

Doing gender, doing nation! Marches, protests, and mass events as a space for reproducing gendered national roles in nationalistic organisations

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ABSTRACT: The article aims to analyse the physical practising of gender by women in Polish nationalist organisations to reflect on what vision of the nation is reproduced by these embodied gender practices. Using information obtained from interviews and observations, I seek an answer to how the physical gender practices correspond to the logic of the gendered presence of women as members of a national community (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). One of the main conclusions of the analysis is that the physical body and the gender practices involved in it are a significant stronghold of reproducing the roles that the nation imposes on women. This is related to justifying cultural differences by referring to the biological differences between genders. What is particularly interesting, however, is the fact that the body and its physical capabilities provide space for gender transgressions beyond established norms.

KEYWORDS: doing nation, practising nation, practising gender, nationalist organisations

INTRODUCTION

The gendered national studies has a long tradition, which was initiated by insightful works that broke the previous disregard for this perspective (Mosse, 1985; Anthias & Yuval-Davis 1989; Yuval-Davis, 1997, among others; latest research: Campion, 2020; Felix, 2017, 2015; Geva, 2020; Gutsche, 2018; Meret, 2015; Petterson, 2017; Scrinzi, 2017; Vieten, 2016). Following gendered studies on national issues, in this paper, I focus on a small part of the gendered presence in national organisations: physical, material ways of practising nation by women working in nationalist organisations. This article concentrates on the activities related to ‘going outside’ or field-work for nationalist organisations, which allows me to analyse those physical and ma-

terial manifestations of the nation's reproduction. By analysing activities, using the concept of gender as a social institution reproduced by its practices (Martin, 2004), I will attempt to answer the main question: what vision of the nation is reproduced by those embodied gender practices?

Focus on this element of the activist's work is guided by the voices of the respondents (and the collected material) discussing fieldwork using principles and connections between the division of labour, responsibilities, and gender in fieldwork. This approach to the topic is also related to the fact that during my 2019 study, the nationalist community actively organised mass public events. Apart from organising remembrance events of historical anniversaries, they hosted or participated in anti-EU protests, protests against post-war Jewish Material Claims, Roman Catholic pilgrimage and pro-life and anti-LGBT+ marches aiming to promote an image of a traditional family. It was a time rich in such events, constituting an essential element of the organisation's activities. Additionally, observing the fulfilment of duties allows us to look deeper into the dynamics of everyday gender practice in organisations, which remains an unexplored element of research on this type of organisation (Blee, 2020; Kajta, 2022).

POLAND—NATIONALISM—WOMEN. INTRODUCTION

Today, national values and attitudes are widespread in Poland, confirmed by survey data where 88% of Poles declare themselves patriots (CBOS, 2018). At the same time, however, no statistics would estimate the number of people involved in work for or sympathetic to nationalist organisations, except for a study, which indicates that 7% of respondents self-identify as nationalists. (CBOS, 2016)¹. Also, regular participation in marches or financial contributions to their activities. A particular indicator of the popularity of these types of groups may be the estimated number of attendees of nationwide marches and mass events—in 2018 the police announced that 250 000 people attended an event celebrating the 100th anniversary of Poland regaining its independence, which was organised by a nationalist organisation March of Independence Association (policja.pl, 2018; Wprost, 2018). This event is attracting tens of thousands of supporters and nationalist organisations activists every year and is one of the most important events for this community. The significant Polish nationalist community consists of dozens of groups, organisations, and associations whose postulates and ideological foundations are not homogeneous.

In this article, nationalist organisation is defined as a group that exhibits conservatism (which encompasses the ideal of a traditional, heteronormative family with so-called traditional gender roles, the protection of life from conception, anti-abortion

¹ It is common practice in Poland to separate the concepts of 'good' patriotism and 'bad' nationalism, which is different from Anglo-Saxon literature tradition (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2013, pp. 189-190; cf. Billig, 2008, p. 115; Calhoun, 2007, pp. 11-12; Sztompka, 2012, pp. 374–375; Connor, 1993, p. 376). To be more precise, in article, following Kajta (2020) and Billig (2008), I understand nationalism as the 'hot' pole of national attitudes without attempting to evaluate views and ideas, their 'correctness' or 'positivity'.

views and ever stronger homophobia) as well as ethnonationalist notion of homogeneous Polishness with a strong attachment to the Roman Catholic faith (Kajta, 2020, pp. 14-21; Pankowski, 2010, pp. 21-31; Płatek & Płucienniczak 2017, p. 286-313; cf. Graff, 2008a, 2008b). These groups also emphasise local charity activities and helping Poles in areas that historically belonged to Poland (cf. Kajta, 2020, pp. 14-21).

