private enterprises such as shops, restaurants and media corporations – supported the women's protest (Newsweek 2016). This is controversial since the essence of a strike is class conflict represented by the collective struggle of wage workers against their employer or the state, which organizes the conditions of work. The fact that employers "gave permission" to strike or even encouraged participation in various events is what marks the most Women's Strike as different from industrial conflict.

The refusal of unpaid work was different, organized on an individual level and according to different patterns – from the refusal to perform any reproductive work to changing its conditions (like taking children to the demonstration). Parents of persons with disabilities could not refuse work, so they moved it from the private to the public space in order to make it recognized. They used a strategy traditional in industrial conflicts, the sit-in strike, just outside their "factory" but inside the public building.

Both protests disturbed the work of public institutions and blocked public spaces which is a well known tactic of workers' protests, especially in contemporary Poland, where a strike action is unavailable for many groups of workers for formal reasons. The most famous demonstrations and occupations in recent Polish history were made by nurses (Kubisa 2014), coal miners (Kubisa 2016b), and teachers (Czarzasty 2017). Both protests were preceded by attempts at negotiation and other forms of resistance. A strike was seen as the ultimate action, after exhausting other options of dispute with government.

Finally both protests were not aimed towards any particular employer but the governing bodies – the government, politicians, the ruling party and, in the case of the Women's Strike, the Catholic Church as well. It is against Polish law but in line with the tradition of workers movements to raise demands directly to the state as the regulatory body of the social system and living conditions.

The focus of the article is on the basic question: what does it mean exactly that the Polish Women's Strike and the Protest of Parents of Disabled Persons in 2016, 2017 and 2018 were called strikes? Our first research question – was it a strike? – has a double answer. Both protests have much in common with the trade unions who lead a traditional workers' strike. The similarities include the collectiveness of action, forms of work refusal, and the demands concerning living and work conditions. The differences arise from both the legal and organisational conditions as well as the type of work performed – unpaid reproductive and care work. Therefore, it was a strike as an idea, but not as a tool. A strike as an idea empowered reproductive labour and care work. Both protests can be seen as step further from the politicization of care as described by Briskin because they make care and reproduction in the private sphere political. The organizers and the participants of both protests made efforts to make the actions inclusive, recognizing the specific character of reproductive and care work. In the case of the Women's Strike, the inclusive character was achieved by online hashtag action. The protest of persons with disabilities and their carers was very exclusive in terms of participation, as not even every person with a disability or their carers could participate due to the physical, emotional and geographic constraints. This was overcome to some degree in the form of online participation. We interpret those inclusive actions as a recognition of the specifics of reproduction and care work and adjusting the profile of the strike for the participants.

However, a strike as a real tool did not take place because the refusal of work was never fully performed. Paid work was not fully refused due to legal constraints. In the case of reproductive and care work, both protests showed that they are very difficult to refuse. The strike framework shows its limitations when the axis of conflict is analysed more precisely. Both protests were directed at the state and its institutions. However, the direct care relation between the caregiver and care receiver in the private sphere, both in the case of the women's protest and RON protest, differ substantially from the protests related to class conflicts in productive labour. This observation can be further strengthened if we look at cases of the refusal of care work in paid work, under the framework of the politicization of care. In the Polish context, nurses on strike refuse to work but at the same time are ready to help in case of an emergency (Kubisa 2014). The recommendation of Silvia Federici (2008) of striking against the exploitation, not the people in care relationships, proved to be hard to put into practice. While the participants recognized the gendered nature of the state (Walby 1990, 1997),

represented by the public authorities and government and were able to elaborate on the strike demands, they never fully stopped performing reproductive and care work. However, they performed it on their terms, which was especially visible in case of the protest of persons with disabilities.

The answer to the second research question – What are the implications of this for the understanding of a strike from an industrial relations perspective and feminist perspective? – is also complex. The participants and main speakers of the Polish Women's Strike made no references to the older international women initiatives such as Global Women Strike, initiated in 2000 as an international action for wages for the domestic work of housewives subsidized by the state budget instead of army-focused expenses (James 2018). The topics raised in the discussion on the value and importance of reproductive labour and its relation to capitalism, formulated by Silvia Federici, for example, were not referred to. The concept of unpaid domestic work is generally recognized in Poland. The Polish Women's Strike was the first wide application of the term strike to reproductive labour and reproductive rights. There were incidents before, like Fundacja Mama's "Mothers' Strike" picket on the 26th of May 2008 in Warsaw, but never on such a scale. The use of the term "strike" brought empowerment to reproductive labour and a new form of agency to the participants – they not only formulated their demands as social movements do, but also performed their agency by active refusal. For social movements, strike rhetoric is a new idea of action, much needed in long-standing struggles. The demands of both protests were focused around the recognition of reproductive work as work and economic issues. By using the term "strike", protesting women gave a new axis to the abortion rights debate, pointing out the direct connection between reproductive rights, reproductive labour and production. Parents of Disabled Persons formulated demands that were directly connected to productive work, even though they referred to care work performed in the private sphere. They demanded benefits and medical supplies that would make their work less expensive. Both groups struggled against the privatisation of public services and demanded the state's support towards disempowered groups.

An industrial strike action is considered as the ultimate, radical, almost vulgar form of protest. The direct reference to the idea of a strike emphasizes the ultimate character of both protests and is a touchstone for the scale of the social conflict and determination of the protesters. The use of strike terminology in a new context overruled the usual anti-strike mocking discourses present in public debate. Therefore, the use of strike terminology has vital consequences for industrial relations in Poland and the trade unions' agenda. The link between reproductive labour and the strike, seen in the case of both protests and socially accepted, could be recognized by the trade unions also. Support and participation in the protests of some trade unions can be seen as the beginning of a process of recognition for non-wage care and reproductive work as labour. Even though trade unions could not organize such strikes due to

formal reasons, they could express their support in the form of statements or legal advisories. The possibility of the extension of forms of support for protests in the domain of reproductive labour forms a new field for discussion, both in terms of the collective bargaining legislation, which prohibits political strikes, and in the broader terms of trade unions' social, economic and political agenda. Such actions have already been undertaken by some foreign unions. For example, in 2016 all major trade unions in Spain called for a two-hour strike in all unionized workplaces in solidarity with the Women's Strike and two radical trade unions, CNT and CGT, called for 24-hour action (Garcia, Alabao, Perez 2018). Moreover, international union federations like ITUC (International Trade Union Confederation) for years have trained their members on issues of recognition and equal share of unpaid work between men and women (ITUC 2008). Support for the Women's and Parents of Disabled Persons Strikes seems to be indicator of such changes in the Polish trade movement.

## Conclusion

Both analysed protests can be characterised as strikes only partially if the formal legal aspects are put aside. However, we may describe them as a kind of "strike takeover" because not only the strike idea was used outside the factory gates, but it was used in the context of reproductive labour. The participants politicized care and reproduction and the use of strike terminology broadened their agency. The Polish Women's Strike events weren't strikes *de jure*, however they still built upon the notion: "I disagree, therefore I don't work". They rejected the division between production (wage labour) and reproduction (non-wage labour), which gave a deeper meaning to the "refusal of work", showing how closely they are interconnected, both in terms of reproductive rights and of care work. The empowerment of this event was derived from taking over the concept of the strike and providing an inclusive space to connect different actions related to the struggle for reproductive rights. In the case of parents of persons with disabilities the "refusal of work" can be interpreted as the refusal of performing reproductive work on the margin of the private sphere. In this case, striking is not a refusal of work but the contrary – a demonstrative public performance of work that is usually hidden.

The idea of the strike proved to be socially needed and the form and realisation of protests proved interdisciplinary potential. We interpret this as a strategy of appropriation of typical protest actions reserved for wage labour. The use of the strike framework to analyse social protests enables to better understand their dynamics and limitations. It is therefore clear that what is the biggest strength of the protest, which is reproductive labour, is its weakness, because of the limitations of the refusal of reproductive work. Nevertheless, the "strike take over" for the purpose of reproductive labour creates a new context for the actions of industrial relations actors, especially trade unions.

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## Annex

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**TYTUŁ**: Czy to był strajk? Refleksje na temat strajku polskich kobiet i strajku rodziców osób niepełnosprawnych

**ABSTRAKT**: Dwa znaczące protesty społeczne, które miały miejsce w Polsce w ostatnich latach – masowa mobilizacja kobiet przeciwko zakazowi aborcji i okupacja budynku Sejmu przez opiekunów osób niepełnosprawnych – nazywano strajkami. W artykule analizujemy wydarzenia związane ze Strajkiem Kobiet w 2016, 2017 i 2018 roku oraz strajk Rodziców Osób Niepełnosprawnych z 2018 roku, ujmując strajk jako formę protestu. Dlaczego obydwa protesty nazwano strajkami i jakie są implikacje określania ich przy użyciu terminologii z zakresu sporów zbiorowych? W Polsce strajki są formą zbiorowego, zinstytucjonalizowanego konfliktu pracowników najemnych, organizowanego wyłącznie przez związek zawodowy zarejestrowany w określonym miejscu pracy, a ich przedmiotem mogą być wyłącznie sprawy związane z miejscem pracy, nie zaś sprawy polityczne i znajdujące się poza gestią pracodawcy. Strajk Kobiet i protest Rodziców Osób Niepełnosprawnych nie były strajkami *de iure*, odrzucały

jednak podział na produkcję (pracę najemną) i reprodukcję (praca nieodpłatna), co nadało szczególne znaczenie „odmowie pracy", jaka miała wówczas miejsce. Użycie koncepcji strajku i stworzenie przestrzeni łączącej różne działania związane z walkami o prawa pracownicze i reprodukcyjne skutkowało upodmiotowieniem protestujących. Interpretujemy to jako strategię przejęcia typowych akcji protestacyjnych zarezerwowanych wcześniej dla pracowników najemnych.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** strajk, protest, Strajk Kobiet, Czarny Protest, Rodzice Osób Niepełnosprawnych, praca reprodukcyjna, praca opiekuńcza

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# THE BLACK PROTESTS: A STRUGGLE FOR (RE)DEFINITION OF INTIMATE CITIZENSHIP

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**Abstract**: This article focuses on an analysis of the redefinitions of the visions of intimate citizenship in the arenas created by the recent women's protests in Poland. The 2016 and 2018 attempts by the Sejm, the lower house of the Polish Parliament, to introduce amendments to the existing law regulating access to abortion in Poland stirred dramatic social mobilisations and widespread social protests labelled with the umbrella term "Black Protests". We see these mobilisations not only as a protest, but also as attempt to (re)define dominant notions of citizenship, and in particular, as a quest for a new model of intimate citizenship, i.e. a public reconceptualisation of the rights regarding the private/intimate sphere. Our article offers an in-depth analysis of these reconceptualisations. It unfolds in the following way. Firstly, we discuss the phenomena of the Black Protests and Polish Women's Strikes and present the context of their emergence as well as their agenda. Secondly, we briefly discuss the issue of intimate citizenship. We then present the methodology as well as discuss the empirical material used for our analysis. In the final part, we reconstruct the visions of (intimate) citizenship emerging from the collected material.

**Keywords:** intimate citizenship, reproductive rights, women's rights, public sphere

The 2016 and 2018 attempts of the Sejm (the lower house of the Polish Parliament) to introduce amendments to the existing law on access to abortion in Poland stirred dramatic social mobilisation and widespread protests labelled with the umbrella term "Black Protests". This mobilisation may be seen as yet another phase in the debate on abortion, which has been ongoing since the early 1990s, and an attempt to redefine reproductive rights in Poland (Korolczuk 2019). One may also view these events through the lens of social movement theories, focusing on an analysis of the success of the mobilisation and resistance (i.e. the rejection of the parliamentary bill in 2016 and slowing down the bill's passage in 2018) (Korolczuk et al. 2019). Moreover, the Black Protests may also be seen as a new form of citizens' mobilisation and practice (cf. Kowalska, Nawojski, Pluta 2018). As such, these mobilisations should be also viewed as attempts to (re)define dominant notions of citizenship, and, in particular, as a quest for a new model of intimate citizenship, i.e. public reconceptualization of rights regarding the private/intimate sphere. The latter aspect will be the focus of our article.

We claim that the Black Protests have created a space for the construction and expression of alternative articulations of such concepts as womanhood, individual, citizen and abortion. These re-articulations ushered in a new vision of intimate citizenship, based on autonomy, agency, self-determination of one's body as well as women's right to sexual expression. The elements of such a vision were previously visible in various women's mobilisations (e.g. in the annual "Manifa" marches, held to celebrate International Women's Day, often expressing demands for easier access to legal abortion). However, the scale and the geographical dispersity as well as social support for the Black Protests indicated a new quality. More importantly, these mobilisations have initiated a broader reflection and demands for a redefinition of the terms of inclusion and boundaries of citizenship, yet conditioning such changed on the need to limit the public role of the Catholic Church in Poland.

The article will first discuss the phenomena of the Black Protests and Polish Women Strikes and present the context of their emergence as well as their agenda. Secondly, it comments on the issue of intimate citizenship. Further, we present the methodology as well as discuss the empirical material used for our analysis. Finally, we reconstruct the visions of (intimate) citizenship emerging from the collected material.

## Black Protests – what were they about?

Abortion has been a highly contested and politicised topic in Poland since the early 1990s. Ever since, we have witnessed ongoing debates and mobilisations of representatives of both "anti-

choice"[1] and "pro-choice" groups. For both sides, the discussion and social mobilisation around the introduction of 1993 Act on Family Planning, Human Embryo Protection and Conditions of Permissibility of Abortion[2], imposing serious limitations to legal access to abortion in Poland, marks a groundbreaking moment[3]. The former groups, supporting the introduction of stricter laws or even a total ban on abortion, have spread across the country with the strong support (both institutional and ideological) of the Roman Catholic Church in Poland (Mishtal 2015, 37). The latter groups, whose structure was formalised to a varying degree, protested against the planned restrictions on abortion as well as broader re-traditionalisation trends and reinforcement of the patriarchal order that accompanied the post-1989 Polish socio-political transformation (Mishtal 2015, 68; see also: Fuszara 2005).

Since around 2009, we have witnessed the intensification and radicalisation of claims for limiting or banning access to legal abortion in Poland, initiating yet another chapter of the debate on abortion. Between 2011 and 2018, several bills were introduced to the Sejm seeking to impose such changes. They were drafted by anti-choice groups with the support from the Roman Catholic Church and the right-wing politicians in the Sejm (especially from Law and Justice [Prawo i Sprawiedliwość]). Each mobilisation on the anti-choice side also triggered resistance and a response from the supporters of the pro-choice opinion, especially at the civil society level. Women's groups, with the help of liberal politicians (mostly from Your Movement [Twój Ruch] and the Social Democratic Alliance [Sojusz Lewicy Demokratycznej]) drafted their bills proposing the liberalisation of the 1993 law and submitted them to the Sejm. Nonetheless, Civic Platform [Platforma Obywatelska], in government between 2007 and 2015, opposed all attempts to restrict or liberalise the 1993 law by either not processing the submitted bills or rejecting the proposals at a very early stage in the Sejm. Most politicians from that party justified their votes as a need to keep the "abortion compromise," which had been reached at the beginning of the 1990s. However, Civic Platform's reluctance towards the revision of the

[1] We choose to use the term "anti-choice" to describe groups opposing abortion, as, in our opinion, such a term better captures their agenda than the frequently used label "pro-life". The latter is problematic in the light of research showing that harsh anti-abortion laws lead to women's deaths and suffering. The participants of the Black Protests also questioned the pro-life agenda of such groups: "Above all, we do not agree to the dictate of movements which brazenly call themselves "pro-life". Where is pro-life in your activities? Where is the protection of life? [The protection of] a mother's life? (…) So-called "prof-lifers" want to condemn us to death when pregnancy threatens our life. So-called "prof-lifers" want to condemn us to disability when pregnancy is a threat to our life. And they want to condemn our children to an inhumane and painful death, forcing us to give birth to defected foetuses" (S/W/Poznań, 3.10.2016).

[2] This law, still in force, allows legal abortion only under three conditions: when the pregnancy poses a threat to the life or health of the pregnant woman; when medical and prenatal tests indicate that there is a high probability of a serious and irreversible foetal defect or incurable illness that threatens the foetus's life; and when the pregnancy is the result of a crime. The text of the act is available at http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19930170078/U/D19930078Lj.pdf

[3] For more on the history and reasons behind the abortion debate in Poland, see e.g.: Mishtal 2015, Kulczycki 1995, Heinen and Porter 2010, Nowicka 2007.

existing laws resulted not from their concern for women or their rights. It rather stemmed from the party's attempts to prevent the potentially disruptive implications of opening a discussion on the existing abortion laws. The debate could affect both its own integrity – this party is internally divided over the issue with many conservative members supporting the idea of introducing further limitations while others hold more liberal views on the matter – and the wider society.

The outcome of the 2015 parliamentary elections changed the political context of the debate on abortion (Korolczuk 2015, 2016a). The winning coalition of right-wing conservative parties led by Law and Justice had supported anti-choice claims while still in parliamentary opposition. Therefore, the groups criticising the existing abortion laws and demanding additional restrictions on access to legal abortion in Poland saw their seizure of power as a new window of opportunity to pursue their claims. In April 2016, the Stop Abortion (Stop Aborcji) initiative began collecting signatures to support the bill proposing a complete ban on legal abortion in Poland, backed by the Roman Catholic Church. In parallel, the Save the Women (Ratujmy Kobiety) pro-choice initiative for the liberalisation of the abortion laws also started collecting signatures in support of their proposal. The bills reached the Sejm in July and August 2016 respectively, and were discussed jointly in the plenary session on 23 September, but only the former was voted to be further processed.[4] The latter bill proposing the liberalisation of the laws was rejected (Król and Pustułka 2018, 373).

The outcome of this voting sparked massive demonstrations across the country on 3 October 2016, labelled as the Polish National Women's Strike (Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet) or Black Monday.[5] Participants expressed strong opposition to the Stop Abortion bill and the ruling party's support for it (Majewska 2017; Kowalska and Nawojski 2018). This moment marks the birth of a wider social movement fighting for reproductive and women's rights in Poland, tagged with the umbrella term "Black Protests"[6]. In contrast to earlier pro-choice

[4] See information on the proceeding of both bills: http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm8.nsf/PrzebiegProc.xsp?nr=784 and http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm8.nsf/PrzebiegProc.xsp?nr=830

[5] Three days after the demonstrations, on October 6, the Parliament, this time also with the overwhelming sup-port from the ruling party earlier backing up the bill, rejected the proposal. Jarosław Kaczyński, the leader of Law and Justice, argued then that introducing such a law could have contradictory outcomes. Instead, to show the party's support for the "protection of life", Beata Szydło, then Prime Minister of the Law and Justice government, declared work on a new law supporting mothers with "difficult" pregnancies and families with children with disabilities (speeches from the debate are available at: http://www.sejm.gov.pl/Sejm8.nsf/wypowiedz.xsp?posiedzenie=27&dzien=3&wyp=0&view=2#020). Clearly, the ruling party tried to manoeuvre between contradictory demands from the "street" to reject the bill and anti-choicers to "protect life".

[6] The adjective "Black" started to be used in reference to the protests only in September 2016, but the first groups opposing further restrictions to the abortion law had begun to emerge already in April. The first Gals for Gals (Dziewuchy Dziewuchom) informal initiative was launched on 1 April. In just a few hours, it gathered thousands of followers on Facebook, and local groups started to mushroom in the following days. Another important grassroots initiative, the Polish Women's Strike, emerged in September 2016. It played a critical role in organizing October events (Black Monday), and then subsequent nationwide protest actions.

mobilisations, the Black Protests resonated more deeply with the Polish society, reaching well beyond the usual supporters of such initiatives – groups of metropolitan and well-educated women and men (Majewska 2017; Korolczuk 2016a). As a matter of fact, the Black Protests mobilised people from very diverse backgrounds – men and women of different ages, sexuality and class. Furthermore, the protests were not only limited to big cities, as had been the case with earlier pro-choice initiatives, but also took place in peripheral areas, small towns, often as self-organised, grassroots initiatives (Kowalska and Nawojski 2018).

The popularity and the mobilising effect of the Black Protests need to be seen in a broader political context. The support that the ruling party gave to the bill proposing drastic restrictions on access to legal abortion and punishment of women having an abortion coincided with numerous other initiatives of this party aiming to limit citizens' freedoms in Poland (e.g. changes to the Constitutional Tribunal, the amended law on public gathering) (Korolczuk 2016a). The social support for the Black Protests should therefore also be considered as part of a wider resistance mobilisation against the ruling party's policies. Nonetheless, what distinguishes Black Monday from other protests against the government's activities is its unprecedented scale (Black Monday was the biggest grassroots manifestation in Poland since the Solidarity protests of 1980 [Król and Pustułka 2018, 375]) as well as the social visibility and support for these protests (according to representative public polls, 88% of respondents had heard about the Black Protests and 58% declared their support for them [CBOS 2016]). Firstly, the Black Protests created new public spaces where a variety of women's experiences and identities have found expression. They constituted a forum for discussion on the barriers for women's full involvement in social and public life. Moreover, the emergence of such spaces allowed for the articulation of various topics, previously "locked" in the private sphere, to be transferred to the centre of the public sphere and political mainstream (Korolczuk 2016b). The discussions during and around the Black Protests sensitised the issue of the limitation of women's subjectivity and sexual autonomy, visible in both the barriers in access to reproductive rights and representation in the political discourse. As a result, these deliberations allowed for a change in the articulation and perception of women in the debate on abortion from being a subject to an agent equipped with the right to shape it (Kubisa 2016).

Secondly, by opening such new discursive areas, the Black Protests also challenged the narrative praising the current laws, often presented as a successful "compromise" between anti- and pro-choicers. The cases showing how women are limited in their ability to execute their right to access legal abortion under the current law (e.g. the consequences of doctors' conscientious objection, a lack of clear decision and appeal procedures) revealed the reality of the "compromise". It showed that in practise it often translates into women's limited access to their reproductive rights (Chmielewska, Druciarek and Przybysz 2017, 12) and women being deprived of their sexual subjectivity and autonomy (Król and Pustułka 2018). Therefore, the

Black Protests not only stimulated the debate on women's rights in Poland, but also linked it with the question on the condition of Polish democracy. As such, reproductive and women's rights became a litmus test for respect for human and citizens' rights in Poland under the rule of Law and Justice.

Finally, the distinctive character of the Black Protests stems from their organisational and territorial dispersion as well as their inclusive character. Demonstrations were organised in many places in Poland and abroad, included various types of acts (e.g. taking part in protests, wearing black clothes, supporting protests via social media etc.) and often covered issues exceeding reproductive or even women's rights (Majewska 2018; Murawska and Włodarczyk 2016). As such, the Black Protests exemplify subaltern counterpublics, that is the emergence of "parallel discursive arenas" allowing for invention and circulation of counter discourses, which in turn contribute to constructions of women's alternative identities, interests and needs (Fraser 1990, 67). The mobilisations themselves could therefore be regarded as new forms of citizens' mobilisation and practice (see Kowalska, Nawojski and Pluta 2018) and were explicitly articulated as such by the protesters via their slogans and claims. We made this concept a tool for our analysis, following Lister's observation that "[c]itizenship […] provides an invaluable strategic theoretical concept for the analysis of women's subordination and a potentially powerful political weapon in the struggle against it" (Lister 1997, 195).

## Citizenship in focus – from universality to particularity, and back?

Citizenship is a contested notion, to which various authors attach different meanings (see e.g. Lister 1997; 2008; Voet 1998; Isin and Wood 1999; Kabeer 2005). In its classical understanding, as introduced by Thomas Humphrey Marshall, citizenship is understood as "a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community." Those who hold such a status are "equal in respect to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed" (Marshall 1950, 28–29). Marshall identifies three dimensions of citizenship rights: civil, political and social. They relate to individual and private rights ("liberty of the person, freedom of speech, thought and faith, the right to own property and to conclude valid contracts, and the right to justice"), to political representation ("the right to participate in the exercise of political power, as a member of a body invested with political authority or as an elector of the members of such a body") and to human welfare ("the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilised being according to the standards prevailing in the society") (Marshall 1950, 10). Each cluster is also attached to a relevant institution responsible for the execution and sustainability of the rights – to courts, to political, national and local governing bodies, and to educational and welfare services respectively (Marshall 1950).

With time, this universal notion of citizenship, entangled with the national state as a guarantee of the related entitlements, became challenged. Firstly, critics noted that citizenship has a dual character – it serves as a tool for both inclusion and exclusion. Whereas the traditional reflection on citizenship focused mostly on the integration of citizens, it tended to ignore its exclusionary dimension (cf. Isin and Wood 1999; Lister 1997; Siim 2000; Yuval-Davis 1997). The history of women's exclusion from full citizenship illustrates this case well. For a long time, their access to civil or social rights was mediated by their relation to their male relatives and social status (e.g. being unmarried or married, social class) and guided by their husbands or another male member of the family (e.g. in the case of a right to property, liberty, but also to social benefits). In most countries, women did not gain access to political, civil and social rights until the twentieth century. Their limited access to citizens' rights illustrates broader historical and existing practices of the national state's boundary setting, often characterised by "strong patriarchal, racialising, nationalising, and heterosexist elements" aiming to "exclude others on the grounds of gender, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality and so forth" (Plummer 2003, 55).

Also linked to the practice of exclusion is the universalism embedded in classical visions of citizenship. This means that the concept often points to a generalised and universalised experience, values and norms of the privileged and/or dominant group. Iris Marion Young aptly describes this:

> In a society where some groups are privileged while others are oppressed, insisting that as citizens persons should leave behind their particular affiliation and experiences to adopt a general point of view serves only to reinforce the privilege; for the perspectives and interests of the privileged will tend to dominate this unified public, marginalizing or silencing those of other groups (1989, 259).

Feminist critics were the first to address the issue. They argued that the concept of citizenship reflects male experience related to the public sphere while ignoring women's experience stemming from their inhabitation of the private sphere. They also point out that it affects women's practice of citizenship in the public sphere (the gendered division of labour in the private sphere limits women's access and practices in the public sphere) (Lister 2008, 324).

The criticism not only identified the shortcomings of the notion of citizenship as conceptualised by Marshall, but also initiated the search for a new understanding and model of citizenship. Firstly, it aimed to overcome the exclusionary character of the concept. Even if scholars do not challenge the existence of social boundaries altogether, they question their nature – conceptualised as stabile, impermeable and exclusionary (Plummer 2003, 55). Instead, they stress the need to look for "differentiated universalism" as proposed by Ruth Lister (1997).

This would allow for inclusion of a variety of identities and experiences of women and marginalised groups in the concept of citizenship (cf. Kabeer 2005; Lister 1997; Siim 2000), further mediated by other social divisions, i.e. class, disability, sexuality, age, ethnicity, race etc. (Lister 1997, 66). Therefore, such a redefinition implies the conceptualisation of boundaries which "remain present but shift and sway, are less permanently settled, less rigid and divisive, but rather become more porous, more archipelago-like, more open to change" [emphasis in the original] (Plummer 2003, 55). At the same time, the criticism opened the internal debate among feminist thinkers on how to understand the idea of equality – in universal or gender-differentiated terms – and how this should translate into an inclusion of women and other marginalised groups (Yuval-Davis and Werbner 1999; Lister 1997; Halssa, Roseneil and Sumer 2011). The debates resulted in developing new concepts of citizenship which responded to the emergence of new social spaces, recognised identities and the social movement's claims, and therefore added new dimensions to Marshall's classical understanding of the concept. Hence, the feminist criticism resulted in the introduction of the concept of gendered citizenship, challenging the universality of male experience (Lister 1997; Walby 1994; Voet 1998). The gay and lesbian liberation movement, the sexual revolution of the 1960s and the third wave of feminism as well as queer theory and activism brought the issue of sexuality onto the agenda and revealed the (hetero)sexual dimension of citizenship (Evans 1993; Richardson 2000; Weeks 1998).

Another step in the development of new concepts of citizenship was the challenge posed to its links to the nation state. Along with the process of globalisation and localisation, the concept and practice of citizenship are no longer solely entwined with the nation state, but we should rather speak of the variety of permeable levels of conceptualising and practising citizenship, i.e. from global to local (Lister 1997; Yuval-Davis 1999; Kabeer 2005). Finally, the critics challenged the focus of citizenship on the public sphere, stressing that today the issues traditionally defined as belonging to the private sphere, i.e. how to live one's personal life, are becoming the subjects of public debates. To address these observable connections, Ken Plummer introduces the concept of intimate citizenship. This aims to bridge the personal and political (Plummer 2003, 15) and is understood as:

> [...] a sensitising concept which sets about analysing a plurality of public discourses and stories about how to live the personal life in a late modern world where we are confronted by an escalating series of choices and difficulties around intimacies [emphasis in the original] (Plummer 2001, 238).

The concept aims to embrace a broad scope of issues including gender and the sexual dimension of citizenship (Plummer 2003, 65), but it puts a particular focus on the private/intimate spheres of life (i.e. personal identity, sexuality and the way it is expressed, family

and decisions about one's body). It is not only gender and sexual divisions that modify the public conceptualisations, claims and rights of certain groups and individuals to their private/intimate sphere, but also other social characteristics (e.g. age, ethnicity, disability). Furthermore, the concept of intimate citizenship allows us to see how individual and intimate practices, choices and decisions relate to public institutions and public policies (Plummer 1995, 151).

## Research approach and empirical material

Our research aimed to reconstruct the visions and discourses on intimate citizenship circulating in the subaltern counterpublics created by the Black Protests, assuming – in line with Fraser's claims – that the discourses produced in such arenas serve to widen a discursive contestation (Fraser 1990, 67) on the issue of citizenship. The sociology of knowledge approach to discourse analysis provided guidelines for our research. In keeping with it, we understand discourse as an attempt to "freeze more or less broad symbolic orders, that is, fix them in time and by so doing, institutionalise a binding context of meaning, values and actions/agency within social collectives" (Keller 2011, 51). Discourses compete with one another in various arenas of the public sphere and attempt to enforce a dominant meaning and interpretation of reality and related actions. Applying this to the issue of intimate citizenship, we can speak of various discourses circulating in the Polish public sphere, each attempting to conceptualise "the right" way of organising intimate life and to enforce it, for example, via laws and public policies. In our analysis, we focused only on the one arena – spaces created by the mobilisation and participants of the Black Protests. We used diversified empirical data to reconstruct such discourses. We used the public speeches delivered during the Black Protests in various cities across Poland[7] as well as in-depth interviews with participants (15 individuals who took part in various Black Protests in Krakow between September 2016 and March 2017, the interviews were conducted in May 2017[8]. This data exemplified the articulations, actualising, in more or less accurate repetitions of utterances (Keller 2012, 60), the discourses on intimate citizenship produced within these particular discursive areas. This empirical material was also

[7] We acquired the content of speeches from the websites of groups involved in the organisation of protests, recordings of speeches available on YouTube and saved on Facebook Live broadcast, private archives of protest participants as well as from our own recordings taken during the protests. We used the speeches from the protests organised in the following cities: Poznań and Wrocław 3 October 2016; Zielona Góra and Warszawa 24 October 2016; Kraków and Warszawa 8 March 2017; Gdańsk 17 January 2018; Kraków and Warszawa 3 March 2018 and Kraków 2 July 2018.

[8] We used the snowball method to recruit the respondents. The sample consisted of 13 women and 2 men, representing diverse age groups (18-24, nine people; 25-35, one person; 35-44, two people; 45-55, one person; 55-64, two people). The majority were students and people with a higher education (eight and four respondents respectively).

enriched with the results of an open-ended questionnaire included in an online survey on the perception of the protests[9]. We were interested in finding out how the Black Protest leaders and participants conceptualised the "rights, obligations, recognitions and respect around those most intimate spheres of life – who to live with, how to raise children, how to handle one's body, how to relate as a gendered being, how to be an erotic person" [emphasis in the original] (Plummer 2001, 238). Also, we sought answers to the questions of whether there are limitations regarding who should be granted these rights, who/what is envisaged as responsible for granting and protecting those rights, and finally how individual/intimate decisions, practices and choices should relate to the public institutions and policies, and how they should be organised.

## Women's quest for intimate citizenship – Whose rights? Which responsibilities?

The Black Protests were a reaction to the issue of access to legal abortion in Poland. Consequently, the questions of who should decide about women's bodies and, more generally, about their procreative choices were recurring themes during the protests. The evaluation of the existing laws and practices revealed a decidedly dark picture – women deprived of choice and the ability to control this most intimate aspect of their lives. Therefore, the anti-choicers' attempt to impose more severe limitations on women's access to legal abortion, supported by the conservative parties in power, was perceived as a further threat to women's lives as well as their self-determination and safety ("because of limitations and lack of respect for women's rights in Poland, I don't feel safe in my own country" [Q/W/29][10], "I'd like to stop being afraid of living in my own country" [Q/W/49]). Such articulations unveil a particular vision of the state, unable to fulfil its basic functions of providing freedom and security to its citizens (i.e. women). In the accounts of the participants of the Black Protests, this is a product of the state's agenda, especially under the current government, reflecting the conservative views of the ruling party, which is closely related to the Roman Catholic Church's social teachings. Such views translate into the prioritisation of the community (i.e. Catholic nation) and rights of the "unborn" over the rights of women-citizens. Furthermore, at a more general level, they contribute to the construction of discourses of traditional gender roles feeding the stereotypes which justify women's subordination or violence against them. As a consequence, the nation,

[9] Quantitative research was carried out using an online questionnaire. The research group consisted of persons belonging to groups associated with the Black Protests on Facebook and gathered in various cities across Poland, as their name suggested. We have received a total of over 1,000 responses.

[10] We coded the empirical material in the following way: data from questionnaire – Q for questionnaire/gender (W-women, M-men)/number of questionnaire in the database; date from the interviews – I for interview/number of interview in the database/gender (W-women, M-men)/age; speeches during the protests – S for speech/gender (W-women, M-men)/ place/date of the protest.

represented by the state, gains the right to decide about women's bodies and lives. The discourses on the Black Protests, despite their diversity (Ramme and Snochowska 2018), all formed resistance towards such views and produced counter-discourses. The former offered a redefinition of gender relations and relocating power and agency back to women. The following extracts illustrate it well:

> [The Black Protest is a] [d]emonstration that we are responsible for our bodies, that we can make an informed decision and no one has the right to intrude into this our private sphere. This is wholly and solely our issue, our matter and we are reasonable, conscious persons, so why someone should guide us, I don't understand this and never will (I/5/W/23).

