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## **“I learnt how to scream.” - Women’s Protests in Poland, Reproductive Politics and Gendered Citizenship**

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**“I learnt how to scream.” – Women’s Protests in Poland,  
Reproductive Politics and Gendered Citizenship**

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Thesis Seminar: Borders and Migration

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# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. Literature Review</b>	<b>8</b>
2.1. Social movement theories	8
2.2. New school	11
2.3. Women's movements' claims	13
<b>3. Methodology and Data Collection</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4. "Polishness" reproduced</b>	<b>20</b>
4.1. Gendered inequality and accountability	22
4.2. The Catholic hiccup and the nationalist discourse	25
4.3. Political protests as the only available tool	28
4.4. The binary nature of Polish patriotism	25
<b>5. Discussion</b>	<b>34</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Appendices</b>	<b>42</b>
<b>Appendix A: Interview Questions</b>	<b>42</b>

## **Abstract**

This study aims to uncover the dynamic present in the women's mobilisation and protests against Polish reproductive policies between the years 2016-2020. It focuses on the lived experience of the protesters to establish what type of protests occurred in Poland within that time frame, what did they mean for the citizenship of Polish women, and how did it translate in the concept of patriotism. The paper argues that there is a direct relationship between the lack of political salience of the protest to the value of female citizenship in Poland. It also examines the images of patriotism that emerged from a series of interviews conducted in the study. The dynamic presented a broken dichotomy of protests being both a form of exercising female patriotism, as well as a demonstration of anti-patriotic feelings.

## 1. Introduction

Recent years have seen many countries globally taking on the subject of reproductive rights and politics, as feminist movements have been gaining more traction in both domestic and international politics. There has been plenty of consideration about the morality of decriminalisation of abortion, discussions about social justice and womanhood, attempts to bring the issues of gender violence to the public's attention, as well as legislating the reproductive dimension of citizenships. The directions in which those public debates go are varied, in some cases looking to liberalise previous reproductive policies, in other cases, taking the approach of restricting those policies even further. The latter has been the case in the instance of Poland. Since 2014 Poland witnessed a series of legislative initiatives that were continuously aimed at restricting female ability to control their biological ability to reproduce. This was directly connected with the election of a conservative populist government formed by the Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) party. The first evident step in promoting the natalist and moralistic rhetoric in reproductive policies was legislation that made emergency contraception only available on prescription. This was met with the first wave of outrage of the Polish women, as the reality of the Polish healthcare system made this preventative method virtually inaccessible for most lower-income women. It also sparked the first wave of protests, which since then took on the title of "the Black Protests".

Further, since 2018 a debate on abortion was brought to light by Ordo iuris, a conservative Catholic organisation that presented a project of the total abortion ban. That particular project has been successfully thrown by the Polish parliament; however, this event turned out to be opening Pandora's box of grievances and moral issues that had been chocked down by the Polish society since the democratic transformation. It ultimately led to the moment where the

Constitutional Court of Poland ruled abortion of a damaged foetus as an act of murder according to the Polish constitution. This specific ruling sparked further indignation and, despite the rules of the pandemic, led Polish feminist activists and many previously unaffiliated people to the streets in protest of additional limitation of women's reproductive agency, as well as the potential health risks coming from this ruling.

The fact that Poland has traditionally been a country with liberal abortion legislation might be surprising given the current controversial policy (Zielińska, 2000, p. 25). In 1932 women in Poland were guaranteed the right to abortion for medical and legal reasons, that is in case of rape or incest and that those laws remained virtually unchanged until 1956, despite the political transformation Poland experienced with the end of the World War II and becoming a Soviet satellite state (Zielińska, 2000, p. 25). At that point the Catholic Church did not have the political influence that it gained later in Polish politics. Poland has always been a very religious country, with Catholicism as its dominating religion, but also pre-WWII it used to be a very diverse and religiously tolerant country. However, 1978 brought the election of the first and only Polish pope, which significantly emboldened the Polish Catholic church and provided it with political capital to be used in opposition against the transgressions of the communist regime. In fact, the Catholic church in Poland became a site of the opposition. Given the newly acquired political influence, the Catholic Church in Poland actively started to participate in law-making processes in the freshly democratic state. Within the first four years of the emerging democratic Poland, the discussion on abortion and both its legal and moral dimensions entered the arena of public consciousness for good.

As explained by Mishtal, at until that point access to abortion and contraceptives were often taken for granted by Polish women, despite some dimensions of care of reproductive health

being lacking at the time (Mishtal, 2015, p. 5). The subject was generally absent from the public discourse and debate (Mishtal, 2015, p. 6). This, however, has changed dramatically with the democratisation of the country and the powerful narratives coming from the Catholic figures. Subsequently, new abortion laws were introduced in 1993 which criminalised abortion apart from three instances: rape, incest, and danger to the life of foetus or the mother, or severe damage of the foetus. This regulation already put Poland on a list of most restrictive countries in terms of reproductive policies. According to the official statistics provided by the Ministry of Health only 1076 procedures were performed in 2018, and 1100 the next year (Zakolska, 2020). This is evidence that there is a big disparity between legal rights of women in Poland and the practice, where their experience is gendered. This is one of the main arguments of this thesis, as well as the implications of this gendered experience for the subject of citizenship in Poland.

This paper is an exploration of the subject of reproductive policies, citizenship of women and the issue of female patriotism. Such widespread protest indicates high levels of interest across the society; therefore, those levels of mobilisation could be indicative of the impact this ban has on the feelings of patriotism amongst the protesters. The aim of this thesis was to explore the relationship of women participating in the protest with the state, their perception of their own citizenship, as well as a deeper discussion about the nature of those protests, as well as perceptions of patriotism amongst the protesters. The empirical data for this project suggests a dual nature of the concept which also reflects the societal divisions in Poland at this moment.

Participation in protests could potentially be perceived in two possible ways: as a form of anti-patriotic expression, or the exact opposite, a mobilisation of patriotic feelings of solidarity with a potentially disenfranchised group in the Polish society. Through “anti-patriotic” one should

perceive the expression not as anarchist, but more as a form of rejection of the status quo, as well as the ruling class in the country. The empirical data in this study clearly shows that there is a common perception of two types of patriotism, both functioning in opposition to the other. Therefore, what the ruling class labels as “anti-patriotic” can be the exact opposite in the minds of the protesters. At the same time, this paper explores the distinction between perceptions of “patriotism” and “nationalism”, which in Polish case appear to be overlapping for the large part of the society.