When discussing the activism of female members of nationalist organisations, it is worth shedding some light on the historical role of women in the nationalist movement. As shown in numerous works, Polish women actively engaged in nationalist activism in the past. They fought for Poland's independence in various accessible ways (Walczevska, 2000). They also took part in battles of World War II and the Warsaw Uprising, although their presence in these events faded in retrospect (Grzebalska, 2013). This tradition continues today, and women are active in national organisations (Kajta, 2022; Kociołowicz-Wiśniewska, 2020) and in field research (Zimniak-Hałajko, 2017; cf. Baran, 2022)². This article is also part of the trend of researching women's perspectives in national organisations through direct methods, i.e. interviews and observations, and responds to Justyna Kajta's postulate, who, analysing the discursive strategies of women from national organisations, asks: what is it like in everyday life? What does 'everyday' gender practice look like in an organisation? (Kajta, 2022, p. 78).

NATION AND GENDER

A nation "is an imagined political community—and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1997, p. 19), and one of the elements that shape the way the nation is constructed is the vision of origin adopted by the community. As studies show, in Poland, the dominant image of the nation is constructed on the basis of ethnic categories (ethnos) as an ethnic and genealogical community (Budyta-Budzyńska, 2013, pp. 44-8, 54-6; cf. Larsen, 2017; Wysocki, 2020; Zubrzycki, 2001, 2002). The foundations of the national bond are common origin, language, and culture.

Gender, viewed through the prism of a social construct, will capture the dynamics of constructing and reproducing these national norms in practice, i.e., while working for nationalist organisations, which is what I propose in this paper. Patricia Yancey Martin defines gender as "having a social structure and related practices with a history that entails opportunities and constraints and a plethora of meanings, expectations, actions/behaviours, resources, identities, and discourses that are fluid and shifting yet robust and persisting" (Martin, 2003, p. 344). The approach to gender as a social institution consists of two interrelated elements: gendering practices and practising gender.

"Gendering practices stand for a class of activities that are available—culturally, socially, narratively, discursively, physically and so forth—for people" (Martin, 2003, p. 345). They are a repertoire of practices, the ideal—a framework that sets rules and

² The subject of women—nationalists has been eagerly covered in recent years by journalists, who, by interviewing them, try to present their motivations and aims (m.in. Kaleta, 2016; Barejka, 2019; Ruta, 2018). Many of the studies focus particularly on male activists working in these organizations (Kociołowicz-Wiśniewska, 2017; Barłowski, 2018; Kubica-Heller, 2006; Struzik, 2019, pp. 169-171).

norms. They are: “a collection of rules constituting a model and blueprint of women’s and men’s action, which may but doesn’t have to be implemented, as it is a potential, modelled action” (Leszczyńska, 2016, p. 80). Practising gender is a dynamic aspect of the process that constitutes gender, making it prevail by recreating people’s behaviour (Martin, 2003, p. 354). Actions are embedded in rules; they are based on internalised knowledge. Gender is understood as an activity learned through repetition. Practising gender refers to individual physical and narrative activities. It is a fragmented, dynamic use of the rules determined by the repertoire. By this category, we understand what women and men do as women and men.

Martin also draws attention to the significant role of the material body, which is actively involved in the processes of gender reproduction. The material bodies constitute and recreate the practices, which is possible thanks to the assimilation and implementation of cultural norms leading to the skilled body (Martin, 2003, p. 359). Martin writes, “events do not happen on their own. People with bodies do things, physically and narratively” (Martin, 2004, p. 1263; cf. Connell, 1987). Consequently, “this criterion requires scholars to take the body into account. Biology exists; its effects and contours are relevant to gender, at least in some regards” (2004, p. 1263). Institutions are embodied, and the material body is critical to understanding and describing the dynamics of gender reproduction (2004, p. 1251).

This conception indicates that the principles of gendering, or gendering practices, can be found in many places of social order, including the national rhetoric³ described by Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis (1989). They identified five main ways of conceptualising women’s presence in the community as: (1) biological reproducers of members of ethnic collectivities; (2) reproducers of the boundaries of ethnic/national groups; (3) reproducers of the collectivity and as transmitters of culture; (4) signifiers of ethnic/national differences; (5) participants in national, economic, political and military struggles (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989). For the purpose of this paper, I suggest looking at mentioned women’s roles as a manifestation of gendering practices as fixed behaviour patterns, rules, and norms.