> The ruling party wants to shut women in their homes again, it wants to force us to give birth no matter if we want to or not, if we have the capabilities or not, despite anything. It wants to rewind history (S/W/Kraków/8.03.2018).

The claims for women's right to decide on the termination of pregnancy are linked to the broader issue of self-determination in the sphere of procreation. It is the woman who should have the right to decide if, when and how often to be pregnant. Articulations of the woman as an individual, human and rational being – therefore as the same as her male fellow citizens, – serve as justifications for granting them with agency and the freedom to decide. Such conceptualisation allows us to link women's rights regarding the intimate aspects of their lives with more universal human rights. So the right to decide on one's own body and pregnancy is conceptualised as part of human rights ("I think the women's right to decide about her own body is a fundamental human right" (I/3/M/28)). The slogans changed and presented on the banners during the protests (e.g. "women's rights, human rights", "reproductive rights are human rights") confirm the strength of such articulations among the participants in the protests. Interestingly enough, such use of human rights in the Black Protests' discourse is in stark contrast to the argumentative repertoire of antichoice groups. The latter frequently refer to human rights, but only in relation to "the unborn child".

Even if women's right to decide was widely accepted and taken almost for granted[11], the more nuanced analysis of our material allowed us to capture different voices regarding who else (if anyone) can partake in the decision, the limits of the freedom, and the definition of reproductive rights in more general terms. Firstly, occasionally the right to decide was extended beyond the individual woman to her partner or husband, but clearly only to those men who

[11] This also applied to women who identify as Catholics: "As a believer I'm against abortion on demand. However, I think that everyone has the right to decide about themselves and their body. We should not impose our worldviews on others" (Q/W/54).

are involved in intimate relations, within the woman's private sphere. At the same time, other men – strangers holding power in the public sphere – should be deprived of such rights:

It annoys me that someone in the Sejm [the lower chamber of the Polish Parliament] will decide. For a woman this is a very difficult decision. Even if she will have an unwanted pregnancy, let her make her own decision, [with] her partner, her husband, but not a decision made by men and especially by priests, who don't deal with this and should not speak on the topic. And they want to decide and this is sick to me. Let women decide about themselves. One must not impose [a decision] on women. (I/2/W/61)

> A human being who is deprived of their intimacy, a human being who has someone looking into their home, bed, their panties, such a person is deprived of their dignity. If women are attacked, their men – their fathers, brothers, sons, friends – suffer along with them. This is why again we see not only women on this square, but also men, entire families (S/W/Zielona Góra/24.10.2018).

In such articulations, the woman is not constructed as a sole individual, but rather as a relational one (c.f. Galligan 2016). As such, her intimacy (in the sphere of procreation) also involves another individual, i.e. a man who should, potentially, be involved in the decision. Such conceptualisation of women, granted with subjectivity and autonomy, yet seen as part of heterosexual family/relations, suggests that identified re-articulations are still embedded in Polish conservative discourse on women and family. This seems to correspond with Anna Zawadzka's observation that Polish feminism has not yet deconstructed the normativity of the family as a model for intimate relations and as such sustains its hegemonic nature, exclusivist for many women (Zawadzka 2017).

Another differentiating element was the conceptualisation of the scope of the right to decide upon the termination of pregnancy. For some women, this right would be unequivocal ("The lack of possibility to decide about my own body [and, in an extreme situation, life] is something I consider barbaric and insulting to human dignity" (Q/W/25). For others, the choice for women should be more or less limited ("I have mixed feelings about unlimited access to abortion" [Q/W/36]), but still not completely taken away. This would support the claim that the Black Protests mobilised people of different views on abortion. At the same time, analysing material from the public speeches and declarations from different events happening in different times (between October 2016 till March 2018), we could also see a shift from claims for the right to abortion within the scope imposed by the law from 1993 to more radical demands to make abortion accessible on demand, with a limitation regarding a certain stage of pregnancy.

Undoubtedly, the Black Protests were a reaction to attempts aiming to restrict access to legal abortion, but the visions of intimate citizenship circulating within their spaces certainly

touched upon other dimensions of intimacy centred around reproduction. The participants as well as the public speakers frequently referred to sexual education and access to reliable and cheap contraceptives as an inextricable part of individual reproductive rights. Furthermore, they questioned the socially accepted gender roles and identities perpetuating inequalities between men and women as well as conditioning gender-based violence. Showing how intimacy is entwined with gender and sexuality, these discourses sought a new vision intimate citizenship based on redefined gender identities and gender equality, granting women with more agency and self-determination. Again, despite agreement over the need for such a redefinition, the analysed material indicates a variety of articulations. Some would imply the radical redefinition of gender identities, while others are more moderate in their quest, often differing in their conceptualisation of an individual seen as either detached or embedded in social (i.e. family/couple) relations. However, most of them reflect a differentiated approach, stressing the importance of equality, but also a need for recognising differences.

Interestingly enough, the articulations of a new vision of intimate citizenship, built around reproductive rights, seem to reflect heteronormativity. They related almost exclusively to the reproductive rights of heterosexual women (hence the references to [male] partners and husbands), despite the visible support from and participation in the protests of various LGBT+ groups or even the explicit demands for their inclusion[12]. This can be explained by the potential embedment of these re-articulations in the conservative discourse on the family, as already mentioned (Zawadzka 2017). Therefore, such exclusion reflects the non-representation of non-heteronormative sexualities and identities from the Polish public sphere, also reproduced in the subaltern counterpublics created by the Black Protests. Our analysis suggests that this non-representation or silencing applies primarily to the intimate sphere, as it happens only in relation to reproductive rights. This would correspond to the more general social views, as captured by many public polls, that Poles are particularly intolerant towards the issue of adoption of children by same-sex couples (84% of those surveyed would oppose it), yet tend to be more tolerant towards forms of public presence and the rights of homosexual people (CBOS 2017). At the same time, support for LGBT+ rights was frequently manifested in the public voices during the protests, especially in the ones which followed the initial Black Monday when the issue of general citizenship occurred. We will further explore this issue in the next part of the article.

[12] Such claims found explicit expression in the public speech delivered in Poznań on October 3, 2016 by a representative of the Stonewell Group: "The problem of abortion touches also homosexual and bisexual women as well as transsexual persons, including non-binary and intersexual ones. Unfortunately, the reproductive rights of LGBT+ people are ignored in the political discourse. Let's not ignore them during today's manifestation! The bill proposing the ban on abortion affects cis-gender women in the same way as non-heterosexual persons who often become victims to vile crimes of so-called corrective rapes (S/W/Poznań/3.10.2016).

The Black Protests not only opened a space for the articulation of new discourses on intimate citizenship, but also served as a mechanism for transgressing intimacy, the female body as well as the abortion experience from the private to the public spheres. It was perceptible in the visual dimension of the protests. During demonstrations, both symbolic pictures of women's reproductive organs and words representing them were featured on banners. Mass media and social media reproduced them widely, allowing for the transfer from the bounded space created around the Black Protests to the more mainstreamed areas of the public sphere. This transgression also had an impact on the participants and supporters, who had a space to vocalise their own intimate experiences (e.g. abortion, miscarriage), but also to listen to them:

> There are issues which you don't talk about, which are uncomfortable, and in this very moment [during protests] it became part of daily life. Everyone talked about such issues. It was a good moment to reconsider it (I/1/W/23).

This transgression had an important educational and activating impact on the participants, building social demand and support for a redefinition of intimate rights.

## From intimate to universal yet differentiated citizenship?

Our analysis also shows that the discourses on intimate citizenship circulating in the spaces opened by the Black Protests often implied its differentiated and intersectional character. This was visible in particular in the public speeches, when the protest participants stressed that the women's right to decide upon their reproductive rights are compromised by their class, legal status (i.e. refugees) and disabilities:

> For those in power the issue of our reproductive rights or even our sexual life does not exist. (...) We, women with different abilities, want to decide about our parenthood. The right of every woman to decide about her body and motherhood is inviolable, no matter her or her child's disability. We demand that our rights be observed (S/Kraków/23.03.2018).

> The compromise [the existing law] is binding only for some of us. Despite the level of restriction, some of us, who live in big cities, will manage to get the pill for pharmacological abortion. The rich ones will pay a thousand zloty to have a procedure [abortion] at doctor's private practices And these who have contacts abroad will become abortion tourists. The women who are poor are only left with the proverbial coat hanger, a symbol of underground and backstreet abortion (S/Wroclaw/3.10.2016).

> In Poland, Polish women have troubles with accessing abortion, can you imagine how the refugee women feel, if there are no contraceptives or doctors available in the refugee centres? Let's think about them. Let's fight for the right to legal abortion for everyone and the situation of everyone will improve. Women from all around the world, let's fight together, and there's no other option (S/Warszawa/ 23.03.2018).

Therefore, the differentiated experiences of women, as related in different speeches, problematised the issue of rights and nuanced the concept of intimate citizenship, as requiring adjustment to diverse experiences, identities and needs. To make this happen, the state and its institutions need to be redefined and transformed. In their ideal emanation they should promote a socio-cultural and legal context in which women would not be put under moral or legal pressure in their decisions regarding procreation and abortion. The role of such institutions would be to offer a space for women's self-determination, regardless of their different identities and abilities and allowing them to make conscious and autonomous decisions. Such articulations of citizenship recognising differences echo Lister's (1997) claims for "differentiated universality", but especially in relation to intimate citizenship.

Yet the Black Protests not only contested the visions of intimate citizenship perpetuated by both anti-choicers and the ruling political elites, but also initiated a broader reflection on the content and boundaries of citizenship in general. It evolved over time. Whereas in the initial protests most of the arguments in speeches focused on rights related to the private/intimate sphere of reproduction, with time the focus widened. In other words, the re-articulations of intimate citizenship triggered a re-articulation of general citizenship, understood as inclusive for all sorts of groups and individuals, yet differentiated to accommodate different identities, interests and needs:

> You take away Poland from each other, you take it away from us, and you think that we want to take it away from you. No, we want Poland for everyone, Poland where human rights are for all – for women, for people with disabilities, for the elderly, for people with a low income, for people from ethnic, national and religious minority groups (S/Warszawa/23.03.2018).

Remarkably, citizenship was mostly expressed in national frames as the participants, in their slogans written on the posters and chanted during the protests, stressed that women are also Poles and Poland is a woman. This could be seen as illustration of what Zawadzka (2017) calls "mimicry" strategies of Polish feminism aimed at "adding women" to national discourse and therefore legitimising it, rather than deconstructing it. However, as illustrated above, the participants interpreted nation in a more inclusive way, at the same time challenging the ethnic and exclusivist visions characterising hegemonic visions of the Polish nation (c.f. Zielińska

2012). This was also visible in the inclusion of female migrant's voices during the speeches in many cities as well as in the transnational character of the mobilisation (protests also took place in many parts of the world) and in transnational alliances to support other women's struggles.

The main principle for the construction and practice of such inclusive citizenship should be human rights as well as equality between women and men. Interestingly, our respondents in the interviews not only stressed the need to advance the situation of women, but also claimed equality for men, whose rights also need to be respected (as in the case of paternity leave (Q/W/20). This need to extend equality to both men and women is justified by the fact that:

> (...) whatever affects women also affects them [men] (we live in the same world, we have common households and children, which should be born out of a joint decision, in health and provided with the best possible conditions (Q/W/46).

This again suggests conceptualisation of women's intimate rights in relation to men's rights, and therefore the heteronormative dimension of such articulations of citizenship. The situation seems to differ in the "public" articulations of the Black Protests, especially during the most recent events. More visible here, in the public speeches, were demands for building an open, inclusive society and state based on the principle of solidarity, offering equal rights to all members and therefore extending the boundaries of citizenship, also applying to LGBT+ communities and individuals. We can therefore see how the visions of intimate citizenship initially conceptualised narrowly as reproductive rights, including the right to abortion for women, with time served to articulate the new, inclusive version of citizenship. At the same time, as our material suggests, within the spaces produces by the Black Protests, there were also differences in accepted/desired constructions of citizenship. Moreover, our material suggests that this reconceptualization had a more limited scope in relation to the private/intimate aspect of citizenship (as indicated in the earlier section on reproductive rights and their heterosexual limitations) and more open in relation to reconceptualization of the "public" aspect of citizenship as discussed above.

## The quest for secular (intimate) citizenship? Redefinition of the public institutions

The Black Protests became not only an impulse for a social reflection on the state of women's intimate rights, but also initiated a deeper reflection on the quality of democracy (see Korolczuk 2016b) and the shape of the public institutions responsible for providing such rights. As indicated above, the participants of the Black Protests often articulated the need to reshape

public policies and the state's attitude toward citizens' rights, including intimate rights. For them, the lack of rights in the intimate sphere illustrated by the ban on abortion indicates the oppressiveness and totalitarianism of a state (S/W/Zielona Góra/ 24.10.2016). In their view, a redefinition of such a situation requires, among others, the secularisation of the state and the relevant institutions, since the lack of state and Church separation translates into a limitation of citizens' rights, especially those of women. The following quotations illustrate such articulations:

> I very much support the separation of Church from state. I think without such a separation we cannot speak of equality, as the Church has always imposed a limitation on women's freedom which has led to patriarchalism (Q/W/17).

> (...) equally important are guidelines for perinatal care, education, contraception, prenatal tests, the right to terminate a pregnancy, religion in the parish and not in the school, as these all constitute citizens' rights in a secular country. These all are basics, so it is difficult to state which one is the more important basis (Q/W/46).

The problems stemming from the entanglement of religion with the state are identified specifically in relation to women's reproductive rights. The participants expressed their resistance towards the idea of organising public institutions in line with religious views or norms, demanding institutional differentiation between the public and the religious:

> In the case of hospitals, in private clinics let them invoke their conscientious objection, whichever they want. However, in the public hospitals, it is outrageous that Dr Chazan works there and he tells women that he invokes conscientious objection (...). Public hospitals are for everyone, I don't care if he [the doctor] is a believer or not. I come to a doctor, not to a priest (2/W/61).

Clearly, the unlimited and institutionalised individual rights of doctors to object based on their consciences is seen as potentially jeopardising female patients' rights and freedoms.

The analysed material also shows that the participants of the Black Protests not only envisage new, secular citizenship, but also see their own activities as a necessary condition for inducing such social change. The discourses on citizenship emerging in these areas thus not only offer a redefinition of citizenship as a status, but also demand building citizenship as a social and political practice aiming to implement and change the existing and expected notions and practices of citizenship:

> Women-citizens, we are the majority in this country and we still leave the power in the hands of men. Enough! Enough! (...) We shouldn't let the power be taken from us. We

> shouldn't let anyone decide for us. It is time that you believe, become aware, that you know how to solve the problems, that you seek the solutions to conflict (S/W/Warszawa/ 23.03.2018).

This implies political mobilisation, the entry of women to politics and a redefinition of the existing power relations. Such mobilisation needs to be based on solidarity and inclusiveness. As expressed by many participants, the Black Protests became an initiator of such mobilisation.

## From "subaltern counterpublics" to mainstream public sphere? Concluding remarks

The Black Protests expressed social resistance against the planned introduction of further restrictions on access to legal abortion in Poland and the limitation of women's rights. However, they also created spaces for the construction and circulation of alternative discourses, resisting the dominant, "frozen" symbolic orders or ways of seeing and defining things, perpetuated in the mainstream parts of the public sphere. The analysis of the way intimacy and the rights related to this sphere were articulated by the participants of the Black Protests allowed us to reconstruct their visions of intimate citizenship and their attempts to redefine such central concepts as woman, individual, citizen and abortion. At the very foundation of such visions of citizenship, as we proved, lay autonomy, agency and bodily self-determination as well as the right to sexual expression viewed as constitutive for women's full participation in social life. Yet, as we have shown, this reconceptualization may have a different meaning depending on the underlying concept of individual seen as detached or embedded in wider family relations.

Human rights served as the wider frame justifying such a reconceptualisation of citizenship. At the very basis of this new vision – and this is of particular importance for challenging established meanings – is the relocation of rights from the "unborn child" back to women themselves, and also the redefinition of the term "abortion". The emergence of the "Abortion Dream Team" [Aborcyjny Dream Team] in December 2016 promoting a positive view and positive evaluation of abortion as well as providing information on the available options seems like a consequence of the breach in the understanding of abortion made by the Black Protests. Their phrase "Abortion is OK" and its promotion on crowd-funded billboards may be seen as a further consequence of this redefinition. The more recent actions affirming access to abortion (i.e. "Legal Abortion, Now!" [Legalna aborcja, teraz!] show that we may witness a transfer of a new discursive construction of abortion from the "subaltern counterpublics" of the Black Protests to the more mainstream spaces of the public sphere.

As we have shown, the re-articulation of intimate citizenship also initiated a broader reflection on citizenship. Crucial for proposing a new citizenship model was the "intersectional sensitivity" expressed by protesters, resulting in claims to redefine the inclusion terms and the boundaries of citizenship. Again, human rights serve as a foundation for this re-definition, but its realisation was also seen as conditioned upon secularisation of the public sphere. The recent discussions explicitly linking the subordination of women and limitation of their rights with the activities and status of the Roman Catholic Church as well as public actions expressing such views (i.e. Stop to the Silence [Dość Milczenia] and #Word for Sunday – coat hanger for the bishop [#Słowo na niedzielę – wieszak dla biskupa) initiated by women's groups involved in the Black Protests also signal a challenge to the discursive domination of Catholicism in the Polish public sphere. Therefore, we seem to observe the permeation of the resistance discourses from the parallel spaces of the Black Protests to the mainstream of the Polish public sphere.

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**TYTUŁ**: Czarne Protesty: walka o (prze)definiowanie intymnego obywatelstwa

**ABSTRAKT**: Próby zmiany prawa regulującego dostęp do aborcji w Polsce, podjęte przez polski Sejm w 2016 i 2018, zainicjowały intensywną społeczną mobilizację i szerokie protesty społeczne, określane wspólną nazwą „Czarnych Protestów". Tę mobilizację traktujemy jako próbę (prze)definiowania obowiązujących pojęć obywatelstwa, a w szczególności jako wyraz poszukiwania nowego modelu obywatelstwa intymnego, czyli publicznego przedefiniowania praw dotyczących prywatnej, intymnej sfery. Celem autorek artykułu jest analiza wspomnianych (re)artykulacji intymnego obywatelstwa. W pierwszej części tekstu autorki opisują, czym były Czarne Protesty oraz Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet, a także przybliżają kontekst ich powstania oraz postulaty. W drugiej części zdefiniowana zostaje kategoria obywatelstwa, a w szczególności obywatelstwa intymnego. Następnie przedstawiona zostaje metodologia badań. W ostatniej, analitycznej części artykułu autorki rekonstruują wizje obywatelstwa intymnego wyłaniające się z analizowanego materiału empirycznego.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** intymne obywatelstwo, prawa reprodukcyjne, prawa kobiet, sfera publiczna

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# SOLIDARITY DESPITE AND BECAUSE OF DIVERSITY. ACTIVISTS OF THE POLISH WOMEN'S STRIKE

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**Abstract**: In one of the largest studies on coordinators of the Polish Women's Strike (OSK) conducted in Poland so far, we carried out almost 100 CAWI and PAPI interviews with local coordinators of OSK groups from the entire country. Our aim was to get to know the people behind a countrywide network that organized the successful 2016 protests against attempts to tighten the already restrictive abortion law. We also wanted to find out what drove them to activism and how they understood the ambivalent concept of an "ordinary woman." Although almost all of our respondents agree that the participants of the Women's Strike in 2016 were "ordinary women", the way they use the term "ordinary" does not align with the right-wing operationalisations of that term; on the contrary, it is associated with the diversity of the protesters. Based on the findings about the kinds of social positionings and intersections that OSK coordinators pay attention to, we discuss the issue of agency and possible reasons constraining participation in public (socio-political) life.

**Keywords:** Polish Women's Strike, black protests, social movements, ordinary women, right wing populism

"The government got scared of women!" – was one of the comments one could read in the newspapers and on social media in October 2016. In response to the attempts to tighten the already restrictive abortion law in Poland[1], thousands of people took to the streets. Residents of cities, but also of small towns and even villages took part in the biggest single women's rights protest in post-socialist Poland. Mobilization on such a scale brought about a success – the government temporarily withdrew from work on the restrictive act. At the same time, a new subject, describing itself and described frequently in the mass media as "ordinary women", entered the political scene in Poland. This subject (the Polish Women's Strike – Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet, OSK) – a countrywide network of independent local groups that formed spontaneously after the call for a strike was issued on the internet – managed to transcend the evanescence of a one-off action and has by now become one of the most active protests groups in Poland, focusing not just on gender issues. This sudden broad mobilization and the emergence of a new political subject that included actors not known publicly as women rights activists took not only the government, but also the feminist movement and even social movement researchers by surprise.

In the first months of mobilizations the protesters were frequently called "ordinary women" not only by the media, but also by the protesters themselves. We tried to learn about the people behind the countrywide network called the "Polish Women's Strike" (OSK). It seemed that the protests mobilized many new activists. Therefore we wanted to find out who they are, what drives them to activism and what their previous history of social and political engagement had been. We were also wondering how the activists themselves understand the category of "ordinary woman." The notion of an "ordinary woman" touches upon many issues such as the problem of representation, the problem of social exclusion and restraints on socio-political agency, while simultaneously the notion of "ordinarity" is also highly ambivalent due to its right-wing political operationalisations.

In order to answer those questions, we asked almost 100 local coordinators of OSK groups from the entire country to complete our questionnaire. Participants in the activities of OSK who did not participate in organizing group activities were not included in this research project.

We hope that our study will facilitate further research and help shed light on what leads the coordinators of the OSK to political contestation and activism in social movements, but also what might be the factors constraining or enabling political agency. Our findings could also serve as an inspiration both for the application of an intersectional approach in the Polish context and for the intersectional practice of feminist activists.

1 Since 1993, the Polish anti-abortion law allows abortion only in three circumstances: in the case of rape or incest, when the woman's life or health is in jeopardy, or if the foetus is irreparably damaged. The new law was intended to criminalise abortion even in these three circumstances (except to save a woman's life).

## State of research and theoretical frameworks

In past several decades, feminist theory has been very suspicious of the possibility to mobilize and the claims to represent "women" in general. Such universalist claims, according to the critiques voiced within critical feminist theory and on behalf of social groups marginalized by feminist practice, often go along with asserting the dominance of a particular perspective or result in homogenizing practices with regard to what the term "women" implies. Intersectional perspectives pay attention to the ways that gender as an identity or a positioning in a social structure is multidimensional and intersects with other positionalities (cf. hooks 1984; Crenshaw 1989; Lutz and Wenning 2001; Degele and Winker 2007, among others). This interdependency of identity categories (Walgenbach 2007), social positionings and forms of oppression results in a variability in terms of what it means to be "female", but also a variability of oppression or even "multiple jeopardy" (King 1988). This diversity also involves the history of struggles for reproductive rights – while some had to struggle for the right to abortion, others had to struggle against sterilisation forced on them because they did not fit into an ethno-nationalist or "healthy" concept of a nation.

There are specific circumstances that condition women struggling for their reproductive rights in Poland. These circumstances influence the participation in public (socio-political) life, creating obstacles or advantages to people from different social groups. People from smaller towns and villages, with lower social/cultural capital or speaking on "controversial" topics may be prevented from such participation. Taking into account that a prominent feature of the Women's Strike was that it mobilized people from outside big metropolises, our theoretical lens was also inspired by the contextual analysis of geographical centre-periphery relationships (Zarycki 2009) as the spatial determinant of public/socio-political participation and by the analysis of participation in public life according to class affiliation (Siermiński 2016; Domański 2015), which means that we aim to consider various social positionings, including related types of capital and axes of inequality. Other important factors are the elitism of "public life" (Siermiński 2016), as well as a persistent distrust in representational politics and political parties (e.g. Anheier and Seibel 1998; CBOS 2016c). This latter phenomenon is conditioned among other things by the legacy of authoritarian states (e.g. Ost 1990), resulting partially in a preference for informal activism among private networks, while simultaneously many activists focus on professional NGO work in the area of care or advocacy (e.g. Owczarzak 2010). The promotion and professionalization of the so-called civil society (e.g. Hann 1996; Mandel 2002; Gal and Kligman 2000a; 2000b; Sloat 2005) and in part the problem of so-called "NGOzation" (e.g. Lang 1997; Graff and Krzeski 2013; Jacobsson & Saxonberg 2013; Korolczuk 2016c) or neoliberal developments affecting thethird sector (Jezierska 2017) might have prevented some parts of the population from engagement as well. However, the thesis on the sociological

vacuum in Poland has been critically discussed (see Pawlak 2018); researchers also point out that especially in recent years a revival of grassroots activism and a development of a civil society "beyond" NGO-ization can be observed (Jacobsson and Korolczuk 2017).

Gender dimensions, as an important variable for the participation in public (socio-political) life, also need to be considered while discussing this participation. The concept of an "ordinary woman" is symptomatic of the contemporary political scene, the more so in the context of the current right-wing populist discourses – especially the ethnic and nationalist discourse of the ruling party, claiming to be the only legitimate representative of the "real people." According to this discourse, the concept of "the ordinary" is not only contrasted with "the elite", but also shaped, among other things, by national and ethnic significations, normative concepts of gender, class, the placing on the geographical centre-periphery axis, political beliefs and conservative values (compare Graff, Korolczuk 2018; Lewandowski, Polakowski 2018). Thus, the right-wing discourses place "ordinary women" against "not ordinary women" who do not fulfil normative ideas of gender (especially feminists).[2] The nationalist context of this opposition deserves deeper consideration and further research.

The so-called "Black Protest" – demonstrations, the Polish Women's Strike on the 3rd of October and various other actions of the OSK and cooperating groups in 2016 – and the attempts to restrict the abortion law were not only widely commented on in the international and Polish press, but also monitored by journalists and scholars (Druciarek 2016; 2017; Dryjańska 2017; Kubisa 2016; 2017a; 2017b; Korolczuk 2016a; 2016b; 2017; Chmielewska, Druciarek, Przybysz 2017). Despite the immense number of articles analyzing the protest, so far there has been little systematic research on the Polish Women's Strike and its members which would take a look "behind the scenes" and focus on the protesters themselves. Most of the academic research is based on public and (semi)public data and there is little empirical and no quantitative research available. A study that is closest to ours in terms of methods, and in fact the only comparable study published so far (another study will be published in 2019 – Kowalska and Nawojski 2019), is a qualitative research study conducted in May 2017 by sociologists who interviewed 20 activists from various groups in order to reconstruct the organization of the protest and to analyze the reasons for its success (Murawska and Włodarczyk 2017). With our research, conducted among almost 100 active OSK coordinators, we aimed to expand the limited body of research. We reached most active members and local

2 In another article (Ramme, Snochowska-Gonzalez, forthcoming in 2019), we address this issue by comparing the answers of OSK members with the answers of the members of another feminist group: the 8th of March Women's Coalition (Porozumienie Kobiet 8 Marca - PK8M), organizers of the annual Manifa - the 8 March demonstration in Warsaw. The Manifas have been described, especially in the right-wing press, as events representing the elites and their concerns, and as a negation of the notion of the "ordinary" (Kopciewicz 2011).The ambivalence of the term "ordinary women" is analysed by us with a focus on the discourse about the Women's Strike and the organizers of Manifas and taking into account the nationalist and populist context.

leaders of almost all known OSK groups in the country in order to ensure that the study is representative.

## Methods and characteristics of the group under study

Our studied group consisted of 95 persons; 41 of them came to a gathering of all OSK groups at the end of March 2017 in Warsaw and filled out our paper-and-pencil questionnaire. As social media were an important tool supporting the organization of local Women's Strike events, we looked for more respondents by contacting the FB profiles of local groups organizing the protests in 2016, especially the ones which were not present at the meeting in Warsaw. Fifty-four local activists completed an online questionnaire (with the same questions as in the paper-and-pencil questionnaire) between August and November 2017.

The questionnaire consisted of 21 closed- and open-ended questions. We asked about age, sex, education, place of residence, place and form of employment, about the respondents' opinions on the anti-abortion law, about their civic, political and social activity beyond the activities of the OSK, including their involvement in women's rights activity. We asked also about their motivation to act, their sense of having an impact on the situation in Poland and about the way the activity within the OSK changed the lives of our respondents. Finally, we asked whether they think women's strikes were a protest of "ordinary women" and what do they understand this concept to mean.

The answer to the question of whether women's strikes were a protest of "ordinary women" is complicated and requires precision. We decided to examine how the respondents understood the concept of "ordinary women," and then we analyzed how they themselves, as the organizers of the protests, met the criteria of such defined ordinariness. We also examined how (in the opinion of our respondents) these criteria were met by other participants of the protest. Moreover, we were interested to find out how the movement frames the subject they frequently claimed to represent in public statements. When asking individual members of OSK whether the women's strike was a protest of "ordinary women," we deliberately did not impose any specific understanding of that category (and consequently the subject that emerged through the strike). Defining whether the respondents speak about themselves (when they confirm that it was a strike of "ordinary women") or only about other participants of the protest is complicated by the fact that the OSK-coordinators acted in a dual role: they were also participants in the strike that took place on October 3, 2016.

Our respondents are active members of the OSK: people who coordinate local groups and/or who are a part of the organizing committee of the OSK not only on the local level, but for the whole group. We did not ask persons who only passively participated in the protest and have no function as OSK organizers to fill out our questionnaires. As there is a visible

dynamism in regard to the group's agenda (e.g. from defending the existing law to demanding full legalization of abortion; from opposition to attempts to change the abortion law to contesting other activities and the political programme of PiS and other ethno-nationalist right-wing players), it must be clearly stated that the moment in the group's development we relate to in our research is the period between March and November 2017. And, last but not least, our findings are based only on the analysis of the results of anonymous questionnaires completed by individual OSK coordinators, not on an analysis of the entire OSK discourse (e.g. the public discourse of the OSK).

The vast majority of OSK coordinators (90 persons) declared themselves as female, four as male and one declared another gender. The age of OSK members reflects a great deal of variety. Most of them are between 31–50 years old. The majority of OSK respondents come from small cities (31,58% from the cities with 100–500,000 inhabitants; 29,47% from the cities with 20–100,000 inhabitants; and only 27,37% from the biggest cities with more than 500,000 inhabitants). They are rather well educated, with 27% with secondary and post-secondary education and almost 70% having BA, MA or PhD.

Table 1. Characteristics of OSK group – age

| **Age** | |
|---|---|
| 18–30 | 19 |
| 31–40 | 26 |
| 41–50 | 29 |
| 51–60 | 16 |
| 61–70 | 5 |

Table 2. Characteristics of OSK group – education.

| **Education** | |
|---|---|
| basic education | 1 |
| secondary without baccalaureate | 2 |
| secondary with baccalaureate | 20 |
| post-secondary education | 6 |
| BA | 12 |
| MA | 49 |
| PhD | 5 |

Table 3. Characteristics of OSK group – place of residence.

| **Place of living** (thousands of inhabitants) | |
|---|---|
| <10 | 2 |
| 10–20 | 8 |
| 20–100 | 28 |
| 100–500 | 30 |
| >500 | 26 |
| no answer* | 1 |

*The person who didn't answer this question pointed out as her origin the voivodeship where there is no city with more than 500,000 inhabitants. Therefore, in further analyzes, we include her with the group of residents of cities with a population of less than 500,000.

## The findings

### Ordinary women

We were particularly interested in what our respondents included in the category "women" – the subject they mobilize and claim to represent. This subject was frequently referred to – by the media and by the newly emerged protest groups themselves – as "ordinary women."

In the context of the alleged right-wing populism (or neo-authoritarianism) of the current Polish government and of its supporters, the concepts of the elites and the ("ordinary") people are usually placed in a mutually oppositional relationship and the term "ordinary" is highly ambivalent.

At the same time the frequent self description as "ordinary women" by many of the protest groups (including OSK) was partially met with suspicion within feminist circles, since the category of "ordinary women" in right-wing discourse is often placed in opposition to feminism and feminists. Therefore, we decided to ask the actors of those newly arisen protest groups directly. We aimed to find out what did individual coordinators of local OSK groups have to say about the category of "ordinary women" and to what extent their understanding of that term fell within the (right-wing) populist discourse about ordinary people versus the elites/non-ordinary and within the normative right-wing concepts of "ordinary women."

We asked whether the Women's Strike (OSK) was a protest of "ordinary women" and almost all of the respondents (except for seven) confirmed it was. Of particular interest were their lines of argumentation while answering our open-ended question ("What do you understand this term to mean?").

The respondents explained the term "ordinary" in the context of the Polish Women's Strike by referring it most frequently to the following notions: not being active before (34 indications), diversity, acting above divisions (29 indications), common goal (17 indications), all women, the majority, a big group (11 indications). Thus, although almost all of them subscribe to the term "ordinary," we think their understanding of the term does not align with its right-wing populist application, where the (ordinary) people are described as a homogeneous unit and contrasted to elites.

Here are some typical answers to this question:

> "The participants of the protest are women of various ages, schoolgirls, university students, mothers, grandmothers, with various levels of education. They have various jobs, they live in the villages, in cities and small towns." (Woman, 61–70 years, MA, Warmia-Masuria.)

> "It was a protest of women who had never engaged in political life before and hadn't had enough courage to express their opinion loudly until now." (Woman, 31–40 years, secondary education, Lesser Poland.)

> "Mrs. Basia from Biedronka [a supermarket chain] came, and Mrs. Małgosia from the HR department, and Mrs. Henia from a village nearby, the businesswoman Zofia came in her cool car, and even Kasia, always so shy, came to share her story." (Woman, 18–30 years, MA, Warmia-Masuria.)

> "It was not just a strike of activists of social or feminist movements. It was a citizens' strike, a women's strike. The strike for each of us. The women who participated in it have never, or rarely, been active in such a way until now." (Woman, 41–50 years, MA, West Pomerania.)