Alternatively, the protests can also be a symptom of disillusionment with the system, which not only fails to protect the protesters, in this case women, as members of society but also makes reproductive freedom challenging to exercise. Many of the participants expressed feelings of detachment from their Polish identity and nationality and did not perceive themselves as patriotic. The reason behind that was most commonly the sense of hopelessness, exhaustion with the system and repeated sense of disappointment.

In a series of interviews this research project explores the subject of reproductive policies as a marker for the quality of citizenship of women in Poland, the issue of grievances Polish women have towards the system and how they choose to express it. It discusses protests as a political expression and why was it the route Polish women chose to showcase their contempt with further limitations of their reproductive rights. At the same time, this paper aims to establish the difference between the Polish women’s protest with other women’s movements globally that have already been researched. The literature on this subject sets a certain type of expectations about the way women protest and the issues which they protest. Poland’s case to some extent reflects some of those expectations, but on the other hand it has elements that do not fit those expectations. This paper explores those differences and establishes reasons behind this divergent nature of Polish women’s mobilisation and protests.



## **2. Literature Review**

This literature review focuses primarily on two issues that need consideration in the debate of the Polish reproductive protests. Those are social movement theories and women's rights movement claims.

### **2.1. Social movement theories**

Social movements could be perceived as a potential rival to the political representation system and can have a major impact on the structure of the relationship between the state and civil society (Jenkins and Klandermans, 1995, p. 5). Therefore, in many cases, it is a natural choice in terms of collective actions to attempt to influence the status quo from the grassroots of the society.

In consideration of the Polish women's protests, it is most practical to look at the already existing literature explaining mobilisation mechanisms. There are several prominent theories, this literature review will discuss the resource mobilisation theory and work by Jurgen Habermas in the new mobilisation theories framework.

At one point in social sciences research, resource mobilisation theory (RM) was the most dominating way of understanding collective action, however for several years at this point, its framework has been challenged and critically reassessed. The main point in this perspective is the idea that social movements are an extension of politics as an alternative to classical choices (Beuchler, 1993, p. 218). Movements in RM are perceived as structured and patterned, and

therefore they can be examined similarly to organisations or institutions - in terms of conflicts of interests created by the existing power relations (Beuchler, 1993, p. 218; Jenkins, 1983, p. 528).

RM emphasises the element of rational choice, especially in the context of calculation of personal costs and gains deriving from participation (Somerville, 1997, p. 678). Furthermore, the grievances generated by those conflicts are pervasive enough that the movement's formation is reliant primarily on the availability of resources, group organisation, and opportunities for collective action (Jenkins, 1983, p. 528). This results in centralised, formally structured movements whose success is dependent mainly on the strategic factors and the political processes existing in the system within which they operate (Jenkins, 1983, p. 528).

The main shortcoming of this theory is the fact that it relies too strongly on the rational choice of the participants, and it portrays the social movement as not that different to what a political party is in a political system. Social movements in their nature serve a different function to political parties in the system, they strongly rely on specific grievances for mobilisation purposes, while a political party is a group that follows a more stratified mode of mobilisation. It can be said that RM operates on the overly instrumental perception of rational choice, and it vastly underestimates the importance of emotive and normative basis for social mobilisation (Somerville, 1997, p.678). It puts a lot of importance on the institutional dimension concerning the cultural sphere, which is mostly the environment in which social movements operate (Somerville, 1997, p. 678). RM tends to downplay grievances in the emergence of collective action. RM theorists claim that grievances are not enough of a factor in explaining social movements and highlight the importance of the potential control over resources as significantly more relevant (Beuchler, 1993, p. 221).

Steven Beuchler takes on the case of the women's movements in The United States to demonstrate that this kind of interpretation does not provide the best explanation behind the emergence of one of the most prominent movements in recent history. Many women's movements first derived their ideas and resources from women participating in other social movements and evolved into independent gender-based mobilisation. Their grievances were separate from those of their parent movements and came from pre-existing feminist ideology (Beuchler, 1993, p. 221). In a combination of those separate grievances with the resources coming from their association with the parent movements, the modern women's movement emerged (Beuchler, 1993, p. 221). This is consistent with the resource mobilisation theory; however, those movements radically challenged the patriarchal arrangements within those parent movements, ultimately leading to an independent mobilisation of women (Beuchler, 1993, p.221). That dynamic shows that in some cases the grievances can have the same importance, if not more, than access to resources, when it comes to explanations of the roots of collective action. A similar argument can be made in terms of the ideology, which also played the dominant role in the mobilisation of women's activism in the U.S (Beuchler, 1993, p. 221). Furthermore, the women's suffrage movement did not start as a structured, bureaucratic organisation, but as a web of informal connections between female activists and communities, where the communities played the leading role in mobilising and organising the collective action (Beuchler, 1993, p. 223).

RM theory, therefore, presents an idea, where strategy and structure play a bigger role in social mobilisation, than a potential grievance. Concurrently, it puts plenty of value onto the wish and will to control resources, making movements seem very similar in concept to political parties.

Alternatively, social movements are natural predecessors for political parties, according to this theory.

## **2.2. New school**

Jurgen Habermas is one of the most influential thinkers in social sciences. He offers his perception of the mechanisms behind the collective action in a group of theories that function under the shared name of new social movements theories. As opposed to preceding thinkers, he presented a view that social movements should be perceived separately from class politics, a dominant belief in academia at the time (Edwards, 2009, p. 382). Habermas was a student of counter-cultural movements, which raise questions about identity and quality of life within the system over the demands of fair wealth distribution and working conditions (Edwards, 2009, p. 382). Habermas suggested that modern movements should be perceived as primarily “defensive” and “reactionary” to the economic and political interference in the daily lives of the citizens (Edwards, 2009, p. 382). He named this “a colonisation of the lifeworld”, and his theory is mainly based on the idea that there is a clear divide between the politico-economic structure ruled by money and power, and the lifeworld which is still governed by normative consensus (Edwards, 2009, p.382; Beuchler, 1993, p. 445). The matter of responsibility and accountability is generally detached from means such as power or money, while “lifeworld follows a communicative rationality requiring that norms be justifiable through discussion and debate” (Beuchler, 1993, p. 445). Habermas perceived this relationship as concerning, especially vis-à-vis the welfare state. In his view, the overbearing presence of the welfare state in the areas of private life turned people into de facto “clients” of state bureaucracy (Edwards, 2009, p. 383).