METHODOLOGY

This article aims to analyse the physical, embodied practising of the nation by women working in nationalist organisations. Employing Martin’s concept of gender practices, I analyse how gendered saying and doing acts, but mostly doing aspects of responsibilities and tasks, reproduce the nation. In this paper, I focus on activities related to ‘going outside’ or fieldwork for the nationalist organisation, which allows me to

³ In her theory, the author looked for answers to the questions: when, where and how women and men interpret each other and themselves as gendered. Martin’s main area of interest was how women and men practice gender in the workplace. When studying organizations, this issue was often omitted by scholars, which was due to the assumption that employees are gender-free because their positions are gender-neutral (Martin, 2006, p. 255). However, numerous analyses show that these relations are inscribed in the structure of the organization (including Acker, 1990, 2006, 2010; Martin, 2006; Connell, 2006a, 2006b; Bradley, 2008; Leszczyńska, 2016).

concentrate on analysing the material manifestation of the nation's reproduction. In these tasks, I identify and describe practices which, according to Martin's theory (2004), reproduce, undermine, redefine the specific vision of gender and gendered nation. This analysis will attempt to answer the main question: What vision of the nation is reproduced by those embodied gender practices? Concerning the discussed concept of Anthias and Yuval-Davis, what are these reproductions of the nation?

The ability to behave like a woman (or a man) depends on using one's internalised knowledge, accepted as one's own, that is practical and silent (tacit), which makes it difficult to express (Martin, 2003, p. 351) verbally. Thus, practising gender is much easier than describing the rules governing an institution (Martin, 2003, p. 354). These difficulties can be overcome by interpreting the behaviour of people around them and by the respondents' reflection on their own behaviour (Martin, 2006, p. 261). Additionally, the observations made during the research, which allowed for a direct study of the dynamics of gender reproduction in the field, are of significant value to the analysed material.

This project uses triangulation in qualitative research (Flick, 2011). The primary technique was an individual in-depth interview (IDI) with questions divided into two sections. The first one was devoted to technical issues—how does a given group work, and what are the respondents' responsibilities? The second focused on the reflective side—thoughts on the gendering of responsibilities and roles, as well as on the gender rules concerning the tasks performed. The respondents were selected by nonprobability sampling based on gender and affiliation to an organisation. Interviews were conducted with 18 women aged 20-44 between December 2019 and February 2020. The study included women who operate in nationalist organisations, i.e., formal and informal associations, which are voluntary and permanent, and their members do not have earning purposes. An important quality was broadly understood activism, i.e., voluntary work organising public events (including marches and pickets), leaflet campaigns, charity activities, as well as Internet activities (including writing articles and social media activity). Considering the scale of the national environment in Poland and the need to maintain the anonymity of the respondents in the article, I decided not to reveal which organisations women come from. I chose associations and groups that fit the adopted definition of a national organisation.

Another technique of collecting the data was observation without intervention used at the early stage of the study. I have undertaken 14 observations between March and August 2019 during open, mass public events. I participated in events organised by actors of the nationalist movement—the Confederation political party, nationalist organisations such as All-Polish Youth, and the Independence March Association. These were marches, demonstrations, pickets and public meetings: anti-EU protests, protests against post-war Jewish Material Claims, Roman Catholic pilgrimage and pro-life and anti-LGBT+ rallies aiming to promote an image of a traditional family, mainly in Cracow and Warsaw. During observation, I focused on activities and interactions regarding female roles: are women present at the event; what are the proxemics of the event—where they choose to stay, do they hold organisational functions, do they speak unofficially—in chanting, prayer?

The level of interviews and observations was intertwined in the analysis of the collected material. In the interview transcript, I could distinguish fragments: what does the woman do, why does she do it, and what is it related to? The observation form provided answers to the question: What do women do? I couldn't find an explanation for why they were doing it or what it was about, but I could see the 'chemistry' of the moment and the division of labour among men and women. Data from interviews and observations complement each other.

FROM STEREOTYPE TO TRANSGRESSION—INTRODUCTION

In this analysis, I propose to look at the discussed tasks and gender practices implemented in them through the prism of the described ways of conceptualising the presence of women in the community. This paper aims to show what reproductions of the nation can be observed employing embodied tasks while working in the field. Therefore, I suggest conducting an analysis in the direction of tasks that strongly reproduce the existing order to those that contest this order. Starting with tasks and gender practices implemented in them that are strongly embedded in the typology created by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989). And finishing with patterns of behaviour which are transgressive, in which the body allows for the reproduction of a gendered vision of the nation in new ways that undermine the question of the established order.