Since uniting for a common goal (despite differences) and diversity was so commonly mentioned, we did take a closer look at what categories of diversity did appear in the answers to our open-ended question on their understanding of the term "ordinary women." When referring to the term "ordinary," the OSK coordinators most frequently mentioned the following forms of diversity: age/female generations (13 indications), education (10), political views, worldview (8), occupation (8), place of residence (big city, small city, village) (6), social status (6), family situation, having/not having children (5), sex/gender (4); social stratum or class (4), social groups, social communities (3); and they also mentioned origin, belonging (or not) to a party, organization, material status, ambitions, functions, religion.

As we can see, many respondents pointed to the dimensions related to social stratum or class position (education, occupation, material status), world views and political views, geographical location and their social status as women. The most frequent answers mentioned age and different generations of females within a family: grandmothers, mothers and daughters. The family situation and differences resulting from having or not having children also seemed to be of importance. All of these elements expanded the concept of "ordinary women."

We did not ask OSK members about their understanding of the category "women" in regard to, for example, non-essentialist concepts of gender or its variety, nor did we ask about their understanding of the "nation" or whether patriotism played an important role in their struggles. Although they would often describe themselves as "Polish women" on their Facebook profiles and during the protests, we noticed that in our surveys they did not refer to patriotism, nor to national or ethnic categories.[3] But they did not mention migrants, refugees

3 On the deployment of national categories and the use of patriotism in order to oppose familist and androcentric nationalism within recent mobilizations and the public discourse of feminist groups, see Ramme (forthcoming in 2019).

and ethnic minorities in terms of diversity. The term "origin" appears twice in regard to diversity, but it is not exactly clear what is meant by that. Although the respondents called themselves and the 2016 protesters "ordinary women," they did not refer to the term "normal" or "average"; nor did they mention, for example, people of colour, refugees, lesbians, people with disabilities, transpersons or queers.

A question arises about what it means that they chose one kind of difference and not others and to whom they ascribe the diversity (to themselves or to other women they are supporting). Based solely on our survey, we were unable to answer this question, as the results only indicate what categories of diversity were prioritized in individual and anonymous responses. We also could not answer the question why they did not mention, for instance, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, being (or not) a refugee; this might indicate that national belonging and binary essentialist understandings of gender are either underlying and taken for granted, or that these issues have not been priorities on the agenda in the concrete timeframe when the research was done. Meanwhile, OSK groups and its leaders included other dimensions of inequality and social exclusion in their agenda (e.g. disability, LGBTQ*). They predominantly acted in solidarity with other struggles, defined in the public discourse of OSK as related. To determine what types of diversity and axes of social exclusion individual members and coordinators of OSK pay most attention to today would require additional research.

## Socio-political engagement

What we found striking was the linkage of the term "ordinary women" to someone who is not socially or politically active yet. This may confirm the significance of a radical elitism in social and political life in Poland, but also might indicate an exclusion of a majority of females from political decision-making. However, the claim that the participants of the protest have so far been politically or socially inactive is partly in contradiction with the responses to the questions about their own political and social activity: 73,65% of the respondents declared that they have been socially and politically active before October 2016 (before the Polish Women Strike).

We also asked in which initiatives they were engaged. Before 2016, most (21 indications) of our active respondents had been local activists, working in local associations, local government, local groups or initiatives. The second most frequent form of activity was in KOD (Komitet Obrony Demokracji – Committee for the Defence of Democracy) and its successor Obywatele RP (Citizens of Poland) – two movements established after the Polish constitutional crisis in 2015 (18 women). Some (7) of the other respondents were active in informal feminist organizations and initiatives, such as Dziewuchy Dziewuchom (Gals for Gals), Ratujmy Kobiety (Save Women), defending and promoting reproductive rights (Dziewuchy

Dziewuchom is a countrywide-group that formed through Facebook before the strike in a direct response to the attempts to restrict the abortion law and those groups significantly contributed to organizing the strike in the Fall of 2016). The other forms of activity include: trade unions (including Solidarność in the 1980s), left-wing parties and organizations, civic, queer and antiracist organizations and Kongres Kobiet (Women's Congress – a liberal women's organization).

Another study, conducted on a smaller sample – 20 organizers of various protests on October 3, 2016 in different places around Poland (Murawska and Włodarczyk 2017, 2) – revealed that just seven people out of the 20-person group under study had not been engaged socio-politically at all. Thus, according to this sample, two-thirds of the organizers had been socio-politically engaged before, especially in the framework of KOD and the party Razem (Together), a fact which, according to Murawska and Włodarczyk (2017, 3–5), allowed them to use their skills and networks to organize the Women's Strike in a very short time. Our research shows that the experience of the OSK coordinators in other areas of socio-political activity is much more varied. While, for example, Marta Lempart, one of the leading persons behind the strike and the OSK network today, is known to be a member of KOD-Wrocław, our study shows that feminist organisations (such as Kongres Kobiet or other informal groups) might also have been resources to build upon. The same applies to other forms of activity, such as the local ones. Nevertheless, the OSK remains a distinct group on the country/international level, building their informal activism using a variety of resources. It constitutes a kind of network where the local groups remain autonomous.

In our survey, many OSK members declared that their action was a protest of women who had not been politically or socially active thus far, but, as the results above show, at the same time more than 73% declared their own political and social activity. For women from smaller towns, not well educated and not from the middle class, there are many reasons not to be active. The obstacles to getting socio-politically engaged could be explained in the wider context of the centre-periphery relationships, and by taking into account the elitization of public life and the professionalization of politics and social activism in Poland, linking politics with class and making political participation impossible for people with lower cultural capital and education. According to the available analyses of this context (Zarycki 2009; Tokarska-Bakir 2007; Buchowski 2008; Smoczyński and Zarycki 2017; Siermiński 2016; Domański 2015, 218), to be active, to make socio-political claims and to gain broad public support should be constrained for our respondents. But this is not always the case.

As we could see, more than 70% of our respondents live in villages and towns with less than 500,000 inhabitants (Table 3), with 27.36% denizens of Polish metropolises (Warszawa, Kraków, Łódź, Wrocław, Poznań) – which is more than twice the percentage of all the inhabitants of metropolises in Poland, and at the end of 2015 amounted to approximately 11%

(GUS, Baza demografia, statystyka regionalna)[4]. The place of residence influenced their previous participation in socio-political life, which in the case of the inhabitants of small towns and villages is lower:

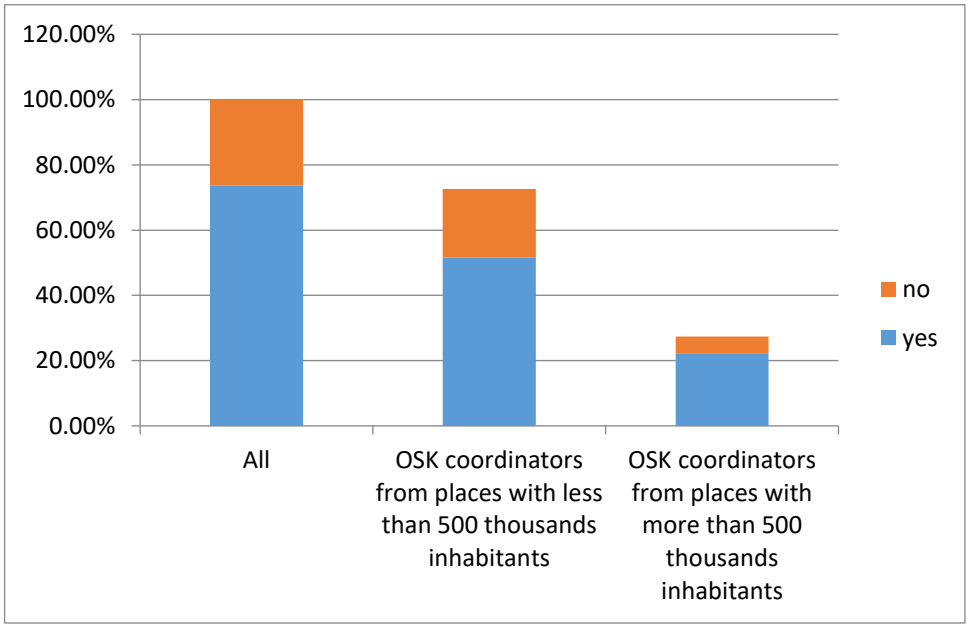


Fig. 1. Socio-political activity, according to place of residence (number of indications).

The answers of all our respondents (even from places with less than 500,000 inhabitants) prove that their engagement was significantly higher than the general engagement in Poland (71.01% of respondents from places with less than 500,000 inhabitants and 80,77% of respondents from places with more than 500,000 inhabitants declared any socio-political activity).[5] According to a study by CBOS (2016b), only 36% of the representative random sample under study participated in any form of civic activity in 2015 and only 50% did it at least once in their life; according to another study, 37% was active in any civic organization (CBOS 2016d). Some women from the OSK perceived the protesters and/or themselves as politically inactive (at least until 2016), even though they could list lots of examples of their own activity before 2016

[4] Regarding the place of residence of our respondents, in our analysis we used the division only into these two groups (less than 500,000 inhabitants or more than 500,000 inhabitants) in order to refer to one of the dimensions of the populist dichotomy, namely, the division into "people" (from small towns) and "elites" (from the metropolises).

[5] There exist no "big city" nor "small town" nor "village" as such; all these places have their own specificity, which in various ways determines their social structure, place of individuals and their socio-political activity. The division that we have carried out (into these two groups - less than 500,000 inhabitants or more than 500,000 inhabitants) is intended to refer to the populist dichotomy mentioned above. The analysis of various types of social structure of smaller or larger towns, which conditions various ways of engaging in civic activity by women, requires more thorough research (see: Michalska 2016).

and (perhaps thanks to this activity) they were able to organize an action that forced (at least temporarily) the government to change its plans. The declaration of a lack of socio-political engagement before the strike in 2016 might result from their narrow understanding of the term "political." In the eyes of the respondents, the format of their socio-political engagement within the OSK, such as the organization of public demonstrations, acts of civil disobedience, and activities seeking to influence legislation and directed against the government may mark a significant difference to their previous activity. However, it is important to observe that the forms of activity (mentioned prior to the involvement in OSK and women rights issues) coupled with related forms of social, cultural and economic capital might have provided a relevant basis for the success in organizing the protest in 2016.

Another reason for declaring "ordinary women" as those who were not socio-politically active before might be their lack of involvement on gender issues.

As we can see, there are more differences appearing between the respondents from the villages and towns with less than 500,000 inhabitants on the one hand, and from the metropolises from the other. Most of respondents from smaller places had not been active on women's issues before 2016, which was not the case for persons from bigger cities:

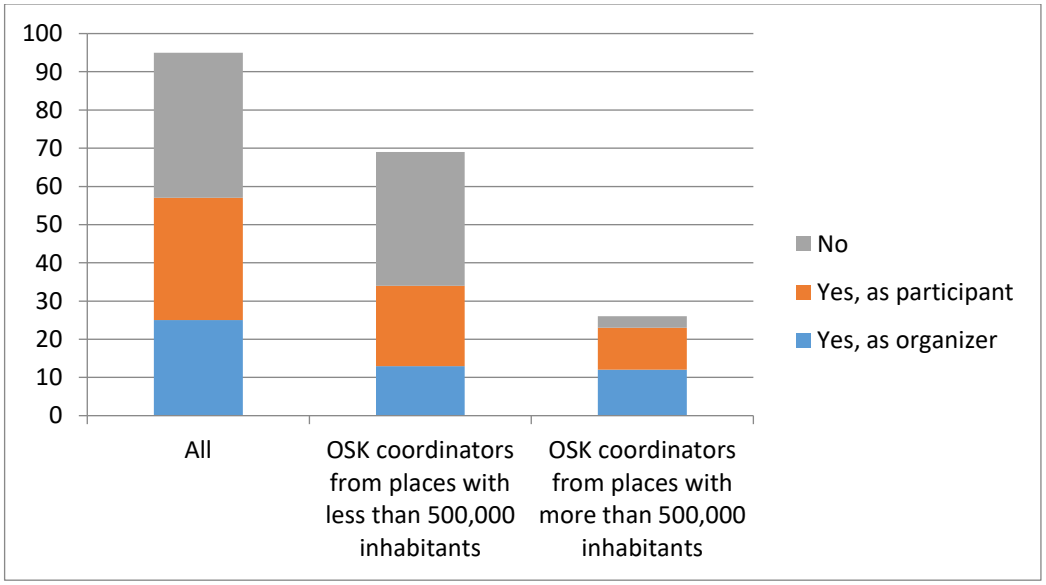


Fig. 2. Previous activity on women's issues (number of indications).

More than 50% of women from smaller cities, towns and villages had never been active as organizers or participants of initiatives related to women's issues before the strike in 2016, only 18,84% organized and 30,44% participated in such events or initiatives, while an overwhelming majority (almost 90%) of women from metropolises either organized (46.15%) or participated (42.31%) in women's events or initiatives. Such a result may prove both that a feminist protest is less likely to happen in smaller locations, where there are fewer socio-politically engaged

people in relation to such topics, and, at the same time, that the Women's Strike managed to overcome this obstacle (at least in October 2016).

The answers of all the respondents demonstrate that 60% of all new activists engaging with women's issues were mobilized within the framework of the local strike groups. The political mobilization related to the proposed abortion ban has had an impact on a growing interest not only in issues of reproduction. A side effect seems to be an engagement in other feminist groups as well.

Taking into account that among the women mobilized by the strike were also women from small towns and villages, an important issue to consider concerns the impact of living in a smaller town or a village on political agency and the ability to express disagreement publicly. Although the number of women obtaining local political functions in the countryside improved significantly since 1989 (e.g. Fuszara 2006; Siemieńska 2011; Brodzińska and Brodziński 2016, 33–35), research on female populations in villages also show that women are still supposed to play certain roles in traditional families and that this restrains them from equal participation in political spheres (e.g. Siemieńska 2007; Michalska 2013; Brodzińska and Brodziński 2016). Women who do not fulfil traditional gender norms are still not likely to be accepted within the community (Michalska 2013). Moreover, within the right-wing and Catholic religious public discourse women who have had abortions are especially the subject of hate speech and become excluded from those who count as respectable members of the community. Considering the strong influence of the ruling party and the Catholic Church in the countryside, such a positioning within the conservative discourse might limit women's political agency further [6].

The fact that the strike mobilized people from outside of the big metropolises and from social groups that are considered to be either supporters of the governing party or not capable of having a significant political impact is of major importance. Representing "ordinary people"

[6] An interesting context for the analysis of the political agency of women in small towns and villages may be a study conducted by Maciej Gdula (2017) on the political viewpoints and activities of people from a small town in Masovian Voivodeship. According to this study, PiS owes its high support not only to those who remain at the bottom of the social ladder. Gdula explains the party's success using the concept of neo-authoritarianism: PiS supporters (both from the middle and popular classes) want to deal with degenerate elites and dissociate themselves from "pathology", i.e., everyone except for "respectable" representatives of the national community ("pathology" thus comes to include refugees, the unemployed, alcoholics, etc.). Local (peripheral) elites have a direct interest in this endeavour: by distancing themselves from the old elite, they can demonstrate their moral superiority and gain a sense of power. In a time of global neoliberalism, nationalism becomes the uniting framework against those "to whom nothing should belong" (Gdula 2017: 34). In contrast to these attitudes, those of Gdula's interviewees who do not support recent political changes brought about by the far right and the ruling party are confused, broken, unorganized - as if there were no alternative to neo-authoritarianism. According to our study, OSK coordinators are obviously an example of a different response to the recent political changes in Poland than neo-authoritarian support of ethnic-nationalist politics: Their disagreement transformed into a grassroots mobilization successfully opposing legislative change. The study by Gdula thus introduces a distinction between "nationwide" elites and local elites, which can be used as a way to complicate the populist people-elite dichotomy. What is missing in Gdula's analysis is the impact of the public right-wing and Catholic religious discourse about women who do not conform to gender norms.

– people from smaller locations, not the best educated, and not the highest earners – belongs to the most important elements of the public image created by PiS. Taking into account this representative claim, the emergence of a collective subject that includes and encourages "non-elites" and makes them politically active (or mobilizes them using resources built upon earlier, allegedly non-existent, political activity), and at the same time a subject that opposes the politics of PiS is a great challenge to the image of the governing party.

## The collective category "women" and motivations for engagement in the OSK

The vast majority of our respondents declared themselves as "female"; the collective political subject in which the respondents position and construct themselves is likewise "women." The majority of the respondents spoke in plural and referred to a "we" (we, the women), although they often used the "universal" masculine grammar forms (instead of the feminine forms as promoted for decades by feminists in Poland). In their answers they do rather not use words and concepts that are popular in (academic) feminist theory and activism. Instead, many of our respondents use an everyday language and refer to personal experiences and feelings, linking them with situations and developments in the society and politics in Poland.

Referring to a female "we" shows a strong identification with women in general, whereby commonalities are framed in terms of their political situatedness. "Women," as our results show, are perceived in a highly intersectional way. However, the total number of protesters and the diversity of representation in the category of women mobilized during the protests in October 2016 are used as a source of legitimization of claims to represent the general category of "women."[7]

In order to establish what has led OSK coordinators to engage in feminist activities (but also what were the possible constraints), the motivations and life changes described by our respondents are of particular importance. As we know, the OSK came into being as the result of a call for a countrywide women's strike in order to stop a restrictive abortion bill. The threat of a radical restriction on the abortion law is named directly as one of the main reasons and motivations for the involvement in the movement. The answers we obtained allow us to trace in more detail the grounds on which the motivation for political engagement builds upon and the reasoning behind it. Most common in this regard are postulates of sovereignty. These are expressed in various ways: in relation to men, to the government, to the Church or anybody who does not respect this sovereignty. The answers demonstrate that reproductive issues are

[7] Such a reference to "women" in general is perceived critically within feminist critical theory (including poststructuralist, intersectional or queer perspectives), as there are no "women" as such and neither are there general interests which would be shared by every single person positioned or identifying herself as a "woman".

not the only ones which are important to the activists of the OSK: they refer to the situation of women in the country in general or even to other activities of the government, which indicates that for some women the proposed bill was a breaking point, leading them to finally react. For some of them the bill was the tip of the iceberg, while for others it was an eye opener, changing the perception of their own situation and the status of women in the society.

In the questionnaires we also asked: "what was your most important motivation for engaging in OSK?". The question was formulated as an open one in order to not influence or restrict possible responses. Many respondents referred to their autonomy as individuals, females, humans, and insisted that their right to decide about themselves and their lives had to be respected.

**Motivation. Some typical answers**

"I'm fed up with them deciding for me. I am an upright citizen, apparently. So let it happen. A woman is also a human being." (Woman, 61–70 years, MA, Podlaskie.)

"I am a woman and I do not wish for decisions about me to be made by men with a worldview according to which a woman should sit at home and give birth to children, fully subordinate to the man." (Woman, 18–30 years, BA, Warmia-Masuria.)

"No one will take away our rights. They took away our sense of security. They tried to take away our dignity and this will not be forgotten." (Woman, 18–30 years, MA, Lower Silesia.)

A frequently given explanation for the engagement was a desire for freedom, but also references to "rights," such as women's rights, human rights, civil rights, and individual rights. Those rights were described as being violated, limited and taken away. The situation was even described as a violent "attack" ("zamach") on women, their social positioning and their rights. The respondents did not claim that they aimed for a "recognition" of their rights, but claimed that they had natural rights: as citizens, as humans, as individuals. Instead of "recognition", a very frequent word that appeared was "disagreement [to the violation of rights; to unjust treatment; to humiliation]." Many answers referred to emotions and feelings such as anger ("wkurw", "wkurzenie", "wściekłość"), a feeling of degradation, powerlessness, a feeling of being threatened with disrespect and not being taken seriously. Demands for dignity and respect were voiced very frequently. This association of the proposed bill with deprivation of dignity might be explained by the fact that most of the respondents claimed to know someone who had had a miscarriage, difficult pregnancies, an abortion – or to have had such experiences themselves. The bill would criminalize persons who have had abortions and institutionalize their social exclusion as respectable members of the national community, regardless of whether

or not they are respected members of the society in other respects (belonging to the middle class, being well-educated, etc.). In other words, the bill was, on the one hand, a threat to the social status of women and, on the other, it was seen as an essential threat to the health and life of pregnant persons.

In the case of the Women's Strike in 2016, an important dimension in the protests are emotions (Chełstowska 2016; Druciarek 2016: 5; Murawska and Włodarczyk 2017: 3; Chmielewska, Druciarek and Przybysz 2017: 4). Emotions as a significant motivation for political engagement were also named by many of our respondents. In this respect, the answers given by our respondents resonate with the public expressions of emotion that could be observed during the protests. In the answers of our respondents, their emotional solidarity becomes evident. Such solidarity, according to social movement researchers, helps to overcome fear and to develop "encouragement mechanisms" such as communal gatherings (Goodwin and Pfaff 2001; Yang 2007). Social movement researchers stress that so-called "moral shocks" prompting outrage in a person can serve as the first step toward recruitment into social movements and toward political action (Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001, 16). The "Stop Abortion" bill was for some a "shock" and for the others the last straw. It served as the catalyst for smouldering discontent and the accumulated anger became a basis for mobilization.

An important question to ask is: How did individual concerns became a matter of collective politics? As our the survey has shown, a fraction of OSK coordinators had been active before the strike, but now, for a majority of them, their activism gained another dimension, as it is countrywide and dedicated to women. The answers of our respondents explaining the reasons for their activism showed that the motivation for political engagement is also a result of the direct links they see between official politics on a national and local level (such as the proposed abortion ban) and their individual lives, but also the lives of people close to them, especially their daughters, granddaughters and friends. One OSK coordinator wrote: "After recognizing the reality after the strike, we as organizers understood that the reason that brought us to the streets was mainly our difficult personal experiences. This was a kind of wake-up call for activism." This dimension become especially visible in the responses to our questions in regard to abortion legislation.[8]

Thus, the mobilized actors can be seen as representing themselves and their friends, sisters, daughters, granddaughters: they feel responsible for them, but also act in solidarity with "other women." That means that their activities do not serve (only) their private goals, but are meant to help or benefit a larger group. In this sense, the activities can be described also as actions for a common good. Their emotional solidarity translated into political solidarity and enabled collective action. While many OSK coordinators describe their feelings of apathy,

8 The analysis of the opinions of OSK coordinators in regard to abortion-legislation is part of another article based on data from the same study: Ramme and Snochowska-Gonzalez, forthcoming in 2019.

hopelessness and a lack of power before the strike, it seems that this has changed due to the protests and the new networks they have given rise to. Almost all of our respondents (97%) stated that their activities in the OSK network give them a feeling of having impact on the political situation in Poland!

## Concluding remarks

Our main findings are that although almost 93% of the coordinators agree that the attendees of the Women's Strike in 2016 were "ordinary women," their understanding of term "ordinary" do not align with its right-wing operationalisations, focusing instead on the diversity of the protesters.

Their understanding of the category "women" that they mobilize around is highly diverse and informed by an intersectional sensibility. Due to the stress on diversity they seem immune to the normative and homogenizing effects of right-wing identity politics. However, based on our survey, we cannot provide answers as to whether the actors of OSK refer to "Polish women" only. In the obtained answers we did not find any references to patriotism or the "nation", which is quite surprising, taking into account that national or patriotic symbols are frequently appropriated (ironically or affirmatively) within the frameworks of protests. While we can see that OSK coordinators do not focus much on important aspects of social inequality and domination, such as racism, binary gender orders, heterosexism or ableism, we also need to be aware that OSK is a newly arisen movement which is continuously developing.

Yet even though individual OSK members while responding to our survey did not mention certain practices of social exclusion and axes of inequality/domination highlighted especially in feminist theory, they *do* highlight other social dimensions which are in turn often marginalized by today's dominant feminist theory/practice. Some of those dimensions mentioned, like age, social stratum/class, occupation, education level and the professionalization of politics (including the third sector/civil society), the dominance of metropolises, might be considered as factors limiting political agency, not only in Poland, but also in others parts of the world. Another important and often overlooked aspect we would like to draw attention to is the high value of cultural capital which is still necessary to participate in politics and public life. As researchers we also need to remain critical towards our own instruments and concepts; this means that while studying social movements in today's Poland, we need to be aware of the political and social history of the country, as it also is part of the conditions in which a social movement and protest emerges. Theory, its frameworks, concepts and language, will always provide a selective lens on the field of study. This is the case with intersectional perspective as well, which has partly been under critique for failing to pay

sufficient attention to the peculiarities of the local contexts. The political changes that took place in Poland in 2015, including the rise of ethnic nationalism, made it necessary to rethink the theoretical framework that is used to analyze the Polish socio-political life and important phenomena in the country's public scene.

What is more, our results prove that the OSK mobilized women who have never been active in any women's events or initiatives before (especially women from smaller town and villages). The activity of OSK coordinators draws our attention to the problems of elitization of public life, the professionalization of politics, the impact of the position on a geographical centre-periphery axis and to how those dimensions intersect with gender. The factors that constrain or strengthen women's political agency and their impact on successful collective mobilization, especially in rural areas and small towns, are of particular importance to consider in subsequent research.

When the first Women's Strike took place in October 2016, it managed to impress right-wing politicians. This was because they challenged the claim of PiS to represent the "ordinary" and "Polish people" (or, using their language, "the sovereign") versus the degenerate elites. The protesting people were not a homogeneous group (from queers, anarchist feminists and feminists who opt for abortion on demand all the way to Catholic women who support the existing law that allows abortion just in three limited cases). In consequence, the protesters could not be described as "elites" in the meaning proposed by the populist discourse. Their diversity thus allowed them to overcome the populist way of understanding the opposition between the ordinary people and elites, based on homogenizing assumptions. Therefore, the term "ordinary women", as applied by the OSK, should rather be understood as akin to the emancipatory category of "the people", embodying a version of intersectional practice. Such an understanding of the subject of OSK is at odds with the understanding of the (ordinary) "people" the party Law and Justice and far right claim to represent. Contrary to OSK, the ordinary "people" within right-wing discourses are defined through homogeneity.

In our research, we found that before the strike in October 2016, many of the OSK coordinators that are very active today felt hopelessness, anger and apathy, while after the strike the vast majority claims to have an impact on the situation in the country. It seems that we can observe the emergence of a new social movement which mobilizes actors across a broad range of social groups and partly people who – as our research has shown – were not socio-politically engaged in terms of women's rights and gender issues before 2016 (although many of them have been socially or politically active in other areas).

For the activists of the Women's Strike, their political engagement means not leaving politics to others, but taking matters in their own hands, networking and acting with others – in solidarity, despite and because of diversity.

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**ABSTRAKT**: W badaniu dotyczącym organizatorek Ogólnopolskiego Strajku Kobiet (OSK) – jednym z największych, jakie dotychczas zrealizowano w Polsce – przeprowadziłyśmy prawie 100 wywiadów CAWI i PAPI z lokalnymi koordynatorkami grup OSK z całego kraju. Naszym celem było poznanie uczestniczek ogólnopolskiej sieci, która w 2016 roku umożliwiła organizację protestów przeciwko próbom kolejnego zaostrzenia restrykcyjnego prawa aborcyjnego. Chciałyśmy dowiedzieć się, co skłoniło je do aktywizmu i czy przed OSK były aktywne społeczno-politycznie również w innych obszarach. Ciekawiło nas też to, jak rozumieją one niejednoznaczne pojęcie „zwykłej kobiety". Istotnym wnioskiem z badań jest to, że chociaż prawie wszystkie nasze respondentki zgadzają się co do tego, iż uczestniczki Strajku Kobiet w 2016 roku były „zwykłymi kobietami", to ich sposób użycia terminu „zwykłe" różni się od prawicowych operacjonalizacji tego słowa, wiąże się bowiem przede wszystkim z różnorodnością protestujących. Na podstawie ustaleń dotyczących krzyżujących się pozycji społecznych, na które zwracają uwagę koordynatorki OSK, omawiamy kwestię sprawczości i możliwe bariery ograniczające udział w życiu publicznym.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet, czarne protesty, ruchy społeczne, zwykłe kobiety, prawicowy populizm

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# ROCKING THE SMALL-TOWN BOAT: BLACK PROTEST ACTIVISTS IN SMALL AND PROVINCIAL POLISH CITIES

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**Abstract**: How it is to be an activist in a small or provincial town? Are the structural challenges the activists face the same as their counterparts from big cities, that are usually studied and described in academic literature? If the environment is different, do small town activists adopt other practices to cope with the challenges that stem from the different milieu they operate in? In this paper we try to answer some of those questions by looking at the organizers of Black Protests in provincial Polish cities in 2016 and afterwards. The protests organized to oppose the intended changes in the already repressive anti-abortion law not only surprised everybody with their scale and intensity, but also with their distribution, as majority of the protest events took place in small and provincial towns in Poland. This article aims at filling the gap within the social movement studies literature between analysis of activism in big cities (upon which majority of theories are constructed) and of rural activism.

**Keywords:** feminism, small-town activism, Poland

*There were also comments that a woman should sit at home and not yell the market square.*
One of the interviewees on traditional gender roles in Poland.

## Introduction

Monday, October 3rd was a special day in Poland. On this day, tens of thousands of people (mostly women) went out to the streets to protest against an attempt to tighten the already restrictive law on abortion in Poland. The campaign that culminated in Black Monday aimed at forcing the authorities to withdraw from their plans, and has also changed the landscape of Polish social movements. Although the electoral victory of the conservative Law and Justice party in 2015 – both in presidential and parliamentary elections; in the latter the party secured an absolute majority in the parliament – has triggered new waves of protests, approximately doubling the numbers of people on Polish streets[1], Black Monday was special for a number of reasons. What surprised many observers and academics within the Black Protest was the distribution of protest events throughout the country. Apart from demonstrations in big cities[2] numerous protest events were held in smaller towns in provincial Poland. As Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (The All-Polish Women's Strike, one of the key groups in the described mobilization) writes on their Facebook page: *We are a grass-roots, independent social movement of pissed-off women and intelligent [in Polish "rozumny"] men supporting us. We are protesting and are active for women's rights, democracy, Poland for all, mobilizing in over 150 cities in Poland – 90% of those are cities of less than 50,000 inhabitants and this is our greatest strength and pride* [1]. Police sources indicated that 143 protest events were held with a cumulative participation of 98,000 people. However, according to the CBOS public opinion agency, 3% of the population took part in the protest, and 52% supported it (58% among those who have heard of the campaign)[2]. The hashtag #CzarnyProtest was the most popular hashtag on the Polish internet in 2016, and according to Brand24 it had 44 million interactions.

The goal of this article is to present the social, political, and cultural environment of the small town activists, using the interviews with organizers of Black Protests in their hometowns. Despite growing literature on the topic of Black Protests (often coming from the activists themselves, see Korolczuk 2016; Murawska and Włodarczyk 2016; Król and Pustułka 2018; Chmielewska et.al. 2017; Czarnacka 2016, 2018; Kowalska et. al. 2018), its spillover and spillout, and its meaning for the reinvigoration of the Polish feminist movement, there is a vast and surprising gap in social movements' literature that deals with small-town activism. By analyzing

[1] Or at least this is the case for Warsaw, see http://serwis.mamprawowiedziec.pl/analiza/2017/08/zgromadzenia-w-warszawie.html [access 09/02/2019]

[2] Over 500,000 inhabitants, the usual arena of grassroots protests, sometimes indicated as a characteristic feature for Central and Eastern European social movements, see Piotrowski 2015

the environment in which the activists in small towns organized and staged protests in 2016 and how their engagement has continued and developed over time (such as participation in an electoral campaign before the 2018 local elections), we want to fill this gap. By reviewing social movement literature, we discovered that there is very little written on small town activism that is located between activism in big towns (which are the usual arena of activism) and rural activism. Our assumption is that activism in provincial towns has to be different than in the metropolis, thus one of the key goals of this paper is to define the characteristics of such activism and of provincial small towns as an arena for this activism. Also, by providing empirical material we want to contribute to a more general picture and a better understanding of the Polish women's and feminist movements in recent years.

The structure of this article is as follows: firstly, we define key terms and concepts and embed our study within the tradition of social movement studies. We use concepts that refer to *structural opportunities* and, in particular, the discursive interpretation of the concept that looks at the positive reception of the political program, claims and goals and the ability to introduce the narrative into the mainstream discourse. Later we describe the methodological details of the conducted study, the context of the Polish social movement milieu with a particular focus on women's and feminist movements. The next section discusses in detail the outcomes of the fieldwork and presents the findings of our inductive study, which recreates the nature of women's activism in provincial Poland. This part is divided into three sections: (1) issues that we find specific to small-town activism; (2) issues that are present throughout the society, but in small towns are much more amplified; and (3) we also look at activists' strategic and tactical efforts to overcome structural challenges, in particular those connected to communicating their claims. The final sections discuss the findings and conclude the paper.

## Theoretical framework

Researchers of social movements have theorized about social movements as a whole, identity formation, and social transformations (Touraine's works; Melucci 1996); investigated complex network structures in relation to strategies and identities (Diani and McAdam 2003); stressed the crucial role of organizations in mobilizing people into collective action (McCarthy and Zald 1977); and studied series of protest events from a political approach perspective (Tilly 1978, 1986; Tarrow 1989). This does not mean that scholars have completely neglected micro-level analysis, as the individual's involvement in social movements has been studied from a micro-sociological perspective (Blumer 1971; Turner and Killian 1987; Gurr 1970) by emphasizing various phases of the socialization process, pointing to protestors' "structural availability" and "cognitive frames" (McAdam 1988; 1989), or looking at the interactions between protestors, social movements activities, and public authorities (della Porta 1995). If these studies focusing

also on the individual level have used qualitative methods such as in-depth interviews and life histories (della Porta 2014a; 2014b), which provide us with an intensive understanding of the individuals involved in order to draw more generalized conclusions from the empirical findings.

The above-mentioned research, however, has in general focused on big cities activism, whether the analysis is done at the national level or at the local one. Though those studies report obstacles to micro-mobilization processes, activism was analyzed in the context of the reach of political opportunities, organizational resources, urban political milieu, big universities and generally characterized by well-articulated civil societies. Small town activists clearly face harder obstacles, but at the same time they can rely on a different set of opportunities and resources based on stronger interpersonal ties and informal relationships with targets, opponents and authorities. Moreover, with the development of ICTs and social media in particular, activists from small towns can take part in bigger campaigns, but still be challenged with the provincial characteristics of their collective action fields.