Edwards states, “whilst the welfare state was an initial ‘victory’ for the workers, they failed to see that the particular means of securing protection ‘from the cradle to the grave’ would lead to a shift like social conflicts *from capital/labour to* ‘the seam between the system and lifeworld” (2009, p. 383). This results in ‘legitimation crisis’ where the state experiences a democratic deficit when it comes to their interventions and ‘motivation crisis’ where a ‘loss of meaning’ and fragmentation of everyday life occurs because of the disintegration of communicative contexts due to the state interference (Edwards, 2009, p. 383). This leads to a dynamic where most of the decision-making power ends in the hands of experts and administrative structures, which function according to the logic of money and power (Beuchler, 1993, p. 445). Respectively, these decisions are removed from contexts of validation and accountability within the lifeworld (Beuchler, 1993, p. 445). Habermas suggests that since this new genre of conflict is not traditional, it cannot be channelled by political parties or assuaged by material compensation (Beuchler, 1993, p. 445). If that is the case, Habermas’ theory would suggest that those types of new conflicts would contribute to a larger legitimation crisis, which he associates with advanced capitalism (Beuchler, 1993, p. 445).

Over the past decades, we witnessed strong political movements basing their whole ideation on those spheres of conflict, especially where it comes to the identity and quality of life is independent of the structural design of the state and international order. For instance, the so-called “Green” parties, as well as newly emerging populist movements, make those kinds of claims the main speaking point in their agendas. Those political groups discuss the subjects such as identity, culture, ecology, and globalisation with significantly more zeal than issues pertaining to class conflicts or the distribution of wealth. When looking at social movements of this decade of the millennium it is possible to notice a tendency for those being more ideology driven, rather than class or capital motivated. Many of those movements operate on

the plain of distinguishing “right” from “wrong”, “humanitarianism” versus “instrumentalism”, and represent an incredibly dualistic discourse. Another example of such movement would be Black Lives Matter, which in its claims mostly lists emotional and moral grievances (Black Lives Matter, 2020). At the same time, modern feminist movements also seem to operate within the same spectrum of meaning, making the issues of women’s rights a subject of moral judgement and justice over the practical and legal argument of access to resources and capital, which was the case in the early emancipation movements (Smith, 2009, p. 27).

Therefore, Habermas’ theory, even if incredibly compelling, does not offer a complete explanation for the emergence of the social movements in the current global political climate, especially in those countries he would consider as capitalistically advanced. Such as with the “Ni Una Menos” women’s rights movement in Argentina (Daby and Moseley, 2021). Similar could be said about movements surrounding the activism initiated by Greta Thunberg in 2018. When looking at those social movements it is possible to notice a pattern for those being more ideology driven, rather than class or capital motivated and it appears to be a tendency that only becomes more prominent.

### **2.3. Women’s Movements Claims**

Women have been actively voicing their discontent with their situation in society for many decades through countless protests, lobbying, political representation, and other forms of political engagement. With issues ranging from: economic welfare, legal discrimination, gendered violence, reproductive rights, among others. In looking at the development of women’s claims it is beneficial to look at the most prominent movements of the past several decades. These grievances can be found in most feminist movements. However, in many cases they are specific to the environment from which the movement stems.

One of the most researched feminist movements is the American Women's Movement. Most of the engagement this movement had to do with the legal dimension of the inequality that women experienced in the United States. One of the central claims that this movement highlights is gender-based exclusion from opportunities and sources of development in American institutions (Smith, 2009, p. 24). Other issues that the movement contends with are economic inequality, gender-based violence, and the differential treatment of men and women under American law, especially in terms of maternal and paternal responsibilities and the issue of citizenship by blood (Smith, 2009, p. 28). It is important to note that the feminist struggle in the United States becomes united most efficiently when it comes to federal issues, while claims expressed at the state level vary significantly across the country. This is especially true in terms of access to reproductive healthcare. However, it is evident that the American feminist movements primarily engage with the legal dimension of women's rights activism, often in front of the Supreme Court, where they seek resolution for those issues.

Another approach and set of claims is witnessed in ongoing Irish and British reproductive debates/protests. Ireland is known for its close ties to the Catholic Church, therefore many of the legal arrangements in Ireland are strongly influenced by this relationship (Kasstan and Crook, 2018). One result of this relationship was a section in the Irish constitution that made abortion illegal. Over the years there were many different attempts to challenge this provision, however the most recent one (2016) focused its argument on the need to challenge the hegemony of the state to withhold abortion from women (Kasstan and Crook, 2018, p. 7). Similarly to the British movements, the Irish demonstrations focused on the issue of bodily autonomy, using the vocabulary and evocation of "female body" as a site of control, resistance, and autonomy (Kasstan and Crook, 2018, p. 7). What is even more intriguing in the way the demonstrators showcased their claim, was also making the female body the site of the social

and political history of Ireland, connecting the issue with the concept of imperialism (Kasstan and Crook, 2018, p. 7). By “imperialism” Irish feminists mean “the forces which deny us control over our own lives, over our bodies as women, as of our country as an independent state” (Kasstan and Crook, 2018, p. 7). This is particularly interesting as it shows how the Irish experience of imperial domination, in their view, translated to the occupation of the female body (Kasstan and Crook, 2018, p. 7). Therefore, the lack of self-governance became the most prominent theme of Irish women’s activism in recent years.

Those examples coming from countries with similar backgrounds, specifically being modern democracies, where Catholicism (or Christianity in case of the U.S.A.) and politics interact and mesh with religion and ideology, create specific list of expectations about what kind of claims would a similar movement make in Poland. The American movement focused on the issues of access to resources, unequal opportunities and exclusion of women, the Irish case presents a situation where women attempt to gain bodily autonomy and remove their physicality from the nationalist discourse in Ireland. All the above are present in Poland; however, it is possible to argue that there are other issues which are specific to the Polish movements. The idea of women being disenfranchised in a system is not new, and many different social movements have attempted to address it. Conversely, many issues that have been brought to light by Polish protesters do not fit the traditionally expected mould for feminist protests. Alas, from the very beginning (and more prominently in November 2020), it is possible to see the shared understanding amongst the Polish people that these protests also reflect on matters that are not connected to reproductive freedom and women’s rights. This paper aims to examine those claims and grievances.



### **3. Methodology and Data Collection**

This project is mostly based on interviews conducted with members of prominent feminist organisations, as well as a varied group of people who have been participating in the Black Protests. The practicality of this method is based on the fact that it permits to collect of first-hand accounts of Polish citizens, who are directly involved in the issues touched by the governmental crackdown on reproductive freedom in Poland. An ability to speak with the organisers of the protests, as well as the people behind the ideological and political foundation of those movements produces information on the protests that are otherwise unavailable from the media or the regular protesters. Moreover, speaking with regular participants of those protests gives this project a capacity to attempt to understand the perceptions and understanding of women who do not regularly work within the feminist movements. They are Polish citizens and women, and they most definitely have their understanding and reasons behind fighting further restrictions on the reproductive freedom of Polish women. Their reasons and opinions may be significantly different from those represented by the organisers of those protests and speaking with them would provide a more in-depth insight into the issues presented by this research puzzle.