In the beginning, it is worth emphasising that the Polish nationalist community has been considered intensely masculine (Kajta, 2013, p. 65). The male face of nationalism in Poland may also be proved by its strong connection with the fan community (Narodowcy.net, 2019; cf. Jakubowska et al., 2019). Despite the established image of a male nationalist in Poland, it must be admitted that Polish women are present in national movements. They can be observed at nationalist marches and during anti-EU demonstrations. The purpose of this article is to reflect on what can be said about the nation's reproduction through women's presence at those public events and the modes of this presence.

CARE WORK AS ADHERING TO CULTURAL NORMS

Some groups where the respondents operate organise pickets to promote specific social attitudes. Both women and men hand out leaflets, answer questions, and start a conversation with passers-by: "I am the person responsible for talking with people who ask what we are working on. I am the person who is to express my opinion and explain what's going on. So mostly just talking, discussing. This is kind of my thing" [R5]⁴. During the observations, I noticed that women more often collect signatures for civic bills, which was also confirmed by one of the respondents—allegedly due to women's ease of making contact with people. However, most of the respondents did not notice such a regularity—people who easily make contact, are able and like to talk to strangers are selected.

Fundraising is a common task women perform during public events: "I, for example,

⁴ All quotes in the article come from individual in-depth interviews.

took part in fundraising. It means that I was collecting donations to a collection box, from people who wanted to donate. And it is girls who were assigned to this task” [R6]. Fundraising is considered safe and thus more suitable for women: “a little bit lighter, and definitely less dangerous than, say, march guard”⁵ [R6]. The significance of gender when assigning fundraising tasks is also manifested in one respondent’s explanations of what conditions would need to exist for a man to take part in a collection, for example, physical indisposition that would justify the willingness to help collect donations.

Described tasks are primarily “emotional work” (cf. Hochschild, 1983), which consist of creating a good atmosphere so that a person served, in this case, a person signing the list or making a donation, feels substantial and taken care of (Bradley, 2008, p. 120-21). Following the gendered logic of assigning tasks in imagined communities, let us recall that one of the fundamental roles of women is being a cultural carrier (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 9). It is women who convey ideas and traditions important to the community. In the context of the discussed patterns of the presence of women in the nationalist community, the described care work should be related to what Anthias and Yuval-Davis describe as: “participating centrally in the ideological reproduction of the collectivity and as the transmitters of its culture” (1989, p. 9). This is because these tasks make use of gendered rules frameworks defining the norms, falling under the category of gendering practices (Martin, 2003, p. 345). In these tasks, as the analysed material shows, activists are most fully and least critically entrusted with tasks that are considered appropriate for women. These examples show the embodied reproduction of a nation by walking in the crowd with a collection box or a list to sign. This care work is accomplished because of the available reproduction paths of the culture imposed on women, in this case, a tradition connecting women with emotional and care work. Women present at the gathering perform stereotypically feminine tasks, thus reproducing a vision of the gendered nation where femininity is caring, kind, helpful, and focused on other people. Organisations approach these tasks strategically - they base them on gender stereotypes in which women are kind and friendly, which allows them to raise money for planned activities. Therefore, in the context of the discussed phenomena, the women’s duties should be considered a work that reproduces a vision of the nation based on a stereotypical determination of women’s roles, closely related to how an appropriate place for women in the nationalist community looks.

THE PHANTASMATIC BODY OF THE NATION

Anthias and Yuval-Davis indicate that a crucial role that the gendered vision of the presence of women in the nationalist community assigns to women is being the carriers of symbolic differences, a symbol of the nation (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 9-10; see Ostrowska, 2004; Graff, 2014, p. 334). They are signifiers of differences between the roles of women and men presented as a dichotomy: a symbol (woman) detached from time versus here and now (man) (Graff, 2014, p. 334). It is also worth pointing to the closeness of this role to the casting of women as a symbolic collective

⁵ The *March Guard* will be discussed in detail later.

boundary (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 9), which personifies the honour of the community and embodies the nation. This has far-reaching consequences that significantly affect the position of women and their rights and freedoms in the nationalist community: “As a result of identifying the female body with the phantasmic body of the nation, the struggle for national identity is therefore connected, on the one hand, with the elevation of the imagined woman, and on the other hand, with the marginalisation and instrumentalisation of real women” (Graff, 2014, p. 334).