In order to stage protests, movements also need a capacity to *mobilize resources*, personal as well as economical, both within their own networks and from external actors (McAdam, McCarthy and Zald 1996, 3). Furthermore, using the concept of *frames*, it is possible to conceive of movement actors as "signifying agents, actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers" (Snow and Benford 2000, 613). Thus, frames organize experiences and guides action (Benford et al. 1986). This borders on the concept of *cognitive praxis* (Eyerman and Jamison 1991), through which social movements are seen as expressions of underlying societal tensions. Through their cognitive praxis, social movements both analyze and aim to resolve the tensions of a specific society. This often takes the form of *protest* as a way to highlight specific social tensions in conflictual forms.

For the purpose of this article, we define social movements as informal networks based on shared beliefs and solidarity, which mobilize about conflictual issues, through the frequent use of various forms of protest based on a seminal text by della Porta and Diani (2007, 16–17). The activities constituting the movement are often staged through more formal organizations as well as partly organized groups, which often make up nodes and actors within these - sometimes loose - networks. Thus, social movement research commonly studies not only contentious activities such as demonstrations or riots, but also the people, groups and organizations taking part in and shaping these activities (Melucci 1996, Graeber 2009 to mention some examples). In this regard, the Black Protests fulfill all the points of the definition and therefore should be regarded as a campaign of a social movement. However, our interviewees represent a specific cluster of the activists due to their place of residence and action.

For many of the activists, Black Monday was the first protest they participated in, and has shaped their future activism. In social movement literature, this is often dubbed a "transformative event". Transformative events are, in this theoretical framework, not only the emergence of an "innovative contentious action" (McAdam 2003, 293), but also connected to a "collective interpretation" that reads "new understandings" of changing structures through experiments in collective action (McAdam and Sewell Jr. 2001, 119–120; Sewell Jr. 2005, 244–248). The meaning of such events can over time become "relatively fixed" and act as a reference in both the staging and interpretation of similar protest events in the future, thus becoming part of a relatively stable repertoire of contention (Sewell Jr. 2005, 243). Sewell is concerned with pivotal historical moments, like the birth of a modern concept of revolution after the taking of the Bastille. Andrés Brink Pinto and Johan Pries (2017) have expanded this concept, applying it to the history of the antifascist movement in Scandinavia, and referring to the movement's memory and broadly understood political culture. We find the concept of transformative events can be analytically useful at a micro level, shaping activists' future choice of types of groups, used repertoires, and political sympathies. Apart from a few of the interviewees over 60that were active in the 1980s in the Solidarność movement (but later stopped being involved in any forms of political activism), Black Monday was the first time they went out to the streets and joined a protest.

All forms of social movement activities need to be understood in relation to the social context in which they take place, and in relation to the structural or institutional openings or closures – the *political opportunity structures* – that movements confront. The relative openness, or lack of openness, in different polities can elucidate what facilitates or constrains the emergence, expansion, composition, and possible success of social movements and collective action in general (c.f. McAdam 1996; Tarrow 1998). This can be analyzed through highlighting factors such as the closure/openness of the institutionalized system, the stability of elite alignment within the polity, the presence of elite allies and the state's capacity and propensity for repression (McAdam 1996, 27), but also more cultural structural factors (Gamson & Meyer 1996).

Since the late 1990s, more academic attention has been given to the cultural context in which movements operate. This has, for instance, resulted in the emergence of the concept of discursive opportunity structures (Koopmans and Statham 1999), which emphasize that the ideas that the broader political culture deems to be "sensible", "realistic", or "legitimate" significantly affect whether movements can get support for their "collective action framing" (Ibidem). In summary, "discursive opportunity structures reveal that cultural elements in the broader environment facilitate and constrain successful social movement framing" (McCammon 2013). When it comes to self-positioning within the political spectrum, discursive opportunities seem to have a pivotal role in the process and remain the core structural challenge

for social movements' ideological self-positioning. This seems to be a particularly important issue for social movements operating in a discursive field that is hostile to the movements (i.e. ideologically). In this case, the discursive opportunities for the movement are closed and activists face serious challenges in order to get their messages through. The activists try to strategically and tactically overcome these structural challenges, mostly by trying to impose their framing of the diagnosis of the problem and offering solutions in line with their own framing.

Using the concept of *frames*, we conceive of movement actors as "signifying agents, actively engaged in the production and maintenance of meaning for constituents, antagonists, and bystanders or observers" (Snow and Benford 2000, 613). Thus, frames organize experiences and guide actions (Benford et al. 1986). Many scholars examine carefully the processes of framing and the frames used by a movement. What we see as a novelty and an approach worth pursuing is to view culture as a set of practices, and focus on its performative aspects, which seems to be valid in collective action studies. The advantage of the anthropological approach is the empowerment of the subjects of the research that allows them the possibility to speak about themselves, instead of a constructivist approach that generates categories from the outside. In particular, we are looking at the *frame alignment* process, in which activists try to discursively link their claims with the so-called master frames that exist within a society and mainstream discourse.

Finally, some of the structural challenges are not connected to the discursive, political, cultural or economic opportunities but also stem from the nature of small towns. This purely structural (in the Marxist understanding of the term) challenge is connected to the limited number of spaces in which activists of small towns can exercise their political involvement. In social movement literature, this was conceptualized by Francesca Polletta who put an emphasis on the importance of space and spatiality and distinguished between three main areas according to their relationship with the social movements. These are: *Transmovement spaces*, which may be organizations or networks of activists that play a role in the scene, providing training for traffic, or offering their resources; *Indigenous Spaces* are spaces and places that already exist, but they are not initially involved in political activities, be it bars where activists, local groups and organizations hang out, and where they make room for lectures and meetings with people invited by the movement, as well as addressed to wider audiences; and *Prefigurative spaces* are deliberately created by the movement to express opposition to the surrounding world. This category includes, for example, squats or illegally occupied empty buildings used by activists as the centre of their activities (Polletta 1999, 9–10). Connected to this is the small scale of the so-called "scene". It describes a place where people meet, listen to music, meet other people who are not a politicized part of the movement – for example, artists sympathetic to social movements (Piotrowski 2017, 69). The distinction in terms between belonging to a scene or a

movement is problematic to define. As Leach and Haunss write: "the transition between core members and those less integrally involved is fluid, as is the transition between members and non-members. Neither the boundaries of a scene nor its membership criteria can be determined from the outside" (Leach and Haunss 2009, 259).

## Methods

Empirically, our paper relies on 24 in-depth interviews conducted between July 11th and August 21st 2018 with activists that organized demonstrations and other events during the Black Protest in 2016. Organizing and staging a protest was a key characteristic as we were looking not only for people that were active in October 2016, but were also active long after (this is especially critical considering that for almost all of them, Black Monday was an entry point into political and social activism or an event that triggered their decision to return to activism). At times, in the case of "action research" and "militant ethnography" (for elaboration on these concepts, see Juris 2008), as the border between the researcher and the objects of the research becomes blurred, the deeper the understanding of the processes that take place within a social movement along with access to crucial information and data. In the case of this project, two points need to be mentioned. Firstly, one of the authors was involved in the movement and had an opportunity to meet some of the interviewees in person and learn from their experience firsthand. Secondly, it is also worth noting that the author conducting the interviews is a woman, which should reduce the bias in the interviews coming from prejudices generated by gender bias (this is a topic of academic methodological discussion since the late 1960s, see Colombotos et. al. 1968, Schaeffer et. al. 2010)

The interviewees were recruited through networks of feminist activists, during meetings and workshops organized for and by women's networks, and occasionally a snowballing technique was introduced. Due to the grassroots nature of this research project and the complete lack of funding associated with it, the research was conducted after working hours: the majority of the interviews were conducted over the phone and 5 of the interviews were conducted in person (in a total of 14 cities: Słupsk, Elbląg, Sochaczew, Węgorzewo, Gryfin, Puławy, Siemiatycze, Sanok, Czarnków, Gorzów Wielkopolski, Piła, Złotów, Sławno, Szczecinek).

To our surprise, at some point the information about this research started spreading among social networks and social media and some of the interviewees contacted us and offered their help. The women interviewed were all active and living in cities either below 50,000 inhabitants, or some bigger ones (such as Elbląg, Słupsk) for which the respondents pointed to their provincial character. Moreover, these cities were rather distanced from major towns (over 500,000 inhabitants, usually provincial capitals). Age-wise, the interviewed women ranged

from their late 20s to their late 60s. We offered anonymity to the respondents and they rejected it, although some of them mentioned living in fear because of being threatened or even physically attacked by far right-wingers or having their phones tapped by the police. Such incidents, mentioned in numerous interviews conducted, clearly show the closure of the Political Opportunity Structures available to the activists studied.

The interviews lasted between 40 minutes and over two hours and occasionally became very emotional. During the semi-structured biographical interviews, two clusters of questions were asked: one to recreate the small-town environment in which the activists functioned, and the second about how this experienced shaped their post-2016 activism. In the first cluster, we particularly asked about the interviewees' family and political backgrounds (that allowed us to implement a class analysis into the article) and asked about the features of the environment in which they were active, how the protests were received and changed the small-town environments. We also asked about the broadly understood movement's dynamics; ties and cooperation with activists from large towns; help or lack thereof and what support have the small town activists been able to count on? For the purpose of this article, we have chosen the top three most frequently recurring topics (each divided into 2-3 more precise categories) and focused on the responses that characterized the environment of small towns. This comes from the inductive research model we adapted because despite personal connections to some activists by one of the authors, the area of study – small-town and provincial activism in Poland – was unknown to us. In addition, the interview guide (see Appendix A) was not only generally constructed but also treated as an indicator of directions of the interviews rather than a survey-style question sheet.

Most of the respondents had a university degree; in terms of economic status, the situation was more complex, with some of the interviewees running their own businesses or working in the service sector, often in companies independent from local authorities. As the respondents pointed out, it was the "older" feminist activists who were employed within the NGO sector that is often tied (through financing of projects) with local authorities, causing self-censorship and deradicalization of claims and repertoires. Summarizing all the features, the interviewed activists belonged to the middle or lower-middle class, a picture that is similar to other studies of Polish social movements. However, the impact of the socio-cultural context of a Polish province might change the expression of belonging to the middle class when compared to other contexts of residence. For most of the activists, the organizing events were the first time they went out to the streets. As one of the interviewees described it, prior to 2016 she was "a couch feminist", not engaging herself in any public and political activities, although having a rather "strong, feminist worldview". As all of the interviewees continued to be active (mostly in their own communities, although some of them were also active outside of their small-town environment), Black Monday can be regarded as a "transformative event" in their

biographies. And judging by the impact on social activism in Poland (in small, provincial towns), this category can be applied to micro as well as to mezzo levels of activism. However, the impact of the 2016 protests on the entire sector of the women's and feminist movements requires more time in order to be assessed properly.

## The structural context of social activism in Poland

Previous analysis of social movements and civil society, in particular during the 1990s, has presented Central and Eastern European societies (Polish included) as demobilized, passive, and depoliticized. For some of the scholars (such as Howard 2003, Grzymski 2017 for an overview), low levels of political and social engagement were a direct result of the experience of living under the communist regime. From this perspective, the people of Central and Eastern Europe were forced to join associations and groups under communist times, and, as a reaction, they have moved towards family and friendship networks that allowed them to overcome the difficulties of living in communist countries. Later conceptualizations tried to modify the "weak civil society" narrative by introducing the concept of "transactional activism" (Tarrow and Petrova 2007), according to which groups of activists and organizations focus not on massive membership, but on inter-organizational exchanges of know-how, resources, and expertise (constituting the "transactions"). The more organized and institutionalized sector became "institutionalized" and "NGO-ized" (Jacobsson 2015) and thus detached from both grassroots activities and the rest of the political society. However, an increasing amount of literature is challenging these assumptions, pointing to rich and dense activist networks and campaigns, often in previously overseen areas, such as family-related activism (Korolczuk and Hryciuk 2016), urban activism (Polanska and Piotrowski 2015, 2016; Domaradzka and Wijkstrom 2016; Pluciński 2012), and right-wing activism (Płatek and Płucienniczak 2017). To some extent, this is a result of Western-centered social movement theories (a trend criticized by Gagyi 2013) and the use of categories and analytical tools developed while studying Western European and North American social movements and Western-generated concepts of politics, civil society, and democracy. Also, the growing political polarization of the Polish society expressed in deepening cleavages clearly visible after the 2015 presidential and parliamentary elections have resulted in a vast increase of street activities of grassroots actors.

## Analysis

The above-mentioned issues are combined with other (limited) resources available for small-town activists (mostly economic, but also cultural) and *opportunity structures* that are often closed for the activists, which results from a traditional perception of gender roles, acceptable forms

of political involvement. These constrictions stem from two different roots: on the one hand, there are limitations that are connected to the political reality of the activists' work; on the other hand, there is the availability (or lack thereof) of social infrastructure. Small towns are lacking the usual social infrastructure that shapes social activism: universities, social centres, squats, cafes and the like. In this sense, one can speak about the opportunity infrastructures that are available (or not) for the movement.

## 1. General characteristics of small-town activism

One of the first things we asked the respondents was to characterize the social, political, and cultural environment they are active in. Without additional suggestions, nearly all of them pointed out the "provincial characteristics of their towns", mentioning their size in the first place, but also noting the changing and changed demographics, mostly the aging of the local community:

> Because if there are 28,000 people [in the city], mostly retirees, […] those young people who are still here are those who finish school, […] most of them go abroad anyway (interview 2 )

Another respondent characterized her city in the following manner:

> A sad city. Unfortunately, poorly managed, dug up, everywhere [it] is difficult to reach, people are frustrated. I find myself frustrated when I think about our city. Generally, this is a city of older people, although as I said, we have older people who always come, always, are at all manifestations, but there are a few of them (interview 7).

Others pointed to the lack of the cities' infrastructure that could be used by the activists: spaces available for the movement (as presented in the typology by Polletta mentioned above), and also the smaller variety of potential targets (recipients) of their protests:

> If you are in a large city, where there is a large academic and cultural center, then it draws people to other people […] and here they grow old and the city becomes depopulated. This is a city of pensioners (interview 14).

The above quote can be linked directly to categorizations of spaces that are available for social movement activists (see Polletta 1999). The lack of such spaces is a structural challenge that cannot, however, be overcome by the framing efforts of the activists, but definitely reduces the number of resources available to the activists.

Respondents that lived in villages (but close to provincial towns) had even bigger obstacles to overcome, as one respondent characterized: "A village is a community where you do not crap in your own nest, you cannot be different. If you're different, then you're gonna crap in your own nest." (interview 3)

Quite often the respondents juxtaposed the reality of their activism with examples of their colleagues from big cities, showing their marginality versus the big city activists (in relation to the size of the movement) at times being on the verge of becoming exotic species: "I mean, people in bigger cities are probably more civically-engaged citizens, in small towns people show very poor social awareness levels." (interview 6) This is surprisingly close to the situation of blaming the local communities for the reality they are stuck with, worryingly close to the infamous "civilizational competences" that were supposed to describe people living in bankrupt state-owned farms. In this case, the lack of "civilizational competences" was supposed to be the explanation for worsening living conditions (Buchowski 2018 for an overview). On the other hand, some of our respondents were worn out by their activism and the challenges they had to face every day, so such remarks might have been the result of them simply being tired. However, the lack of a group of fellow activists was a frequently recurring theme within the interviews:

> Because it's completely different than in a large city, where you have a group, you act bravely, you're not alone. And here, you're on your own and people, who are coming for a moment, in this act of bravery, later run away from fear or are afraid of disrupting their comfort zone. (interview 10)

In a slightly similar vein, some of the respondents linked the situation in their provincial towns with general developments within Polish politics and the said growing apathy among the society:

> In small towns, it is also a matter of shame, parochialism, lack of knowledge, interest. […] People are afraid of going out on the streets because they are afraid of the consequences of living in a small town, that the neighbours will point their fingers, that the boss at work will get angry and there will be consequences. There is also a lack of knowledge of the residents of our neighbourhood regarding what is happening in Poland, because 500+[3] has so blurred the clear idea of what is happening that they are not interested in it, do not take into account that democracy is being destroyed in the country (interview 8).

[3] A welfare program supporting the second and each subsequent child within the family with 500 zloty, introduced by the Law and Justice party and since then broadly commented on by politicians as well as citizens.

## 2. Close connections to local authorities and their impact on everyday life

One of the characteristics of small towns is the dense network of interconnections between people. This applies not only to the family or friendship networks, but the connections are often extrapolated to business relations. In this understanding, being an activist poses a threat when the boss is connected to the opposing political camp. This not only affects the relations with the boss, but also the functioning of entire companies, as one of the activists recalled:

> Once I was walking and a woman was sitting on a bench, a stranger, she got up and said that she works at Zakłady Azotowe and now there is fear to say anything in an anti-governmental tone, and that there is even bigger fear to come with these type of protests. She said that they cheer for me, they observe what I'm doing but they are afraid to even give a like to a post on Facebook (interview 20).

In many provincial towns, the opportunities for employment are limited and often managerial positions are political prey, as it was described by one of the interviewees:

> This is Podkarpacie, it's almost Bieszczady[4]. There are two large factories, there is the City Hall, MOPs [local social benefit and support agency] and tax office. It's all part of the budget sphere. Somehow they are dependent on the Mayor, and he is from PiS [Law and Justice party], so it is known that he has a broad range of possibilities. It may slow people down, because it has happened so many times before, that he dismissed people who did not fit into his worldview, they had a different opinion to his, or they opposed him. And people know that he can do that. And people think like this: "I have a home, I have a job, why should I stick my neck out?" (interview 12).

The above-described situation is even worse when it comes to employment in the public sector, a situation often characterized by our respondents, as one of them explained:

> The biggest problem in [name of town] is that there are even some people who want to be active, they say that they want to act, but when it comes to specific actions everyone withdraws because of fear. […] This is a small town and if the teacher is not liked, gets fired. The lady who is a pedagogue and a school teacher told me that the Religious Education teachers are spying on them, they inform the priest, the priest goes to the mayor and tells him that this and that teacher has problems with politically incorrect thinking and that he or she must be fired (interview 6).

[4] Both south-east regions of Poland with higher unemployment rates and lower wages than in other parts of the country.

The close connections between residents also affect private businesses who fear losing their clients over their political self-declaration. With a limited clientele, the business owners in small towns are not likely to be picky and the fear of losing customers is a potential deal breaker for them, as one of the respondents shared in her story:

> One of the co-organizers of the first protest was a colleague who has a printing house and printed banners. During the first protest, she was very much involved; in the second, she did not get involved anymore because she lost her clients. Customers came to her and said they were withdrawing their orders because she was organizing a protest. I told her that she would gain other clients but she could not be persuaded. This fear is real (interview 11).

From the aforementioned quotes, it seems that this is the case of a different configuration of political opportunities available for small-town activists. Also, in small towns Political Opportunity Structures should be analyzed more on a relational level rather than on a formal one (as it is mostly done in the literature), because of the small scale of the whole environment and due to a smaller number of people involved, networks between those people are more dense than in big cities.

## 3. Lack of anonymity

The small scale of the environment brings us to another of the characteristics of small-town activism, which is a lack of anonymity. Apart from the issues described before, occasionally this becomes a burden for the activists for other reasons:

> We bear a lot of responsibility for activities in such small communities. A huge social responsibility, because you cannot go out and tell lies, because people know you and you must have a clear and consistent message: we do this and that. We must be credible. […] In such small communities, unfortunately, you cannot hide a romance; similarly you cannot hide mishaps, so you must be reliable and consistent (interview 14).

The lack of anonymity pushes people away, especially those who have exposed public functions; in smaller towns and in provincial Poland, public image is worth a lot, much more than in big towns and affects more cohorts of people than in big towns, as one respondent described:

> Everyone is afraid for their image. This is not Warsaw, everyone knows each other here. There was a protest, the judges and lawyers came out with us, but they went out quietly

> so that no one would see, nowhere was it documented either in the picture or in the film (interview 5).

## 4. The Catholic church

As mentioned earlier, the Catholic church in Poland plays an important role in the country's life. Its role was very often stressed by the interviewees as one of the key challenges they had to face in their activism. In Poland, approximately 94% of the population is baptized and – according to a recent study by the Catholic Statistical Office – 38% attends Sunday service weekly [8]. In the context of small towns, the role of the church is even greater, reflecting the figure of a triumvirate of local authority, the priest and the local wealthy person popularized in Polish culture and literature by the text *Krótka rozmowa między panem, wójtem a plebanem* (Rej 1543). Being written as a political satire in the mid-16th century, this figure is surprisingly actual today.

The activists point to the close connections between the throne and the altar, as one – almost anecdotal – experience shared by one of the respondents:

> Here lives one PiS MP. Someone was threatening him so the police had to find him and they did not know where he was, even his parents did not know where he was. One of the policemen called the priest and he knew where he was. This connection between the throne and the altar is in [name of town] typical (interview 20).

Priests often attack the feminist activists, as their proclaimed political and ideological enemies. Although most of our respondents had cut their ties to the Catholic church, many of them were and are aware of what is being said during Masses about them. Some of the activists are personally insulted (with their names mentioned) by the priests. Due to the greater authority and influence of the Church on the daily life of residents in small towns, such a stigma has a much higher impact and power of punishment than in big cities, as one of the respondents reported:

> When Black Monday was celebrated, there was a Mass held for us. […] I have a video recorded, where one can hear that these girls that go out onto the street are Hitler's daughters, Satan's friends. […] After all these epithets in our direction, the spiritual adoption of unborn children took place […] And after this meeting comes my daughter and says: "Mom, have you heard? They were talking about you" (interview 3).

The influence of the Church is exercised not only through the clergy, but is also proxied through hardcore believers. One of our respondents has shared a rather traumatic story that happened to her in her small town:

> Elderly ladies, with rosaries, praying on the bus once said "this black rag, widow, divorcee, who celebrates the devil, wants to kill children" Something of this sort. I stood next to them, and those older ladies… you would not think that they can say something like that (interview 15).

Finally, our respondents pointed to another role of the Church in small communities that locates it – literally – in the centre of the communities, as one of our respondents noted:

> The Church is important for another reason - usually a church stands in the centre of small towns, in the central square, where of course demonstrations are also held (interview 3).

This defines what in social geography is called "geographies of resistance" (see for instance Keith and Pile 2013 for an overview), which also poses a challenge to the activists, in particular in the rather conservative setting of provincial Poland described in the points above.

## 5. Traditional and conservative gender roles

The final challenge that was enumerated by the respondents were the traditional gender roles stemming from the conservative setting of Polish provinces. One of the respondents was astonished by the inhabitants of the town, because:

> Women in Podlasie, it's a strange topic. I could not get used to it for a few years, because I lived here for several years and for the first few years I had a problem, because even when I was walking with a man he must walk a few steps in front of me. And it continues until now, but I say [to my partner] that either we go together or I do not go at all. However, at the beginning it was so that sometimes we even ran up, because he tried to be 2 meters ahead of me (interview 17).

In a reportage by Ryszarda Socha (2017) on small-town activism, one of the activists from Siemiatycze (15,000 inhabitants) has said that "women from small towns are not yet used to having their own opinion, different to the one of their husbands or fathers".

Within the prevailing conservative gender roles, being involved in politics (street politics included) is not an occupation for women. This was a recurring theme in the interviews, for example:

> A good woman should take care of her home more, not about politics. For example, a friend told me: "Leave the politics to men". Or another example: "I respect you very

> much, but leave the politics to the guys. Why are you pushing yourself into politics?" (interview 6).

Women's and feminist activism openly challenges these gender roles. For many of our respondents, this prompts a feeling of being threatened among the men, whose gender roles are being questioned and challenged. This is why they often react in a harsher manner than expected, as one of the interviewees analysed it:

*The men may have reacted worse. In general, I have the impression that as if these "real" men feel that their masculinity, strength, and their importance are being taken away, that they are always in a fight. And suddenly women take matters into their own hands and do something, do not wait for them (interview 3).*

## 6. Ways of approaching audiences in small towns

One of the key challenges of small-town activism described by our respondents was the lack of resources, not only material but also lack of help from other activists, which connects this issue to a cluster of theories generated by social movement scholars under the common theme of resource mobilization theories. This also means that the activists need to use different methods of approaching target audiences in small towns, as most of the local media is connected to local authorities (sometimes characterized as the local "chief man" [*kacyk*]), as one of the activists said: "The city pays the local newspaper, so this local newspaper is faithful to the local government. Of course, they came to the end of the protest as there were only 5 people left, they took pictures and wrote that no one was there" (interview 12). The limitation of this resource generates an obstacle for the activists who need to rely on other resources (in this case, means of communication) than activists from big cities who have an easier access to media outlets.

Moreover, many of the potential addressees of the activists' claims belong to an older generation and use social media less but are more responsive to more conventional tools of communication. As one of our respondents characterized:

> Here if you do not go on a bike and do not hang up posters, if you do not try to break through the media wall, nobody will come because nobody knows. We are aware of the fact that older people do not sit on the Internet, so you need to share leaflets, you have to give them something on a piece of paper, hang a poster somewhere and go to the market, so there you need to inform these people (interview 9).

Other resources that are challenging small-town activists include **limited audiences**, smaller capabilities for recruiting newcomers, and smaller scale of the movement, as one of the activists described:

> When I organize a protest in [name of town] I don't know if anybody will come. Last time in front of the court [a wave of protests against judicial system reform and politicization of courts in 2017], I was there alone, because nobody showed up (interview 12).

In this case, the numerous issues mentioned above intersect with each other, combining a limited access to resources with structural obstacles that come from more structural formations of power and ownership in small towns, as well as to the aforementioned lack of anonymity. As another activist described:

> Because it's a small town of 40,000, everyone knows everyone and if someone comes, it will be noticed, because we have two internet portals and one newspaper. They will describe it, they will pay attention to who was there, there will be no way to hide. I once asked another friend, if they would go, but they work in the City Hall. She said that not really, because the city is ruled by PiS, so they think that they know how it will be received (interview 7).

The quote above points out the fear factor among citizens of small towns. The fear is connected to a lack of anonymity and the potential repercussions for the activists. Another common emotion that accompanies small-town activists is shame, often connected to fear of social reactions to the activism:

> It seems to me that the biggest problem of small towns is that people are simply afraid and ashamed to go out on the street and say their own opinion. They are ashamed of the neighbours' reactions, the family, because there are many families who have mixed up views (interview 15).

However, the small scale of the field in which the activists operate sometimes works in their favour (as in the case of informing the potential audience), as, on the one hand, it is easier for the activists to build their own social capital; and on the other, they can make use of the social position of their families within their societies. In this case, the structural opportunities of small and provincial towns work two ways: as a challenge, but also as an opening. As one activist from northern Poland has described:

> It seems to me that such an important thing and the thing that made it easier for me to operate in a small environment is that my father in 1946 opened the first photographic studio in my town. It was something unbelievable and his shop works to this day. He had a car as one of the first people in town and each of us - four sisters - we are known in [name of town], although we do not necessarily know everyone. It also changes the

> attitude of people, because even if I do not know someone, the fact that I'm the daughter of this photographer gives me a green light for action (interview 3).

The small scale and lack of anonymity makes the activists in question not only known to the local public, but also often admired by this public for having skills that are valued by the local society, as one of the respondents characterized:

> The only [thing that] gals have to realize [is] that from this moment [on] they are not anonymous and certainly someone will point them out with their finger. But on the other hand, a lot of people will also admire them. It happened to me that I went to the city, and a lady accosted me, whom I completely did not knew before and said: "Mrs. [name of respondent], when will another protest be?" and hugged me. But on the other hand, you also have this dark side of power that someone will point your finger at you. And from this gals should realize that anonymity ceases to exist (interview 21).

However, this admiration is often kept secret and words of admiration are not publicized:

> And that's how I go somewhere, I hear the shout "Bravo Mrs. [name of activist]", I ask for what and they answered that for this protest in Warsaw. They are watching, from time to time they will give some feedback, but it is not that the number of incoming people will increase (interview 21).

This suggests that there is a unique nature to social networks in smaller towns that are much more embedded in kin and other types of relations, following the concepts of Marc Howard (2003), who pointed out that this is a legacy of communism – that kin and personal networks are much more prevalent than for example formal membership in organizations. This also supports our claim that opportunity structures (especially political) in small towns should be analysed on a relational, rather than a formal level.

Another interviewee pointed to a similar understanding of her role by the local community:

> Activists from small towns are perceived in the local community as sinners but not only. On principle, if there is a problem, this person [the activist] will certainly know, or tell where to find a solution, what to do. It's easier to reach people here. In the beginning, we distributed leaflets, so these were face-to-face contacts. If we protest, if we do announce it, then it is known that this protest will not disappear like in Warsaw, that there is a protest somewhere again and we do not know where, one of many protests on this day. Besides, I know people here. It also helps in a way, because as a resident, I know the specificity of this town (interview 3).

This observation is also noticed by others dealing with the topic, as Ryszarda Socha (2017) writes:

> Recognition after breaking down barriers that block activity is often an asset. Katarzyna Kotula sees how it works in Gryfino: - We are 550 km from Warsaw, it cannot be any further. Women from here, who watch protests in Warsaw on television, think that it is not their business, it's something for feminists, women who have money and drink coffee at Starbucks for PLN 15 each. If they see a protest in their city, they identify it with specific people. Earlier, they did not think about women's rights. And now they are starting to wonder.

This creates an interesting issue of the influence of the perception of feminism and activism that is proxied by mass media and later confronted with one's own experiences of involvement and engagement. In the case of our respondents, this created situations in which they developed a feeling of belonging to a broader social movement.

## 7. Language used in small-town activism

As we mentioned, small towns require a different language when advertising their protests. These recurring themes came out of our interview scheme. which included questions about the language used during protests in small towns. As one of our respondents told us, this is not only the language used during protests but also the type of public events held:

> In [name of town], these protests all have to take place more as a happening, an informative action and it must be distanced, more chilled out. […] I come from the position that it is a small community and you cannot go out with a large calibre, with such topics, because it is mainly a place for elderly people […] If I would go out to the streets with radical banners, then we would be just kicked out, smothered. Last year's protest on March 8, it was not hardcore, was simply a protest of disagreement with what the government is preparing for us, and the girls were very penitent, because there was a wave of hate, and that's not the point. Therefore, all actions have to be carried out more happening-like, thematically, in terms of information and education. In small towns, it causes anger, shame too, discouragement (interview 13).

Compared to their counterparts from the big cities, the small town activists had the impression they had to de-radicalize their claims and their discourse in order to reach their local audiences and make their claims visible, as one of the respondents described:

> I am aware that what is mediocre for me is difficult to accept in the local environment. I observed this with girls who are from here: they were born here, they grew up here,

> they live here and they are women between 30 and 60 years old, so a significant cross-section and, in most cases, they also avoid extreme wording, statements from the space of loud voices. This is certainly the specificity of smaller towns, that we do not allow direct criticism expressed so sharply, because we know that more people are disgusted than we find allies (interview 13).

This can be interpreted as an example of a frame alignment process and can be perceived as a source of the campaign's success. By framing it as a struggle for defending human dignity and rights rather than as an ideological struggle, numerous people decided to join the protests and many of them later stayed within the movement.

Another respondent added that such a strategy not only allows the small-town feminist activists to reach local communities, but also differentiates them from their opponents, who are often radical, vulgar and aggressive:

> We do not want to offend anyone. We say what we think about it, we list all the MPs who voted against us, but we do not do such drastic things as those who stand against us. [During] Black Monday, we faced a pro-life group in front of us and they were aggressive, not us. […] In a small town, you have to ease the language a bit to get to the residents, too sharp discourse will discourage them (interview 5).

It seems that the "polite" way of doing activism is one of the characteristics of small-town activism, a tactical effort to overcome a closed discursive opportunity structure. One of the respondents, when asked what she would advise other activists that would try to take up activism in provincial towns, offered:

> I would advise you not to use vulgarisms, not to radicalize speeches in such small towns, because there are friends everywhere: these are people who later meet in a bank, at school, on a bus. Not to overdo it. People, however, prefer such gentle, cultural behaviour (interview 6).

## Discussion

According to the journalist-research report Small City Lights (Światła Małego Miasta[4]), a smaller city is a more hermetic environment with less understanding for otherness, but with a stronger sense of locality, greater attachment to traditional values, and greater social control (even if there is a cutthroat in the society, he is under the control of residents). The control is exercised in direct contacts, on the streets, through, for example, gossiping. In the cited report, the strong position of the Church is also stressed, as are its relationships with local government on various levels, which supports our argument that political opportunity structures in small

towns should be analysed on a relational, rather than a formal level. As far as political aspects are concerned, the attitude that "this does not concern us" prevails. This confirms our observations when it comes to the characteristics of small-town environments that were described by our respondents, who pointed to the facts of social apathy and depoliticized society.

Regarding political activism, the environment of small and provincial towns overlaps with some more general trends observed in Poland. In a poll from March 2017, 58% of respondents of a CBOS study declared that they feel they should exercise self-censorship and do not feel free to express their political views [9]. This is a major change considering that after the regime transformation of 1989, only 33% of the population shared this attitude. This forms an obstacle for political activism in the streets because not only does it become a challenge for the activists, but also for potential supporters. However, as Cezary Obracht-Prondyński says (after Socha 2017): *In Warsaw, a dozen or so people no one will notice, but here it's potential, on which you can build something […] Because people get to know each other, they experience something together. Later it is easier because they know that they can count on each other.*

From this observation, there is only one step to the situation we observed in the vast majority of cases studied. As mentioned in the beginning of the article, we looked at activists who continued their engagement after 2016. Many of them became involved in local campaigns and politics, posing a serious challenge to the existing power structures that stem from the conservative environment and context. Feminist activism is only a fraction of the activities of the interviewed women: some of them are running in the 2018 local elections for mayors or to the city councils, they are getting involved in local issues (i.e. environmental), and take part in nationwide campaigns, such as struggles to improve the position of people with disabilities. All this shows that the women activists from small towns should be regarded more and more as political actors on local scenes.