To ensure that the interviews are conducted in a non-biased manner, the design of the questions remains neutral in its tone, allowing for the interviewees to express their views. I applied the method of interpretative interviewing in this project for a number of reasons. The first one would be the type of “logic” this kind of research offers, focusing on meaning and interpretation. A language is a tool that hides meaning in social interactions. One sentence can have meanings depending on the tone or inflexion of the speaker. Speaking with multiple persons directly involved in the events allows us to create a larger web of narratives, explanations, and understanding (Soss, 2015, p. 163). Words and expressions carry meaning

This research must be largely interpretative, due to the number of references, background, social rules, and circumstance navigating most conversation. This method aimed to uncover patterns in accounts given by the women, who protest in Poland, which can provide a greater picture of the reasoning and motivation behind the mobilisation of women. Furthermore, it allows to discuss the kind of claims did those protest carry and what do those events mean for concepts such as “citizenship”, “patriotism” and “womanhood” in the Polish context. It also allows us to step outside a structured interview as a methodology, which by default would assume certain meanings being fixed or assigned in a specific way (Soss, 2015, p. 166). The chance of polysemy is incredibly high when a subject as delicate as this one is being discussed, therefore a lot of care and forethought went into the design of questions that are to be asked. Clearly, it is impossible to do so for every single word or expression, or every single meaning, however giving myself the chance to elaborate on certain matters and ask follow-up questions largely limits the possibility of misunderstanding what the interviewee wishes to express (Soss, 2015, p. 166). Meanings are not fixed and apart from their most common essence, they also contain contexts that can be ambiguous, contestable, or even contradictory (Schaffer, 2015, p. 186). This thesis explores those meanings therefore being aware and taking into account that abstract terms carry a number of meanings that can vary from person to person are vital.

An interpretative project by design is meant to explore the conceptual worlds of the interviewees, and so, it is the role of the interviewer to compel them to speak to the specific concepts that one wishes to explore (Soss, 2015, p. 167). By giving myself the space to have more relaxed “conversation” style interviews, I allow myself the opportunity to pinpoint the exact meanings I wish to understand in this project. Those conversations were discursive by nature and therefore, for the sake of understanding deeper underlying arguments or perceptions,

looking at associative thinking or connotative meanings allowed for clearer analysis. Finally, it allowed for in-depth exploration of the conceptual worlds of the interviewees (Soss, 2015, p. 169).

Language varies depending on the speaker's background, for example, in terms of class, race, gender and others (Schaffer, 2015, p. 191). This study consisted of open-ended interviews with twelve women from different regions of Poland. Due to my personal connections with some of the activists I had access to many women from Lower Silesia and Silesia region (Wrocław, Cieszyn), but also Central Poland, with interviewees from Warsaw or Łódź, and Kuyavian-Pomeranian Voivodeship, the city of Toruń. Wrocław, for instance, is also considered one of the biggest hotspots for women's protests in Poland. Therefore, Wrocław could be considered the hub of women mobilisation in Poland.

Some of the participants from the study belonged to the structures of the organisations at some point or they closely cooperate with it within their own activist groups, therefore the ability to speak with them gave me a priceless insight into the inside machinations and considerations of the feminist movements in Poland. The age of the participants varied from 24 to 52, which resulted in a variety of experiences to be considered. Admittedly, however, out of eleven participants, only three were not in a reproductive age. All names were changed for the sake of anonymity and assigned alternative names so that the reader can easily identify the testimonies and perceptions with the correct interviewee.

<b>Coded Name</b>	<b>Location of protesting</b>	<b>Age</b>
Katarzyna	Warsaw	49
Aneta	Wrocław	24
Maria	Górki Wielkie/Cieszyn/Bielsko Biała	25
Barbara	Wrocław	25
Izabela	Wrocław	29
Justyna	Warsaw	26
Joanna	Warsaw/Warsaw	26
Magdalena	Toruń	41
Halina	Wrocław	40
Alicja	Łódź	~35
Kinga	Wrocław	52

Figure 1: Demographic data of the participants

The essence of this project relies on the questions that are to be asked to the respondents and their responses. I aimed to make those questions require answers that express opinions or assign value, judgement and perspicacity to the case and its many facets that I look to understand (Schaffer, 2015, p.187). Within the conversations I had with my interviewees some of the issues I wanted to discuss were raised by the participants themselves, therefore several of the questions ended up not being asked in some of the interviews. Most of the time those questions were related to the issue of patriotism and nature of “Polishness”. It appeared that those two subjects naturally connected in the minds of the participants, and one could not be discussed without touching upon the other. The list of the questions I asked the participants can be found in Appendix A.

I am aware of the bias that I might have in this research, due to having an opinion on the subject, as well as being a Polish woman in the age of reproduction. Theoretically, those changes in legislation and the results of the feminist activism concern me as a private person. However,

there are mitigating circumstances, which allow me to limit my bias exponentially. Firstly, I do not reside in Poland, and I have not resided in Poland for a long time, apart from a brief period in between my studies. Since I spent my formative years in Poland, I speak the language fluently, and further, I understand the cultural references that one often uses while speaking about such delicate matters. Women are more likely to speak openly to a fellow woman about intimate issues. Notwithstanding, there might be situations in which the interviewee would assume that I implicitly understand certain contexts and meanings, which means that they could potentially skip certain matters which they would explain to a researcher with less connections to the case. I attempted to limit such possibility by asking for clarification for the sake of establishing of the context. However, at the same time, this shared understanding of the grievance allowed also for a deeper exploration of certain themes, as it permitted to better perceive nuance.

#### **4. “Polishness” reproduced**

According to many scholars, the constant presence of the abortion debate in Polish politics has little to do with abortion itself but is more of a means for redirecting societal attention from more urgent and pressing issues that the state is undergoing towards a matter that operates within a scope of philosophy, lifestyle, and personal beliefs (Zielińska, 2000, p. 24). However, it could also be perceived as a marker on the subjects as fundamental as the role of women in society, the understanding of gender equality, as well as the importance of women’s rights (especially the reproductive rights) are situated in the stratification of socially desired values (Zielińska, 2000, p. 24). At the same time, the reproductive debate in Poland represents central concerns in terms of the democratic condition of the state: the discourse of reproductive debate could be perceived as a clear marker for the condition of the state, state’s obligations to society, the rule of law, and most importantly the extent in which the civil rights and fundamental

freedoms are protected (Zielińska, 2000, p. 24). This was clearly expressed by one of the interviewees as seen in the quote below.