Also, in the analysed material, we can observe the mechanism of assigning work, where this logic resonates. A clear example of this is the discussed above pickets, which may cause a passers-by response:

R2: when someone comes up and starts to discuss something, argue even, and it can... to a girl, they often come up to a girl, they automatically know that the girl is weaker. (...) Overall... it's logical. You are likely to jump on somebody weaker than you if you want to win, not a stronger one. A boy can possibly hurt you, but a girl, not so much. She can get scared... that's stereotypical thinking and just human.

JB: So, what happens then when someone like this appears?

R2: When someone like this appears, it's not like we are left on our own and need to cope. Often, one of our fellows comes over, not necessarily straight away, to punch this guy, but he looks, joins the conversation if the other one starts to argue. It's a straight great relief. It's not nice to talk to violent people. (...) To come over, explain the situation, ease the burden. That kind of people, often immediately calm down because they can see that ok, maybe talk with a bit of respect. [R2]

The quote above shows a man taking action to ensure a woman's safety. The respondent points out that men's presence alone changes the balance of power and benefits women. The situation allows for a preview of their role: a man takes the initiative and comes over to ease the burden of responsibility for the unruly passer-by. This burden has a somewhat metaphorical meaning, but it shows the bodily dimension: “They often come up to a girl, they automatically know that the girl is weaker” [R2]—is she physically weaker or worse at debating? It is yet to be decided, although, in the quoted statement, we also see an indication that the mere presence of a man makes the rude interlocutor immediately lose his energy for further discussion. This behaviour places the woman in a symbolic role related to what Anthias and Yuval-Davis call “signifiers of ethnic/national differences” (1989, p. 9). According to the nationalist discourse, the role of men in this community is to take care of their women, their honour and safety. On the other hand women's role is to surrender to this male care, and in the analysed example, the expectation is that they will not be left alone with a rude interlocutor (Martin, 2004, p. 1257; cf. Graff, 2014, p. 334).

Those public events are very often met with a counterdemonstration, which triggers a number of bodily activities in which gender plays a crucial role. I observed a similar scenario several times: one group marched along the designated route with the oth-

er standing in a tight group holding banners. They are separated by a police cordon armed with shields. As the parties approach, the emotions take over. They start chanting slogans, waving fists, and crowding in on police officers. It takes only a few minutes, and for an untrained eye, this may seem completely random, devoid of order—feverish screams, a moment of nervousness until one of the groups moves on, and the situation slowly returns to normal, and the emotions fade away. However, when listening to the shouted slogans, there was just this prevalent male voice and when I looked at who was crowding in on police shields; I saw mainly men. The question arises: where are the women? They were standing here a moment ago.

During such extraordinary situations, when it gets dangerous, we can observe a very specific gender practice, which was explained by one of the respondents:

R14: (...) If there is a situation, where there is a counter or something, they go up the front and, it's never that the girls are standing at the front, girls kind of go to the back, and the men go up the front. So, in case they are shielding. There's always the police, so there was never a life threat, but if there's a risk, like, for example, a firecracker explodes near us, or something, or someone throws something because there are nuts like that, so if that happens the man go to the front.

JB: And, if that happens, you move back to the second row?

R14: Yes. [R14]

In the above example, gender is practised in a very literal, physical way—it consists of taking a few steps forward or back, depending on the gender. This dynamic was explained by the respondents by the fact that men have women's safety in mind, as they can get hurt if they collide with the police shields. The respondents pointed out that it wasn't an escape, only safety measures. An exciting and important lead was that this wasn't done against women's will—they are voluntarily stepped aside: "When the situation had got serious, we just stepped aside, we felt that we shouldn't be so greatly involved in this" [R12]. I have also noticed an important dimension of the narrative about femininity while working in the field, which is a continuation of the thread that has already started. It is regarding how one of the respondents constructed a positive and negative vision of practising gender. She defined the way women should behave on pickets as gentle. This means: "As I say, we don't scream, yell our heads off or walk around naked with offensive slogans and so on" [R6]. The respondent shared her point of view on anti-feminine practices, where nudity, offensiveness, screaming and yelling were the opposite of being gentle.

Until now, I have discussed practices that involve the gendered reproduction of a nation, somewhat in line with what Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) described. In these tasks and activities, women behave as expected—they perform tasks that I have defined as care work and take male protection against aggressive passers-by or during crisis situations. To sum up, in the fieldwork discussed so far, women collect donations and signatures, talk to passers-by. Still, when it gets a bit dangerous, they willingly use the care of men and move to the background—sometimes very literally, when they escape police shields. However, the described tasks allow for the reconstruction of only

some of the patterns of behaviour that concern women during public events. As the analysed material indicates, fieldwork is strongly related to the physical body, a space of activity in the organisation that allows for specific behaviours. They contradict the patterns of appropriate behaviour set by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) for female members of the nationalist community.