Broadly speaking, Polish women's activism is challenged by closed discursive opportunity structures that are a result of the dominance of conservative discourse spread by the mainstream media. The label "feminist activist" is seen more as a challenge rather than a neutral, descriptive label. In a 2018 study for one Polish women's magazine, only 5.5% of the respondents characterized themselves as feminists and 18% admitted to knowing one. However, 9% support "all feminist claims", 21% support the majority and 42% some of feminist claims [5]. The authors of this report stress that in small and provincial towns there is even less self-identification as feminists and less support for their claims, which proves our assumption that small towns provide a different context for social activism. In the context of small towns, this is amplified by the social and cultural dynamics: the role of the Church, the entanglement of local authorities with employees and local media, and the conservative gender roles. These features force the women from small towns to change the language used in their

political activism to more moderate and occasionally make use of their social capital (stemming from their family histories or their education and skills) in order to push forward their claims.

## Conclusions

The focus of our paper was to determine the key factors of the socio-cultural environment that shapes small town and provincial activism of women's and feminist activists in Poland. As described in the sections above, small town activists face numerous external challenges to the emerging movement. These are, in particular: the hostile environment and closed discursive opportunity structures; a lack of political allies on local and national levels that support the claim of closed political opportunity structures; and the domination of the conservative discourse, strictly connected to the role of the Church, which is particularly visible in small towns. This constitutes closed cultural opportunity structures. These closed opportunity structures and limited resources available for the activists – both in terms of available audiences and other resources in the understanding of Resource Mobilization Theory, but also in terms of available infrastructure, differently conceptualized by social movement scholars – constitute the characteristics of small and provincial towns. The small size of the environment in which activists operate is the most visible pattern that comes out of our study. Apart from hindering the resources available to the activists, this situation changes the perception of available opportunity structures from formal to relational. Some of the factors, such as conservative gender roles or the role and influence of the Catholic church, which are observable throughout the whole country, are amplified in small towns. One characteristic of small town activism – the lack of anonymity of the activists – plays a twofold role. On the one hand, it creates an obstacle for activists, exposing them to social criticism and the like. On the other hand, it provides an opportunity for the activists that can draw on their and their families' social capital and use it for their activism. Besides the context and the environment of small towns, the activism also seems to be different as these external factors push activists to other repertoires of action, with specific ways of communicating with the public and language used during protests and campaigns.

This article is one of the first steps to fill in a gap in social movement literature, which usually focuses on big cities and only occasionally deals with rural activism. That, however, lacks one important feature of small towns, which is the existence of a modern *agora* with a public connected to it. Due to a lack of space here, some of the issues that emerged during our study will be elaborated elsewhere. The majority of them are of a relational nature, where small-town activism is juxtaposed against activism in big cities. Small towns are usually neglected – many of them are rather distant from big cities, which makes attending demonstrations or meetings held there too time- and resource-consuming, but so are the activists. This is mostly

a result of class divisions between "old" and "new" feminists, connected to the professionalization and NGO-ization of the feminist movement (and the broader civil society) in Poland and, in particular, in big cities. This is the direction in which studying small town activism should be going, thus offering directions for future research.

[1] http://strajkkobiet.eu/co-robimy/ [07.11.2018]
[2] *Kto nie lubi „dobrej zmiany"?*. Komunikat z badań CBOS, nr 115/2017, CBOS, Warszawa 2017
[3] http://ciekaweliczby.pl/21-polakow/
[4] https://www.swiatlamalegomiasta.pl/[20/09/2018]
[5] http://www.wysokieobcasy.pl/wysokie-obcasy/7,163229,23952656,tylko-5-proc-polek-uwaza-sie-za-feministki-choc-postulaty.html?disableRedirects=true#s=BoxWyboLink [20/09/2018]
[6] https://oko.press/zdecydowana-przewaga-zwolennikow-dopuszczenia-aborcji-na-zadanie-nad-przeciwnikami-sondaz/ [13.11.2018]
[7] https://oko.press/zdecydowana-przewaga-zwolennikow-dopuszczenia-aborcji-na-zadanie-nad-przeciwnikami-sondaz/ [13.11.2018]
[8] http://www.iskk.pl/badania/religijnosc/211-praktyki-niedzielne-polakow-dominicantes [27/11/2018]
[9] *Kto nie lubi „dobrej zmiany"?*. Komunikat z badań CBOS, nr 115/2017, CBOS, Warszawa 2017

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**TYTUŁ**: Rozbujać małe miasteczka: aktywistki Czarnych Protestów w Polsce

**ABSTRAKT**: Jak to jest być aktywistką w małym lub prowincjonalnym miasteczku? Czy wyzwania strukturalne, które stoją przed aktywistkami z małych miast, są jakie same jak ich odpowiedniki z dużych miast, które zwykle są studiowane i opisywane w literaturze naukowej? Jeśli środowisko jest inne, to czy małomiasteczkowi aktywiści i aktywistki podejmują inne praktyki, aby poradzić sobie z wyzwaniami wynikającymi z różnych kontekstów, w których

działają? W artykule staramy się odpowiedzieć na niektóre z tych pytań, przyglądając się organizatorkom Czarnych Protestów z 2016 roku i późniejszego okresu w prowincjonalnych miastach Polski. Protesty te, zorganizowane w celu przeciwstawienia się planowanym zmianom w już i tak represyjnej ustawie antyaborcyjnej, nie tylko zaskoczyły wszystkich swoją skalą i intensywnością, ale także zasięgiem, ponieważ większość protestów miała miejsce w małych i prowincjonalnych miastach w Polsce. Artykuł ten ma na celu wypełnienie luki w literaturze dotyczącej ruchów społecznych między analizą aktywizmu w dużych miastach (na których buduje się większość teorii) a aktywizmem na wsi.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** feminizm, aktywizm, małomiasteczkowy aktywizm, Polska

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# FEMINIST TRANSNATIONAL DIASPORA IN THE MAKING. THE CASE OF THE #BLACKPROTEST

GRETA GOBER, JUSTYNA STRUZIK

**Abstract**: This paper discusses the #BlackProtest mobilization among Polish migrant women living in four European cities. The #BlackProtest is the name of the most impressive women's rights protest in Poland's recent history. The main research question explored in this small study was what the act of solidarity, demonstrated in organizing the #BlackProtest internationally, meant for its organizers. The analysis of the reasons behind the transnational #BlackProtest organizing revealed that it is insufficient to talk about #BlackProtest mobilization only in terms of transnational activism. The theoretical framework of the study needed to be expanded from social movements to contemporary diasporas and the discussion demonstrated how through a process of identities, heterogeneity and boundaries' negotiations a feminist diaspora was formed. Social movements' theories, explaining the role of connective leadership, discursive opportunity structures and emotions in social mobilization helped to demonstrate how this media-driven mobilization initiated the emergence of a transnational, feminist diaspora.

**Keywords:** transnational diaspora, feminist mobilization, media-driven mobilization, #BlackProtest

The #BlackProtest is the name of the most impressive women's rights protest in Poland's recent history . The protest earned its name from its participants, who wore black clothes to symbolically refer to death and mourning for lost reproductive rights. The mobilization, in the form of a general national walkout, demonstrations, marches, petitions and pickets, was organized under the hashtag and name Czarny Protest (Black Protest) and lasted, it its most intensive form, for approximately six months, starting from 23 September 2016. On that day the majority government formed by the Law & Justice party approved a decision that made the possibility of a total ban on abortion rights in Poland very realistic. This attempt to introduce a total ban on abortion rights was spearheaded by an ultra-conservative NGO – Fundacja Pro-prawo do życia (Pro Foundation – the right to live) and their civil initiative called Stop Aborcji (Stop Abortion), supported by Institute Ordo Iuris , a very influential, conservative anti-choice legal think-thank that called for an absolute prohibition of abortion and for criminal liability for anyone who "causes the death of a conceived child". Under the human embryo protection rhetoric, the proposed legal solutions, if approved, threatened not only abortion rights, but also prenatal care, in-vitro fertilization procedures and even post-colloid contraception or the so-called "morning after" pill (Gober 2016a, 2016b). The government approved the Stop Abortion initiative for further proceedings by the Justice and Human Rights Committee while simultaneously rejected a counter civil-initiative Ratujmy Kobiety (Save the Women) , which was also brought to the Parliament and advocated for liberalization of the existing abortion law. The combination of these decisions started a women-led civic uprising that spread throughout the country and abroad and reached its peak on Monday, 3 October 2016. On October 6th, the Parliament voted to reject the Stop Abortion bill. That Monday became #Black Monday and was declared a victory by the movement but the mobilization did not end there. The #BlackMonday was followed by a #BlackFriday and many other initiatives, all organized in response to the Polish government's new plans and decisions regarding limiting or interfering with women's reproductive rights and health. Each mobilization in Poland was accompanied by solidarity mobilizations organized by mostly Polish migrant women across the world under the hashtag #SolidarityWithPolishWomen. For example, the #BlackMonday mobilized approximately 150 thousand people (Gober 2016 a, b), gathered around over 200 events in Poland (pickets, demonstrations, marches), and over 49 solidarity events organized mostly in Europe, but also in USA, Canada, Australia and even China.

Several articles and studies have already been published on the #BlackProtest (Korolczuk 2016a; 2016b; Kubisa 2016, Majewska 2016, Narkowicz 2016, Chmielewska, Druciarek and Przybysz 2017, Król and Pustułka 2018). Despite the fact that the transnational dimension of the mobilization was widely acknowledged in Poland, as it was seen as a sign of the movement's huge success (Korolczuk 2016b), the majority of the articles focused on national protests and mobilization within the country. Demonstrations organized by Poles living outside of the

country were overlooked. This study intends to fill this gap by focusing on the #BlackProtest's transnational dimension. The inspiration for exploring this particular aspect of the mobilization came from the authors' own experience of the #BlackProtest. Both authors had had the opportunity to observe and participate in the mobilization in different localities. One of us was situated in Poland and took part mostly in the protests organized in Cracow; the second engaged in and observed the movement from abroad in Oslo, Norway. This gave us a unique perspective on what was happening with respect to the feminist mobilization both in Poland and abroad, and inspired us to conduct a case study on how the #BlackProtest was defined, understood, performed and negotiated by Polish migrant women living in different European cities.

Our main research questions for this study thus focused on what this act of solidarity, demonstrated by organizing #BlackProtest internationally, meant for the organizers and what were the reasons behind their engagement? However, the analysis of the reasons behind transnational #BlackProtest organizing revealed that it was insufficient to talk about this mobilization only in terms of transnational activism. As the characteristics of a transnational feminist diaspora emerged from the interview data it became clear that the #BlackProtest mobilization should be understood as a case of transnational feminist diaspora in the making. We understand the diaspora not only in relation to ethnicity, or nationality, but as a heterogeneous cultural identity, that is constantly produced and reconstructed through a process of negotiations of intra-diasporic differences (Hall 1994, 235; Campt and Thomas 2008). The transnational dimension is primarily defined as social, cultural, economic, symbolic and personal ties that are maintained between a migrant community and their country of origin. This understanding makes the transnational #BlackProtest organizing an event triggering the emergence of a transnational feminist diaspora. The key contribution of the paper is thus to demonstrate how in practice a feminist diaspora comes into being in the context of social movement mobilization.

Structurally, the paper is divided into several parts. It starts with a short description of the transnational #BlackProtest's mobilizing structure. Next, we present the theoretical background of the study followed by a description of the data collection and the analysis process. The findings section presents the main reasons for Polish migrant women's engagement with #BlackProtest organizing. Lastly, we discuss how and why these findings testify to the emergence of a transitional feminist diaspora.

## Transnational #BlackProtest's mobilizing structures

In this section we want to outline and contextualize the mobilizing structures that we believe enabled the transnational organizing of the #BlackProtest. Apart from the already mentioned

civil-initiative Ratujmy Kobiety (Save the Women) that was established in response to Stop Aborcji (Stop abortion) and which provided the immediate impulse for the #BlackProtest mobilizing, three other aspects are important to consider in the study of the #BlackProtest's transnational mobilization: the discursive opportunity structure (Mosca 2014) that existed in Poland prior to the mobilization; the connective leadership that linked people and helped frame and curate the stream of information that was produced by the movement (Della Ratta and Valeriani 2014); and the emotions that guided the mobilization.

## Discursive opportunity structure

An important aspect of the transnational #BlackProtest's mobilizing structure was the discursive opportunity structure that existed in the 'mediated public sphere' in Poland (Mosca 2014) and was made available to the movement due to a sequence of events that proceeded the mobilization. The emergence of the #BlackProtest was preceded by a political shift that took place in Poland and that in 2015 led to a political crisis and the formation of a civic organization called Komitet Obrony Demokracji (KOD, the Committee for the Defense of Democracy). This crisis led to massive demonstrations organized by KOD across the country starting from December 2015, gathered at its highest peak approximately 50,000 demonstrators, and was highly covered by national and international media , . KOD was on one hand supported by the centre-right opposition parties (including Civic Platform (PO) that formed the previous government) and as such was supported by the liberal and commercial media. On the other hand, KOD opposed the actions led by the ruling majority government formed by the Law & Justice party and as such was in conflict with the public media (controlled by the government) (Gober 2018). The #BlackProtest could be interpreted as part of bloc recruitment (Diani 2013) since many of the KOD pro-democratic activists joined and even helped with the #BlackProtest mobilization.

This context is important to show that a discursive opportunity structure existed in Poland that helped the #BlackProtest secure an important place in the mediated public sphere. The mediated public sphere, as the indirect and mediated side of interaction between KOD and later the #BlackProtest, and the political elites are at least as important for the study of social movements as the physical and direct confrontations that happen in the streets. As Mosco argues by quoting Koopmans (2004, 368 in Mosco 2014, 224) that news media are "the most relevant part of the mutual observation and interaction between protesters and authorities" and "Authorities will not react to – and will often not even know about – protests that are not reported in the media, and if they are reported, they will not react to the protests as they 'really' were, but as they appeared in the media." The #BlackProtest was as such a case of media-driven mobilization and the international media played a signification role in its initial

success (Walgrave and Manssens 2000). However, the mobilization was not only facilitated by mainstream media but was enabled by social media and bottom-up women-led mobilization that energized Poles across the country and internationally.

## Connective leadership

The mass mobilization of the #BlackProtest was facilitated by social media networks Dziewuchy Dziewuchom (Gals to Gals). The Gals to Gals in Warsaw gathered over 90 thousand members just a few hours after it was initially formed (Korolczuk 2016a). Soon other Gals to Gals networks were formed, including internationally – Gals to Gals in London, Gals to Gals in Berlin. Other initiatives, including Ratujmy Kobiety (Save the Women) also played an important role in social media bottom-up mobilization of supporters. The already mentioned KOD initially also played such a role. However, the most important role was played by Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (All-Poland Women's Strike), an informal, non-partisan initiative of women, both non-affiliated and belonging to various women's organizations, which took on the role of connective leadership for the whole movement. Connective leadership is a crucial concept in the study of contemporary social movements (Della Ratta and Valeriani 2014). Its main function is to connect people and information and curate, pack and frame the information in a way that generates support for the mobilization both internally and externally. "Connecting people has a crucial meaning both inside the movement (where strong and weak ties coexist) and outside (where links are established with other activists of similar movements around the world, specifically 'diasporic' activists, 'slacktivists' and the mainstream media)" (Morris and Staggenborg 2004 quoted in Della Ratta and Valeriani 2014, 290). The All-Poland Women's Strike maintained and updated a website that framed the information about the movement and its activities and put it into context. As Della Ratta and Valeriani underline: "Giving the information a specific framework and putting it into context is a key factor in gaining national and international attention and credibility" (2014, 295). The All-Poland Women's Strike, in the persons of Marta Lempart and Natalia Pancewicz, also maintained a help desk, which coordinated and supported local activities and oversaw the movement's social media presence. Collective leadership emerged also at the regional level, in different smaller cities, where activists rooted in the communities became responsible for coordinating and mobilizing regional protests and demonstrations.

## Emotions

Last but not least, an important aspect when considering the mobilizing structure of the transnational part of the #BlackProtest was the emotionality of the mobilization in Poland.

Emotions can play a crucial role in social movements' dynamics (cf. Flam 2005); to quote James Jasper (1997, 127), "Emotions give ideas, ideologies and identities, and even interests their power to motivate". We will argue that emotional aspects of the mobilization in Poland were an important trigger that not only ignited the transnational organizing of the #BlackProtest but also played a crucial role in transforming identities of the migrants participating in the mobilization and had influenced their ways of engaging with the movement (cf. Collins 2001, Young 2005).

A diverse set of practices enabled the activists from Poland and migrants from across Europe to produce and sustain the #BlackProtest mobilization for approximately six months. These included building networks, creating tools to communicate in a transnational space, communicating with the mass media and with the general public. These practices have already been analyzed by scholars (Kubisa 2016, Korolczuk 2016b) and as such will not be the focus of this article. Nevertheless, their existence needs to be acknowledged as an important context for the study we will present here on the transnational aspect of the #BlackProtest mobilization.

## Theoretical perspective – feminist diaspora in the making

We began our study with a conceptual framework embedded in social movement theory, as could be seen in the previous part of the article on transnational #BlackProtest's mobilizing structures. This framework is useful when the #BlackProtest mobilization amongst Polish migrants is theorized as a solidarity gesture with women in Poland and when the opportunity structures for transnational mobilization are analyzed. To that end, we began our study with questions on why the #BlackProtest appeared abroad and what meanings the organizers assigned to it. However, collecting the narratives from the activists revealed that a different theoretical framework was needed to account for the process of a community formation, which was clearly happening in the context of the transnational #BlackProtest. In this section we want to elaborate on the theoretical foundations that helped us argue that the transnational part of the #BlackProtest mobilization testifies to the emergence of a transnational feminist diaspora.

Looking at how migrant women living in different European cities create transnational communities by demonstrating various linkages between their country of origin and the receiving societies, by negotiating their own feminist identities developed across borders, and by constantly reconstructing the boundaries of these communities, the concept of a diaspora became particularly useful. Definitions of a diaspora, on the one hand, have been often seen as

problematic and criticized for assuming that the formation of the diaspora is inevitable[1] once people have moved abroad (cf. Berns-McGown 2007/2008). The concepts have been also widely criticized for not addressing power relations and intersectional dimensions within ethnic and cultural communities (Campt and Thomas 2008, Sawyer 2008). On the other hand, since the 1990s diaspora and migration scholars, including feminist researchers, have argued that diasporic communities should be understood more broadly than only in relation to ethnicity or nationality. They propose seeing diasporas as imagined, cultural and identity collectives that go beyond ethnic and national aspects of the community. In such an understanding, belonging to a diaspora means recognizing and reflecting upon its own heterogeneity as well as negotiating its boundaries (Sökefeld 2006, Hall 1994). Ethnicity or nationality does not disappear from such a definition, but rather is perceived as entangled with other dimensions important for the formation of identities and communities, such as gender, class, religion, etc. (Paerregaard 2010). Furthermore, all these elements, crucial for the community formation, are expressed through various transnational practices, understood here as "[…] links that migrants establish to their country or region of origin, which allows them simultaneously to create new lives in the receiving society and maintain strong identity relations to the sending society" (Paerregaard 2010, 93). Importantly, the existence of the imagined feminist, transnational community does not require frequent transnational relations. Scholars have argued that the transnational dimension of the community is often symbolic and imagined (Sökefeld 2006, 268). However, for the diaspora to form a certain discourse has to arise and mobilize the community around it. Thus, the formation of a diaspora involves social mobilization and, as we have shown, should also be analyzed from the perspective of social movement theory. This does not mean that social movements and diasporas are the same social forms, nor does it mean that the formative phase of both is the same. On the one hand, diasporic practices do not need to pertain to social mobilization aiming at social and political changes. On the other, social movements are not inevitably related to migration. Yet, as Sökefeld argues, there are many parallels in the processes at work, and he continues to explain that the study of the diaspora can benefit from the study of social movements. Taking this reflection as our departure point, in this article we engage both social movement theories and diaspora concepts to explore the #BlackProtest's transnational mobilization.

[1] The issue of the inevitability of diaspora formation has been questioned by Stuart Hall (1996) who argued that when people are called "a community" (Sawyer 2008, 88) they may demonstrate their agency by deciding whether to participate in it or not. Similar to Hall, Martin Sökefeld in his analysis of diasporic communities focuses on its transnational dispersed yet collective character (Sökefeld 2006, 267). As such, the diaspora perceives itself as a community. As Sökefeld notes, migrants do not automatically form a diaspora simply by the fact of becoming migrants. They may become a diaspora by developing a new imagination of their community, even years after the migration took place (Ibid., 267). To talk about a diaspora we thus need a sense of belonging to a community.

Following Hall's notion of diasporic communities (1994, 235) defined "[…] not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity", we want to address an internal heterogeneity of the feminist transnational diaspora, by looking at motives standing behind the decision of joining the movement, and by exploring the transnational aspects of the feminist community (embedded in contexts of both receiving and sending countries). Building upon Paerregaard's argument (2010, 92) we offer to see diasporic, feminist groups of Polish migrants evolving around the #BlackProtest as those communities, "[…] that are constantly negotiated and contested and that exclude as much as they include, rather than as entities that are bounded and homogeneous and that automatically embrace all migrants from a particular nation". We explore transnational feminist practices of self-organizing with regards to reproductive struggles in Poland as a consequence of both sharing similar migration history and feminist ideas at the same time. We thus propose to understand a transnational, feminist diaspora through three main dimensions important for defining diasporas in general:

1. A transnational dimension, which enables the analysis of the entanglements between a country of origin and a receiving country, often manifested in various practices undertaken by migrants to sustain their relations with the country they come from, and at the same time introduced to build stronger links with the receiving society;
2. Identity formation and negotiation processes, which helps to explore how both feminist and transnational aspects of the activist's identities are formed and navigated by them in everyday mobilization;
3. An internal heterogeneity, which points to the boundaries created by the feminist diaspora by showing how certain conflicts lead to the inclusion of some ideas, practices and groups in the diaspora, and to the exclusion of others.

As we will show in the findings and discussion sections, the experience of mobilization reported by migrant women involved in the organizing of the #BlackProtest did testify to the formation of a new imagined transitional community, which unified feminists living in different geographical locations, yet having strong relations with Poland (Sökefeld 2006, 267). Sökefeld's and Hall's definitions of diaspora thus helps us argue that the #BlackProtest can be perceived as a case of transnational feminist diaspora in the making. We argue that by identifying themselves as "a Polish feminist abroad" or "a Pole and a feminist living abroad", the activists demonstrated not only solidarity gestures with women in Poland, but actively participated and negotiated their identities, bonds and relations with their country of origin and the Polish feminist movement, and as such formed a transnational feminist diaspora.

## Data collection and analysis

This study was conducted under the framework of a small, self-financed research project carried out by the authors between May and August in 2017. Six in-depth interviews were conducted with Polish migrant women involved in organizing #BlackProtest solidarity demonstrations in Oslo, Norway (two activists), London, UK (two activists), Berlin, Germany (one activist) and Brussels, Belgium (one activist).

To select the cities that were included in the study the authors have analyzed Facebook event pages created for each demonstration that was organized as part of the 3 October 2016 #BlackMonday protest. The decision to focus on #BlackMonday was motivated by the fact that it was the first mass demonstration of the #Black Protest that took place in over 200 cities and towns in Poland and in 49 cities in 29 countries in Europe and elsewhere, and it was well documented. The full list of the sites where the protests were organized, together with links to their Facebook event pages was published by connective leaders – the Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet on their website (All-Polish Women Strike). The authors looked at the number of people who indicated their willingness to participate in the event. These numbers obviously did not correspond with the number of the actual protesters but nevertheless provided a good indicator of the demonstration site's visibility and the organizers networks, both in Poland and abroad. The Facebook event pages that were contacted to participate in the study had generated an above average interest from the public. The average interest for the 49 cities was 562 potential participants with the median at 204, and the sites selected for the study had an average of 1372 potential participants with the median at 947. An additional criterion was applied to select the sites; for comparison reasons we were interested in demonstrations organized in different European capital cities.

The authors contacted the administrators of the selected Facebook event pages, who in most cases were also the organizers of the demonstration, to participate in the study. Most responses were very positive as all women felt it was important to reflect on their experiences of organizing the #BlackProtest abroad. Due to some logistical problems, not all interviews were eventually conducted, but the six in-depth interviews were comprised of women who were white, of Polish origin, with higher education and a median age of 42.5. All of them had rather high cultural capital but they represented different class backgrounds and two of the interviewees represented working-class migration. The time they have spent living outside of Poland ranged from 5 to 24 years. All interviews were conducted in Polish via Skype and were recorded and transcribed. The interviews lasted from 41 to 108 minutes, with the average being 72 minutes. Pseudonyms are used in the article and we avoid identifying individual women simultaneously with the city they represent, as some of their biographical details might make their identification possible. Considering some of these women are present in the media and

stay active on social media it is important to make sure that their anonymity is properly maintained. As we were interested in understanding the motives behind the transnational dimension of the #BlackProtest, the main topics discussed during the interview included questions on how and why they got involved in the organizing of the #BlackProtest; if they felt they belonged to a social movement and if their activism was important for Poland; how was the protest organized? Did they keep in touch and did they receive any help from the activists in Poland; and what reaction did the traditional media have to their protest. Both open and theory-driven ways of coding the interviews were applied, following the principles of a thematic analysis (cf. Flick 2006). The theory-driven codes were primarily based on social movement theories, providing the following main categories for coding: reasons for engaging in the #BlackProtest, the main aims behind organizing the protests, experiences related to the protests, important social actors involved in the activism, ways of self-organizing (communicating strategies, leadership, contacting media, etc.). Open coding contributed to reflective reading of the material and looking for new categories emerging from the narratives. In this phase, the researchers read the transcripts as text looking for recurring themes, similarities and differences. This step enabled the researchers to reach out for a new conceptual framework which led to the notion of the diaspora in the realm of the #BlackProtest.

## Findings

Women who stood behind the #BlackProtest demonstrations organized outside of Poland had different reasons for their activism. Their backgrounds differed in regards to previous experiences of social organizing but most of them had been involved in feminist activism before the #BlackProtest. Some had had these experiences from when they were still living in Poland and abandoned activism for a couple of years after having emigrated, others continued engaging with feminist social organizing after emigration, yet others discovered the need for activist organizing only once they became migrants and engaged either with the Polish migrant community or local organizations and local feminist networks. The high media visibility of the #BlackProtest had all of the interviewed women reflect on their relations with Poland and Polish society and despite the different experiences with activism, almost every interviewee depicted her decision to engage in #BlackProtest organizing as a certain turning point or an important moment in her life.

The reasons for why these women decided to get involved with organizing of the #BlackProtest could be grouped into three main categories: feelings of responsibility, personal experiences, and anger as the main emotion that framed the whole movement. These categories are created for the purpose of organizing the findings of the study. They did not emerge as distinct categories from the interviews, but rather overlapped and interlocked with other

motives and with each other. Still, these were the resounding motives for joining the organizing of the #BlackProtest.

## Feelings of responsibility

One of the reasons for getting involved with #BlackProtest organizing evolved around a sense of personal responsibility the interviewees felt for women's rights in general, for women in Poland and finally for Poland as a country.

Alina connected her #BlackProtest activism to a strong sense of personal responsibility for women's reproductive rights. She emigrated from Poland 13 years before the #Black-Protest and had been involved in various projects and campaigns aimed at and organized with women from the Polish migrant community ever since. Despite her previous activism and engagement with the Polish migrant community, the #BlackProtest left her reflecting on her own privileged life and a sense of indebtedness overwhelmed her. Having lived for many years in a secular state where women's rights are respected left her dismayed that in her country of origin there are still people with power to control or limit women's reproductive choices. In additional to her rights being respected by her host country she underlined the good financial situation of her own family. The privileged social position that she occupied in the society, in her opinion, enabled her activism and Alina explicitly pointed out that she became an activist because she did not have to overcome any structural obstacles. Such personally declared biographical availability (McAdam 2015) was undeniably an important factor for her becoming a women's rights activist, however it was the strong sense of personal responsibility that drove her engagement with the #BlackProtest. Similarly, Agata, who emigrated from Poland 10 years before the #BlackProtest, became active in the movement because of a moral sense of responsibility for other women and specifically for one of her two daughters, who still lives in Poland.

Ewa's motivation to join the #BlackProtest, similarly to Alina and Agata, was driven by her explicit feminist convictions – she wanted to support women's reproductive rights. However, the focus of her and her fellow activists' organizing was predominately on Polish migrant women and women living in Poland. Their sense of responsibility for helping those women who are still living in Poland drove many of the activities her feminist network organized in the host country. Ewa explained,

> Polish women are mobilizing out of fear. We are doing this [abroad] because we can't believe that in the XXI century somebody can still have such ideas. Polish women are happy we are supporting them. Sisterhood is great. We have to be grateful to Zuckerberg for Facebook and to Kaczyński [the leader of the Law & Justice party] for

> mobilizing women. Something wonderful will come out of this crisis. (Ewa, Skype interview, 2 August 2017)

The goal of Ewa's feminist network was to spread knowledge about the situation of women in Poland amongst the migrant community but also to bring hope and positive examples of women's organizing back to Poland. As she put it: "We take up small educational actions, we write in Polish, we want Polish women to read this." Their actions were not limited to street protests. They were also organizing conferences, screenings of feminist movies, and held a mini Congress of Polish Women, where they have invited Krystyna Kacpura, President of a Polish NGO Blue Line, which works against domestic violence in Poland.

For Agata it was also the feeling of responsibility for the fate of Poland that drove her towards #BlackProtest organizing. Agata's teenage years happened during the political and economic transformation Poland went through at the beginning of the 1990s and she remembers very vividly the feeling of relief and hope that her country would finally be free and democratic. Agata strongly believed her daughters would grow up in a modern and democratic state and the recent political changes and the attempt of the ruling Law & Justice party to restrict women's right to abortion left her bitter and disappointed. As a Pole living abroad, she said she felt responsible for demonstrating to her new fellow citizens that not all Poles support the Polish government's decisions. "I feel Polish and I identify with what is happening in Poland" – Agata stressed and she went on to explain:

> I was very proud of all the changes Poland went through in the last two decades. And at some point, I started feeling ashamed. I felt responsible for what was happening in the country. I didn't have to. I never voted for them [the ruling party], but I feel a moral obligation as a Pole representing other Polish women it this country and Poles in general. As a Pole I also participate, for example, in initiatives supporting the refugees. Because I feel ashamed of the decision of the Polish government not to help the refugees. This is an important moment to show that we don't accept what they are doing. (Agata, Skype interview, 5 August 2017)

## Personal experiences

Another resounding motive for joining the organizing of the #BlackProtest evolved around personal experiences. Agata, for example, recalled a crisis situation she went through as a teenager. During that difficult period, she received psychological counseling from two psychologists, who she believes helped her regain a sense of control over her life. The attempt of the current government in Poland to cut funding to women's organizations and support centers left her very upset. From her personal experience she knew very well how important

such organizations are and how without them women's struggles will be even more painful and difficult. Similarly to Agata, Anna, who emigrated 10 years ago, decided to join the organizers of the #BlackProtest based on her personal experience. In the interview Anna re-called that her views on abortions rights changed dramatically from when she was a teenager living in Poland in the 1990s to when as a mature migrant woman, she tried to become pregnant while undergoing in vitro fertilization treatment (IVF). Since the discussion around abortion and access to IVF are intertwined in the Polish context, her experiences with #BlackProtest organizing were strongly tied to her own experiences. Anna explained: "Because of the fact that I was trying to have a baby, I believe that every woman has the right to have a child, but at the same she has the right to not want to have a child" (Skype interview, 15 June 2017)

## Anger as the driving emotion of the movement

Anger and the emotionality of the movement was another important factor that facilitated the activists' decision to get involved in #BlackProtest organizing. Monika, whose feminist activism started in Poland before her migration 5 years ago, found herself inactive and not really involved in any collective actions in her new country, apart from participating in a few feminist demonstrations. She did, however, form a small informal friendship-based network of Polish feminists, with whom she eventually started organizing the #BlackProtest. Monika explained,

> For me the most important trigger was the fact that I was here while in Poland there were these horrible things happening. There was this wave of terrible news everywhere on social media […] I just couldn't stand it, I had this need to express myself. I remember we [her small feminist network] were talking on the phone, saying "What the fuck is going on? We have to do something." (Monika, Skype interview, 24 August 2017)

Similarly, anger directly motivated Anna, for whom the #BlackProtest meant in fact engaging in social activism for the first time in her life.

> I went to a demonstration, because I was angry and I somehow felt this sisterhood. I have never been engaged in anything like this, I have not participated in any protest. […] Right now I am just happy I don't live in Poland and my kids won't have to live there as well. (Anna, Skype interview, 15 June 2017)

Agata's engagement with the #BlackProtest organizing, as was already mentioned, was fueled by a sense of shame for what was happening in the country. At the same time, however, she

felt passionate about mobilizing resistance amongst other migrants living in her city. Agata explained,

> I was very angry that nothing was happening in my city. I was posting [on social media] passionately, trying to mobilize other women to act together. But they were not very interested in doing anything. I believe they felt they are safe living abroad and that what is happening in Poland doesn't concern them. But I didn't give up… I was so angry that eventually I managed to mobilize a group and our actions gained a lot of attention from the international media and support from the local activists. (Agata, Skype interview, 5 August 2017)

The different reasons behind #BlackProtest organizing by migrant Polish women revealed that, in terms of the individual biographies, the pro-choice mobilization has been motivated mainly by a sense of responsibility for what was happening in Poland as a country, responsibility for the women who live in Poland and a sense of caring for their futures, as well as responsibility for the future of their own children and women's rights more broadly. Another important category of motives included personal past experiences related to reproductive rights and women's health. And lastly emotions triggered by the events in Poland had driven #BlackProtest organizing abroad. The activists' experiences of daily life were rooted in Western democratic countries where women's rights (including reproductive rights) are perceived as guaranteed and unthreatened and comparing their own situation with the situation in Poland made many of them angry. This anger drove their mobilization.

## Discussion and conclusions

An analysis of the reasons Polish migrant women had for getting involved with the #Black-Protest organizing revealed the need these women had for negotiating their own definition of feminism and their place within the feminist movement. In the discussion we aim to argue that the #BlackProtest spearheaded the process of a transnational feminist diaspora formation. Our argument is supported by three dimensions of such a community:

1. Negotiating transnational feminist identity;
2. Handling and redefining relations with the Polish feminist movement and, more broadly, with the country of origin;
3. Internal heterogeneity and conflicts over the diaspora boundaries.