*Interviewer: What kind of issues did you protest?*

*Joanna: The loudest issue, and the one which is talked about the most, and it is important for me, was abortion, so generally reproductive rights. Because in my opinion, this is the issue which shows the general attitude towards women's rights in a particular society because it is a fundamental right to decide about one's own body. In my view, that it doesn't matter that we might have some rights and pseudo-equality guaranteed wherever, when realistically we can't decide about such fundamental issues as one's own body and own life. For me it is a bit like a measurement of those attitudes towards women rights.*

Later in our interview she elaborated on the subject.

*Joanna: The case of abortion in my opinion is very important because it illustrates the approach towards women's rights and women in society just in general. And of course, the screwing of the women is very systemic, and it doesn't only limit itself to not being able to decide about our own bodies if we get pregnant. But there are so many different things, which are not legally allowed, and even the opposite, are designed to be egalitarian in lawmaking, but they don't translate to the society at all. So what that in our constitution we have an article about the equality of men of women and theoretically we can, [...], work in any kind of a position? So what if such phenomena exist as for instance "the glass ceiling"? Women are still discouraged, belittled, and marginalized in every social way. Society tries everything so that this real equality doesn't happen, really from the moment we are born and become girls.*

Those statement clearly establishes a connection between the issues of gendered experience of daily life and their value in the society as theoretically equal citizens. Similar themes reoccurred in multiple interviews, where experiences of the daily life were directly linked with the

relevance of womanhood for their experience of the system, bureaucracy, access to services, and respect. This issue is what navigates the exploration of each of the issues presented in this thesis, as it appears to be a paradigm in Poland's gender relations.

#### **4.1 Gendered inequality and accountability**

Perhaps most obviously, given that the protests occurred due to the change to abortion laws, was the issue of the access to abortion. As mentioned in the earlier section, abortion has always been one of the cornerstones of feminist activism in Poland, however this time the issue was not only fought by feminist activists but plethora of women coming from various backgrounds. In most of the cases of the participants of the study, their activism and mobilisation had started either with the first protests in 2016, or more recently, with the recent Constitutional Court ruling in 2020.

The contexts within which this matter was protested varied depending on the interviewee, however certain themes were reoccurring. The women, with whom I spoke about this subject firstly expressed their anger at limiting their personal freedom, as well as restricting their ability for exercising their bodily self-determination. One of the sources of their anger lied in the perception that the state appears to perceive women as unable to make reasonable and difficult decisions by themselves, or even portrays women as promiscuous and sexually irresponsible, who would use the procedure as a form of contraception, rather than a serious decision which will most likely impact their lives for a long time.

Kinga was one of the interviewees who participated in protests in Wrocław and she was in her early fifties at the time of our meeting. She told me a story about her friend, who had to undergo the procedure in the early 90s and she explained to me how much of an impact this experience

had both on her and herself, having to witness the guilt that woman experienced for decades afterwards.

*Kinga: On the other hand, my friend had an abortion in year 1990. She did it privately, this was her choice, and I was with her. It was such a massive experience for us, it wasn't a rash decision. But in a situation that she was she had to have that abortion. Everything ended up well, so it is also an important part. She did it consciously, with a lot of trauma and we still remember that. This is a very difficult decision and for example, whenever she has any problems or issues, or something bad is happening in her life, even now she says it's a punishment. It was over 30 years ago and up until this day she feels guilty. This is not an easy decision.*

Kinga was adamant that if the ruling class were able to empathise with the experience of women in need of an abortion, then perhaps they would not be speaking in such absolute and binary terms. Her participation in the protests was also an expression of that view.

*Kinga: I just can imagine all of this. I can imagine what would happen! It would be something incomprehensible for that woman, this is something horrible for her. You give birth to death. This is very difficult and its hurtful, that they [the politicians] trivialize this and think that women are stupid. Let's think, where are those men? After all a baby is shared by both. Often men convince women to have an abortion. Those politicians do it, those priests do it... How many priests have convinced the women they had intercourse with to have an abortion? So, what are we talking about here?*

*Interviewer: So, in this discourse men are talking about women, but they don't talk about themselves?*

*Kinga: Yes! Exactly! As if it wasn't their problem, right? That this abortion and all that is just a women's issue. Excuse me, did she make that baby all by herself?*



The feeling of absence of men from the issue of abortion and ignorance in terms of the reality of this experience was prominent in multiple other interviews. The sensation of being left alone with this issue and lack of accountability of the opposite gender was a recurring theme in those conversations. This should be perceived as evidence of disjointed and separated experience of social taboo that is connected to gendered experiences.

Another prominent claim that was made by the participants was the issue of the privacy being infringed by the state by making such legislation. Usually, the subject of reproductive rights being relegated to the private sphere of citizen's life occurs in the context of discussion of planning one's reproduction within the confines of their marriage (Stark, 2009, p. 347). However, in this specific case it has little to do with family planning but more with the individual decision-making of women.

*Interviewer: Why did you participate in the protests?*

*Magdalena: This is a good question. I suppose there is this huge disagreement inside of me for anyone to intervene with personal decisions. With personal decisions of women.*

Once again, the subject of self-determination reappears, this time in the context of the ability to maintain woman's right to her own privacy and freedom of decision about her own biological ability. Participants expressed the need for respect of their private boundaries and perceived the attempt at regulating this part of their lives as an attack on their personal rights for self-determination.

What was a common denominator between all interviews was the idea that women at this point are fully unwilling to return to the situation of the previous "rotten compromise" and in the future of the law-making, the only acceptable progression would be a full liberalisation of

abortion laws up to the standards they know from their counterparts in other parts of Europe and the world. As Izabela stated, “the time of the compromises is over” for Polish women.

#### **4.2 The Catholic hiccup and the nationalist discourse**

Another grievance that was discussed multiple times during the interviews was the issue of the presence of the Catholic Church in Polish politics, but especially in matters concerning lifestyle choices and reproduction. In some cases, the narrative pushed by the PiS government and the Church’s discourse seemed to be merged in the minds of the interviewees. For instance, this was the case for Kinga, when she explained to me how both the image of women in the society is highly influenced by the paradigms often presented by the Catholic Church both in the context of the “patriotic” environments and the government (or, as she has put it J. Kaczyński’s personal political agendas). However, it would be important to stress that in this specific conversation the person of Jarosław Kaczyński and the PiS government was meant to be synonymous.