THE NEW PATTERNS OF NATIONAL REPRODUCTION

In this part, I focus on describing practices beyond the order defined by Anthias and Yuval-Davis. In them, women reproduce a vision of a nation that does not agree with the vision of gender roles. Here, gender practices based on the gendered order within the nation are being redesigned or wholly rejected. This part of the analysis will also show that the roles set by the authors of the typology should not be treated as fatal. According to the interviews, they can be successfully reconstructed; thus, changes in the gendered vision of the nation are possible. Additionally, based on the analysis, two sources of these reconstructions emerge—the first one, to which, due to the aim of this article, I will mainly focus on the physical body. The second, which I will return to at the end of my analysis, is the power derived from formal responsibilities within the organisation.

According to the analysis, marches are a particularly important aspect of the activity of nationalist organisations, either those organised by individuals or those where activists from one organisation join the initiative of another. It is where I recruited my respondents. The marches may be local or nationwide (the most extensive national event is the Independence March⁶). Such mass events are usually protected by a specially trained group formed inside a given unit, which is called the marching guard. Its task is to provide additional support to the police and law enforcement. An example of an official, legalised unit of this type is a quasi-military organisation called the Independence March Guard (IMG). Importantly, it does not operate as a separate, independent organisation. Its members are primarily activists from existing nationalist organisations. The IMG website describes it as “a voluntary formation responsible for the organisation, logistics and securing the annual March of Independence on November 11” (Straż, 2020; cf. smn.org.pl). The Independence March Association established it as the main unit responsible for organising the annual march on November 11 in Warsaw. Over time, IMG has changed its type of activity and is now actively securing other mass events of organisations affiliated with the Independence March Association⁷.

It is mostly men who are involved in the March Guard activities. Women reasoned

⁶ The Independence March it's an annual mass event organized in the anniversary of Poland's Independence Day by the nationalist organization the Independence March Association headed by Robert Bąkiewicz, a former member of National Radical Camp.

⁷ Independence March Guard does not officially attend to all initiatives. Local events are secured by a guard section, and a few members are appointed to protect the route. This analysis mostly refers to the official formation of the IMG. In the interviews, a locally organised guard appears only once, and it is not gendered. According to the respondent this is due to low safety risk.

that this is related to the tasks that March Guard volunteers are responsible for, which require physical strength and preparation in the form of additional training. The respondents indicated that as women, they are less suitable to handle those tasks due to their smaller bodies. Men's dominance in performing tasks related to securing the events was unanimously approved without question:

It's not like one of the fellows says that... I don't know. You can't do that because you're a woman. Just because you're a woman. It's just more, for example... to some extent, it probably results, as I say. From such things, for example, participation in the march guard. Of the things that would necessarily make a woman's smaller body a little disqualifying her, somehow. [R1]

The women emphasise that there are no restrictions and theoretically each of them could participate in the marching guard, but none of them had this experience. This confirms Martin's theory that people practice the kind of femininity and masculinity available to them (Martin, 2003, p. 346). In the analysed material, it is clear that tasks related to securing the march, which may be dangerous and require a lot of physical effort (training), remain unavailable for women. They know there is such a group, but none is active in it. One of the respondents pointed out: "Girls are simply not particularly keen on it". Women are not keen on physically demanding and dangerous work because it is beyond the preferred model of femininity.

However, this does not change the fact that even the activities generally considered masculine in the organisation, such as participation in a quasi-military group protecting the march participants, are not entirely inaccessible to women. As the respondents indicated, some women want to join march guard training. A few respondents mentioned they saw women in the guard units or that they knew women who were involved in securing such events. What allows breaking the gender barrier is physical fitness and strength, which takes women to the world of activities reserved for men:

(...) there are girls who are in the foreground and feel strong enough, and the guys accept such girls during their trainings, they walk next to them in the Independence March Guard. Just like I'm saying, these are mainly girls who work out as well. In some kind of training and so on. [R8]

Therefore, some women want to join the quasi-military unit and participate in it on an equal footing with men. They can find fulfilment in this activity, and others accept them, but the condition for belonging to the group is good physical fitness, endurance and strength. Thanks to this fitness, women activists in IMG transform the vision of femininity in the organisation, perhaps broadening its spectrum. By performing male tasks, they blur the line between typically male and typically female tasks based on the previously established rules.