These dimensions reveal how through forming and negotiating feminist identities across borders, through reconstructing and sustaining relations with the country of origin, and through establishing the boundaries of the community, a diaspora is constructed by the activists.

## Negotiating transnational feminist identity

The interview material showed very clearly that the organizers of the #BlackProtest living outside of Poland had a strong sense of belonging to a newly formed community. As we argued in the theoretical part of this paper, forming a diaspora requires producing and sustaining specific identities, which are, however, rarely stable and taken for granted in everyday practices (Hall 1994, Paerregaard 2010). The imagined diasporic community does not assume that a shared identity, which is a significant element of this concept (Cohen, 1997), is unproblematic (Hall 1994). Quite the contrary, it can be bitterly disputed, as was the case in our study.

Some of the interviewees had been involved in feminist activism before migration, but experiences of organizing the #BlackProtest triggered questions about their place and position in the feminist mobilization. A good illustration of these kind of negotiations and reflections comes from the activists in London. One of the interviewees describes her commitment to the movement through the lens of a change that the #BlackProtest evoked in her. Her history of engaging in feminist activism began after she emigrated from Poland. In London, over the years, she was actively involved in various feminist events. Because her experiences of feminist selforganizing, knowledge, and ideas were rooted primarily in the English context, she used to describe herself as "an English feminist." The experience of organizing the #BlackProtest had her question the meaning of her symbolic and physical "separation" and the distance she kept from Poland and Polish feminism. She explained,

Finding a Polish feminist in me had a deep meaning for me. Although I visit Poland regularly, I read about Poland, the fact is I had been doing English feminism with English feminists. These last events made a great change in me, [it meant] a sort of opening to the world, admitting to myself that maybe I separated myself from Poland. Rightly so or not, I had separated myself from Poland. But I am Polish after all. I come from Poland. And these events helped me to find my own place in feminism, because through many years, I've worked for many organizations and I never felt I fitted there entirely. This Polish feminism absorbed me intensely. I think this is my place now.

The emotions that she experienced during the protest had a transformative character (cf. Collins 2001, Young 2005): they enabled a feeling of solidarity with women in Poland, but also reconstructed her own identity and definition of feminism. Ever since she got involved in #BlackProtest organizing, she started to see her feminist identity in a more complex way than before and merged her past ways of defining feminist activism with her self-awareness of being a Pole and its impact on her activist identity. She started to link feminist ideas with the particular situation of women in Poland and her own nationality. The fear that a total ban on abortion would be introduced in her country of origin and the emotions that accompanied these events provoked a visible change in her way of framing feminist activism. Her sense of belonging to the English feminist community has been replaced to some extent by a sense of belonging to

a transnational community, in which fighting for and with Polish women for their rights was a crucial mobilizing factor. While the feminist ideas guiding her actions are still embedded in the English context, the actions themselves became more centered on women's rights in her country of origin. Similarly, the second activist from London argued her feminism was also born during her stay in England, however it was not done with and amongst English feminists. The motivation for her early involvement in the feminist struggle came from a group of women who were living in Poland but with whom she met online regularly. These intensive online conversations with other Polish women helped her "feel at home" and find her space within the feminist diaspora. This mobilization practice – communicating constantly and sharing ideas online across borders – seemed to be pivotal for her later engagement in the movement. She recalled,

> When I first came here 24 years ago, I tried to establish some relationships with the Polish migrant community, but it didn't really work. I didn't find my soulmates amongst other migrants. And then I found this Polish chat group, called "Women over 30" (it was based in Poland) where finally I felt at home. This group was very important to me and we are still in touch after 13 years. Many of us remain active in feminism until this day, especially now during the #BlackProtest in Poland.

Experiences with #BlackProtest organizing provoked the transformation of the Polish female migrants' self-involvement in feminism, impacted their self-organizing strategies, and had the activists re-negotiate their transnational feminist identities. Rejecting the separation between themselves, Poland and other Polish migrant communities and taking conscious steps towards more transnational activism, yet remaining critical to the concept of a Polish identity, revealed how a transnational feminist diaspora was being formed. Based on feminist ideas and the need to support women's struggles for their reproductive rights, the activists' engagement with Polish and non-Polish feminists goes beyond the #BlackProtest, making the argument about a transnational feminist diaspora in the making even stronger. Following the #BlackProtest organizing, the activists have set up various groups which published updates and organized events around different feminist issues, either only in Polish or both in Polish and in the local language, but always with a focus and links to the Polish feminist movement and the Polish migrant feminists. Sometimes the linkages also included the local feminist community. For example, in London an informal group FARSA – Feminist Activists of Royal San Escobar Association[2], – was established and performed various actions on the Internet and in public

[2] Farsa in Polish means mockery. Both the abbreviation of the group's name and the name itself is meant to ridicule the Polish government. San Escobar is a reference to a non-existent country, which serves as a reminder of a blunder by the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Witold Waszczykowski. The minister told reporters that

spaces. Activists from Brussels established a non-governmental organization called Elles sans frontières (Women without borders), which among other activities organized the Congress of Polish Women in Brussels. In Oslo, the activists formed an informal group Kvinner står sammen. Kobiety razem (Women together), which blogged about women's rights, both in Polish and in Norwegian. Similarly, the activist from Berlin started her own group which mobilized support for the #BlackProtest through social media and a blog.

Through these various practices of self-organizing the activists negotiated their sense of belonging to the feminist community, their identities as feminists, migrants and Poles, but also ensured the persistence of the diaspora. The hybridity of feminist ideas taken from both Poland and their host countries seems to be central to shaping the transnational feminist diaspora (cf. Hall 1994).

## Handling and redefining relations with the Polish feminist movement

The newly found identity of belonging to a feminist transnational diaspora did not come without a struggle. Diasporic organizers of the #BlackProtest found themselves negotiating their own place within the feminist diaspora and redefining relations with the Polish feminist movement. These negotiations varied from city to city and depended very much on the type of relations the activists had had with the wider Polish migrant community and feminists in Poland, and on their own understanding of what the role of the feminist diaspora could be. The complex and ambivalent relations with the center of the protests – the movement and activists situated in Poland – can be demonstrated with the following example.

Although the mobilization in Poland was, as we already argued, the mobilizing structure for these diasporic feminist responses, the activists had very different experiences with the center, both in regards to their needs and wishes to maintain relations with the #Black-Protest organizers from Poland. Ideas were also very different in regards to where and what the center of the protest actually was. For one of the activists from Berlin, for example, it was very important to maintain personal relations with the established feminist community in Poland. She was not interested in communicating only with the actual organizers of the #BlackProtest, but invested time and resources in maintaining relations with the broader Polish feminist community. She traveled to Poland as frequently as possible, made sure to participate in important feminist events, such as the Congress of Polish Women, demonstrations and conferences and continued to build her personal network. She felt that such devotion was not sufficiently rewarded, hence she was disappointed with the support she, as a representative of

in a bid for a non-permanent seat for Poland on the UN Security Council, he met with officials from various countries, including from San Escobar.

the Polish feminist diaspora, received from the center. Despite the fact that during her visits to Poland she was "patted on the back" as she put it (a gesture of appreciation for her actions), she felt that in the moments when real advice and support were needed they were not available to her. She explained,

> Multiple times I felt bitter that we are doing so much here in Berlin, but that we are forgotten in Poland, treated as something worse. I don't know where it's coming from. Maybe it's our Polish mentality to treat Poles who are living abroad as lesser Poles or something like that.

Together with two other Polish women she responded to everything that was happening in Poland by organizing solidarity events in Berlin. This was their group's own initiative and as such it was not directly coordinated with the #BlackProtest organizers from Poland. With some regret the interviewee reflected that the only help Berlin organizers received from Poland was with obtaining access to the protest's logo. Similar reflections appeared in the narratives of the women situated in Oslo. Although one of them had strong informal relations with feminist organizations and groups located in Poland, both interviewees underlined that organizing the protests in Oslo was done without support or even knowledge from the Polish side. Unlike the activist in Berlin, however, the feminists from Oslo did not feel the need to maintain close relations with the center of the #BlackProtest organizing, and limited their communication to sharing links to their events on the center's social media pages. Organiz-ers of the #BlackProtest from London felt satisfied with the relations they have maintained with the center. Despite the fact these, similarly to Oslo, were mostly limited to sharing links to events organized via social media and commenting on each other's posts with pictures and updates about the happenings in London, reflection about the relationship with the center was rather positive. The relationship between the diasporic #BlackProtest organizers and the center of the protest was maintained through the connective leaders, the Ogólnopolski Strajk Kobiet (All-Polish Women's Strike) website and with some disruptions through social media networks, mainly the Dziewuchy Dziewuchom (Gals to Gals). The feminist diaspora both obtained information about mobilization plans in Poland and updated the center about their solidarity mobilization activities in London, Oslo, Berlin and Brussels. In addition to keeping contact with the #BlackProtest organizers in Poland, the activists from London maintained contact with feminists who were mobilizing around reproductive rights in other countries: Italy, Argentina, Ireland, Malta, and South Korea, to name just a few countries that had experienced backlash against reproductive rights around the same time as Poland did[3]. The support they

[3] This may suggest that there is potential for expanding the transnational diaspora beyond the two dominant contexts of a country of origin and a host country, but this hypothesis requires further research.

offered each other was also facilitated by social media and came down to occasional messages and "liking" and commenting on each other's social media activity.

Against this background, we argue that the relations the activists maintained with the center of the protest – understood here both as symbolically referring to the Polish movement and the everyday, yet often ephemeral, transnational practices between diasporic communities and feminist activists in Poland – required ongoing negotiations, which in fact produced and maintained the transnational feminist diaspora.

## Internal heterogeneity and conflicts over the diaspora's boundaries

The exploration of the feminist diaspora that emerged through the transnational #BlackProtest organizing revealed its internal heterogeneity and conflicts over the diaspora's boundaries. Debating and negotiating the diaspora's identity, its goals and visions are productive for the community as it creates a heterogeneity of voices, and allows for a variety of roles and positions to emerge within the imagined community. But it also allows for inclusion of certain voices and positions within the diaspora, leaving others at the diaspora's margins and yet excluding still others from the community all together. These practices based on inclusion and exclusion were salient in the #BlackProtest activism and provoked internal conflicts and disputes both within the movement in Poland and within the transnational diaspora. Interestingly, all interviewed feminists from London, Oslo, Berlin and Brussels eventually decided to set up their own groups, as with time a conflict emerged within the social media networks that provided connective leadership for the diaspora. The conflict concerned the end goal of the protests. Some women joined the movement to defend the status quo of the abortion law in Poland; others joined to mobilize for its liberalization. The transnational feminist diaspora defended its identity as supporters of the liberalization of the currently existing abortion law in Poland. This led to the Polish feminist migrants either excluding themselves or, as was the case with Berlin, being excluded from some of the social media networks that were set up to facilitate the mobilization. Because of these divisions, the center and some of the social networks were sometimes depicted by the diaspora as more conservative and reserved with respect to feminist demands. As one activist from London explained,

> Some women from the network Dziewuchy Dziewuchom w Londynie (Gals to Gals in London) opted primarily to protest against restrictions of the existing law. They told us that they supported liberalization as a utopian goal, but had decided to settle for a more realistic objective. For me it was surprising that they didn't want to take the struggle further and demand a full liberalization of the law. Because for me it's clear that abortion should be legal. I understand why it might be less obvious in Poland. But here it is obvious, abortion is normal here and the society is used to it.

Another issue raised during the interviews concerned the question of the class dimension of the #BlackProtest and, more broadly, of the transnational feminist diaspora. For example, one of the already mentioned interviewees suggested that her relatively good and stable economic and social position made her biographically available to engage in collective actions. Other interviewees have also noticed their difficulties with engaging working-class Polish migrant women in the #BlackProtest. Because of that, the working class was sometimes described by the feminist diaspora as a separate society with different values and goals in their lives. One of the interviewees observed: "They [working class Polish female migrants] don't even say 'hello' to me, although they can hear me speak Polish. This is a class gap. I'm active in a group of let's call it 'conscious migration'. These two groups don't mix with each". Similar to how the diaspora negotiated its imagined feminist identity, which was visible in the conflict over the goals of the protest, the Polish diaspora ("Polonia") was depicted by the feminist community as rather conservative and not interested in mobilizing for women's rights. The activists thus drew clear boundaries not only between themselves – the transnational feminist diaspora – and the other activists, but also between themselves and the traditional diasporic groups.

Our research looked at the #BlackProtest organizing in various European cities by Polish feminist migrants who were triggered by the #BlackProtest taking place in Poland. When we analyzed the reasons Polish migrant feminists had for joining the movement and at their ways of self-organizing the #BlackProtest, the transformative character of this solidarity activism became apparent. In this paper we claimed that organizing the #BlackProtest abroad resulted in the emergence of a transnational, feminist diaspora. We argued that joining the movement contributed to the activists' forming and negotiating a new identity for themselves – that of a transnational feminist. It also had them seeking new strategies for managing transnational relations, including connections with the center of the #BlackProtest, the feminist movement in Poland. Finally, organizing the #BlackProtest abroad initiated a process that has shaped the boundaries of the emerging feminist community. As we demonstrated in the theoretical part of the paper, the belonging of people to a larger community may refer to specific events that are then defined as incidents that affect the whole community and trigger the formation of a diasporic community (Sökefeld 2006). The #BlackProtest diaspora did emerge in the context of migration, but was not directly triggered by the fact of being on the move. Despite the fact it emerged in the context of living abroad, it was developed in response to a specific event (the #BlackProtest mobilization in Poland). Thus, the #BlackProtest mobilization resulted, we argue, in the formation of a transnational, feminist diasporic imagination of community, however fragile and durable this community may prove to be.

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**TYTUŁ**: Feministyczna transnarodowa diaspora w działaniu. Przypadek #CzarnegoProtestu

**ABSTRAKT**: Autorki artykułu omawiają społeczną mobilizację wokół #CzarnegoProtestu wśród polskich migrantek mieszkających w czterech europejskich miastach. #CzarnyProtest był najwyrazistszym przykładem ruchu o prawa kobiet w najnowszej historii Polski. Główne pytanie badawcze prezentowanego studium dotyczy znaczeń przypisywanych zagranicznym protestom solidarnościowym przez ich organizatorki. Analiza motywów skłaniających do organizowania #CzarnegoProtestu za granicą pokazuje, że mobilizacja ta wykracza poza ramy transnarodowego aktywizmu. Teoretyczna rama artykułu powstała w oparciu o rozważania na temat diaspor jako kulturowych wspólnot tworzonych przez procesy negocjowania tożsamości, wewnętrznej heterogeniczności oraz własnych granic. Do ramy tej autorki włączają dodatkowo koncepcje ruchów społecznych, pokazując, w jaki sposób liderstwo oparte na łączeniu, dyskursywne struktury możliwości oraz emocje umożliwiły transnarodową mobilizację wokół #CzarnegoProtestu. Opierając się na wywiadach jakościowych z organizatorkami protestów, autorki wskazują, że #CzarnyProtest zainicjował powstanie feministycznej, transnarodowej diaspory wewnątrz społeczności migranckich.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** transnarodowa diaspora, feministyczna mobilizacja, mobilizacja stymulowana medialnie, #CzarnyProtest

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# PRECARIOUS LOCATIONS: FEMINIST CO-OPTATION AND STRATEGIES OF RESISTANCE IN THE NEOLIBERAL AGE

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**Abstract**: As women gained access to influence politics through official channels, the social justice concerns of feminist activists started to be pursued in Romania through institutionalized forms of political intervention. The institutionalization and professionalization of the feminist movement were widely associated with feminist and women NGOs collaborating with governmental gender equality bodies to advance movement goals and achieve policy success. While some scholars insisted on the benefits of infusing feminist ideas and practices within the state, others considered that NGOization made the feminist movement susceptible of co-optation contributing to its demobilization and depoliticization. The concept of co-optation reflects the dilemmas faced by contemporary feminist movements regarding the displacement of feminist goals and concerns that might be adapted to other priorities and agendas – sometimes adverse and conflicting with the original aims – once they become part of the official political channels of decision-making. The resource dependency of feminist NGOs and groups on state or private funds is also associated with the co-optation of movement organizations.
With this in mind, how does one build on critical analyses around the concept of co-optation without disbanding the actions and efforts of feminist activists and NGOs as legitimating the policy agendas of state or private donors? This study aims, first, to explain, the tensions engendered by co-optation and the insider/outsider dilemma facing the contemporary feminist movement and, second, to explore the strategies developed by the feminist movement to resist or govern co-optation. In order to explore the process of co-optation, especially the tensions and strategies of resistance engendered by it, the paper uses the NGOization body of literature and provides empirical evidence from research on the Romanian feminist movement.

**Keywords:** Cooptation, institutionalization, NGOization, feminist movement, resource dependency

## Introduction

After the fall of state-socialist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), social movements were described as transactional, professionalized and lacking potential for broad political mobilization (Cîrstocea 2010; Petrova, Tarrow 2007). The financial dependency on foreign resources (Gal and Kligman 2003) was an element widely present in the NGO-ization hypothesis and urged scholars to study the effects of EU funding on NGOs (Roth 2007) and transnational mobilization (Paternotte 2013; Císar and Vráblíková 2010). All these accounts framed a hostile picture of activism in the region. More recent studies challenged the general understanding of the weakness and lack of capacity of movement actors to mobilize for policy change (Kriszan 2015) and emphasized a variety of mobilizations, groups and repertoires, depending on domestic political opportunities, available resources and collective identities (Jacobson and Saxonberg 2013).

This shift in tactical repertoires from contentious actions to lobbying and advocacy, occasioned by access to official politics, was associated with the institutionalization and professionalization of the feminist movement (Lang 1997; Alvarez 1999; Bernal 2000; Halley 2006). While some scholars insisted on the benefits of infusing feminist ideas and practices within the state (Banaszak 2010), others considered that institutionalization and professionalization made the feminist movement susceptible to co-optation, entailing demobilization and depoliticization.

However, charges of co-optation related to the movement's participation in policy-making were based on a romantic vision of an "autonomous" feminism outside the state. Critical accounts (Grewal in Roy 2017, 7; Roy 2015) reveal the normative formulations of such concepts, showing that they are an integral part of feminist politics today. Building on this perspective, the aim of this study is to explore how co-optation translates into the practice of doing politics by the feminist movement. In order to fill in the gaps in the co-optation literature, this analysis will explore the tensions and dilemmas faced by actors when engaging in co-operation with state institutions and undergoing a potential risk of co-optation, but also the strategies of negotiation and resistance.

Empirically, I draw on feminist epistemology, methodology and methods. Following a participatory approach to research, I combined feminist ethnography through participant observation, political activism and collaboration, with semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Participatory approaches to research were used both by social movement scholars (Melucci 1995) and feminist scientists on social movements (Taylor 1998; Taylor and Rupp 2005). I focus on the meso-level, specifically on the feminist movement community embodied in different locations, spaces and organizational structures. I loosely distinguish between street feminism (more informal groups and collectives), and NGOized feminism

(more formal and institutionally tied), nevertheless understood as imbricated in a spatial and locative web.

To define the field boundaries in Romania, I combined a nominalist approach prior to starting the fieldwork, identifying feminist organizations and groups according to predefined criteria, with a realist approach relying on feminist activists' perceptions of who is part of the field. I aimed to bring together both formal organizations and informal collectives that inhabit the feminist movement community and intersect, through overlapping membership with other social movements such as the LGBTQIA+ movement, the right to housing movement or the anarchist movement. The research focuses on feminist organizations and groups that emerged after the 1990s. The interviews were guided by a loose grid of pre-identified themes and they lasted between 30 minutes and three hours, were tape recorded, transcribed, coded and analyzed using Nvivo software.

The article is organized as follows: the second section provides a brief overview of the feminist movement in post-socialist Romania with particular attention to institutionalization. The third section examines the scholarly contributions to co-optation, on which this analysis builds. The fourth section covers the empirical findings organized in various sub-sections analyzing co-optation in relation to state institutions or subsidizing bodies.

## II. NGO-ization & feminist mobilizations in post-socialist Romania

In Romania, during the first decade of post-socialism, when the anti-communist backlash was at its apogee, the feminist movement debuted in academia (Nimu 2015, 182), as an intellectual-elitist endeavor within a mainstream liberal philosophy (Molocea 2015). Initially, there was no aperture for class, ethnic, and sexual diversity, and there was little capacity for mobilization (Molocea 2015). Nevertheless, Romani feminists organized since the 1990s, related to racist violence, hate speech and discrimination. Feminist activists organized both around formal NGOs and informal collectives within the cultural scene of the left, in an anti-authoritarian, anti-fascist, and anti-capitalist struggle.

At the end of the '90s, gender studies/feminist studies became institutionalized. The first program created, still in existence today, was an MA in gender studies at Scoala Nationala de Studii Politice si Administrative (SNSPA) . Similar programs were subsequently created in Cluj and Timisoara (Borza, Grunberg and Vacarescu 2006, 37) but were rapidly dismantled (Vlad 2013, 35).

For post-socialist governments, gender equality was not a priority unless related to the EU accession (Massino and Popa 2015, 171), reflected in the adoption of legislation and public policies to comply with the acquis communautaire – a process labelled 'room service' feminism to emphasize the import character of policies and legislation (Miroiu 2004). Gender equality

and non-discrimination bodies were created, such as Consiliul Național pentru Combaterea Discriminării (CNCD) or Agenția Națională pentru Egalitatea de Șanse între Femei și Bărbați (ANES) and Equal Opportunities Commissions in the Parliament.

On the mobilization side, the first feminist protest was organized in 2000 to end domestic violence, in response to an article published in Playboy Magazine entitled "How to beat your wife without leaving marks." In 2010, a protest against cuts to the childcare allowance was organized by mothers joined by feminist organizations and activists. In 2011, queer feminist collectives and feminist NGOs organized Slutwalk Bucharest, which strengthened cooperation and favored a transfer of confrontational tactics from informal groups towards formal organizations (Vlad 2015, 108–109). Since then, they have organized yearly protests and public actions for Women's International Day or the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, participated in the 2012 anti-austerity mobilizations (Ana 2017), and the Rosia Montana protests in 2013 while some of them engaged in Anti-Eviction protests organized by the Common Front for the Right to Housing.

The availability of financial resources from international and European donors facilitated the expansion and development of these gender equality cells within the government, academia and civil society. Feminist NGOs started collaborating with the newly created agencies to advance the movement's goals and contribute to policy-making. They responded to a call for tenders from foreign donors to develop their organizational capacity, build networks and coalitions, train experts or create raising awareness campaigns. Nevertheless, cooperation with state institutions and the financial dependence on donors raised concerns about the risk of co-optation that would lead to goal displacement, appropriation of the movement's language and technique, channelling, pacification of critical issues or regulation of NGOs.

Yet, the feminist movement in Romania was never completely autonomous and unaffected by its collaboration with the hegemonic institutions that it tries to reform. Its growth is ingrained in coalitional politics that involve constant and dynamic negotiations between different actors – from feminist NGOs to self-managed informal collectives, gender equality bodies or other civil society allies. Viewing the feminist movement this way, co-optation is neither a choice nor an end in itself but an inherent aspect to the process of coalitional politics of the feminist movement.

## III. Co-optation

The co-optation of social movements is thought to be a product of challengers' interaction with dominant institutions, state or vested interests, strongly encouraged by the process of NGO-ization. Co-optation has been addressed in the sociology of organizations and social movements literature, but also in feminist studies.

In a study on the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA), Selznic (1949, 13) defines co-optation as the process of absorbing new elements into the structure of a hegemonic organization, to avoid threats to its existence and stability. According to Gamson (1968), co-optation emerges when (1) moderate challengers gain access to the policy process without producing policy changes; (2) targets, antagonists, or sponsors appropriate and redefine the discourses of the challengers; (3) by financial donors who channel, transform and reorient the mandate of the social movement; and (4) through the adoption of empty-forms-without-substance. Later, Gamson (2006) refers to co-optation as one possible outcome of social movements. The two clusters of the outcome measures are "acceptance" – concerned with the fate of a challenging group as an organization and, "new advantages" that refers to the distribution of new benefits to movement's beneficiaries (Gamson 2006, 113–114). Co-optation appears when there is an acceptance of the movement without new advantages.

Co-optation as a four-stage process was conceptualized by Coy and Hedeen (2005) based on the US community mediation movement and its co-optation by the state legal system. The first stage is inception, which captures a movement's formation, its demands for change, the potential establishment of alternative institutions and the perception for the need to reform by dominant institutions (Coy and Hedeen 2005, 410–412). The second stage is appropriation. Appropriation by language and technique includes the adoption of a movement's language and methods as well as its employment and redefinition against the initial purposes. Appropriation via inclusion and participation is realized: (1) through channelling, when hegemonic groups shift a movement's focus away from their substantive goals, towards moderate reforms; (2) through the inclusion of movement actors within governmental bodies with limited decision-making power; (3) through the pacification of movement concerns over critical issues under the impression that they are adequately managed and there is no need for pressure (Ibidem, 413–415).

The third stage of co-optation is assimilation of movement actors and goals through employment within dominant structures or state-certified training programs (Ibidem, 420–424). The carrot-and-stick of funding pressures organizations to pursue specific goals. The last stage is regulation/response in which dominant institutions routinize and standardize practices, and regulate the qualifications of providers pressing for the professionalization of social services and endorsing dependence upon experts. Social movements might develop strategies to protect their alternative institutions, practices and cultures.

Feminist scholars have also contributed to debates on co-optation. Analyzing the US feminist movement, Ferree and Hess (2000, 141) found that the risk of co-optation appears when movement actors and leaders are absorbed within the hegemonic structures or when they are used to promote other goals than those of women. Analyzing EU gender policies, Stratigaki (2004) shows how co-optation unfolded in the case of reconciliation between work and family

life, which shifted meaning from a feminist understanding that encouraged sharing family responsibilities, to a market-oriented understanding that encouraged flexible forms of employment. The original, feminist-inspired meaning of reconciliation between work and private life was altered, losing its potential for transforming gender relations (Ibidem, 32). In the co-optation process, a concept is not rejected but its meaning transformed and used for a different purpose in policy discourse (Ibidem, 36). Co-optation undermines gender equality by shifting meanings that deteriorate the policy impact and undermine mobilization around an issue of concern because it appears to be adequately handled by policy-makers (Ibidem, 36), which results in the pacification of concerns in Coy and Hedeen's (2005) model.

The neoliberal co-optation of feminism was addressed by Fraser (2013; Fraser and Honneth 2003) who argued that there was a shift from redistribution to recognition claims within the feminist movement that downplayed the critique of political economy at a moment when it was much needed – when neoliberal capitalism was on the rise. She argues that feminist critiques of economism, androcentrism, étatism and Westphalianism were re-signified in the context of rising neoliberalism with attacks from free-marketers of the welfare and developmental states. First, the shift from redistribution to recognition decoupled feminism from a critique of capitalism which it previously embraced. Second, feminist critique of androcentrism and the family wage was re-signified by neoliberalism serving today to intensify the valorization of waged labor by capitalism. Third, feminist critique of bureaucratic paternalism that originally aimed to transform state power into a social justice channel is now recuperated by neoliberalism and used to legitimate marketization and welfare-state retrenchment (Fraser 2013, 222). In postcolonies, the critique of state androcentrism favored a move towards NGOs to compensate for shrinking of the state, entailing grassroots' depoliticization and distortion of local groups' agenda in the direction of Western donors (Ibidem, 221). Lastly, feminist critique of Westphalianism proved ambivalent in the era of neoliberalism. What began as an attempt to build-up a transnational social justice movement through the organization of UN women conferences and engagement with European Union (EU) bodies, identifying local abuses and shaming states, transformed into a gap between professionals and grassroots through intensified "NGO-ification" (Ibidem, 223).

Angela McRobbie (2009) also argues that feminism has been instrumentalized. She shows how feminist elements such as "empowerment" and "choice" have been incorporated into political and institutional life and converted into a greatly individualistic discourse claimed by Western governments to define freedom for the rest of the world (McRobbie 2009, 1). The discourse on women's empowerment after the financial crisis marks the rise of a politico-economic project termed by Roberts (2015) as "transnational business feminism", referring to the joint efforts of liberal feminists together with states, funding institutions, NGOs and multinational corporations to construct women as brand-new resources capable of providing

high returns in Western investment. This perspective resonates with Kantola and Squires' (2012) idea of today's shift from state feminism to market feminism.

Shifting the focus from how to avoid co-optation by hegemonic institutions to how to understand when engagement produces liberation, and when it fosters inequality and exploitation, Korteweg (2017) proposed a framework that distinguishes between the "who" and the "what" of co-optation, illustrated by the Sharia-based arbitration debate in Ontario. Co-optation, as a form of erasure, occurs as attempts to advance liberation instead further illiberal practices (Ibidem, 2). "Gender equality" becomes the "what" of co-optation, as a process that diminishes the liberatory potential ingrained in notions of freedom as practice while "immigrant women" are the "who" of co-optation, reflecting actors whose subjectivity becomes defined in ways that support illiberal ends (Ibidem, 3). In the "what" of co-optation, gender equality, originally understood as a liberal project, becomes a neoliberal one, which grants access to power and resources to certain categories. "Gender equality" functions as an empty signifier articulated in relation to liberal concepts such as progress and might not even be about gender, but a value of elites that helps preserve social hierarchies, including those related to post-colonial settler nation-states (Ibidem, 4). The "who" of co-optation starts with the radical idea that there is no a priori liberated subject and actors are embedded in social structures that contribute to the production of discourse and practice, where freedom as a practice makes some freer to act than others (Ibidem, 3). Co-optation results from power differentials between political actors, whose agency is embedded and shaped – though not determined – by structural contexts and conditions in which those less free to imagine or enact their liberation have their ideas and discursive practices mimicked by the powerful actors (Ibidem).

The solution to co-optation is not to stop political engagement, nor to see co-optation as the end of agency, but to critically examine the subjectivities produced through dynamic interaction that generated universalizing practices in the Sharia-based arbitration debate, with second wave feminist claims, contributing to the racialization of immigrant communities (Ibidem). The open question is whether co-optation represents the contemporary hegemonic mode of political engagement (Ibidem, 14).

Interviewed by Roy (2017) about co-optation and intersectionality, Grewal challenges the ideas of purity and autonomy of the feminist movement. Earlier, Grewal (2005) argued that if co-optation is a loss of feminism to other movements and institutions in terms of subject or strategies, we should acknowledge that feminism was never about gender alone as revealed by theories of post-colonialism and intersectionality, which showed how a gendered subject is co-constructed with other movements and institutions. The idea of an autonomous feminism is untenable because it suggests the need for a pure subject of feminism that dismisses other kinds

of feminist activism and because there was no moment in which feminism was not attached to an institution – an empire, a state or a market (Roy 2017, 1).

Intersectionality offers the grounds to capture the complex history of the feminist movement and a solution to a narrative of co-optation that assumes a coherent, one-dimensional movement, with a pure identity, produced via white privilege and imperial subject (Roy 2017, 6).

The normative formulations around co-optation and NGOs between neoliberal imperial evil and world saviors are based on this romantic vision of an "autonomous" feminism. NGOs, as part of feminist politics today, make women recognizable as specific categories of women, subsequently naturalized and universalized (Ibidem, 7). NGO women as a new professional class at the crossroads of class and globalization can reveal the kinds of subjects and feminisms that have been produced and the possibilities offered by NGOs for imperial and anti-imperial feminisms (Roy 2017, 7–8). Observations of how institutions, states, corporations, NGOs, the EU and communities embrace and use feminist ideas might help to address neoliberalism, beyond ideas of pure autonomous movement.

## IV. Feminist co-optation and strategies of resistance

The creation of gender-equality bodies opened a window of opportunity for the feminist movement in Romania, as these governmental bodies started to call for consultation or collaboration with feminist activists and NGOs. The debate on cooperation with state institutions and the risk of co-optation or remaining autonomous and advancing the movement's agenda with independent means sparked debates within the movement. Financial dependence, mostly on European and international donors also fosters exposure to co-optation and channelling. While these financial resources are vital for organizational survival and development, they do not encourage long-term strategies, being allotted for a short time span. This section will explore co-optation and resistance of NGO-ized feminism, in relation to state institutions and donors, through processes of institutionalization and professionalization together with financial dependence.

### IV.1. Risks of co-optation through institutionalization and professionalization

As feminist NGOs were recognized as legitimate partners of the state, especially by gender equality and non-discrimination bodies, they were sometimes invited to collaborate. Nevertheless, frequent political changes prevented continuity in the relationship. Regarding state institutions, the risk of co-optation appears in relation to the process of inclusion and participation that involves contractual relationships and regulation.

Becoming a legitimate partner and participating in the decision-making process, through official channels, comes in tandem with a pressure towards formalization and professionalization. The state allocates the space within the framework of civil society where these organizations can exist and participate; it gives them financial incentives, but also legitimacy to formalize. The ongoing negotiations take place in relation to issues of content – legislation, public policy, or framing of some issues.

### IV.1.1. Professionalization, expertise and legitimacy

It is not only the form that counts – the NGO form that is constraining regarding procedures and manner of operation – but also the enclosure of expertise within a certain institutional framework, which brings official recognition and confers the legitimacy given by a profession, being an incentive for professionalization.

In Romania, the professions of expert and technician in equal opportunities were introduced in the register of occupational classifications in Romania – COR (Classificarea Ocupatiilor in Romania) – due to the long-term advocacy carried out by some feminist organizations, especially by Centrul Parteneriat pentru Egalitate (CPE). One of the CPE employees, who previously worked at ANES (the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between women and men) recalls the process of introducing these two professions into the corpus of occupations in Romania:

> I worked at ANES initially, and ANES was very interested in CPE's work, especially when, in 2006, CPE introduced a request to include the profession of gender expert in the COR. But this request was met with several refusals by the Ministry of Labor. ANES always expressed support for this request and, in 2014, there were no more obstacles. Obviously, the proposal was subject to some modifications because you cannot expect the proposal to appear exactly as you submitted it, but it was introduced. And this is a very good result of CPE's advocacy policy extended over a long period of time – nine years of advocacy on a theme (she laughs) – but it is a result that would not have been achieved if the CPE would not have insisted. (M.T. – CPE)

While it was a long-term and successful process of advocacy, the limits of its success were set by the terms of negotiation regarding the framework in which the professions of equality of chances expert and technician were enclosed. It concerned the regulation of the educational and professional training, competencies or the conditions of access to the program in relation to the level of study or other special requirements. This case exposes the potential risk of co-optation, as power imbalances between the state and the feminist movement organizations could have weighted heavily against the latter. But not every case of collaboration with the state

should be seen as co-optation, rather a movement's collaboration with official institutions should be understood as containing in itself the potential risk of co-optation, due to power asymmetry, external events and new elements into volatile opportunity structure dimensions, such as the configuration of power on the left that can occasion shifts in negotiation. The case is more representative of a channelling process in which governmental actors tried to dissuade CPE's lobbying attempts to gain recognition for their professional expertise and their proposal was subject to long negotiations and multiple modifications. Beyond the idea of purity and the autonomy of the movement, deciding to collaborate with the state allowed feminist NGOs to professionalize their activity and experts to gain formal recognition, a goal that they could not achieve on their own.