*Kinga: I am pissed off at Kaczyński, I hate him. There is a gigantic mutiny inside of me that he forces a certain idea of his own world and the idea of his vision of Poland. And especially the idea of a woman in Poland, who, in his opinion, is less than, is meant to just pray, give birth, cook for the husband, and so on. This idea of his is completely unacceptable for me.*

*Kinga: Women have to fight for their own freedom constantly. They managed to win something, but now we regressed a full generation, you could say.*

*Interviewer: Perhaps even more because before 1981 women had a lot of rights...*

*Kinga: Yes, even more. We’re back to the Middle Ages! We regressed to the very beginning. Women even disparagingly joke that soon our voting rights also will be taken away.*

*Kinga: I live in a country where soon I will be forbidden from doing anything. I'm only supposed to give birth and nothing more.*

*Interviewer: And then the value of a woman drops to nothing when she's no longer giving birth?*

*Kinga: Yes. The politicians that should be setting an example seriously state that. Minister Czarnek and so on... that we must give birth and that's it. It doesn't matter if it's alive or dead.*

Similar statements were made by Joanna, who argued that the roots of the current situation of women should be directly blamed on the Catholic Church and its privileged position in Polish system of power relations.

*Joanna: For me, the subject of the division of Church and State is very important, and it also appears on our protests. Because I believe that the significant majority of this shit that is happening all around us is a result of the Concordat and how much ability to influence the law and indoctrinate everyone did the Catholic Church receive.*

At the same time, when the subject of the concept of a "Polish woman" (Polish language permits for gendered forms, which is relevant in this case), one interviewee instantly connected this idea with Catholic faith.

*Magdalena: Being a Polish woman brings some type of connotations to being some type of a woman. [...]*

*Interviewer: How would you describe that type of a woman?*

*Magdalena: Exhausted by the family, by the responsibility of some kind of patriotic upbringing... I don't know why but, in my mind, instantly an expression of "Polish Woman-Catholic Woman" appeared. She generally is socialised to live in a patriarchal system. She is so soaked through with it, that she doesn't even see that she could make one step and be somewhere*

*else. She is also a woman that often does strenuous and unpaid work for men, most definitely, but also the country and the society, which only tries to lock her within an oppressive system.*

In this case Magdalena describes how certain conditioned gender roles permeate every single facet of socialisation and it is impossible to escape it unless one fully removes themselves from the narrative. Furthermore, it is visible that, even though men are mentioned in the narrative often, the anger of women is directed more at the system which allows for the inequalities to persist. The perception has less to do with patriarchy of men over women, but more with the patriarchy of the establishment over the role of women within its structures.

*Magdalena: I see how strongly its forced upon my daughter. She is completely different; she grew up in a different environment where she experienced diversity. However, whenever she participates in any type of public thing, for example school, or a dance team she keeps encountering this type of oppression. And she rebels against that oppression, even though she is just 11. For example: "Now the boys get up and go help the teacher carry all the books back to the library". And then a bunch of girls stand up and ask if they also are allowed to go. "No, because you'll get tired, get dirty, you are weak..." Yes, of course, weak girls in a school for athletes?*

Magdalena also gave another description of a situation which clearly reproduces certain types of attitudes and operates within micro-discriminatory attitudes.

*Magdalena: For example, you can't sign a girl up for a paid football team.*

*Interviewer: Because there isn't an all-female one? Or because there aren't any co-ed teams?*

*Magdalena: You just can't sign up a girl for that football team.*

*Interviewer: So, only boys are admitted?*

*Magdalena: Yes.*

*Interviewer: So, they don't create those types of teams?*

*Magdalena: No, they don't. Nor do they try to build relationships between the players [of different genders]. And this is at a stage, when football is just playtime for children, as I tried to make it happen since the kindergarten.*

At the same time, it is vital to remember that while just daily interactions were mentioned, this type of attitude translates into bigger concepts, such as “citizenship”, “inclusivity”, or “participation”. There is an impossibility to receive treatment that is not influenced by gender in the Polish system. This is not only true for women, but also for men. It would be important to stress at this moment, that the last sentence is not a claim that men in Polish society do not have to experience harmful and limiting expectations of behaviours. They most definitely do experience certain attitudes specific only to their gender as well. Therefore, gender in Poland seems to be omnipresent in terms of interactions with any element of social, political, or infrastructural life.

### **4.3 Political protest as the only available tool**

Most of the women interviewed took to the streets solely due to their anger at the reproductive crisis they perceived to be happening in their country. This is significant, as the perception of the media coverage both globally and locally created an impression that the women’s protests, especially those from November 2020, were encompassed by wider political disagreement and opposition to PiS as the ruling party (TVN Warszawa, 2020). On the contrary, confrontation with the real participants of those protests paints a fully different picture. Joanna, a political activist in her own right, was especially incensed by this dynamic, where, in her perception, the opposition parties and public independent media “kidnapped” their protests for the sake of gaining more political capital and traction for the upcoming elections. Joanna was especially dissatisfied with the way the media translated the women’s protests into anti-governmental protests. As she pointed out:

*Joanna: The thing that got my attention and deeply outrages me is the fact that the mainstream media very quickly presented those protests as a strictly anti-government action. And this was not at all what it was about. Because we got to the streets to claim our own autonomy, fully independently from who is the one trying to take it away. Because it was taken away also by the same group that now is in opposition, meaning, the same people, who are currently in PO. Actually, it is still the same people, who are in some kind of rotation between PiS, PSL and PO for the last 20 years. They were the ones that signed the Concordat, they are the ones who passed the “rotten compromise”, they are the ones who regressed Polish women to the times when.... Well, in the interwar period abortion was legal, so...*

Therefore, while the protests had an anti-establishment nature, it did not have the anti-governmental nature in the eyes of many protesters. This represents a big outlier in the world of women’s protests. As mentioned in the literature section, usually reproductive politics protests stay within the boundaries of the women’s emancipation and equality, as given in the example of Ireland. In this case it appears that those protests became an opportunity for building a political capital for the group who is also responsible for the reproductive policies in Poland.

The same perception was shared by Magdalena, who explained that protests brought a lot of disillusionment to her as an activist, as she felt that a lot of the reasons why those protests were not as impactful as she would expect them to be had to do with the personal political ambitions of the leaders of the strikes.