This division of tasks aligns with what Anthias and Yuval-Davis described as the last category of women's presence in national communities: "participants in national, economic, political and military struggles" (1989, p. 10). And these are not, as Mroziuk points out, servant, caring roles "towards fighting/wounded/dying men" (2012, pp. 111–12, after Zamojska, 2017, p. 367). At the same time, these activities are not en-

tirely equal to the activity of men – the respondents indicated that for those women who, for various reasons, are not involved in the most dangerous activities (i.e. head of the march—the section responsible for protecting the front of the march), other tasks are available: the protection of the sides of the march among others: “there are many tasks in the march guards, such as securing an ambulance or, for example, securing lower risk areas, and so on” [R8]. Nevertheless, as the next discussed practice will show, these tasks and women’s activities elude the established norms. To sum up, we see women as active participants in the ‘fights’. They are not relegated to the second row because physical fitness and strength allow them to play social roles reserved for men.

Interestingly, there are also more spontaneous reconstructions of the norms that may disturb the established order based on male protection of women thus disturbing the reproduction of the position of women as symbolic figures, detached from action and time here and now (cf. Graff, 2014, p. 334):

R5: There was a situation where the boys asked, they simply asked to withdraw from a turmoil, but we stayed with my friend because we got angry. And there was such a situation, yes. And even later we discussed that with the boys, and they were surprised that we got so worked up that we didn’t care about the consequences. I don’t think it was super wise, but in the end... there were such situations; yes, they were. As I said, I had such a situation myself that I was surprised that the boys told us to withdraw somewhere and me and my friend, we stayed longer. But as I say, there was a situation where my friend and I were fiercer (laughs).

JB: And when you later discussed this, how was it perceived?

R5: With humour, yes. We approached it rather humorously. Yes, with humour. Like: congratulations to the girls. But was it prudent? So, now I do not perceive it like that, because simply, it could have massively and proportionally turned to our disadvantage, ultimately such a litigiousness. But it was taken with humour. Nothing happened, so everyone joked and congratulated. [R5]

There are a few points worth paying attention to. Firstly, the respondent rejected the care of men described in the analysis above, which confirms Martin’s thesis that gender practices may not only be invoked but also ignored (Martin, 2003, p. 343). Secondly, the group noticed this situation, which indicates its unusual nature. Thirdly, the respondent herself confronts the fact that she has upset the current order—she blames herself for voluntarily exposing herself to danger (although, in the end, nothing wrong happened). This situation successfully illustrates the concept of gender as an institution that only persists because actors practice it. Paraphrasing Martin, the institution exists because women and men reproduce gender by acting it—doing gender.

The above example highlights that established gender divisions may be suspended and reconstructed. The tension can also affect women, and the repertoire of available practices remains unused, even temporarily questioned. Therefore, it doesn’t always

happen that women step aside, but it will be noticed if they don't, as the above situation shows.

However, it should be indicated that behaviour is also conditioned by the individual's disposition—not all women will react the same. One of the respondents quoted a dissimilar story of a member of the unit from those described above:

R14: But there were some girls who had a more militant attitude, but that's their business, no one will forbid them, but if the girl I don't know, goes to the gym and so on, then she's treated differently at this point.

JB: Meaning?

R14: It means that she will also come out with them, well... that she is already, at this moment, she has a normal male strength.

JB: So, the point is that due to her physical prowess, her fitness, she is... you just know that she can cope with it?

R14: Yes, exactly. Well, she ... if she's training in the martial arts and so on, then everyone knows that she can cope, and that's a different situation. [R14].

Similarly to participating in the March Guard, what transforms gender practices is the physical force that allows for gender transgression. Having experience in practising martial arts means that such a woman does not need to be particularly taken care of—she takes over male attributes. She does not need the protection of other activists. Then, it is no surprise that a woman can have the militant attitude that was so surprising in the previous quote. The above statement clearly demonstrates the correctness of the thesis in this article that this physical, material body is an essential tool for restructuring the logic of the gendered reproduction of the nation.