### IV.1.2. Inclusion or marginalization: autonomy versus dependence

Debates around autonomy versus dependence that would entail a risk of co-optation appeared in relation to state institutions and funding bodies – public or private. Recognized as legitimate actors and participating in decision-making, NGOs' unbalanced power dynamics with official institutions, especially when playing in the official arena, contributes to altering a movement's claims in favor of the state (C.P. Front). To compensate for power asymmetry, or failure of negotiations on the official terrain, feminist organizations step out of the conventional political channels and resort to contentious actions. The choice among confrontational and/or cooperative tactics is the trump card of the movement that helps answer the risk of co-optation, not by avoiding political engagement with state institutions – a process inherent to the institutionalization of feminism – but to critically engage with the political arena, choosing the appropriate tactics, on different fronts, in the service of the situation.

The false debate around the idea of pure autonomy is also illustrated by the relationship between feminist NGOs and informal collectives that consider it necessary to engage both in collaboration in official politics – through lobbying and advocacy – to improve laws and policies, but also in contentious actions and self-managed organizing for consciousness-raising, self-help, or political resistance. Activists in self-managed collectives do not discard the work of feminist NGOs as being merely reformist and acknowledge that some activists working in professionalized organizations have radical and critical positions towards NGOs activities.

One activist from the Dysnomia collective mentions that feminist NGOs:

> Omit a lot of marginal identities, omit what intersectional feminism does in the feminist struggle, omit the intersection of class, race, gender identity, sexual identity, their positions being rather liberal. But at the same time I think the work they do it's important. It seems to me that we should appreciate their work and I will not reject it; I will not suppress the work they do. There are women we know, with whom we have

> discussions, who have good political positions but who are part of this structure that works like that, it's the European project that works like that, that's why that money has been allocated. (R. – Dysnomia)

Regarding contractual relationships, interviewees mention that the situations in which NGOs make alliances with "the enemy", i.e. the state most often, the risk of co-optation becomes difficult to counter when power dynamics are unbalanced (C.P. – Front, C.T. – Filia). This was the case with the START project, carried out by the Department of Equal Opportunities between Women and Men together with the National Academy of Intelligence and funded by the European Social Fund (ESF) – a 38-million-euro project. The project aimed to contribute to the prevention and fight against domestic violence by creating an infrastructure dedicated to these objectives. However, the project was revealed to be a national fraud and a money laundering investigation took place. The project manager was a former employee of the Interior Ministry . Although the project was highly controversial with regard to transparency and the use of funds, some feminists, NGO members (from Filia Centre) or providers of services for victims of domestic violence (from Transcena Association, Sensiblu Foundation or Anais Association) worked as gender experts on the project. Activists fighting to end violence against women had high expectations from the START project since it was the first time that such significant resources were allotted to develop an infrastructure to address this phenomenon. But for service providers who constantly struggle to maintain their activities in precarious financial conditions, the way the project money was used was considered a waste. However, they were not comfortable criticizing the project, as they depended on the National Agency for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men (ANES), which has responsibilities related to minimum quality standards for social service providers. When some activists denounced START, the experts hired for the project tried to prevent criticism from the feminist comrades and were not comfortable themselves criticizing the project because they collaborated with state institutions and were bound through inflexible employment contracts and very rigid confidentiality clauses that prevented them from talking about it (C.T. – Filia; C.P. Front).

A former member of a feminist NGO, who worked at the time at the Department for Equal Opportunities and also in the START project, mentions on her Facebook page, sharing a newspaper article with the title "Fraud of 170 million euros for a quality life…":

> I am sorry to have worked on this project and I am happy to have left the project and the country in time. With this European project and my work in the Department for Equal Opportunities, my last hopes for a change for the better have died. I hope that the feminists and activists who remained there are more cautious and less naive. (C.T. Filia )

Another activist insists that co-optation takes effect when NGOs ally with the state like in the START project: "it kills some of your independence and activism and your capacity to criticize and to critically engage with a state institution" (C.P. Front).

A contractual relationship interrelated with financial dependence might occasion an exclusion from the decision-making process. Professional activists are contracted to provide expertise within precise confines, established a priori. They are not involved in the build-up process of the project, being unable to denounce the way a project is ran and unfolds. One project, financed through SOP HRD and initiated by the Order of Nurses and Midwives in Romania, aimed to provide training for women employees in the health care system. Feminist and gender equality professionals were contracted as experts for trainings and workshops and, in accordance with the EU's transversal principle of gender equality, applied through gender mainstreaming . Feminists hired in the project were very critical towards it, considering that it had a negative impact on the system. They argued that apart from "training cheap labor for abroad", those women who were trained did not have decisional power within the medical institutions they were part of and could not make changes regarding workplace sexual violence or the implementation of protocols that would give women the possibility to file complaints in total safety (V.A. – Front, Filia, O.C. – Front). One of the experts adds that without decisional power and "since their bosses remain uninformed, nothing will change and it is because of this that the impact seems reduced to me" (O.C. – Front).

What does this mean for a movement that wants to be subversive? Within the movement, discussions and reflections regarding the symbolic value and meaning of the terms of collaboration with different actors – public or private – are ongoing. Offering consultancy is the same as selling any other service? (M.R., Front)

### IV.1.3. Instrumentalization versus institutional discursive socialization

Collaboration between state institutions, especially ANES, and feminist organizations is considered mostly mercantile, meaning ticking a collaboration or consultation with NGOs because of an EU recommendation or an obligation from international bodies with whom the country is bound legally through conventions. Openness to collaboration depends on the government in power and varies from institution to institution. Within the process of inclusion and participation, some feminist activists and professionals were hired within these gender-equality bodies and contributed to the institutional discursive socialization of some state employees. One of the oldest employees and former secretary of state of ANES recalls the exchange of knowledge:

> "We were a very young team then, all university graduates. The youngest of us, X, had gender expertise because he had completed the gender studies Master's, or was in the last year. We debated many issues… I was coming to work at 7.30 in the morning and staying until the evening to debate various issues. The first time, he gave me Drumul catre autonomie ("The Road to Autonomy") by Mihaela Miroiu and told me "Read it. After you read it, we talk". And then my world broke completely. That was it. Since then, I started a Master's, but I did not finish it; I gave birth to my daughter, but I read a lot of literature, because he gave me, he was my supplier, my feminist literature dealer. And we slowly started to function as an institution as well – we also had a headquarters, we also had the necessary facilities…" (M.C., ANES)

This situation is reflective of the scholarly debates around the possible benefits of infusing feminist ideas within the state and function as a contamination process.

### IV.1.4. Occupy the space: resistance to the current hegemonic order

Rather than just risking blunt co-optation, feminist NGOs, who engage in formal politics, occupy a space in the official political arena and secure opposition: first. to the present hegemonic order, including the state – an order that tends towards a normalization of the neoliberal consensus (Mouffe 2000); and second, in relation to counter-movements and other antagonists, providing an alternative to the right-wing and radical right discourses that are gaining momentum in recent years.

Critics of NGO-ization argued that NGOs address issues only in a politically acceptable manner (Alvarez 1998, 306) and target a mere reform of the state that might create new dependencies and regulations for women (Lang 1997, 112) or as agents of imposed neoliberal reforms by Western states (Jad 2007). Without denying such critical stances as they are grounded in instances of instrumentalization and mercantile cooperation, as previously shown, I suggest that through participation in institutional politics, feminist NGOs and activists occupy a space that otherwise would have been unoccupied, free and open to use by conservative groups or counter-movements, which often supported legislation and policies aiming to restrain various rights such as the right to abortion (A.F.1, Filia; A.T. – Filia; M.R. 1 – Front).

One of the strikes of the pro-life movement strongly supported by the Orthodox Church within their long-term anti-abortion campaigns was the legislative initiative by MPs Marius Dugulescu and Sulfina Barbu from PDL (Democratic Liberal Party) to establish counseling cabinets for the pregnancy crisis (my emphasis) and introduce compulsory counseling for women who want to have an abortion, including showing audio-video materials regarding abortion procedures and information regarding the fact that "from the moment of conception, the embryo is a human being in the full sense of the word, whose life will cease following the

medical procedure". In the explanatory memorandum of the law, the deputies unilaterally promoted and supported the activity of pro-life movement organizations or religious organizations.

During the conference organized to present the legislative proposal, hosted by the Parliament, in March 2012, the room was physically divided: on the right side, sat pro-life organizations such as Pro-Vita, the Families Coalition and allies such as religious organizations; and on the left side, sat feminist organizations, representatives of the Antidiscrimination Coalition, LGBTQIA+, Romani and human rights organizations. The latter organizations coalesced to oppose to the legislative proposal and organized a rigorous campaign with both domestic and international support , until September 2012 when the proposal was rejected in the Parliament.

One feminist, who participated throughout the process recalls:

> "It is against this stuff today that it is very hard to fight, very very hard, because what can you do? Here I am with you, with X and Y creating NGOs, protesting and screaming like three wimpy cats in the rain, in the public market, and these people have some millions of dollars. You, who are you? Who are you to buy TV broadcasting space, what? There is such an explicit, absolute power imbalance." (M.R. 1 – Front)

Apart from solid infrastructure – organizational and financial – with enormous support from the Romanian Orthodox Church, the pro-life movement and the Families Alliance have an effective communication strategy: formally detaching themselves from extreme-right organizations, bringing women to the forefront with rainbows on their websites, using both frontal and subtle tactics, such as trying to obtain the recognition of the fetus as a human being in order to avoid other parliamentary procedures in their way towards banning abortion. (A.T. – Filia)

Beyond risking co-optation, engaging with the state allows feminists to occupy a space in the official politics, to position themselves as pawns on a chessboard in relation to governmental agencies and state institutions as hegemonic institutions, but also in relation to counter-movements such as pro-life movements and the extreme-right.

The argument for the necessity to constitute an opposition to pro-life movements, extreme-right movements, theorized under the general umbrella of anti-gender mobilizations (Kuhar and Paternotte 2017) is similar to feminists' urging about the dangers of giving up opposition while taking for granted the gained rights. This shows the need to act both in the official political arena and in contentious street politics to construct and maintain alternatives to the existing hegemonic order and to counter-movements. It resonates with Hodzic's research where she finds that Ghanian feminists see no value in opposing the state "for the sake of taking a pure stance" but they try to re-gender state institutions, establishing

collaborations with public institutions but at the same time being critical about them, considering them both "dangerous and generative" (Hodzic 2014, 233–234).

## IV.2. Co-optation through financial dependence

Financial dependence, amplified by the lack of alternative independent resources that could assure an NGOs' survival, increases the risk of co-optation, which in this case is related to the multiplicity of funding sources. Co-optation through financial dependence involves four dimensions: channelling through increased bureaucratization and project-based work; donors' agenda and priorities; constant evidence of the social needs to donors that favor mostly a one-shot approach; the risk of restrictions and censorship.

Feminist organizations distinguish among two periods after the fall of the state-socialist regime regarding donors' practices. Before entering the EU, sponsors were more flexible, there was less bureaucratization and "a less expert attitude" (C.B. – Filia). This allowed feminist professionals in NGOs to negotiate with donors, the terms of project implementation or to explain when some aspects did not go as planned in the initial funding application. This initial flexibility of donors allowed for bring local issues and knowledge to the forefront, but also to gain expertise and competencies, learning about project management. After EU accession, NGOs were awarded according to their organizational capacity. The more grassroots feminist organizations did not conform to the European donors' requests and, to survive, entered into partnerships with bigger organizations or state institutions who had the organizational capacity and resources to apply for European funds, such as universities, ministries and hospitals (C.B. – Filia). The second wave of funding brought increased bureaucratization, which diverted time. Feminists in NGOs confess that they spend around half of the time devoted to a project to bureaucratic activities connected to donors, instead of working for and with beneficiaries. This also lowers their reactive capacity for mobilization and the degree of politicization of certain issues.

### IV.2.1. Channelling through bureaucratization and project-based work

Channelling through increased bureaucratization and project-based work implies that considerable resources of time and personnel are channelled towards administrative and bureaucratic activities: fundraising, evaluation and justification for subsidizing bodies, writing reports and compiling supporting documents. Project-based work is a logic of action endorsed by donors by offering thematic short and medium-term funding for projects. Organizations do not have access to structural funding that can ensure organizational continuity and long-term strategies; their survival depends on the projects they have. Hence, feminist NGOs' financial

resources are composed of a mosaic of project funds from multiple donors. They spend substantial time searching for grants and writing applications and, if they get the grant, on writing reports and evaluations. This happens in the detriment of reactive, contentious actions, supporting a certain degree of demobilization.

Concerning organizational survival by engaging in projects overloaded with bureaucracy, one interviewee from Filia Center recalls that apart from the positive things that Filia does, all of them are built on constant negotiations and tensions regarding balance sheets, audit, payments, budgets, problems with reports – all these representing the work behind the scene that is mostly unseen (A.T. – Filia). Bureaucratic activities, many times overlooked, should have a place in this narrative because they constrain, in the sense that "you need to make some compromises on taking projects because otherwise the organization cannot survive", in the most basic way with office rent and bills (A.T. – Filia). Related to compromises such as taking projects overloaded with bureaucracy, the president of the same association recalls:

> "We participated in this project on equal chances for active women that aims to support women to become competitive on the labor market. This project is a SOP HRD and it offers a bigger salary, but is loading us with bureaucracy. Nevertheless, if we have a bigger salary, we can bring more money for the organization and these are some informal policies at the level of organization, which do not represent a sustainable method of survival. Another colleague and I are constantly donating money. I apply for different funds, but if we do not win the grants, all our labor contracts end here." (A.F.2. – Filia)

The ALEG Association recalls that their first funds, before entering the EU, were awarded from sponsors considered more flexible, such as the Global Fund for Women or Global Fund for Children. After EU accession, ALEG members had to deal with the bureaucracy of European and Romanian funds, but they were already used to it, more mature as an organization and able to manage the heavy bureaucracy without giving up (P.P. – ALEG). One member recalls one of the biggest projects they implemented which was the build-up of a crisis centre, a pilot centre for counseling in cases of sexual violence. She explains that half of her time as project manager was used to do bureaucratic work. She considers this excessive because it takes from the time that should be allotted to those for whom the service is created, for the coordination of the service, for adjusting the procedures (A.V. 1 – ALEG). Though much of the bureaucracy is meaningless, she is aware that some bureaucratic work is useful for establishing evaluation procedures and measuring the impact of the service created:

> "This is the bureaucratic part of the service that would make sense and would be worth investing time in, but instead we lost a lot of time with the bureaucracy demanded by the donor where there are a lot of requirements with notifications every time you do

> not fall into a budget line; and all these notifications had many attachments and explanations and very exhaustive period reports." (A.V. 1 – ALEG)

Similarly, members of the Front Association tried to avoid the Sectoral Operational Program Human Resources Development (SOP HRD) financed through the ESF because it set some obstacles beforehand, as there is a cash-flow requirement to be able to advance money and start the project and because it is loaded with bureaucracy. They preferred to apply to Fondul ONG, which gives less money, but has more flexible conditions (C.P. – Front; O.C. – Front).

Feminist activists have to consider that using organization's resources for predictable, well-planned actions and for bureaucratic activities related to donors' accountability leaves fewer resources available for non-predictable and reactive actions. The consequence of financial dependence and the precarity of project-based work loosens NGOs' reactive capacity regarding urgent, imperative concerns and decreases involvement in grassroots activism and contentious actions (C.B. – Filia, C.P. – Front, M.M.1 – CPE).

The case of a gang rape that involved seven young men from the Moldova region who were tried in freedom was emphasized during interviews as an important case with low mobilization for reaction. One feminist recalled that NGOs and the larger feminist community did not organize any public action of protest because "as simple as that, they did not have time or they had other priorities. Other priorities like projects, you know?!" (C.P. – Front). She continued: "And it seems to me that this activism where you do not react although it is a very important and serious matter – because you realize that sexual violence, at least in Romania, is a critical and serious issue and it would be a huge priority but you lose yourself with other things like projects" (C.P. – Front ).

The potential trigger of a gang-rape case was not sufficiently handled – interviewees emphasize (M.M.1 – CPE, C.P. – Front, V.A. – Front, Filia, A.V. 1 – ALEG) – as to mobilize the public in a wider movement against sexual violence. However, the Network Break the Silence against Sexual Violence, which gathers NGOs involved in preventing and combating sexual violence, wrote an open letter to the Romanian President Klaus Iohannis, questioning the trial in freedom of the offenders. The Network asked the Ministry of Justice to make public the means by which it was decided to order the transposal of the Directive 2012/29 / EU establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime in the national law and the way they will implement them. The Network also asked for public consultations with representatives of expert organizations and to correctly transpose and implement the directive. Finally, they sent a message of solidarity with the abused girls and women and their families .

The lack of (independent) resources or their scarcity intensifies the tension between engaging in contentious, disruptive actions close to the SM type or in policy change actions and collaboration with state institutions. One activist, a former volunteer at Filia, recalls that

one of the last actions they organized before she left the organization was Slutwalk Bucharest. The president of the organization back-then opposed Filia's institutional participation or its name associated with the protest, arguing that "it looks bad on Filia's CV" and it might preclude possible funds from the Soros Foundation or embassies since it would appear as too radical and an anti-system organization (V.A. – Front, Filia). However, a few Filia members contributed to the organization of Slutwalk and participated in the march. A few years later, another feminist organization was inquired by donors following a grant application in relation to the organization of Slutwalk (I.T. – Front).

### IV.2.2. Social needs and donor's one-shot approach

With the new wave of funding, proving to European sponsors the special needs within local communities became more difficult. There is a gap between donors' perceptions about the imperative needs and problems of groups and communities – and NGOs understanding of those issues. Donors maintain control over resources and their distribution, having the power to decide to whom, how and for what purposes resources will be allotted. This asymmetrical relationship between donors and NGOs reveals the disconnection between acceptance of progressive postulates and dismissal of advantages, such as the refusal of institutional support in the following cases. One employee of an LGBTQIA+ organization in Bucharest mentions that HIV prevention is still needed but "this is the perversity: that you still need this but you have to prove to sponsors that it is sustainable and donors, unfortunately, are dictating the social movement up to a point, even if not completely." (S.P. – ACCEPT, Biblioteca Alternativa).

Similarly, the ALEG Association created specialized service for victims of sexual violence, working from a feminist perspective, a unique service in Romania, implemented with resources from NGO Fund. ALEG wanted to continue offering the service as there was a proven necessity in their view, based on the experience of the pilot project. However, they did not manage to win funds, as donors rejected their application, considering that ALEG did not prove the special need for the service. For ALEG it was difficult to see the subject of sexual violence rejected, knowing from the ground the great need for specialized services (P.P. – ALEG).

While for domestic violence, some infrastructure of services was developed, for sexual violence it is still deficient. Sexual violence can be both with a partner and included in domestic violence, but also with a non-partner, outside the family environment and no rape crisis services are provided. Romanian legislation concentrates on violence within the family. Victims of sexual violence outside the family are protected by the penal code, but there are no specialized services for them. An activist explains:

> "We think it is very important to work from a gender perspective, from a feminist perspective in the area of sexual violence because it is very easy to re-traumatize if you don't help the victim understand that the causes of the violence she suffered do not depend on her, that she did not do something wrong. This approach is lacking within state institutions' intervention and this is why what we bring has an added value, but unfortunately it is not sufficiently important for some donors." (A.V. 1 – ALEG)

ALEG decided to maintain the specialized service for sexual violence, but since financing is lacking, they have had to work as volunteers providing counseling, sharing information, working with lawyers who offer pro bono support, but it is not able anymore to reimburse medical-certificates or to support victims to the same extent (A.V. 1 – ALEG, P.P. – ALEG).

### IV.2.3. Adjustment to donors' agenda and priorities

In the context of NGOs' financial scarcity, co-optation through financial dependence concerns the contingent pressure from a donor's agenda. NGOs indicated the limiting character of the donor's agenda and priorities that dictate the projects to be funded and the issues addressed, sometimes to the detriment of local needs when they do not correspond to the agenda.

The new wave of EU financing, the largest donor in Europe, came with the top priority of integration of vulnerable groups in the labor market. Consequently, many NGOs implement projects that aim to integrate vulnerable women on the labor market. The Centre Partnership for Equality in Bucharest (CPE) implemented two SOP HRD projects: one on innovation and promotion of women in the labor market; and the other on the integration and promotion of women in the labor market, both targeting unemployed women between 16–35 years old. To achieve this goal, CPE organized different activities: focus groups with unemployed women, to elaborate a needs analysis to further build-up a course on social and civic competencies; ten campaigns to raise awareness; five courses on social and civic competencies at the end of which participants would receive a diploma and 250 RON (around 50 euros); seminars for public authorities, NGOs and vulnerable women in the labor market; a study visit in Milan for public authorities to exchange good practices on gender equality (M.M.1 – CPE).

Feminist NGOs question themselves about the potential contributions from these kind of projects in accomplishing the movement's goals. One activist mentions that these projects aiming to integrate vulnerable women in the labor market are not sustainable and amplify and maintain class divisions between women, with some women being empowered on the back of other women (C.B. – Filia). She further explains:

> "I think a lot changed with the new wave of financing from the EU. This means that when you train 500 women to become baby-sitters, you think that you helped them.

> And the problem is that this is an absolute systemic phenomenon. All these projects that follow an issue theoretically exasperate me – like you teach another hundred women to better write their CV and to participate in job interviews. For me this is an illusion to believe that we can do this for all women, like the labor market would be an endless supply of decent jobs. And I think we need an intersectional feminist critique of capitalism because many women are emancipated at the expense of other women." (C.B. – Filia)

Feminist NGOs criticize the European-funded projects that aim to contribute to the integration of vulnerable groups of women in the labor market, considering that they address neither the local issues of women nor the root causes of their oppression and vulnerability. Being poor, some women from the target group are incentivized to participate in the seminars organized through these projects to get the meagre sum of money that they receive at the end (M.M.1 – CPE, A.S. – CPE). Likewise, representatives from state institutions such as school inspectorates, institutions for retirement, and employment agencies were incentivized to participate in trainings with the possibility to apply for a study visit abroad or other benefits.

Channelling, through financial dependence, donors' agendas and priorities, also means alienation and self-alienation from the grass-root movements, including from the working class people, by being exposed to the mirage of inclusion to the elite or at least an upgrade to the new middle-class. The perversity of this phenomenon is to be understood in the context of the precarious working conditions of many feminist NGOs' employees and activists. There is a gap between NGO experts with high salaries and other feminist employees who perform a great deal of voluntary work in addition to their NGO contract. One former Filia member who later joined an informal queer feminist group explains that "for civil society, anti-capitalism is against its interests" and everything that means civil society fits the neoliberal model very well (C.B., Filia). She argues that the professionalization of feminism in Romania during the last twenty five years was profitable for some people:

> "A moment of awakening was when I realized that people really think about this as a job and they take money. It seemed to me they take a lot of money, especially after the SOP HRD projects appeared […] And I work all day with poverty rates and threshold – 100 euros – and then I see a salary like this…it gives me a headache. For many people, it is profitable to do this […] And when it's not about money, it's about the CV – you're building your resume. You get a better job. When you enter the mainstream civil society, it helps you in this neoliberal system. For me, the first alarm sign was that if we would really be anti-system activists, fighting systemic injustice, it should be harder. I mean, you should not feel like you can actually go on." (C.B., Filia)

### IV.2.4. Risk of restrictions and censorship

The last aspect of co-optation through financial dependence concerns the risk of restrictions and censorship by donors. Constraints in terms of actions, discourse and language shape the activities and framing of feminist NGOs and they appear both indirectly, through regulations provided through donors' guidelines for applications and call for tenders, and directly, through rejecting reports and other written, audio or video materials submitted to donors for evaluation until they fit the sponsor's frame or agenda.

One Filia member explained that when doing research about the impact of the economic crisis on women financed by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), when they sent the final book version which resulted from the research , the sponsors rejected it initially saying that they would not publish the report until it was re-written. They were disturbed by the fact that the authors criticized the austerity measures implemented by the government and they argued that the project was supposed to be about the impact of the economic crisis and not about the austerity measures. Those involved in the research replied that they cannot separate the two of them. A Filia member recalls: "we tried to resist it as it seemed to be overt censorship and then they said we should at least rephrase some things as there is too much essay and they want bullets. Anyhow, I understood that they had many interactions at the time with the governing party and that's why they asked for a re-write." (C.B. – Filia). Similar situations were not uncommon. In another case, donors conditioned funding on changing the title of a project from what activists called "misogynistic advertising" to "disrespectful advertising", erasing the element of gender – the objectification of women by the mass media and the promotion of gender roles rooted in structural inequalities – revealing the subtle coercion with depoliticizing effects (A.T. – Filia, C.B. – Filia).

Feminist NGOs stressed the need for independent funds, such as the Frida Fund, that target feminists' work to tackle different issues and is intended for formal and informal organizations. Having to compete for funds with all the social causes raises problems for feminist organizations (A.V. 1 – ALEG; P.P. – ALEG).

## Conclusions

Risks of co-optation of the feminist movement appear when entering into a collaborative relationship characterized by a substantial power asymmetry, such as those with state institutions or donors.

Collaboration with state institutions and gender-equality bodies opened a window of opportunity for the feminist movement to contribute and influence policy-making in crucial areas, such as gender equality laws and policies, non-discrimination and violence against women. The formal recognition of the experience and knowledge of the feminist activists and

later professionals was translated into the institutionalization of their expertise. However, feminist NGOs view alliances with the state as both dangerous and constructive, considering that mobilization alone does not suffice and other strategies that do not just target but also involve state actors are necessary.

Cooperating with state institutions does not automatically entail co-optation, nor does it involve stopping being critical towards the government or stopping engaging in contentious strategies. When institutionalized tactics such as lobbying or advocacy failed, organizations adopted more disruptive repertoires.

The risk of co-optation appears also when feminist NGOs enter collaborative contractual relationships with rigid clauses and limited decision-making power. Beyond the false idea of pure autonomy, the necessity to act on urgent social issues by improving legislation and policies offers limited choices to feminist NGOs but to participate in the official political arena. The scarce independent financial resources pressured NGOs to search for funds from public or private donors. However, the power asymmetry between NGOs and donors and the financial dependence sometimes weigh against the movement. The rare, limited state funds pushed feminist NGOs to collaborate with European and international donors. European funds channelled NGOs work by overburdening them with bureaucracy and through project-based work that endorse a one-shot approach. Proving the urgency of the social needs that they want to address sometimes clashes with donors' agendas and priorities. Risks of restriction and censorship appear when NGOs' perspectives collide with those of donors.

However, the answer to the risk of co-optation was not to stop engaging politically with state institutions, thought unaffordable by many activists, but to critically engage with the political arena by occupying a space in the formal official politics to foster norm diffusion or institutional discursive socialization, to secure opposition to the current hegemonic order that normalizes neoliberalism and to provide an alternative to the right wing and radical-right movement and discourses that are gaining momentum during recent years.

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| **SP** | Accept, Biblioteca Alternativa Bucharest | June 2015 |
| **MM1** | CPE, Bucharest | June 2015 |
| **CB** | Filia, Centrul Feminist Sofia Nadejde, Bucharest | June 2015 |
| **AS** | CPE, Bucharest | February 2016 |
| **BM** | Filia, Bucharest | January 2016 |
| **A.M.** | A-Casa, Cluj | July 2016 |
| **B.T.** | Biblioteca Alternativa | June 2015 |
| **T.D.** | Biblioteca Alternativa | June 2015 |
| **I.C.** | Filia | June 2015 |
| **C.S.1** | Front | June 2015 |
| **M.R.1** | Front | June 2015 |
| **C.L.1** | Dynsomia, Claca, Biblioteca Alternativa | June 2015 |
| **R.C.** | A-Casa | July 2016 |
| **O.** | Dysnomia | July 2016 |
| **C.C.** | CPE | June 2016 |

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**TYTUŁ**: Niepewne miejsca: feministyczna kooptacja i strategie oporu w czasach neoliberalizmu?

**ABSTRAKT**: Gdy kobiety zyskały możliwość wpływania na politykę za pośrednictwem oficjalnych kanałów, postulaty feministek dotyczące sprawiedliwości społecznej zaczęto realizować w Rumunii poprzez zinstytucjonalizowane formy interwencji politycznej. Instytucjonalizację i profesjonalizację ruchu feministycznego powszechnie kojarzono z feministycznymi i kobiecymi organizacjami pozarządowymi współpracującymi z rządowymi organami do spraw równości płci w celu realizacji postulatów ruchu i osiągnięcia sukcesu w sferze polityki. Podczas gdy niektórzy badacze zawracali uwagę na korzyści płynące z przenikania idei i praktyk feministycznych do struktury państwa, inni uważali, że organizacje pozarządowe czynią ruch feministyczny podatnym na kooptację, przyczyniając się do jego demobilizacji i odpolitycznienia. Koncepcja kooptacji odzwierciedla dylematy, przed którymi stoją współczesne ruchy feministyczne. Dylematy te dotyczą przesuwania celów ruchu, które mogą być dostosowane do innych priorytetów i programów – czasami działając na niekorzyść

ruchu i w sprzeczności z pierwotnymi celami, szczególnie gdy staną się częścią oficjalnych kanałów politycznych. Zależność feministycznych grup i organizacji pozarządowych od funduszy państwowych lub prywatnych jest również powiązana z kooptacją ruchu. Jak budować ruch na krytycznych analizach koncepcji kooptacji bez jednoczesnego kwestionowania wagi działań i wysiłków aktywistów feministycznych i organizacji pozarządowych jako legitymizujących programy polityczne państwowych lub prywatnych darczyńców? Badanie to ma na celu, po pierwsze, wyjaśnienie napięć powstałych w wyniku kooptacji i związanych z dylematem bycia wewnątrz/na zewnątrz, przed którym stoi współczesny ruch feministyczny. Po drugie, celem autorki artykułu jest zbadanie strategii przeciwstawienia się lub zarządzania kooptacją opracowanych przez ruch feministyczny. Do analizy procesu kooptacji, a zwłaszcza wywoływanych przez ów proces napięć i powstałych wopozycji do niego strategii oporu, w tekście wykorzystano literaturę NGO-izacji i przedstawiono empiryczne dowody pochodzące z badań nad rumuńskim ruchem feministycznym.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** kooptacja, instytucjonalizacja, NGO-izacja, ruch feministyczny, zależność finansowa

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# THE #ЯНЕБОЮСЬСКАЗАТЬ (#IAMNOTSCAREDTOSPEAK) CAMPAIGN OF JULY 2016 IN FACEBOOK'S RUSSIAN SPEAKING COMMUNITY: A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

ANNA SEDYSHEVA

**Abstract**: Digital or hashtag activism in social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook has gained popularity around the globe. Campaigns such as #MeToo and #YesAllWomen have drawn much needed attention to the problems of gender based violence and misogyny. This article is dedicated to a similar, but unique, campaign – #ЯнеБоюсьСказать (#IamNotScaredToSpeak) – that took place in Facebook's Russian speaking community in July 2016. (It followed an identical campaign started in Ukraine, which subsequently crossed over into other former Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan.) The objective of this article is twofold. First, utilizing Discourse Analysis, I analyze posts associated with #IamNotScaredToSpeak, and argue that the campaign raised the visibility of the problem of sexual violence largely as a result of women's active participation in it. A number of women who decided to reveal their personal experiences and others who stood with them against rape culture, helped increase the significance of women's linguistic agency and made #IamNotScaredToSpeak the first large-scale feminist movement in Russia to date. Second, I will examine the specificity of the #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign and argue that it was predominantly of a grass-roots nature with the self-organization and participation of ordinary people being crucial to the movement. By way of comparison, the #MeToo campaign, operating in the western context, was largely initiated and led by celebrities.

**Keywords:** feminist movements, gender based violence in Russia, #IamNotScaredToSpeak, digital activism

## Introduction

The campaign – *#яНеБоюсьСказать* (in English: #IamNotScaredToSpeak) – began on Russian language Facebook on July 5, 2016.[1] The hashtag initially appeared on Facebook in Ukrainian, when activist Anastasia Melnychenko encouraged women to fight against misogyny and the attitude of victim blaming in Ukrainian society by speaking about the sexual assaults they experienced during their lifetime (Melnychenko 2016). The post gained widespread popularity very rapidly and within less than 24 hours a similar campaign was created by women in Russia by altering the original hashtag (by changing one letter) to Russian (Bondareva 2016).

During the entire month of July 2016, thousands of Russian women shared their stories on social media while others joined the discussion and expanded it to traditional media, including Russian TV channels. From the perspective of Structuration Theory (Giddens 1986), one can argue that the campaign drew much attention and challenged feminist discourse in Russia. Being the first large-scale manifestation of women's solidarity in modern Russia, the #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign, opposed *Structure*, the "recurrent patterned arrangements which influence or limit the choices and opportunities available" (Barker and Jane 2016, 448). Giddens sees *structure* as "a »virtual order« of transformative relations;" i.e., "social systems, as reproduced social practices, do not have »structures« but rather exhibit »structural properties« and that structure exists, as time-space presence, only in its instantiations in such practices and as memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents" (1986, 17).

Studying the Russian women's movement from the perspective of a discursive approach helps identify this kind of activism's potential and the opportunities it offers for women's solidarity at the level of language and consciousness and for collective identity building. Discursive patterns that permeated the public Facebook posts related to #IamNotScaredToSpeak touched upon various aspects of sexual violence and made social interactions more explicit in terms of issues concerning gender equality problems.