*Magdalena: The first protests gave me the sense of unity, but also a sense of self-agency. Because we went there to stop them. [...] Inside, I felt that we could change something. If not politically, then in other people. However, feminist activism catches you in the neck a lot and a feeling of burn-out*

*appears. Apart from that, there was this feeling of disappointment by some of the activists, especially those more recognisable ones. Because you can see the backstage. [...] I have a feeling that there are political motivations standing behind the motivations of some organisers of the women's protests.*

Perhaps this has to do with more varied demographic of the protests in 2020. The interviewees reported a surprising presence of groups they did not expect in the 2020 protest, which included men, elderly, and communities from across the board of ideological spectrum – including religious environments. The same was reported by the media at the time, further creating an impression that women's protests transformed into more general opposition protests, and many opposition politicians also framed them as such (TVN Warszawa, 2020).

As it was explained in the literature review, social movements and uprisings usually have a rather structured and organised nature, even if they came from spontaneous roots. With time they develop a structure to aid the mobilisation and at times they transform from social movements into political groups (Beuchler, 1993, p. 218). This case, however, presents a very different image, where some attempts were made at structuring the movement with the conception of All-Poland Women's Strike, however most of the mobilisation was mostly sourced through the word of mouth, social media, and smaller local women's groups. Its nature remained spontaneous and any attempts in transforming into more political movement failed. Many of the interviewees had an opinion that what had occurred, was an attempt of the opposition parties to harness the political capital of the protests for the sake of their own political agendas. In their view, at one point the demonstrations were, as they perceived it, hijacked from women, and translated into a more considerable social upheaval against the ruling class and the general political situation in Poland, instead of staying focused on the issues that women wanted addressed.

#### 4.4 The binary nature of Polish patriotism

The current crack down on reproductive freedoms of women resulted in two dynamics. It either woke up the patriotic need to express discontent and disagreement with the current politics and government, or it resulted in final rejection of Poland as a source of loyalty due to the continuous infringement of female citizenship and freedom in the system. The frustration was at the base of both of those development, however it is visible that in the case where the participation in protests was in line with a rejection of patriotic feelings, the levels of this frustration were so all-encompassing, that the Polish identity started to directly contradict all the other values those women considered close to their heart.

A number of interviews brought interesting observations about the binary nature of Polish patriotism. It was pointed out to me that in Poland one must differentiate between two types of patriotism – the patriotism of the people who were on the street participating in the Black protests, and the patriotism, which they described as “stolen”.

The “stolen patriotism”, according to the interviewees, belonged to the highly conservative group called “*narodowcy*” (“the nationalists”), a group that used to be in political minority, but in the political climate maintained by PiS governments of the past five years they have been gaining both prominence and membership. *Narodowcy* are rooted in organisations that often are accused of neo-fascist tendencies, such as ONR (Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny), an extreme right organisation, as well as some of the newer political parties with populist or extreme-right tendencies, such as Confederation Liberty and Independence (Confederation), National Movement, K’15, KKP or KORWiN. Most recognised identifier of members of those groups is considered the participation in the annual riots of 11<sup>th</sup> of November, Poland’s Independence



Day, as well as usage of WWII symbols for the expression of their values. Here it would be beneficial to note that associations of war veterans categorically separate themselves from those groups and condemn the appropriation of their symbols, as they do not share the values expressed by those groups (Dzierżanowski, 2019).

The patriotism of *narodowcy* was described as an expression of difference and separation, instead of unity and solidarity. Joanna explained to me that in her view, this type of patriotism is unnecessarily combative, but at the same time focuses on finding issues that should be discriminated against, instead of contributing to the development of their communities and the Polish society.

Several the participants explained that even the word “patriotism” on its own should be considered as appropriated by those groups, as at the moment the imagery of a nationalist, aggressive and discriminating patriot is what is associated with the concept. To them “patriotism” was often equal in meaning to “nationalist”. Therefore, at times, it seemed to be difficult to them to call themselves patriotic, and once they did, they were incredibly precise about *which* kind of a patriot they are. In other words, the word “patriot” in Poland carries several different meanings, and separation of those meanings is essential for the understanding what did the patriotism of women on the streets, protesting the reproductive issues, means.

*Interviewer: How would you define “patriotism”*

*Kinga: For me the word “patriotism” is a bit busted. Firstly, it is appropriated by PiS... secondly it is so... this patriotism is kind of puked-out. I support civic spirit. For me, patriotism is taking care of specific problems of your city. For example, I love my city, I try not to walk on the grass, I try to pay taxes, I try to park my car where I’m supposed to park it.*

*I participate in events; I consciously choose the mayor of my city. This is patriotism. And not walking around with a flag and singing the Polish national anthem. Patriotism is just us, the people, the citizens.*

This is only one of the examples where this type of perception of “patriotism” was expressed. The modern patriotism of Polish women in seven out of eleven interviews was connected to the loyalty with their city, town, or region, to the ecological consciousness and “organic work”, a concept well known to Polish citizens from their school education and lecture of the book “Lalka” by Bolesław Prus. organic work is a term which was borrowed by the Polish Positivists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century from English philosopher and sociologist, Herbert Spencer (Janowski, 2004). The idea behind the Polish version of organic work was to focus on the improvement of the Polish society from its foundations through investing in education and economic development, as well as modernisation of the lower classes to create a modern Polish nation (Janowski, 2004). It was a response to a series of failed uprisings against the partitioning empires and an attempt of shifting the patriotic focus inwards, instead of outwards, which up until this point resulted in bloody conflicts and loss of Polish intelligentsia (Nowak-Cieplak, 1972). Nowadays, the concept seems to be celebrating a rebirth amongst Polish activists, and in this context women, who want to separate themselves from the aggressive and discriminatory forms of patriotism expressed by the nationalist environments, and promote conscious citizenship and political participation, mixed with values expressed by the European democratic community. Many of the participants of the study refused to identify themselves as patriotic, explaining that their nationality brings them little more than shame and discomfort.

Some of them agreed reluctantly to being patriotic, but more in the dimension of the European or local patriotism.

*Maria: It's a little bit like a "Stockholm syndrome". Those things keep happening and yet, I still have some sentiment left in me.*

This statement shows this feeling of disjointed loyalty to a concept and the internal fight stemming from the direct experience of reality, which makes one question one's attachment to this part of their identity. To some extent, it is an experience of a cognitive dissonance, where one part of your fundamental identity (womanhood) is downgraded by another arbitrary source of identity (nationality).

All, but one participant stated clearly that their identity as a woman is more important to them than their Polish identity. The one participant, who did not make that statement explained that in her perception it is an equal mix of feelings that she cannot detach from one another.