To summarise the findings, I have written about the division of female and male tasks during public events mainly through the prism of arguments related to physical strength and referring to the respondents' arguments about biological predispositions. As the research shows, the respondents looked for explanations and justification for the gendering of certain aspects of their work in the organisation in the body and its predisposition. By the conducted analysis, we can observe that the body, physical fitness, causes women in nationalist organisations to reproduce a vision of the nation that recreates Anthias and Yuval-Davis gendered vision of the nation. At the same time, it is questioning it, allowing for its reconstruction and going beyond the established practising of gender anchored in gendering practices. It should be noted that the conducted interviews revealed a second, seemingly detached from the body argument, which again refers to material gender difference.

In the following quote, it can be observed that the respondent recognises established patterns of men's behaviour during public events, but simultaneously, she does not give in to them. Because of her position, she feels responsible for others, which does not allow her to hide behind boys:

(...) I welcome the fact that the guys are trying to protect us when something

is really wrong out there, and I always tell them that I appreciate their attitude and so on. But since I don't need it, I don't expect it. (...) for me, the position in the sense that, say, as [proper name of the position] you are responsible for the people. And whoever they are: people physically weaker than you or stronger, such as, for example, men, I think that I am responsible for making everything go smoothly, for the unit to come back in its entirety, so to speak, and so on. So, I also want to be involved in all of this, no matter what happens. I will not hide behind the boys because I should take part in it all the more for everything to be fine later, everything to work out. [R8]

In times of crisis, gender ceases to be of paramount importance because there is something more substantial—a given role, a task to be performed. As illustrated in the quote above, high positions held by women significantly impact changing the shape of the institution of the gender—behaviours that do not support the existing and functioning pattern that men must ensure women's safety are shown. This challenges the theory's assumptions, according to which practices are defined as single physical and narrative gender activities, which are fragmentary and dynamic use of rules determined by the repertoire (Martin, 2003, pp. 353–355). When analysing gender practices, it should be remembered that they are contextual and may be situationally modified—therefore, women behave differently, even in such a way that undermines established norms and rules. Some withdraw with relief when the situation becomes dangerous, according to the operating in individual gender rule. Other women reject it because gender loses its importance when making decisions requiring them to act as responsible person and not as a woman.

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis focuses on the specific tasks and duties of women in which the material body of the activists is involved. This perspective allows us to move away from viewing the processes of constructing gender through discursive practices (Kajta, 2022; Blee, 2020) and thus contributes to deepening knowledge about the Polish national environment from a gendered perspective.

Corporeality and physicality constitute important arguments in national organisations for the division of specific tasks—it is objective because of natural, biological arguments. Therefore, the body is a particularly powerful 'tool' for the nation's reproduction. The physical body, biological sex and gender difference, as shown in the described cases, have a special type of power—it allows objectivizing cultural divisions, including those defined by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) and later developed by Yuval-Davis (1997) in their typology of the gendered division of tasks in the national community. At the same time, however, the research shows that we are dealing with transgressions reconstructions—they are much more often based on physical predispositions (and occasionally also on participation in the authority).

The collected material shows that gender rules and roles are not understood and reproduced according to a single pattern. This also allows us to notice that the nation is not understood and reproduced uniformly by women in national organisations. The

analysis shows that there are ways to go beyond the established patterns of activities and the construction of gender. The article, responding to the demands of taking a closer look at the everyday practice of gender in organisations, gives insight into the heterogeneous, although still close to patterns, reproduction of the nation by women in national organisations. What can be said about the reproduction of a nation after describing the tasks related to them, gender practices, and the evincing gendered division of tasks within an imagined community? The analysis shows that the duties performed, and with them the described physical, embodied and material gender practices, largely reproduce the division of roles, which is determined by the gendered division of tasks and the gendering practices based on them. They agree with them, although at the same time, we see that it is not fatal—it is physical fitness that allows women to enter the male world. The typology of Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) does not consider female roles static and unquestioningly reproduced by women. The modes of presence and tasks resulting from them are the most common but may change depending on the time and place. The authors of the theory do not see women as passive, deprived of the possibility to switch from victims to products of ideology and policies. They assume the community members have agency and the chance to cause change. They write: “The roles that women play are not merely imposed upon them. Women actively participate in the process of reproducing and modifying their roles as well as being actively involved in controlling other women” (Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1989, p. 11).

It should be noted, however, that in the analysed situations, these transgressive behaviours do not redefine the established division, because virtually no gender revolution in the researched organisations has taken place so far. If there are transitions between the world of female and male tasks, they are rather individual than the rules. To sum up, embodied practices show that the gendered division of roles is actively reproduced in the fieldwork. But at the same time, we see that this system is quite apparent as both authority and the analysed embodied transgressions can disturb it, limit its influence and, above all, question its rightness, obviousness, and naturalness.

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