This paper poses the following questions:

- to what extent was women's agency the crucial component of the #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign (i.e., "the capacity of individuals to act independently and to make their own free choices" (Barker and Jane 2016, 448);
- how did this movement affect women's mobilizations within Russia;
- to what extent could the campaign be recognized as feminist in its nature.

[1] My translation of *#яНеБоюсьСказать* as #IamNotScaredToSpeak, is taken from *The Guardian* newspaper (Walker 2016). Other English-language media have proposed different translations; for instance, GlobalVoices.org uses #IamNotAfraidToSayIt (Global Voices 2016). I believe that the first translation is better suited to the victims' posts owing to its more narrative nature.

Crucial to answering these questions is a reflection on whether #IamNotScaredToSpeak was the entry point for discussing the previously taboo topic of gender-based violence in Russia.

The objective of this article is twofold. First, applying Discourse Analysis, I analyze posts associated with #IamNotScaredToSpeak and argue that the campaign successfully increased the visibility of the problem of sexual violence largely through the active participation of women. A number of women who decided to reveal their experiences and others who stood with them against rape culture contributed to raising the significance of women's linguistic agency and made #IamNotScaredToSpeak the first large-scale feminist movement in Russia to date. Second, I will examine the specificity of the #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign and argue that it was predominantly of a grass-roots nature where self-organization and participation of ordinary people were crucial to it. I further argue, that it differed from the #MeToo campaign which exploded after *The New York Times* published allegations of sexual misconduct against Harvey Weinstein in October of 2017. The latter campaign, operating in the western context, was largely initiated and led by celebrities.

## Patriarchal culture in Russia. Feminist understanding of violence against women

Feminist theorists have shown that violence is gendered, and that most violent acts are committed by men and therefore cannot be observed outside the concept of gender (Connell 2009; Scully 1994; Hearn 1996). Connell defines "Gender" as "the structure of social relations that centers on the reproductive arena, and the set of practices that bring reproductive distinctions between bodies into social processes" (2009, 31). "Genders" are socially constructed in terms of features and behaviors and are considered masculine and feminine. In many patriarchal cultural contexts, masculinity is associated with strength and dominance, femininity with weakness. According to The World Health Organization (WHO 2017), gender-based violence against women is one of the most important global problems as of 2017: "Global estimates published by WHO indicate that about 1 in 3 (35%) of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence in their lifetime."

In Russian society, as in many others, patriarchy links gender to the issue of power (Carrigan, Connell & Lee 1985). In her book, *The Manifesto of the Feminist Movement of Russia* (*Манифест феминистского движения России*), Dr. Olgerta Kharitonova states that "men make women culturally invisible and use their social power to create a wall of silence around those who are in pain, around women whom they use" (Kharitonova 2015, 61). In the past, the Soviet Union preached that it was a society that had achieved the complete equality of women and

men. While this may be true with regards to some areas of social life, e.g. women's employment, various scholars have argued that the extent of emancipation during the Soviet reign was in fact not as large as was proclaimed (Posadskaya, 1994). "The Soviet state promoted and institutionalised a distinctive »gender order« which has had a lasting impact on gender relations and gender identities in post-Soviet Russia" (Ashwin 2012, 329).

This is what Giddens sees as "memory traces" and argues that *Structure* only exists as such (1986, 377). According to him, "memory traces" can be seen in three ways: as Domination, Signification and Legitimation rules (Giddens 1986, 29). "The 1990s constituted a rupture in policy terms but not in the behaviour of men and women, which continued to be structured by Soviet gender norms" (Ashwin 2012, 329). Some authors, such as Ekaterina Kochkina, consequently argue that so-called gender equality triumphs in the Soviet period were actually myths (Kochkina, 2003).

Contemporary statistics on violence related crimes against women in Russia, including domestic violence, are imprecise. According to Russian Government Statistics, 3,900 women were raped in 2016 and 5,400 were subjected to violent sexual acts (Laikam 2016, 185). Oddly, Russian statistics indicate that it had fewer rapes than Sweden, a country almost 15 times smaller in population (Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention). In addition, the UN Secretary-General's report on all forms of violence against women cautions that police reports worldwide are unreliable because of significant underreporting.

Various sources note that it is difficult to assess the real scale of the situation since, according to unofficial data, only every seventh rape victim reports it to the police (NGO Krizisnyj centr dlya zhenshchin 2018). Russian laws do not encourage reporting of sexual abuse to police. Women who do so are often subjected to additional stress and pressure owing to an unsympathetic police force in a society wherein victim blaming is common (Ibidem). Even people who personally experienced sexual violence sometimes manifest such feelings. Lerner calls them "justice-driven fundamental assumptions"; that people perceive things on the basis of their own convictions and also that people are inclined towards seeing causality for why things happen (Lerner 1980, 255). Self-blame occurs when sexual assault survivors start looking for reasons for what happened to them in terms of what they might have done wrong (Richardson and Campbell 1982; Lerner and Miller 1978; Kiecolt-Glaser and Williams 1987).

Men still determine norms in partner-relationships in Russia and legislators have not been engaged in improving laws protecting women from sexual and physical violence. "According to reconstructed statistics, in Russia, every forty minutes a woman dies at the hands of a close male: her husband, cohabitant, father or friend. Domestic violence is the same as femicide, both being based on the belief that a woman is not an equal person to a man" (Kharitonova 2015, 24). Currently Russia has no law protecting individuals against sexual harassment. Furthermore, in February 2017, the government decriminalized some forms of domestic

violence that had previously been on the books (Walker 2017). The problem of violence against women might be indicative and/ or the result of the low status of gender equality in other spheres of social life. Only 15% of the Lower House of Russia's State Duma consists of women members (IPU PARLINE Database 2018).

The unequal status of women in society is reinforced (Ashwin 2012, 337) by sexist and patriarchal attitudes characteristic of "rape culture" that permeate Russian media and public discourse. "In the 2000s some Soviet policy themes, in particular the pro-natalist emphasis on women's role as mothers, were resurrected in a modified form" (Ashwin 2012, 329). Popular Russian TV shows such as "Let's get Married" (*"Давай поженимся"*) and "Fashion Judgment" (*"Модный приговор"*) are illustrative of this, and have promoted marriage as the most important factor in women's success for over a decade. An incident on another national show ("Let Them Talk" – *"Пусть говорят"*) further illustrates the point. In March 2017, a rape victim named Diana S. was subjected to public condemnation and mass internet-bullying (Berg 2017). Subsequently, the Burger King Company in Russia created an advertisement wherein a girl without a visible face was painted mimicking a hand gesture used by Diana to indicate how little vodka she had in her bloodstream at the time of her attack. In the advertisement, the gesture indicated that the promotion would be "limited" in duration (*Meduza* 2017).

Victim-blaming in Russian society is quite common. The above-mentioned programs regularly faulted the single women appearing on them for their inability to keep a man, often criticizing their wardrobe and behavior.

## Women's linguistic agency, and rape culture

Public discourses and the way experiences of sexual violence are narrated fundamentally affect how the issue is treated by the general public, legal system and its institutions, e.g., law enforcement. Linguistic agency of various actors engaged in the debate on sexual violence, including women, is of crucial importance. Laura M. Ahearn (in her essay "Language and Agency") illuminates the meaning of linguistic agency noting that: "because language and culture are so tightly interwoven, neither should be studied in isolation from the other, especially when a researcher seeks to understand a concept as complex as agency" (2001, 131). Ahearn argues that the concept of linguistic agency offers promise, maintaining "that attending closely to linguistic structures and practices can shed even more light on practice theorists' main dilemma: how social reproduction becomes social transformation" (Ibidem). Moreover, categories of grammar "construct the roles of Subject, Agent, and Object differently," and by examining them, researchers can gain much insight as to "how people attribute responsibility, credit, or blame for an event" (Ibidem). Engaging with discursive aspects of linguistic agency

is equally crucial for such an analysis, as it illuminates how gender limits access to public discourse.

In the social sciences, it is feminist theory that "is intensively involved in questions over access to discourse" (Mills 1997, 97), that women do not have the same access to discourse as men. For instance, as Raewyn Connell has noted, rape is "routinely presented in media as individual deviance, a form of person-to-person violence deeply embedded in power inequalities and ideology of male supremacy. Far from being a deviation from the social order, it is in a significant sense an enforcement of it" (Collin 2009, 116).

Gender-based violence can also be described by the term "rape culture," a concept which first emerged and crystallized in the 1970s Margaret Lazurus's and Renner Wunderlich's 1975 documentary, *Rape Culture,* was an early example of discussing the term within the context of cultural normalization (Peters and Besley 2018, 3). In rape culture, women are subject to the constant threat of violence ranging from sexual comments and sexual/physical touching to direct rape. In such a social, cultural and symbolic context, both men and women treat sexual violence as a commonplace fact. Some feminists of the 1960s–70s argued that historically, sexuality is a form of male domination. Most famously, Catharine MacKinnon stated that "feminism fundamentally identifies sexuality as the sphere of male power" (Jaggar 1983, 105). Social scientists, policymakers, feminist researchers and activists from around the world have all argued that women experience gender-based discrimination (Collin 2009; Hatty 2000; Smiths 2014; WHO 2017; UN Women).

## #IamNotScaredToSpeak: A brief history of the hashtag campaign

The #IAmNotScaredToSpeak campaign triggered widespread hashtag activism to further the feminist cause of fighting violence against women. On July 5, 2016, Anastasia Melnychenko, the head of NGO Studena (whose main activities focus on social adaptation of military veterans, gender equality and human rights activism) (NGO Studena 2018) launched a campaign on Facebook under the Ukrainian hashtag *#ЯнеБоюсьСказати* with the following request: "I want women to speak today. Let us talk about the violence that most of us have experienced." After describing her own traumatic experiences with sexual assault, Melnychenko concluded her post with the words: "[I]t's important for us women to talk about our experiences. It is important to make them visible. Please speak. #IamNotScaredToSpeak" (Melnychenko 2016).

The campaign stayed in active mode for one month. The post of Melnychenko (2016) received over 2,000 comments with many later additions in 2017 and 2018. Thousands of women responded to Melnychenko's call to share their experiences. Less than a day after the campaign was launched in Ukraine, shares were expanded to Russian Facebook and the hashtag

was translated into Russian – *#яНеБоюсьСказать* (Mingalieva 2016). From then on, the two campaigns developed simultaneously within Ukraine and Russia.

Studies have shown that hashtag activism has become a new and popular form of mobilization in recent years. As a social phenomenon, it started on the platform Twitter:

Hashtag activism, a term that entered the public consciousness when New York Times media columnist David Carr (2012) wrote of the phenomenon, gives communicators an ability to streamline their messaging on the micro-blogging social networking platform. The hashtag, a function of Twitter that allows users to cluster their tweets around a single issue or focus, has garnered growing media interest in the wake of well-publicized efforts stemming from the Arab Spring and Occupy movements. (Moscato 2016, 3)

After the events of the Arab Spring, activists resorted to using hashtags to attract public attention on a wide range of issues on Twitter, and various other social media platforms such as Facebook (Moscato 2016). An important difference between hashtag platforms relates to post limitations. In 2016, tweets on Twitter were limited to 140 characters (Wagner 2017) whereas Facebook offered authors the wherewithal to narrate and detail their stories more emotionally (e.g. Melnychenko's post had 2,475 characters).

Hashtags have become, in effect, a "Wikipedia data base" of social media platforms. In terms of hashtag campaigns, one could easily navigate and find updated news regarding a topic framed by particular hashtags and every participant becomes akin to a news reporter, thus helping social media platforms become (uncensored and emotional) forums for public debates on crucial social issues.

## Methodology of the Study. Discourse Analysis. Data Collection

Discourse analysis is often used to determine how social action is shaped, by examining patterns of meaning conveyed by the words that people employed concerning an issue (Phillips and Jørgensen 2002). Blache and Durrheim (1999) add that authors' motivations may be apparent or just implied. Such an examination can illuminate participants' ideological perspectives and/or motivations. The hashtag campaign was itself an attempt to change the existing discourse in which sexist insults and misogyny prevailed. In this case, we are not simply analyzing power, domination and inequality, but challenging the dominance that has taken shape in society. For social scientists, discourse is a broad range of social practices (Tannen, Hamilton, and Schiffrin 2018).

I have herein used the method of Discourse Analysis for this study, applying it to the issue of the social media hashtag movement, #IAmNotScaredToSpeak. For the purpose of my analysis, in January 2018, I collected Facebook posts with the hashtag *#яНеБоюсьСказать* and selected 50 of them (based on the criteria below). I used this hashtag as the search query term.

All posts were manually collected and dated between July and August of 2016. Half of the entries were posts of people who shared their stories; the other half belonged to those who reacted to them, sharing their positive or negative opinions. Selected posts met the following criteria: they received a minimum of 10 likes and 2 comments; i.e., they were entries that became starting points for discussion. The great majority, but not all of the participants, were female.

In my analysis, I identified the emerging themes in the posts and developed an analytical framework to organize them. I conducted textual analysis of the collected data on a thematic basis and divided posts into groups based on the following authors' positions: active participants who shared their traumatic experience, their supporters, skeptics and people engaging in victim blaming or belittling these encounters.

## Initial Findings

In the following paragraphs my aim is to examine the new narratives that entered the public discourses and empowered women's linguistic agency. At the same time, it is apparent that such interventions met with resistance leaving the Russian public hesitant towards debates about sexual violence. Within the #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign, some women shared stories of sexual assault, which focused on their experiences while others brought up fear, shame and guilt as important components that support the "rape culture." In the analysis of these posts, another aspect became apparent: eleven of the posts used both Ukrainian and Russian language hashtags. This expression of solidarity between Ukrainian and Russian women represented a unique commonality in public debates within these two otherwise warring countries. It also showed the transnational, cross boundary aspect of the campaign.

My analysis of the collected posts revealed the existence of diverse and polarized opinions within the campaign. The first group of posts had the tone of a war manifesto with protest slogans against the existing discrimination. The second group of posts was colored by strong emotions as well, but more out of irritation. They questioned whether a problem really exists and offered support for the existing social order.

In the following sections I present and analyze the most common themes from the authors' collected data: those who experienced sexual assault and shared their stories and those who reacted to the campaign, as such.

## 1. Analysis of people's shared posts framed with the hashtag *#яНеБоюсьСказать.*

### #яНеБоюсьСказать as a manifesto against fear

Scholars of linguistic agency argue that wording and word order play an important role in constructing an agent or an object of an action. Such was the case with *#яНеБоюсьСказать* where the topic of fear was addressed in several dozen posts and exemplified by these women's statements:

> I'm not scared to speak, but I'm scared of many other things:
> – to go alone by taxi;
> – to go out in shoes and clothes, in which it will be difficult to run, if need be, to escape;
> – to return home alone in a state of intoxication;
> – to wear short skirts or shorts.
>
> It can be said that my experience is basically an experience of fear.
>
> In fact, I'm afraid, and for a long time I'll be afraid, and the rage inside me is as if it happened yesterday.
>
> When I pass that street now, my heart contracts from fear.

Participants acknowledged the existence of a culture that cultivates women's fear, in other words, rape culture. Many posts followed the hashtag with the phrase "I'm really scared, but I'll try to speak now." The hashtag itself was a kind of manifesto, a challenge not only to society and the dominant discourse, but to itself, an attempt to overcome public fear. The campaign's form, a hashtag online movement, provided a platform for mobilizing Russian women and gave them linguistic agency to participate.

### Self-blame, predicting social anger

Authors who shared their experience often expressed feelings of shame and guilt. They seemed to foresee the reaction of society in advance, even choosing silence. They tended to project the wrath of society onto themselves, attributing the blame for what happened to themselves, as evidenced below:

> What was special that happened? You're not the only one. It was I myself who had come! I, myself who did not refuse champagne. I, myself who stood as a dumb idol while he did what he did.

> I was ashamed. I'm still ashamed – like many others.
>
> Why did you not tell anyone? Because it's scary. Because apart from condemnation, embarrassed banter and even frank jeers I did not expect anything.

As many studies have indicated, such self-blaming can occur when survivors themselves sometimes attempt to make sense of their having been subjected to violence and/or negative experiences seeking some reason, any reason, to explain why it occurred to them (Richardson and Campbell 1982; Lerner and Miller 1978; Kiecolt-Glaser and Williams 1987).

Being put in such a vulnerable position affects women in a threefold manner: after experiencing humiliation from the rapist, the woman may then be publicly condemned or subjected to ridicule in some manner and this while coping with her own sense of guilt and shame for what happened. Foreseeing such a reaction, women provided detailed explanations in their posts that aimed to counteract societal stereotypes with regards to sexual assaults:

"I was without make-up in normal clothing"

"I was without make-up in sporty clothing. It was 1pm on a crowded street."

In this manner, the authors pushed-back against the stereotype that only women who dressed sexually provoked men's aggression. At the same time, these posts' authors were, in a way, seeking social pardon, suspecting themselves of some sort of wrongdoing. Anastasia Malnychenko's opening campaign words are instructive: "I want us to not justify »I was walking in my sport clothes during the day time and I was still grabbed.« Because we do not have to justify it. We are not guilty. A rapist is ALWAYS guilty." (Melnychenko's Facebook page 2016). In this manner, survivors reproduced discourse that was typical for "rape culture," wherein women were often blamed for their own sexual assault, and were required to prove that they did not provoke the aggression in any way (as if aggression could be provoked – a common precept in rape culture societies).

## Protest against stereotypes from rape culture

Feminist researchers have emphasized that there are common myths about rape that support rape culture (Burt 1980; Russell 1982; Ussher 1997). One of the myths is that sexual assault occurs rarely. The authors of posts that shared stories about sexual harassment often fought with their own established stereotypes. In particular, they emphasized the frequency and prevalence of this phenomenon:

> I think each of us [women] has something to tell.

> It always seemed to me that in my life, as in the life of most women, there were several cases of harassment. I began to dig into my memory. Not a few. Dozens.

Thus, authors sought to refute the stereotype that violence or sexual harassment only happened to those who provoked it. They also drew attention to the fact that sexual harassment in society is considered the norm:

> The worst thing is that in our society THIS is the NORM OF LIFE. You understand? Violence and coercion is the norm of our life with you.

> This is some kind of general idiocy, everyone knows that it exists, but everyone is silent. And people feel dirty and guilty. But it is obvious that only one is guilty – a rapist.

The authors used emotionally colored speech in their posts. They often resorted to capital letters so that posts sounded like screaming.

## The image of a predator of sexual assault and the place of action

Posts under *#яНеБоюсьСказать* also contributed to the fight against the stereotype that a rapist is always someone else, i.e., the "restrictive criteria" that strangers (choosing their prospective victims on the basis of some visual triggers) are the primary rapists. This stereotype clouds the entire issue of rape's true nature, as sexual violence is actually often committed by a partner, husband or relative, thus silencing most victims (Temkin and Krahe 2008). Women participating in the campaign stated:

> #IamNotScaredToSpeak, although actually I'm scared. Because it was my relative, significantly older than me. I was 12. […] but fortunately I sobbed and refused to follow him.

> I hardly survived the birth of my child, I was sewn up after a difficult birth. I did not know that I could resist, and say no to my husband. The man is more important. He needs sex.

The last passage refers us to a broader feminist discourse that a man has the prerogative wherein he dominates a woman, who has no right to object. According to the WHO, "30% of ever-partnered women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner" (WHO 2013, 2). However, such crimes do not fit into society's rape myth where the perpetrator is an unknown violent stranger. The campaign, #IamNotScaredToSpeak, gave

voice to women who experienced sexual violence from their partners and brought this problem into public debate.

### Intentions to participate in the campaign. Women's solidarity

Campaign participants often explained their motives as the desire to change the public mood against victims of sexual assault by asking men to think about woman's desires, encouraging parents to pay attention to their children and expressing solidarity with other women:

> I hate violence. I do not want my daughter to face violence. I want boys to read about this and NOT BECOME violators. Read the stories on the hashtag, read the comments. You will understand a lot. Girls! You will realize that you are not alone.
>
> And now I want to say, girls, my darlings, my bold ones – I am with you.
>
> Thousands of stories with the hashtags *яНеБоюсьСказати* and *яНеБоюсьСказать* eloquently illustrate why we need feminism… I need feminism so as not to be afraid. I need feminism to fight. I need feminism to change this. I need feminism to win.

The last comment touches on a very important topic: this campaign was the first large-scale manifestation of women's solidarity in Russia. As the press secretary of Transparency International Russia, Anastasia Karimova, noted: "It seems to me that what arose was a request for a feminist discourse, which was previously not present in Russia … What is happening now with this campaign is quite in line with the actualization of feminism and the struggle for women's rights in general" (Medvedev 2016).

## 2. Analysis of campaign reaction posts

Reaction posts fell within a variety of categories: pro-feminist reactions *supporting victims; criticism, supporting the existing power dominated discourse; and conspiracy theories relating to the discussion of Russian-Ukrainian relations.*

### Pro-feminist reactions supporting victims

The majority of analyzed posts within this category, were written by men. (Women also expressed their support for others, but more commonly only after sharing their own personal

experiences.) There were three particular posts in which a male stated that he should take his own behavior into account:

> What a shocking campaign. I started to think, perhaps, I also have to apologize in front of some people. Of course, I knew that it's common, but I didn't know TO WHAT EXTENT…

> After reading lots of posts with the hashtag #IamNotScaredToSpeak, I called one girl to apologize for my past behavior, but she said "what are you talking about"

> I wish I knew how painful things could be. I might need to also apologize, I think all of us men need to do so.

The motive of apologizing was present in all these posts. Despite such apologies being uncommon, many women commented that it was already a small step toward changing the dominant attitude. Through these examples, we can see the shift of existing power relations, as more men started to realize that fear of violence is a tool of unhealthy dominance.

Another common motive in posts expressing support was admiration for the courage of people who shared their traumatic experience:

> Thank you for your courage!

> Such brave people – I am impressed!

> I am ashamed of the reaction of many men. I'm ashamed not only for the mentality of men, but also for the Russian mentality, for our inability to hear and feel compassion.

The respondents expressing appreciation were both male and female.

## Criticism, supporting the existing power dominated discourse

On the other hand, many comments, supported the dominant discourse by referring to the guilt of victims, blaming them for fabricating stories and/or exaggerating them:

> I'd like to remind everyone that in most cases the victim is guilty for the sexual assault!

> What do you expect from us, from men? […] A man always needs sex and women remind him about it every second they wear short skirts and stuff.

> Nostalgic marathon of sex stories "oh, I was young once, and all men wanted me"

There were posts of people who did not understand the point of the action, and the common theme of such posts was to attack the exhibitionism of the participants:

> Sorry, I don't understand anything in this campaign, but I can't stop thinking that many stories are of a dreaming nature.

> I take this action as the exhibitionism of souls.

> Well, this is exhibitionism, this is the result of such harassment; this is not therapy. This will not help anyone.

These reactions correspond with the dominant discourse and stereotypes about women and their modesty.

## Conspiracy theories relating to the discussion of Russian-Ukrainian Relations

Another popular reaction to the campaign involved an effort by Facebook users to identify a mechanism of manipulation while expressing skepticism about the movement:

> I told you that your campaign was a total manipulation. Read this article! And do not let others cheat you! [Link to website].

The above comment was followed by a link to a media source analyzing manipulation techniques on the internet to encourage other people to accept this point of view. Comments with links to articles were not uncommon:

> I would like to ask Anastasia Melnychenko: does she want to launch the same campaign on her Facebook with the confessions of the inhabitants of the "ATO zone" telling about other rapes …?

> People, are you serious? How can you join this stupid campaign organized with some American grants?

These two comments were typical for users who accepted official Russian government sources that delivered a message of Russia being surrounded by enemies. The first commenter suspected a connection between the initiator of the campaign and the Ukrainian Army fighting in the East of the country; the second commenter saw an American conspiracy. (A more

thorough analysis of these aspects is beyond the scope of this paper; it is a topic that itself requires additional research and is thus addressed here only cursorily.)

In a way it is curious that the campaign had political features and provoked political discussion. It was an exceptional mass movement (the first since protests for fair elections in 2011–2012). Another significant feature of the campaign was the simultaneous functioning of two hashtags, in Ukrainian and Russian, in many of the posts. The Russian action responded to the Ukrainian one and existed in parallel with it. Given the tensions between Russia and Ukraine, this action was a curious exception with authors of posts participating in a public debate that was now uniting the warring countries.

## Context of the Campaign

*#яНеБоюсьСказать* started at the grass-roots level of ordinary people with celebrities joining the discussion a few days later (Krasnova 2016). This was a significant contrast with the #MeToo movement, which was started by celebrities. Alyssa Milano, (and others) who encouraged women to share their experiences of sexual assault popularized the hashtag #MeToo (Chuck 2017) and spurred the movement to become a truly global feminist protest. In contrast, *#яНеБоюсьСказать* was initiated by a Ukrainian human rights activist. While Anastasia Melnychenko was an activist with several thousands of followers, her stature in either Ukraine or Russia was not at all comparable with that of a Hollywood star with a mass following. Melnychenko's following in Russia was not even that of a low-level famous person. Yet, her appeal to women to speak out on the issue of sexual harassment elicited a mass response of a grass-roots nature, as well as subsequent media attention.

Moreover, the environment in Russia where the *#яНеБоюсьСказать* campaign developed, was not at all comparable to the one in which the #MeToo movement gained traction. Russian civil society differs to what exists in many other countries, particularly in many European nations and North America, where campaigns of a protest nature are not uncommon. Two factors account for this: one is historical and the other results from the current politics of the Russian government. The historical factor is argued by Crotty (2009, 87):

The legacy of the Soviet Union still casts a shadow over the development of Russian civil society. It continues to shape the structure of Russian society and the propensity of individuals to engage with social movements and other civic organisations. In this context the Soviet Union's approach to civic activity remains a topic of debate within the literature, with some scholars viewing Soviet civil society as "historically weak" or "oppressed" and actively removed from society (Nichols 1996; Osgood & Ong 2001; Woolcock 1998; Kennedy et al. 1998). Others contend that Soviet civil society was not weak, but "institutionalised." (Rose 1995; Mishler & Rose 1997; Hartner 1998)

More recent political actions relating to "the regime's restrictions on the right to public protest and on the independence of the media" (Johnson & Saarinen 2013, 544) further complicated the environment for Russian citizens to have their voices heard. "[A] 2006 nongovernmental organization (NGO) law increased the power of the Justice Ministry to monitor NGOs not seen as supportive of Putin, checking a sphere dominated by professional women" (Johnson & Saarinen 2013, 544). Additionally, since 2012, administrative responsibility for holding and participating in rallies was tightened. This led Nils Muiznieks, the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, to publish a memorandum castigating Russia for "the right to freedom of assembly [which] has been curtailed in recent years, particularly as regards the organisers' autonomy in deciding on the place and the manner of holding public events" as well as "restrictive interpretations" of government policies which have, for Russian citizens, become, "a *de facto* obligation to seek authorization for holding public events. At the same time, the already severe sanctions have been dramatically increased by the legislative changes and have been widely applied" (Council of Europe 2017).

## Conclusion

The scandal in Hollywood with Harvey Weinstein (and the subsequent #MeToo campaign) has been referred to by some Russian media outlets as the American version of #IamNotScaredToSpeak (Klimushkina 2017; Deutsche Welle RU 2017; Balaeva 2017). This stems from the fact that #IamNotScaredToSpeak actually preceded #MeToo. However, the Russian campaign is rarely seen as the starting point of the global conversation about sexual violence and women's solidarity against it. A number of scholars attribute this to the lack of visibility of East European feminism vis-à-vis a perceived Western feminism hegemony (Jung 1994; Havelkova 1996; Slavova 2006; Blagojevic 2004; Kasic 2004). This is a question which requires more research.

In relation to the restrictions that the Russian state places on its citizens to organize and engage in mass activity of a protest nature, the *#яНеБоюсьСказать* hashtag and internet campaign was an unprecedented mobilization of voices in the Russian public sphere as well as a political protest able to utilize few alternate forums. It reached an audience that would have been difficult to reach otherwise. Without a doubt, spontaneity was one of the most important features of *#яНеБоюсьСказать* and could have been a factor of its unprecedented traction in Russia, which drew the issue of violence against women into the mainstream of Russian public discourse. Melnychenko's campaign needs to be seen in this context.

One result was that, feminist discourse gained unprecedented public attention in Russian social media as well as drawing in more traditional Russian media. The #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign was not specified as feminist and it was not common for

its women-participants to identify themselves as feminists. However, in my opinion, raising the important issue of violence against women with the intention of breaking the silence made this campaign de-facto feminist. The campaign also contributed to women's solidarity building as women-participants mutually acknowledged sexual violence and oppression by men. I argue that other feminist driven campaigns (such as #andIamaFeminist, #NotTheReasonToKill) and subsequent reactions on social media to sexism in advertisements and cases of domestic violence that have been initiated in Russian social media since 2016 would not have been possible without the exposure and coverage that the *#яНеБоюсьСказать* campaign engendered.

Traditional media sources actively followed the *#яНеБоюсьСказать* campaign for two months. #IamNotScaredToSpeak challenged women to share their traumatic experiences and offered women linguistic agency in the following ways:

- It was led by women, and it engaged with predominantly female audiences (thus creating a situation in which women gained control over how their experiences of sexual violence were narrated).
- It happened outside the legal, power system.
- It was not coordinated "from above."
- It utilized the more democratic space of the internet; providing a forum for people, including women (as well as marginal actors, perhaps without the financial wherewithal and/or access to intellectual discourse) to speak directly about their experiences (without mediation "experts," i.e., the male point of view).

As discussed previously, gender limits individual opportunities and access to public discourse and the transformation of the associated *Structural* norms is a slow and often confrontational process. My research supports this, revealing that the campaign, being orientated to women and focused on sexual violence in Russia, was accompanied by a strong backlash based on denial and victim blaming – strategies often used to disregard sexual violence in other social and cultural contexts. Yet, #IamNotScaredToSpeak influenced the dominant discourse by providing platforms for people to express their experiences. In an interview, Melnychenko described her motives:

The idea of the campaign…arose after I read one discussion where the victim of violence was accused of being guilty. In the country [Ukraine], and indeed in the post-Soviet space, instead of unconditionally blaming the rapist, society immediately begins to look for – what the woman did wrong, why did this happen to her? Maybe she was in a short skirt, or was going home late, or maybe she was drunk. It turns out that the woman is to blame simply because she was born a woman. (Melnychenko in Skibickaya 2016)

Russian sociologist Kharitonova argues that to fight the existing rape culture in Russian society and to overcome the violence it produces requires owning up to its existence. Only

then can the basis of the whole culture (the paradigm of social building) begin to be changed (Kharitonova 2015, 25). The extent to which public discourse has been challenged by this campaign is an issue for further study. However, it is clear from my study's initial results that a new narrative may be in the process of forming and is a direct result of this campaign's elevation of women's solidarity and increased discussion of such taboo topics as sexual harassment in Russian society. *#яНеБоюсьСказать* posts have not been removed and are still accessible to online searches. The hashtag remains in the collective memory and to this day traditional Russian media still refer to it in their coverage. Posts in 2017, subsequent to the initial campaign, used two or more hashtags such as #MeToo and *#яНеБоюсьСказать*, reinforcing the idea that the #IamNotScaredToSpeak campaign was successful and remains present in Russian society.

The transnational nature of #IamNotScaredToSpeak, with its origin in Ukraine and its reach into other post-Soviet spaces, is another indication of its resonance. Dina Smailova, a resident of Kazakhstan, decided to share her story by creating the hashtags *#яНеБоюсьСказать*и *#НеМолчиKZ* (#Don'tKeepYourSilenceKhazakhstan). After launching the campaign in Kazakhstan, she soon followed up with the creation of an assistance organization for victims of sexual violence *НеМолчиKZ* (Aleseeva 2017). Users of Russian Facebook were continuing to post under the hashtag #IamNotScaredToSpeak at the time of this article's completion in 2019. Moreover, other feminist campaigns have been initiated in Russian social media since 2016. A Russian Facebook and Instagram campaign dates from February of 2018 and uses the hashtag *#ИЯФеминистка* (#andIamAfeminist).

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**TYTUŁ**: #яНеБоюсьСказать (#NieBojęSiępowiedzieć) kampania z lipca 2016 roku na rosyjskojęzycznym Facebooku: analiza dyskursu

**ABSTRAKT**: Aktywizm cyfrowy lub hashtagowy na platformach społecznościowych, takich jak Twitter i Facebook, w ostatnim czasie zyskał popularność na całym świecie. Kampanie takie jak #MeToo i #YesAllWomen zwróciły uwagę na problem przemocy ze względu na płeć i mizoginię. Artykuł ten jest poświęcony podobnej, ale wyjątkowej kampanii – #ЯнеБоюсьСказать (#NieBojęSiępowiedzieć) – która odbyła się w rosyjskojęzycznej społeczności Facebooka w lipcu 2016 roku. (Po tym wydarzeniu identyczną kampanię rozpoczęto na Ukrainie, a następnie w innych byłych radzieckich republikach, między innymi w Kazachstanie.) Cel tego artykułu jest dwojaki. Po pierwsze, przeprowadzając analizę dyskursu, autorka przygląda się postom związanym z #NieBojęSiępowiedzieć i stawia tezę, że kampania, w wyniku aktywnego udziału kobiet, zwiększyła widoczność problemu przemocy seksualnej. Uczestniczki kampanii, które zdecydowały się ujawnić osobiste doświadczenia swoje i innych, pomogły zwiększyć znaczenie kobiecego sprawstwa językowego i uczyniły #NieBojęSiępowiedzieć pierwszym jak dotąd dużym ruchem feministycznym w Rosji. Po drugie, autorka bada specyfikę kampanii #NieBojęSiępowiedzieć i stwierdza, że miała ona przede wszystkim charakter oddolny, a samoorganizacja i udział zwykłych ludzi były kluczowe dla powstania ruchu. W przeciwieństwie do #NieBojęSiępowiedzieć kampania #MeToo,

działająca w kontekście zachodnim, była w dużej mierze inicjowana i prowadzona przez gwiazdy.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** ruch feministyczny, przemoc ze względu na płeć w Rosji, cyfrowy aktywizm, #NieBojęSię-Powiedzieć