## **5. Gendered reality, gendered patriotism**

The aim of this thesis was to identify what makes the Polish women's protests a case study that does not fall into previously analysed cases and why the existing theories of social mobilisation not providing an adequate recipe for the understanding of those protests. The image that was presented by the interviews conducted for this paper paints a relatively clear picture of the issue. Firstly, there seems to be an inherent inability of the Polish non-governmental feminist institution to mobilise women and to harness the political capital that comes with the numbers of citizens that are supporting the mission of those organisations. Perhaps this stems from the lack of legitimacy of those institutions in the eyes of the potential protesters, maybe it is a result of years of social engineering that resulted in an institutionally disengaged society.

The empirical data from this research presents an image which, while it has some characteristics that are described in theories of Habermas, and resource mobilisation theory, also showcases shortcomings of those theories as well. RM suggests that it is natural for a

social movement to move towards structuration, and movements transform themselves into centralised organisations as the movement grows in prominence. However, the Polish case represents an example where this theory does not accurately demonstrate what had happened. Five years since the commencement of the Black Protests in Poland they remained as fragmented as ever. The movement operates based on action generated by independent cells and organisations which have similar grievances and claims and only mobilises through protests. RM describes highly strategic political activity in which the movement partakes; however, Polish women's protests do not have a group that strategizes the political negotiation with the government about the issue at hand. No legal and official attempts at appealing to the ruling class were made as a unified front of The Polish Women's Protest. Those occurred through independent organisations and NGOs which supported the cause. At the same time, the movement fell victim to political exploitation for the political gain of the opposition. It is especially visible in the framing of the protests as more universally anti-governmental, while women on the streets wanted to be heard in terms of their reproductive freedom. Therefore, there is a dissonance of reception and intention of the protests.

Nonetheless, while clearly being reactionary, the Polish women's movement does not fit with Habermas' theory as well. To some extent, the mobilisation did occur because of the "colonisation of the lifeworld", however it has little to do with the concept of the welfare state and client-like relationship with the state. This conflict does not operate on the plain of capital and the presence of the state within it, it operates on the ideological plain, where the discussion has more to do with morality, meanings, and does not challenge technocratic structures, but the actual leaders and policymakers.

The next conclusion that can be drawn from the interviews conducted for this thesis is the fact that it appears that Polish women are disregarded as a political force even in a situation, where

it is their political power that is the driving force behind the events occurring politically in the country. It could be a result of a misguided perception that women's voice is not as relevant in the public space. According to Yuval-Davies, nationalist discourses often create a divide between the worlds of the "public" and the "private" (Yuval-Davies, 1997, p. 6). Ideologically, there has been a dichotomy of private/public domains, where women belong to the private world, while men belong to the public (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 6) This attachment of women to the private has to do with identifying them with "nature", a reason why they have been excluded from the "civilised" public political domain, but also an explanation as to why they are less valued socially than men (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p. 6). Thus, while women are identified with "nature", men are identified with "culture". Less value is attached to the natural creation over cultural creation in this context, therefore women's voices tend to be overlooked and disregarded.

Further, the experience of women interviewed for this paper shows a peculiar dynamic when it comes to the meaning of female citizenship in Poland. This should be perceived as a matter connected to the previous point of this discussion. The interviewees often expressed their participation in protests as a form of reclamation of their political voice and agency in the public sphere, therefore a form of exercising their citizenship. What is interesting in their dynamic, is the paradox that was revealed by the dichotomy between the exercising this citizenship and the sensation of being unheard. It often contributed to deeper feelings of disenfranchisement and neglect in the political sphere. All of this suggests a wider problem of female citizenship carrying less meaning and influence in the Polish politics. Given that the subject of their protest had to do specifically with female issues, and they often felt excluded and absent from the dialogue about the problem suggests that the voice of this particular type of a citizen is not considered as valid valid for the decision-making in the matter. This most

probably, relates to perceptions of womanhood in a traditional society. This could be possibly further translated to other political debates and law-making, where at the first glance the citizen would appear to be genderless, but realistically the citizen ends up being predominantly male. This conclusion stems from the simple fact of absence of the topic of gender in the discussion, while the practice forces gender to the upfront of the political reception of the policies. Subsequently, each of the interviews conducted for this paper pointed out the gendered nature of socialisation and participation in Poland, where escaping this arbitrary denomination appears to be impossible, and it highly influences the type of an experience that one can have. This occurs regardless to the attempts to make legislation genderless, which as a concept appears to be unrealistic. Both womanhood and manhood in traditional societies, such as the Polish Catholic one, comes with a set of expectations, behaviours, choices, and opportunities and access to those is fully independent from the law-making. However, it appears that the perception of women as creatures of the “private” and men as those who belong in “public” only enforces the disparity between law-making and practice.

Lastly, we are presented with empirical data about the nature of perceptions of women of Polish patriotism. The dynamic of two, coexisting forms of patriotism was evidenced by multiple interviews and this is particularly interesting from the scientific standpoint, as it presents a dynamic of two fully alternative patriotisms to one another, where each is met with contempt to the other side. Female patriotism in this case had also two dimensions: one where protests were a direct expression of their patriotic feelings towards their nation state, and the other where the opposite was true. Thus, one is presented with an image of highly fragmented perception of the matter and a dynamic, where some perceive their plight for women’s rights and reproductive freedom as a direct expression of their attachment to the concept of “Polishness”, and the other considers their national identity as a burden to be carried, and

perhaps, in the future, a burden to be left behind for the sake of wider European identity. All of this could potentially mean that the reproductive debate in Poland, in conjunction with the general dissatisfaction of Polish women with the status quo of Polish politics, has a direct translation to their feelings of identity and belonging. At the same time, one shared denominator shows that in a classic situation of multiple identities clashing within the same plain of meanings, gender takes precedence in the experience of both political influence and the everyday life as a Polish woman.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Interview Questions

- Why did you participate in the protests?
- What kind of issues did you protest?
- What did you hope to achieve by protesting?
- What is your opinion on the response to the protests?
- What did participation in the protests mean to you?
- How would you describe the current situation of women in Poland?
- What is your opinion on the ruling on the Constitutional Court on abortion?
- What kind of an arrangement would you perceive as acceptable in terms of reproductive policies?
- What is “patriotism”?
- What does “patriotism” mean to you?
- Do you consider yourself patriotic?
- What does being Polish mean to you?
- Is being Polish important to you?
- Which of these identities is more important to you: being Polish or being a woman?
- What kind of value does being a Polish citizen gives you?
- In your opinion, is there a difference between being Polish and being patriotic? What kind of a difference is that?